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POLICY OF PERSECUTION AGAINST REPRESENTATIVES OF FOLK MEDICINE IN THE SOVIET PERIOD

Oydinoy Ochilova

Associate Professor, Doctor of Philosophy,
Asian University of Technologies

Abstract:

This article analyzes the Soviet government's policy toward practitioners of traditional medicine in Uzbekistan, focusing on the restrictions imposed on their activities and the persecution they faced, based on historical sources and scholarly literature. It examines the Soviet anti-religious campaign, the ideological attitude toward traditional medicine, the legal status of traditional healers, and their role in society. The study also explores the separation of traditional medicine from the official healthcare system, the limitations placed on traditional healers, and the impact of these policies on the preservation of Uzbekistan's national medical heritage.

Keywords: traditional medicine, Soviet period, persecution policy, traditional healers, anti-religious campaign, traditional medicine, ideology, Uzbekistan, history of healthcare.

In Uzbekistan, folk medicine has been one of the most important means of protecting the health of the population for centuries. Healers were not only engaged in treatment, but also played an important role in the use of medicinal plants, diet, hygiene, prevention, and promotion of a healthy lifestyle. Their activities were closely connected with the religious and national traditions of the people.



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After the October Revolution of 1917, the Soviet authorities sought to bring the medical system, like all other spheres of society, under complete state control. Based on the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, religious organizations, traditional knowledge, and folk medicine were considered remnants of the old system. As a result, representatives of folk medicine were viewed as an alternative force to official medicine, and their activities were subject to various administrative and legal restrictions.

Especially as a result of the anti-religious policy implemented in the 1920s and 1930s, many eshans, mullahs, and folk healers were persecuted, some of whom were prosecuted or banned from working. The right to provide medical care was given mainly to state medical institutions, and folk medicine was considered an activity without a scientific basis. At the same time, the population, especially those living in rural areas, continued to use the services of folk medicine for many years. This indicates that the traditions of folk medicine have been preserved in practice, despite official restrictions.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the causes, main directions and consequences of the policy of persecution of representatives of folk medicine during the Soviet era, based on historical sources and scientific research.

After the October Revolution of 1917, the Soviet authorities set themselves the goal of bringing the health care system, as well as all spheres of public life, under full state control. Soviet health care policy was based on the model of state medicine, formed under the leadership of N.A. Semashko, and was aimed at centralizing medical services and establishing scientific medicine as the only official treatment system. This policy led to the formation of a cautious, and later critical, attitude towards traditional folk medicine.

In Uzbekistan, folk medicine has been one of the most important means of treatment for the population for centuries. Doctors used medicinal plants,



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minerals, animal products, diet, massage, and other traditional methods to treat diseases. However, during the Soviet era, this knowledge began to be considered “unscientific,” “based on hearsay,” and “related to religion.” Starting in the 1920s, health authorities consistently implemented a policy of attracting the population to state medical institutions, abandoning the services of doctors, and popularizing modern medicine. Newspapers and magazines criticized folk medicine and instead promoted the achievements of sanitation, prevention, and modern medicine. One of the main ideological directions of the Soviet state in the 1920s and 1930s was the fight against religion. Since religion, according to the theory of Marxism-Leninism, was considered a “relic of the old system,” religious organizations and individuals considered to be associated with them were placed under state control.

In Uzbekistan, the majority of folk healers received religious education and were familiar with the Quran, Hadith, and works on Islamic medicine. They also used methods such as praying, giving spiritual comfort, and using verses from the Quran in the treatment process. For this reason, local authorities sometimes considered healers to be mullahs, eshans, or religious figures. As a result of the large-scale atheistic policy implemented in 1927–1938, many mosques, madrasas, and shrines were closed. This process also had a negative impact on the activities of folk healers. Some healers were forced to cease their activities, while others continued their treatment in secret.

During the political repressions of 1937–1938, archival documents record that, along with local intellectuals, scholars, and religious scholars, some individuals engaged in folk medicine were also persecuted on charges such as “counter-revolutionary activity,” “religious fanaticism,” or “fraud.”

During the Soviet era, the provision of medical services was transformed into a state-licensed activity. The right to provide treatment was mainly granted to state



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medical institutions and specialists with special medical education. This situation created legal problems for folk healers. Since they were not officially registered, they were often considered illegal.

The sanitary and epidemiological service, the prosecutor's office, and local executive bodies in some cases checked the activities of folk healers. Especially during periods of widespread infectious diseases, folk medicine methods were banned on the grounds that they did not meet sanitary requirements.

At the same time, due to the insufficient development of state medicine in rural areas, the population continued to secretly turn to folk healers. Despite all the restrictions, the practice of folk medicine did not disappear completely. Especially in the villages of Kashkadarya, Surkhandarya, Samarkand, Bukhara, and the Fergana Valley, healers continued to work. They passed on their knowledge mainly orally to their children or students. Traditions of collecting, drying, storing, and using medicinal plants also survived among the local population.

Many women continued to practice infant care, postpartum diet, bathing, warming, and folk remedies. This knowledge survived not in the official medical system, but as a family tradition.

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