

The 1916 Honor and Dignity Uprising in Khojayli

Khujaniyazov D.M.

Doctoral Student Berdaq Karakalpak State University, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article highlights the people's uprising that took place in 1916 in the city of Khojayli under the severe oppression of the Khiva Khan and the difficult conditions of the people. The study is based on previously researched sources.

Keywords: Khiva, Khojayli, Asfandiyor Khan, Mogadak cart, Avazjon Bek, Tilovmurod Kal, girl tax, peasants, artisans, Mangit, A. Galkin, Mahmud, Isomiddin Eshon.

Introduction: The year 1916 was one of the most difficult periods during World War I, as the full burden of the Russian Empire's participation in the war fell on its colonies. Across the empire, public dissatisfaction grew due to the worsening living conditions caused by the war. Even before the events of 1916 in Khojayli, several protest movements had taken place in the Karakalpakstan region. On one such day, a people's uprising began, which would later be known in history as the Khojayli Uprising.

Among the more than 20,000 large and small uprisings in human history, this movement is unique in terms of its causes. Perhaps one of the reasons was the moral degradation of Asfandiyor Khan, which worsened year by year. For this reason, the uprising can be called the "Honor and Dignity Uprising." [1.22]

MAIN PART

The Khojayli Uprising involved people from all social classes of the Karakalpak, Uzbek, Kazakh, and Turkmen communities living in the city and its surrounding areas. Among the participants were peasants, industrial workers, artisans, and even some wealthy individuals and religious figures. [2.111]

The primary goal of the uprising was to overthrow the Khiva Khan, Asfandiyor Khan, and replace him with a ruler who could free the people from heavy taxation and landlessness while also protecting their honor and dignity. The rebels demanded that government officials, the Khiva Khan's servants, and the Yomut mercenaries stop their dishonorable actions against the local population. [3.220]

Another significant reason for the uprising was Asfandiyor Khan's deteriorating health—he was reportedly suffering from syphilis. Following the advice of palace physicians, his servants were ordered to gather 40 young girls as a supposed cure for his illness. [4.100]

The custom of taking the most beautiful and renowned girls of the people into the khan's harem had long been preserved. Asfandiyor, like the rulers before him, embodied both the good and bad traditions of his predecessors. However, his excessive greed at times led to shocking actions—such as ordering the execution of his father-in-law, the grand vizier and leader of the young Khivans, Islamkhoja, by hanging.

One particularly horrifying incident was the fate of Aqljon, a young girl from Gurlan who was forcibly taken to the harem. When she refused to submit to the khan, he had her thrown into a large cauldron of boiling water. Such unimaginable cruelty further fueled public outrage.

At that time, special decorated carts were used to bring girls from the people to the harem, and these were known as "Mogadak Arava." [5.22]

The efforts of court officials influenced by Hikmatullo Eshon to "cure" the Khiva Khan's illness through entertainment with young girls became one of the main reasons for the uprising of the people on the left bank of the Amu Darya. Among the public, rumors spread that "the people are the subjects of the khan, and a girl is like his own daughter; it is against Islamic law for a ruler to desire his own daughters." [6.23]

In the first days of January 1916, two girls were brought to the khan's harem. A few days later, their lifeless bodies were secretly returned to their parents. Both had been killed in the harem for resisting the khan.

When the khan's servants planned to take another 20 girls from Khojayli, parents with daughters sought ways to protect them from such disgrace. Before the khan's men arrived, they dressed their daughters in men's clothing and sent them across the Amu Darya toward Nukus at night.

Tragically, the first boat carrying 16 girls capsized due to strong waves, and all the girls drowned. The second boat, with four girls aboard, was rescued by people on the opposite shore. The next morning, mourning spread throughout Khojayli. When the khan's men arrived to collect the girls, they were met with outrage—locals threw stones and sticks at them in protest. [7.45]

This incident became the spark that ignited the uprising. Additionally, there were frequent cases where young girls were taken away by neighboring Yomut mercenaries, acting under the orders of the khan's officials.

On January 8, 1916, news spread that Turkmen feudal lords might once again forcibly take girls from the Khojayli beylik. In response, peasants from Khojayli and its surrounding areas began an uprising.

Hikmatullo Oталиq, along with the peasants from the southeastern outskirts of Khojayli, gathered near Bogibek's estate and marched toward the old city. As they approached the Qizil Bridge at the entrance of old Khojayli, city dwellers and villagers joined the movement from all directions.

The insurgents first went to the office of the Khojayli beg (district governor) but found no one there. They then headed toward the house of Avazjon Khoja, the Khojayli beg, located near the Suenli Canal and close to the city's bazaar. However, they discovered that the beg, Yusuf Eshon, had left to attend a yearly memorial ceremony. Undeterred, the rebels continued their march toward the house where the eshons and officials had gathered.

During the march, powerful leaders such as Tilovmurod Kal emerged among the rebels. As they reached their destination, angry voices filled the air:

“What is the use of officials and religious leaders who only care about their own stomachs while ignoring the suffering of the people?”

Terrified by the rebels' calls for justice, the officials and religious leaders had no choice but to come outside. Realizing that empty words would not pacify the furious crowd, they promised to deliver their

grievances to the Khiva Khan and ensure that their demands were met. Only then did the insurgents agree to return to their homes. [8.48]

The Khojayli beg, Avazjon Bek, in accordance with his promise to deliver the rebels' grievances to Asfandiyor Khan and ensure their demands were met, was forced to march toward Khiva on January 14, 1916, accompanied by 300 to 500 insurgents. As they advanced, more rebels from Qipchoq, Mang'it, Porsi, Toshqinchoq, and other regions joined them, increasing their numbers to 2,000–3,000 people. [9.26]

Fearing this development, both the Khiva Khan and the Tsarist administration sent their representatives to Khojayli in an attempt to pacify the people and halt their march toward Khiva. However, the movement had already gained unstoppable momentum.

The Tsarist authorities made another effort to suppress the uprising. The head of the Amu Darya division ordered the Turtkul volost leader, Qozokboy, to warn the insurgents against marching on Khiva in large numbers. However, the rebels ignored this warning. Instead, they sought help from Junaid Khan, the de facto ruler of the Turkmen forces in Khiva Khanate, to complain about the violence and oppression committed by the Khan, the Yomut tribes, and large landowners.

Although Junaid Khan was preparing for an open confrontation against the Khiva Khan, he chose not to actively engage in the rebellion. Instead, he merely provided guides to lead the insurgents to Khiva.

Not only Junaid Khan but also the Tatar eshon, Isomiddin, sought to take advantage of the movement. It is important to note that Isomiddin's involvement in the rebellion was not sudden but was tied to the economic interests of the Tatar bourgeoisie.

In January 1916, the Tsarist government put forward the idea of abolishing the Khiva Khanate and incorporating it into the Russian Empire. This plan was unacceptable to both the Tatar bourgeoisie, which aimed to establish an independent Muslim state under Turkish patronage, and to Junaid Khan, who had his own ambitions.

As a result, Isomiddin eshon and his close associates began spreading propaganda among the people, opposing the Tsarist plan to annex Khiva to Russia.

On January 18, the rebels reached the outskirts of Khiva, gathering around the house of Otajon To'ra. They sent their demands to the Khan through delegates, awaiting a response. The insurgents demanded that the Khan abdicate, threatening to storm Khiva if their demands were ignored.

That night, the Khan's representatives arrived at the

rebel camp, stating that the Khan invited eight of their leaders to a formal dinner for negotiations. The Khojayli elders, community leaders, and the Mang'it leader, Darg'abek, accepted the invitation and traveled to Khiva.

However, it was a trap. As soon as they arrived, the rebels' leaders were tied up and thrown into prison instead of being received for negotiations.

Upon learning about the capture of their leaders, the rebels regrouped under Avazjon's chief officer, Abduqodir Yuzboshi, and launched an attack on Khiva.

Fierce battles took place at the fortress gates for several days. However, the rebels were ultimately defeated, forcing them to scatter in different directions, marking the end of the uprising.

The development of events resembles an exciting novel. Commander Abduqodir, along with several of his men, secretly enters Khiva. Near the prison where Avazkhoja and his comrades are held, they settle in an old woman's house in exchange for a considerable sum of money. From there, they start digging an underground tunnel toward the prison. Within a few days, they manage to break through to the prison, free the captives, and take them away with them.[10.24]

In April 1916, the head of the Russian Tsar's punitive unit, General A. Galkin, concluded that 11 people should be executed as leaders of the uprising. They were hanged in a field southwest of Qizilko'pir, near the Suenli canal. Among them were the governor of the Khojayli fortress, Avazjon Bek, his brother Mahmud, Isomiddin Eshon, and others. At that time, Avazjon Bek was 50 years old.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the 1916 uprising in Khojayli came to an end. The rebels failed to achieve their goals because they lacked a clear strategy, a centralized political organization, and a strong leader. Additionally, the lack of unity among the uprising's participants negatively affected their ability to take decisive action. Most of the insurgents were ordinary peasants armed with sticks and hoes.

However, despite its defeat and the severe punishment of its participants, the 1916 people's uprising holds great significance. It was a movement for national freedom, a fight for honor, and a struggle for a prosperous life. The grief over those who sacrificed their lives for the people's happiness still lives on in the oral traditions and laments of the people.

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