



FETĀRAT, 'ABD-AL-RA'ŪF BOĶĀRĪ

FETĀRAT, 'ABD-AL-RA'ŪF BOĶĀRĪ; (official Soviet name: Abdurauf Abdurahimov, b. Bukhara, ca. 1886; d. Tashkent, 1938), teacher, man of letters, and the most important thinker of the Jadid movement of modern Central Asia. He wrote in both Persian (later known as Tajik) and Turki (late Chagatay, q.v.; subsequently Uzbek). His biography can be divided into four periods: (1) the years of his *madrassa* training and teaching until 1909; (2) the time he was the principal theorist of the Jadid movement, 1910-20; (3) the years he was leader of the Bukharan People's Conciliar Republic, 1920-23; and (4) his final years as educator, writer, and scholar, 1923-37.

The son of 'Abd-al-Raḥīm Şarrāf, a Bukharan petty merchant, Feṭrat studied in *madrassas* of his region, particularly at Mīr-e 'Arab. Following his mentor, Maḥmūd-Ḳvāja Behbūdī, Feṭrat joined the reform movement known as Jadidism (see [CENTRAL ASIA. ix](#)), which had been gaining strength in the emirate from the turn of the century. Around 1909-10 he became one of the principal founders of the Society for Spreading Knowledge (Jam'iyat-e ta'mīm-e ma'āref-e Boḳārā, an offshoot of the clandestine Jam'iyat-e tarbīa-ye aṭfāl; see Khodzhaev, 1965; S. Ayni, *Ta'riki inqilobi Bukoro*, Dushanbe, 1987). He was also among the first group of students sent to Turkey by the Society to acquire a modern education (Allworth, 1994, p. 198; Hayit, pp. 41-42). These students, and Feṭrat above all, played a significant role in the modern history of Transoxiana.



During his stay in Istanbul Feṭrat became immersed in reformist ideas originating in other Middle Eastern Islamic societies, where modernism had already made an imprint decades before their appearance in the deeply backward Bukharan emirate. It was also in Istanbul, where he was exposed to the Pan-Turanist movement, that Feṭrat wrote some of his most influential books, which were widely read among the Jadids of Central Asia. He was now the spokesman for the Jadids residing in Istanbul (Becker, pp. 207, 389).

At the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Feṭrat, together with many other Bukharan students (Allworth, 1994, p. 200), left Istanbul for Transoxiana, where he continued to cooperate with the Jadids, who were also known as the Young Bukharans (Becker, pp. 208-9). In November 1917 Feṭrat and 'Oṭmān Ḳvāja wrote a reform agenda for the Young Bukharan party which was implemented later when the reformists seized power. Their original draft called for liberal reforms but was published only after being padded with radical phrases to appease the triumphant Bolsheviks (for the text of the program, see S. M. Dimanshtein, ed., *Revaliutsiya i natsionalnyi vopros* III, Moscow, 1930, pp. 354-59; Carrère d'Encausse, 1988, pp. 199-206; see also Becker, pp. 265, 399, 292-93; Khodzhaev, 1926, pp. 35-38, 40).

Feṭrat escaped in 1917 from Amīr 'Ālem Khan's increasing repression and went to Tashkent, where he became a staunch organizer of Bukharan intellectuals and founded the Chaghatay Conversation Circle (Čaġatay gurungi), aimed at establishing a unified literary Chaghatay (q.v.) and Turki language by reading and disseminating its heritage, such as the writings of 'Alī-Šīr Navā'ī, Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā, and Ṣahīr-al-Dīn Bābor, and publishing modern literary works in that language, particularly drama (see below; Eraslan; Allworth, 1996; idem, 1964, pp. 38-39, 110-14).

After the establishment of the Bukharan People's Conciliar Republic in 1920, which replaced the emirate, Feṭrat held high official positions, including the ministerial posts of education, finance, and foreign affairs, in addition to the membership of the Central Bureau of the Bukharan Communist party (from 1919). He was now able to carry out his reform program (see above) of modernizing the school curricula. In 1922, he sent seventy students to Germany as prospective instructors at the Bukharan university founded in the same year (Carrère d'Encausse, 1988, pp. 172-74; Hayit, 1956, p.136). It was presumably under his influence that in March 1921 the Ministry of Education changed the language of instruction from Persian to Turki, which also became the official language of the Republic (*Pravda*, 20 March 1921). However, when



the Bolsheviks gained supremacy in Bukhara, Feʼrat and most other high officials were removed from their posts and deported to Russia in 1923 (Becker, pp. 306-7; Hayit, 1956, pp. 141-42; Allworth, 1964, p. 115). In the following year the short-lived republic was integrated into the Soviet Union as a part of the Uzbek SSR.

The shift in power (from nationalist to communist) and status (from independent to a satellite state) of his homeland also marked a turning point in his life from politics to academic studies. In terms of scholarship, these were fruitful years. He spent part of 1923 and 1924 in Moscow, and, reportedly, worked at the Lazarov Institute of Oriental Languages (Mirzozoda). On his return to Tashkent and Samarqand, he taught literature in high schools and, from 1928, at the University of Samarqand. In the same year he was appointed a member of the Scientific Council of the the Uzbek SSR.

Although he had kept away from politics for more than a decade, Feʼrat became a victim of the nationwide Stalinist purges of the late 1930s, paying for his nonconformist views. Nothing was known about him after his arrest in 1937 until archival material, uncovered in the era of *glasnost*, confirmed that he was sentenced to death in 1938 (Nabijon Boqii, “Qatlnoma,” *Šarq yulduzi*, 1991, no. 6, pp. 84-132, esp. p. 90). He was rehabilitated in the post-Stalin years (Allworth, 1994, pp. 389-90) and praised for his literary and scholarly works (Braginskiĭ; Mirzozoda et al, pp. 147-50, 211-13), but he was still condemned for his early liberal views by the official Soviet press and particularly by Tajiks for his Turkophile tendencies (e.g., B. Ğafurov, *Tojikon II*, Dushanbe, 1985, pp. 271-72; cf. Bečka, especially pp. 551, 554, 558, 561). Nearly all his literary works, with the exception of *Qīāmat*, were labeled ideologically reactionary and remained banned until the advent of *glasnost*.

In his early works Feʼrat probes the causes of spiritual and material decay of his society, adapting the reformist theories of Muslim thinkers, particularly [Jamāl-al-Dīn Afgānī](#), to the particular case of Bukharan society. He too contrasts the past glory of his homeland under the Samanids, Timurids, and earlier Uzbeks, with its present plight, a model of backwardness even among the Islamic nations. He found the causes of stagnation in the way Islam, once dynamic and unified, had become backward and divisive through excessive institutionalization under the clergy. He saw the way forward in adapting aspects of modern culture to a base of Islamic society and above all through educating the masses, and he devoted a significant part of his works to the problem of reforming the schools (cf. Carrère d’Encausse, 1988, pp. 106-11;



idem, "Fiṭrat"; Allworth, 1990, pp. 143-46).

These ideas found their expression in his first two dialogues, which were also his most influential works. *Monāẓera* (Debate) is a debate on Muslim versus European values which takes place in India between a European and a Bukharan *modarres* (teacher) on his way to Mecca. Much of the conversation is devoted to the nature of knowledge among Muslims, which is shown to contain nothing but a set of scholastic dogma; hence proving the need for educational reforms. Gradually the Bukharan *modarres* is won over by the reasoning of the European. *Bayānāt-e sayyāḥ-e hendī* (Tales of an Indian traveler) relates the memoirs of an Indian tourist on a visit to Bokharo. It compares every aspect of life there against European standards and finds it wanting; in particular, it taunts the superstitious beliefs of the masses, as expressed in pilgrimage to the mausoleum of Bahā'-al-Dīn Naqṣband or through the contrast between a traditional healer and a Russian physician. It groups Bukharan society into three social classes: '*olamā*' (the clergy), '*omarā*' (the rulers), and '*ahālī*' (residents, masses), and criticizes all three for the decline of the country. The book can also serve as a topographic guide to old Bukhara as it furnishes detailed information on schools, libraries, markets, etc. The style of these two books echoes that of more famous political dialogues written by Malkom Khan, *Āḳūndzāda*, and Zayn-al-'Ābedīn Marāḡāī.

In his next two prose works Feṭrat formulates his social doctrine. *Rahbar-e najāt* (The Guide to salvation) is a study of the socio-economic basis of the emirate and calls for a revolutionary change in all aspects of human life, which would transform not only Islamic nations but the whole world into a progressive society. '*Ā'ela*' (Family) focuses on family relations, proposing a fundamental restructuring. Particular attention is given to the education of women as a condition for a rise in their social status.

The story *Qīāmat* (Resurrection) is the most controversial and frequently published of his works (for an English translation of some passages, see Allworth, 1991, pp. 11-16). Drawing on koranic passages as well as common Muslim beliefs about the after-life, Feṭrat narrates a satirical account of the journey after death experienced by two ordinary Bukharans on the day of the Last Judgment and their subsequent stay in paradise. While *Qīāmat* was hailed by Soviet authorities as an outstanding piece of atheistic literature (cf. Baldauf) and published by them in several languages, there are critics who in contrast maintain that its satire is really aimed at the new dogma of the communist bureaucrats and ideologists of the period (Allworth, 1996).



Drama was a growing genre in Central Asia and Feʼrat wrote numerous plays. His popular plays on historical themes, including *Abū Moslem* (1918), *Oluḡ Beg* (1919), *Tēmūrning saḡānasī* (Timūr's mausoleum; 1919), *Oḡuz Kān* (1919), *Hend ektelālčilarī* (Insurgents of India; written 1920, pub. 1923), and *Arslān* (1926) were mostly performed on the stage (Rakhmanov, 1967; *Uzbekskii sovetskii teatr*, Tashkent, 1966, p. 263). However, *Šaytānīng tangrega ʻešyānī* (Satan's mutiny against the Lord; in verse), *Bēdel*, and *Abu'l-Fayz Kān*, all published in 1924, the year of his exile to Moscow and Tashkent, reveal a more sophisticated literary approach, attributable to a shift in focus from the ordinary reader to intellectuals. The fact that these same works are also closely related to the heretical theme found in *Qīāmat* could be explained as part of his attempt, faced with the new political realities of the mid-1920s, to conform and avoid marginalisation (cf. Allworth, 1996; Alimjan, p. 224).

Like many in his generation, Feʼrat composed poems in Persian since early youth. His earlier poems, in which he uses the pen name Mejmar, are lyrical in tone. He wrote a *maṭnawī*, *Mer'āt-e kayr al-bašar*, on religious themes, probably in the early 1900s. His later poetry also adhered to the classical *ʻarūz* form, but they were now reformist in their content, as reflected in *Šayḡa* (The shout), which consists of five *ḡazals* and six *tarkīb-bands*. He also wrote pedagogic pieces for school children, as found in the textbooks of 1910s and 1920s published in Transoxiana. A collection of his Turki poems was reprinted in *Milli Edebiyat* (I, Berlin, 1943). His work was severely attacked by the Soviet literary critics for its lack of socialistic content (for references to his Persian poetry, see Mirzozoda et al., pp. 148-50).

The range of Feʼrat's scholarship is impressively wide and varied. He published monographs on the literature, linguistics, prosody, and music of his homeland. The works devoted to Sayf Esfarangī, Ḥāfez Ōbahī, Ferdowsī, ʻOmar Ḳayyām, and ʻAlī-Šīr Navāʻī show a deep knowledge of Persian language and literature. His study of history benefited from his knowledge of Arabic, Russian, and perhaps Urdu and drew on his familiarity with rare documents related to Transoxiana. No comprehensive bibliography has yet been published listing his numerous scholarly and popular articles.

Feʼrat had a fine literary command of both Persian and Turki; thus both Tajiks (Mirzozoda) and Uzbeks (*Uzbek sovet èntsiklopediyasi* XII, Tashkent, 1979, p. 119) claim Feʼrat's literary heritage. Which of the two languages was his mother tongue remains an open question. The fact that he wrote his earlier works in Persian even in the Turkophile expatriate environment of Istanbul



can only confirm that Turki had not yet gained a high literary status, or at least was not a widely-read language among the predominantly Persophone urban intelligentsia of Transoxiana. On the other hand, his strong support for Turki in the early 1920s, going as far as denying the existence of Persian as one of the native languages of Central Asia, can hardly be used as contrary evidence given the impelling force of pan-Turanism at the time. Furthermore, the fact that in the mid-1920s Feṭrat started to publish once again in Persian, side by side with Uzbek, could be attributed to the end of the Jadid era and the suppression of Turkic nationalism, at the time of the Soviet recognition of Tajiks as a distinct nationality (1924). Four years later, the status of Tajikistan changed from an autonomous republic within Uzbek SSR to a full constituent republic of the Soviet Union in 1929. These developments may have also encouraged Feṭrat to publish some of his originally Turki works, e.g. *Qīāmat*, in Tajik Persian. In the introduction to the *'Eṣyān-e Wāse'* (Wāse's uprising; 1927) he states his intention to write in Persian rather than Turki, the language of his previous plays, to promote dramatic arts in Tajikistan.

Another indication of the shift in Feṭrat's attention back to Persian is manifested in his influential articles on the substitution of Perso-Arabic by Roman script which appeared in *Āvāz-e tājik* (no. 3, 1927, no. 165, 1927). The idea quickly gained popularity among Tajik modernizers, as the script was adapted already to several Turkic languages of the Soviet Union. During 1928 many commentaries were published, mostly in the review *Rahbar-e dāneš*, on the two principal proposals for the Tajik Persian language, initiated by Feṭrat and by Aleksandr Semēnov. Feṭrat's proposal was finally officially adopted with some modifications and was used until supplanted by Cyrillic characters in 1940 (Braginskiĭ, p. 24).

Feṭrat was described by SÂadr-al-Dīn 'Aynī as the pioneer of modern Tajik prose ('Aynī, 1924, pp. 455, 531). In his earlier works he used simple, clear, language, avoiding the ornate embellishments found in certain styles in the past. It was not, however, a total break with tradition, for it incorporated frequent passages from the Qur'ān and Hadith and stayed almost free of the vernacular. With the exception of certain usage peculiar to the Persian style of the Transoxiana, it does not radically differ from the contemporary prose of Persia proper. Nevertheless, a conspicuous development in his prose style is detectable in his later dialogues, where he makes full use of vernacular forms and idioms, a characteristic of 'Aynī's prose and of his followers—a style best accentuated in the Persian version of *Qīāmat*, published a year before the



author's disappearance. Feṭrat's significance as the lost ring in the chain of Persian writers of Transoxiana, between Aḥmad Dāneš and Ṣadr-al-Dīn 'Aynī (qq.v.), has never been sufficiently explored: compared with numerous critical studies on the other two, and on Feṭrat's Turki works and his political thought, little, if any, is written on Feṭrat's Persian literary heritage.

See also [EDUCATION xxiii](#).

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