

peoples who were not true adherents of Islam, even when it was at its most widespread, were also called Muslims. But after the Great October Revolution, as a result of socialist transformations, the masses broke away from religion and the former application to them of the word "Muslim" lost its meaning.

Our concern here is the persistent confusion of ideas: a word signifying religious adherence is used to delineate a group of nationalities amongst which the religion had previously been widespread.

But if it were simply a case of incorrect word usage much of this discussion would be unwarranted. Unfortunately, the situation is much more complicated.

Most non-believers are still deeply convinced that their nationality obliges them to perform certain rites and to keep customs which, on closer inspection, are not national but religious. Hence, in Kirgizia and Kazakhstan, people rigorously observe the traditional rites which, incidentally, are financially ruinous for a bereaved family. A Muslim funeral, with all its rituals and customs fully observed, costs two or three thousand roubles.

In Uzbekistan and Tadjikistan, the rites of circumcision and religious weddings are common practice. In 1964 I took part in the work of a team of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, checking up on atheist work in the Tadjikistan Young Communist organizations. In the Kurgan-Tyube region I had to talk to many young communists. It was clear that the great majority of young people register their marriages according to Muslim custom and that even certain communists do so.

Evidently, many of these religious rituals affect one's way of life and family relationships. Their observance is always linked with national traditions.

The suggestion that the confusion of religious and national identity is not altogether innocent or free from danger is borne out by numerous facts. If today's young person considers himself to be a Muslim, then to some extent he connects himself by this to religion and imperceptibly falls under the influence of believers. From here it is only a short step to the sort of reasoning adduced by I. Irbutayev in his article "In the *makhalla* of Yangi-Hayat" (*Nauka i Religia* No. 12, 1965). A 38-year old lady confessed to him "I believe in God because I can do no other . . . If you say there is no God, everyone ridicules you and says she's not a Muslim". This is how things are - she believes in Allah so that nobody should doubt her national identity.

## Sociologist Studies Islam

*Sociological surveys in the Soviet press have become an important source of information on religion in the USSR. The following extracts are taken from "Particular Manifestations of Religious Survivals Among the Urban Population" by S. Begmedov (News from the Academy of Science of the Turkmen Republic, Series: Social Sciences No. 3, 1968, pp. 34-40). A glossary of some terms used in this article is given at the end of the document.*

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. . . This article reviews some questions regarding particular manifestations of the most thriving religious survivals among the population of the town of Tashauz, on the basis of materials gathered by means of concrete sociological investigations. This includes a questionnaire, individual talks with believers and

direct observations by the author. By means of the questionnaire and individual conversations we made a survey of 6,146 people of 18 years and over: 3,085 men and 3,061 women.

The survey covered mainly representatives of three social groups: workers (41.79%), white-collar workers (23.51%) and others (pensioners, old men incapable of work, old women and housewives – 34.7%).

We divided those in the survey into three age groups, putting into the first group people of the older generation – 65 and over, whose consciousness was mostly formed before the establishment of Soviet power in our country; in the second were representatives of the middle generation – 46 to 65 (22.6%), whose consciousness was formed mainly in the period of the transition of Turkmenistan from the patriarchal – ancestral order to socialism, and in the third, members of the younger generation – 18 to 46 (71.2%), whose consciousness was formed in the years of Soviet power.

According to nationality, 25.1% of those in the survey are Turkmens, 66.7% Uzbeks, 4.7% Kazakhs, 2.6% Tatars, 0.9% Karakalpaks, Tadzhiks, Azerbaidzhanis, Uiguris and people of other Muslim nations.

6.2% of those in the survey are members of the older generation, 22.6% of the middle and 71.2% of the younger generation.

Of all those in the survey 374 men (12.1%) and 361 women (11.8%) were believers. There are grounds for supposing that the number of believers would have been higher, especially in the older and middle generation groups, up to approximately 20-25%, if all the questionnaires had been returned. The fact is that of 5,000 questionnaires which we handed out, 2,835 were completed and returned, of which 275 were invalid. 2,165 questionnaires were not returned. Checking this by means of individual conversations, we came to the conclusion that the number of believers in families that had not returned the questionnaire was somewhat higher than in those which had.

As the investigations indicate, religious survivals in Turkmenia in general and Tashauz in particular have in the majority of cases been inherited by believers from members of past generations. The majority of believers are elderly people. According to the data of our investigation, 47.3% of the believers were from the age-group over 64, 24% in the age-group 46 to 65 and only 5% under 46 years. Believers acquired faith in God, in various religious legends, veneration for the “holy scriptures” – the Koran, and the habit of observing religious rites in their childhood. At the same time in Turkmenia the ritualistic side of religion is much more alive than its ideological side. Many believers simply observe religious rituals, following the traditions of their fathers and mothers.

About 87% of the believers had a low cultural and general educational level. In general there were no believers among people with intermediate or eight years of education. More than 60% of believers belong to the social grouping “dependants”. The remainder are people doing socially useful work, mostly skilled – stevedores, labourers of various kinds, stokers, cleaners, etc . . .

These facts testify that the bearers of religious survivals in our time are mainly people with a low cultural and educational level, who are not capable of subjecting religious teachings to critical analysis . . .

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Believers may be divided into four groups according to their attitude towards *namaz* (prayers from the Koran). In the first group are believers who say prayers five times daily and who try to make up for those omitted by saying the *gaza-namazy*. They are all representatives of the older generation and they include 7.2% of male believers and 7.5% of female believers. In the second group are believers who say prayers three times a day. They usually say the *erte*, *oile* and *yastin-namazy* prayers and they do not make up for the ones left out. They comprise 12.8% of male believers and 13% of female. Age-wise they are in the overwhelming majority members of the older generation.

In the third group are believers who say prayers only once a day. They comprise 21.4% of male believers and 18.6% of female. Age-wise they include representatives of all three generations, although members of the younger generation are very few. In the fourth group are believers who say prayers, as a rule, only in connection with particular circumstances. They accompany believers who take part in festival and *dzhinaza* prayers. These people come basically from the middle and younger generations. They formed 58.6% of male believers and 60.9% of female . . .

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Believers also divide into four groups according to their attitude to the Ramadan Fast (*oraza*). In the first group are those who observe the Fast for 30 days; take part in *taravo* prayers and the solemn prayer said in honour of the end of the fast; who organize *agyz-achar* (ending of the fast) and take part in it and pay *pitre*. They comprised 7.2% of male believers and 8% of female. However it may be noted that participation in the *taravo* and festival prayers only affects the men, since women are forbidden by *Sharyat* (Muslim law) to participate in collective prayers.

In the second group are believers who observe the Fast for more than three but less than 30 days. They are in principle in favour of observing the Fast for the month, therefore they usually fast at the beginning of the month, then because of various – in their opinion – objective reasons, they end their Fast after several days. These believers formed 7% of both sexes. Age-wise, they belong mainly to the older generation and to a small extent to the middle generation.

In the third group are believers who observe the Fast for only three days. The overwhelming majority observe it for one day each at the beginning, middle and end of Ramadan. However there are also some who observe the Fast for the first three days of Ramadan, but they are very few. Of the believers in the survey, 21.7% of the men and 19.4% of the women belonged to this group.

Believers in the fourth group have various attitudes to the Fast. Among these are some who used to fast but no longer do, but at the same time they organize *agyzachary* and go to *oraza khait-namazy*; or some who even now fast for a few days, but not every year. Sometimes they agree with those who do fast, sometimes not. Their attitude to the Fast depends on certain circumstances and situations, but their attitude to *taravo* prayers and *pitre* varies. These believers comprised 63.4% of the men and 64.8% of the women. Age-wise, they are overwhelmingly of the younger generation, and an insignificant proportion of the middle generation.

Those in the survey may be divided into two groups according to their attitude

to the *Hajj* (pilgrimage to a holy place, particularly Mecca – Ed.). In the first group are those who believe in it and make pilgrimages usually to holy places of a local nature. This group comprises 27.8% of male believers and 41.8% of female believers. Age-wise, the majority are of the older generation, some of the middle generation, all of them are dependants. In the second group are those who doubt the value of the *Hajj*, but still do it in some circumstances. But the main reason for their doing it is not so much religious ideas, as other circumstances, for example a trip to a healing spring, venerated by the believers, for purposes of healing; a trip to “holy” places which are also cemeteries, for the purpose of venerating relatives buried there. Trips to such places are often made as excursions, but at the same time represent a pilgrimage. In this group are 58.8% of male believers and 52.6% of female.

Belief in the *Hajj* ritual is more strongly developed among women than among men. It should also be emphasized that among Muslim women the idea of the pilgrimage as “pleasing to God” is replaced to a significant degree by the idea that the “holy” places have miraculous properties. Many women make a pilgrimage to “holy” places with a request for specific aid. This tendency is particularly developed among women without children and incapable of child-bearing. This, and also the continual suggestion by believing parents and old people (who enjoy great authority) nourishes in some pious women the hope that the “holy” places will help them to become capable of child-bearing. This explains the great number of women who believe in the *Hajj*.

The next vital religious survival is the *Kurban-bairam*, celebrated 70 days after the end of the Ramadan Fast.

The investigations have shown that although at present the number of believers who participate in the festival of *Kurban-bairam* is significant, the number of families who specially slaughter animals, as the ritual prescribes, is small. As our informants explained, of those who celebrate this festival today, the majority buy meat for it at meat stalls and invite a small number of guests, mainly relatives and neighbours. The majority do not invite the mullah. At the same time the head of the house often does not emphasize that he is in fact observing *Kurban-bairam*. The feast occurs like a normal guest meal. Such a celebration of *Kurban-bairam*, from the point of view of *Sharyat*, is a great deviation from the demands of orthodox Islam.

The religious legend which serves as the basis for the celebration of *Kurban-bairam* has lost its meaning for the majority of town-dwelling believers today. Members of the clergy also take an indifferent attitude towards it, on the principle “not to lose this as well”, and they sanction deviations from the norm laid down by *Sharyat*.

This fact on the one hand testifies to accommodation by members of the clergy and, on the other, it illustrates a noticeable departure by the majority of believers from strict religious canons in the fulfilment of particular rules in the Koran and *Sharyat*. According to the data of our investigations 74.9% of male believers observed *Kurban-bairam* and 66.5% of the women. Age-wise, they belong almost completely to the older and middle generations, by social grouping they are mainly dependants.

One of the most barbarous rites of Islam is circumcision. When a boy is circumcised, he receives not only a physical, but also a profound psychological trauma. A child who is subjected to circumcision naturally wants to know why

this is done to him. In answer to this question, believing grandfathers and grandmothers tell him religious legends and thus already at an early age they sow seeds of religiosity in his soul. As the results of the investigation showed, almost all boys in rural areas and the majority of boys in the town are subjected to circumcision. The only exceptions are those whose father or mother are not Muslims. It was established that circumcision today is carried out by the older generation. They subject their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren to circumcision and the parents of these children adopt a position of compromise . . .

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Among the most vital religious survivals in Northern Turkmenia is the observation of religious burial rites. This may be explained to a large extent by the fact that our atheists and other workers on the ideological front hardly touch this subject in lectures, talks and speeches (in newspapers and journals, on television), they do not give enough attention to revealing the essence of religious burial rites, and do not show their harmfulness.

At the same time our investigations have shown that many religious norms and the corresponding rituals, which used to be strictly observed by Muslims, in Tashauz today are not observed or are observed rarely and by a small number of people. These include for example the rites of *azan aitdyrmak* at the birth of a child; religious ablutions and name-giving to newborn children, various magical devices and methods prescribed for the "preservation" of a person and animals from the evil eye and evil spirits (for example, deliberately keeping a child dirty, putting it in old, torn clothes, hanging various kinds of "charms" on children and animals). In the conditions of a socialist society the ground has completely disappeared for one profoundly reactionary idea, the so-called *gazzavat* – the "holy war" against unbelievers . . .

#### GLOSSARY

<i>gaza-namazy</i>	ommitted, postponed prayer
<i>erte</i>	paying of a religious debt (fasting, prayer)
<i>oile</i>	prayer at noon
<i>yastin-namaz</i>	prayer between evening and midnight
<i>dzhinaza</i> prayers	prayer for the dead at a funeral
<i>taravo</i> prayer	prayers during Ramadan
<i>pitre</i>	money given to the poor instead of fasting