

**THE ROLE OF CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE
SOCIAL LIFE OF UZBEKISTAN IN THE 1920s–1950s**

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Abstract: This study provides a scholarly and historical analysis of the role played by cultural and educational institutions in the social life of Uzbekistan during the 1920s–1950s. During this period, clubs and houses of culture, libraries, museums, theaters, extracurricular educational institutions, and the press served as important instruments for increasing social activity among the population, expanding literacy, and instilling new ideological views. The article also examines the policy of the Soviet authorities to ideologically manage society through cultural and educational institutions and to shape a “new person,” while offering a balanced assessment of both the positive and negative aspects of this process.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, 20th century, 1920s–1950s, social life, cultural and educational institutions, clubs and houses of culture, libraries, theaters, literacy, Soviet ideology.

In the post-war years, the level of provision and support for cultural institutions in the southern regions of Uzbekistan was in a critical condition. This was because during that period all resources and efforts were directed toward eliminating the consequences of the war. As a result, the funds allocated to meet the needs of cultural institutions were extremely limited. Moreover, during the war years, many specialists working in this sector were mobilized to the front, and a significant number of them never returned from the battlefield. This factor also had a serious negative impact on the activities of cultural institutions. In addition, the process of training qualified personnel for this sector was very weak during this period.

If there were 153 libraries operating in the Kashkadarya region in 1940, their number decreased to 64 by 1950. Small rural libraries were closed, and in their place larger libraries were established in the centers of collective farms and state farms. The number of books in these libraries amounted to 117,000 copies in 1940 and reached only 122,000 copies by 1950 [1].

Nevertheless, in the post-war years, the construction of clubs and houses of culture in district centers and rural areas experienced a certain revival. In 1945, there were 165 clubs in Kashkadarya, and by 1950 their number increased to 288 [2]. During this period, some improvement was also observed in the provision of cinema services to the population. For example, in 1945 there were 19 cinema projection units in the Kashkadarya region, while by 1950 their number reached 46 [3]. If there were 7 cinemas operating in Kashkadarya in 1943, their number increased to 28 by 1948. In the same year, although there were 14 radio relay points in the region, only 8 of them were functioning [4]. In addition, in 1948 the Kashkadarya region had 84 collective farm clubs and houses of culture, 12 district libraries, and reading halls in 116 villages [5].

During this period, a certain revival of cultural life and cultural institutions can also be observed in the Surkhandarya region. For instance, while there were 99 libraries in Surkhandarya in 1940, their number increased to 148 by 1950 and reached 162 by 1955 [6]. The book

collections of these libraries also expanded steadily over the years. In 1940, libraries in the region held 91,000 copies of books and journals [7]. By 1945, this figure rose to 96,000; by 1950 to 218,000; and by 1955 to 468,000 copies [8]. At the same time, the number of clubs in these regions also increased annually.

Specifically, in 1940 there were 86 clubs in the Surkhandarya region and 148 clubs in the Kashkadarya region. By 1950, the number of clubs in Surkhandarya increased to 108, while in Kashkadarya it reached 288 [9]. However, not all of these clubs operated at full capacity, as material shortages and the hardships of the post-war years significantly affected their functioning.

For example, in 1950, only 9 out of 18 clubs in the Sariosiyo district of Surkhandarya were operational, and in the Termez district, 7 out of 11 clubs were not functioning [10]. Nevertheless, the Soviet regime viewed cultural and educational institutions primarily as instruments for strengthening and promoting Soviet ideology. Therefore, the activities of all cultural and educational institutions were directed toward promoting Soviet reality, studying the works of the classics of Marxism-Leninism, disseminating the decisions of party congresses among the population, educating people in the spirit of atheism, and other similar objectives.

As a result, a process of politicization intensified in the activities of clubs. Cultural and educational institutions began to function as a kind of guiding mechanism in fulfilling the social order of the Communist Party. This, in turn, led to a growing alienation of the population from club activities. Nevertheless, the central authorities attempted to artificially enhance the role of cultural and educational institutions by various means. As a result, laudatory talks, lectures glorifying party and Soviet realities, and monotonous, tedious events became the main focus of the work and activities of cultural institutions.

For example, at the 1st conference of the Surkhandarya regional party organization held in 1945, as well as at its 2nd conference in 1949, 3rd conference in 1951, and 4th conference in 1952, issues related to the ideological and political work of party organizations were placed firmly on the agenda. These meetings assigned sector specialists the tasks of widely promoting mass political work in regional collective farms, enterprises, and institutions; organizing large-scale study of the works of the classics of Marxism-Leninism; delivering continuous lectures on the history of Bolshevism and communist organizations; intensifying atheistic propaganda; and revitalizing the activities of political schools, study circles, and party schools [11].

Such a situation was not limited to the Surkhandarya region alone but was widespread throughout the entire USSR. In order to implement these objectives, a new political organization—the All-Union Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge (later known as the “Znanie” Society)—was established in the USSR in 1947. Regional, district, and city branches of this organization were also set up within the republic. Not a single settlement, collective farm, state farm, or enterprise remained outside the scope of this society [12]. In this way, the Communist Party brought all socio-economic processes, including the cultural and educational sphere, under its control.

As a result, all cultural and educational institutions gradually turned into instruments for fulfilling the social order of the Communist Party. One of the most distinctive features of this period was the task of “educating a new person” through culture and art. From the perspective of the Communist Party, the “new person” was an individual who was always ready to unquestioningly carry out the goals and tasks of the ruling party and who gradually lost a sense of personal identity, becoming a representative of a conformist mass [13]. Under such conditions,

there could be no question of the local population's right to cultural and spiritual heritage or of their independent use of national and universal human values.

Nevertheless, despite these constraints, devoted employees of cultural institutions and members of the intelligentsia carried out diligent efforts to raise the cultural level of the population and to improve cultural life. As a result, the number of cultural institutions in the Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya regions gradually increased. This can be illustrated by the following facts: in the Kashkadarya region, 230 clubs and cultural-educational institutions operated in 1960, 249 in 1970, 291 in 1980, and 315 in 1985. In the Surkhandarya region, the number of clubs reached 134 in 1960, 191 in 1970, 241 in 1980, and 245 in 1985 [14].

Similarly, in 1965 the Kashkadarya region had 324 public libraries, 251 clubs, and 236 cinema units [15]. In 1967, an additional 32 clubs and 26 public libraries were opened in the region. Moreover, five clubs and four houses of culture were constructed directly using collective farm funds and equipped with modern facilities [16]. In 1979, the Kashkadarya region served the population with 300 clubs and houses of culture, 600 libraries, 250 cinema units, and 120 amateur artistic groups [17].

In 1983, the population of the Surkhandarya region was served by 254 clubs, 473 libraries, 1 museum, 1 theater, and 381 cinema units [18]. In the same year, the population of the Kashkadarya region was served by 296 clubs, 562 public libraries, 1 theater, 1 museum, and 440 cinema units [19].

These data indicate that the number of cultural services and cultural institutions provided to the population increased year by year. However, the activities of these institutions were subject to constant supervision by Soviet state bodies and control agencies. Only activities approved under strict censorship regulations were permitted. Any deviation from the prescribed direction or any action contrary to central directives resulted in party disciplinary measures.

Nevertheless, creative individuals never ceased their efforts; on the contrary, they continued to express their attitudes toward the existing system, sometimes openly and sometimes covertly. In particular, amateur folk ensembles played an exceptionally important role in preserving the invaluable cultural heritage of the people, as well as age-old customs and traditions refined over centuries, and in promoting them through stage performances.

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