

**THE REFLECTION OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE EARLY  
20TH-CENTURY FAMINE IN TURKESTAN IN THE WORKS OF SAID  
RIZO ALIZODA**

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***Abstract.** This study analyzes the famine that occurred in Turkestan at the beginning of the 20th century and its socio-economic consequences based on the works and journalistic legacy of Said Rizo Alizoda. The author's views on the causes of the famine, its impact on the population's way of life, and the role of colonial policy are examined. The paper also explores Alizoda's attitude toward issues of national awakening and social justice. Using historical sources and modern scholarly approaches, the study highlights the relevance and key aspects of the problem.*

***Keywords:** Turkestan, early 20th century, famine, Said Rizo Alizoda, colonial policy, socio-economic crisis, journalism, national awakening, historical sources.*

Despite nearly half a century having passed since Turkestan came under the colonial rule of Tsarist Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the condition of the common people remained extremely difficult. The country required deep economic, social, and political reforms. However, supporters of the authoritarian regime continued to violate the rights of the Turkestan population for their own interests, while suppressing the religious and cultural values of the people. The only way out of such backwardness was to educate and enlighten the population [1].

The Jadid movement, which entered Turkestan in the late 19th century, had a positive impact on the development of socio-political and cultural processes in the



region. However, the colonial authorities did not allow reforms in the political and economic spheres, rendering all efforts ineffective. The socio-political rights of the peoples of Turkestan were severely restricted.

Nevertheless, by this time Jadid intellectuals had made significant progress in the field of the press. In their efforts to raise the spiritual and intellectual level of the population, they covered socio-political issues of the region in newspapers and journals such as Sadoi Farg‘ona, Ulug‘ Turkiston, Khurshid, and Zarafshon. At the same time, they informed the local population about global events, scientific achievements, and political developments.

These achievements were realized despite strong resistance from the colonial authorities, thanks to the tireless efforts of Jadid enlighteners. As a result, the people of Turkestan became increasingly aware of global developments in science, politics, and society. Moreover, the socio-political consciousness of the population gradually developed. The role of the Jadid press in helping the people understand their political rights and freedoms was truly invaluable [2].

The political and legal activity of the peoples of Turkestan can also be observed in their reaction to the decision of the Tsarist government to conscript the population of Turkestan for labor service in 1916, in order to strengthen the rear of the front during World War I. On June 25, 1916, Nicholas II issued a decree to mobilize non-Russian male populations of the empire for work in the construction of defensive fortifications and military communication routes in active army zones, as well as for other tasks necessary for state defense. According to the decree, men aged 19 to 43 from Turkestan, Siberia, and the Caucasus were to be mobilized [3].

This decision led to major uprisings in cities such as Khujand and Jizzakh. The Tsarist government deployed approximately 100,000 armed troops to Turkestan to



suppress these revolts, doing so with extreme brutality. Particularly in Jizzakh, the violence reached especially horrific levels. These nationwide movements reflected the deep resentment and collective protest of the population against colonial policies. Another important contributing factor was the famine that spread across the empire, especially in Turkestan [4].

During World War I, the import of grain from Russia to Turkestan decreased year by year. At the same time, agricultural land in the region was increasingly allocated to cotton production, while areas for grain and food crops were reduced. The colonial authorities exploited Turkestan's territory without any rational planning to meet the needs of their domestic light industry. As a result, both the population and the state faced a severe food crisis.

Following the events of October 1917, the people of Turkestan sought to take control of their own destiny. On November 27, 1917, the Turkestan Autonomy was established in Kokand by intellectuals and political figures. However, it lasted only 70 days. The brutal massacre carried out in Kokand by Bolshevik forces further intensified public anger toward the authorities. The interests of the local population were ignored: sufficient food supplies were provided to settlers from Russia and Europe, while the local population was given poor-quality and often inedible food. Evidence of this can be found in periodical press sources of the time.

Samarkand was one of the important cities of the Tsarist Empire, where ancient cultural traditions and elements of modernity were gradually blending. It was here that Said Rizo Alizoda lived and worked as an active intellectual of his time. He consistently wrote about the suffering of ordinary people, striving to draw the attention of political circles to their hardships. This is evident in his article "A Terrible Incident," where he describes the following episode:



“It was Friday. Having finished my work, I was sitting at home with some concern among the children. There was a knock at the door. A child ran out and returned with two women, saying they had come on some matter. My wife invited them in, and they sat in the hallway. When I asked who they were, I learned that one was the mother of Qurban, a village guard from our village, and the other was the mother of Rahim, a shopkeeper from a neighboring village, whose son had been sent to labor service as a squad leader and had not yet returned. They were served tea, bread, and food. As soon as they saw the bread, as if they had not seen it for a year, they kissed it several times, touched it to their eyes, and began to eat. One of them burst into tears, saying: “Thank God, I can see bread again” [5].

The characters described in this account symbolize not only individual families but, more broadly, the tragic condition of countless families throughout Turkestan.

After World War I, Tsarist Russia emerged with significant military and economic losses. In the Fergana Valley, severe famine led to the death of many people. The primary cause was the indifference of the authorities toward the lives of the indigenous population. This was the result of a one-sided, self-serving colonial policy.

This can be illustrated with statistical data. For example, in the Fergana Valley, cotton cultivation expanded dramatically: 274,891 desyatinas in 1913, 303,150 in 1914, 333,658 in 1915, and 348,525 in 1916. In 47 out of 84 volosts, cotton accounted for 50% of cultivated land; in 9 volosts, 90%; in 4, 80%; and in the remaining 23, 70%. As a result, other crops - especially grain, the primary source of subsistence - were displaced, making the region heavily dependent on imported grain [2].



As in other regions, the population of Samarkand also suffered from famine. Reading about these events evokes a profound sense of injustice and raises questions about the value of human life at that time. Another factor that worsened the situation was severe drought in Russia's main grain-producing regions.

Despite these hardships, Said Rizo Alizoda did not remain passive. He actively organized charitable support, collecting donations from wealthy individuals to assist the residents of the Bog'ishamol area where he lived [6].

In his article "From the Society of the Hungry," Said Rizo Alizoda provides even more distressing descriptions of the suffering endured by people affected by famine:

"The length of the days of hunger and, on the one hand, the heat have had a very negative impact on us poor and destitute people. As if this were not enough, according to old custom, the holy month has also arrived. Fasting and worship, being a command of God, we naturally welcomed with due respect. We fast continuously, day and night, and we fast sincerely. Not only until Eid, but due to the lack of bread, we will be forced to continue fasting for several weeks even after Eid. For it is clear that for those who have no bread to eat, there is no other way but fasting. Therefore, while the wealthy sometimes eat even during the day or at dawn, we continue fasting even at night without eating" [7].

During the month of Ramadan, the poor population, despite suffering from hunger, continued to fast, demonstrating strong faith and resilience without voicing complaints. However, this passage also contains a layer of irony. Beneath the surface lies a bitter question of fate: how long can such a situation continue while people remain silent?



The author criticizes the wealthy members of the same community who, despite being Muslims, fail to assist their poorer neighbors. He raises a moral question: how can one consider oneself a true Muslim while neglecting those in need? While it is natural for a fasting person to endure hunger and thirst during the day in the heat, for the wealthy these hardships disappear at the evening meal (iftar). For the poor, however, the lack of food left them with no alternative.

The author also points out that local officials who collaborated with the oppressive regime were among the main contributors to this situation. By describing these hardships, Alizoda vividly reconstructs the socio-political and economic landscape of the time.

Continuing his account, Said Rizo Alizoda writes that the members of the “Society of the Hungry” decided to hold a meeting shortly before iftar:

“Without any difficulty, everyone gathered. At the meeting, a chairman was elected and the issue of food supply was discussed. The next delicate matter was the dismissal of the heads of the food committees and the appointment of new ones—Eshmat and Toshmat. Upon being elected, they expressed their gratitude and promised to provide half a measure of flour per person. The meeting, which began at the time of iftar, ended very late, at three o’clock in the morning.”

Bureaucratic obstacles have existed in every era. However, when such dysfunction becomes deeply rooted among the lowest strata of society, it causes the greatest harm to ordinary people [8].

In his 1917 article “From the Voice of Five Thousand Workers of Bog‘ishamol,” published in the newspaper “Mehnatkashlar Tovushi” (The Voice of the Workers), Said Rizo Alizoda also discusses injustices in food supply policies:



“It is well known that the Bog‘ishamol district belongs to the second district of the city. In this district, there are about 10,000 inhabitants, including Muslims, Russians, Armenians, and Jews. Of these ten thousand people, half - that is, all Russians, Armenians, and Jews, as well as three thousand Muslims - receive small quantities of food from the railway food supply office” [9].

In such a situation, privileges granted to representatives of other nationalities, while unjust and discriminatory policies were pursued against the local population, can be interpreted as deliberate and systematic oppression carried out by the Bolshevik authorities. We do not have the right to forget these pages of our recent past. It is necessary to draw appropriate conclusions from these events and to inform our people about the true course of Turkestan’s history [10].

Indeed, the life and work of this scholar, who devoted his entire life to enlightenment and education, should serve as an example for the younger generation. It is important to further develop efforts aimed at promoting his legacy and dedication [11]. Studies related to this topic can be found in the scientific research works of Professor G.K. Masharipova [12–21].

**Conclusion.** During the years of independence, large-scale efforts have been made to study the lives of many enlighteners, preserve their memory, and promote their scientific and literary heritage. In particular, the life and work of Said Rizo Alizoda have been examined by numerous scholars and researchers, including Farhod Alizoda, G‘aybulla as-Salom, Salohiddin Hayitov, Bekmurod Yo‘ldoshev, Saydi Umirov, Begali Qosimov, Naim Karimov, and Jumhur Ja‘farov. However, preserving the memory of the scholar requires more than simply honoring his name. The enlightener’s service and sacrifices for his people deserve the highest level of recognition, respect, and active promotion.



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