

FOLK MEDICINE IN THE BUKHARA PEOPLE'S SOVIET REPUBLIC

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Annotation: This article provides a scholarly analysis of the condition, historical development, and social significance of folk medicine during the period of the Bukhara People's Soviet Republic. The study examines traditional healing methods, the activities of healers and religious scholars, pharmaceutical traditions, and the role of folk medicine in preserving public health. It also considers the policy pursued toward folk medicine after the establishment of Soviet power, its relationship with official medicine, and the processes of integration. The article evaluates folk medicine as an important component of national cultural heritage and substantiates its medical and social significance.

Keywords: Bukhara People's Soviet Republic, folk medicine, traditional medicine, healers, pharmacology, medical heritage, healthcare, Soviet medicine, integration process, cultural values.

Introduction. Folk medicine occupied an important place in the life of the population of the Bukhara People's Soviet Republic. During this period, the majority of the population relied on the services of traditional healers. These practitioners, who had mastered the secrets of healing, based their work on medical treatises and the centuries-old experience of their ancestors. Healers treated patients suffering from smallpox and jaundice by means of bloodletting. One of the travelers who visited Bukhara noted: "There are many healers in Bukhara, and even more medicines." In the 1820s, E.K. Meyendorff, who visited Bukhara, wrote that, like all Muslim peoples, the Bukharans had great respect for medicine, and that a skilled healer was expected to diagnose a disease merely by feeling the patient's pulse without asking any questions. These descriptions were also characteristic of the first quarter of the twentieth century [1].

Sources provide information about the diseases widespread in Bukhara, the medical condition of the population, the spread of modern medicine, sources of infection, various microbes and bacteria, water- and air-borne diseases, and the contamination of drinking water stored for long periods in clay vessels. In treatment, healers took into account the patient's temperament (mizaj), which was classified as hot, cold, moist, or dry. Great importance was attached to temperament in therapy. Patients were prescribed strengthening, warming, relaxing, or cooling medicines according to their constitution. Food products were also classified according to their warming or cooling properties. If a patient had a "hot" temperament, cooling medicines were prescribed, and vice versa. This method of treatment was known as diet (parhez). Medical books described all medicines and foods as either hot or cold in nature. Even grapes were considered cooling, while their seeds were regarded as warming; only bread was considered neutral. Healers used between 500 and 1,000 types of remedies. E.A. Eversmann, who visited a pharmaceutical shop, noted that nearly a thousand types of medicines were available in Bukhara. Thus, Central Asian healers continued into the early twentieth century to practice the art of treatment based on a pharmacological tradition formed over a thousand years, astonishing European observers [2].

The medicines recommended by healers were prepared from various plants, mountain minerals, and other local raw materials. They could be purchased at herbalist shops (attor). Herbalists selected medicines based on patients' complaints about their health.

Folk healers specialized in different branches of medicine: surgeons treated wounds; leech practitioners applied leeches to remove what was considered impure blood; bone-setters treated



fractures; specialists removed foreign objects from the throat; and midwives assisted women in childbirth. However, literacy among healers was limited. Therefore, people often turned to faith healers, charm readers, fortune-tellers, and other practitioners, and religious-magical methods were widely used when the causes of illness were not properly understood [3].

Representatives of folk medicine sought to treat the population based on experience developed over centuries. They also used healing mineral waters, therapeutic mud, and baths. In the Karakul area of Bukhara, saline lakes and mud were used for treatment.

The population of Bukhara long suffered from dracunculiasis, known locally as “rishta,” named after the parasitic worm. The parasite lived in water reservoirs and entered the human body through drinking water or bathing, developing over nine months before emerging under the skin and causing severe pain. Bukharan healers had considerable experience in removing the worm by carefully extracting it through a small incision. In many developed countries, such practice was virtually unknown [4].

Before secular medicine became widespread in Bukhara, medical assistance to mothers and children was largely provided by women. Assisting childbirth was considered one of the most complex medical tasks, and experienced midwives performed this role. They supervised pregnancy, childbirth, and the care of the child up to one year. Midwives achieved certain success in treating infertility and often predicted the sex of the unborn child based on experience. Special attention was given to the mother’s nutrition after childbirth, with recommendations including porridge, sugar candy, walnuts, mutton soup, eggs, and honey. Women followed strict dietary rules during the postpartum period [5].

For forty days after birth, strangers were not allowed near the newborn. Measures were taken to protect the child from harmful environments, and daily fumigation with wild rue was practiced to prevent illness [7].

In this context, modern medical traditions gradually entered the sphere of maternal and child healthcare in Bukhara. For example, in 1911 a special outpatient clinic for women was opened in Bukhara, including a maternity department. In 1912, 13,500 women sought medical assistance there. Treatment types were divided into three groups according to ethnicity. Local women often preferred traditional methods of treatment due to economic difficulties and limited access to medical examinations. Physician Predtechensky regretted that local women sought medical assistance only when complications became severe. He recorded that 32 patients received prenatal medical care [6].

During the Soviet period, considerable efforts were made to improve public health and living conditions in Bukhara. Although the Bukhara Republic existed for a short time, decisive measures were taken to establish a state healthcare system.

Alongside the opening of hospitals and pharmacies, the training of doctors and nurses and the development of medical science were initiated. Sanitary units, medical expeditions, and healthcare workers provided assistance to urban and rural populations. As a result, the incidence of epidemics decreased and overall health indicators improved. However, due to limited access to state medical institutions, especially in rural areas, the population continued to rely largely on representatives of folk medicine [8].

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