

THE TRAGIC FATE OF KHOREZM INTELLECTUALS IN 1937–1938

Y. Rahmonova

Professor, Asia International University

Annotation: The article analyzes political repressions carried out by the Soviet totalitarian regime in Uzbekistan during the 20th century, with a particular focus on Khorezm. It examines the persecution of intellectuals and state officials in 1937–1938, their creative legacy, rehabilitation, and the significance of historical memory.

Keywords: Khorezm, political repression, 1938, intellectuals, Soviet regime, historical justice

In the 20th century, the Soviet totalitarian regime left a deep mark in history through its political repressions, which began after the October Revolution. These repressions were carried out through mass arrests, trials based on fabricated testimonies, sending people to labor camps (the GULAG system), and physical and spiritual elimination.

Particularly, the period of 1937–1938, known as the “Great Terror,” is marked in history as the most severe phase of political oppression. During this time, hundreds of thousands of people were punished based on various slanders and fabricated accusations. The scope of the repressions was broad, affecting different layers of society — state officials, representatives of social sciences and culture, military personnel, party activists, workers, and peasants were imprisoned or executed.

According to historians, as a result of political repressions between 1930 and 1953, more than three million people were sent to GULAG camps, and hundreds of thousands were executed.

In the history of Uzbekistan, the years 1937–1953 represent the harshest period of political repression under the Soviet regime. During this period, approximately 100,000 people in Uzbekistan were imprisoned on various charges, a large proportion of whom were young people, representatives of the national intelligentsia, and women. The scale of the repressions caused significant damage to the socio-economic and cultural life of the republic.

Under these repressions, national cadres were either eliminated or imprisoned. These political persecutions in Uzbekistan were carried out in a targeted and systematic manner, aimed at establishing the absolute control of Soviet power by removing local leadership cadres. Several thousand cultural, literary, scientific, and administrative figures belonging to the national intelligentsia were unjustly punished based on Soviet accusations, which led to a significant reduction in the reserve of national cadres.

During this period, serious threats emerged to national ideology and political stability in Uzbekistan. A sense of mistrust toward national identity and traditional values developed. The mass persecution and imprisonment of national cadres sharply reduced their influence in society, negatively affecting the formation and development of national identity.

During the “Great Terror,” many writers, scientists, and state officials were imprisoned on political charges, and numerous people not related to any crimes were executed. This process became a significant obstacle to the development of national culture and science.

The repressions carried out between 1937 and 1953 drastically changed public life in Uzbekistan. The disappearance of national cadres and pressure on cultural heritage led to social and cultural crises in the country. Moreover, an atmosphere of anxiety, instability, and mistrust emerged among the population. Many families were broken, negatively affecting the economic and spiritual development of society. Political repressions under the Soviet regime created a climate of fear, adversely impacting free thought and scientific creativity.

Repressions were particularly severe in Uzbekistan. Prominent intellectuals such as Abdulla Qodiriy, Cho‘lpon, Fitrat, and Qurbon Beregin — holders of significant scientific and literary potential — were executed based on fabricated charges.

Khudoybergan Devonov (1878–1938) — founder of photography and cinema in Turkestan, born in Khiva, known as a progressive figure in the Jadid movement. In the early 20th century, he established the first photography school in Khorezm, teaching young generations the scientific and practical foundations of the field. Under his initiative, photography began to be taught as a discipline in educational institutions.

In the 1920s–1930s, Devonov was engaged not only in national but also in all-Union cinematographic activities. He filmed documentary works such as *Working Women*, *Shorkul*, *Koza*, *Cotton Caravan*, and *In the Fields of Khorezm*, which depicted life, labor, and natural landscapes of Turkestan for the first time on screen.

However, the political repressions of 1937 did not spare him. Devonov was accused of being an “anti-revolutionary element,” “English spy,” and “guilty of espionage activities.” His trial lasted ten minutes, and on October 5, 1938, he was sentenced to death by shooting. Archival records indicate that he was executed a day before the court verdict. He was posthumously rehabilitated by the Supreme Court of the USSR only in 1959. Khudoybergan Devonov remains in history as a dedicated creator who laid the foundation of national cinema and photography.

Nazir Sholikurov (1881–1938) — Minister of Internal Affairs of the Khorezm People’s Soviets Republic and one of the organizers of the national security system. He actively participated in the modernization of state administration. In 1937, he was accused of “counter-revolutionary activity” and executed in 1938. He was rehabilitated in 1958.

Qurbon Beregin (1904–1938) — a Khorezm writer, cultural figure, and intellectual who actively contributed to the development of national literature. He edited journals such as *Soviet Literature*, *Sun of the Revolution*, and *Cultural Revolution*, playing a major role in shaping national literature and ideological thought. He was imprisoned in 1937 and executed in 1938, later rehabilitated in 1956.

Yoqub Devonov (1906–1938) — active member of the Khorezm Komsomol movement and leader of the Central Asian Youth Union. He worked in Moscow at the Communist Youth International. He was sentenced to death in 1938 and rehabilitated in 1957.

Karimberdi Boltaev (1901–1938) — born in Khorezm, a state official and Minister of Land Affairs of Uzbekistan who participated in agricultural reforms. Executed in 1938, rehabilitated in 1956.

Atajon Rakhmatullaev (1898–1938) — political official from Khorezm, executed in 1938 on fabricated charges, rehabilitated in 1989.

These devoted individuals, though victims of Soviet political repression, left a legacy that demonstrates the moral awakening of the nation, traditions of statehood, and continuity of national culture. Their memory is a symbol of historical justice and the restoration of national identity.

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