

Education and the Russian Ethnic Minority in Central Asia: A Case Study of Tajikistan

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Abstract: Russian education in Central Asia reached to its every nook and corner during the Soviet period; literacy rate, as such, reached to the highest water mark. However, after the unexpected fall of Soviet Union, there occurred drastic changes in almost every field of life; the case of education was no exception. Since the medium of instruction for education during Soviet period was Russian, they, therefore, felt no need to learn the native languages. And, for that matter, the knowledge of Russian language provided extra opportunities for its speakers in many respects. For example it would help one to get a government job in preference to that of any regional native language; provides opportunities to learn and teach at higher education, to do business at international level, etc. for Russian was the common language of the entire Soviet Union and was a language of international repute. However, after the fall of Soviet Union, every state in Central Asia adopted their regional language as the medium of education. Nevertheless, there are still some educational institutes with Russian as the medium of instruction. In this paper an attempt has been made to bring to light the educational status of the Russian ethnic minority in Tajikistan.

Keywords: Education, Ethnic Minorities, Schools, Government.

I. INTRODUCTION

Not only Russians or Russian speaking other Europeans but all others in Central Asia got benefited by the Soviet education system. Since education was aimed to create material gains therefore all of them, in one way or the other, attained skills to fetch them jobs in various sectors of the Soviet economy.

II. EDUCATION

Under Soviets, a shift was made in the education field from the traditional religious education to that of modern scientific one which was based on western methodology. This education system created by the Soviets made such progress that the literacy rate in Central Asia rose from mere 1-2% in pre-Soviet period to around 98% during Soviet period. Russians in Central Asia generally had a very high level of education. Following table (Table. I) shows the education level of Russians in 1989 in republics of Soviet Union.

Table. I Educational Level of Russians (per 1000 persons) in the USSR, 1989

| Republic | University | College | High school | Incomplete high school |
|--------------------|------------|---------|-------------|------------------------|
| Russian Federation | 162 | 249 | 328 | 178 |
| Armenia | 391 | 278 | 314 | 92 |
| Azerbaijan | 238 | 269 | 328 | 123 |
| Belorussia | 294 | 253 | 329 | 86 |
| Estonia | 169 | 262 | 336 | 153 |
| Georgia | 239 | 248 | 346 | 115 |
| Kazakhstan | 153 | 268 | 350 | 158 |
| Kirgizia | 179 | 268 | 336 | 149 |
| Latvia | 194 | 212 | 367 | 158 |
| Lithuania | 223 | 272 | 326 | 120 |

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|------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Moldavia | 241 | 274 | 327 | 117 |
| Tajikistan | 220 | 301 | 281 | 146 |
| Turkmenia | 220 | 326 | 250 | 154 |
| Ukraine | 216 | 266 | 355 | 114 |
| Uzbekistan | 231 | 308 | 283 | 136 |

Source: Compiled from USSR 1989 census data. cited from Valerii Aleksandrovich Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame*, Sage Publications, Inc., Oslo, 1997, p. 117.

But the disintegration of USSR left a profound impact on this sector of the social life as well. Between 1992 and 1997 (Civil War period), Tajik education system was severely damaged. The war destroyed several schools and scattered most teachers who either joined the war or left the country. Even at present the Soviet legacy in Central Asia, among other things, includes creation of a significant scientific-technical intelligentsia and a level of education higher than the remaining Muslim world. As on 2009 the literacy rate among the Central Asian countries was Kazakhstan: 99.3%, Tajikistan: 99.1%, Uzbekistan: 99%, Turkmenistan: 98.3%, Azerbaijan: 98.2%, Kyrgyzstan: 98.1% while as among the rest of the Muslim world it was Afghanistan: 12.6%, Bahrain: 85%, Brunei: 88.5%, Iran: 73%, Mauritania: 31.9%, Oman: 73.5%, Pakistan: 36%, Yemen: 30%, Saudi Arabia: 70.8%, Qatar: 88.6%, Algeria: 61%, Bangladesh: 31.8%, Egypt: 59.4%, Kuwait: 91%, Malaysia: 85.4%, Maldives: 97.3%, Morocco: 39.6%, Tunisia: 65.3%, UAE: 81.7%, Burkina Faso: 15.2%, Gambia: 32.8%, Guinea-Bissau: 27.4%, Mali: 39.6%, Senegal: 30.7%, Chad: 39.3%, Djibouti: 59.4%, Somalia: 25.8%, Indonesia: 86.8%, Albania: 79.5%, Bosnia and Herzegovina: 94%, Turkey: 79.6%. Even today Tajikistan continues to enjoy high literacy rate of 98%, a tradition established by the Soviets.

The independence of Central Asia provided them a chance to alter the Soviet educational system and accordingly in view of nationalist considerations as well as modern educational models available in the West certain changes became inevitable. Accordingly the system of education as established by the Soviets was gradually replaced by the one wherein Tajik has replaced Russian texts and these have now stress on Tajik history, culture, geography and language instead of Soviet. Even many believe that it is comparatively of lesser standard yet the new education system has to fulfill the new nationalistic considerations of overwhelming majority of Tajiks. Russian language is still there but comparatively with very less emphasis.

Tajikistan provides freedom to its citizens in choosing their language of instruction. Education in schools is generally imparted in Tajik, Russian, Uzbek, Kirghiz and Turkmen language mediums to fulfill the aspirations of all major ethnic groups. Tuition in primary and secondary schools in Tajikistan is given in five languages: Tajik, Russian, Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Turkmen. In vocational training schools, special secondary schools and higher educational establishments, Russian and Uzbek operate in parallel in Tajik. The secondary education is provided in Tajik but the areas with high concentrations of citizens of other nationality, it is provided in the respective language of the people living there and most of time all these languages get due representation in the present scenario as every student is generally getting about 20% classes (other than Turkmen who get 13%) in ones chosen languages. The full details of the class work given to students at different levels in 2002/03 is reflected in the following table (Table. II).

Table. II Number of pupils by languages of education in schools for 2002/2003

| | Tajik language | | Russian language | | Uzbek language | | Kyrgyz language | | Turkmen language | |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| | No of classes | No of pupils | No of classes | No of pupils | No of classes | No of pupils | No of classes | No of pupils | No of classes | No of pupils |
| Preparatory classes | 196 | 2295 | 1 | 26 | | | | | | |
| I | 6581 | 134601 | 183 | 4677 | 2092 | 40179 | 102 | 1639 | 15 | 306 |
| II | 6466 | 133073 | 163 | 4044 | 2117 | 40762 | 99 | 1490 | 18 | 325 |
| III | 6029 | 118757 | 151 | 3497 | 2008 | 38251 | 94 | 1444 | 17 | 308 |
| IV | 6215 | 124665 | 124 | 2635 | 2070 | 39183 | 88 | 1445 | 16 | 262 |
| V | 5762 | 126712 | 137 | 3113 | 1890 | 39656 | 86 | 1503 | 12 | 209 |
| VI | 5656 | 125152 | 137 | 3079 | 1870 | 40197 | 86 | 1461 | 5 | 98 |
| VII | 5383 | 116135 | 133 | 2886 | 1820 | 38326 | 80 | 1324 | 12 | 242 |
| VIII | 5096 | 109704 | 133 | 2827 | 1738 | 36886 | 86 | 1367 | 11 | 237 |
| IX | 4969 | 106104 | 125 | 2477 | 1717 | 36297 | 78 | 1336 | 12 | 240 |
| X | 2453 | 46718 | 101 | 1820 | 802 | 14762 | 52 | 693 | 11 | 230 |
| XI | 2307 | 43035 | 87 | 1452 | 769 | 14108 | 48 | 665 | 8 | 145 |
| Total | 57124 | 1187205 | 1478 | 32587 | 18897 | 378705 | 899 | 14367 | 137 | 2602 |

Source: T. N. Bozrikova, "Problems of Ethnic Minorities in Tajikistan", in Sub-regional Seminar on *Minority Rights: Cultural Diversity and Development in Central Asia*, Panorama Foundation, Bishkek, October 2004, p. 35.

Apart from ethnic aspirations the new education policy is aimed to improve the teaching of English in addition to Russian so that students are conversant in these languages to aspire for international institutions for higher educational attainments outside the country. Accordingly the government in 2003 has approved a ten year programme (2004-2014) for improving teaching and study of English and Russian in the schools. Accordingly various minority groups have been provided education in their own languages at secondary level school which is reflected in the following table (Table. III).

Table. III Education provided in Minority languages

| Year | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Russian | 1,240 | 1,282 | 1,424 | 1,478 |
| Uzbek | 17,543 | 18,047 | 18,609 | 18,897 |
| Kyrgyz | 810 | 913 | 902 | 899 |
| Turkmen | 153 | 156 | 155 | 137 |

Source: International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, reports submitted by states parties under article 9 of the convention, Addendum, Tajikistan, United Nations, 2004, p. 5.

Following this, President Emomali Rahmonov, in 2004 declared that the teaching of Russian is obligatory for the school going children from the 2nd to 11th grade in all Tajik and Uzbek schools in the country. Russian-language streams are therefore available in all higher education establishments. Besides this, in the Russian-Tajik Slavic University, established in 1995 in the capital Dushanbe instructions are exclusively offered in Russian. These initiatives accordingly opened avenues for Russian speaking people to continue education in Russian and thus more than 30% (30,058 out of 118,427) university students got education in Russian medium by the year 2008. The Russian government fully supports these educational initiatives, offering resources and professional development opportunities to Russian language professionals.

According to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan in 2002/2003 school year 28,188 persons were studying in the groups with Russian language of education of the higher education establishments of the republic, 3348 persons study at the groups with Uzbek language of education and at the specialized establishments 5530 persons with Russian language of training and 2554 persons with Uzbek language of training and many Tajik students in addition to Russians study in the group in the group with Tajik language of education.

In spite of the government help and extraordinary support from Russian federation to promote Russian in Tajikistan the educational institutions with Russian (and Uzbek, Kirghiz and Turkmen) language of training, are facing several problems like poor financing, weak material and technical base, crowded classes, etc. as is reflected in the following statements recorded in 2004.

School № 20 admits 336 pupil, but we have 1500 pupil. The educational process goes in 4 flows. At school there are 42 classes and practically we have no places for the pupil. There is, for example, 1 class, in which there are 54 pupil. (Irina...belongs to a Russian speaking minority in Tajikistan and express about condition of a Russian school.)

School № 21 admits 850 places, but we teach 1875-1880 pupils. It is very difficult to work in conditions, when all schools are actually overflowed in 3-4 times. These problems we announce on all meetings of Rayon Education Department, City Education Department and Ministry of education. Construction of 5 pilot schools in our rayon is envisioned under the project, plus one is renovated, 1 is under construction, total we have 7 schools. But we did not get into this pilot project. (Valentina...belongs to a Russian speaking minority in Tajikistan...)

Until 2000 schools with Russian, Uzbek, Kirghiz, Turkmen languages of training worked under the educational plans, programmes and textbooks of countries of an ethnic parentage along with a mandatory state standard- language, history, literature and geography of Tajikistan. But after 2000 all schools have been transferred to the educational plans and programmes of the Republic of Tajikistan with identical distribution of hours in all subjects. As a result following problems emerged for the schools with the non-Tajik language of education:

1. unconformity of the educational plans, programmes and textbooks;
2. acute shortage of the textbooks on the native language;
3. reduction of hours for study of the native language (accordingly Russian, Uzbek, Kirghiz, Turkmen);
4. absence of hours for study of history, geography, literature of countries of an ethnic parentage;

The Tajik language teachers are usually ordinary philologists, trained for teaching at school with Tajik language of education they do not possess knowledge of methodology of education of non-native language. In certain higher educational institutes, the education is imparted only in Tajik language. In that case ethnic Russians are not only deprived of learning but also from the employment over there. For example in the Central Institute of Improvement of Professional Skills teaching is imparted only in Tajik language. Even if teachers of the natural sciences (physics, chemistry, mathematics) can take courses on improvement of qualification in Tajik, for the teachers of humanitarian subjects this is practically impossible. Thus the main deficiency or the problem of the ethnic minorities is the study of Tajik language. And avenues to teach / study the Tajik language in the non-Tajik schools are practically inadequate. According to the statistical data Tajik language and literature teachers in classes with non-Tajik language in comparison with the teachers of other subjects have the lowest educational level. In 2000-2001 educational year 66.1% of them were with higher education, 5.3% with incomplete higher education, 20.2% with specialized secondary education and 8.5% with general secondary education. This is creating certain problems which have been highlighted by a study of 2004. These are:

1. absence of training techniques of Tajik language as the national language;
2. low level of preparation of the Tajik language teachers;
3. shortage of the textbooks, reference literature and etc.;
4. crowded classes: It is very difficult to teach language in the class with number of 40 pupils and more.

III. CONCLUSION

Consequent upon this the study of Russian has been also included in the national television programme “Paemy subkh”, which is telecasted twice a week. Whatever the limitations and aspirations the present educational policy is aimed to give fillip to Tajik language to create a people where Tajik can dominate. For specialised education attainments English and Russian will help one and all but more to the dominant majority for they are enormous in number. In any case Russians are having adequate arrangements for learning Russian as well as Tajik to apply for jobs that may come in their way, of course with a difference Russian no more guarantees them.

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