

INVESTIGATION OF THE CAUSES BEHIND THE EMERGENCE OF THE SARBADAR MOVEMENT (From the Perspective of Selected Historians)

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Abstract

This article analyzes the social, economic, political, and religious causes behind the emergence of the Sarbadar movement through the lens of various historical sources and scholarly interpretations. It explores how historical accounts (such as those of Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi, Nizamuddin Shami, Hafizi Abru, and others), as well as perspectives from Soviet and Uzbek historiography, have shaped our understanding of this multifaceted movement. By comparing different historiographical approaches, the study seeks to clarify the complex nature and historical significance of the Sarbadar movement.

Keywords

Sarbadars, class struggle, religious factors, historiography, Khorasan, 14th century

1. Introduction

The Sarbadar movement, which arose in 14th-century Khorasan, represents one of the most significant political and social movements in the history of Central Asia. It is often portrayed as a struggle for social justice inspired by religious ideals. Based on primary historical sources and scholarly perspectives, this study shows that the origins of the movement were complex and multifactorial. The paper aims to examine these causes through diverse sources and analyze the historiographical interpretations surrounding the movement.

In recent scholarship, the Sarbadar movement has also been linked to broader regional transformations in the Islamic world during the post-Mongol period. These include the fragmentation of centralized authority, the rise of local Sufi-based governance, and the growing role of urban guilds and artisan communities in political life. Understanding the movement thus requires examining it within the broader socio-political shifts of the 14th century Islamic East

2. Methods

This research employs comparative historical methodology, historiographical analysis, and qualitative content analysis. Primary sources examined include works by Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi, Nizamuddin Shami, Hafizi Abru, Ahmad Fasih Havofi, among others. Additionally, the views of Soviet and Uzbek historians (e.g., Bartold, Petrushevsky, Yakubovsky, Asqarov) are analyzed to understand how interpretations of the movement have evolved over time. In addition to textual analysis, this study draws on a comparative historiographical approach, contrasting Soviet Marxist interpretations with postcolonial and Islamic political theory frameworks. Modern digital tools such as text-mining were also referenced for identifying recurring socio-political themes in classical Persian chronicles.

3. Results and Discussion

1) Perspectives in Primary Historical Sources: Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi characterizes the movement as a struggle against social inequality, injustice, and oppressive taxation. Nizamuddin Shami emphasizes the weakness of local governance and economic exploitation as key causes for the movement's emergence. Hafizi Abru attributes religious motivations as the primary inspiration, highlighting the pursuit of Islamic justice. Ahmad Fasih Havofi provides a complex analysis linking the movement to socio-economic hardship and political instability. Qazvini, Samarqandi, and Natanzi underline political unrest, Mongol oppression, and grassroots discontent as central causes. Zia al-Din Barani, a contemporary Indian historian, also commented indirectly on the rise of socially conscious Islamic governance in neighboring regions. While he did not write about the Sarbadars directly, his works help contextualize the ideological climate of the 14th century where religiously motivated political activism was gaining legitimacy. Sufi orders such as the Kubrawiyya and the influence of charismatic leaders like Sheikh Khalifa played a pivotal role in legitimizing the Sarbadars' claim to power. These spiritual leaders not only mobilized mass support but also provided a theological foundation for rebellion.

2) Historiographical Approaches Soviet historians (Petrov, Yakubovsky, Tolstov, Ivanov, Gafurov) interpreted the movement as a form of class struggle, emphasizing Marxist methodology and the primacy of socio-economic causes. V.V. Bartold analyzed the movement through a multi-causal lens—economic, political, and religious—while maintaining analytical balance and avoiding religious overemphasis. I.P. Petrushevsky, building on Bartold's work, viewed the movement primarily as class-based resistance. Post-Soviet Central Asian historiography has increasingly challenged the reductionist view of the Sarbadars as merely a class-based rebellion. Scholars such as B.A. Akhmedov and

R. Shoabdurakhmanov emphasize the complex interplay of tribal, religious, and local governance factors that shaped the movement. Western historians such as John Woods and Said Amir Arjomand have interpreted the Sarbadars through the lens of Islamic political ethics and revolutionary theology. Arjomand, in particular, views them as a precursor to later Shi'a political movements in Iran.

Uzbek historians (Asqarov, Masov, Saidov) adhered to Soviet methodological principles but also incorporated local sources to partially address religious and political dimensions.

4. Conclusion

The Sarbadar movement emerged from a convergence of factors including Mongol oppression, economic hardship, political instability, and religious inspiration. Historical sources and scholarly interpretations reveal the multidimensional nature of the movement. Rather than viewing it solely through the lens of religion or class struggle, it should be understood as a complex socio-political response to the conditions of the time. This study contributes to future research by providing a nuanced understanding of the historical and historiographical context of the Sarbadar movement.

The Sarbadar movement serves as an early example of religiously infused populism that not only opposed feudal oppression but also sought to create an alternative model of Islamic governance. Its legacy can be traced in later revolts and movements that blended faith and social justice as foundational principles of statehood. The findings underscore the need to further investigate the ideological continuities between the Sarbadars and later Islamic political thought.

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