Four Bloody Incidents in the History of Kazakh History

Bolat Zhanaikhan\textsuperscript{a}, Bauyrzhan Karipov\textsuperscript{b}, Ener Unal\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a}Suleyman Demirel University, Abylaikhan str. 1/1, Kasakelen, 040900, Kazakhstan
\textsuperscript{b}L.N.Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, 010008, Kazakhstan

Abstract

This article studies the bloody incidents in the history of Kazakh nation. Although we did know about those cases, they were fully not uncovered because of the pressure and censorship of Soviet system. However, it has been 22 years that Kazakhstan gained its independence these sorrowful hot points in the history of Kazakhstan. It is historically recorded that Kazakh people were opposed so many hardships and survived the bloody battles until they reached their independence. From the period of mass movement of Kazakh people because of Kalmyks’ foray (1723-25) to repression times (1937-39) and December uprising (1986) there was a very probable risk of disappearance of our nation at all in this world. Ordinary people are not fully aware of the real view and facts about the mentioned cases, which are now possible to be researched from state archives. This work reviews some facts about the mentioned happenings relying on trustworthy sources, also taking into account some materials among the local people.

1. Background

A national idea – a continuous struggle for freedom can be seen in the historical timeline of Kazakh literature, when it is thoroughly observed. That is an idea of unity, independence, building of own state without being dependent to anyone. Kazakh people defended their freedom and honour under this perception. These kinds of struggles undoubtedly date back to long Turkic heritage. The lines on the epos of “Kultegin”: “I never slept at nights, never sat during daytimes, for the sake of Turkic people and the nation that were built by our father, grandfather.” show the mood of people who were ready indeed to devote their life, sacrifice themselves for their nation. They battled against the enemies and protected the integrity and unity of homeland.

This idea always continued to develop, especially during the birth of Kazakh literature and at the time of khanate. Bukhar zhyrau (people who deliver the message in poetic songs and epics), a popular Kazakh zhyrau, an advisor of Abylaikhan, asks the God in his verse “Tilek” (wish), he wishes:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[1] Corresponding author name. Tel.:  
  \item[E-mail address:] Bolat Zhanaikhan
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“Not being afraid of powerful enemies,  
Protecting from fluttering stranger’s flag,  
And from being booty of the whole honourable Akorda for others, in one day”.

These are also the words of unprotected nomad people in Sahara, those were wishing their independence and unity, worried about enemies and their attack.

During the colonial period of Kazakh people under Russia, this idea was mostly implied, and sometimes was said openly. Openly is meant here, the voice of people warning about the politics, which was gradually occupying the ancient lands of Kazakhs and separating them from their native lands. Murat akhyn (poet) sings about it as following:

“Occupancy of Edil (Volga river) – stealing our pocket,  
Occupancy of Zhaiyk (Ural river) – grabbing from our neck,  
Occupying the Oiyl (local river) – accomplishing their intentions.”

Moreover, Makhambet’s battle against Zhangir khan also defines the people’s opposition attitude to colonialism. He mentions, “We fought for Edil, united for Zhaiykh, battled for Kigash (river), opposed for Tepter (land)”.

However, there were no successes in such battles. All uprisings, led by Syrym, Shagay, Makhambet, Eset, Beket, Kenesary and Nawryzbai, suffered bloody repulses. As a result, nation had to obey them.

The history verifies that Kazakh people were opposed so many hardships and survived the bloody battles until they reached their independence. From the period of mass movement of Kazakh people because of Kalmyks’ foray (1723-25) to repression times (1937-39) and December uprising (1986) there was a very probable risk of disappearance of our nation at all in this world.

In the history of Kazakh literature many akyn-writers’ works were mainly based on four big bloody cases in Kazakh history. First of them is a Mongolian assault, which took a name of “Aktaban shubirindy, Alkakol sulama” in the history. The second one is “the famine of 1932”. Third case is a “Stalin repression” and the fourth one is a “December uprising of 1982”.

2. Mongolian Assault

Indeed, the Mongolian assault was one of the very difficult periods in the history of Kazakh people. The evil enemies, interested in taking away the rich resources of our vast land, destructed the peaceful people, using the chance of disintegrated divisions of Kazakhs into roos (kins) and zhuz (Kazakhs consist of three different “zhuz”s). This incident is a sorrowful heartbreak in Kazakh history that was named as “Aktaban shubirindy, Alkakol sulama”. That was a mournful occurrence of 1723-1725, when our homeland was down on its luck. After the death of Tawke khan, the personification and divergence of three zhuzs had affected on weakening of military and political power of Kazakh khanate.

At the beginning of 18th century, fair-haired Kalmyks were able to put their internal issues in order and build their army. They bought lots of arms and ammunitions from neighbouring Russia, improving their relationships with them at the same. In 1715, Kalmyks could acquire the technology of making the cannon by detaining the Swedish master – Renat, who was under arrest in Russia.

They attacked Kazakh lands in the spring of 1723, with their 7 detachment forces consisting 10 thousands soldiers. Kazakhs had lost about 100 thousands warriors during the shattering Mongolian plunders, and the losses of defenceless population were quite a lot. According to Abylaikhan, four of every ten people died at that time. For the first time in its history that Kazakh people came across with such a huge mournful and suffering tragedy, which even could put the nation under the threat of disappearance. The chaos and disturbances caused by this disaster – “Aktaban shubirindy, Alkakol sulama” really raised the spirit of freedom and courage of local people. Some national representatives tried to unite the local people realizing the more possible difficulties without collaborations. For instance, mass of ordinary people
led by Bogenbai, Kabanbai, Saurik, Zhanibek, Malaisari, Abylai and Abilkaiyr, who fought against Mongols near the rivers of Bulanti and Bolenti, and in the plains of Anyrai, succeeded to defeat their enemy. Thereby, this incident – “Aktaban shubirindy, Alkakol sulama” was historically recorded in the memory of people as a big sorrow for forever. Namely, at that time, the song of “Elim-ai” (My homeland), which is full of grief that come from unforgettable sobbing in people’s mind.

...Rhapsody...

When one reads this verse, it brings the views of straggling movements of Kazakh people, and the lands with deserted properties. It still feels touchy even though it passed several centuries since these people’s mourn and the sorrow happened. This song, which defines the hardship of Kazakh people during the attacks of Mongols, was written by Kozhabergen zhyrau Tolybaiuly, who was one of the heroes and popular akhyns.

3. The Famine of 1932

In the history of Kazakh literature, the next sorrowful incident after the “Aktaban shubirindy, Alkakol sulama” came to Kazakhs’ life as the thunderstorm clouds, was the “famine of 1932”. This nomad Kazakh people rarely faced with the starvation in its long history, except during very suffering times. People clearly remember couple of very scarce famines in new Kazakh history. The first of them was during the 1921-1922, and the second starvation lasted from 1930 to 1933. It is said that the number of Kazakhstan’s population decreased to 3 379 500 people, during the period of June, 1930 and June, 1933. M.Kozibayev, a historian, mentions in his works that if we even exclude the number of refugees from the above mentioned quantity of people, Kazakh nation lost more than 2 200 000 people during the “famine of 1932”.

Generally, Kazakhs lost about 4 million people in the years of 1920-1930 under the governance of Soviet system. There are some records that 1 700 000 people died during the starvation of 1921-1922, and 2 300 000 people passed away in 1932-1933.

The industrialization and solidarity policy of F.I.Goloshekin, who governed Kazakhstan during 1925-1935, was very tough. As a result, the cattle-breeding programmes seriously suffered, the quantity of 40 million cattle declined down to 4 million.

The collectivism policy of Soviet governance, led several nations, especially Kazakhs, to the “intentional” woe. Consequently, poverty-stricken Kazakhs had to move to the neighbouring countries, such as China, Mongolia, and further to Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey. The facts about famine of 1920-1933 were published only in foreign press. For instance, Robert Conquest, a British historian, mentions in his work of “The harvest of sorrow: Soviet collectivisation and the terror-famine” that the loss of Kazakhs were about 4 millions.
4. Old Stalin Repression

Let us talk about how the political repression of 1937-1938 started, which took a name of “Stalin repression” or “Big terror”. This was the next bloody incident which was directed to Kazakh nation by Soviet rule.

Repression – [lat. repressio – to press, to put an end] punishment methods in order to completely destroy and bring to an end (e.g. reactionary regulations). The punishment methods of heads of government that fulfil through legislative authorities those are used against own nation, pursue the distinct persons amongst the population. The repression in Kazakhstan during the 1937-1938 can be stated as a clear example.

The earliest repression in Kazakhstan started in 1928. Generally, during the governance of Soviet power, the repression policy had been applied in Kazakh nation since the last century’s Kazan revolution until 1953. The years of 1918-1922 were recorded in the history as “Red terror”. When Bolsheviks gained the power, they immediately started to punish the people oppressively, who were against the Soviets. That was the initial tyranny of communistic system.

The second period of political repression covers the years of 1920-1922. That time many political activists and intelligentsia were suppressed. Many had to escape to abroad. And the third period of repression started at the end of 20s combining all policies of the Stalin’s ruling system. The peak of this suppression was in 1937-1938.

In general, the repression lasted till the Stalin’s death, 1953. The Central Committee of Kazakh Communist Party took a plenum on bearing up the political repression in the USSR, which lasted from February 23 to March, 1937. The main issue was about the significance of mercilessly combating against the antagonists of Stalin’s Soviet system. Right away after this discussion, The Peoples Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) started wiping out the “enemies of nations”.

Punishing process had two phases. First one was the period of sentencing so called “nation’s enemies” to be shot, whose offences were enormous. The second punishment phase was putting the people, with less serious crimes, in prisons for 8-25 years, or sending them to forcible works in Siberian lands. According to the accurate facts, the total number of victims of that repression during the 1921 and 1953 is said about 5.5 million people. Among them, 642 980 people were shot. 2 369 220 people were jailed with varied durations from 5 to 25 years. And the rest of them were sent to work in Siberian lands. Moreover, in total, in the years of 1934-1954, 1 053 829 people died because of tortures in Corrective Labor Camps and Colonies (The Gulag). About 10 million people did in such camps in the years of 1920-1950. Mainly, “offenders” were accused of being “nation’s enemies”, “betrayers of motherland”, and “foreign spies”. In one of his interviews, A.Solzhintsin (“Komsomolskaya pravda”) states: “From 1917 to 1959, because of Soviet system’s tragedies against own nation, such as famine, collectivism, taskwork, putting in prisons and camps, shooting and hanging, plus the victims of civil wars, 66 million people were killed. Let us add this number to our loss of 44 million compatriots during the Second World War. It can be stated that we lost about 110 million people during the formation of socialism.” This statement really makes a sense.

According to the decision of a plenum of Central Committee of Kazakhstan’s Communist Party in 1937, the wiping out the “nation’s enemies” began in August 5, in Central and Western Russia, it began in SSRs of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan in the 10th of August. In Far East, they began working on the 15th of August. Those activities were agreed to get finished for 4 months, so NKVD arrested 800 000 people within the period of August and November, 1937, and half of them were shot. Moreover, 53 camps, with thousands of departments, were built in USSR those years to jail the captives. 425 colonies and 2000 special commandants’ offices were working in them. The number of prisons was over 30 thousand. Those were the places of millions of USSR residents of who served their poignant years with the offences of “nation’s enemies”. Some surely could not endure the tortures. These kinds of camps were built also in Kazakhstan with the names of “Karlag”, “Steplag”, and “Algeria”. There were over 1 million people only in Karlag. This makes clear that the repression period was quite tough for Kazakh nation.
Namely, the bustle in 1916, the civil war in 1918-1920, famine of 1921-1922, the seizures in 1928-1929, famine in 1931-1932, the political repression in 1937-1938 – all these disasters completely ruined Kazakhs. More than 100 thousand people were repressed during the 1928-1929, 25 thousand of which were shot. Mainly, leaders of nation, enlighteners, intelligentsia and other people with whom Kazakhs could be proud of, were shot. In that way, Soviet red empire brought lots of misfortune to this land.

5. December uprising

After the incidents of “Stalin’s repression” or “Big terror”, the next bloody occasion was the “December uprising of 1986”, which brought independence to Kazakh nation. That time, as a consequence of Stalin’s outrage, it was almost impossible to respond against to the government in any ways. But, Kazakh people, who had been patient to all kinds of conditions, could not endure the Soviet rules. As a result, Kazakh youth gathered in the square. They rose up making the song of Shamshi (the current anthem) as their appeal. Honest and simple-hearted people, those always believed in the beautiful words of M.S.Gorbachev, came up to peaceful demonstrations protesting the decision of the CPSU to assign G.V.Kolbin as a First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. In that way, for the first time, they protested the Moscow’s hypocrisy and tyrant pinion wall of Soviet empire, being able to open the real face of the “Centre”, showing the obvious contradictions between traditional administrative command system activities and so called declaring democratic principles of perestroika (restructuring). But certainly, the powers of opponents were not equal at all.

How can the unarmed youth that gathered to peaceful demonstration rebut the troops armed with bludgeons, combat spades and dogs in armored carriers and fire engines? Volunteer Militia formed by punitive imperialists and chauvinists in Almaty cruelly suppressed our young people. Those views – beating everyone regardless their ages, dragging the girls by their hairs, and hounding dogs on them by flogging at the same time, – are terrible even to describe. Mass media of that time named the youth, who sacrificed themselves for the independence of their homeland, as “elements of nationalism”, “mess”, “hooliganism”, “spongers and aliens within the society”, “drunkards”, “narcoists”, “ill-mannered criminals”, and “double-dyed nationalists”. The December incident of 1986 ended up with the total repressions of intelligent freedom supporters within the society, in the same way they did during the years of 1937-1938.

However, the December incident, the efforts against obedience that bloodily suppressed, waked up the whole dozing Soviet Union. Not long after, Baltic States also began their struggles for their independence. Unrests were blazed up in Tbilisi and Baku. At the end, the “immense winds” of December could reach all the corners of Kazakhstan, tearing the slavery chains and bringing the independent states out to this world. There might be different views about the December incidents, but this is the reality about its outcome without any exaggeration.

6. Conclusion

Abish Kekilbayev, the State Secretary of Kazakhstan Republic, published an article titled: “The impressive introduction of the bright turn” on “Egemen Kazakstan” (Independent Kazakhstan) in 1996, which was the first scientific work, intended to clarify the status of the December incident phenomenon. This article discusses the significance of learning the history of the December uprising, naming that event as the bright prologue of reformatory movements towards to democracy and national liberation.

Developing his opinions author makes a conclusion: “The December incident also demonstrated the tacit discontent of allied republics to Central imperiousness. It quickened the process of getting rid of people of communistic ideology for forever, which was previously viewed as a steadfast system. From this view, that movement can be considered an historical step in several meanings: firstly, as an occasion of national importance (appearance of nation’s self-recognizing), secondly, an event in the level of all republics (inspired other allied republics for independence). And, thirdly, this is a very restrained shake,
with multiple social characteristics that concerns the global politics (the beginning of collapse of socialistic camp).

It can be summed up, the incidents, which were considered as sorrowful times Kazakh people in the history, still could not gain their real value even though our country attained its independence. We are saying so, because the absence of scientific research activities by the government in studying those incidents, definitely makes us upset. It can be argued that any other country or nation would have already made qualitative works thoroughly exploring all details of that history. This also might be the laziness of Kazakh people. It seems difficult to be a deserving nation without wearing for our ancestors and estimating our today’s values.

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