

**HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRARIAN RELATIONS IN
UZBEKISTAN" (SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY - 20TH CENTURY)**

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Abstract: This article explores the historical evolution of agrarian relations in Uzbekistan from the second half of the 19th century through the 20th century. It examines the transformation of land ownership, irrigation systems, the role of the Russian Empire and Soviet policies, and their impact on local agricultural practices and rural society. The study highlights the continuity and change in land relations, emphasizing the role of reforms, colonial influence, and socialist collectivization in shaping Uzbekistan's agrarian landscape.

Keywords: Agrarian relations, land ownership, Russian Empire, Soviet collectivization, cotton monoculture, land reforms, dekhkan, kolkhoz, irrigation.

INTRODUCTION

Agrarian relations have historically formed the backbone of Uzbekistan's socio-economic structure. Due to its geographical location and reliance on irrigated agriculture, land and water rights have long been central to the livelihoods of rural populations. The second half of the 19th century marks a turning point in Uzbekistan's agrarian history, as the region became part of the Russian Empire. This transition initiated a series of transformations in land tenure, taxation, and rural administration. These changes intensified during the Soviet era, culminating in collectivization, the establishment of kolkhozes and sovkhozes, and the imposition of cotton monoculture. Understanding these historical phases is crucial to grasp the present condition of agrarian policies and rural development in Uzbekistan.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Following the Russian conquest of Central Asia in the 1860s and 1870s, the territories of present-day Uzbekistan were integrated into the Russian colonial system. The Tsarist administration introduced legal and administrative reforms that affected agrarian relations, though to a limited extent in the early years.

The traditional system of land ownership in Uzbekistan was complex. Lands were classified into several types: waqf (religious endowment), mulk (private property), and state-owned lands. Under the Russian regime, while customary land use remained in place in many areas, new taxes and administrative controls were imposed. The introduction of the zarurat (land necessity) principle and expansion of the cotton economy led to the commodification of land in fertile oases, particularly in the Fergana Valley.

The Russian administration also invested in the expansion of irrigation canals, primarily to boost cotton production for the imperial textile industry. This shift initiated the transition from subsistence agriculture to a market-oriented, export-driven cotton economy. However, this expansion came at the cost of local food crops and increased the dependency of the region on external supplies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Colonial policies altered the traditional social structure in rural Uzbekistan. The emergence of land intermediaries and the concentration of land in the hands of local elites (beys, arbobs, and

religious leaders) created a class of wealthy landowners, while a large portion of the population became landless sharecroppers (muzdurs) and tenants (yollanma dehqonlar) [1].

Russian legal codes limited the land rights of indigenous populations while granting privileges to Russian settlers in certain areas. This inequality was particularly pronounced in newly irrigated lands where settlers received priority access. These shifts created the foundation for socio-economic polarization in rural areas and set the stage for peasant unrest and discontent, especially during the early revolutionary movements of the 20th century.

The Bolshevik Revolution brought radical changes to land relations in Central Asia. The Soviet regime abolished private land ownership and redistributed lands among the peasantry under the slogan of “land to the tiller.” However, this initial redistribution was short-lived. By the late 1920s, Stalinist policies enforced collectivization, which marked the creation of collective farms (kolkhozes) and state farms (sovkhozes).

Traditional farming systems were dismantled. Peasants were forced into collective farms under pressure, often accompanied by repression, famine, and resistance. The concept of dekulakization targeted wealthier peasants, many of whom were dispossessed and deported.

Collectivization led to the institutionalization of centralized planning in agriculture. Local autonomy in land management was eliminated. The Soviet authorities introduced monoculture — particularly cotton — turning Uzbekistan into the empire's primary raw cotton supplier. This process fundamentally altered the landscape, water management systems, and labor patterns, with long-term consequences for soil fertility and ecological sustainability [2].

After World War II, the collectivized agricultural system in Uzbekistan was fully entrenched. The state controlled nearly all aspects of rural production, including land use, cropping patterns, labor allocation, and marketing. Land remained formally under state ownership, and peasants worked as laborers on collective or state farms with limited economic autonomy.

The Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras witnessed attempts at improving productivity through mechanization, land reclamation, and increased irrigation. However, these efforts were often top-down and disconnected from local needs. Cotton quotas grew more rigid, leading to over-irrigation, land salinization, and ultimately, environmental degradation — most notoriously reflected in the shrinking of the Aral Sea.

Despite centralized control, rural communities maintained some elements of traditional social structure, especially through informal networks, local leadership, and customary norms of land and water distribution [3].

By the 1980s, the Soviet agrarian system in Uzbekistan faced stagnation. Land productivity declined, ecological damage increased, and the heavy reliance on cotton exports made the region economically vulnerable. Attempts at reform under Gorbachev's perestroika had limited success due to bureaucratic inertia and resistance to decentralization.

Nevertheless, the period preserved certain continuities from both pre-Soviet and early Soviet agrarian traditions: collective responsibility, seasonal labor organization, and strong kinship ties remained influential in shaping rural work and identity. The legacy of collectivization, however, left deep structural and environmental scars that would challenge the newly independent Uzbekistan in the 1990s [4].

CONCLUSION

The development of agrarian relations in Uzbekistan from the second half of the 19th century to the end of the 20th century reflects a complex interplay of tradition, colonial influence, and socialist transformation. From the layered land tenure systems of the khanates to the centralized, planned economy of the Soviet era, each stage brought new institutions, power structures, and environmental pressures.



Understanding this historical evolution is crucial not only for appreciating the socio-economic fabric of Uzbekistan's rural communities but also for addressing the contemporary challenges of land reform, sustainability, and rural development. The legacies of both the Russian Empire and Soviet Union continue to shape land policies, agricultural practices, and social dynamics in Uzbekistan today.

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