

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE SOUTHERN REGIONS OF UZBEKISTAN DURING THE SOVIET PERIOD

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Abstract

The article analyzes the profound social changes in the life of Uzbekistan's population during the Soviet era (1924–1991). It examines the impact of collectivization, industrialization, and the forced labor system on societal structures, as well as reforms in education, healthcare, and gender relations. The article explores the interaction between Soviet policies and local traditions and social institutions, while also assessing the effects of urbanization and Russification on social life. Based on archival documents, historical sources, and sociological analysis, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the social transformation of Uzbek society during the Soviet period.

Keywords: Social transformation, collectivization, industrialization, urbanization, Russification, education, healthcare, gender equality, kolkhoz, sovkhoz, social structure, local traditions, Soviet policy.

Introduction

Relevance of the Study

Due to the ongoing reforms in the "New Uzbekistan," it is of particular scholarly importance to examine how housing and cultural values were ideologically marginalized during the Soviet era, especially in the communal infrastructure development processes in the Surkhan Oasis. This analysis, grounded in historical sources, highlights an urgent area of inquiry.

The history of the social sphere, as an independent branch of historical science, has consistently attracted the interest of specialists from various fields. Politicians, economists, sociologists, historians, and scholars from other disciplines have conducted numerous academic investigations into the diverse themes within the social domain.

The complex conditions of the post-war period compelled the Soviet leadership to restructure the system of governance in line with contemporary demands and to reform its socio-economic development strategy. The population, recovering from the devastations of war, held high expectations for improvement. However, the widespread use of coercive and administrative governance methods had already disillusioned the masses. It became necessary not only to reconstruct the national economy according to the needs of peacetime but also to renew the spiritual and moral climate of society.

Unfortunately, such transformations were not realized. This was largely because the deeply entrenched authoritarian administrative system proved too difficult—if not impossible—to reform. As a result, instead of liberalizing governance, the central authorities soon chose to further entrench totalitarian control. These decisions manifested in subsequent developments and led to several adverse outcomes in the social life of the population.

Methodology and Degree of Scholarly Development

This article employs universally recognized historical methods, including the principles of historicism, scientific objectivity, comparative-logical analysis, sequential interpretation, and impartiality. The research focuses on the southern regions of the Uzbek SSR during the 1950s–1980s, particularly on rural housing policies, implementation processes, and associated shortcomings.

The study offers an analytical evaluation based on primary archival sources regarding the state's efforts and errors in ensuring adequate housing for the rural population. In this context, extensive use has been made of archival materials from the regional state archives of Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya provinces.

Research Findings

The successful resolution of issues in the social sphere is closely linked to the state policies directed toward different social strata and groups within society. In the Soviet Union, a primary goal of consolidating the social structure of the population was to achieve social “equalization” and eliminate distinctions between social classes. This process was, naturally, implemented through violence, coercion, and the imposition of artificial boundaries. Attention was given to homogenizing the needs, goals, and roles of various social groups. Consequently, this led to a reduction in the diversity of labor and leisure practices among classes and the elimination of pluralism in political and social thought.

As a result of the Soviet regime's social stratification policies, the structure of the rural population changed, with the peasantry divided into collective farm (kolkhoz) workers and agricultural laborers. The former peasant class was brought entirely under state control, losing its distinct identity and autonomy.

In the immediate post-war years, the demand for housing among the population was acutely high. The war had severely disrupted living conditions and household infrastructure. Many residential buildings, schools, and cultural institutions had fallen into disrepair or were partially destroyed. Even after the war, shortages of fuel and construction materials remained a pressing issue.

In state farms (sovkhozes), the housing situation was particularly dire. For instance, in 1947, only 47% of state farms had any residential space, most of which was in dilapidated condition. Many sovkhoz workers were forced to live in basements or makeshift shelters. In response, in 1946, the USSR People's Commissariat of Finance allocated 100,000 rubles to support individual housing construction for Uzbek sovkhoz workers. Additionally, the USSR State Planning Commission promised 14,000 rubles worth of construction materials. By the end of 1946, 737 houses with a total area of 31,800 square meters that had been started before the war

were completed in Uzbekistan's state farms. Cultural and domestic facilities valued at 70,000 rubles were also established. However, the organization of housing construction was fraught with contradictions. Chronic shortages of materials and skilled labor often rendered housing programs unfulfilled.

During this period, revitalizing and improving public healthcare became one of the key priorities of Soviet social policy. The war had left many hospitals and clinics in a dilapidated state, with significant shortages of medical equipment and pharmaceuticals. Furthermore, many medical professionals had perished on the frontlines, resulting in a serious shortage of qualified personnel. The health infrastructure in Uzbekistan faced significant challenges: many regions lacked basic medical facilities.

Addressing public health concerns required deep systemic reform. Between 1945 and 1950, certain steps were taken to streamline Uzbekistan's medical infrastructure. For example, based on the decree of the USSR Commissariat of Health dated June 25, 1946, it was mandated to establish feldsher-obstetric stations at enterprises with over 200 employees. In rural areas with populations ranging from 500 to 2,000 people located more than 5 km from hospital-ambulatory centers, dental clinics were to be opened. In settlements with more than 2,000 residents, specialized outpatient clinics offering internal medicine, surgery, dentistry, gynecology, and pediatric services were to be established.

Nonetheless, the shortage of hospital beds remained acute in the post-war years. In 1948, for instance, more than 3,000 patients in Tashkent alone were denied hospital admission due to a lack of space in emergency facilities. The same year, there were only about 2,000 beds available for tuberculosis patients in the entire republic, whereas the actual demand exceeded 4,000 beds. Despite the existing difficulties, certain measures were undertaken in Uzbekistan to implement plans aimed at preserving public health. For instance, by 1950, the number of medical-sanitary and preventive care institutions in Uzbekistan had increased by 56% compared to 1940. During this period, the number of physicians nearly doubled. In 1940, excluding military hospitals, there were 390 civilian hospitals across the republic; by 1950, this number had risen to 604. The number of hospital beds increased from 20.6 thousand in 1940 to 32.4 thousand in 1950. Moreover, the number of feldsher-obstetric points rose from 1,385 to 1,560.

Conclusion

The study of the social history of the southern regions of Uzbekistan has now become possible based on the fundamental principles of historical science—namely, objectivity and impartiality. The available scholarly articles, monographs, brochures, and dissertations offer valuable insights into various dimensions of the social sphere, drawing from authentic archival sources and historical documents. These works have contributed to constructing a more accurate representation of social life during the Soviet period. For the first time, critical information regarding the living standards, social welfare, and housing conditions of the Uzbek population has been publicly revealed.

The social sphere is closely interlinked with the country's economic dynamics and is implemented by specific state policies. As a key sector of national development, it directly influences the population's quality of life, work, and living conditions. Consequently, it



encompasses a wide range of areas relevant to various social groups and strata, thereby functioning as a comprehensive domain within the broader framework of societal progress.

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