

LAND GRANT SYSTEM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PRE-MODERN CENTRAL ASIA

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ABSTRACT

Pre-modern Central Asia was comprised of three principalities: the Emirate of Bukhara and the Khanates of Khiva and Khokand. The triumvirate was caught in the web of socio-economic and political crises. To cope with these crises and to solve the problem of the expenditure of huge administrative costs, the Khans and Amirs distributed some portions of land from the state lands (*amlak*) as grants among their heirs, both civil and military officials. This paper concludes that instead of solving the problems, the distribution of land grant adversely affected the normative political order. The grantees, as landlords, began exercising enormous political and economic powers. These actions created immense exploitation of the subaltern tenants. The landlords **siphoned off the tenants' surplus and consequently** subjected them to the most appalling conditions with their housing, food, and clothing.

Keywords: Khanates, production, surplus, labor, tenants

INTRODUCTION

In the outset it needs to be stated that to understand the impact and trends of advancement in a society, one needs to understand the entire dynamics of that society in respect to the means and forces of production of the society. Karl Marx poetically unfolds the implications of the mode of **production while saying: "It (mode of production) assigns rank and influence to the others; bathes all other colors and modifies their particularity and as ether determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it" (Marx, 1857, p. 81).** Therefore, if the mode of production is based on surplus extraction relations, it tends to impose very adverse impact on the growth and development of the societies. The surplus extraction relations have been developed in many regions of the world: Europe, Japan, China, India, Russia, Spain, Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Italy, etc. This phenomenon occurred in different centuries including pre-modern Central Asia.

Pre-modern Central Asia encompassed three principalities: the Emirate of Bukhara, and Khanates of Khiva and Khokand. These principalities existed before the appearance of the Tsars in the region (1860s). The triumvirates were situated in the basins of Amu, Syr and Zarafshan Rivers respectively with agriculture as the main source of economy and means of production Becker (1968). The whole set of socio-economic and political relations revolved round lord-tenant ties within the medium of land tenures. According to Islamic law, land ownership was vested with the

Khan/Amir (King) called *memlek-i-padshahil memleke/mumliki* or *mamlak*. Being the legitimate owner, he owned and governed everything from above and below in his specified landed estates. The peasants (*dehkans*) as mere tenants, held non-proprietary land rights, and paid a certain amount, usually substantial, of their produce as rent for the use of the land to their overlord, lord or sub-lord. Obviously, they were not allowed to sell, mortgage, or transfer their land to any third party. However, one should not assume that there were no private proprietors on land. We notice the sufficient use of the term *milk/milki* in revenue and other records to define private persons enjoying irrevocable, hereditary, and permanent proprietary rights on land and other articles of property. These rights were freely transferable. But in practice, the Khans or Amirs, in order to pay debts without using cash, distributed some portions of land among heirs, civil and military officials, as grants called *tankhoh/chek*. However, he reserved a special type of land called *khasa* for his personal use Allworth (1967). In return, the assignees **committed to place military troops for the Amir's use** Khan (2003). Besides individual assignments, the Khans and the tribal chiefs provided *waqf* grants for the maintenance of religious and other institutions. With the passage of time, such grants became hereditary and naturally the kings lost control over them. The right to use the land was not free; rather assignees paid a fee as tribute in the same sense as the English lords under classical feudalism paid a fee to the king for holding their property. In some cases the given rights were

irrevocable both in terms of land ownership and its accruing of revenue. This action gave rise to different land tenures including *tankhoh*, *waqf*, *amluk*, *khassa*, *milki*, etc. These were the major socio-economic units. However, each set of land tenure had a varying share in the overall land composition. For example, in Bukhara 12.2 % of the land was personal property of the Amir (*khassa*); 55.8% *amluk* (state land); 24.2% *waqf*, and just 7.8% was the *milki*, the personal property of commoners Williams (1974). In Khiva, two-thirds of the total irrigated and fertile land belonged to the Khans (overlords) and other lords; one-seventh was the *waqf* and *amluk* (state land), and only one-tenth of the total land belonged to the peasants (*dehkans*) as *milki* (private property).

The institution of the land grant or fief was popular under the Khanates from the early times of Qarakhanids (9th-10th century AD) Haidar (2004) including the Mongols. Changiz Khan (1162-1227 AD) bestowed lands along with its tenants to his ruling elite and military commanders. Under the auspices of the royal orders and charters, these beneficiaries exercised enormous powers within their defined estates, virtually their personal property. They could share these powers and rights with their peasants in their specific fiefs termed as *hoshun* in the 18th century Mongolia. The holder of the *hoshun* was accordingly called *nutug-un-ezen* (lord of the domain) or *nutug-un-ezen jasag noen* (ruling noble lord of the domain) or simply *jasag* Natsagdorj (1967); Tabib (1971). During the disintegration of the Mongol empire in the 16th century, the Uzbek Khans (16th century) upheld the same system but named the land grants differently and called them as *iqta*, *tankhoh*, *waqf*, and *suyurgul*. However, among the nomadic population, land usage was determined by the nature of their pastoral economy. During the 18th century the three principalities were caught in socio-economic and political crises, which caused tribal invasions, socio-economic deprivation and insecurity Levi (2007); Weinerman (1993). In order to increase the amount of collections, and ensure central control over the distant regions, the Amirs and Khans adopted several economic measures including the sale of state land (*amluk*) to private individuals. But these measures could not solve the problem of the expenditure of the huge administrative costs. Consequently, instead of paying in cash, the rulers distributed some portions of land from the state lands (*amluk*) among their heirs, civil and military officials as grants called *tankhoh/chek*. The beneficiary called *tankhohdar/chekdar*, was committed to place at the Amir's disposal a certain number of troops (*qara-chirik*) Khan (2003); D' Ecausse (1996). Since the size of grants constituted

huge areas that varied from 5-50 hectares, the assignees, at will, sub-divided the grants among their subordinates leading to further size reduction of the estates. These actions result in the establishment of a chain of land holdings organized in hierarchical order with a soldier with a *tankhoh* plot of one family on it at the base of the structure Burns (2003); Khan 1981). At the lower rung of this vassalage were the tenants. The most exploited group of the nascent was serfs who cultivated the land on a rent basis. The serfs were required to perform several unpaid services, a type of forced labor (*hasher*) to the feudal lords so they could maintain their orchards, canals, houses and roads. This mode of production had similarities with the 'classical feudalism' in many respects. Instead of redeeming the people from the political and economic crises, it perpetrated immense exploitation of the serfs at the hands of the feudal lords. This situation adversely affected the overall conditions of the state at the upper level and the masses of servile tenants at the lower register. The purpose of this paper is to reveal these terrible conditions. Since this impact constitutes a wide range of constituents, this paper will focus on the impact on the political and administrative structures and on the socio-economic life of the tenants.

POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE IMPACT

The distribution pattern discussed above in the triumvirate facilitated the decentralization of imperial power. This was also the case in classical feudalism in Europe. The decentralized mode of feudal governance dramatically fragmented the Khanates into a number of power pockets held by a band of feudatories who acted as "parceled sovereigns" in real practice. There are ample references of the strong feudal power structures that were analogous to the state system. The feudatories of Shahr-i-Sabz, Qarategin, and Darvaz in Bukhara and Nurata, Kolab, Khujand, Ura-Tube, Jizak, Khatirchi, Kattakurgan, etc. in Khokand, substantiate this fact. While the royal power shrunk, the power of the feudatories swelled. Because of the loss of power, Abul Fayz Khan (1711-1747) of Bukhara was weak and virtually confined to his fortified palace Khalid (1998). The growing feudal influence was correspondingly felt in the royal assembly (*jamo'e*) to such an extent that Amir Daniyal (1758-1785) helplessly allowed Fazil Tutra/Tura to become *de jure* Khan of Bukhara Adle and Habib (2003). In Khiva, the otaliqs (tutor/regent) assumed the same authority as that of the king. *Muftis* and *qazis* were no exception to above phenomenon. Oblivious of their religious obligations, they amassed disproportionate wealth

from their religious grants, and, at times, meddled with political affairs of the Khanates. Makhdum-i-Azam, a *sufi* saint of the 19th century Farghana, frequently recruited the Kyrgyz army to attack the cities of Eastern Turkestan. The other *sufi* leaders like Ihsan Baba Akhund Shadman, established his own standing army (*sarboz*) in the early 20th century Manz (1987). In sequence of their weakening tendencies, Amir Muḥ affar (1860-1885) unusually shared his power with the *mullahs* of Bukhara and Samarkand Bregel (2011); Manz (1987).

When their bilateral relations were strained, the feudatories encroached upon the Amir's domain and confiscated tax collections payable to him on the *milkiyati* (private land). Furthermore, *kharaj*, which was transformed into rent and land ownership rights of the peasants, were confiscated in the process. The gradual absorption of the peasant rights over the production of goods made the lords economically strong D'Ecausse (1996). The feudatories also refused to pay the state or share monies to the weak Amirs. This was particularly true following natural calamities. One feudatory of Balkh, Ihsan Khoja, expressed reluctance to remit land revenue of 20,000 *tillas* to Amir Nasrullah (1826-1860). While exploiting the Amir's weakness, some *waqf* institutions withheld the payment of 18 *lacs* out of total 36 *lacs* of rupees to the Amir from two regions of Balkh and Jizzak Burns (2003). The Amirs would not exempt the feudal lords from annual payments or fixed share payments from produce during normal times. Yalangtush-bi, a feudal lord of Samarkand in the 18th century was exempted from paying a stipulated share to the state Gufurov (2005). But in all cases, it amounted to economic losses to the Amirs and a serious impediment to the growth of the Khanates. Florio Beneveni reports about one Amir, Abdul Fayz Khan (1711-1747) of Bukhara, "The Khan says that he has great ideas but no power to implement them ... because of the scarcity of the funds in the treasury." (Gufurov, 2005, p. 394); (Allworth, 1990, p. 99)

In order, therefore, to bolster the money fund, the Amirs and Khans adopted several measures including the sale of state land to the private individuals in Bukhara with a tax exemption on one third of the sold land. However, the private individuals were the big landlords rather than the commoners. As a result, the sale of the feudal land increased dramatically. For instance, 3,700 hectares of arable land were sold in Zarafshan Valley in 1920 Khan (2003). In one instance, Shah Murad (1800-1825) sold *madrassa* cells to those private individuals who had no knowledge how to manage the land. Izzatullah (1882) stated about Samarkand,

"It had fallen into such utter ruin and decay, that tigers and wolves had actually taken abode in the colleges ... which were situated in the center of the city". In Khokand, the Khans adopted a new monetary policy to cope with the economic crisis. The weight of the coins was reduced in the early 19th century from 4.44 grams a *tanga/tenghe* (a silver coin) to 3.25 grams. Later in the mid-19th century one *tanga* was worth only 20 silver *kopecks* Burton (1997); Djan (92003). The prices of the commercial crops correspondingly dropped. In Bukhara, an indigo costing 12 *tillas/pood* (one *tilla* was equal to 15 *rubles*), fell by 11 to 10, 8, 6, 4 and 2 *tillas a pood* by 1833 Adle and Habib (2003). The purchasing power went so low that "the customers were dragged by their sleeves and flap," Gafurov (2005), and trading activities reverted back to the barter and credit system.

Therefore, the state(s) was relatively seen as a feeble organization overwhelmed by anarchy, chaos and confusion. As a result, there was a negative effect on the normal political order and economic development of the Khanates.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

Since feudalism had an agrarian base in the Khanates, the majority of the tenants (*karandas*) were engaged in agriculture and pastoral farming Becker (1968). The purchased estates of the feudatories which are indicated by the greater share of the feudatories in the overall land distribution pattern are stated as: 12.2% land was *khassa* (personal property of the Amir), 55.8% *amlak* (state land), 24.2% *waqf* (endowment), and just 7.8% was *milki* (private) lands Williams (1974). This distribution indicates that 92.3% of the peasant population worked on a rent basis. The procedure of surplus extraction which constitutes the prominent feature of feudal system was done through a number of taxes, rents, and levies imposed on the tenants. The tenants were subjected to pay one fourth to one half of the yield as rent to the lord for the leased land; 40% to 75% for the leased working cattle and implements, 50% to 80% for the leased seeds, and 18% to 25% of the yield for the leased money and clothes (Khan, 2003). In addition, they paid other feudal levies (*wujuhat*). Taken together, a very small amount of produce was left for the basic producers at the end. In the process, they were left with little or no food as stated by Boris Pazuklin, the envoy of Tsar Alexci Mikhailovich (1875-1895) to Bukhara, "...and over the years very little bread is left in some homes (of Bukhara, Balkh and Khiva)," Gafurov (2005, p. 391). As a result, for most part of the year, the serfs/tenants subsisted on fruits, vegetables, and

milk. The concept of saving for rainy days was obviously a distant dream.

Living in the countryside and bound by law to the land, they depended on their little crops for subsistence; hence, money played a minor role in their economy. Amid this sort of “natural economy,” the society had two broad divisions, the lord and the servile peasantry. The former were privileged and able to control the maximum means and forces of production, and the latter having to facilitate their jobs to the lords. The society was characteristic of ‘the White Clans’ (the upper stratum) and ‘the Black Clans’ (the commoners) in the Khanate of Khiva Adle and Habib (2005). These divisions were further diversified under the Tsars with the addition of the classes of the *bednyaki* (hired labourers), *izdolshchik/yarmichi* (share croppers), *seredniaks* (middle peasants) and *kulaks* and *beys/biis* (landlords), and *batraks* (landless agricultural workers) Tulupbayev (1986); Aminova (1974). The large spread of economic differentiation between the “exploiter” and the “exploited” in the Central Asian Khanates created the “bi-polarity” of European feudalism. As a result, the tenant farmers were reduced to the position of limited rather than absolute owners of their lands despite being the basic producers of agriculture.

TENANTS: MATERIAL CONDITIONS

The tenants had some satisfaction from the right to land use (*tasarruf-i-malikana*), which assured them food for sustenance. The same right was upheld while the lords engaged in sorts of feudal excesses produced by the farmers. Nevertheless, the farmers had limited access to produce, which subjected them to the most appalling conditions with respect to housing, food, and clothing.

The housing was scattered around the lands of the lords. The houses were adobe type buildings generally made of mud. These houses were in sharp contrast to the brick and stone made castles of the lords. A thick wall built up of lumps of loose mud surrounded the outbuildings and courtyards. A house had no windows facing the street. A closed door faced the street and it was strongly barred at night. The household furnishings were simple. Reed mats were laid on the mud floors and over these mats were spread felt or pile-less woven rugs. In the homes of the rich, the floors were laid with Bukharan pile rugs or highly prized Turkmen rugs. Niches were cut into the mud walls to keep teapots and other household articles. Food items were kept in the packed clay terrace, called *aivans*. However, the lack of space in the dwellings according to Davydov and Federov (1983) and the poor ventilation in the homes during hot seasons

compelled the serfs to sleep in the *aivans* Allworth (1967). The *aivans* were actually meant for storage purpose not for sleeping. A single room was furnished for the guest. The *kibitkas* (tents of nomads) were small and usually smoky and meant for many purposes. The dwellings of the poor were ill equipped and poorly planned. The luckless people were exposed to, especially women and children, many diseases like blindness, *rishta* (an internal worm infection acquired by drinking impure water), cholera, leprosy, rheumatism, etc.

They had a very poor diet. Though the diet was varied from time to time, bread formed the staple food (*ash*). Usually eaten fresh, sometimes it was kept for many days to make up for the food shortage in the dwellings of the poor. Chinese green tea was commonly brewed by everyone. Instead of *kumiss* (a beverage made from mare's milk), *bozeh* made from different kinds of grains, was the beverage of the poor. *Pilau*, rice cooked with the fat of mutton, vegetables and dried fruits was a favorite of the wealthy. The tenant farmers cherished barley instead of rice. Even the middle class used barley on certain special occasions. The poor mostly thrived on milk, curd, eggs, fruits and vegetables. During extreme famine, grains of horse-fodder, the *jogan*, were eaten as a substitute for food by the poor. Clothing for the peasantry was no better. Mostly they wore ragged clothes Murav'yov (1997); Hutton (2005).

The tenant farmers material possessions were very modest. They included simple tools such as a spade (*katmen*), a wooden harrow (*mola*), a sickle (*orag*), a wooden plough (*amach*), a pair of oxen (*gosh*), a and hoe. All these implements and animals were shared on a *shirkat* basis. In Uzbekistan there were 1, 350,000 wooden plows and 1,071 metal plows. In addition, there were 337 iron harrows and 12 seeders by 1910 Tulupbayev (1986). The share of the feudatories in the limited livestock was very large. Five and one half percent *kulaks* (landlords) from the total population possessed 33.51% of the cattle. The total percentage of the population was 50 % and they only possessed 12% of the cattle stock by 1914. The soil was not fertile because of poor management of the land. The only available source of manure was pigeon droppings. The amount of droppings was insufficient to compensate the fertility loss. Productivity per hectare was so poor that the only 3% of the needed fodder was grown for feeding sheep Becon (1966). Many of the farmers were forced to sell their animals. Horses were sold in the foreign markets. Eventually, most farmers gave up farming to become daily wage earners.

Consequently, tenants became very depressed following damage to standing crops, food and

livestock, and shrunken yields and reduced crop areas Schomberg (1932). It was not surprising to see them clandestinely migrating to cities. This migration caused a large shortage of manpower in the villages. Samarkand had a population of 1,50,000 in the 15th century, the population declined to only 10,000 by the early 19th century. In Balkh (in the Khanate of Bukhara), the population dropped from 2,00,000 in the 16th century to 2,000 by the early 19th century Burns (2003); Levi (2007); Adle and Habib (2003); Weinerman (1993); Becon (1966). True feudal excesses contributed to the human exodus to the urban areas but it was not the sole factor for the exodus.

Tenant farmers have not had an easy life. An American, John D. Littlepage, wrote, "The peasantry (including both subjected and free cultivators) were being dragged under the police and set down as forced labourers." A native of Turkestan, Zeki Vilidi Togan, recalled a similar situation after watching executions and persecutions by the feudatories in Farghana. For fear of their concerned lord, Nar Muhammad Parvanchi, the tenants of Qurama demanded justice by hanging posters (*arizalar*) on trees during the reign of Khudiyar Khan Djan (2003). The eminent poet of the 17th-18th century, Saiido Nasafi, highlighted the tenant sufferings at the feudal hands in *Bahoriyat* (The Spring Motives) in the following words:

*"The sky is like a torso of the bent of old man
World is like a ravaged village
As the people of the world sucked each other's
blood
The ferment is like a squeezed pomegranate,
Destiny took away water and granary from the
streams of the flowering garden,
The soil in the garden is like a torn pocket
In this colorful dress the wealthy man is like a
worm wrapped in silk."*

CONCLUSION

One gathers from above that the land grant mechanism proved detrimental both to the state and the basic farmers. The state lost its sovereignty by allowing the grantees and feudatories to share political power and economic resources. The tenant farmers had their surplus produce taken away. Free labor was a pre-requisite to their asset building capacity. On the other hand, the aristocracy lived off the farmers' sweat and blood. There was no compatibility between the lives of the aristocracy and the tenant farmers.

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