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THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN THE TASHKENT AND SYRDARYA REGION

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Abstract:
The article explores the historical evolution of agriculture in the Tashkent and Syrdarya regions, focusing on its emergence, development, and significance within the broader agrarian landscape of Uzbekistan. Particular attention is given to traditional irrigation practices, the management of land and water resources, and changes in crop cultivation patterns across different historical periods. The study also examines the large-scale land development programs carried out during the Soviet era, the growing importance of cotton and grain production, and the transformation of agricultural practices following the country's independence. Through a historical perspective, the article highlights the key factors that have shaped agricultural development in these regions.

Keywords: history of agriculture, Tashkent Region, Syrdarya Region, irrigation practices, agrarian reforms, cotton cultivation, grain farming.

Agriculture has long occupied a central position within Uzbekistan's agrarian sector, serving as one of the key foundations of the national economy. Among the country's agricultural regions, the Tashkent and Syrdarya provinces have historically played a significant role as major centers of crop cultivation and horticultural production. The emergence and advancement of agricultural practices in these areas, together with the introduction and adaptation of new crop varieties, have been shaped by a complex historical process spanning several distinct periods. In the contemporary context, marked by climate change, increasing pressure on water resources, and steady population growth, the diversification of agricultural production through the introduction of new crops and their adaptation to local environmental conditions has become an increasingly important priority. These challenges underscore the need for sustainable approaches aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity while ensuring the efficient use of available natural resources.

Agriculture is recognized as one of the earliest forms of economic activity in the history of human civilization. In this regard, the emergence and development of farming in the Tashkent and Syrdarya oases among the ancient centers of civilization in present-day Uzbekistan occupy a significant place in the region's historical evolution. The natural environment of these territories provided favorable conditions for agricultural development. The presence of the Syrdarya and Akhangaran rivers, together with their numerous tributaries and seasonal waterways, created extensive opportunities for irrigation. These natural resources formed the foundation for the growth of settled agriculture.

The earliest evidence of agricultural activity in the Tashkent and Syrdarya regions dates back to the fourth and third centuries BCE. Archaeological investigations have revealed various implements associated with agricultural production, indicating the existence of organized farming practices. The principal crops cultivated during this period included wheat, barley, and mung bean.

The emergence and gradual expansion of agriculture represented a crucial stage in the development of human society, enabling the establishment of stable settlements and the growth of productive economic systems. Owing to their favorable ecological and geographical conditions, the Tashkent and Syrdarya valleys have long served as suitable environments for human habitation and economic activity.

The origins of agricultural practices in these regions can be traced even further, reaching back to the Neolithic period. Early communities tended to settle in river valleys, foothill zones, and other areas offering access to water and fertile land. Within the Syrdarya basin, the utilization of rainwater, natural streams, and primitive irrigation channels gradually became one of the principal methods of cultivation. As irrigation techniques evolved, agricultural production expanded and became increasingly sophisticated. Historical evidence suggests that simple canals and ditches were constructed around the Tashkent oasis and along the Syrdarya River to support crop cultivation. The continuous improvement of irrigation infrastructure contributed directly to the advancement of agricultural activities.

Archaeological findings further confirm the antiquity of farming traditions in the region. Excavations conducted at sites such as Qovunchitepa and Shoshtepa in the Tashkent oasis, as well as at several settlements situated along the Syrdarya River, have uncovered agricultural tools dating to the fourth and third millennia BCE. These discoveries provide important evidence for the early development of agricultural communities and demonstrate the longstanding role of farming in the economic and cultural history of the region.

The emergence of early agriculture not only ensured a more stable food supply but also facilitated the transition to a sedentary way of life, contributing to the formation of rural communities, the division of labor, and the development of economic specialization. Furthermore, the processes of land reclamation, the construction of irrigation facilities, and the organization of agricultural production increased the importance of collective labor, which became an essential component of rural life.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, following the incorporation of Tashkent and the Syrdarya region into the Russian Empire, significant changes occurred in agricultural policy. New irrigation networks were established, and particular emphasis was placed on the cultivation of cotton as a strategic agricultural commodity. These developments marked the beginning of a new phase in the region's agrarian history, characterized by increasing state involvement in agricultural production and resource management.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during the period of the Central Asian emirates and khanates, agriculture constituted one of the principal sectors of the economy in the territories of present-day Tashkent and Syrdarya. Agricultural practices and policies were largely shaped by the utilization of natural resources, the development of irrigation infrastructure, systems of taxation, and patterns of land tenure. The prosperity of rural communities depended heavily on the effective management of land and water resources, which formed the basis of agricultural production.

Land ownership within the emirates and khanates was generally divided into three categories: state-owned lands (khalisa), religious endowment lands (waqf), and privately owned estates (mulk). In the Tashkent and Syrdarya regions, waqf and private lands were particularly widespread. Farmers commonly cultivated these lands under tenancy arrangements and were required to transfer a specified portion of the harvest to landowners in return for usage rights. In Tashkent, which formed part of the Kokand Khanate, demand for arable land was especially high. As a result, many

cultivators farmed not only their own plots but also leased lands belonging to the state in order to expand production.

Agricultural activity in these regions was closely dependent on irrigation, making access to water a matter of critical importance. The development of farming in Tashkent and Syrdarya relied heavily on the waters of the Syrdarya River and the extensive irrigation systems connected to it. The construction, maintenance, and expansion of canals and irrigation channels were typically carried out through collective labor. These activities involved not only peasants but also local administrators and religious authorities, reflecting the communal significance of water management in agrarian society.

Historical records indicate that during the nineteenth century extensive agricultural lands around Tashkent were irrigated through major canals such as Anhor, Bozsu, and Chirchiq. These waterways played a crucial role in distributing water to cultivated fields and supporting agricultural productivity across the region. At the same time, peasants were subject to various forms of taxation, including *ushr* a levy imposed on agricultural output and *baj*, a payment associated with land use. Although tax obligations were generally linked to the volume of production, they could place a considerable burden on rural households.

In addition to their economic responsibilities, farmers during the period of the emirates and khanates, particularly under the Kokand Khanate, were expected to fulfill a range of social obligations. These included participation in the repair and maintenance of irrigation facilities, involvement in agricultural public works, and other forms of communal labor that were considered necessary for sustaining rural life and agricultural production. Such practices demonstrate the collective character of agrarian organization and the central role of cooperation in the functioning of traditional agricultural systems.

The agricultural economy of the Tashkent and Syrdarya regions was primarily based on the cultivation of grain crops, melons and gourds, and cotton. Among these products, cotton gradually assumed greater economic importance during the nineteenth century, particularly as demand from the Russian market increased. The expansion of cotton cultivation became a notable feature of regional agricultural development and occupied a significant place within the economic policies of the Kokand Khanate. Growing commercial interest in cotton production encouraged the wider utilization of irrigated lands and contributed to the increasing integration of local agriculture into external markets.

Agricultural policy in the Tashkent and Syrdarya territories during the period of the emirates and khanates was closely intertwined with prevailing systems of land ownership, irrigation management, and taxation. The organization of agricultural production depended on a combination of state authority, private property relations, and communal mechanisms for regulating access to water resources. These policies were largely sustained by the labor of the local population and by the effective utilization of available natural resources. As a result, agriculture became one of the principal pillars of the regional economy, shaping both economic activity and social relations throughout the area.

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