

Social and Economic Life of Rural Residents of Uzbekistan during the Great Patriotic War

Safarova Zilola Safarovna

Karshi State Technical University, Uzbekistan/ Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Historical Sciences, Dotsent

E-mail: zilolsafarova@yandex

Abstract

The article examines the peculiarities of the socio-economic life of the rural population of Uzbekistan during the Great Patriotic War. It analyzes the processes of restructuring agriculture to meet wartime demands, the mobilization of labor resources, the role of women, adolescents, and elderly people in ensuring the country's food security, as well as the impact of the evacuation of population and industrial enterprises on the rural infrastructure of the republic. Special attention is paid to the moral and ethical aspects of life in Uzbek villages, manifestations of mutual assistance, labor heroism, and the preservation of traditional social institutions under wartime conditions. Based on historical materials, the contribution of the rural population of Uzbekistan to the Victory over fascism is revealed.

Keywords: Great Patriotic War, Uzbekistan, Rural Population, Collective Farms, Agriculture, Evacuation, Labor Heroism, Social Policy, Women During the War, Rear Front.

1. Introduction

The Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 became one of the most severe trials for the peoples of the Soviet Union. Military operations required the mobilization not only of front-line resources but also of the entire socio-economic system of the country [1], [2]. Under these conditions, the labor potential of the union republics, including Uzbekistan, acquired special importance, as the republic played a significant role in supplying the front with food, raw materials, and human resources [3]. The rural population of the republic found itself at the center of large-scale economic and social transformations connected with restructuring the economy to meet wartime needs [4]. The relevance of this study is determined by the necessity of comprehensively examining the everyday life of rural residents of Uzbekistan during the war period, identifying the peculiarities of society's adaptation to extreme conditions, and objectively assessing the contribution of Uzbek villages to the common Victory [5]. Of particular importance is the analysis of social and living conditions, changes in labor relations, the role of traditional public institutions, and moral values that enabled the population to maintain resilience during the severe wartime crisis [6].

*Corresponding author : Safarova Zilola Safarovna
Article history : submitted, 2026/02/21 revised, 2026/03/19 accepted, 2026/04/17 published 2026/05/17

With the outbreak of war, the economy of Uzbekistan was completely subordinated to the interests of the front. Agriculture became one of the key sectors supplying the army and the rear with food and raw materials. A significant portion of the able-bodied male population was mobilized into the active army, which led to serious changes in the organization of agricultural production. The main burden fell upon women, adolescents, and elderly people, who became the primary labor force of collective and state farms.

In Uzbekistan, senior school students (grades 7–10), technical school students, and university students began working at industrial enterprises and in agriculture after classes and during summer vacations. Thus, by the resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of Uzbekistan dated July 18, 1941, students of grades 7–10 were officially allowed to participate in agricultural work. This decision was soon implemented in practice. According to the resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the Uzbek SSR dated July 21, 1941, labor brigades composed of students from grades 7–10 were established in the Fergana and Namangan regions of Uzbekistan [7]. School students in Tashkent were also actively involved in agricultural work, harvesting more than 3 thousand tons of raw cotton. The wide-scale involvement of senior school students in agricultural labor is evidenced by socialist competitions organized among schools. Schools achieving the highest results in agricultural work were declared winners of the republican competition and awarded monetary prizes amounting to 30 thousand rubles.

2. Research Method

Wartime conditions required the expansion of cultivated areas and an increase in the production of strategically important products. Alongside traditional cotton growing, special attention was paid to grain crops, vegetables, and livestock products. The state sought to ensure uninterrupted food supplies to the front; therefore, collective farms were obliged to fulfill increased state procurement quotas [8]. Under wartime conditions, agriculture in Uzbekistan experienced a serious weakening of its material and technical base. Military operations led to the suspension of supplies of new tractors, agricultural machinery, and spare parts, while a considerable portion of existing equipment and draft animals was mobilized for army needs. As a result, labor productivity declined significantly, and the expenditure of time and physical effort in agricultural work increased.

The mobilization of machinery for the front was accompanied by a sharp reduction in the supply of fuel, fertilizers, and transport for the agricultural sector. The technical equipment of machine-tractor stations, collective farms, and state farms steadily declined. In 1941, the number of tractors in Uzbekistan decreased by 425 units compared to 1940, and by 1942 the reduction had reached 900 units. At the same time, the number of trucks decreased by 3,800 in 1941 and by 5,268 in 1942. The shortage of agricultural machinery and qualified personnel led to an increase in manual labor and wider use of draft power in fieldwork. This negatively affected crop yields and the overall condition of agriculture in the republic, with consequences that continued to be felt in subsequent wartime years. Despite shortages of machinery, fuel, and skilled workers, rural residents continued fulfilling production plans [9].

Cotton played a particularly important role in the republic's economy as it constituted one of the most important strategic raw materials for the military industry. Uzbek collective farms supplied cotton fiber for the production of fabrics, uniforms, medical materials, and gunpowder. At the same time, the orientation toward monoculture complicated food provision

for the population, which necessitated the search for new methods of organizing agriculture [10].

During the Great Patriotic War, sericulture became one of the most important branches of agriculture in Uzbekistan and had strategic significance for meeting the needs of the front. Under wartime conditions, the republic turned into one of the main centers of natural silk production in the USSR. Despite labor shortages, difficult living conditions, and the general restructuring of the economy for wartime needs, rural residents of Uzbekistan managed to preserve and significantly increase silkworm cocoon production. The main burden in this sphere fell on women, adolescents, and elderly people, who ensured the full cycle of silkworm breeding, mulberry plantation maintenance, and cocoon processing. Sericulture required intensive labor, precision, and constant care; therefore, work in this field was regarded as an important contribution to Victory.

Uzbek silk acquired particular significance for the military industry. Natural silk served as an indispensable raw material for parachute fabric due to its high strength, lightness, and elasticity [11]. Silk threads were used to manufacture parachutes for pilots, paratroopers, and cargo deliveries to the front. The reliability of parachutes largely depended on the quality of silk fiber produced in the republic. During the war years, Uzbek collective farms and sericulture enterprises supplied the state with thousands of tons of cocoons from which strategically important products for aviation and the defense industry were manufactured. Thus, the labor of rural residents engaged in sericulture possessed not only economic but also military-strategic significance [12].

The wartime period significantly increased state attention toward the development of sericulture. Areas of mulberry plantations expanded, new cocoon collection and processing centers were established, and labor resources were mobilized for seasonal work. Socialist competitions among silk producers aimed at overfulfilling state plans became widespread. Many rural workers demonstrated examples of selfless labor, working several shifts a day in order to fulfill raw material deliveries on time. In public consciousness, silk production was perceived as direct assistance to the front and a contribution to saving the lives of Soviet soldiers. At the same time, participation in supplying the army with parachute silk strengthened patriotic sentiments and fostered a sense of involvement in the common struggle against fascism. The labor of Uzbek silk producers became one of the most vivid examples of the people's labor heroism during the Great Patriotic War and occupied an honorable place in the history of the Soviet rear [13].

During the Great Patriotic War, karakul breeding occupied an important place in the economic life of rural districts of Uzbekistan and possessed strategic significance for meeting the needs of both the front and the rear. The breeding of karakul sheep, traditionally developed in the steppe and desert regions of Bukhara, Navoi, Kashkadarya, and Karakalpakstan, acquired particular state importance during wartime. Karakul was not only an important export product but also valuable raw material for light industry and military supply. Despite difficult wartime conditions, labor shortages, and reductions in material and technical resources, the rural population of the republic continued ensuring the stable development of this branch.

Karakul pelts and wool were widely used in the production of winter military uniforms. Warm hats, collars, sheepskin coats, and other clothing items for military personnel, especially for units operating in regions with severe climatic conditions, were manufactured from karakul and sheepskin. The high thermal insulation properties of karakul played an important role in supplying the army with winter clothing. At the same time, wool was used in the textile industry

for the production of fabrics, blankets, and felt products necessary for both the front and the evacuated population.

Wartime conditions demanded a significant increase in livestock breeding efficiency. Collective and state farms specializing in karakul breeding were obliged to fulfill state plans for wool and karakul deliveries. The main burden of animal care fell on women, adolescents, and elderly people who replaced men drafted to the front. Under the harsh natural and climatic conditions of desert regions, shepherds continued ensuring the preservation of livestock, organizing wintering, and uninterrupted product deliveries to the state. The labor of workers in karakul-breeding farms was regarded as an important component of the overall labor front. The work of Uzbek livestock breeders and karakul breeders became an essential part of the common feat of the peoples of the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War [14].

3. Results and Discussion

Wartime significantly transformed the everyday life of the rural population. During the four years of war, agricultural workers of the Uzbek SSR delivered to the state 4.8 million tons of raw cotton, more than 1 million tons of grain, 195 thousand tons of rice, 108 thousand tons of potatoes, 374 thousand tons of vegetables and fruits, 35,289 tons of dried fruits, 57,444 tons of grapes, 1.6 million tons of meat, and 5.3 million leather hides. The population of the republic also contributed 649.9 million rubles in cash to the Defense Fund, subscribed to state loans amounting to 4.226 billion rubles, and donated 52.9 kilograms of gold and silver. These funds were used to build and send to the front armored trains “Uzbekistan” and “Krasnovostochnik,” the “Komsomol of Uzbekistan” air squadron, tank columns, and other military equipment. Increased labor burdens were accompanied by deteriorating living conditions. Shortages of food, clothing, medicines, and basic necessities became characteristic features of life for most rural families. Nevertheless, society maintained a high level of moral resilience and social cohesion.

One of the most important manifestations of the humanism of the Uzbek people was assistance to evacuated populations. Hundreds of thousands of people from war-affected regions, including orphans, women, and elderly people, were evacuated to the republic. A significant portion of evacuees was settled in rural areas. Residents of Uzbek villages shared their last reserves of food and housing with newcomers, provided moral support, and assisted them in finding employment. Such manifestations of mutual aid became an important part of social life during the wartime period.

Significant changes occurred in family structure and the social role of women. Women not only replaced men in agricultural production but also became active participants in the social and administrative life of villages. They headed collective farm brigades, participated in organizing labor processes, raised children, and maintained household economies. The wartime period accelerated changes in traditional social perceptions of women’s roles in society.

Despite difficult conditions, schools, medical centers, and cultural and educational institutions continued functioning in rural areas. The state sought to preserve the systems of education and healthcare, although their material base weakened considerably. The activities of local self-government bodies and mahallas played an important role in maintaining public order and mutual support among the population. One of the most significant features of life in Uzbek villages during the war was the mass labor heroism of the population. Work on collective farms was perceived as a direct contribution to the struggle against fascism.

Socialist competitions, shock-worker movements, and initiatives aimed at overfulfilling production plans became widespread. Many rural residents voluntarily donated funds to the Defense Fund, collected warm clothing for soldiers, and participated in the construction of defense facilities.

Young people played a particularly important role by actively engaging in labor activities. Adolescents worked in the fields, cared for livestock, and replaced adults in various production sectors. Labor education became an important element of public life during wartime, fostering a sense of responsibility and civic duty. Patriotic sentiments intensified under the influence of the common threat and the desire to defend the Motherland. Traditional values of collectivism, mutual assistance, and respect for elders were preserved in rural society, helping people overcome numerous wartime hardships. Spiritual and moral foundations rooted in the historical traditions of the Uzbek people also played a significant role [15].

4. Conclusion

Thus, the years of the Great Patriotic War became a period of severe trials for the rural population of Uzbekistan. Under conditions of mobilization of human and material resources, Uzbek villages managed to ensure the stable functioning of agriculture, supply the front with strategically important products, and support evacuated populations. Despite difficult social and living conditions, the residents of the republic demonstrated a high level of labor heroism, patriotism, and humanism.

The experience of the war years revealed the considerable potential of Uzbek society for self-organization and social consolidation. The labor contribution of the rural population of Uzbekistan became an important part of the common Victory over fascism and occupied a worthy place in the history of the Second World War. The study of this period possesses important scientific and educational significance, as it allows for a deeper understanding of the historical experience of the people, their spiritual resilience, and their ability to overcome the most difficult trials.

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