

Raj Kumar Sharma NatStrat (Centre for Research on Strategic and Security Issues), India, New Delhi
e-mail: kumar.raj015@gmail.com**FOOD SECURITY & MIGRATION:
SOME INSIGHTS FROM CENTRAL ASIA**

Food security and migration are two interlinked concepts which have not received desired attention in the discipline of international relations. Food insecurity, combined with other non-traditional security threats, has been responsible for political instability in many countries in recent decades. In Central Asia, both food insecurity and migration have been important issues; however, their impact on state varies from country to country in the region. The root cause of food insecurity in Central Asia goes back to second half of the 19th century, when this region gradually came under Tsarist Russia's colonial rule and cotton monoculture was introduced replacing food crops cultivation in the region. In countries like Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the relationship between food security and migration is clearly visible as their youths in large numbers go to Russia seeking employment. Kazakhstan is self-sufficient in food supplies and does not face food problems like these three countries. Food insecurity is an issue in Turkmenistan also; however, lack of relevant data does not allow reaching any conclusions. The Central Asian countries have been dealing with food insecurity; however, they need regional cooperation in order to better handle this issue. This article would also highlight the potential for India-Central Asia cooperation to address food security concerns of the Central Asian countries.

Keywords: India, Central Asia, Food Security, Migration, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan.

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e-mail: kumar.raj015@gmail.com**Азық-түлік қауіпсіздігі және көші-қон:
Орталықазиялық көзқарастар таласы**

Азық-түлік қауіпсіздігі және көші-қон мәселелері –бұл халықаралық қатынастар саласында қажетті деңгейде назар аударылмаған бір-бірімен байланысты ұғымдар болып табылады. Азық-түлік қауіпсіздігінің болмауы басқа дәстүрлі емес қауіпсіздік қатерлерімен бірге соңғы онжылдықтарда көптеген елдердегі саяси тұрақсыздықтың себебі болды. Орталық Азияда азық-түлік қауіпсіздігінің болмауы және көші-қон күн тәртібіндегі өзекті мәселелерге айналып отыр. Алайда, олардың мемлекетке әсері аймақтағы әр елде әр түрлі болады. Орталық Азиядағы азық-түлік қауіпсіздігінің негізгі себебі, XIX ғасырдың екінші жартысында бұл аймақ бірте-бірте Патшалық Ресейдің отаршылдық билігіне өтіп, аймақта азық-түлік дақылдарын өсірудің орнына мақта монокультурасы енгізілген кезден басталады. Тәжікстан, Қырғызстан және Өзбекстан сияқты елдерде азық-түлік қауіпсіздігі мен көші-қон арасындағы байланыс айқын көрінеді, өйткені олардың жастары Ресейге еңбек көші-қонымен жиі қоныс аударады. Қазақстан азық-түлікпен өзін-өзі қамтамасыз етеді және осы үш ел сияқты азық-түлік проблемаларына тап болмайды. Түркменстанда азық-түлік қауіпсіздігінің болмауы да проблема болып табылады, дегенмен бұл елге қатысты деректердің қолжетімді болмауы қандай да бір қорытынды жасауға мүмкіндік бермейді. Орталық Азия елдері азық-түлік қауіпсіздігі мәселелесін шешумен айналысқанмен, бұл мәселенің тиімді шешімі аймақтық ынтымақтастық мен серіктестікпен анық. Сонымен қатар бұл мақалада Орталық Азия елдерінің азық-түлік қауіпсіздігі мәселелерін шешу үшін Үндістан мен Орталық Азия арасындағы ынтымақтастықтың әлеуеті туралы зерделенеді.

Түйін сөздер: Үндістан, Орталық Азия, азық-түлік қауіпсіздігі, көші-қон, Қазақстан, Тәжікстан, Қырғызстан.

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Продовольственная безопасность и миграция: некоторые взгляды из Центральной Азии

Продовольственная безопасность и миграция – это две взаимосвязанные концепции, которым не уделяется должного внимания в области международных отношений. Отсутствие продовольственной безопасности в сочетании с другими нетрадиционными угрозами безопасности стало причиной политической нестабильности во многих странах в последние десятилетия. В Центральной Азии как отсутствие продовольственной безопасности, так и миграция являются важными проблемами; однако их влияние на государство в регионе варьируется от страны к стране. Основная причина отсутствия продовольственной безопасности в Центральной Азии восходит ко второй половине XIX века, когда этот регион постепенно попал под колониальное господство царской России и монокультура хлопка была введена вместо выращивания продовольственных культур в регионе. В таких странах, как Таджикистан, Кыргызстан и Узбекистан, взаимосвязь между продовольственной безопасностью и миграцией отчетливо видна, поскольку их молодежь в массовом порядке отправляется в Россию в поисках работы. Казахстан обеспечивает себя продовольствием и не сталкивается с продовольственными проблемами, как эти три страны. Отсутствие продовольственной безопасности является проблемой и в Туркменистане, однако отсутствие соответствующих данных не позволяет сделать какие-либо выводы. Страны Центральной Азии сталкиваются с проблемой отсутствия продовольственной безопасности, однако для более эффективного решения этой проблемы им необходимо региональное сотрудничество. В этой статье также будет освещен потенциал сотрудничества Индии и Центральной Азии для решения проблем продовольственной безопасности стран Центральной Азии.

Ключевые слова: Индия, Центральная Азия, продовольственная безопасность, миграция, Казахстан, Таджикистан, Кыргызстан.

Introduction

Historically, food security has been an area of concern in Central Asia; however, this aspect is often not given due academic importance while discussing problems in the region. Almost all the available literature on the subject generally discusses Central Asia's food problems in the contemporary times and from a developmental perspective with almost no references to historical origin of this problem. Historical analysis of food insecurity in Central Asia helps in contextualizing this problem in order to improve our understanding on this subject. There are many approaches to understand food security: economic and developmental, sociological and political. This article brings out the historical aspect of this problem in Central Asia to argue that colonialism and food insecurity have a strong link, as evident in case of Central Asia and India.

Materials and Methods

This article uses historical method to trace the origins of food insecurity in Central Asian countries in contemporary times. It is based on the hypothesis that both Central Asia and India suffered from food insecurity due to colonial policies of their respective former rulers during those times. The results include

suggestions for India-Central Asia cooperation on the issue of food security, sustainable development and climate change.

Results and Discussion

Colonialism, Cotton and Food Production in Central Asia

Contemporary Central Asian countries came under Tsarist Russia's colonialism in the second half of the 19th century. In Russia, it was a period of economic transition as feudal-serf relations were making way for capitalist mode of production. Hence, expansion of capitalism in Russia required takeover of new markets. That is why; Central Asia was being seen as a potential market by Russian industrial circles (Kaushik, 1970). Quoting N A Khalfin, R R Sharma argues that Russian search for new markets to sustain and promote its capitalist trade led to its conquest of Central Asia (Sharma, 1979). Securing regular supplies of cotton was one of the main motives for which the Tsarist Russia conquered Central Asia. America was main cotton supplier for Russian textile industry. However, it was undergoing a Civil War (1861-1865) and its cotton supplies to Russia were severely hit. Russia desired to secure cotton supplies from Central Asia to replace American supplies (Rakowska-Harmstone, 1970). Moreover, the

global price of cotton had risen more than five times due to the American civil war. Due to increasing cost of imported cotton, Russia was looking for an alternate source of cheap cotton supply and Central Asia was their first choice as the climate in the region was favorable to grow cotton (Anderson, 1997). There was a well-planned strategy in place which encouraged cotton production in Central Asia. This led to cotton monoculture (cultivation of a single crop) in the region, to the extent that food stuffs were imported from Russia to meet grain requirements in Central Asia. Russia's policy in Central Asia was similar to British policy in Egypt, where cotton production was increased with a resultant decrease in grain production (Rywkin, 1982). Cotton cultivation was a traditional economic activity in Central Asia and it did not differ from any other local industry. Cotton production did not have access to external markets as there were problems of transportation and poor quality (Sharma, 1979). Russians were aware of the fact that in order to increase cotton production in Central Asia, they had two alternatives. One was to increase total area under cultivation in the region while second option was to decrease area under crops other than cotton. Since the first option was difficult and involved large economic costs, Russians exercised the second option which was cheaper as well (Pierce, 1960). Kai Wegerich also makes a similar argument. He says increased production of Central Asian cotton was not based on expansion of irrigated area. Rather, it was done by shifting area under food crops to cotton crop. This made Central Asia dependent on subsidised wheat imports from Russia (Wegerich, 2003). Hence, soon after the Tsarist annexation, Central Asia became a base to supply raw material to metropolitan industries in Russia. Russian policies gave preference to cotton, encouraging it at the cost of wheat and other agricultural crops in Central Asia (Wheeler, 1964; Kaushik, 1970). The total land under cotton cultivation in Central Asia between 1886 and 1914 increased 46 times. Central Asia supplied 24 percent of Russian cotton needs in 1900. In 1913, share of Central Asian cotton in Russian industry was 50 percent. Such a tremendous increase in cotton cultivation came at the expense of grain cultivation in Central Asia. The policy to replace grains at the cost of cotton set Central Asia under economic tutelage of Russia in the sense of survival, as it supplied the region with foodstuffs (Caroe, 1967). Transport was required for the final conquest of the Central Asians by the Tsarist Russia. Camel and horse were the main modes of transport before 1880 in the region. There were problems of inhospitable terrain

and water supply due to deserts and mountains. All these issues led to construction of Trans-Caspian or Central Asian railway (Lloyd, 1998). Trans-Caspian railway integrated the Central Asian economy with the capitalist Russian economy and paved the way for its colonial exploitation. Due to this transport facility, the annual trade between Russia and Bukhara more than doubled in the first six years after the opening of Trans-Caspian rail line. The trade tripled between the early 1890s to the eve of First World War in 1914 (Jonson, 2004). According to R Vaidyanath, one of the main reasons for constructing the Central Asian railway line was cotton. Russia wanted to smoothly transport the Central Asian cotton to its industrial centres. Gradually, the cotton crop became so important in the economy of Central Asia that it was referred to as 'land of white gold' (Vaidyanath, 1967). The colonial nature of Tsarist Russia was very much visible in the transport sector, apart from agriculture. Preference was given to construct rail lines that connected the metropolis with the colonies and very few rail lines were constructed to connect the colonies among themselves (Baransky, 1956). Lavrishchev has analysed the disparity in distribution of transport between European part of Russia and Asian part of Russia. There was 17.1 km of rail line per 1000 square km of territory in central areas of European Russia while in Central Asia; it was only 1.2 km per 1000 square km (Lavrishchev, 1969).

Later, Central Asia had a special role in Soviet economic planning. Soviet economic geography was developed by economic geographers like N N Baransky, N N Kolosovsky, L L Nikitin, A T Khrushchev and well known Soviet economists like N N Nekrasov and M K Bandman. As the name suggests, economic geography determined the type of economy a republic will have based on its geography (climate, terrain, minerals, natural resources etc.). The Marxist-Leninist economic science says that natural conditions form the natural basis of social production (Lavrishchev, 1969).

The Soviet Union was to be made self-sufficient in all respects but the constituent republics were to carry out economic specialisation based on their geographic attributes that would contribute to the all-Union economy (Cole and German, 1961). At the 11th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in Moscow, Vladimir Lenin declared Russia would be divided into regions according to scientific principles and on the basis of climate, economy, fuel availability and local industry (Demko and Fuchs, 1974). The economic regions did not have planning bodies of their own; instead

they had just constituent units for carrying out regional plans formulated centrally. Though Central Asia had favourable climate for cotton cultivation, still due to uncommonly dry climate and shortage of moisture, cotton was cultivated only on irrigated lands (Lavrishchev, 1969). Hence, keeping in view the geographical realities of Central Asia, the region was called upon to free the Soviet Union from dependence on imported cotton (Holdsworth, 1952). The Central Asian oasis economies due to their hot climate were seen as having the potential to supply large amounts of cotton to Soviet Union in the context of centre-periphery colonial relations. It meant that the region was to become a part and parcel of Soviet-inter-republican division of labour, focusing on cotton specialisation (Spoor, 2000). As a result of its climate, land and water resources, Central Asian economy became the most specialised in the Soviet Union. Subsequently, Soviet Union undertook massive irrigation projects to supply water to cotton fields in Central Asia (Roudik, 2007; Mehta 1978). Another factor that could have played a role in development of cotton monoculture in Central Asia was limited availability of arable land in Central Asia, which did not extend beyond 4 to 5 percent of the total land area. This region having mountains, deserts and grasslands was never capable of sustaining a large population (Sharma, 1979). Central Asia did not produce enough grains and depended on supplies from Russia. Keeping in view Soviet regional economic planning, Central Asia specialised in cotton cultivation to be exported to European Russia. In exchange, it received foodstuffs and other necessary agriculture inputs including fertilisers from Moscow. The economic structure of the Central Asian republics was designed to fit the requirements of a larger whole (Soviet Union) and developed differently from that of independent nations (Matley, 1981).

During 1931-1933, Kazakhstan witnessed one of the most horrible famines in Soviet Union's history in which more than 1 million people lost their lives. There is academic literature available that points that it was a man-made disaster, potentially indicating the role of Soviet state in its creation. Kazakhstan had also suffered from a famine earlier from 1919 to 1922 during the Civil War in Russia. It is hard to miss the relationship between democracy and hunger, as highlighted by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen in his book, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, where he argues that in working functional democracies, there have been no famines as democratic governments are accountable to the people and by not ad-

ressing their food needs, they risk being voted out of power by the people. Russia's colonial policies were meant for its own benefits; not for the people of Central Asia. This is why; there were famines in the region and Central Asia was made dependent on food supplies from Moscow while the region grew cotton on a very large scale. There were many famines in India also under the British colonial rule, one of the worst being the infamous Bengal famine of 1943. During the British rule, the policymakers did not focus on a long-term policy to address issue of frequent droughts which led to millions of deaths from 1769 to 1943 (Panda, 2023). One of the prominent Indian economists, Prof Utsa Patnaik has argued that the infamous Bengal famine was a result of an 'engineered profit inflation' in order to finance the war spending by the Allied forces (Patnaik, 2018). A British historian has even argued that the British created famines in India as the images of starving people reinforced their superiority and right to rule in India (Arnold, 1988). A recent media report claims that in the forty years between 1880 and 1920, British colonial policies in India claimed almost 100 million lives which was more than the lives lost in all famines in the Soviet Union, North Korea and Maoist China combined (Sullivan and Hickel, 2022). The British also introduced commercialisation of agriculture, which enhanced the speed of land ownership transfer, thereby, increasing the number of landless labourers. It also brought in middlemen, merchants and traders in the picture who could exploit the situation to their benefit. The peasant depended on them to sell their produce. The peasants started to cultivate commercial crops which reduced the food grain cultivation. Less food stock led to famines (Social Science, Book 1). Hence, it could be argued that colonialism has been one of the main factors responsible for hunger and famines in Central Asia, mainly Kazakhstan and India.

Food Security, Migration and National Security

In 1996 during the World Food Summit in Rome, food security was defined as:

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2006). This definition emphasizes the multidimensional nature of food security which includes four aspects.

1. Food Availability: The required food for the population should be available which is ensured by

domestic production, food imports, food stocks and food aid from other countries and agencies.

2. **Food Access:** Physical and economic access to food is ensured by purchasing power of the population and infrastructure for market and transport.

3. **Food Utilization:** This includes food safety measures, hygiene and sanitation practices and health care facilities. It underlines role of non-food factors in concept of food security. This also determines nutritional status of individuals.

4. **Food Stability:** In order to have food security, people should have unhindered access to food at all times. Price fluctuations, natural disasters

and weather variations, political and economic hindrances should not disrupt food availability and access (FAO, 2008).

It must be mentioned that in international security studies, food security is seen as a part of human security. There are two major components of human security, according to the UNDP Human Security Report 1994 as shown in the figure 1. First one focuses on ‘freedom from want’ which focuses on human needs in economic, food, health, social and environmental terms. The second school focuses on ‘freedom from fear’ and seeks to remove use or threat of force from people’s daily lives (United Nations Development Program, 1994).

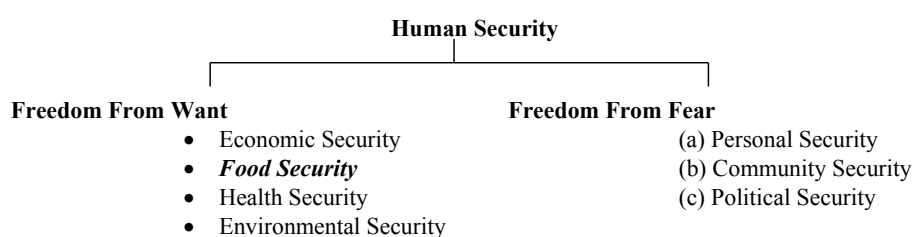


Figure 1

Food security forms an important part of a country’s national security, although, this is a new idea as national security is mainly seen in military terms around the world. However, COVID-19 could induce a paradigm shift and force many countries to take a holistic view of their national security including food security. Food security forms an important element of national security, according to ancient Indian political thinker Kautilya as mentioned in his book, *Arthashastra*. Classic realist, Hans J Morgenthau had identified food production as an element of national power and all states try to achieve maximum food production in order to survive under international anarchy (cited in Naylor, 2014).

Dependence on food imports is a weakness which can be used against a country. The concerns over food insecurity have direct impact on society in Central Asian countries. Better access to food requires employment but in countries like Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and even Uzbekistan, there is lack of substantial employment opportunities. Hence, people have migrated to Russia and Kazakhstan in search of employment to keep their families away from hunger and also provide them better education and health facilities. According to World Bank 2022 figures; remittances add up to 51 percent of Tajikistan’s GDP, 31 percent for Kyrgyzstan and

20 percent for Uzbekistan. Food insecurity can lead to migration but at the same time, remittances received from migrants help improve the food security of their families. Russia is main destination for migrants from Central Asia; however, Western sanctions on Russia following Russia-Ukraine conflict would negatively impact remittance flow to Central Asia, thereby impacting food security in countries like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. A study by United Nations in 2023 argues that land degradation is one of the main triggers for migration in Central Asia. In Central Asia, food security has been recognised as an important element of their national development by various documents produced by the governments from time to time. However, their efforts have fallen short due to complexity of the problem: food insecurity is also connected to water, energy, environmental issues and mountainous topography in the region. The regional cooperation mechanisms in Central Asia like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) are geared more towards the needs of China than the local needs of the regional countries. This leaves enough room for countries like India to cooperate with the Central Asian countries in order to strengthen their food security. The areas of potential cooperation include research and development for high yielding and better quality seeds,

green house cultivation of vegetables, drip irrigation, agricultural implements and storage technology. At the same time, the Central Asian countries could become members in India's initiatives like the International Solar Alliance and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure that could help them to deal with climate change. This would also positively impact their food security, since rising temperatures in the region would negatively impact food security. Food trade was an important element of ancient Silk Road between India and Central Asia and this could be the right time to revive that spirit in a rightful way.

Conclusion

The main objective of this article was to trace the historical origin of problem of food insecurity in some Central Asian countries. The answer goes back to second half of 19th century, when the region came under Tsarist Russia's control and the pattern of crop cultivation was changed. Cotton monoculture was introduced in Central Asia, replacing food

crops with cotton while the region received wheat supplies from other regions of Russia. The effects of this change are still visible in the region. Colonial policies were responsible for some of the worst famines in both Kazakhstan and India. Colonial governments are not accountable to the people being ruled and hence, they could end up ignoring the issues like hunger. Due to deep links between water, food, energy and climate change, food security has become a complex and multi-dimensional threat in Central Asia. The regional countries need international partnerships to deal with this issue and one of them could be India-Central Asia cooperation mechanism for food security. India's recent focus to tackle climate change could be of particular importance to the Central Asian countries. This is likely to help them in addressing their food security concerns in times to come.

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