Preface

Central Asia or what was historically called Turkestan, is a huge landmass comprising the territories between the Amu and Syr Rivers (Mawaranahr in Arabic), Xinjiang or Chinese Central Asia, Khwarizm, Afghanistan, North West Frontiers of India including Sind, Multan and Kashmir, Mongolia and Tibet. Located on the cross roads of Grand Silk Route, the region had several fascinations: the home to diverse ethnic groups, and rich arts, cultures, faiths, learning and philosophy. Nonetheless, the region was largely landlocked and characteristic of barbarism and backwardness due to the presence of a swath of ethno-tribal and nomadic and semi-nomadic groups and communities. With the discovery of Sea Routes, Central Asia lost strategic importance, and the world focus shifted to outward, seaward, and westwards thereby subjecting the region to partial hibernation. Although the entire dynamics of the region’s past was meticulously highlighted by the Western and Russian scholars, the issues concerning land tenures and tribal organization were not analytically examined by them for certain limitations. True the foreign travelers plugged the gap. But since they belonged to a different educational background, they could not, as such, present a scientific view of the land tenures in terms of feudal mode of production.

The history of the Tsars as well as the Soviets abounds with information on the theme under reference. For strategic reasons, however, they did not allow unfolding the facts about agrarian and feudal structure of the region. This is the reason why Christopher Beckworth’s statement that “Central Asia is a missing link in the world history,” holds good even today. It is a fact that the post-Soviet writers strived to unravel the region’s rich past. However, due to changing regional and global scenario, they were soon caught up in discussion on contemporary issues: geopolitics, geo-economy, security, energy, foreign investment, democracy, terrorism,
drug trafficking, arms smuggling. With the result, the dynamics of feudalism, received little attention from the native scholars though some painstaking job was performed by the foreign NGO’s while examining the exploitative nature of the Khanates, Tsars and the Soviets. Therefore, the present work is not, in any way new, but rather a supplement to their endeavours to profile region’s land tenures under the Khanates of Khiva, Khokand and Bukhara. The work is devised into six chapters.

Chapter I:
This chapter discusses the issues concerning the region’s geo-physical frame, population, ethnic composition, land tenures, and religious-cultural fabric of the people of the Khanates of Khiva, Khokand and Bukhara. It also accounts for the history of the region since the Arab invasion: a phenomenon that changed the entire socio-economic and religio-spiritual texture of the region under the Khanates in medieval period.

Chapter II:
In this chapter, a modest effort has been made to study feudalism in a conceptual framework. The theories of eminent scientists right from Marc Bloch, Maurice Dobb, Perry Anderson, Henry Pirenne, Immanuel Wallesttien, Guy Bois, Frank Perlin, down to F. W. Maitland, R. S. Sharma and Harbans Mukhia, have been randomly perused keeping in view the varying conditions and multilateral dimensions of feudalism in Europe, Japan, China, India, Russia, Spain, Turkey, Iran, Italy, and even in the nomadic Turko-Mongol societies of Eurasia. The chapter also takes note of a serious debate on Central Asian feudalism among the eminent social scientists like Boris Ya. Veidimirtsov, Sergey Tolstov, Zimanov, Potapov, S. E. Tolybekov, S. N. Wainstain, Yu I. Semenov and G. M. Markov, Sh. Nacador, A. Minis, G. Sughbatoar, and N. Seradjav, N. Seradjav, Academician Sh. Natsagdorj, Earnest Gellner, Nikolay N. Kradin, Owen Lattimore, Lawrence Krader etc. Interestingly, little effort was earlier made to engage debate on such a crucial issue in the Central Asian Khanates.
Chapter III:

The chapter deals in detail with the real working of feudalism in the Khanates of Khiva, Khokand and Bukhara. The information has been studied and presented under three headings: (i) Overview of Feudalism in Central Asia, (ii) Feudal Structure and Functioning, and (iii) Feudal Levies. The whole discussion is characteristic of information on the landlords, fiefs, manors, and the serfs from the early times of Qarakhanids (9th-10th century AD) down to the Mongols, Khanates and the advent of the Soviets. B. Ya. Vladimirtsov, the initiator of the debate on Central Asian feudalism, has designated the above period (12th-20th century) as feudal in context to Central Asia and Mongolia. He has based his whole argument on lord-tenant relationship, and maintained that while notionally land belonged to the Amir/Khan, certain strips of it were practically distributed by them among civil and military officials with absolute rights on everything from “below and above” the land, and which incidentally included the actual tillers, thitherto traditional owners/proprietors. In lieu thereof, the officials were required to acknowledge the Amir as their overlord and render him military service in the event of wars from within and outside the Khanates. Since, the estates of the land lords were usually big, they, as such, sub-infeudated them among their own men, which resultantly led to decentralization of the royal powers in all the three Khanates.

The chapter also profiles the status of the tenants (karandas) in these estates, under the most inhuman and appalling conditions. Treated virtually as commodities, they were inhumanly subjected to lots of unpaid and involuntary services, the payment of innumerable levies and exorbitantly fixed rent rate on the land use aside. They were tied to the land, and had no right to appeal before against the feudal excesses.

Chapter IV:

It examines the impact, good and bad, of feudalism on different organs of Central Asian Khanates, nobility, and the subjects at large. No doubt, feudalism developed
amid crisis following socio-political break down, and redeemed the Amirs from the arduous task of protecting their subjects from foreign invaders, and which job was instead assigned to the most affluent local chieftains. They were compensated in terms of big landed estates, their resources, and the subjects. They were virtually recognized by law as being the “masters of whatever was above and below the land including of course the cultivators.” The said arrangement empowered the feudatories beyond proportions, which eventually transformed the real land owners into a most nascent class of tenants/serfs. The impact on their life pattern, attitude, and behaviour was, therefore, obvious because of the change in land tenures, which weakened them in many ways, and which is the central point of this chapter. The chapter also deals with feudal phenomenon on the Khanates and the feudal lords themselves.

Chapter V:
This chapter is devoted to a discussion on the challenges, threats, and response to feudal system in Central Asian Khanates. While feudalism emerged under the failing state systems, it nevertheless triggered such conditions as were characteristic of extreme level of peasant exploitation, their labour and surplus by the feudal lords, which eventually pre-empted their clandestine exodus from native villages and settlement elsewhere, indeed a major contributory to the agrarian crisis. This brought the Khanates face to face with several challenges and threats, which the stakeholders, however, strived to address within mutual constraints, and which sequentially averted an organized anti-feudal resistance in the Khanates of Khiva, Khokand and Bukhara. These and similar other type of issues are discussed in the present chapter.

Chapter VI:
This concluding chapter profiles the discussion contained in the preceding chapters. It argues that feudalism was the product of failing state systems across the globe. Though it originated in Europe, yet it transcended regional and geographic borders, and spread/appeared in Asia, Africa etc. from time to time. Feudalism in the
Khanates of Khiva, Khokand and Bukhara being no exception to it, was also the product of the breakdown of the centralized Uzbek Khanate (16th century) due to tribal invasions, socio-economic deprivation, human insecurity, and ever decaying communication and transportation networks. It also possessed such features, exceptions apart, as were characteristic of European and Indian feudalism, and was, therefore, oriented to sustain the ruling elite, the landlords, while exploiting the labour and dispossessing the tenants/serfs of their surplus produce. In the process, not only that the basic producers were dispossessed of their generations - old hereditary and ownership rights on land, but they were also enslaved and tied to the land in a manner that their self and that of their family became irrelevant. They were allowed simply a piece of land for use on rent basis, which too was exorbitant and unaffordable for them in view of their growing family needs. While for their own compulsions, they could not afford any organized “dissent” to the feudal order, they, however, were ceased of their excessive feudal exploitation under the patronage of their overlords, the Amirs/Khans. Therefore, they peacefully invoked the justice and fair treatment of the landlords, which in some, if not in all cases, was favourably considered by them for expediency.

Purely historical methodology has been followed in the completion of the present thesis. Besides primary and secondary sources, information available on web resources, print and electronic media was consulted in constructing information on *Feudalism in the Central Asian Khanates (18th- Early 20th century)*. Every possible endeavor was made to avoid subjectivity and skip unauthentic information/statements. Nevertheless, the present work is not devoid of fault lines, which I own, and which could not be taken care of for linguistic barriers and also for my inability to visit former Central Asian Khanates due to financial constraints.

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