



TERRITORIAL SETTLEMENT AND CLAN DIVISIONS OF THE LULIS IN THE SURKHAN OASIS

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Abstract. In the Surkhandarya Oasis, the lifestyle and occupations of the Lulis have undergone significant changes over the centuries under the influence of the ethno-cultural environment of surrounding peoples. In the studied region, shifts in the Lulis' way of life and daily activities have played an important role in improving their economic conditions. As they acquired labor skills and adapted to new types of economic activities, the number of impoverished and destitute Lulis began to decrease significantly. This article analyzes the **changes in the material and spiritual culture of the Lulis in the Surkhan Oasis.**

Keywords: Lulis, Surkhan-Sherobod, Denov, Sariosiyo, material culture.

Introduction.

The sense of identity in each nation is the understanding, perception, and feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic group. It is known that self-awareness is related to ethnic identity, playing a crucial role in determining the survival and development of an ethnic group. Many ethnic communities around the world have collective perceptions about their origins, historical destiny, and cultural values. One such group is the Luli (Gypsy) people, whose descendants are gradually forgetting the ethnic history of their ancestors, where their forefathers lived, and what economic activities they were engaged in.

Today, the cognitive component of self-awareness among young people is relatively low, and their understanding of their identity is changing in modern society, as mixed marriages lead to socialization, where they tend to forget their national culture and historical memory. Additionally, Luli youth show flexibility in adapting to the social and cultural environment. This flexibility changes their life goals and views.

Materials And Methods.

Currently, approaches to studying the ethnology of Luli communities, widespread across the world, are yielding positive results. However, the topic of Lulis has mostly been studied by local and global researchers based on events, with fewer studies on social, cultural, political, religious, and gender histories. In the Surkhan region, Lulis maintain a distinct lifestyle and traditional culture compared to other nations. The preservation of their traditional culture has, to some extent, contributed to their long-standing practice of begging. Furthermore, the presence of begging as a practice makes them stand out from the surrounding population, thus forming the basis of their identity [1].



In the local social life of Lulis, ethnic processes over the centuries have led to changes in their lifestyle, pushing them toward a more sedentary existence. They have adopted new professions such as agriculture, handicrafts, and trade in rural areas and towns. As a result, the necessity for begging diminished, and the idea of begging as the primary source of income began to lose its strength. Alongside working as migrant laborers, they started mastering new trades and professions.

Lulis moved to rural areas far from urban centers or industrialized cities. In these places, naturally, they could not continue their traditional occupation of begging. The most suitable occupations in these regions were farming and livestock breeding, which led them to abandon begging in favor of these activities. Thus, changes in their sense of identity have taken place [2].

The mentality of the Lulis has formed over a long historical period, reflecting their economic activities and natural environment. The decree issued by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on October 5, 1956, «On the Settling of the Lulis and Their Involvement in Social Labor,» accelerated their transition to a sedentary lifestyle. However, their habit of constantly moving and interacting with surrounding villages and communities remained ingrained.

The mentality of a people is embedded in their consciousness and spirit during the cultural exchange process. From childhood, individuals internalize their people's mentality through their native language, folk traditions, and living conditions. As they grow, this mentality shapes their national culture and leads them to integrate with their surrounding cultural environment [3].

The truth is that a person's mentality can change when they enter a new cultural environment during their life. For example, Lulis once lived a nomadic life, but over time, they understood the importance of mutual trust with the local population once they settled in one place. The Lulis' lifestyle, occupation, behavior, and other such factors have led to the formation of perceptions about them among the surrounding communities.

Some elements of Luli clothing have remained unchanged over the centuries. Lulis never wear short, tight, or short-sleeved clothes. Women cannot walk with their heads uncovered, and the length of their dresses must reach their ankles. Unmarried girls can adorn their faces, but this is forbidden for married women. If they fail to adhere to these rules of dress, they face criticism from their relatives.

Today, it is important to determine how Lulis understand their identity according to different types of identification. For example, Lulis cannot be distinguished by their religious identity. Lulis around the world have always followed religions that benefit them and have faith in those that their local population adheres to. Lulis in Uzbekistan practice Islam, but they also retain some of their unique religious beliefs. One of the important features of ethnic self-awareness is language, and the language and dialects of Lulis differ from one another. In Uzbekistan, Lulis primarily communicate in Tajik as their first language, followed by Uzbek. In the northern regions of Surkhandarya, the Luli language resembles the dialect of Tajiks from the Sughd region of Tajikistan. In addition to Tajik and Uzbek, Lulis in Surkhandarya retain elements of their Mugat language, which is unintelligible to Uzbeks and Tajiks [4].



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Discussion And Results.

According to the UNESCO Interactive Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, the language of the Central Asian Lulis is classified among the endangered languages. It is listed as «definitely endangered,» with only elderly speakers using it. Some literature mentions that the Lulis' spoken language includes specific dialects such as Mugat, Abdal, or Zaboni Panoyi. In I. Oranskiy's work, more detailed information is provided on these dialects. Mugat is a unique Luli dialect that is unintelligible to Uzbeks or Tajiks. The term «Abdal» refers to a person who is a beggar, ascetic, or wandering performer. Additionally, the «Abdal language» is used by artists, musicians, and other wandering performers. Zaboni Panoyi means «secret language» in Persian, and this hidden language may be used by different groups to protect their professional activities. While today, fewer Mugat words are preserved, they are still used in internal communication, both by the older and younger generations of Lulis. In scientific literature, studying the Lulis' territorial identity remains a challenge. For example, Lulis in Bukhara, Tashkent, Fergana Valley, Samarkand, Kashkadarya, and Surkhandarya have distinct characteristics. While there are common ethnic traits, each region's Lulis differ in language, appearance, clothing, and customs [5].

In various villages, different Luli ethnic groups live in close proximity to each other. However, they recognize themselves as a unified community with a common identity. For instance, Sherabad, Denov, and Oqtepa Lulis form distinct groups.

Lulis in Surkhandarya speak both Tajik and Uzbek, and in Tashkent, Luli women may not wear headscarves, while in Surkhandarya, they are expected to. This reflects the specific regional characteristics shaped by prolonged residence and interaction with the local population.

Until 10-20 years ago, Luli men were not allowed to marry outside their ethnicity. The elders strongly opposed it, and there was a saying among the people: «He who marries a Luli will suffer for seven generations,» or «The fate of those who marry a Luli is doomed.» This saying originated from their own community, as Luli women were historically engaged in begging, petty trading, and fortune-telling. The phrase served as a way to prevent others from looking down on them. Our research has not yet identified any cases of a Luli girl marrying someone from another ethnicity [6].

As a result of the economic and cultural interactions between the Luli people and other ethnic groups such as the Uzbeks, Tajiks, and others, many Lulis have integrated into different ethnocultural environments. Consequently, even though they still identify as Luli, their distinctions have evolved in various forms. In different parts of Surkhandarya region, the way Lulis perceive their own identity also varies. Based on sociological survey results, in the villages of Denov district, Lulis often identify themselves as either Luli or sometimes as Uzbek in official documents. Meanwhile, the majority of Lulis in urban areas tend to identify as «Luli,» but do not distinguish themselves from other neighboring ethnic groups. In personal documents, they are often listed as Uzbek or Tajik [7].

Undoubtedly, such cases are influenced by mixed marriages. For example, children born to Luli fathers and Uzbek mothers might have their ethnicity recorded as Uzbek by their



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parents. Additionally, many Luli individuals who grew up in Luli families, while feeling Luli in terms of identity, may request to have their passports issued with «Uzbek» or «Tajik» as their ethnicity. This is often due to the perception that identifying as Luli on official documents could potentially cause issues when applying for jobs, obtaining driver's licenses, or facing other challenges in everyday life. It is also important to consider the historical connection of the Luli people with their ancestral homeland. Traditionally, Lulis have identified their historical homeland as India. Until the late 20th and early 21st centuries, many Lulis continued to link their identity with India. For example, the tradition of Luli women applying a beauty mark (mole) on their faces and foreheads, as well as their preference for bright clothing and walking barefoot, was considered a reflection of their imitation of Indian practices. However, these views have not been widespread, and the majority of Lulis now identify themselves as part of the Uzbek people, a shift that likely stems from the influence of civic identity [8].

Modern Luli youth do not see themselves as descendants of Indians but recognize Uzbekistan as their homeland. When examining the territorial locations of the Luli, it becomes evident that their self-identification varies across different areas of Surkhandarya. In the areas around the city of Termez, where Lulis have lived for centuries in a settled lifestyle, they have taken up trades such as commerce and craftsmanship, gradually abandoning their traditional occupation of begging. As a result, they have developed cultural connections with the local population, identifying as Uzbek or Tajik.

Similarly, in Denov district, a similar trend is observed. In rural areas, the practice of begging or collecting secondary goods is not feasible. The rural population primarily consists of farmers and herders, and a barter-based economy is more prevalent. As a result, Lulis in these villages, who have adopted agricultural practices, experience a more active socialization process, leading to their integration with the Uzbek population. This integration has been a key factor in the evolution of their self-identity [6].

Conclusion.

In conclusion, the issue of self-identification among the Luli people of Surkhandarya manifests in various forms. This diversity is, on the one hand, related to historical periods and, on the other hand, to the geographic location of the community. From a historical perspective, the settlement of the Luli people, their social integration, and their cultural convergence with neighboring populations have led to shifts in their sense of identity. This evolution is also reflected in the differences between the older and younger generations in terms of historical memory, mentality, and adherence to traditions.

For instance, the older generation recalls life events and legends about their ancestors, while the younger generation does not place as much importance on preserving these memories. The older generation is more rigid about issues like endogamy, while the younger generation does not reject mixed marriages. While the older generation is satisfied with a traditional lifestyle, the younger generation shows a desire for development and progress, even if this is not always explicitly expressed. In general, there is a noticeable difference in how national values are perceived between the generations, reflecting the evolution of the community's identity over time.



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