



# India And Tajikistan: A Historical Overview Of Bilateral Relations

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The collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist systems in eastern Europe had profound consequences for world politics. It meant the end of cold war confrontations. The ideological dispute over whether the socialist system would beat the capitalist system was not an issue any more. The end of the confrontation demanded an end to a massive arms race, the existence of military blocs and accumulation of nuclear weapons.

Again, the end of the Soviet bloc meant the emergence of many new countries. All these countries had their own independent aspirations and choices. Some of them, especially the Baltic and East European states wanted to join the European Union (EU) and become part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The Central Asian countries namely, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan wanted to take advantage of their geographical location and became a part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which came into being in December 1991, sealed the fate of the Soviet Union. Some look upon it as a transitional arrangement leading to total separation while others visualize it as a step leading to a stronger union of independent and equal partners.<sup>1</sup> There remains, however, no doubt that the CIS was instrumental in maintaining peace in a region which everyone suspected would become the most dangerous place on earth. All the states of the erstwhile USSR, barring the Baltic states, are aligned to it and in place of the amorphous organisation that it was initially, a more coherent institution is emerging.<sup>2</sup> Also, the Central Asian countries after their independence, continued their close ties with Russia and to establish ties with the west, the US, China and others. Thus, due to the demise of the Soviet Union, the international system saw many new players emerge, each with its own identity, interests and economic and political difficulties.

Central Asia is a vast region of over four million square kilometers, or almost one-sixth of the territory of the former Soviet Union. This newly created region possessed a collective population of only about 55 million people at the time of its existence. After their independence, the five Central Asian states suddenly emerged into sovereign existence on the dismantling multi-nationality federation of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Emergence of Central Asia, as the latest region of the sovereign states on the global map opened prospects of distinct shift in power politics.<sup>3</sup>

The October Revolution and ensuing turbulence in Russia stirred the Central Asian region into seeking independence. In 1918, a new state, the Turkestan Independent Islamic Republic was declared. As the Soviet Union consolidated its independence and territorial integrity, it was brought firmly under Soviet sway. As an insurance against bourgeois nationalism, the Soviets drew lines cutting across tribes and hordes to create five distinct entities.<sup>4</sup> The Central Asian states, therefore, are divided by artificial man-made borders and lived inside their demarcated spaces all through Soviet rule.<sup>5</sup>

Central Asia under the Soviets were organised into five republics and continued in the same form as successor states after Soviet disintegration.<sup>6</sup> This could be construed as the most important contribution of the Soviet state, which created nations out of proto-nations and even from clan, tribal and nomadic identities.<sup>7</sup> The Central Asian republics have attempted to establish themselves as viable nation-states since their independence from the former Soviet Union in December 1991. This is essential for their legitimacy in the international political system, and for their internal cohesion and development.<sup>8</sup>

Central Asia is the largest landlocked region and is regarded as the heart of Asia. The region stretches from the Caspian Sea in the West to the China in the East, from Afghanistan in the South to Russia in the North.<sup>9</sup> The emergence of new states not only left indelible imprints on the geopolitical milieu, but the geo-economic and geo-strategic situation also affected.<sup>10</sup>

The names of all the five Central Asian republics ending with the Persian suffix 'tan' means 'land' and in the modern period, the five republics, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, cover the definition of Central Asia.<sup>11</sup> The vast deposits of gas, copper and uranium make this area an attractive region for energy hungry Europe and China and its geostrategic location in the very centre of the Eurasian continent on the intersection of critical transport routes. Halford Mackinder in his work, "The Geographical Pivot of History" considered Central Asia as a pivot or heartland due to the nineteenth-century struggle between Britain and Russia over this territory what is referred to as "The Great Game or Tournament of Shadows."<sup>12</sup>

Soon after the independence, these newly emerged countries of Central Asia tried to maintain close and healthy relations with the other countries of the world in order to have a successful political and economic transformation. In particular, in respect of India, Central Asia is keen to develop warm, friendly and cooperative relations. The basic attitude of India towards Central Asia has always been one of goodwill and equality. The foreign policy of India has always been governed by the desire to assure Central Asia that India fully respects its sovereignty and integrity.

The history of relations between India and Central Asia is as old as the evolution of human civilization in the two regions. The people of the two regions are strongly inclined towards each other. India is keen to

cement the traditional, cultural and trade ties by taking concrete steps towards the development of a more meaningful friendship and cooperation. Until large parts of Central Asia were incorporated into the Russian Empire in the mid-nineteenth century, relations between India and Central Asia had been close and cordial. During the post-1971 era of close Indo-Soviet relations, cultural exchanges flourished between India and Central Asian republics. India recognized Central Asia as an area of strategic significance. The growth of the Indian economy creates an ever-growing demand for energy and natural resources to enhance and maintain the intensity of growth. With the intense power play taking place between major powers and regional actors in the strategic arena of Central Asia.<sup>13</sup> India's emphasis on soft power strikes a positive chord among these countries. However, India's absence from the SCO and CSTO were the main reasons as to why India could not promptly make a place for itself as other countries did.<sup>14</sup> India did not gain any strategic leverage and fear the losing out in the New Great Game was predominant in the political and diplomatic circles.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, in order to gain the strategic leverage, a Connect Central Asia Policy was unveiled by the Minister of External Affairs, F. Rashid Ahmad, in a keynote address at the first meeting of the India-Central Asia Dialogue, organized on 12-13, June 2012 in Kyrgyzstan. The meeting aimed to review India's dormant relations with the five Central Asian countries. Thus, the real challenge that emerges for India is to find ways and means to enhance its presence in the region.<sup>16</sup> India concluded policies and programs with the Central Asia. On the other hand, India and Russia are trying to refresh their all-weather friendship which will remain an opportunity for India to access Central Asian region.<sup>17</sup>

Again, the dissolution of the Soviet Union forced India to construct policies to deal with the new political situation in the Central Asian republics.<sup>18</sup> In 1991 and 1992, India established diplomatic relations with five Central Asian republics and worked with them to develop frameworks for diplomatic, economic and cultural cooperation.<sup>19</sup>

Due to India's geographical proximity with Central Asia from the ancient times till the British occupation of India, there was cross-regional and social interaction which led to forging of highly significant linkages. For many centuries, Central Asia was an immense reservoir of human energy and skills where many conquerors and many religions left their still unextinguished marks.<sup>20</sup> Many great and world religions were present and some still are present in the region : Zoroastrism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and others. Vast treasure of art materials, temples and manuscripts were explored by expeditions and individuals.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, India's relations with Central Asia in early Medieval times corresponds with the spread of Buddhist teaching and worship. Another splash in relations between India and Central Asia was during Mahmood Ghaznevi region and Delhi Sultanate times. At that times, Persian language and literature were introduced to India and mostly it has been done through Central Asia.<sup>22</sup>

Central Asia was not conquered by Islam by military means, but they were Islamic missionaries mostly from Persia who introduced Islam in Central Asia. It is at that time when many Sufi scholars, poets and saints came from Central Asia and settled in Delhi, Kashmir and elsewhere in India. It many cases, this was return of many Buddhist thoughts and ideas back to India.<sup>23</sup>

The relations between India and Central Asia including Tajikistan go back to antiquity. Their uninterrupted flow and diversity of forms extending over period of several millennia have imparted the character of a civilisational relationship. The civilisational links between the land of the 'Avesta' and 'Rig Veda' were strengthened when Bactria, Sogd and Parthia were incorporated into a common state together with the Gandhara and the Indus Valley territories of north-western India during the period of the Achemenid, Indo-Greek and Kushan empires. It was during the Kushan period that the Great Silk route connecting the Far-East, Europe and India through Central Asia came into existence.<sup>24</sup>

The multifaceted relations between the peoples of both India and Central Asia were further cemented during the Sultanate period and the Mughal period of Indian history. Though Babur and his descendants could not unite their ancestral kingdom of Samarkand with the newly acquired home of the Indian sub-continent, Babur did maintain his Central Asian connection through his cousin who continued to rule in the Hissar Valley which Babur too is reported to have visited a number of times.<sup>25</sup>

### **Indo-Tajik Geo-Cultural Ties**

The strong geo-cultural ties of Tajikistan and other Central Asian republics with India have been at the root of sustained trade and commerce between them over the centuries. Indian traders engaged in trade with Central Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were not deterred by frequent closures of the route through Afghanistan on account of inter-tribal conflicts of wars of successions.<sup>26</sup> Discarding the Afghanistan route, they first switched over the transit-trade through Persia before settling down in the 90's of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in favour of the Bombay-Batumi Sea route and then by rail to the Caspian and across the Caspian to the Krasnovodsk. The inclusion of the peoples of Central Asia and India in a common geo-cultural complex imparted strength to them for overcoming the political barriers.<sup>27</sup> The public mind in India has been in general clear about high Indian stakes in Central Asia on account of India's age-old vital cultural and economic interests in the region and concern for India's security arising from developments in her neighbourhood.<sup>28</sup> But it is noteworthy that Indian public opinion never approved of the expansionist moves of the British power in India vis-à-vis Central Asia including Tajikistan and their justification by the colonial rulers in the name of safeguarding India's security.<sup>29</sup>

Besides its long historical connections with this region, India sought good relationship for several reasons : to prevent Pakistan from developing anti-India coalition with the Central Asian states in the dispute over Kashmir, to persuade those states not to provide Pakistan with assistance in its nuclear programme, to ensure continued contacts with long-standing commercial and military suppliers, and to provide new opportunities to Indian business.<sup>30</sup>

The relations between India and Tajikistan had remained strong and cordial since her independence. The present state of Tajikistan was created during the Soviet rule in 1929 which brought economic and social benefits to Tajikistan. Though Tajikistan got full national territorial status during the Soviet period, Tajik identity had formed in the fifth and sixth centuries, according to Soviet historians and the process was completed within the tenth century Samanid empire.<sup>31</sup> From its inception to the present century, Tajikistan experienced different rulers who ruled different periods and was influenced by the culture and administration of different rulers.

The Republic of Tajikistan, formerly the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic (TSSR), is situated in the South-East of Central Asia. As a landlocked region, the Republic covers 143,100 square kilometers. To the north and west, it borders Uzbekistan, to the north-East, Kyrgyzstan, to the east, it shares a 430 kilometers border with China's Xinjiang province and to the south, it shares a rugged, mountainous 1,030 kilometer border with Afghanistan, which in the east is separated from Pakistan by the thin wedge of the Wakhan corridor which in some places is only 10 kilometers wide.<sup>32</sup> The corridor was mapped out by India's British rulers and the Tsar to ensure that the Russian empire was not contiguous with the British empire in India.

The establishment of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic (TSSR) at the border of the colonial East was of great international importance. It became a model of how the Soviet government has resolved the national problem, and a proof of the triumph of Leninist nationality policy. It demonstrated the great care which the Communist Party and the Soviet Government took 'in the creation and development of national statehood of the previously oppressed backward colonial peoples'. It was to the neighbouring "oppressed" peoples that Soviet Tajikistan 'demonstrated' the success of the Soviet system, and it was for them that it was to serve as a model, underlines Harmstone.<sup>33</sup>

The Tajik region is different from other Central Asian states primarily in one respect that mountains occupy 60 percent of the area as major part of Pamir Altai and south western Tien-Shan fan out to cover this region. While 7 percent area is permanently covered by snow and frost, the remaining territory has slopes valley and plains.<sup>34</sup> Geographically, the whole Tajik region was divided into four natural zones.

The largest and the highest is the Badakhshan region in the east, consisting of the Pamir mountains and plateau, with an average height of 4000 meters and individual peaks higher than 7,000 mrs.<sup>35</sup> Badakhshan borders China and Afghanistan, but its main valley has traditional routes linking it to central Tajikistan in the wet and Afghanistan in the south, fostering social exchange between the communities of these regions. The Second natural zone is located in the center of the country and stretches from Badakhshan to the Uzbek border in the west. It is dominated by three mountain ranges – the Turkestan, Zavastan and Hissar, each running along on east-west axis at latitudes ranging from 2,000 meter to 3,000 meter. In the center-east of this zone is the Quarategin valley, where the Gram and Tavildara areas are located. In the center-west is the Gissar valley where Dushanbe is located and whose communities are closely, linked with the south and with Uzbekistan to the west.

The Third zone, in the south-west, corresponds to the Khatlon province. It is located between the Hissar range and the Amu Darya/Panj river. It borders Afghanistan in the south-east and Uzbekistan in the west. A north-south mountain chain divides this zone into the Kurgan-Tyube region to the wet with its Kofarnihon and Vakhsh river valleys and the Kulya region to the east.

The Fourth zone is the north of the country, in the Zerafshan and Syr-Darya river valleys, forming what used to be in Soviet times the Leninabad province, which was renamed good in summer 2000. The northern area lies mostly in the fertile and densely populated Ferghana valley, which extends into the Kyrgyz republic and Uzbekistan. Its main city is Khujand. This zone was historically part of the ancient 'silk road' trading routes and supported an urban culture linked with other regions and peoples, which enabled a unique fusion of Iranian and Turkic cultures.

In the social systems, there are division and sub-divisions based on clan, tribal and regional affiliations. Among both nomads and settled peoples, the primary socio-political structure was like a pyramid. At every level, from the nuclear family unit upwards, there was a clearly defined hierarchy of powers with its concomitant implications of allegiance and responsibility. Clusters of families formed clans clusters of clans constituted tribes, at the apex was the Khan, who wielded supreme authority.<sup>36</sup> Such 'state' formations were essentially tribal confederation, although among the settled peoples, the administrative structures were considerably more formalized and bureaucratic than amongst the nomads. The whole administration was regulated by the conservative clergy. Justice was administered according to the 'shahariat' (the Islamic code of law) by the Kazi.<sup>37</sup>

Some ethnologists and scholars believed that there was little sense of nationhood in the modern Western sense in pre-Soviet Central Asia. The clan/tribal structures nevertheless provide a framework for self-identification that mounted to proto-national identities.<sup>38</sup> Among these group identities were underpinned in a variety of way. There was a highly developed sense of genealogy that means kinship relationship in which by lineage for seven generations back is respected in order not to violate kinship taboos. Blood lines are important because, like the written deeds of the title of settled, literate communities, nomads also established inheritance rights in such matters as access to water and grazing grounds. For the settled peoples, genealogical ties did not have quite the same significance, but there was a stronger sense of regional identity that was linked most commonly to a town or some other geographical feature. Majority of the population accepted Islam as a religion. Shared cultural traditions and language also played a powerful role in creating communal identities. Even today they follow traditions and cultural patterns of the past and language is a salient feature of their ethnic identity.<sup>39</sup> Tajikistan had a population of 5.6 million in 1992, eighty percent being Muslims. The Tajiks are mainly Sunnis of the Hannati Sect, the largest Muslim Sect of the region. Covered by chains of mountains, the region has very small areas of cultivable land. Nearly two-thirds of the population live in rural areas where they farm the irrigated valleys and mountain slopes. This small Persian-speaking nation in Central Asia was incorporated into the Russian empire in the 1870's and to the Soviet Union after the 1917 Revolution.

The elements characterizing Tajiks as a nation, the language, territory and cultural unity, were formed and existed from ancient times. But, according to Harmstone, before the 1917 October Revolution, these elements were not developed, and existed at best only as a potential.<sup>40</sup>

The Republic of Tajikistan since independence in 1991 is living through a period of national and state reconstruction, self-determination and political and economic integration into the world community.<sup>41</sup> The birth of the independent slate was followed by a widespread bloody conflict, one of the longest and most difficult on the territory of the former Soviet Union. It has become a constant feature in the life of the country and the Central Asian region as a whole and has greatly influenced the process of state formation in Tajikistan, the course and direction of transformation processes in its economy, its social and cultural life and its foreign policy, including relations with the Russian federation.<sup>42</sup> The conflict has slowed down the achievement of full statehood in Tajikistan. As a result, Olimov points out, till the late 1990s the national security concept has could not be fully determined, national interests were not identified, foreign policy

priorities were not set and the mechanism for the establishment and implementation of foreign policy was not been worked out.<sup>43</sup>

The establishment of foreign policy is impeded by constant changes taking place in the balance of political forces in the international arena and in the structure of geopolitical and regional ties. The situation is far from settling down and each Central Asian state is searching for its place in the new system of international relations.<sup>44</sup>

The origins of the Tajik political nation are often traced back to the Samanid Empire (875-999 AD), which at its height stretched from the plains of southern Kazakhstan to the Hindu Kush and from the Pamir to northern Iran. The Samanids were the last Iranian dynasty to rule Central Asia and were overthrown by the Turkic Karakhanids. After this period, local rulers established small but semi-independent principalities in the mountainous regions that had little contact with the larger states on the plains. By the early 19th century, there were two main regional powers on the plains: the Emirate of Bukhara in the west and the Khanate of Kokand in the Ferghana Valley. Both were absorbed into the Russiaa empire towards the end of the century, although the Bukharan Emirate which had authority over the central and southern zones of Tajikistan, retained nominal autonomy until it was fully integrated into the USSR in the 1920s.

Relations between Russia and Tajikistan are very complex. This is characteristic for all the post-Soviet countries which are now mere fragments of the huge former USSR. For 70 years, Russia and Tajikistan were tied together, first, as parts of a single political, economic and social system and second, as 'centre' and 'periphery'.<sup>45</sup> In some respects, their ties are not only pure inter-state relations. A considerable part of their relations now takes place at the level of the CIS.<sup>46</sup> Tajikistan's relations with Russia can be analysed from the historical point of view.

Tajikistan-Russia relations after the disintegration of the USSR certainly owe a lot to their historical attachments in various phases. The relationship between the two countries has always been a smooth one since the time of Tajikistan's creation as a republic within the Soviet Union. Their relations have passed through various stages of development starting from the Tsarist colonial times to the present. Tajikistan's geo-political importance has induced both the sides to chart-out their policies and relationship carefully and very smoothly. Tajikistan is a country with huge natural resources. The region has considerable mineral deposits including gold, antimony, silver, aluminum, iron, lead, mercury and tin. There are large reserves of coal also. Thus, Tajikistan has great strategic importance for Russia.

The Russian conquest of Central Asia began in the 1860's. Since then an imperialistic relation was created by the Russian state which was prompted by the need for cotton to replace the supply cut off by the American civil war and by the desire to protect Russian settlers and trade from nomadic raids.<sup>47</sup> Chimkent and Tashkent were taken in 1865 as were part of the Bukhara Khanate, including Khodzhent, in 1866, and the Russian province of Turkestan was formed in 1867. By 1868, the Russians held the Zeravshan valley and Samarkand and had forced Bukhara to accept their protectorate. Kingdom Khiva met a similar fate in 1873, while Kokand Khanate was incorporated into the Russian Turkestan in 1876 as the Fergana province. All three Khanates offered resistance, but they were no match for Russia's modern armies. By 1884, the

Russians had also subdued the Turkmen and arrived within striking distance of Persia and Afghanistan, areas regarded by the British as their sphere of influence.

Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, is in the heart of the mountains, surrounded by high peaks and lush orchards. It is situated in the Gissar valley on the banks of the Varzob river and streams from nearby thawing glaciers run into the town watering parks and rows of trees. Before 1917, the village of Dushanbe was a small market town where every Monday a lively bazaar was held by the local population. The name Dushanbe, which means 'Monday' in Persian, stuck.<sup>48</sup> For a brief period after the 1917 Revolution, Dushanbe became the capital of the Basmachi rebels when the deposed Emir of Bukhara, Said Alim Khan, took refuge in Dushanbe before he retreated to Afghanistan. In February 1921, Red Army troops entered the city and declared it as the administrative center of eastern Bukhara.

In 1925, Dushanbe had only 6,000 people. It had no railway connection with the rest of the Central Asia, only one modern building and most Bolshevik offices were located in converted cattie sheds. It grew rapidly as Russians moved in and by 1939 the population was 83,000; today it is over 600,000.<sup>49</sup> Dushanbe became a major industrial center with textile, footwear and knitwear industries, and plants that served the metal and construction industries.

Tajikistan was one of the most underdeveloped regions within the Russian empire. On the eve of the Socialist Revolution in 1917, only 0.5% of the population were literate. The overwhelming majority of the population were peasants who cultivate the land, received on-half or one-fifth of the produce.<sup>50</sup> The Tajik economy before the October Revolution was an economy dominated by feudal relations of production within a colonial mode of production in which the Russian bourgeoisie was the dominant exploiter. Although some degree of economic development was brought to the essentially feudal Muslim regions which made up the General Governorship of Turkestan. Railways were built and in order to ensure supplies of cheap raw-materials for the Russian textile industries, particular attention was paid to the production of cotton. Small factories were set up by Russian industrialists in and around Khodzhent, and the mineral resources of the area, including coal, began to be exploited. At the same time, Russian settlements began to develop often with forced expropriation of land.<sup>51</sup>

The Tajiks became a socialist nation after the October revolution, but Lenin's criteria of nationhood (one language, a united territory, a shared economic life, and a common psychological outlook) were achieved only at the time of the conclusion of the first two five-year plans, in the late 1930's ".... In fifteen short years (1925-40), Tajikistan was transformed from the poor and backward land it was earlier in to a flowering socialist republic, and the Tajik people were consolidated into a socialist nation." The Russian proletariat and the Russian Communist Party were the vital element and the absolutely essential catalyst, respectively, in this transformation.<sup>52</sup>

The Tajik nation has been called "a child of October", and it may safely be assumed that without the 1917 revolution and Soviet Rule, the Tajik national consciousness would never have developed, or else would have been lost in the Islamic consciousness of the dominant Turkic majority. The official Soviet theory of the formation of the Tajik nation recognizes two stages of development- the nationality (narodnost) stage,

which began in antiquity and continued, until the modern times, and the nation (natsiia) stage, begun and completed in the Soviet period, when the Tajiks were able to progress directly from feudalism to socialism.<sup>53</sup> The psychological outlook of the Tajik socialist nation was formed on the basis of socialist relations of production, under the direct leadership of the Communist Party and in the decisive battle with the exploiting classes and bourgeois nationalists. The beneficial influence of the other peoples and particularly the Russians has placed the most important imprint on the Tajik psychological outlook, according to Harmstone.<sup>54</sup>

In 1918, the Bolsheviks established control over northern Tajikistan, which was incorporated into the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR).<sup>55</sup> They were quickly able to establish in all major centers of Tajiks, including Khodzhent, Ura Tyube and Kanibadam. But they did not conquer Dushanbe and other territories subject to Bukhara until 1921 because of strong opposition. At that time, a movement inspired by nationalism and Islam began in the Ferghana valley to throw off the Russian yoke. Tajik clan leaders played a prominent role in this movement. They also revolted against widespread unemployment among native peasants that had deprived them of their livelihood.<sup>56</sup>

The backbone of the resistance was provided by the conservative elite seeking the restoration of the status quo; the people flocked to them in their anxiety to preserve their religion and traditional customs.<sup>57</sup> The Jadidists and Young Bukharans, who were reformists, nevertheless were leading the movement against the Soviet regime for the restoration of the status quo and preservation of their religious and traditional customs during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Jadidists established themselves as an Islamic social movement throughout the region. Although the Jadidists were pro-modernization and not necessarily anti-Russian, the Russians viewed the movement as a threat. Russian troops were required to restore order during uprisings against the Khanate of Kokand between 1910 and 1913.<sup>58</sup> Further, violence occurred in July 1916 when demonstrators attacked Russian soldiers in Khujand over the threat of forced conscription during world war-I. Despite Russian troops quickly bringing Khujand back under control, clashes continued throughout the year in various location in Tajikistan.<sup>59</sup>

Among the Jadidists and Young Bukharans only the left fraction supported the Soviet Government, while many others joined the conservatives in overt-rebellion. The liberal-educated Muslims as reform-seeking representatives of a nascent middle class cooperated with Russian revolutionaries.<sup>60</sup>

Opposition to Soviet Rule was also led by the Basmachis (local guerrilla fighters) and foreign interventionists.<sup>61</sup> The Basmachi movement was born out of the Bolshevik's refusal to acknowledge the particularities of the Islamic tribal system of the region. The Russians took the derogative term "Basmachi" from the Turkic language, in which it means 'robber' or 'bandit'. Locally, however, it was known as the movement of the 'bek' or freeman; later the Basmachis themselves were not averse to using the term, as it came to be associated with nationalism and Islam, as was the term 'Mujahiddin' used by the Afghan rebels fifty years later.<sup>62</sup> By April 1918, almost every village in Ferghana and Tajikistan had set up Basmachi guerrilla group to resist Soviet power and they became very stronger and bolder. The largely Russian Bolsheviks were totally alienated from the rural people, because they made no attempt to understand the complex tribal and clan basis of the social structures, which they considered backward.<sup>63</sup> In turn, the

Basmachis were helped by the British in India, who encouraged king Amanullah Khan of Afghanistan to send camel caravans loaded with arms and ammunition to Bukhara and Ferghana in 1919. Initially the Red army was overwhelmed by the Basmachis, until Marshal Frunze arrived in Tashkent in February 1920 to organize a new offensive. Frunze attacked Bukhara forcing the Emir to flee to Dushanbe and then to Kabul. Basmachi attacks on Frunze's forces delayed his advance but he finally entered Dushanbe in February 1921. Frunze declared an amnesty for all Basmachis who surrendered and the 6,000 who did so in 1920 were instantly turned around and made to join the Red Army. Alongside brutal offensives in Ferghana and Tajikistan, Frunze also began to distribute food and money to local chiefs in a 'winning of hearts and minds' campaign. In the mean time the Basmachi movement had been weakened due to lack of unity.<sup>64</sup> The various detachments operated independently of each other under the leadership of ambitious and jealous chieftains, who refused to coordinate their activities and at times engaged in internecine wars.<sup>65</sup>

In order to reduce the influence of the Basmachis, the Soviet Government introduced the 'New Economic Policy (NEP)' in 1922.<sup>66</sup> They returned the lands, formerly owned by religious institutions and reduced the burden of taxes on the peasantry. The Soviet policy of the right to national self-determination, which led to the creation of Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR) in 1924, further eroded the influence of the Basmachis leaders. In 1925 the south-east of Tajikistan was designated a special Pamir region within the Tajik ASSR. By 1926, the Basmachi resistance movement in Tajikistan dwindled from 57 groups of 1,370 men to 29 groups within 959 men.<sup>67</sup> By 1927, the Basmachi chieftains of Tajikistan, Ibrahim Beg and others, fled to Afghanistan. On 16 October 1929, the Tajik ASSR was separated from Uzbek SSR and became a full Union Republic of the USSR. Soon after the establishment, the Tajik government, at the time headed by Nasaratullah Maqsum, used every means at its disposal to encourage peasants to let down their arms and return to their land. It was estimated that 33,000 out of 200,000 returned to Tajikistan from refugee centers in Afghanistan.<sup>68</sup>

Although the Basmachis continued their armed struggle against the Soviet led Government, their struggle ended when their leader Ibrahim Beg and his 2,000 fighters entered their home town, Lokai, in April 1931 to launch an armed insurrection. People were tired of hopeless war and were reluctant to support the Basmachi's call for an armed struggle. Many did not side with the Basmachi and welcomed the Red Army. The continuous war brought depopulation and economic destruction. Cultivated land decreased to less than one-half of the pre-1920 level, and about 26 percent of the population of eastern Bukhara, mostly from the border regions, emigrated to Afghanistan. Again, the famine in the region also destroyed the people's will to resist. Ibrahim Beg was captured on 23 June 1931 and with his execution, the Basmachi movement finally came to an end.<sup>69</sup>

After the death of Ibrahim Beg, the Basmachis went underground, but their ideas and passion never fully disappeared. Fifty years later, Azad Beg, a relative of Ibrahim Beg, revived the Basmchi ethos at the height of the Afghan war when he formed the Islamic Union to subvert Communist Tajikistan, The Soviet Union alleged that he was helped by the American CIA, Pakistan and Turkey to setup a Mujahiddin group of former refugees from Tajikistan who lived in Kunduz province. However, Azad Beg's efforts never matched those of the other important Tajik Mujahiddin leader Ahmad Shah Masood, and he failed in his ambition.

In order to expedite and increase its influence in Tajikistan, the early Soviet Government also initiated the building of a modern state bureaucracy in Tajikistan. Local communists were delegated the task of political organization and served as a means of communication between the Soviets and local Persian-speaking Tajiks. The Soviet Government was devoted to socio-economic changes to social transformation and political indoctrination and elimination of illiteracy. The irrigation network had to be rebuilt, craft and agricultural skills had to be restored, and industries had to be initiated. State assistance was made available to poor and middle peasants, and the first agricultural co-operative were introduced. In Soviet modernization policy, education had top priority. The first schools for children and adults were established in 1926-27 and the first Tajik newspaper began publishing in Dushanbe in 1926. Since Tajikistan lacked skilled and professional employees to run the state bureaucracy, the Soviet Government sent professional technicians and Russian Communists to help the Tajik people to modernize their country.<sup>70</sup> By 1930, all members of the Central Executive Committee and the Tajik Council of People's Commissars were local Tajiks. However, except for the Chairman, Nasaratullah Maqsum and Nisar Mohammad, the commissar for education who was a revolutionary intellectual from Afghanistan, none of them could communicate in the Russian language. Because of Soviet influence, the Tajik Communist Party, which had an estimated 435 members in 1925, expanded its social base of support by recruiting new members to the extent that its membership reached 58,493 in 1962.<sup>71</sup> The establishment of Communist rule, thus, brought a ray of hope for the people of Tajikistan who were suffering under the political and economic exploitation of the Tsarist regime.

Tajikistan also witnessed major economic development undertaken by the Soviet Government. A wide range economic measure was introduced to facilitate the transition to collectivized agriculture. The state distributed religious lands and lands belonging to the Emir to landless peasants, supplied peasant with credit assistance and initiated a massive collectivization of agricultural land.<sup>72</sup> A graduated progressive agricultural tax victimized rich basis (landlords). Mass collectivization in Tajikistan began in the early 1930's and was completed by 1934. The state also built industrial enterprises to boost the country's economy. Heavy industry was limited to coal, lead and zinc. By 1940, the country's economy was transformed from a primitive subsistence economy to a mechanized and industrial economy.<sup>73</sup>

Modernization was also introduced to the most backward regions of the Republic by the Soviet Union. In 1940, roads and rail roads were established that linked Khorog, the capital of Gorno-Badakhsan, with other cities in the republic. However, intensive efforts were made to develop transport links between different regions within Tajikistan and with the neighbouring Soviet Republics.

Beginning in the 1930's and continuing intermittently until the late 1960s, the Soviet authorities forcibly transferred people from the central and eastern zones of Tajikistan to provide labour for new industries and especially, for intensive agricultural projects. These migrations meant that every part of Tajikistan experienced some degree of population movement during the Soviet period. This opened up interregional exchange and integration and generated conflict by stimulating inter-group competition and sharpening perception of social differences.<sup>74</sup>

Since 1960s, Tajikistan entered a new phase in its industrial development. The emphasis shifted to more complex industrial structure. As a result, non-ferrous metallurgy industries became one of the most developed industries; oil and gas output increased remarkably and so also the output of engineering enterprises like looms, fittings, pump machinery, cables, spare parts for tractor and transformers, cotton, ore-processing, and rare a non-ferrous metals industries made Tajikistan important in USSR's national economic structure. Thus, from an area without roads and industries before the revolution, Tajikistan under the Soviets was transformed into an agro-industrial republic. One-third of the population lived in urban areas and about a quarter of population consisted of workers and employees. Until the 1970's economic growth provided virtually full employment. Growing prosperity and greater social security characterized much of the Soviet period. In the early 1980s, rapid construction of hydroelectric plants and other industries were accomplished with labour recruited from other republics. However, despite all this impressive growth, Tajikistan remained the poorest republic in the former USSR and has been facing continuous economic decline since the onsets of perestroika and subsequent disintegration of the USSR.

The implementation of the nationality policy in Tajikistan was similar to that in the other Union Republics. To judge by the stormy history of the establishment of Soviet power there, and by the ethnic pattern of power distribution in the republic, the party could not succeed in making the Soviet government "near and dear" to the Tajik peasants. The party was successful, however, in establishing a viable government and in transforming and developing the region, considered vital from the view point of long-range objectives.<sup>75</sup>

The tide of nationalism was rising in every corner of the Union and Tajiks were no exception. The leadership in Tajikistan, however, showed little understanding of the nature of events. This failure to grasp the significance of Rationalism and its symbols sets the Tajik elite in stark contrast to other national elites in Central Asia. The use of nationalist demands by the opposition appears to have turned the republican leadership against it. Instead of outdoing its opposition in nationalist proclamations, the elite fell back on its Soviet phraseology and reiterated its commitment to 'internationalism' in the framework of the Soviet Union. This was done even after the collapse of the Union. The leadership's lack of political perception and its staunch defence of the status quo contributed to the deterioration of the crisis.<sup>76</sup>

The Tajik nationalism also affects the discussion of other issues, most notably economic and environmental concerns. Even opposition to the construction (begun in 1976) of what was planned to be Central Asia's largest hydro-electric dam in Tajikistan's Roghun area was given a nationalist dimension. The opponents' argument included assertions that the reservoir created by this dam will provide irrigation water for other republics, while not only flooding good land in Tajikistan itself but also driving Tajiks from their village homes in the lands to be flooded, thus destroying the Tajik cultural traditions that village life had preserved. The analogy between the dam project and the Chernobyl disaster as examples of the environmental damage resulting from flawed technology is another illustration of the way nationalists perceived their particular concerns with an eye to developments elsewhere in the Soviet Union.

Economic prosperity and decent living standards hinged on the revival of national sovereignty, though this was not yet interpreted in political terms. And a key element of this national self-reliance and 'spiritual

independence' was the Tajik language.<sup>77</sup> Hence improving the status of the Tajik language acquired top priority on the opposition agenda.

Together with the nationalist revival went a religious revival. Islam remained always in different ways a strong element of Central Asian identity. Be it as a part of everyday life (also called 'everyday Islam') like marriage, circumcision and burial or the authority structure within the family that is influenced by religion as a spiritual aspect of life or as part of ethnic-cultural values that differentiated Central Asian from the slavs, Islam survived despite its separation from the state and weakening of its institutions (Shariat, the Qazi courts, Adat, Maktabs etc.) during the Soviet times.<sup>78</sup> Loyalty to Islam remained stronger, than to Soviet values among Central Asians. Soviets preferred to control religion through religious establishments - officially recognized Mosques in Tajikistan, officially appointed and maintained religious administration etc.<sup>79</sup>

The Islamic revival in Tajikistan was quite conspicuous as there was a surge of Islamic revivalism in capital Dushanbe and other cities of Tajikistan. Between 1991-92 around 126 mosques and 2,870 prayers houses were established.<sup>80</sup> Islamic education gained popularity. Madrassas sprouted and many students went to various middle Eastern countries to receive religious training. There was also steady rise in observance of Islamic rituals. The number of pilgrims going to Mecca increased. Along with making 'Tajik' the state language, the teaching of Arabic script was temporarily reinstated in the Republic of Tajikistan.<sup>81</sup>

Here the central figure was the head of the official Soviet Islam in Tajikistan, supreme Qazi Akbar Turajonzoda. Spread of Islamic education and measures, such as, declaring Islamic festivals public holidays were taken.<sup>82</sup> Gorbachev's 'perestroika' and 'glasnost' allowed Muslims to demand greater religious freedom and worship their Allah openly. Closed mosques were reopened and new ones were built. This was a general pattern throughout the Soviet empire, where people flocked to their religious meeting places to reassert their identity.<sup>83</sup> Agreements with several Islamic international groups to build new 'Mosques' and 'Madrasas' were signed. Other unofficial mosques were built for the first time.<sup>84</sup> These activities brought foreign Muslims into Tajikistan including Iranians, Pakistanis and Arabs who were involved with religious and cultural revivalism. Speeches by Ayotallah Khomeini, works of Maududi - the founder of Jamat-I-Islami of Pakistan, Jamal-ud-Din Afghan, the renowned Muslim theologian and other Muslim revolutionaries were circulated widely in Tajikistan.<sup>85</sup>

The Islamic movement which started in unofficial mosques in the 1960 and 1970s was transformed into a political movement when Gorbachev lifted restrictions on religious institutions in the late 1980s.<sup>86</sup> New Soviet policies led to dismissal of President Rahman Nabiyev from the party and the state bureaucracy. His successor Kakhkar Makhkamov was considered to be more loyal to Moscow, hence his unpopularity in Tajikistan. The policies of 'Glasnost' initiated by Gorbachev provided golden opportunity for the freedom of expression by the opposition members and clerics in Tajikistan.<sup>87</sup> As a result, the clerics like Abdullah Nuri Saddov, from the provincial capital of Quighonteppe, vehemently assaulted clerics who had been on state pay rolls and called for reduction of taxes on Muslims and condemned the Soviet administration of Tajikistan. He even demanded for the creation of an Islamic state. When state security forces arrested him in August 1986, his supporters staged a protest demonstration at the office of the Internal Ministry demanding

his release. These religious leaders were not only preaching religion, but had also called open Jehad (holy-war) against the Soviet system. It was also reported that sophisticated electronic gadgets like radio, tape recorders, audio and video cassettes were used to spread radical Islam in Tajikistan.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, both the nationalist revival and religious revival created conditions for the political instability in Tajikistan. Though Tajikistan got full national territorial status, the region has been facing innumerable problems and unlimited upheavals.<sup>89</sup> The country has become the key factor of the re-emerging balance of power in Central Asia. In order to broaden their sphere of influence, regional powers are trying hard to dominate the political corridors of Tajikistan, which has become the worst victim of internal and external power rivalries.<sup>90</sup> The civil war provided an opportunity for outside powers to involve in Tajikistan's political scene. Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan involved directly in the bloody conflict, whereas, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and OSCE were indirectly involved in the conflict. The civil war provided Iran an unprecedented opportunity to establish its influence in Tajikistan. By the end of 1992, Iran was backing a wide range of political parties with money, food and military supplies while Afghan Mujahiddin groups and Pakistan's Jamaat-I-Islami were also active in training and supplying Islamic fundamentalists in Dushanbe. In October, when the entire foreign diplomatic corps from six countries in Dushanbe numbered around twenty diplomats, the Iranian mission alone comprised twenty-one official diplomats and some fifty unofficial diplomats.<sup>91</sup>

The Republic of Tajikistan since independence in 1991, is living through a period of national and state reconstruction, self-determination and political and economic integration into the world community.<sup>92</sup> The birth of this independent state was followed by a widespread bloody conflict, one of the longest and most difficult on the former Soviet Union. It has become a constant feature in the life of the country and the Central Asian region as a whole and has greatly influenced the process of state formation in Tajikistan, the course and direction of transformation processes in its economy, its social and cultural life and its foreign policy.<sup>93</sup> The conflict has slowed down the achievement of full statehood in Tajikistan. As a result, Olimov points out, till the late 1990s, the national security concept has could not be fully determined, national interests were not identified, foreign policy priorities were not set, and the mechanism for the establishment and implementation of foreign policy was not been worked out.<sup>94</sup>

The establishment of foreign policy is impeded by constant changes taking place in the balance of political forces in the international arena and in the structure of geopolitical and regional ties. The situation is far from settling down and each Central Asian state, including Tajikistan, is searching for its place in the new system of international relations.<sup>95</sup>

The sudden dissolution of the USSR with which India had close and healthy relations left India in a shocked state of mind. New Delhi, however, soon came out of this shock and tried to maintain close and cordial relations with the newly independent states of Central Asia, especially with Tajikistan. The five landlocked Central Asian countries of the former USSR republics are India's extended neighbourhood and occupy a special place in India's foreign policy priorities. Close bonds of history have always linked the two republics. It is pertinent to underline that the centuries old relationship between the two regions has evolved

through cultural interaction.<sup>96</sup> Several facets of the cultures, civilizations and intellectual histories of the two regions suggest that they evolved not in isolation, but through reciprocal cultural enrichment.<sup>97</sup>

### **Tajikistan : A Gateway for India's entry into Central Asia**

Tajikistan had become India's main point of entry into the region, mainly due to Dushanbe's proximity and a special relationship with Kabul. New Delhi's close collaboration with Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, originates from the late 1990s when both countries supported the anti-Taliban resistance forces, the Northern Alliance (NA) in Afghanistan. Tajikistan provided Indian military advisers with access to the ethnic Tajik leadership of the Northern Alliance.<sup>98</sup> Until 2002, Dushanbe hosted a medical facility set up by the Indian army to treat injured anti-Taliban resistance fighters at the Farkhor air field to supply the Northern Alliance with military equipment, munitions and intelligence, and to repair its combat helicopters.<sup>99</sup>

Tajikistan occupies a pivotal position in India's foreign policy towards Central Asia and continues to remain a significant partner for India in the region. Political and strategic relations between the two countries can be termed as excellent.<sup>100</sup> However, economic and trade ties remain the unsatisfactory part of an otherwise fruitful relationship.<sup>101</sup>

Tajikistan's importance for India lies in its geo-strategic location; it shares borders with China, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and is located in proximity to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). In India's regional security calculus, Tajikistan assumes a significant place, especially in the context of Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>102</sup> The infiltration of extremist forces into Tajikistan can have serious security implications for India because of its proximity to POK and the likely impact of this on the situation in Kashmir.<sup>103</sup>

Both India and Tajikistan historically linked by long-standing tradition of close cooperation and friendship between the peoples of two countries, deep cross-cultural relations.<sup>104</sup> The disintegration of the Soviet Union provided the newly independent Tajikistan a new statehood. Under the new statehood of the Republic of Tajikistan, relations between the two countries moved to a new stage of development.<sup>105</sup>

The Republic of India was one of the first foreign countries, which recognized independence of a new country in the Central Asia, the Republic of Tajikistan. Though the sudden dissolution of the USSR left India in a shocked state of mind, New Delhi soon came out of this shock and accepted the new development in world politics. Since independence, the Republic of Tajikistan had clear and peaceful foreign policy with priorities of the principle of transparency, fairness and multilevel.<sup>106</sup> The conceptual structure of the Tajikistan foreign policy based on three fundamental components : first, pragmatism in foreign policy and equal mutually beneficial cooperation; second, the legitimate interests of international acts in Central Asian region; third, to conduct predictability foreign policy in international relations.<sup>107</sup>

Both India and Tajikistan signed a historical agreement for the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries on August 28, 1992. After one year, the Republic of India opened its Embassy in Tajikistan. In 2002, the Republic of Tajikistan declared of a new foreign strategy in its foreign policy. It was "Open Doors Policy (ODP)", which means open cooperation with all countries in the world including India on the principle of mutual respect, bilateral and mutual cooperation.<sup>108</sup> On the basis of bilateral and mutual cooperation, the Republic of Tajikistan opened its diplomatic mission in India on August 2004 and on April 2006, the Republic appointed the first Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan in the Republic of India.

The bilateral relations between India and Tajikistan are based on a strong foundation of historical and civilizational linkages, shared cultural heritage, sound political understanding and warm people-to-people ties. The relations between the two countries rest on two solid pillars : first, the bonds of history and culture manifested in shared belief in pluralism, secularism and the spirit of tolerance; and second, convergence of geo-political concerns and interests in modern times.<sup>109</sup> Growing cooperation in economic, political, academic, cultural and defence fields may further strengthen and deepen the existing bonds.<sup>110</sup>

Speaking at the ICWA-Tajik Academy of Sciences Conference, Prof. Shodi Sufiev, of the Institute of Oriental Studies and Written Heritage (IOSWH), pointed out that during the great Mughal period, when Persian was the language of the court, the number of scientific, literary and historical works written in India in the Persian language far exceeded the number of such works in all other Iranian areas.<sup>111</sup> This period was described by noted German Orientalist, Herman Ette, as “the Indian Summer of the Persian literature”.<sup>112</sup> The Tajiks regard the study of the Persian manuscripts preserved in various libraries in India as very valuable in order to understand their own history and heritage.<sup>113</sup>

The advent of Babur in India in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century is the high watermark of bilateral interaction of two civilizational entities that had much in common besides a common originating source.<sup>114</sup> The time had distanced them from one another. Although Babur’s military commanders were mostly drawn from Tartar-Uighur stock, yet soon the empire’s administrative apparatus and its cultural nurseries were to be manned and nurtured by a galaxy of outstanding Tajik and Iranian personalities.<sup>115</sup> Three hundred years of the rule of Temurid Gorkanis over Hindustan brought out the very best in two great civilizations.<sup>116</sup>

Therefore, the Tajiks of today have every right to construe of India as the great repository of their rich and colourful cultural treasure.<sup>117</sup> Naturally, for the Tajiks, the music frozen in the white marble pillars of Taj Mahal is no less reverberating than the music in the profound verses of Bedil who was born, sang and died in India, far away from his own people.<sup>118</sup>

The spirit of tolerance appears to imbue the beautiful mountainous country richly endowed with verdant countryside and flowing rivers and rivulets. Modernity and tradition seem to blend well in the Tajik capital. Indian films and music are immensely popular. Famous Tajik poet Mirzo Tursunzade following his visit to India in March 1947, wrote 13 poems on various aspects of India. The poems created great interest in the people of Tajikistan in contemporary India.<sup>119</sup> Subsequently, the works of great Indian writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Prem Chand and others were translated in Tajik language. Indeed, Tagore from India became a household name throughout the former Soviet Union, including in Tajikistan.<sup>120</sup>

Further, the National Antiquities Museum (NAM) at Dushanbe, displays with pride one of the biggest Buddhist monuments – the 13-meters long statue of sleeping Buddha. After the senseless destruction of the two thousand year old giant rock statues of Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in 2001, the sleeping Buddha at Dushanbe may be one of the biggest Buddha statues in the region.<sup>121</sup> Utmost care is taken with great reverence to protect the priceless historical statue from the dust and din of the outside world.<sup>122</sup> Thus, the visitors to the museum have to put on disposable plastic coverings over their shoes before entering the museum. One of the most impressive buildings in modern-day Central Asia, the Ismaili Centre combines with perfect symmetry the traditional Central Asian style with contemporary architectural concepts.<sup>123</sup>

The Central Asian region including Tajikistan is considered to be the part of India's "extended neighbourhood" who once were a part of the former Soviet Union which had very friendly relations with India. India had good diplomatic engagements with the region by establishing embassies in the erstwhile Central Asian region of the Soviet Union. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, there seemed to be drift in India's relations with the region. The most prominent being that India was thoroughly engaged with its immediate neighbourhood, especially Pakistan, over the issue of Kashmir.

Since gaining independence, Central Asian states including Tajikistan comprising of at least 62 million people, have drawn worldwide attention due to security and economic compulsions.<sup>124</sup> So far India is concerned; there are two important reasons for improving India-Central Asian relations. First, are India's needs for energy in order to sustain economic growth and second, is the threat from militant Islamic groups. Besides these reasons, the geo-political location of Central Asia affects India's relations with Pakistan, China and US and other powers.<sup>125</sup>

India's relations with Central Asian region, especially Tajikistan, was marked by her closeness to the Soviet Union, particularly after the 1962-Sino-Indian war. India signed a "Friendship Treaty" with the Soviet Union in 1971 and was more concerned with the Soviet Union.<sup>126</sup> But after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, one witnessed a major shift in India's foreign policy as that moved away from Nehru's idealism to BJP's realism and pragmatism. This was quite reflected in India's policy doctrine of 1997 that referred to Central Asia as "India's near abroad". The person responsible for this was the then Prime Minister of India, I.K. Gujral. His policy was more famously known as "Gujral doctrine": and the doctrine emphasized that India would not tolerate any foreign interference that affected India's national interest.<sup>127</sup>

## Cultural Relations

The cultural relations between the people of Tajikistan and India indisputably has an ancient and rich history deserving attention. The state of these relations always depended on historical situation, political views of governments, state of science and culture and world outlook of the people of both the countries. After the year 1947, when India achieved independence, another era of cultural relations of the Soviet Union and India started. One should not confine oneself with pride, howsoever, legitimate in the relations in the past. Today, by the will of history and fate, Tajikistan has been a free independent state for more than a decade now and has the opportunity to have direct contacts with other countries of the world.<sup>128</sup>

For the first time, a high-level government delegation of independent Tajikistan visited India in February 1993. A very important and useful document – the protocol on cooperation between the two countries consisting of six points was signed during this visit. The fifth point of this protocol related to "Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Government of the Republic of India on cooperation in the field of culture, art, education, science, mass media, film and sports."<sup>129</sup>

Again, in October 1998, the Director General of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Mr. Himachal Som visited Tajikistan. During this visit, the problems of cultural cooperation and opening of a cultural centre of Tajikistan in India and cultural centre of India in Tajikistan were discussed. At that time, itself an invitation for visit to India by group of 30 Tajik artists was extended.<sup>130</sup>

At the beginning of the year 2002, the embassy of India organized a round table conference participated by eminent Tajik artists, headed by the president of the Artist's Union on Tajikistan Suhrob Qurbanov. The initiator of this event was the Indian Ambassador to Tajikistan, Mr. Yogendra Kumar who himself is well aware of the Tajik artists' knowledge about the works of Indian artists. The Tajik artists expressed strong desire to collaborate with the Indian artists inclusive of holding joint programmes.<sup>131</sup>

Thus, the embassy of India makes great contribution to the cause of cultural collaboration between the two countries.

The five landlocked Central Asian countries are regarded as India's extended neighbourhood and occupy a special place in India's foreign policy priorities.<sup>132</sup> For that to happen, India needs to have strong political ties with these nations. The key elements which outline India's Central Asia policy today, constitutes political economic and strategic cooperation. Political cooperation involves building strong political ties through high-level engagements and interaction between leaders at bilateral and multilateral levels.<sup>133</sup> It also involves government to government interaction primarily at bilateral level and secondly at multilateral level, but the important thing to remember is that the engagement at former level enhances the cooperation at multilateral level. Once the political cooperation is established, it opens a big door for economic tie ups between the governments as well as the private sector.<sup>134</sup>

India's interests in Central Asia have become multi-dimensional; it would be much more profitable to India increase cooperation with its Central Asian neighbours rather than other way round. This is because all the great powers are already involved with the region and are having very high stakes in the region. Each one is eyeing the regional resources and wants to exploit for their own self or 'selfish' interests.<sup>135</sup> This critique has been put forward by almost every Central Asian scholar and academicians from outside. Some even say that even USSR used the Central Asian region as its colony and exploited the regional resources for its own good. Though many Indian academicians and politicians have maintained their position that India has never exploited any country for its own interests at the expense of others.<sup>136</sup>

Speaking at 6<sup>th</sup> IISS-MEA Dialogue on 'India's Extended Neighbourhood : Prospects and Challenges', organised by International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), London, and IDSA, New Delhi, Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (East), MEA, in his keynote address, focused briefly on India's burgeoning engagement with Central Asia, including Tajikistan, a vital part of India's extended neighbourhood, suffused with centuries-old cultural ties and enormous goodwill for India.<sup>137</sup> While for India, the geo-strategic position of the region is salient, of no less important are the emotional bonds between the two regions that stem from the civilizational links of both. In 2012, India launched the "Connect Central Asia Policy". This includes an all-embracing template to diversify and deepen our relationship with the region that includes increasing the frequency of high-level visits, forging strategic partnerships, comprehensive economic engagement, innovative solution in connectivity, and partnership in the development of energy and natural resources. The plan also includes a proposal to set up an e-network on the lines of Pan-Africa e-network that will bring the benefits of tele-education and telemedicine to around 60 million people of Central Asia.<sup>138</sup>

Tajikistan especially occupies a special place in India's foreign policy. It has the closest geographic proximity to India and is separated from the Indian sub-continent by Wakhan Corridor (Afghanistan), which

is 200 kilometers long varying from only 16 to 65 kilometers in width. Tajikistan is a Persian-speaking country having its population estimated by seven million is quite young. Unlike other four republics, exploitation of Tajikistan's modest fossil fuel and natural gas resources are currently not economically viable.<sup>139</sup>

India's "Look North Policy" in 1990s and "Connect Central Asia Policy" launched in 2012 reflected her strategic interest in the Central Asian region. This region is considered being of high priority by almost all the governments in India. Convergence of economic cultural and security interests between India and Tajikistan have led to the development of cooperation in the recent years. Consecutive visits from both sides accelerated the momentum of bilateral diplomatic and political relations.<sup>140</sup>

In 2007, Hamrokhon Zarifi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan, states that "the relations between India and Tajikistan and people of the two countries have deep historical roots and from the most ancient times, we enriched each other with scientific and cultural achievements." The middle ages are characterized by penetration of the Tajik-Persian language in the Indian sub-continent and appearance of the brilliant literature in Farsi in India. The works of such permanent word-masters as Amir Khusrav Dehlavi, Amir Hasan Dehlavi, Mirzo Abdulqodir Bedil, Masuud Saad Salmon, Zebuni SSO, Muhammad Iqbal and hundreds of others became the subject of Tajikistan's common pride.<sup>141</sup>

In the same year of 2007, again, H.E. Mr. Salohiddin Nasriddinov, the first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Tajikistan to India, said that our people love India, Indian history, its people, culture and customs. With great love, interest and desire, Tajik people watch Indian songs, dances, movies and love them. India is a wonderful fairy-tale country and Tajikistan is not so far from India."<sup>142</sup>

India remains not only a brotherly country for Tajikistan with common historical and cultural roots, but also as a geo-strategically important nation, rich in natural and human resources. The common views of political leaders of both countries about important issues of international relations are firm points for enhancing bilateral relations in various fields, such as, economy, commerce, politics, science and culture. In 2006, the Hon'ble President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon paid an official visit to India. The visit laid the milestone for further strengthening of historical ties between the two countries.<sup>143</sup>

Thus, the historical and cultural relations between the two countries are the first and preliminary steps by which the future relations will become far more widespread and stronger and that will serve the cause of peace and cooperation.

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