

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL LINKS BETWEEN KYRGYZSTAN AND INDIA

History plays a very significant role not only to understand the existing relations but also to predict the future scenario. The future is always decided by present, which in turn is decided by the past (Bal 2004: 2). It is also true that one can not change the past but the present can be managed to secure its future vision and, therefore it is highly necessary to examine and understand the common historical linkages which existed in the past between Kyrgyzstan and India to visualise the prospects of their cooperation.

Like history, common culture too develops a feeling of harmony in mind and it is the cultural aspect of human life which determines how members of a society think and feel. It directs their actions and defines their outlook on life (Haralambos 1980: 3). Moreover, this aspect has very much controls over behaviour and action from a simplest activity to much larger role of foreign policy making. No doubt the conventional view on foreign policy is that economy, politics and strategic interests are the major determinants of foreign policy but certainly this can not be absolute in nature. Because, there must be some other factors that form the undercurrent of it all, or else a lot of foreign policy would have much more simpler and a lot less interesting than what it is today. But this certainly is not true as there are certain other factors which influence the foreign policy sphere and sometimes dominate the foreign policy making. Everything from our racial features to the food we eat, the way we dress, what language we speak, where we live, all form a part of culture and we carry it altogether throughout our life so that we could develop a sense of unity within the common cultural group. If this is true, the question arises whether it is possible to eliminate cultural values from foreign policy making, in which human being is an integral part? The answer lies into the fact that no relations can be established without having the human element. Besides, if foreign policy is about protecting national interests and preserving and protecting national identity, then this national identity is a part and parcel of what we call as national culture. So, cultural aspect is natural and

inevitable in any foreign relationship and this factor of culture is very much applicable in the case of the people of Kyrgyzstan and India.

Kyrgyzstan and India share a common culture from the days of antiquity. Archaeological evidences show that the relationship between Central Asia of which Kyrgyzstan is a part and India, dates back to the pre-historic period. Historical and cultural factors have played significant roles to bring the two countries close to influence each other. The common cultures of Central Asia and India have strengthened links between the two sides which can act as a boosting factor in the future course of relations particularly between Kyrgyzstan and India. With this background, the present chapter analyses and examines the historical and cultural factors in relationship between Kyrgyzstan and India. This chapter has been divided into three broad sections dealing with the phases of cultural links between the two sides. While the first section analyses the ancient cultural links, the second deals with Russian phase and the third section dealing with the post-cold War era or post-independence Kyrgyz-Indian cultural linkages.

4.1 Conceptual Basis of Culture

Modern science and discoveries have no clue about the existence of human beings except on this planet where we live. However, if we study the Darwinian theory of evolution then only we can understand how the evolution of human beings took place from a very primitive origin and has made a great jump to the present stage. This theory of evolution also emphasises on the human beings' long struggle for existence. If this is true, there must be some left behind traces of their achievements at various levels of development from being a cave dweller to civilised one- the collective knowledge of their long achievements constitute what we refer to as culture.

Initially, the word "culture", derived from the Latin word "*Cultus*", was associated with the "cultivation" of animals and crops as well as with religious worship and later on the human mind. From the 16th Century until 19th Century, the term began to be widely applied to the improvement of the individual human mind and personal manners through learning. During this period, the term also used to be referred to as the improvement of society as a whole, with culture being unused as a value laden synonym for civilization (Smith and Riley 2009: 1). Over the years,

culture has been defined as all capabilities and habits learned as member of a society (Taylor, 1865); as societal heredity (Linton, 1936); as patterns of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinct achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952/1963); and as the totality of equivalent and complementary learned meaning maintained by a human population or by identifiable segments of a population, and transmitted from one generation to the next (Rohner, 1984). Some other scholars have defined culture as a shared symbol system simply as the shared way of life of a group of people (David 2009: 3-4).

No doubt, the concept of culture has consistently been consistently under debate. Different scholars have given different set of definitions about culture, but one aspect about culture is very clear, i.e., it is bigger than countries and has no boundaries. Anthropologists call it “Culture Area,”⁴ and use it as an opportunity to broadly compare cultures within generally similar environments and determine the extent of influence from cultures outside the culture area, such as diffusion or migration. This concept is also useful as a unit of comparison or reference and most anthropologists use it, even in informally, to refer to geographic regions and general culture traits (Sutton and Anderson 2010: 17). If culture is reality, then the broader cultural community or culture area is beyond the existing political boundaries which is a characteristic of modern State system. Since the world has changed from primitive commune to medieval monarchy and from there to present democratic way of life, this change is much more significant in 20th Century than at any other time throughout the previous recorded history. One such change since the end of Cold War has been the vast expansion of the new nationalities in the Central Asian Region (CAR). These Central Asian Nations despite their geographical diversity can be said to have a common shared culture with regard to their way of life which is similar to India. If we refer culture as a way to shared beliefs and sentiments then that serves the very basic fabric of any society. The people of India have the same set of similarities with their Central Asian neighbours. If we analyse their way of life, we can argue that

⁴‘Culture area’, also called ‘cultural area’, ‘culture province’, or ‘ethno-geographic’ area, in anthropology, geography, and other social sciences, a contiguous geographic area within which most societies share many traits in common. Delineated at the turn of the 20th century, it remains one of the most widely used frameworks for the description and analysis of cultures.

the common shared culture may constitute the reason for the convergence and it is certainly beyond any political boundary system.

4.2 Kyrgyzstan-India Cultural Relations

Like India, the Kyrgyz people are one of the most ancient people in the world. As we have already discussed earlier that the Kyrgyz state has a reference in the Chinese history as early as 201 BC but descriptions about the people are inadequate and sometimes ambiguous (Ploskikh 2004: 1). According to the legend, the Kyrgyzs are the later day children of the forty original mothers. Their name which comes from "Kyrk Kys" mainly from girls, is mentioned in Chinese Chronicle dating back to the 2nd Century BC. The Kyrgyz clan has always proudly proclaimed the primacy of their nation over all the other Turkophone peoples. This origin would seem to lie in the Upper Yenisey river basin in Siberia, from where they moved to what is now the area of Present Kyrgyzstan in the course of 6th Century (Cheneviere 2001: 26). Some other scholars argue that the origin of the inhabitants of present Kyrgyzstan goes back to 3000 BC. Though the geographic origin of the Kyrgyz is a matter of scientific debate, some scholars believe that they came from the banks of the Kyrgyz-Nur Lake in Mongolia, while others suggest that they first occupied the Boro-Horo mountain ridge in the Eastern Tien Shan mountains in China. It is believed that the ancient Kyrgyz state was established at the same time as the first run Turkic language group (Ploskikh 2004: 1). Whatever may be the origin of Kyrgyz people, one thing is clear that from the days of the distant past, Kyrgyzstan has had close historical and cultural contacts with India and the continued cultural, economic and political relations flourished between the people of both the countries in various phases of history.

Important archaeological discoveries also show that the people of north India have some commonalities in their everyday life with Kyrgyz people and this may be because of ancient cultural contacts which were made through trade between both the sides during the Silk Route trade period. The traders from both the sides who used to visit from India to Central Asia strengthened cultural linkages along with commerce and other relations. From the above parameters it can be assumed that some part of the Indian export in the form of bronze art and stone items, ceramic bowls with modelled Bodhisattvas and other items were designed for exchange and sale. At

Issyk-Kul lake in Kyrgyzstan every year archaeologists are discovering images of Indian gods which also adds a lot for understanding the interaction on the Great Silk Route (Kablukov 2004).

Before going into the details of Kyrgyzstan-India historical and cultural relations, it is important to trace out India's relations with the Central Asian region as a whole. It is accepted that the flow of Indian culture to the other regions started with the spread of Buddhism. But recent discoveries proved the existence of Indian culture in Central Asia from the days of Stone Age. This can be argued on the findings of "Sohan Culture" in Indian territory by Terra and Paterson in 1935. Neolithic culture has been discovered in the northern Tajikistan which is a border of Kyrgyzstan from where chopper-chopping tools have been found and there is a strong similarity of Neolithic culture of Hissar and Kangra (India) dates back to the circa 3rd millennium BC with Central Asian region. Evidences are also available from the discoveries of comparable picture at "Tokaly" in Kazakhstan and On-archa in Kyrgyzstan (Gupta 1970: 239-241). Such evidence itself indicates that relations between India and Central Asian region existed in the Neolithic period. Even some excavations from South Turkistan proves the existence of cultural relations between these two regions in the Bronze Age of 5 millennium BC Archaeologists also agree that relations continued even during the Harrappan and Mohenjodaro civilisation period (Muni 2003: 100) and such relations provided a smooth way to Indian culture to spread other distant lands.

4.2.1 Cultural Ties in Ancient Times

From various sources it is believed that the relationship between Central Asian and Indian tribes existed in the pre- historic period. There is ample evidence of Indus Valley civilization which is said to have flourished about 5,000 years ago, and had common cultural elements with Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Persia and Central Asia. Central Asian nomadic people in search of a warmer and more fertile land left their home place and migrated to India and started a settled life and assimilated with the local socio-economic life style. (Patnaik 1999: 19). One popular theory suggests that the invasion of the Aryan from the north (Central Asia) may have contributed to the disappearance of the early inhabitants of the Indus valley civilization. It has been

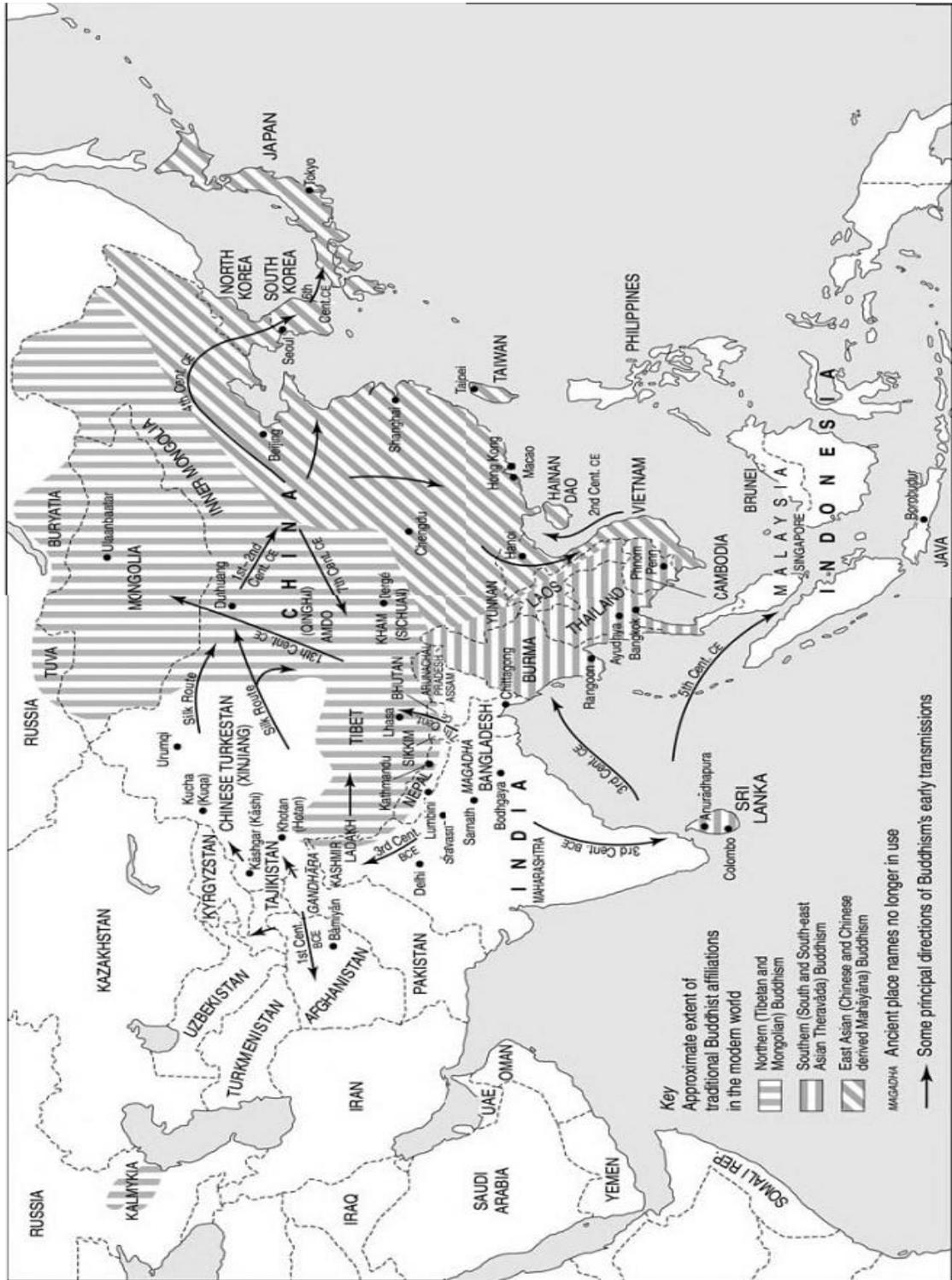
theorized that the cluster of skeletons in disorderly positions excavated at the uppermost stratum of Mohenjodaro is possible evidence of the massacre of the city's inhabitants. Relative dating among the sites indicated that the Harappan phase persisted longer at the areas towards the Ganges. Their disappearance is placed at 1750 BC which spanned to the beginning of a new period- the Vedic period (Irapta and Duka 2005: 52). Indian historian like P. Raghunadha Rao believes that the genesis of Aryans were Central Asia. According to him Central Asia, especially the region between Oxus and Jazarles, was the real home of Aryans which is also accepted by majority of the Scholars (Rao 1988: 9). Though their migration was not sudden, it took centuries in a gradual way (See Map 7). The Aryan migrants to India are known as the Indo-Aryans and the culture they developed is popularly known as the Vedic Culture. If we interpolate from the hymns of the Rigveda and some of the Yashts of the Avesta, we get the picture of the ancient Central Asian inhabitant's presence in the Indian subcontinent (Frye 1998: 40).

During the post-Harrapan or Indus Valley civilisation close cultural ties also existed and from Central Asia as the starting point of Indo-Aryans, they reached India from the west through the Caucasus (Kaushik 1985: 12). This evidence itself shows the origin of earliest inhabitants of this vast land.

From mid first millennium BC onwards Central Asia was a place of great change, a development in the field of ideological expansion stimulated artistic growth in a variety of ways leading to a rich cultural heritage that we can trace through artifacts and style. During this period Achedenids (Persians) controlled much of this area and their influence can be seen in the items recovered from the frozen tombs of the Altai in Siberia, Such as columns with animal sculptures persist into the Buddhist art of the later Mauryan emperor of India, Ashok (Onians 2004: 82). Scholar like Litvinsky also testifies the above evidences. According to him, the history of Buddhism in Central Asia is usually dated back from the time of the Graeco-Bactarian state, although knowledge of the teaching of from the time of the Graeco-Bactarian state, although knowledge of the teaching of Buddha and perhaps some Buddhist practices, may have found their way here much earlier during the Archaemenia era.

Map 7

Indo-Aryan Migration



Source: Cantwell, Cathy, Buddhism: The Basics, Oxon: Routledge, 2010.

The discovery of Ashoka's edicts from Kandahar (Afghanistan) proves that from here Buddhism moved to Central Asia (Litvinsky 1970: 263-265).

After the Archaemenia rule in this region the Greaco-Bactrian emerged in the region and meanwhile maintained cordial relations with the Indians under the *shunga dynansy* (184-72 BC) and in all likelihood continued to adopt a secular policy towards all religions in the multi cultural and multi-ethnic atmosphere of Gandhara. Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and Jainism flourished side by side. The powerful Asian Greek king Menander (163-150BC) known in Buddhist literature as Milinda, was converted to Buddhism by Thera Nagasen after hearing a convincing sermon by the later on the Theraveda theory of non-atman. Perhaps the greatest legacy of the Bactrian Greeks in Gandhara was the founding of *Sirkap*⁵ in Taxila which continued to be occupied and expanded by the succeeding Sakas and then Kushanas (Phuoc 2010: 51).

Another most important phase of common history between Central Asia and India was the rise of *Sakas* or *Sycthians* as the Greeks and Persian called them in the eastern part of the *Achaemenid Empire*. The *Sakas* remained dominant people on the steppes throughout the period of *Achaemenids* and Alexander of Mecedonia (Frey 1998: 77). In the second century BC, the Sakas started their settlements in North Indian region with the Central Asian culture and their presence can be tested from the discovered Iron swords from Taxila. During this period Buddhism as a unifying force transcended the barriers of regional diversity and played significant role in spreading Indian culture, philosophy, language and religion to the distant regions (Haider 2004: 38). Archeological sources have enabled us to reconstruct, though partially, the history of *Sakas* occupation of India. In the second and first century BC Greek rule in parts of Kafiristan, Gandhara possibly the Hazara country, was supplanted by that of the Sakas. The Sakas were a branch of the vast Scythian horde that played an important role in the history of Asia. According to Moreland, the *Sakas* first moved from Central Asia to westwards but their progress in this direction was barred by the *Parthians* Empire and eventually they passed through Afghanistan and Baluchistan into India (Sagar 1992: 118). Sakas entered India by different routes because the

⁵ A city at Taxila is called Sirkap, was founded by the Bactrian king Demetrius, who conquered this region in the 180's BCE. The city was rebuilt by king Menander.

Kabul and northern Punjab at that time was ruled by *Graeco-Bactrian* ruler. The Sakas took initial possession of the lower Indus valley and then spread to western India. By the middle of first century BC the Sakas reached as far as Mathura, the heartland of India (Sagar 1992: 119-120).

Scholars like Ahmad Rashid believe that these Sakas were the earliest recorded inhabitants of modern day Kyrgyzstan, whose tribal confederacy established a kingdom in the region around the eighth century BC. The Sakas traded with China and Persia and remained defiant until they were conquered by the Cyrus the Great of Persia, who employed them to fight in his armies against Alexander in his invasion of India (Rashid, 1994: 138).

After Sakas the Kushanas were the linking force between Central Asia and India. It has been suggested by some scholars that the Kushanas had racial affinity with the Sakas and were a Saka clan and it is also possible that the Kushanas may have been the descendants of some of the Sakas mentioned by Herodotus (Dani 1999a: 260). Discoveries and other historical evidences confirm deep rooted ties between Central Asia and India during Kushan period. Recent findings of coins of Vasudeva, the Kushan king in Turkmenistan (3rd and 4th A.D), also strengthen the belief of ancient contacts between India and Central Asia (Shafi 2007: 196). The Kushan period was the peak of Indo-Central Asia relations in the ancient time and under this Kushana dynasty north-west Central Asia and India were in a single domain (See Map 8). The Greatest Kushana king Kanishka accepted Buddhism and patronised it. According to Chinese tradition, it was said that Lord Buddha understood Kanishka's yueh-chi language (Kumar 2007: 5). The Kushanas played significant role to spread Buddhism in Central Asia and Turkistan (Litvinsky 1970: 263-265).

The period of Greek, Saka and Kushana domination was of great importance for the history of culture in the Indo-Central Asian relations, most importantly in the sphere of Buddhism which got patronage under above rulers. In the north-west, Buddhist influence on the Indo-Greek rulers appeared on the use of Buddhist symbols on their coins. But it was Kushana king Kanishka who in later Buddhist literature (especially in that of the Sarvastivadin school of Kashmir), played the role of a second Ashoka, a royal devotee and defender of the faith. Like Ashoka, Kanishka became the subject of a cycle of pious tales, especially in his capital Purushapura (Presently

Peshawar, in Pakistan). According to sources, he convened a Buddhist council of 500 *arhats*⁶ and minted coins carrying Buddha image, though evidences of some others like, Iranian, Greek and Indian deities were founded to have been displayed on his other coins (Djambatan 1962: 45-46) These evidences suggest that the king's objects of worship were not restricted to the Buddhism alone, but Hindu religion along with other religions were also practised in his dominion.

The Kushana period was also important for the rise of famous Gandhara Art⁷ in this part of the world. Various discoveries from *Khalchayan*, *Dalverzin-tepe*, *Kara-Tepe* testify the cultural interaction among them (Kaushik 1985: 13-14).

Of its several centuries of existence, Buddhism in Central Asia left its imprints in terms of viharas, stupas, paintings etc. It is believed that Vairochana a Kashmiri scholar was the first to build a Buddhist missionary at Khotan and this was the first missionary in Central Asian region (Hasnain 1999: 54). Buddhist monasteries were also had their role during those times. These monasteries were known to be not only educational centres in the East but also conducted trading and money lending operations, crafts and agriculture, despite the Buddhist doctrine prohibiting monks to engage in sale of religious objects. In this respect, location of monasteries in towns near trade routes was significant. Constant flow of Indian traders, Buddhist monks, artists etc. and sales of goods of spiritual demand had increased the scale of Indian influence.

The famous "Silk Road"⁸, the ancient trade route of economic and cultural ties which existed for about 15 centuries linked three parts of the world. Asia, Europe, and Africa passing from the far east through Central and Middle Asia, India, Afghanistan, Iran, Western Asia, Mediterranean countries. This road got its name as Silk Road from the trade articles silk and silk goods, which originated in China (Voropoeva 1998: 67) (See Map 9). That great Silk Route connected China with the East as well

⁶ In Buddhism, a perfected person, one who has gained insight into the true nature of existence and has achieved nirvana (spiritual enlightenment). The arhat, having freed himself from the bonds of desire, will not be reborn.

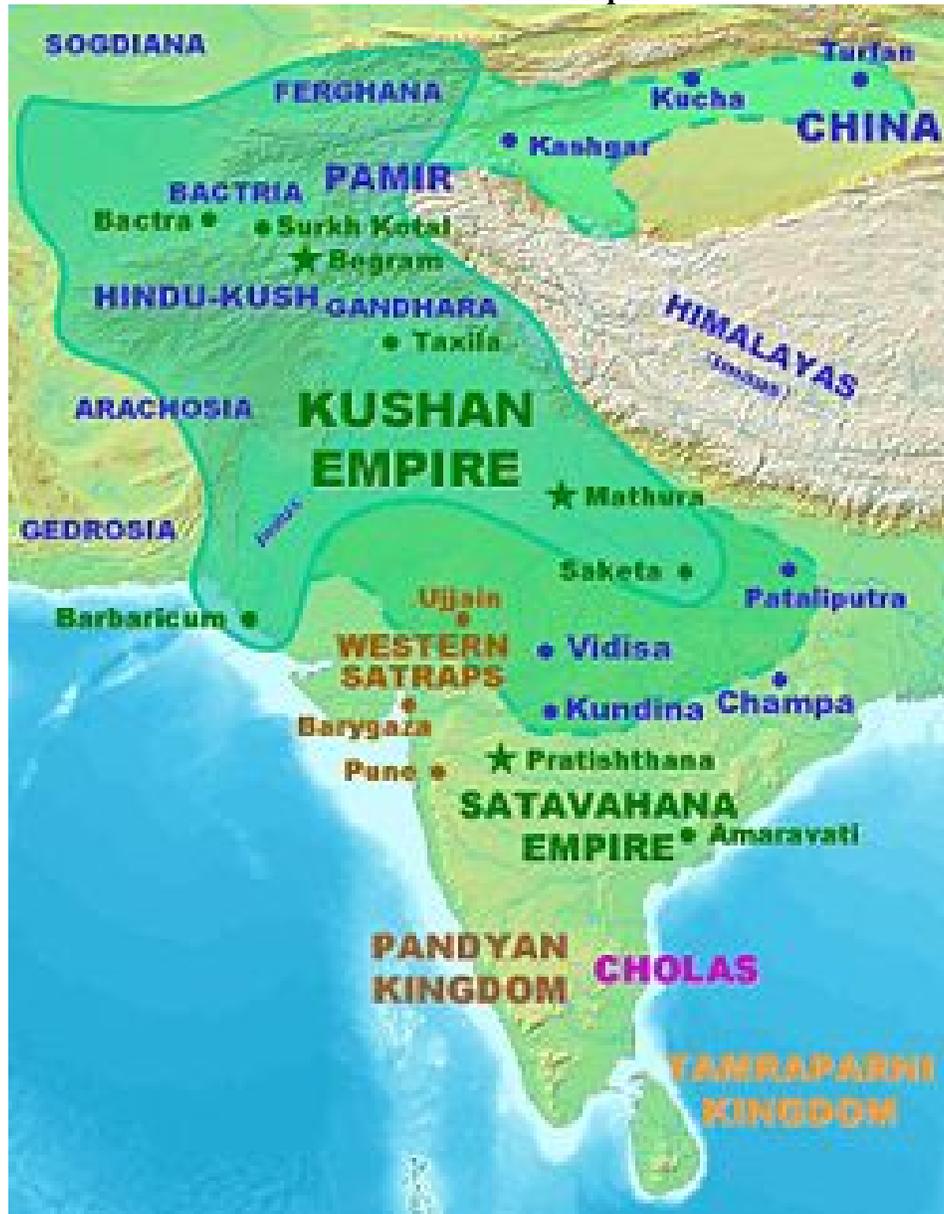
⁷ A style of Buddhist visual art that developed in what is now northwestern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan between the 1st century BCE and the 7th century CE. The style, of Greco-Roman origin, seems to have flourished largely during the Kushan dynasty and was contemporaneous with an important but dissimilar school of Kushan art at Mathura (Uttar Pradesh, India).

⁸ "Great Silk Road" is an agreed name for a trans-continental land road of ancient and middle ages.

as India and Europe during this period. Cultural and commercial interactions between India and the Central Asian region were flourished especially with those countries which were part of the ancient Silk Route, including Kyrgyzstan. The present Kyrgyzstan which was at that time identified with Eastern Turkestan had the main trade route passed through Osh, Uzgen and Jul cities of ancient Kyrgyzstan (See Figure: I) (Hanks 2005: 317).

Map 8

The Kushan Empire

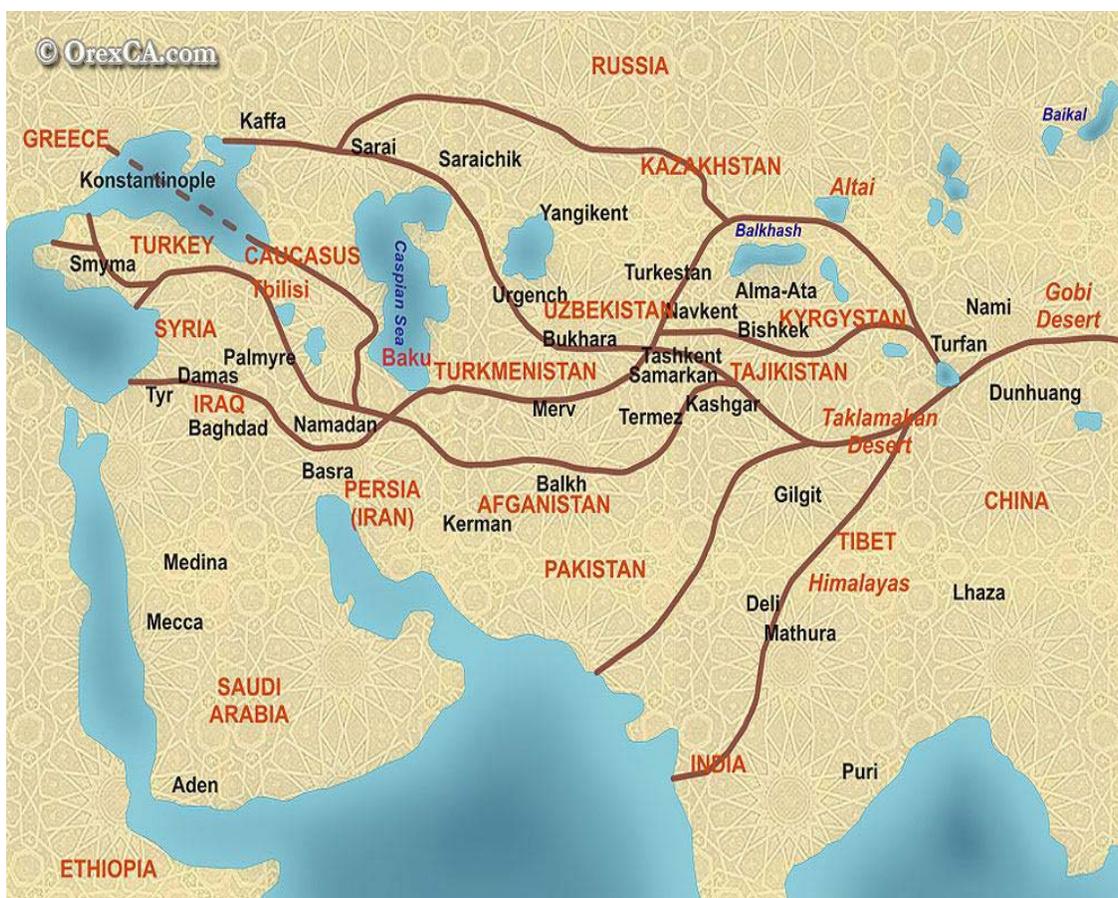


Source: upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/e5/Kushanmap.jpg/250px-ushanmap.jpg

Apart from trade and communication, the Silk Road also served as the main route for Buddhism to travel Central Asia and this new religion not only played a significant role in terms of providing spiritual teaching but also in terms of spreading art, sculpture, literature as well as prospering cultural exchanges. Clearly, Buddhism reached Central Asia including Kyrgyzstan and China through the ancient Silk Route (Foltz 1998: 1).

Map 9

Silk Route



Source: OrexCa.com, URL: www.orexca.com/img/silk_road.jpg.

Historical evidences show that the territory of present Kyrgyzstan existed in ancient period with a common territory of eastern Turkestan and it was the place where evidences of Buddhism and its roots were identified during 2nd and 4th century A.D. It is known from numerous sources that the earliest Central Asian tribes like Sogdians, Juchis, Parthians, Khanguis were settled along the route to the east. Of

great historical and cultural significance was the activity of a Shigao (a Parthian from Marghian), the crown prince of his country who rejected the throne like Shakyamuni and had settled down in Loyan in 148 A.D till 170 A.D. He was working on translation of Buddhist works into Chinese (Voropoeva 2004:17). Experts believe that this period witnessed the translation of numerous Indian literary works.



Figure I. An ancient caravansary in Kyrgyzstan, along with the old Silk Road (Janet Wisnietzky/Corbis). Source: Hanks, Revel. R. (2005), Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook, California: ABC-CLIO, p-318

Several renowned Archaeologists like Sir A. Stein, Prof. A.M Belenitsky, V. Voropoeva, V. Goryacheva, A.N Bernshtam, Peregudova, Koshemyaho, Kyzasov and Zyablin, in their archaeological findings have given enough evidences of ancient India's relations with the eastern Turkistan. Stein has discovered about 764 Kharosthi documents on wool, silk, leather and paper, at Niya, and Loulan in

Chinese Turkistan. These documents from Central Asia consists of quotations in Indian literary texts, Indian grammar, music, astronomy, poetry, dancing, painting etc. and have got an important bearing on the life and culture of the people in the first three centuries of Christian era (Aggrawal 1970: 257). Apart from Buddhist findings several Hindu deities were also found from eastern Turkistan. The word Narayana the Buddha is mentioned in the Khotanese-Saka documents in eastern Turkistan and Narayana the Deva, occurs in the Buddhist Soghdian documents. In addition, Narayana Saivism was also popular during that time. The use of Tocharian language and script on the seal shows beyond doubt that a composite cult of Shiva, Vishnu and Surya was popular with certain people of Central Asia during 5th Century A.D. The popularity of Saivism extended to Soghdian and Eastern Turkistan during the Seventh and Eight centuries which is evident from the discovery of an oil painting (See figure II) at modern Tajikistan by Prof. A.M Belenitsky (Banerjee 1970: 282).

Kyrgyz archaeologists, Voropoeva and Goryacheva explain that the 8th-9th century A.D. represented the golden age of Buddhist Hindu culture in India. During this period direct contacts between Tien Shan and northern India existed. Another archaeologist A.N Bernshtam in 1933-54 discovered Gandhara art style architecture with sculpture and paintings in a number of ancient sites including Ak-Beshim, Krasny Rechka, Karadjigach, Novopavlovka, Sokuluk etc in Chu valley (Voropoeva 2004: 17).

During the post-Kushana period relationship existed between the two regions, especially during Lalitaditya, a Kashmiri King's reign after his conquest of Tukhars, then settled in Tukhristan which has been identified by Stein as the area comprising Badakshan and the upper reaches of the Oxus River in the 8th Century A.D. Lalitaditya even appointed a Turkish Minister Cankuna in his court. Famous Indian writer Kalhan's work referred the free flow of artists from Central Asia to the Kashmiri king Kalasa whose period was 1063-1089 A.D (Warikoo 1989: 90). All these had great impact in Indo-Central Asian ties because this was the period when Buddhism started its footing in the eastern Turkistan region with Indian philosophy, language and literature, art and architecture influencing the lifestyle in Central Asia.

Works in the style of Gandhara art, indicate the main contours of historical-cultural relationship among Tien Shan, Eastern Turkestan and India since 1st Century to 12th Century A.D. Archaeologist A.N Bernshtam found powerful influence of Buddhist culture of northern India on the culture of Semirechye⁹. Other Soviet archaeologists, Kyzasov and Zyablin excavated two Buddhist temples at Ak Bashim in 1950. Both temples were found to be burnt and their sculptures destroyed around 8th Century. Koshemyaho (1961-63) Goryacheva and Peregudova (1980-88) carried investigation of two other temples sites dated 8th Century in Navekat (Krasnorechensk) settlement. In 1961, a sculpture of sleeping Buddha was discovered after excavation there, besides a Kashmiri bronze sculpture of Bodhisattva Avalokiteswara of 8th Century. Many such images (7th-8th century) and Brahmi/Kharosthi scripts found in Navimet are now housed in the archeological museum in the Kyrgyz Slavic University, Bishkek and museum of Institute of

⁹ On the south by the line of the Tien Shan and to the north by Lake Balkhash, this area was known to the Turks as the Yeti Su, the "Land of the Seven Rivers," hence its Russian name of Semirechye.

History, Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, Bishkek. However, the ancient sites at *Ak-Beshim and Naviket*, are lying unprotected with adjoining lands being used for agriculture (Warikoo 2007: 33).

Thus, temple structure, missionary and translation work as well as creative

works in the style of Gandhar art have been found in the remains of eastern Turkestan which testifies evidences of ancient Central Asian ethnos, and these were the people who were first to transfer Indian culture to the east. In this sphere A.N Bernshtam's archaeological exploration at a number of sites of ancient settlement in the Chu valley including *Ak-Beshim, Krasnaya Rechka, Karadjgach, Novopavlovka, Sokuluk* etc, indicate main contours of historical-cultural relationship of Tian-Shan, Eastern Turkestan and India during the period from first century A.D to 12th century A.D. The discovery of Buddhist monuments also proves the above evidences (Voropaeva



Figure II, Siva Narayana from Poandjibent, Uzbekistan
Source: Lobesh Chandra et al. "India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture".
Virekaramanda Rock Memorial Committee: Madras, P-284

2004:17). In several towns of the region, a large number of architectural structures made of clay, granite land stone and alabaster have also been discovered

Apart from temple building, literary evidences have also been found in this region. Most notably is the preserve of Indian Sanskrit inscriptions. During the period from century to 8th century A.D, Hinayana Buddhism was prevalent in this region. And later on Tantrik Buddhism entered to this region. Several paintings of 5th to 7th century A.D. are realistic and they show clear influence of Gandhara and Gupta tradition (Bhattacharya 1970: 294). It is also along the Silk Road that we discover

various Buddhist religious places which played significant role as educational centres and its monks, stupas, monasteries as symbols became popular throughout Central Asia. Along with Zoroastrian religion they became part of the Sogdian culture as well as. When the Turks entered to Central Asia they embraced Buddhism which is evident from various findings in Uighur language of Xinjiang province of present China (Dani 1999a: 9).

4.2.2 Cultural Ties in Mediaeval Period

Social, Cultural and Intellectual relations between Central Asia and India were also strengthened during the medieval period. The inflowing of Arabs into Central Asia with their own culture and beliefs not only influenced the old Buddhist belief system in the region but also introduced new beliefs and ideas of Islam to the Central Asian region. This new belief later on came to India with the advent of Arab and Mongol invaders. Among these invaders the most notably was the great 'Mughal Dynasty' which had a Mongol link with a Central Asian culture in its heart. During the Mughal period Central Asian culture and history flourished in India.

Six hundred years before Chinggis Khan, the Kyrgyzs were a formidable power in Central Asia but the Mongol invasion under Chinggis leadership changed their destiny. It was Temuchin son of Yesukai ruler of a small tribe on the Onon river in 1206 AD that routed his Mongol rival and establish mongol empire (Soni 2002: 13). The Kyrgyz first resisted the Mongols but were badly defeated; their autonomy was shattered and the surviving branch of the Kyrgyz later joined the Mongols in their campaigns (Rashid, 1994: 139). During this Mongol invasion period, the Central Asian people migrated to their southern lands. Describing the Mongol invasion, scholars like Nizami believes that these frequent Mongol invasions had compelled Central Asian people to take shelter in India. Wherever these people settled they named their settlement as Muhallas after their homes as Muhalla-i-Khwarazm, Muhalla-i-Atabeki, Muhalla-i-Samarquandi and Muhalla-i-Khitai. In his work Nizami also mentioned the export of Central Asian culture in the form of mystic Sufi Silsila order. During this period famous personalities like Sayad Jalaluddin Uch and Saikh Abdel Haq Muhaddi had come from Central Asia to India with their mystic Sufi Silsila. All these Central Asian culture and beliefs were later on intermingled with the

local population and reshaped the local culture during the medieval era (Nizami 1970: 162-63).

After the demise of the Mongol empire and the appearance of Islam in the region, the focus of Central Asian history and culture transformed to what is now we refer as culture of Ferghana Valley. Though Islam had existed in Central Asia much before the Mongol invasion. Scholars like Abazov believes that Islam was first brought into Central Asia in the 8th Century A.D by the Arab warriors and missionaries and during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Islam had settled down in Central Asia. By the 13th Century, Central Asia became a great cultural centre. During this era, Central Asian muslim scholars translated ancient Greek, Persian and other texts that had survived in the region probably since classical Hellenic times. Another achievement of this era was the Central Asian scholars contribution to the learning centres such as madrasas (Abazov 2007: 66-67) which are still practised in Central Asia and India.

During the 10th century A.D., Osh (now a province/oblast in Kyrgyzstan) in Ferghana became a major centre of Islamic scholarship. At present Osh is the second Mecca to the Kyrgyz because of the famous shrine of Takht-e-Suleiman or 'the seat of Suleiman'. Another importance of this place is the presence of Islamic shrine of Nabi Ayub and the mosque of Mughal Emperor Babur. In the 14th century, Zahir-uddin Mohammad Babur, who founded the Mughal dynasty in India, built a hermitage on the Takht Mountain. The Kyrgyzs have revived Babur's memory and honoured him as a Sufi saint (Rashid, 1994: 140). Babur (1483-1530) was born in the town of Andijan, in the Ferghana Valley (Gupta 2008: 29-30). From the very outset of his career Babur found himself the object of external foes and internal conflicts and this led him to finally left Ferghana to establish the Mughal Empire in Hindustan (India) (The Cambridge History of India, 4). His legacy included a sophisticated cultural style derived from Central Asia which flourished in India during the Mughal India. His legacy left a persistent and abiding Sunni Islamic faith and a familiar connection with the orthodox '*Naqshbandi Sufi*' order which had originated in Central Asia and finally the language of Turkic in which his memoirs were written. His memoir tells about his journey from Ferghana to Hindustan (Richards 1995: 9). This manuscript became a primary source for the familial pride of the Mughal or the Timurid dynasty.

Another contribution of Turkic language is that the word 'Urdu' itself is a Turkic word which originally means the camp of a Turkish army. In India, it means court or camp. The language in its initial stage was known as Hind or language of Hind or India. It was also known as hindwi or hindostani. Hindi language was also influenced by Turkic language. The number of Turkic word in Hindi, according to Dr. Bholanath Tiwari, is not less than 125, for example, bahadur, chaku, kainchi, qabu, chamcha, top, topachi, barud, biwi, lash etc are very much in use in Hindi (Kumar 2007: 20). After Babur, his successor also helped flourish Central Asian culture in India. It is worth to mention here that the Mughals and their contribution are beyond imagination in expanding cultural flavour on Indian soil. According to Babur's Memoir, two Central Asian artisans came to work for Babur in India, one was Mir Mirak Ghiyas, identified as a stone cutter, possibly identical with Mirak Sayyid Ghiyas, the designer of '*Humayun Tomb*' and the other one was the Ustad Shah Muammad (Asher 1992: 25). During the Mughal period, Central Asian culture and tradition prospered in India. Mughal kings introduced and gave patronage to Central Asian art and architecture which ultimately enriched the local culture (Muni 2003: 100-101). There is no doubt that the historical monuments of India belonging to the Mughal period are the great examples of that period's cultural exchanges between Central Asia and India. For example, Humayun Tomb, Fatepur Sikri, Buland Darwaja, Taj Mahal etc. are influenced by Central Asian engineering. Mughals also patronised several Central Asian painters, poets, singers, and musicians in their courts and literary exchanges were maintained with Central Asia (Foltz 1998: 70).

Another Central Asian contribution during the Mughal era was the introduction of gardens. Certainly gardens must have existed much before Mughals coming to India but the Mughals were the first to lay geometrically designed gardens in their empire. It was the Mughal who carried the art of gardening in India to its zenith (Mukherjee 2001: 206). Though some scholars argue that during the 16th century Central Asia lost its creative culture because of internal disturbances and external threats from neighbours. But during this period several Central Asian scholars like Abu Mansura Muwwaffiqm, Muhammad bin Wali Khwazami and Baruni visited India and learnt Indian sciences and literature and got influenced by Indian culture. (Haidar, 2003: 265). The Mughal period saw the closest and most multifaceted relations developed between central Asia and India. Today there is

hardly a city or region in India that does not bear the imprint of Central Asian art and architecture and that includes painting, monuments, mosque, tomb, shrine of Sufi saints, mausoleum, gates, park and so on.

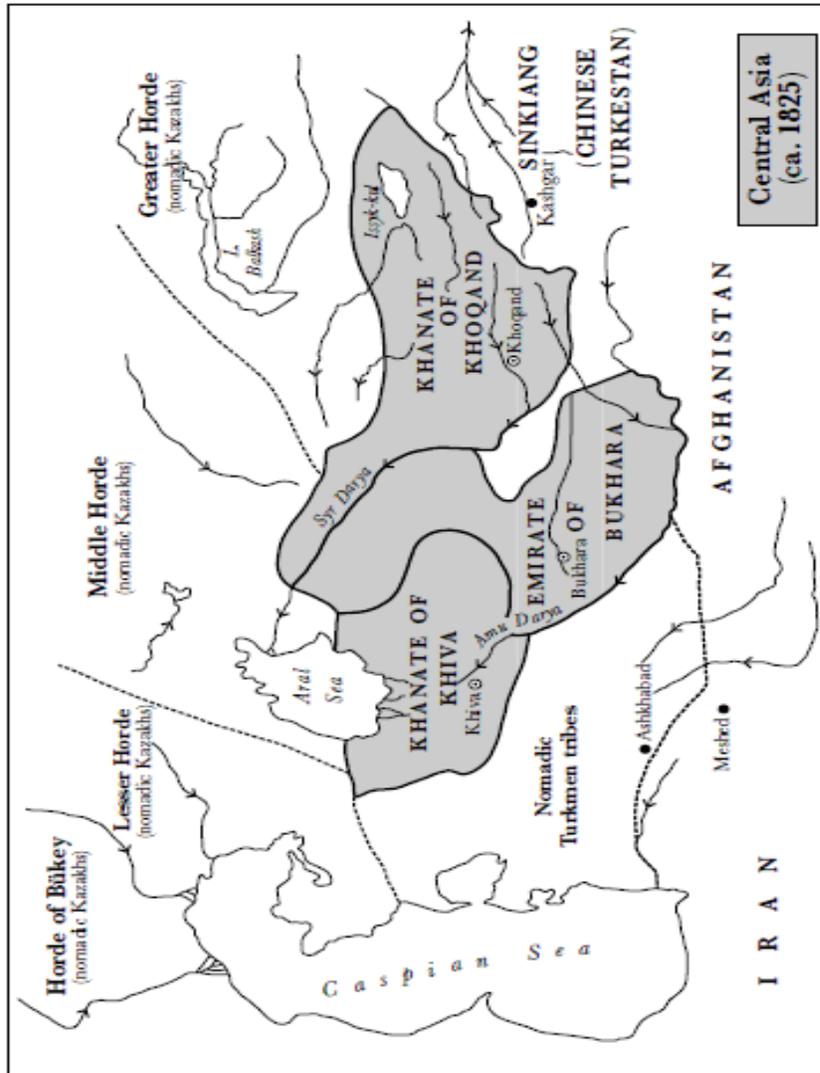
During the ancient and medieval period famous “Silk Route” was the main communication link between Central Asia and India but the discovery of water ways and Europeans coming to India and Central Asia, changed the ancient ties between the two regions. These foreign intruders not only discovered new communication ways but also with the passage of time controlled India-Central Asia historical and cultural ties in their own hands by the Imperial and colonial establishments. In the colonial period, especially the 18th and 19th century was very remarkable in the sphere of cultural relations. During this period, the indigenous merchants could not compete the European merchants because of improved technology, control over market price with protection costs and new communication network. All these discouraged the local trade which ultimately discouraged trade routes through which trade and cultural exchanges between Central Asia and India were conducted. Some scholars argue that the rise of political instability and social change of that time also stopped movements between the two regions. But things were changed during the first half of the nineteenth century when Silk Route trade got a “Modest renaissance” in Central Asia. (Levi 2007: 103).

The medieval period was also remarkable because of the rise of several Central Asian Khanates with whom Indian cultural relations flourished. The most important Khanates of this period were the Khanate of Khiva, Bukhara and Khokand (See Map10)

Among these Khanates the Khanate of Khokand had its own history of Kyrgyz-India relationship. The Khanates of Khokand was founded in 1740 and continued till 1867 (Levi 2007: 112) which was established by an Uzbek tribe “*The Ming*” who expanded their reach and included most of Kyrgyz territory (Hanks 2005: 320). The Kyrgyz vigorously resisted the incorporation into Khokand Khanate and acquired assurances from the Russian side to rescue them. By the middle of the 18th century the Russians reached at the foot hills of “Tien Shan” which in fact completely changed the Kyrgyz culture, history and geography.

Map 10

Central Asian Khanates of Khiva, Bukhara and Khokand



Source: Soucek, Svát (2000) "A History of Inner Asia", UK: Cambridge University Press, P. 176

Cultural relations with all the three Khanates of Khokand, Khiva, Bukhara added new chapters in Kyrgyz-India relations. Trade and cultural contacts were maintained, traders and travellers moved from Khokand (Kyrgyz land) to Jinjing China and India (Kashmir). It is believed that trade relations flourished during Khokand period, goods such as Kashmiri shawls, cotton, and indigo were the main imported products from India by the Khokandise. During this period, urban centres and economic development encouraged Indian merchants and diaspora communities which in turn encouraged cultural links among them (Levi 2007: 112-13).

It is also believed that in the second half of nineteenth century and the initial period of twentieth century, there were six to eight thousand Indians lived in Central Asia who were followers of Hinduism and Sikhism and also included Indian Muslims. Most of them came from north-western India and worked as money lenders in the Emirates of Bukhara, the Farghana Valley, Samarkand and Syr Dariya region of Turkestan. With the passage of time in some Khanates, the position of Hindus and other Indians worsened with Islamic religious laws which hampered traditional trade but cultural relations with India continued. This period also witnessed the appearance of *Russian Hindustani Dictionary* which had its own share in spreading Indian culture in this region (Kaushik 1970: 102-03).

4.2.3 Cultural Ties during Soviet Period

During the Soviet era, the Kyrgyz had an indirect relationship with India, this was mainly because Independent Kyrgyz republic was not existed and was under the USSR. In this period, the USSR and India had very friendly and cordial relations with each other. Though during this period India was under the British colonial domination, it had also links and sympathy toward Soviet leaders and ideology. The main role of Soviet and Soviet Central Asia was to provide shelters for Indian revolutionaries like Maharaja Mahendra Pratap, Barkatullah, Muhammad Shafiq, M.N. Roy, M.B.P. Acharya and Abani Mukherji. And from there they started their activities in India and encouraged Central Asian people against the western colonial dominance in Asia through pamphlets, radio speech and open dais speeches etc. (Kaushik 1970: 110- 112).

During the final phase of Indian freedom struggle, cultural relations with Central Asia revived with the establishment of Friends of the Soviet Union (FSU). In 1941, under the leadership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Smt. Sarojini Naidu, the Friends of the Soviet Union (FSU) was formed. The main aim of this Organisation was to promote voluntary educative friendship between the people of the two nations. After Indian's independence, 1952 the Indian leadership went ahead a step and established Indo-Soviet Cultural Society (ISCUS) (Rai 1991: 24). Though India had politico-economic relationship with USSR, relations with Kyrgyzstan could not established. The first Indian high level visit to Kyrgyz land occurred only after the

then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Issyk-Kul lake in 1985 and this visit opened up future prospects in bilateral cultural and people to people relations with Kyrgyzstan. Mutual cooperation between the friendship societies was very active and provided immense opportunities for getting acquainted with the history and culture of each other. The decade and the months of friendship which were held every year in both the countries, were instrumental in strengthening present state of relations (Kadyraliev 2006: 30). The Soviet government with a partnership with India took a comparative study of archaeology, history, and culture of Central Asia and India. A project on Sanskrit studies in the USSR and India was also under taken in 1986 (Rai 1991: 22). These efforts were continued even after the disintegration of the USSR and the emergence of new Central Asian Republics, including Kyrgyzstan.

4.2.4 Cultural Ties in the Post-Independence Period

The Kyrgyz republic emerged as an independent state after the break up of the former USSR. In 1992, India established its diplomatic relations with the independent Kyrgyz republic. The Kyrgyz embassy in India was established in November 1992 which further enhanced the age old cultural relations between both the countries. The Kyrgyz leadership from the beginning attached great importance to cultural aspect in building cooperation with India. This was more so because Bishkek understood the importance of cultural dimension in foreign policy options which could only be developed with regular cultural exchanges and most importantly through arrangements of organisational and people to people contacts (Mavlonov, 2006: 431).

Bilateral ties were actively developed under the auspices of the society for friendship and cultural ties. At present, twice in a year in Bishkek, both Kyrgyz and Indian governments are regularly organising traditional decade of Indo-Kyrgyz friendship. Several delegations from Kyrgyzstan have visited India through the assistance of this society. In India, there is a great interest to study the outstanding historical and cultural inheritance of the Kyrgyz society, people, art and literature. The Manas is a famous epic poem of the Kyrgyz people, same as the Mahabharata for the Indians and the Odyssey for the Greeks. The epic poem Manas together with other masterpieces of arts and literature are the property of the world cultural heritage and have no borders. It is highly symbolic that a famous Indian translator and writer

Varyam Singh translated Kyrgyz epic Manas into Hindi. In Bishkek Humanities University, there is a separate department known as Mahatma Gandhi centre which became a place for studying great historic and cultural legacy of the Indian people in Kyrgyzstan (Imanaliev, 1998: 49-50).

From the Indian side, the government of India took various institutional steps in strengthening cultural relations with its neighbours and to achieve this objective they established 'The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)' as an autonomous body which was set up in 1950. Following are the primary objectives of ICCR:

- (i) To establish, receive and strengthen cultural relation and mutual understanding between India and other countries;
- (ii) To promote cultural exchanges with other countries;
- (iii) To establish relations with national and international organizations in the field of culture; and
- (iv) To adopt all other measures as might be required to further its objectives (ICCR Objectives).

In order to achieve all these objectives, the ICCR has been playing a significant role to establish cultural relations by granting scholarship schemes for overseas students on behalf of the Government of India. Apart from scholarship the Indian government has been giving training programmes to foreign diplomats through its Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi. India has also been extending various other training programmes in the fields, finance, banking, mining, science, and technology, film making etc. under ITEC. In India, the Foreign Service Institute was set up in 1985 and has successfully organized several training programmes by under this ITEC training programmes. The ICCR has been frequently organising exhibitions, seminars, exchange of performing arts groups, establishing and maintaining Cultural Centres, Chairs and Professorships for Indian Studies abroad, granting awards, presentation of books and musical instruments; Lectures, and Maulana Azad Essay Competition and other programmes on behalf of Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). From the days of starting relationship with Bishkek, Indian government has been focusing to develop sustainable good relationship with Kyrgyz republic.

Historical and Cultural Links between Kyrgyzstan and India

Throughout the years, India-Kyrgyzstan cultural exchanges and other programmes are being organized both in terms of exchanges of delegations as well as development of cultural linkages. During high level governmental visits, agreements in the sphere of culture, arts, education, mass media and sports are concluded. Cooperation in the field of science and technology as well as agreements for the promotion of bilateral tourism are also concluded. The Kyrgyz government has equally encouraged cultural cooperation with Indian by not only organizing seminars, sending personnel, musical troops, sports persons but also by cementing Indian history in Kyrgyz life and this can be testified from a road in Kyrgyzstan named after Mahatma Gandhi.

Since Kyrgyzstan's independence various cultural initiatives have taken place between both the countries. As a starting point, an agreement on cooperation in the spheres of culture, arts, education, science, mass media and sports was signed between the two countries on 18 March 1992. In the same year in October, a cultural programme (CEP) valid for 1992-94 was signed by the two countries. This was subsequently extended up to the year 2000 (MEA Document 3). But the initial major steps in the sphere of cultural relations initiated during the official visit of Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narashima Rao to Kyrgyzstan when bilateral agreements were signed between Bishkek and New Delhi in the sphere of culture, arts, education, mass media and sports and in promoting bilateral tourism sphere (Government of India 1996: 36). One year later, during the official visit of Indian Vice President K.R. Narayanan, an educational centre called 'Gandhi Studies Centre' was inaugurated. The establishment of Gandhi Studies Centre at the Bishkek Humanities University was landmark in Indo-Kyrgyz relationship in the post-independence period (Government of India 1997: 32).

On promoting education as a primary pillar of culture the Indian government is active in promoting Indian academics to teach Indian languages and other related subjects in the Kyrgyz republic on deputation level. The deputation of professors abroad is done under the bilateral cultural exchange programme and scheme of propagation of Hindi abroad. ICCR has deputed eminent professors teaching Hindi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Hindi and Malayalam. The ICCR has also established Chair of

Modern Indian History, Civilization and South Asian Affairs in Osh University in Kyrgyzstan (ICCR Activities).

Like ICCR, the role of Indian Technical Economic Cooperation (ITEC) has been great. Through this programme several facilities have been given to the foreign nations including Kyrgyzstan. Under this ITEC programme for the promotion in the educational sphere, English teaching professionals have been deputed to Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz Arkadiy Gladilovk editor in chief "Slovo Kyrgyzstan" to familiarise himself with political events, current affairs economic issues and issues related to science and technology visited India. A group of 10 member children of Delhi Public School (DPS) to give performances at the "international youth talent festival" visited Kyrgyzstan in 1997 (Government of India 1997: 215). In the year 1997, a centre for 'The Centre for Indian Studies' was set up in Osh State University (MEA Documents 3) which has been useful in providing an exposure to Indian culture and civilization to academicians and intelligentsia in this country.

The Kyrgyzs believe that Manas as their national symbol represents the greatest cultural heritage. Realizing the importance of Kyrgyz epic Manas, New Delhi showed keen interest to translate the historical epic Manas into Hindi. As mentioned earlier Professor Varyam Singh of Centre for Russian studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) visited Bishkek in connection with translation of Kyrgyz epic "Manas" into Hindi. On the occasion of Days of Indian Culture in Kyrgyzstan held in October 1997 M.S Saikia, minister of State for Education, released the Hindi translation of the Kyrgyz epic "Manas". In 1998, experts on Manas studies from Kyrgyzstan participated in a conference on the epic heritage of Kyrgyzstan (Government of India 1998: 43). Besides, promoting cultural cooperation through activities like organizing seminars in different places of the two countries are also taking place, in which various students from both sides participated. Ten Indian students from Delhi Public School participated in the international festival "Young Talents, 1999" held in Kyrgyzstan. To promote Kyrgyz culture in India with the initiatives of government of India, the Days of Kyrgyzstan culture in India were organized from 6 to 14 March 1999 (Government of India 2000: 33).

The Kyrgyz government has opened various schemes to attract Indian tourists to visit Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan is one of the most beautiful countries in the Central

Asian region. Its natural beauty is full of tourist attraction. Sky touching mountain with snow filled view makes it an attractive tourist destination. All along beautiful mountain, Kyrgyzstan is natural habitation of diverse flora and animal life with ever flowing water sources (Koichuev 1996: 168). All this makes it a tourism destination. India showed great interest in tourism sector in Kyrgyzstan by conducting Days of Kyrgyz culture in India in various times, and the Indian Minister of Tourism Omank Apang's visit in 1998 encouraged cooperation in this sphere. In response to it, B.T. Shamshiev, Director of State Agency for Tourism and Sport (SATS) visited India along with a delegation of tour operations on the invitation of Apang.

Recognizing Kyrgyzstan's considerable potential and the ongoing increased cooperation between the two countries, one of Indian tour operator group visited Kyrgyzstan in June 1999 and from the Kyrgyz side Additional Director General of Tourism visited in October 1999. Deputy Director of the State Agency for Tourism and Sports of the Kyrgyz Republic visited New Delhi with a study team of tour operators. Apart from these, a team of scientists led by T. Meimanaliev, Minister for Health of Kyrgyz republic paid a visit to India in December 1999 under the Bio-Medical Research Programme (BMRP) between the Defence Institute of Physiology and Allied Sciences (DIPAS), New Delhi and the National Centre of Cardiology and Internal Medicine (NCCIM), Bishkek. To participate in an international seminar held in January 2000 on "Asian Security in the 21st Century", Director of International Institute of Strategic Research of the Kyrgyz Republic visited New Delhi. During the year 2000-2001, a 30-member cultural troupe to take part in the festival "Peace and Respect" held at Osh, sponsored by Indian Council for Cultural Relations visited Kyrgyzstan in August 2000. Under the ITEC programme, the number of slots was increased from 35 to 50 in the training courses (Government of India 2000: 33) which remained same in 2001-2002 (Government of India 2002: 34). In June 2003, a nine-member Indian dance troupe 'Padatik' visited Kyrgyzstan and in between 2 to 8 October, a photo exhibition on 'Life and Times of Mahatma Gandhi' was organised in Bishkek for one week (Government of India 2004: 51). The year 2005 and 2006 were the years for Indian film in Kyrgyzstan. Two Indian film festivals were organised in 2005, first it was in Bishkek during the month of September and the second was in Talas in November (Government of India 2006: 44); in June and July 2006, it was in Tokmok and Issyk-kul provinces respectively (Government of India 2007: 41).

It is evident from the above activities that Kyrgyzstan and India are strengthening their cultural cooperation so as to achieve their own national interests and at the same time widening the scope of their foreign policy. The rejuvenation highlighting the cultural policy is also in tune with the search of bilateral relations on firm grounding. This trend can also be analyzed in a much better way with the concept of “soft power” given by Joseph S. Nye. Analysing the concept Nye says that the soft power resource of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture, its political values and its foreign policies. These resources give a country an influence far beyond the hard power (military capability) edge of traditional balance-of-power politics. So far as cultural resource as an element of soft power is concerned, Nye regards that if a country’s culture includes universal values and its policies promote values and interests that others share, it increases the probability obtaining its desired outcomes because of the relationships of attraction and duty it creates. (Nye, Joseph S. Jr 1990: 153-179)

No doubt both Kyrgyzstan and India are engaged in their soft power approaches and sharing their cultural values with each other from the days of antiquity. In the olden days, it was the Silk Route that carried Indian culture to Central Asia including the Kyrgyz land and in return brought Central Asian culture to India. By this inter-cultural exchange process several foreign cultures of Greeks, Chinese, Mongol, Persian, and Arab culture came to India by crossing this Central Asian region and Afghanistan and gave us the present Indian multi-cultural society where we live today. It can be said that Central Asia helped in carrying Indian culture to the other cultures. So from this angle it can be concluded that by sharing and carrying culture we developed a common culture from the ancient times and this process should be given more importance in the present world by reopening and strengthening our age old cultural ties.

Despite Kyrgyzstan’s long historic at cultural ties with India the cultural relations between Kyrgyzstan and India could not receive much enthusiasm. Indian Cultural Centres were established in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan but there is no such facility in Kyrgyzstan which equally needs the same for further cultural cooperation. The bilateral cultural exchanges in terms of artistic personnel, troupes, academic activities have been very low. In addition, very few Universities in India has

Central Asian division that conducts research on Central Asian countries. So the governments of both the countries need to take care of these problems. India is a culturally rich country, which from exploring history to research and development has achieved great milestone and the Kyrgyzs can learn from it. Kyrgyzstan is still a virgin country but it contains great potentialities and it is in the interest of both the countries that they should work more for their cultural cooperation and this can be achieved by initiating concrete steps in this direction and encouraging new set of thinking. From the Kyrgyz side, Bishkek must take initiative in the sphere of political stability which is the core of any bilateral relationship. Still Kyrgyzstan lacks any better tourism infrastructure like hotel, tour packages etc. Until and unless these facilities are available the phrase of Kyrgyzstan as a Switzerland of the east would not be a reality. No doubt academic and research activities are going on to discover new information on Indo-Kyrgyzstan cultural sphere. But all these needs equal enthusiasm from the policy making side which at present is not up to the mark and needs to be developed in a more holistic manner.

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