CHAPTER-1

Soviet Legacy – The process of Modernization of Uzbek and Tajik Cultures during the Soviet period:

The Record

The October 1917 Russian Revolution led to the victory of the Bolsheviks and subsequent establishment of their hold on the central power of the Russian empire. Subsequently, the Soviet Union was created, which also incorporated the central Asian Muslim regions including present day Uzbekistan. The main ambition of the Bolsheviks was the establishment of socialism in the Soviet Union. Whereas Russian was looking towards socialism as the ideology of future, Central Asia was still emerging a tribal and nomadic society that was trying to get to grips with the first rumblings of nationalism and capitalism.

One of the policy in the process of achieving socialism was the policy of religious and cultural suppressions. Islam became the prime target of this
suppressive policy in the central Asia including Uzbekistan through out the communist regime.

**Culture And civilization of Uzbekistan & Tajikistan:**

**Historical Grounds**

The history of culture and state hood and social ties of the territory of uzbek and Tajik is more than 2.5 millenium. It is freedom-loving population fought for its independence against all foreign invaders. Situated on the cross roads of the great silk Road, the region played an important role in the dialogue of different civilization, its flourishing in the ancient times, other during the region of the Samanids and Timurids is connected with the involvement of the region in the international economic interrelations, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is blessed with great historical and cultural traditions and have also proved vital in transmitting its cultural light to different parts of the world.

"As far back as is the pre-islamic period Zoroastrism- the world spread religions system was born on the territory of the percent day Uzbekistan (In
Khorezm) and became common property of all Mankind¹ there formed the highest technological culture of those times: town planning, irrigation systems, armory silk-weaving, cultivation of grain cotton, grapes and fruits. In those time local technologies and master craftsman (USTOS) were highly valued and appreciated. The synthetic character is rather typical for this particular civilization.

**Advent of Islam and its impact on Culture**

Historically Islam has been a document factor in Central Asia including Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It has played a key role in the dissemination of Islamic civilization is Asia and other parts of the civilization in Asia and other parts of the world "Samarkand and Burhara were traditionally great centers of theological studies and the region had never remained isolated from Islamic mainstream."²

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¹ Khidhayatov, G. “Uzbekistan: Between The Post And Future” Contemporary Central Asia, Vol. 1, No.1, p. 34.
When Islam was introduced in the social landscape the 8th century A.D., it was redefined to suit the ethnic and tribal peculiarities, that had shaped the life of the people for centuries. The various nomadic groups as well as the new comers to this religions ideology adhered more or less faithfully to their own customary laws (Adat) and their religion was often little more curious mixture of Islam and ancient animist beliefs. But undoubtedly Islam for the first time provided the people of Central Asia a distinct identity and was most important unifying factor for the Central Asian People.

Rich vegetation, favorable climate, rich lands always attracted foreign conquerors to central Asia. It also had a favorable influence on the Iranian culture. First, Persian King Darius conquered the whole territory of present Uzbekistan. Persian domination lasted almost two hundred years. Maverannahr (new Uzbekistan) became a part of Achaemenid Empire. The state of the Achaeminids promoted the development of economic and cultural links with foreign countries widening of trade, fusion between
peoples, growth of cities, division of labour and formation of various social groups.

The new spiritual and economic situation in central Asia determined a new technological progress. It seems to be appropriate to mark the production of the Samarkand paper, which supplanted papyrus and parchment in the Moslem countries at the end of the 10th century. Scientists al-khozemi, Beruni, Farabi, Abu al Ibn Sina (Avicenna) brought fame to their Motherland all over the world. They were respected by the Moslem as well as christains, Judaists and Buddhists.

Uzbekistan and Tajikistan emerged as of the popular islamic centres and also produced great, islamic scholars such as Bahauddin Naqshbandy, Al-Bukhari and Al-Termizi who became pillars of the prophet's holy teachings and his popularisers.

Arabic language was popularized so that people read and understood the holy Quran and Hadith and lived to follow a pure Islamic way of life.
Arabic Alphabets were the only written scripts for almost a thousand years. Thanks to the Arabic language, people of Uzbekistan got acquainted with the world's most famous achievements of science and culture. Uzbekistan became the basis of further dissemination of Islam to the east. From here it was disseminated to eastern Turkistan (present Sinkiang province in China), Siberia, Urals and India. In Tajikistan inculcation of Arabic and Persian language gave a powerful acceleration to the development of science, culture and poetry. Turkik language also developed during that period Bukhara emerged as the theological centre of the Muslim world, as well as, heart of central Asian culture. There were large bookshops and libraries where writers, scholars and religious figures from all our the world used to gather and communicate. The greatest poet of Persian 'Rudaki' genius scholars Al-Khorezmi, Ibn-Sina, Al-Biruni and contributed to the development of literature and science.
Advent of Russians and their impact on socio-cultural dynamics:

The conquest of the central Asia by the Tzarist regime posed a first major challenge for Islam. The campaign against the Muslim religion and the cultural assimilation of the masses were the main ruling principals of the policy. The central Asian Muslims forcefully converted to Christianity. Mosques were destroyed and Quranic schools closed, while special schools were opened under the direction of Russian missionaries for the children of the converts. "in order to make the anti-Muslim measures more effective, the waqf properties secularized and taken over by the state. This put an end to the power of Muslim clergy, who thus became impoverished and ready to constitute a revolutionarily' element. Converts to Christianity were exempted from taxes and from military service, these burdens devolving upon those of their brethren who remained Muslim." The Tsar's Muslim Subjects,

although discriminated against and harassed, were nevertheless capable of maintaining and practising their faith, Islam.

The anti-Islamic policies of the Tsarist regime created severe discontentment among the Muslims, and by the late nineteenth century the Muslims of the empire began to express serious dissatisfaction with Russian colonial control. “Numerous revolts erupted in the 1880s and 1890s in the predominantly Uzbek cities or Samarkand and Tashkent, motivated by religious zeal and desire to reestablish the Khanate of Kokand. Such religious fanaticism reached its peak in the Andhizhan revolt in 1898 as a ‘prepared holy war’, rather than just a spontaneous uprising”.4 But all the revolts were suppressed by the mighty armies of the Tsars. Having no military or political force to counter the Russians, the Muslim started of their religious and cultural heritage through education.

The impact of Russian colonialism in Central Asia was to arouse a dormant elite to political ferment. The jadid reformers and intellectuals in Bukhara and Samarkand were the first to raise the issue of how to adopt Islam to modernism so the Muslims could compete with Russians. The jadids also, however, faced the traditional Islam of the mullahs, who saw the crisis as an opportunity to rid themselves of Russian domination and impose the sharia or Islamic law.

**Cultural and Religious policies under communism**

The situation changed dramatically for the Central Asia People after the consolidation of the Bolshevik regime and the affected by these policies and completely changed the social and cultural fabric of Uzbek and Tajik society reintegration of the tsarist colonies by Bolshevik government into what became the Soviet Union.

The Soviet period introduced an era during which the very fabric of Islamic Central Asian culture was controlled, manipulated and repressed and eradicated through official anti-religious policy, Russification.
programmes including the language reform, resettlement or Russian and other European population in Central Asia, educational reform, elimination of the Islamic institutions and the Muslim clerical class and the creation of socialist republics based on macro ethnic identity. The two most important factors of national identity and culture, language and religion got severely affected by these policies and completely changed the social and cultural fabric of Uzbek and Tajik society.

The creed of scientific materialism with an atheistic character preached by Russia’s new masters posed an existential threat not only to Islam, but to all religions. The mission of new Russia was nothing short or creating a socialist utopia and a Socialist man. In order to be able to achieve this goal, however, first old structures and beliefs which impeded the creations of such an ideal society, had to be eliminated.

The Marxists viewed Islam, as a communal religion and hence has strong social roots and structures, as a particularly difficult barrier on the road to achieving socialist utopian progress, and as a strong reactionary
force. Thus, while the early communists looked to the Muslim East as promising areas for the expansion of communism they never thought that Islam...can be harnessed as a force in any way sympathetic to the ideals of communism.\(^5\) On the contrary they believed that the creation of a "socialist man" and socialist society in the East would not be possible until and unless the hold of Islam over the hearts and minds of the Muslims were eliminated.

In the process of strengthening their position after the October revolution and during the period of civil war, the communists adopted a soft attitude towards Muslims. The central government, conscious of the importance of national factor, set out to gain the sympathy of the Muslims. "A special appeal addressed to all the Muslim workers of Russia and the East, which solemnly promised them that their beliefs and customs would be respected, and invited them to order their national life in their own fashion freely and without hindrance."\(^6\)


\(^6\) Bennigsen, Alexander, op.cit, p. 82.
The appeal which carried signatures of Lenin and Stalin were powerfully worded:

"Muslim of Russia, Tatars or Volga and the Crimea, Kirgiz and Sarts of Siberia and Turkestan, Turks and Tatars of Trans Caucasian; chechens and Mountain peoples of the Caucasus, and all of you whose mosques and prayer houses have been destroyed, whose beliefs and customs have been trampled upon by the Tsars and oppressors of Russia: Your beliefs and usages, your national and cultural institutions are forever free and inviolate. Know that your rights, like those of all the peoples of Russia, are Revolution and its organs, the soviet workers soldiers and peasants."

"Then the council of the people's commissars transferred that most venerated relic of Islam, the Quran of Osman from the petroguard National Library to the Muslim congress."

The Bolshevik leader did their utmost to come to an understanding with the Muslim bourgeoisie organisations.

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7 Ibid. P. 82.
8 Ibid. p. 82.
and entrust them with the task of winning over the mass of the their following to the revolution.

On Jan. 19, 1918, a decree of the council of people's commissars created the 'Central Commissariat for Muslim Affairs' who task for the next several years was to bolshevisce the Muslim masses. The commissariats had from its inception, been endowed with wide powers. It's jurisdiction as may be gathered from its component departments, covered all facts of Muslim life: industry, agriculture, education, press, justice, propaganda.

This liberty, of course, was tactical and temporary. Instant, the civil war was over the struggle for ideological dominance between the Islam and the Bolshevism started. It is believed that Islam, is a collectivist religion, authoritarian: one whose doctrine is binding on the mass of believers and which tends to deploy its direction and its judgments over the whole field of life, corporate and individual alike. In Islam no distinction is draw between the temporal and the spiritual; there is a traditional fusion of the two which endows life, public and private,

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9 Ibid. p. 83
and in all its manifestations, with a sacred character. Moreover, the deep penetration of life by the Muslim ideology engenders a sentiment of religious solidarity: the stands in the way of class-consciousness.

The Bolshevik leaders considered themselves committed to socialism and for the true Marxist the only valid fight was with the class society. That had to be demolished to begin with, and then its survival could be dealt a knock-out blow. The government’s anti-Islamic policy would, on this argument, be pliant and cautious and alive to the reciprocal involvement of religion and nationality among the Muslim peoples.

After the civil war, Moscow was determined to destroy the religion, but it was now convinced of the impossibility of doing so overnight.

The revised policy, then, was to wear down Islam by a long-term process, on the lines indicated by a Muslim communist leader, Sultan Galiyev. For Sultan Galiyev, the need to combat Islam was undoubted because, like
any other religion, it was an obstacle on the way to the building of socialism. 10

Now, the first task of the Soviet government was to bring Islam down and they did this by undermining the basic institutions on which it (Islam) rested: the properties in waqfs guaranteed the clergy’s economic power; the courts both of the ‘adat and of the shari‘at, which enabled Islam to keep its hold on the private life of the believers; and the confessional instruction. The attack on these was simultaneous.

In 1925 the government liquidated the waqfs. “By decree of the Uzbek SSR dated December 19, 1925, all waqfs situated outside towns, with the exception of orchards and Vineyards, were expropriated by the people’s commissariats for Agriculture. Soon afterwards the urban waqfs and those of mosques were in their turn requisitioned. The liquidation of this ancient Muslim institution has been accomplished in a few years, without arousing resistance, by dexterous advertisement of the intention to distribute the confiscated lands to the

10 Ibid. p. 141.
peasants. Then care for ward, the clergy, the mosques and their schools were bereft of their material subsistence. 

Along-with this economic onslaught, the attack was mounted against the law of custom ('adat') and the Quranic law (Shari'at). The power of the traditional courts were reduced gradually and their financing by the government were stopped. Kalym (bride price) and polygamy, amongst to the ingredients of adat made punishable by imprisonment. Finally the sharia courts were abolished in 1924.

Without a doubt Islam was an unifying factor for the central Asian people. It provided them a sense of Unity and integrity. In the process of its anti-religious campaign the communist regime firstly tried to break this Islamic Unity. "In January 1924 Turkestan SSR, was broken up and over a short period five separate republics came into existence the Uzbek, Turkoman, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Tajik Soviet Socialist republics. After a long illness Lenin died in January 1924, warning stalin that

\footnote{Ibid, p. 145.}
he was exceeding his authority against the smaller Nationalities. Lenin wrote in his last testament:

A distinction must be made nation and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nations.

In respect to the second kind of nationalism, we, nationals of a big nation, have nearly always been guilty, in historic practice, of violence.”

The integral cultural and social unity of central Asia and hopes of pan-Islamic or pan-Turkic movements were shattered, which in exactly what stalin wanted. The loss of Turkestan deprived the people of a common homeland, a common language and a common destiny. Stalin’s policies were to pit one republic and one ethnic group against another.

To their dismay the ethnic symbols were severely crushed under Stalin’s resolution, even the use of Arabic Script, which was the only means of common

communication in central Asia before 1917 was forcibly ended in favour of Latin script in 1929 and then to cyrillic in 1940.¹³

These provisions ensured that future generations would grow up knowing little of their past history, literature and poetry because only those works were translated into cyrillic that the communists thought appropriate. Islam was forcibly uprooted beginning with the wholesale destruction of mosques and madrasahs, the end of Arabic as a link language and the cutting off all ties to the Muslim world. Anti-Islamic propaganda increased dramatically as the communist leadership took measures to create a new ‘Soviet Man’ which enhanced Russification. The communists also interfered in other religious spheres. The Islamic sharia courts were abolished in 1924, and this had been followed in 1928 by the closure of some 15000 madrasahs across central Asia. In the same year the veil eas abolished. In 1930, stalin requisite all waqf lands, those lands held by the

¹³ Ahmad, Rashid, op.cit., p. 90.
local mosques and religious endowments which were the only source of livelihood for local mullahs.

In 1934, a government ban was placed on people performing Haj and printing presses were forbidden to publish the Koran. There was a seeming unrest at the personal or level of ethnicity. People in order to safeguard their cultural and various ethnic identities from being massively repressed under communist rule would thus perform their various kinship or cultural obligations 'under cover'. All the rites ranging from solemn marriage ceremonies to circumcision and to dowry obligations were still performed. Girls adhered to their dignity. The areas of inter-caste marriages was still not looked upon as a 'consenting ideology', although, the male sect often indulged with a Russian woman. Thus, the stability of the Muslim family, as well as local traditions, were the main reasons for the population explosion in Muslim central Asia.

But while an Uzbek and Tajik might fail to observe many of the formal rituals like prayer, Islam was still their religion and the defining circle of their cultural
would. They knew that Islam gave them a distinct identity, thus the basic quest was to retain his culture, under the constant threat of communist regime.

The people in the private confines of their homes turned to Islam and the sufi orders for spiritual sustenance.

There is no doubt that the madrasah system, the clerical class, the use and availability of doctrinal texts and the public display of religious beliefs were all deeply limited. The religious education although altered dramatically was not completely eliminated. Religious elites, although not officially recognized were present in local communities and religious rites were practiced. The Muslim family household as well as in the neighborhood, mullah remained a basic component of Muslim central Asian society. Local Islam, in other words, was part of daily life and continued to be practiced in variety of forms.
one of the most pervasive concepts defining Islam during Soviet period was the dualistic concept of 'official' and 'un-official' or 'parallel Islam'.

This dual concept, however, a framework for understanding the contrast between the officially sponsored spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) and the seemingly stubborn persistence of Islam of an underground "unofficial" level. "Organised by the soviets to creates an effective method to provide a state sanctioned, legal status to Islam, SADUM sponsored the two main Institutions of learning on central Asia, the Madrasah in Bukhara and the Islamic Institute at Taskent." 14

All other evidence of religious leadership, education, dissemination of knowledge of organized activity, therefore was labelled 'unofficial'. Moreover, this was proof not only of the existence of an underground religious network was, but its very essence provided the

political rationale necessary to control such religious activity.

But the attempt to restrict Islamic education and knowledge through the “official network” was not entirely successful, since ‘unofficial’ mullahs and ishans did exist, particularly in rural areas. Pilgrimages to shrines, although risky, continued. Sufis continues to consider themselves Sufis, although there is scant evidence that Tariqa organization in the form recognized prior to the soviet period was found outside of Dagestan and North Caucasus region. Besides sufism is perceived as being the main representative of unofficial Islam.

The soviet socialist totalitarian government justified a stronger grip over public and private affairs of every Soviet Nation. The members of the Russian communism was therefore to make more and more Muslims members of the communist party and thus establish an organic relationship between the communist ideals and ideological convictions of the Russian Muslim.
For a Soviet Muslim the chief pre-condition for receiving a membership and of the CPSU was his open rejection of religious beliefs and acceptance of atheism. According to this criteria a Muslim communist no more remained a believer and could not be regarded a Muslim. By and large Muslim Nationalities contrived to nurture their religious feelings and customs through their national festivals, dress, food, marriage etc. Religious sentiments were expressed under the guise of harmless national distinctiveness. The Russian recognized this and their answer was increased russification, i.e. not only ideologically but also culturally transforming central Asia Muslim population. The above performed or existing aspects seemed an inherent feature of the part and parcel of Muslim culture which was deemed as 'unofficial religious activities' by the Soviet Union.

It is noteworthy that the existing state of affairs amongst the Muslims were such that even the younger generation could not be left untouched and participated though informally in the holy Ramadan with a view to
being or identifying with their strong religious sentiments.

Basically the term ‘unofficial Islam’ designates those activities of Soviet Muslim that take place outside the purview or control of the four spiritual directorates. Most of the activities that are considered unofficial Islam seem just basic Islamic ceremonies such as prayers, fasts, Zakat, circumcision rites, funerals, reading the Quran (Khatm-i-Quran), wedding celebrations and so forth.

These were not only delimited in aspect but further aggravated in the form of recording religious broadcasts from an Iranian Radio-station on cassettes and thus mobilizing immense religious consciousness. It further found went in other forms of un-official Islamic activities consists of copying and circulating anonymous religious letters among Muslims in the Soviet Union.

The authority were disturbed not only the holy places that are connected with Muslim saints of the past but also about the popularity of several living persons who are reported to be reversed as saints by large
number of believers. Soviet publications on the subject demeaned the very existence of religious subjects and the "unofficial propaganda" began.

The Sufi religious order have deep roots in the history of Muslim in the Soviet Union. Alexander Bennigsen have perceived sufism as being the main representative of "unofficial Islam". It appears that sufi brotherhoods flourished and were capable of continuing their operations despite periodic campaigns against them by the Soviet authorities. Self appointed mullahs and Ishans have established themselves in various holy places.

The strength of 'unofficial Islam' throughout the Soviet period demonstrated the resilience and staying power of Islam, largely because it forms such an important component of Muslim self-identity and is closely intertwined with elements of their cultural heritage, even those which predate Islam, it also demonstrates the sense of the Muslims alienation from Soviet systems, as well as their desire to assert their identity, their cultural autonomy and implicitly even their
political autonomy. It is because of the latter factor that among the accusations levelled against the Sufi brotherhood by Soviet authorities in the North Caucasus was the charge that they engaged in religious propaganda which sometimes acquire a purely nationalistic colour.

However, when the Islamic revolutions anti-westernism was not translated into pro-Soviet sentiments, and especially with Islamic Iran’s opposition to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviet assessment of revolutionary Islam changed. Progressively, the Soviets came to see this new brand of militant and highly politicized Islam as an even more serious rival and threat to socialism than traditional Islam.

The emergence of Gorbachev as the president of the Soviet Union saw the relaxation towards people’s freedom of religious and ethnic identities. He introduced the policy of ‘perestroika’ and ‘Glasnost’ in the mid 1980’s. Glasnost which means ‘openness’ provided people an opportunity to express their feelings, which had been
suppressed earlier. Through the policy of glasnost and perestroika the people of Uzbekistan were provided an officially sanctioned vehicle to re-assert their ethnic and religious identity.

In the process of 'glasnost', Gorbachev encouraged the formation of what came to be known as 'informal groups'.15 May of these groups did concern themselves with issues such as economic management, environmental degradation and the like. But much to the dismay of Gorbachev, even greater number focussed on how to review cultural heritage and to assert their national and religious identities. Many groups with an Islamic flavour emerged on the scene, even though they did not have official sanction. But even more important as a result of 'glasnost' there was an upsurge in religious activity and an increased level of religious concerns over the lack of public prayer accommodation and Islamic education began to be heard frequently in many parts of Uzbekistan and Tajikstan.

15 Hunter, Shireen, op.cit., p. 295.
One aspect of change regarding the revival of Islam in central Asia, during the period of this policy, was the reformulation of the "official/unofficial" dichotomy. Beginning in the perestroika era of the Gorhachev period, liberalization policies, introduced the skill ongoing process of reinstitutionalization of Islam, through the building and rebuilding of mosques and more open display of religious profession. Although still suspect, 'unofficial' Islam began a process whereby it became an anachronism as it was understood during the Soviet period. Some unofficial religious leaders began to gain legitimacy. Mosque building as well as attendance became acceptable. Studying the Quran and reading Islamic literature was no longer illegal. So, the religious and ethnic identities which had been suppressed during pre-Gorbachev period emerged in the wake of new existential policies.

While reassessing the whole situation, it can be analyzed that the Soviet regime was fully determined to crush the all religious activities, deeply embedded in the Muslim ethnic identity. As, Islam always provided a sense
of security, identity and oneness among various ethnic groups of central Asia, the influence of Islamic Unity by their policies of religious suppression.

But, the Uzbek and Tajik people adjusted with the Soviet linguistic, cultural and religious allegiance. At the popular grassroots level all the local customs and traditions were followed and also there had been an observance of Islamic rites and rituals and Islam preserved in the minds and hearts of the people of central Asia.