CHAPTER-2

Impact Of Disintegration Of The Soviet Union
And Emergence Of Independent Republics On Cultural
Scene In Uzbekistan And Tajikistan

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991 of Kazakhshtan, Kirghistan, Tajikistan, Turkeminstan and Uzbekistan—all having a predominately Muslim population. The sudden demise of the communist rule has created an ideological vacuum in the region, providing Islam an opportunity to play very effective role.

Uzbekistan has a population of about 22 million (about one third of the total Central Asian population) and is the most populous Central Asian republic. About 90% of its population consists of Muslims. The Uzbek Muslims are predominantly Sunni Muslim of the Hanafi School, noted for its theological emphasis on both moderation in action and orthodox interpretation of Sunnah, the tradition of Prophet Mohammad. There are
also a small Shiite community of the Isma’ili order and a small but growing wahabi community in the Ferghana Valley. Undoubtedly, Islam has always been an integral part of the Uzbek ethnic-cultural identity. But when it was introduced into the social landscape of Central Asia in the 8th Century, it was redefined to suit the ethnic and tribal peculiarities that had shaped the life of the people for centuries. As such, Islam made its lasting imprint, not only a way of life.

The situations changed dramatically for the Muslims after the Russian consequent of Central Asia, especially after the establishment of Communist regime in 1917. During the communist rule the very fabric of the Islamic Central Asian culture was controlled, manipulated, and eradicated through official anti-religious policy. But the anti-religious campaign of the Soviet authorities could not eliminate the Islam from the minds and souls of the Central Asian people.

The Islamic revival restarted during the Gorbachev’s policy of ‘perestroika’ and ‘glasnost’ in the mid 1980’s. The people of Uzbekistan were provided, an officially
sanctioned vehicle to reassert their ethnic and religious identity after a long suppression. Several religious organisations and groups emerged on the scene and actively contributed in the revival of religious rituals and practices. The number of mosques increased considerably, and there has been a rise in the observance of Islamic rites, religious, marriages, performance of daily prayers and greater attendance at mosques.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the independence of Uzbekistan in 1991, gave a further impetus to Islamic revival and the re-assertion of Islamic identity in the Uzbek society. Since then, Islam as a religious tradition, and as a form of cultural and national identity has acquired new meanings. The mullahs who went underground during the Soviet period, now playing an active role in the restoration of Islamic rituals and practices in the country.

Islam from the very beginnings has been playing an important role in the Uzbek social life. Now, in the post-Soviet Uzbekistan it is poised to play a much influential role in the society. It is clear from the fact that after the
independence there has been a considerable increase in the number of mosques and greater attendance at mosques to perform the daily prayers. Everyday a new mosque is being inaugurated either by the official Mufti or by the mullahs. The rise in the observance of Islamic rites, adoption of the Islamic form of greetings Asslawa laikum, marriages according to strict Islamic ruled and the increasing numbers of Hajj pilgrims, show the dynamics of religious revivalism.

The revival of Sufism is evident but in a form more popular than spiritual and institutional. Everywhere mausoleums are being restored and frequented especially by women. One of the best example is Baha-ud-Dein Naqshbandi’s sanctuary in Bukhara, officially opened as a mosque in 1989, which was in September 1993, the focus of international conference for the celebration of the 675 the birthday of the leader of Maqshbandiya.1

The sudden emergence of Islam as a factor to influence the every aspects of Uzbek life is not the cause

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of worry for the Uzbek government, but the form of Islamic revivalism and the forces behind it. At present there has been a contuse tussle between ‘official Islam’ promoted by the government and ‘unofficial’ or ‘parallel Islam’ led by the mullahs, various religious groups and political parties, to manipulate Islamic revival in their own favour.

The Uzbek president Islam Karimov has been opposed to the state adopting any ideology, secular or religious. But, he has been stressing the importance of Islam in domestic and external spheres. ‘Consideration for religion and Islam plays an important part within our internal and international politics and conduct’ he stated. Speaking on Islam, he state, ‘Islam manifests itself in the way of life of the people, their psychology and in the building of spiritual and moral values, and in enabling us to feel rapport with those who practice the same religions.”² He reaffirmed the policy of

closer ties with other Muslim countries, especially Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

To improve his anti-religious image, as propagated by the Islamic militants, Islam Karimov has sponsored the revival of moderate form of Islam. He has been showing his interest in Islamic rituals and practices on personal level, also. During the visit of Saudi-Arabia in May 1992, he performed an Umra a short pilgrimage to Mecca. Following this he had begun prefacing his public speeches with ‘Bismillah al Rahman al Rahim’ (In the name of God, the Merciful and the Compassionate). He had then allowed a weekly programme on Islam to be transmitted on television, supervised by Mufti Mohammed Yousuf. Earlier he had taken his oath on the Quran. In other words, Karimov and his party were prepared to treat Islam as a crucial part of Uzbek culture, but were determined to maintain the secular basis of the state by maintaining a strict divisions between religions and government.

In the post-Soviet Uzbekistan, the most important role has been played by the agents of ‘Unofficial’ or
'parallel Islam', led by the mullahs. Through they were active even during the Soviet regime, but quite secretly, and their activities were mainly confined to rural areas, now, after the independence they have started their activities openly, without any fear and their area of influence has widened and covered the whole of Uzbekistan.

The severe restrictions put by the Communist authorities on religious practices could not eliminate Islam from the minds and hearts of the Uzbek people. The people in the private confines of their homes turned to Islam and Sufi orders for spiritual sustainance. Even the young Muslims, who joined the Communist party, remained the firm believers and practice their religion privately. The role of mullah was reduced, but not eliminated. Marriages were registered at the local Communist party office, but the mull solemnized the marriage by a formal nikah ceremony. The dowry and the bride price Kalym officially banned under communist regime were still paid, goods such as jewellery and furniture as well as sheep and goats rather than in cash.
Most people were still buried according to Islamic rites and every male child was circumcised in the traditional way by a mullah, after which a feast would be given by the boy’s parents.³

Now, after the independence of uzbekistan people can freely perform all the Islamic rituals and practices. They feel that Islam has provided them with a distinct identity and are greatly inclined to adopt the Islamic way of life. The prestige and position of mullahs have enhanced considerably. They are now believed as the Custodians of Islam. These Custodians of religion have prepared themselves to take full benefit of the new situation. They are now well prepared to play the fundamentalist card to further strengthen their hold on the Uzbek society. The want to create their influence not only on the Uzbek society but also on the political life of the country. According to fundamentalists, Islam is a socio-political ideology; and in Islam there can be no separation of the state and mosque.

Since the independence of Uzbekistan, the pace of Islamic revivalism has gathered momentum, which was initiated during the Gorbachev's period of Perestroika. During 1992 the number of mosques in Namangan province of Uzbekistan (situated in the Ferghana Valley) was 130, nearly as many as in all the Central Asia before Perestroika, with another 470 in the rest of Uzbekistan. Until 1989 only four Muslims from Namangan province were allowed to undertake the Hajj. In 1992 the figure was 1500, accounting for nearly two fifths of the country's total of 4000 pilgrims. 4

The increasing number of mosques and madrasahs in Uzbekistan indicates the growing intensity of Islamic revivalism. "Hundreds of boys and girls had already started their study in Islamic law and the Koran in 1992. Education is free and so is their simple launch, and the children are given free Islamic literature to distribute to

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4 Cited in Hiro, Dilip, op. Cit., p.179.
their families. On weekend they join mullahs to propagate their message in local village mosques.”

The message of mullahs is deceptively simple: that the government of Uzbek president Islam Karimov is still communist and anti-Islamic and must be overthrown by an Islamic revolution, which will quickly engulf the whole of Central Asia. ‘Wahabism’ the militant and conservative brand of Islam has been establishing its hold in the Ferghana valley and elsewhere. “A huge sum of money has been coming from the Ahle Sunnah movement in Saudi Arabia, which is an organization for the propagation of Wahabism. Saudi believers, who have spent hundreds of millions of dollars supporting Pro-Wahabi movements in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Middle East, have moved into Central Asia at lightning speed.”

This enormous money has been used by Wahabis for the construction of mosques and madrasahs throughout the Uzbekistan, especially in the Ferghana Valley. The Islamic militants are demanding prime lands

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5 Ahmad, Rashid, op. Cit, p.78.
6 Ibid. p.78
in the city centre to build mosques, resulting into a conflict with the official authorities. The money is also used for the propagation wahabism among the Uzbek youths, who readily join Islamic militant as a result of frustration, due to severe unemployment. The Islamists promise them to give jobs after establishment of their hold on the political power of Uzbekistan.

Uzbek official claim that the militants are creating a secret army, that students are undergoing weapons and martial arts training, and that in each city hit squads have been built up to strike at officials and create disturbances at an appropriate time. The crisis in Ferghana is compounded by the fact that local officials have no clear strategy to deal with the economic crisis and no idea how to curb the Islamic militants. The ruling government is an empty shell in the valley, unable to mobilize support against the militants. Officials themselves describe the government as rudderless either without clear political goals or an ideology. The vacuum has forced many bureaucrats either to turn to Islam or to make contacts with the militants to ensure their own
However, the militants have little influence in the capital Tashkent or in the vast southern regions of Uzbekistan, where Sufism and Uzbek nationalism are much stronger forces.

Islamic fundamentalists condemn the popular Sufi tradition in Central Asia claiming quite wrongly, that it is 'nothing but a Zionist' and Turkish conspiracy to undermine Islam.' They condemn Shias and other minority sects in Islam; meanwhile groups such as wahabis and the IRP are bitterly pitted against each other. In short, the militants maintain a narrow and highly sectarian view of Islam, which will bring them up against not only the government but other Islamic groups in the future. Much of this sectarianism has been imported from Asia and Middle East as Arabs, Pakistani and Afghan religious groups try to create new areas of influence.

Uzbekistan's intense religious and political polarization is perhaps affecting women the most. Some are being forced to confirm to fundementalist social mores, while other confront fundamentalists by taking up
women's right issues. Women who follow the Wahabis have abandoned their traditional, colourful Uzbek costumes for white veils that cover the body from head to toe.

The process of Islamization of Uzbek politics is underway as many political and socio-religious groups emerged on the scene and have been actively contributing in the revival of Islam in the country. Most notably among them are the 'Birlik', Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) and 'Adalat'.

Birlik is nationalists, board-front organization, which was demanding a complete break from Moscow, democracy the resignation of Islam Karimov and pan-Turkic alliance of the people of Central Asia. It also supports an Islamic cultural agenda and the use of the Arabic script for the written Uzbek language. Birlik is led by intellectuals, but also included environmentalists, ultra Uzbek nationalist and Pan-Turkic and Islamic activists. However its core is Uzbek nationalism, which means that it adopts diverse and often contradictory
political positions. The movement is confused and divided but it commands respect among Uzbek people.

The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) which is an inter-republican party enjoys a relatively larger following. Founded in mid-1990 in the city of Astrakhan, the IRP's objective is 'the revival of the ideals of Islam' 7. It is believed that the IRP is a part of an extensive Islamic network stretching from the north Caucasus to Central Asia. So far the IRP has been conducting its activities in conjunction with the democratic parties. This alliance has proven to be mutually beneficial to both parties. It is also demanding higher wages and lower food prices for the Uzbek people and has been organising demonstration against the government to consider their demands. Their goal is simple of creating an Islamic republic, which has placed the party on an inevitable collision course with the government. Although militant tendencies exist among some IRP factions, the party as a whole does not seem to favour a militant approach to achieving its objectives.

Rather, the electoral route to power or power sharing has been declared the preferred methods by the leadership.

The IRP has been also criticizing the official version of Islam propagated by the government. The party has been opposing the authority of the Muslim religious Board of Uzbekistan and has pressed for the dissolution of the Board and its replacement there by a new decentralized religious structure with more power vested in the regional and district organizations.8

'Adalat', which is a socio-religious organisation has its headquarters in Namangan, a bastion of Islam. It has started to impinge on the everyday life of the Muslims in the Ferghana Valley. Even in Namangan the "Adalat" formed vigilance groups to impose the veil on women and a ban on the sale of alcohol and made citizen's arrests of suspected criminals. The accused were tried by Islamic judges, who often restricted themselves to sentencing the guilty to forced labour on the construction or repairs of mosques.

8 Ibid. p.254.
The significant growing influence of Islamic forces on the Uzbek society has alerted the government. Karimov and his 'People's Democratic Party' (PDP), argue that Islam is concerned only with a person's moral and spiritual well-being. They are determined to keep religion and politics apart, a principal enshrined in the constitution. To make their point, they refer to the problems that Afghanistan is currently encountering, blaming them on the intrusion of religion into politics.

The Uzbek government is now all set to counter the growing influence of Islamists. All the activities of fundamentalist parties are banned under a provision of the new Uzbek constitution. Article 54 of the constitution of Uzbekistan forbids political parties based on nationalistic or religious principals. Aware of the popularity of Islamic revival, the regime of President Islam Karimov has gone along with it. The Karimov government appointed a mullah as the head of the 'Religious Affairs directorate' and declared Idul-Fitr and Idul-Adha public holidays. The government has paid serious attention towards building new mosques and
madrasahs and rehabilitating the old ones. It has also
decided to open Islamic institutions for the deep study
and knowledge of Islamic teachings and philosophy.
Primary schools have begun to teach Arabic, the Koran
and Islamic customs. Such schools open mainly in rural
areas, but all Children have the right to go to Muslim
school after classes in state controlled schools.

Role of Islamic countries in the religious revivalism

During the Soviet period the contacts between
Central Asia and the Islamic world was almost negligible
due to the severe restrictions of the communist regime.
Now, in the post-Soviet, Uzbekistan, there is substantial
development in the relations between Uzbekistan and the
countries of the Muslim World. As a long isolation of the
region from the main centres and cultural processes of
the Muslim world and shortage of religious literatures,
the level of religious education declined dramatically.

Now the Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan etc. have been playing an effective role in the restoration of true shape of Islam. Saudi Arabia has been providing religious services in the form of, promotion of Arabic language, pilgrimage, and renovation of historic mosques in the country. Plans have been made to send Saudi teachers to Uzbekistan as part of an effort to enhance the understanding of the tenets of Islam and Koran. "A million copies of the holy Koran have been sent to the central Asian religious board as a gesture of goodwill by the Saudi King."9 "Furthermore, the Saudi government has extended two-year invitation to those Uzbek people who wish to participate in the Hajj ceremony, to be paid for by the Saudi Ministry of Awqaf and Haj."10 Funding for religious education has also been promised by the Saudi government.

Iran, a fundamentalist Islamic country has also been developing close relations with Uzbekistan on the

9 Haqrayeghi, Mehrda, op.cit., p.262.
10 Ibid., p.262.
basis of old cultural and ethnic relations. Iran and Saudi Arabia have been pumping large sums of money for the construction of mosques and madrasahs. In other words the Islamic countries have been making vigorous efforts to create their influence in the country. But the Uzbek government seems to be very cautious in its foreign policies, especially with the Islamic countries. Although direct ties have been established with Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and agreements have been signed with them on economic cooperation and financial credits accepted, ideologically they are kept at a distance.

Islam revivalism and fear of Islamic fundamentalism

There is a schizophrenic attitude towards Islam in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. On the one hand, there is general agreement among the indigenous populations that Islam is an integral part of the national culture; on the other, there is widespread fear of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. This dichotomy is born from a lack of genuine familiarity with the religion. Since the late 1980s there has been increasing interest in Islamic culture and belief, but for the great majority of the adult population it
remains something external to their existence, almost an exotic affectation. This will certainly change: thousand of mosques and hundreds of part-time and full-time Muslim schools and colleges have been opened since 1991, and religious literature is now widely available.

It is true that Islamic revivalism and Islamic fundamentalism are two different things and cannot be compared, but it cannot be ruled out completely that intense Islamic revivalism may take the form of Islamic fundamentalism.

However, in Uzbekistan not all the areas are vulnerable to fall into the grip of Islamic fundamentalism. The Ferghana valley particularly in the vicinity of Namangan, a bastion of Islamic asceticism, these forces seem to be strong. This region is the heartland of the Islamic Revival party (IRP) and smaller fundamentalist groups such as ‘Adalat’ (Justice). ‘Adalat’ groups brought together young people at the grassroots level. Well-disciplined and skilled in martial arts, they were part of
the Muslim self-government structure. The groups included numerous Afghan war Veterans.\(^{11}\)

'Adalat' has been actively interfering in the daily life of the Uzbek people, to make it fully and purely a Islamic way of life. Their functions included the struggle against offenders, the settlement of household conflicts, and material assistance to community members. Even in Namangan the 'Adalat' formed vigilance groups to impose the veil on women and a ban on the sale of alcohol and made citizen's arrests of suspected criminals. The accused are tried by Islamic judges, who often restrict themselves to sentencing the guilty to forced labor on the construction or repairs of mosques.

It is not inconceivable that Islam might in time become politicized, a vehicle for expressing the anguish and frustration of those who have lost faith in the ability of the system of provide social justice. Yet it is unlikely, it will affect the whole Uzbekistan and its people with equal force. The growth of Islamic fundamentalism will greatly

depend on the Socio-economic development of the country as during economic distress people are more inclined to join the fundamentalist forces.

It is a well known fact that the sudden demise of the Soviet Union has influenced almost all the spheres of Uzbek life. But its impact on the religion is most remarkable. After the disintegration the Uzbek people seem to be strongly inclined to re-assert their Islamic identity. They consider that, Islam has provided them a distinct identity and has also promoted a sense of unity and integrity in the Uzbek society. The eagerness of the people to adopt Islamic way of life and the roles played by the various forces in the restoration of Islam in Uzbekistan clearly indicates that in the Post-Soviet Uzbekistan, Islam has emerged as a major force to influence the Uzbek social, political and economic life.

Cultural revivalism in independent Tajikistan

In the history of the Tajiks, their culture and spirituality are inseparably connected with Islam and a thousand-year-old Iranian cultural legacy also shared by
modern Afghans, Iranians, and Tajiks. Their synthesis produced a golden age of theology, philosophy, literature, art and music in Mawarannahr, the historical name of central Asia in the Middle Ages. The cities of Bukhara and Samarqand emerged not only as administrative centers of powerful empires and emirates, but also as important spiritual centers of the Muslim world. Among Muslims, Bukhara became known as Bukhoroi Sharif, "Sacred Bukhara," the birthplace of such important Islamic figures as Imam Ismail al-Bukhari and Bahauddin Naqshband. Imam al-Bukhari (810-870) compiled the most authentic collection of hadith, the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (God's blessing be upon him) into a book known as As-Sahih, which is revered by Muslims throughout the world as the second most important book after the Quran. Bahauddin Naqshband (1318-1389) was the founder of one of the main Sufi, mystic orders in Islam known for their desire to achieve utmost personal piety and purity. There were other Tajiks who made a significant input to the progress of world civilization and whose intellectual genius was deeply rooted in Islam. Abdullo Rudaki, Abu Ali Ibn Sina, Abu
Rajhun Biruni, Imam at-Termizi and many others not only contributed to the development of Islamic theology and philosophy but also to Christian theology and philosophy, world science, medicine and literature. For example, the "Canon of Medical Science" of Ibn Sina, who in the West is better known as Avicenna, was a standard work used by west European students of medicine through the 18th century. The flowering of arts and sciences in that period became possible because Islam created a spiritual and cultural milieu, not of a rejectionist but of an all-encompassing character vis-à-vis the legacy of Arab and Iranian pre-Islamic history and that of other civilizations.

In the 9th century, the Samanids, founders of the first Tajik state, made the belief in God and Islam the building blocks of their country and created an Islamo-Iranian (some would say Irano-Islamic) spiritual and cultural atmosphere that was preserved for centuries. Though later different Turkic dynasties Ghazanavid, Timurid, Safavid and Manghyt rose to power in the region, these foundations laid down by the Samanids
were not challenged. It is obvious that the Turkic people of the region had national traits of their own, and that they adapted Islam and, especially, Iranian culture in their own ways to serve their own needs. Yet, Islam and Iranian culture were the common bond that united people of Mawarannahr, and in the case of Islam became their way of life. It should be noted that over the centuries many things contrary to the teachings of Islam were introduced into Sharia (Islamic jurisprudence) by Central Asian ulama, religious scholars. This was done in order to please rulers, sometimes by their orders and wealthy people in general.

Islam so much imbibed Central Asian life, and Sharia regulated it, that when Russian colonizers conquered the region in 19th century they did not inconsiderately intervene into the religious and cultural spheres of the native populations. Mosques were not closed, nor were madrassahs (religious schools). Russian colonial authorities did not dictate what should be taught in madrassahs. This may be partially explained by their awareness that, alongside with Muhammad (God's
blessings be upon him), Muslims recognize Abraham, Moses and Jesus as prophets. Partly, they might have learned bitter lessons from dealing with their own Muslims. Also we should not forget the advice they received from Russian orientalists who in their own ways but in the interests of the Russian crown explored and studied Central Asia. This in no way diminishes the violence and cruelty displayed by Russian colonizers. After all, they came not as benefactors but as masters to exploit people and natural resources. Still, the cruelty of Tsarist colonialism fades to insignificance in view of the horrors the Bolsheviks brought with them. After they came to power, the Bolsheviks proclaimed that Islam, mosques, beliefs and traditions were under the protection of their revolution, and began to methodically destroy everything. They admitted application of Sharia for some time, only to replace it with their revolutionary laws, i.e., lawlessness. Paradoxically as it may sound, they began to implant idolatry by covering the country with monuments, busts and portraits of the leaders of the revolution. Another paradox was that, despite the proclamation of separation of State and Church the
Bolsheviks put churches, mosques and synagogues under their subordination and strict control once they saw that it was impossible to uproot people's belief in God. The KGB controlled and determined the scope of religious institutions' activities, and appointed and fired the clerical cadre. All the nations of the Soviet Union were trapped in a common Gulag, the horrors of which were described by Alexander Solzhenitsin. The Bolsheviks's agenda was to unite religiously and culturally different nations into one, on the basis of want of spirituality and primitive culture.

This could not but lead to mass purges of clerics and intellectuals. For the Tajiks and other Central Asian nationalities, in the 1920s and 30s this turned into the flight of tens of thousands of people into Afghanistan and other countries. Those who stayed and tried to adapt to the new regime were not spared, as were those who helped the Russian Bolsheviks install their power in the region. Moscow's emissaries saw that they could not trust even those who helped, because it was impossible to eradicate the spiritual and cultural identity of national
communists and replace it with ephemeral internationalism and belligerent atheism. Tens of thousands were either killed or sent into exile or labor camps in Siberia, the Urals and the northern Caucasus. Tajiks, as with other Central Asians, became foreigners in their own land because their religious and cultural identity were deemed "non-Soviet." In the wake of World War II, pressure on national republics diminished slightly. For the first time a Tajik became leader of the republic. Though a number of ulama returned from prison or exile, authorities doubled their control over religious activities, especially with those who professed Islam. Many people remember how Mirsaid Mushakar, a noted Tajik poet, fell into disgrace after he drew the attention of a secretary of the Communist Party's Central Committee to the inadmissability of opening an Orthodox church in Kulob with the simultaneous closure of a mosque there. Indeed, by the beginning of perestroika there were 17 mosques, 19 churches and 2 synagogues in Tajikistan, where 90 percent of the population was Muslim.
Even after the start of perestroika, when a religious revival began to flourish in Russia and other predominantly Christian republics of the Soviet Union, opponents of reform and change succeeded in having the Central Committee adopt a resolution on the "reactionary" essence of Islam. Until the year 1991 the Qur'an (Koran) remained on the black list of "subversive" literature. In Soviet years, the connection of Tajiks to the true teachings of Islam for the most part took place clandestinely. Official Islam, which operated under the omnipresent supervision of the KGB, was reduced to performing a number of rites and rituals as well as prayers. The universality of Islamic teachings was completely ignored. These teachings in their entirety were taught and studied in underground madrassahs and groups. It was good luck for Tajiks that among those who returned from prison were two outstanding Islamic scholars Qori Muhammadjon-domullo and Abdurrashid-domullo. Qori Muhammadjon-domullo was a graduate of the world-renowned Deoband University in India, and Abdurrashid-domullo graduated from one of the Bukharian madrassahs prior to the Bolshevik revolution.
Despite their old age and the terrible conditions of Stalin's labor camps, they preserved unbending Islamic spirit which helped them to pass their encyclopedic knowledge of Islam on to a small group of students, who later came to the forefront of an Islamic revival in Tajikistan and Central Asia. Others included Said Abdullohi Nuri, Muhammadsharif Himmazoda, Hikmatullo-domullo and the very bright Alloma Rahmatullo from Andizhan, who died under obscure circumstances at the beginning of the 1980s. Despite all provocations and pressure, Sufi sheikhs, leaders of Sufi communities like Abdurrahim Eloqi, Abdukariim Romiti, Eshoni Abdurahmonjon, Eshoni Turajon and others continued to devote themselves selflessly to the cause of Islam.

Underground education, the possibility to become acquainted with works of modern Islamic political thinkers, and for some a chance to get a comprehensive Islamic education in universities of the Middle East led to the formation of a number of young broad-minded preachers of Islam. The communist authorities, KGB and
their clients in mosques were up in arms against them, and once again there was persecution and prison terms. But they remained faithful to their teachers and the Sacred Vow to commit their lives to revival of the true Islam not a communist one. That is why the appearance of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRP) on the political landscape of the country was a natural development at the time of perestroika. Perestroika provided the possibility for the revival of all religions in the Soviet Union, Islam included. In Tajikistan, as elsewhere in Central Asia and other Muslim-populated regions of the USSR, substantial progress was made in pursuing this goal despite prolonged opposition on the part of local Communist authorities. Between 1989 and 1992 more than three thousand mosques were built under the supervision of the Qoziyot, Muslim Spiritual Board, which this author headed. The Imam at-Termizi Islamic Institute was founded and many religious schools were established to instruct children in Islam. Since the Qoziyot, being a religious, non-political organization in accordance with its charter was not allowed to participate in political affairs, there was a need to establish a
political party to express the concerns and aspirations of the Tajik Muslims. Hence the IRP appeared in 1989. Its emergence was not taken well by, or approved of, by many for different reasons. Initially, this author considered such a step premature and warned that haste in such matters could be fraught with dire consequences. I thought that time was necessary to prepare public opinion to accept the idea of such a party. Unfortunately, on the other side of the political spectrum there were those who, though publicly claiming to be Muslims, in reality denied preachers of Islam the very right to participate in political life, not at that time nor in future. Since they constituted the majority in the Supreme Soviet, they denied the IRP official registration. This happened despite the fact that the IRP charter stated that it was a parliamentary political party that condemned the assumption of power through the use of force. Its leaders and myself in the capacity as the Qadi (chief Islamic cleric) and Chairman of the Muslim Spiritual Board repeatedly made it clear through numerous sermons, speeches and interviews that they had no intention of establishing a theocratic
fundamentalist state in Tajikistan, and that they would never strive to impose Islamic ideology and their objectives on the citizens of the country. The IRP's objective was to play a role of its own in the spiritual revival and self-realization of the nation, and to defend the rights and demands of Muslims. We were guaranteed the right to participate in political and social life of our country by the constitution. Exercising this right, the author and two other imams, ran and were elected deputies of the Supreme Soviet as private citizens. Yet, former Communists-turned-Muslims tried to convince the public at large that Islamic preachers did not have the right to participate in politics, and that their place should be confined to the walls of a mosque and/or a madrassah. In this case it should be written down in the constitution that believers shall not have the right to elect or be elected. In such a case it will mean a return to totalitarianism not a movement toward democracy, as every leader in Central Asia pledges his policy is today. They do not understand that religion establishes and defines relationship, not only between man and God, but between man and man as well, in all aspects of their
relationships. Politics is just one aspect of this relationship, and to reduce functions of religion to purely a relationship between God and man is to narrow the functions of religion. Islam does not recognize such interpretation of the functions of religion.

In the West, nobody challenges the right of parties rooted in Christianity or Judaism to exist, run in the elections, be elected, become a ruling party or a member of a coalition and run a country. But as soon as there is a talk about the same thing happening in a country where the majority of the population is Muslim, we see that an excuse is made and justification is provided for those who, by military force, make null and void the free and democratic expression of the will of people, as happened with elections in Algeria. If the West, France in particular, had demonstrated patience with the Algerian Islamists who were to come to power through parliamentary elections, that would have been best for all. As the British say, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." Instead of writing a hundred books on Islam and modernity, Islam and democracy, we should rather have
seen it in practice. Is Islamists failed in Algeria, only then, could one have said that Islam and democracy are incompatible. In this respect, Iran cannot be taken as a practical example of Sunni Muslims. We had a similar experience when, in 1992, one representative of the IRP became a member of the Tajikistan's Government of National Reconciliation. That was reason enough for the United States, in the person of then-Secretary of State James Baker, to pour its anger out on a small, newly independent country. The same was the reaction in "democratic" Russia. Some of her military and political elites, which would have liked to subordinate Islam and use it for their own purposes, decided to put their stakes on old nomenklatura and criminal elements. Using many mistakes of the incipient democratic forces, this alliance of old apparatchiks and criminal elements succeeded in making the Supreme Soviet vote for the parliamentary coup. Even the United Nations justified this coup and denounced the Government of National Reconciliation as Islamist, despite the knowledge that this government was transitional. Its term was to expire in December 1992 when first free and democratic parliamentary elections
should have taken place. Old, pro-status quo forces felt threatened by these elections and their failure, and pushed the country into the civil war.

The civil war has already claimed tens of thousands of lives. Hundreds of thousands who became refugees are scattered around the world, many of them in Afghanistan and Russia. In the course of the war, the united Tajik opposition, of which the IRP and Islamic religious figures are part, was drawn, not of its own will nor out of the wish to pursue its own group or personal interests, into armed struggle. It was compelled to accept the conditions forced upon it in order to protect the lives and honor of its members and supporters. It is common knowledge that civil wars do not have winners; the whole nation suffers. The sacred commandments of Islam consider creating peace between warring brothers one of the greatest virtues. In our time at the end of the 20th century this commandment has become one of the most important ones that will determine the safe future of mankind. Today, countries of the world are so
intertwined that conflict and destabilization in one of them can undermine stability in the whole region.

Aware of that, we put forward a concrete plan for the restoration of peace and stability in Tajikistan in December 1993, which found supporters both inside and outside the country. We hope that the UN-mediated intra-Tajik peace talks which began in April 1994 will result in peace and national reconciliation of our long-suffering people. Today, nobody in the West, the United States, Russia or in neighboring countries believes that the IRP and the Muslim Spiritual Board of Tajikistan, which today form the Movement for the Islamic Revival of Tajikistan (MIRT), had plans to impose a theocratic state on our people and send the country down the drain of obscurantism. They understand that the MIRT has a legitimate role to play in the spiritual and political life of Tajiks, their national revival and state-building. Even the most belligerent atheist can not deny that, without a profound knowledge of the Quran, it is impossible to penetrate the deepness and charm of the poetry of Rudaki, Firdawsi, Saadi, Hafiz, Rumi, and many of our
other great poets. For centuries our jurisprudence was based on Sharia. It was preserved even through the Soviet period of our history as far as marriage, divorce and inheritance were concerned. We are deeply convinced in the universality of Islam, but now, as earlier and in the future, we are not going to impose our platform and ideology on anyone. The Sacred Quran proclaims "There is no compulsion in religion." Preaching Islam does not exclude the domains of politics, economy and legislation. These fields were and will remain spheres of our activities. Those who say that this will never be the case in Tajikistan either have not been liberated from the Communist ideology or are unaware of the aspirations of their own people. And Tajiks in their majority were and will remain Muslims, who wish to live their own way.