CHAPTER-5

An Overview- Challenges And prospects of Cultural Change in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

The sudden breakup of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and subsequent independence of Central Asian Republics including Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have posed many serious challenges before these newly independent republics. Cultural revival has emerged as one of the most challenging task in these two republics as it is closely associated with the nation-building process. Though all the former Soviet Union republics have started to rediscover their lost cultural and religious identities, the process of cultural change in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has been more prominent.

In the wake of independence, people soon began to re-discover and re-reflect upon the lost social, cultural and political identities. Two most important aspects of cultural revivalism in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are
religion, (which is predominantly Islam) and language and literature.

Culturally, Islam has provided great moral and cultural strength to the masses and so has emerged as the most important factor in the formation of national identities in both these republics. Now people can freely observe the Islamic rituals and practices. They believe that Islam has provided them with a distinct identity and are greatly inclined to adopt the Islam as a way of life. It can be seen from the fact that since 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 'assalamualaikum', marriages according to the strict Islamic rules and the increasing number of Hajj pilgrims, show the dynamics of cultural 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 the women. One of the best example is Baha-ud-din Naqshaband’ 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 675th birthday of the leader of Naqshbandiya.¹

But the Islamic revivalism has also brought about numerous challenges for the people. The rises of many fundamentalists’ groups and political parties based on Islam are on rise and have been trying to establish themselves in the name of cultural revivalism. They have been enforcing and propagating a strict Islamic code of life among the people.

According to fundamentalist’s viewpoint Islam cannot be isolated from the socio-cultural and political life of the society. The Islamic scholars have been subscribing to this viewpoint that an inseparable component of this religion is its exceptionally codified regulation of literally

all walks of the life of Muslims. This code must not only be followed in the religious spheres but also in the norms of conduct and mutual relations with the rest of the people.

"A majority of contemporary Muslim divines subscribe to the view that Islam has not only the capability to regulate activities of men in the sphere of politics and economics, not to speak of law making but an obligation to actively intervene in these domains". It is these peculiarities of Islam (it's pervasive character) which leads the leaders of religio-political parties and movements to justify their political activities on the basis of Quran and Sunna.

Now, in both these republics fundamentalist forces have thrown a major challenge to liberal and secular government's machinery. To counter the move of fundamentalists to radicalize the Islam for their own vested interests, the govt. of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have also started to propagate a liberal and tolerant form

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of Islam among the masses. Since the breakup of the USSR they have been trying to give Islam a more official status and recognition and make it a household word. Primary schools have begun to teach Arabic script, as well as the Quran and Muslim customs. Such schools operate mainly in rural areas, but all children have the right to go to Muslim schools after classes at state-controlled schools.

The rise of militant Islam in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has not only been damaging the secular fabric in these republics but are also affecting the political, economic and social conditions in a big way and ruining the secular and tolerant image of Uzbek and Tajik societies. The rising popularity of these fundamentalist groups has not only alarmed the governments of the respective states but they are viewed as the threat to the security of whole Central Asian region. The unofficial clergy (mullahs) who went underground during the soviet period have now been active again and busy in propagating strict Islamic code of life among masses even by forceful means.
Is Threat of Islamic Fundamenatlism Real?

This is a very complex question to answer in case of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan as scholars differ in their views on this subject. There were strong cultural and political opinions by numerous scholars and commentators suggesting and defining characteristics of five Central Asian republics mainly Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, predicting that these two regions would unite with the wider Muslim world to create a Muslim bloc.

However, the widely held assumption that Islam is likely to be a potent force in shaping the future of the Central Asian Republics is not accurate. Many differing opinions of scholars and researchers have felt that there are certain factors that suggest that these Republics will not fall under the sway of an Islam led opposition and that a unified Muslim state across the whole central Asia would be too unrealistic to be true.

Hence, I would like to explore and investigate the dynamics of Islamic revivalism in Central Asia, mainly
Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and provide a realistic assessment of its role in these regions. The following aspects would be assessed

- Describing the survival of Islam as a cultural phenomenon in Central Asia after seventy years of the Soviet anti-religious crusade.

- Examining the nature and scope of Islamic revivalism, post independence in these regions.

Assessing a number of factors capable of having an impact on the process of Islamic revivalism, including

(a) Internal factors such as economic determinants in pushing the republics towards Islam.

(b) External pressures exerted from the middle east in shaping the Islamic orientation.

Before dwelling further into these aspects, it is important to diagnose what exactly is meant by 'Islamic threat' in Central Asia? Since Islam's role is an important cultural force and a component of the Central Asian national identity, these experts believe that Islam's socio-cultural
clout is a fertile soil bed for the manifestation of Islam as an authoritative political ideology. They subscribe to the view of a region wide, anti-western Islamist network operating throughout Central Asia which is dedicated to establishing Islamic governments based on the principles of 'sharia' [sacred law of Islam] and using violence as a method of spreading militant and fanatical Islam. Hence, my argument will attempt to demonstrate strengths and weaknesses of this interpretation of the of Islam in this region.

**Internal Dynamics of the Cultural revivalism.**

With the end of the Soviet power the world witnessed a resurgence of Islam in all the Central Asian Republics including Uzbekistan and Tajikistan., an understandable reaction to Islam's long drawn oppression under Soviet rule. However, this 'Islamic renaissance' is discussed chiefly in connection with the emergence of Islam on the Political stage (in a militant doctrinaire form), rather than in relation to the

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strengthening of enlightenment tendencies. During the Soviet era, Islam was largely de-intellectualized, surviving mainly in its ritual and traditional forms. Prolonged isolation from the sources of knowledge about the Religion led to almost universal ignorance about the basic tenets of Islam. With Independence, the Central Asian leadership aimed to re-educate their subjects about the basic principles of their faith, recognizing Islam's strength as an element of national rediscovery. As such, it is important to understand that the Islamic revival is principally bound upon the reconisance of national identity.

This is reflected in the dramatic increase in mosque construction, Islamic schools and the observance of Islamic rituals. For example, in Uzbekistan by 1997, the number of mosques had increased from 80 to 500. In conjunction with this, madrasahs or Islamic schools opened, offering courses in Arabic, Shariah law and Islamic history. They also provide clerical training for young Muslims who wish to make Islam as a career. And although the vulnerability to Islam of the different
peoples of Central Asia varies from Republic to Republic, the observance of Islamic rituals has generally been on the rise. Central Asian peoples generally observe 'circumcision' of newborns and the tradition of providing a 'kalym' [bride-price] to the bride's family. They also perform important acts of faith, such as, fasting, pilgrimaging to Mecca, participation in Friday prayers and mosque attendance, which have all increased dramatically.

Whilst the republics have a desire to connect more fully with the traditional practices and culture the Islamic past, their religious awareness does not necessarily translate into radical, political behaviour. In fact, some important factors suggest that Islam will not take a revolutionary form in Uzbekistan. First, 98% of the Central Asian Muslims are Sunni Muslims of the 'Hanafi school of law' not shiite Muslims. This immediately works to the disadvantage of the most radical Islamic clergy in the region, in Iran, and to the advantage of more conservative elements.
Second, we must take into account the fact that the revival of Islamic consciousness came in a variety of forms. Unfortunately, many people neglect the diversity of Islam and espouse the politicized form as the absolute version. This certainly is not the case, especially if we look at the huge revival in Sufis the Mystical strand in Islam. Sufism has been one of the most tolerant forms of religion, incorporating, Buddhist, Shaman and Christian tenets and it helped mould tolerance towards all religions/ Sufis do not believe in Political parties and have no desire to preach a political cause and focus instead on tradition and ritual. Other Muslim devotees continued to follow a primarily secular path, adopting the Muslim appellation and identity without corresponding ritual practice. Others observe, holidays, rituals and Friday prayer, but altered little else in their lifestyles. Some, particularly the youth, chose a stricter form of religious practice: they undertook religious education and adopted religious dress and other tenets posed by conservative Islam. Still, others saw Islam as the basis for an alternative political system. The differences in Islamic adherence reflect the absence of true religious
solidarity in the region. The Islamic bond in Central Asia is highly exaggerated whilst sectarian, tribal, ethnic, linguistic and national differences have been underestimated. But these disparities are not necessarily a barrier to united Islamic activity, they can significantly decelerate or hinder the development of radical Islamic movement that similar to other political ideologies, require a high degree of national unity and support if it is to succeed in capturing power.

Islam and National Identity

An increasingly important role played by Islam is its function as a component of Central Asian identity in an area that is desperately searching for an identity. While Islam is not a significant factor in the politics of republics will be quite useful in dealing with Russia, since Islam along with their Turkish heritage, is what distinguishes republics from Russia. Islam, as Graham Fuller puts it, is an element of nationalism itself. In my interpretation, Fullers’s option is quite correct because Islamic renaissance and national rebirth are closely intertwined in each state. Islam in the republics is largely a means of
national self-identification, an instrument of spiritual liberation from Moscow, from the excessive influence of the communist system and the Slavic culture-expressions of foreign colonial domination. It is likely therefore that as nationalist movements build identity and grow vis-a-vis Russia in the forthcoming years, the Islamist factors will increasingly play a part in any confrontation. Islam and nationalism, rather than act as opposing forces, will mutually stimulate each other: the Islamic consciousness will help shape Central Asia's national regional identities and vice versa. However, Islam, as an expression of national self-consciousness is and will remain innocuous and far from revolutionary.

Islam as a Political Force

After Independence, Islam's participation in Politics seemed quite unexpected to many people. It was not easy at first glance to find a place in the Political makeup of Soviet society that could be taken by Islamists. The total domination of the communist party, the absence of Political freedom and the general passiveness had created a political culture which rendered it unlikely that Islamic
groups would pursue serious political activity. However, the threat of fundamentalism in Islam in the political sphere was seen clearly in the Tajik war.

When commentators write of an Islamic threat in Central Asia, they often use the Tajik civil war to back their claims. They point to this conflict in order to illustrate how Islam, a cultural religious phenomenon, manifests itself in politics. In May 1992, fighting erupted in Dushanbe between government dominated by former communist regional elite from Khujand and Kulob and the Islamic and democratic parties representing mostly Gharim and Badkhanshani clans. Fed by weapons supplied by both the disintegrating Soviet army and neighboring Afghanistan, the war spread across South of Tajikistan and back into the capital. By September, the opposition ousted president Nabiev, leading to a counter offensive by restorationist forces spearheaded by a para-military organization, the popular front. A precarious stability returned in December when these forces, now backed by Russia and Uzbekistan, pushed the fighters of
the Islamic-democratic opposition and thousands of refugees across the freezing Amu Darya into Afghanistan.

To the West and to Russia, the events of Spring Autumn 1992 in Tajikistan showed the radicalization of the Islamic movement, especially as the opposition was said to be inspired and armed by militant Iranian and Afghan extremists wanting to further the cause of Islam. What is more, the media portrayed the conflict in Tajikistan as a model for future conflicts in Central Asia, where Islamic fanatics would use force to challenge state authority. Indeed, on the surface, the civil war pitted an 'Islamic democratic coalition', whose essential component was the Islamic renaissance party [IRP], fighting against the old communists. And certainly the Islamists played up the ideological dimensions of the conflict: during the anti-government rallies, they conspicuously deployed the whole vocabulary of Islamic symbolism including the Green flag, quotations from Quran and the chants borrowed from the Islamic revolution in Iran.

However it is imperative to understand that the Islamic led opposition was driven as much as clan
rivalries, the growth of localism and regionalism as by their desire to establish a theocratic based on Islamic principles. Local people saw the IRP as a political party first, representing the interests of particular regions and clans and an Islamic party second.

**Culture and the State**

However, there is one important reason why Islam could become radical: Islam can grow as a vehicle of protest against Central Asian regimes, when they are oppressive and incapable of meeting economic and social needs. Fuller explains that there is no reason that Central Asia should be immune from the pattern of Islamic political trends and movements that we see in other Muslim countries where the Islamists have often been the primary vehicle of organized opposition against the illegitimate or failing regime. Islam could emerge as a political force in case of the existing regime's economic and political failure; such a failure would discredit the governing elite ideology and thus create an opportunity for an Islamic regime to emerge as an attractive ideology for an oppressed populace. But if Islamic political
participation is encouraged, extremist elements will not have a place in Central Asian Politics.

**Culture and Economics**

The collapse of the Soviet Union rapidly catapulted the Central Asian states into the International arena and dramatically deepened the economic crisis in the region. Within the following two years, the republics received a fast lesson in what Independence signified. In December 1991, Russia cut off trade with Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks went into the winter of 1992 short of fuels and grains. New bilateral treaties were quickly negotiated which eased the crisis, but the Republics learned that they had to make their own way into the world. This was not an easy task considering that none of the Central Asians had any foreign legations since Russia had seized the Soviet Union's foreign assets, saying that the price of receiving a share of the Soviet's hard currency debt. This was something that the republics felt that they could not do. So by 1993, they each signed treaties with Russia in which they renounced claims to the Soviet union's legacy. Domestically, they were suffering as well, with inflation
rampant and economic productivity dropping rapidly. The Central Asian's acute economic need compelled them to turn to the International community. Olcott explained that with independence, the leaders of the new states hoped to use their ethnic composition to attract international investment and foreign support. She contends that in order to strike the best deals possible between their own national interest and those of a partner, the republics could play various ethnic cards in the International arena. Among these ethnic cards is their Islamic religions. Olcott has made a very interesting point since she is suggesting that internal economic forces could be responsible for pushing the republics towards Islam.

Indeed the Central Asian leaders, though committed to the development of Secular societies hoped to use Islam for financial reasons, since the oil rich Gulf states were potential sources of aid and investment. However, the way in which the 'Islamic card' has been played varies among the Central Asians. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan where the Muslim population is more devout
and homogenous have shown a lot of motivation in pursuing contacts with the Gulf States. Their leaders hoping to expand commercial activities in their respective republics have made well-publicized trips to a number of Arab countries. President Karimov of Uzbekistan also emphasized his devotion to Islam by taking a presidential oath on Koran and telling interviewers that he only ate 'halal meat' that met Muslim standards. Overall the Republics have been cautious in playing their 'Islamic card'. Muslim societies are good sources of commercial investment, but the problem is that most of their foreign aid programs are linked to projects designed to propagate faith, and in the light of the dangers of Islamic extremism, the republics have been more eager to work with the rest of the world instead. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has already begun nurturing relationships with countries and multilateral institutions where big money is. The United States, Germany, France, Japan, China and South Korea are all on their way to becoming the regions major trading partners and investors. Malaysia and Indonesia, moderate Islamic countries, have also expressed interest in becoming partners with
the republics and in assisting them in their path towards development.

In the foreseeable future, the Muslim countries of the Near and the Middle East are likely to play the least important economic role in the republics. Thus it is unlikely that economic exigencies will force the republics to play their 'Islamic card' to attract commercial activity since they have other alternatives.

Islam and External Influences

The role of Islamic countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey in the Islamic revivalism of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan also cannot be undermined. All these countries have been making vigorous efforts to create their influence by developing economic and political ties with the Uzbeks and the Tajiks. Saudi Arabia and Iran have been pumping large sums of money for the construction of mosques and madarsahs and also sending religious teachers to guide the people in preaching the true form of Islam. For Saudi Arabia, the 'Haj' becomes a magnetic attraction for Uzbek and Tajik
Muslims. "The revival of Islamic rituals and practices in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are seen in the West and elsewhere as the fertile ground for theocratic Islamic state. Initial success of the diplomatic moves from Iran, Turkey and Pakistan are cited as evidence." But the Uzbek and Tajik 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 up with them on Economic cooperation and financial credits accepted, ideologically they are kept at a distance.

Is economic condition responsible for rise of Islamists?

The deteriorating economic conditions in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have provided the Islamists with an opportunity to legitimize their position in the society. Processes are underway in these republics, which seek to politicize Islam, primarily in areas with high population densities and low standards of living in particular, the Ferghana valley of Uzbekistan. This politicization,
unofficial or even openly antagonistic to the ruling government, is usually regarded by authorities as a threat of fundamentalism, but this approach can hardly be fully justified. The social significance of this process is obvious: the countryside, groaning under demographic pressures and inhabited by small landowners, looks to Islam for language to formulate and articulate its needs and demands.

The traditional countryside is arming itself with Islam as a political ideology and is becoming politicized as it sees no other way out of the present situation. Movements of this sort are typical of societies passing through deep crisis. People in such conditions see no real prospects for themselves in earthly life; they hate the present and fear the future. The only way to survive is to idealize the past. A turn to bygone days prompted by despair.

Though the rise of radical Islam has been seriously affecting the all section of the Uzbek and Tajik societies but it has severely affected the position and status of women in these republics. Some of them are
being forced to conform to fundamentalist social mores, while others confront fundamentalism by taking up women's rights issues. The fundamentalists have been demanding the withdrawal of young girls from the schools.

Islamists are also imposing the 'veil system' on women. This in turn will greatly affect the status of women in Uzbek and Tajik society. During the Soviet period women had been enjoying great social and economic freedom and were as par with men in all social and political activities. If the influence of radical Islam continue to grow the role and position of women in these societies may decrease considerably.

**Will Democracy prevail in these republics?**

In practicing Democracy (which is the government's main agenda) various religious groups, organisations and political parties have emerged on the scene and are actively contributing in the Islamic revivalism. Some of the political parties like 'Birlik' and 'Erk' have nationalism as their main agenda, while others like
Islamic renaissance party and Adalat have made Islamic revival as their main weapon in order to grab political power of the country, causing a danger for the secular fabric of the country. This has also caused fear and insecurity amongst the 'non-muslims' especially Russians encouraging their out migration. Determined to maintain the secular nature of the country, the Uzbek government has banned all the political parties and groups based on religion or nationalism under the new Uzbek constitution. The Uzbek president Islam Karimov stated that 'Islam manifests itself in the way of life of the people, their psychology and in building up of spiritual and moral values and enabling us to feel rapport with those who practice the same religion'. The government is opposed to link religion with the state. On the other hand, the fundamentalists believe that Islam is a socio political ideology and there can be no separation between the state and mosque. They have dubbed the government of Islam Karimov as authoritative and undemocratic. But at present Islamic political forces are seen lying low and may not pose any major threat to politics of the country.

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The democratic nationalist parties like 'Birlik' and 'erk' are much stronger political forces than the IRP or 'adalat'.

The deteriorating economic condition of the country has been further aggravated by the out-migration of skilled Russian workers, causing the closure of many basic industries. As a result, the rising unemployment and inflation have provided an opportunity to the Islamic groups to agitate against the government. The fundamentalists have been trying to convince the unemployed Uzbek youths to join them and they promise them jobs after capturing the political power. On the whole, the situation remains manageable at least in case of Uzbekistan.

Emergence of Uzbek and Tajik language as a symbol of cultural identity

Current language policies in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan developed in parallel with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and were left in the hands of persons trained in Soviet-style state bureaucracy. In 1989–1990, language laws were passed in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.
laying down the rights and obligations in the use of languages. Ensuing language reform has been devoted to corpus issues - first and foremost the question of a change-over to Latin script, but also lexical revision. Even though the implementation of language laws is slow and hesitating, the intensified preoccupation with linguistic matters in the newly-independent states of the region has made people more conscious of their own linguistic destiny and language identities. This concern among language users will add further dynamism to linguistic issues and influence both official language reform and developments for which there are not yet any definite plans.

Within a period lasting less than a year, between July 1989 and May 1990, and as part of a political development that culminated in the final disintegration of the Soviet Union, the five Central Asian languages Tajik (Iranic), Kazakh, Kirghiz, Uzbek and Turkmen (Turkic) were proclaimed the official languages and ultimately the state languages of their respective eponymous republics and would-be sovereign states. These languages were
already defined and, to varying degrees, developed as standardised, sovietised, languages.

The proclamation as official languages was no surprise to anyone and was instead part of a general trend among the Soviet republics. Similar developments could be identified occurring in other parts of the union. Furthermore, it was a generally held belief or expectation that the conferring of official status to such languages was but a natural course of events and the fruit of the endeavours of groups of people, possibly the majority of people, in the republics in order to gain autonomy or even independence. This expectation was reinforced – not least among linguists in the West – by the final collapse of Soviet socialism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The symbolic impact of language is also generally recognized; it easily becomes a feature of identity or an index of cultural belonging of some sort or other. In Western thinking, the symbolism of language has acquired a significant political dimension as a result of the inclusion of language in definitions of ethnicity and nation.
In 1991, as the Soviet Union was split up and new states involuntarily came into existence, the idea of nation-state grew strong and nation-building became an important political goal with language as one of its focal points. The Central Asians were already familiar with this mainly Western idea of nation-building; as members of the Soviet state they had, after all, experienced its impact for the past seventy years. However, they had never before experienced it as a sovereign people, left as they were with the responsibility of determining the features of nationhood for themselves.

**Uzbek and Tajik Language policy**

Another conceptual problem that these republics are facing is that of language policy. Their legacy here is, quite naturally, Soviet language policy which during the Soviet era became highly centralised, being as it was designed and controlled by the central authorities in Moscow and first and foremost characterised by the dominance and influence of the Russian language. The men and women in charge of current language laws and their implementation were brought up with this kind of
language policy. Consequently, present-day Uzbek and Tajik language policies are centralised rather than decentralised, though this time at the local level instead of at a broad all-union level. Further, the languages to which the present-day language policies in the former Soviet Union are applied are former standardised Soviet languages and, as such, are more or less russified languages. At present, Uzbekistan is the only Central Asian state to have a language policy in the sense of a strategy for fundamental change of language practice in the country. For other states and nations it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of tendencies or inclinations in linguistic matters, rather than fully-fledged language policies.

In Uzbekistan today, for example, the language issue is not as politically hot as it was just a few years ago. Uzbek has been established as the state language and is safe in this respect. At the same time there is some fatigue caused by practical intricacies and the slowness of language reform, particularly among politicians who are constantly faced with more urgent
problems in other areas of society. It ought to be mentioned, however, that an impressive amount of language reform work has been undertaken already in Uzbekistan. The Uzbeks are admittedly embracing a fairly broad-scale language policy which includes both alphabet and vocabulary. This is, however, no indication that the Uzbeks always know what they are doing or what they want to do.

**Alphabet reform in Uzbekistan**

One intricate circumstance in the case of Uzbek language policy is the presence of the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakistan within the state borders of Uzbekistan. Karakalpakistan is, to a certain degree, allowed its own autonomous language policy, as is stated more or less emphatically in the Uzbek state language laws. However, thus far, there have been hardly any discernible signs of any independent Karakalpak language policy. Instead, the decision makers in the Karakalpak capital Nukus seem to closely follow the decisions already taken by the central government in Tashkent. The modified Karakalpak Latin alphabet
introduced in 1995, for example, showed the same changes as the revised Uzbek Latin alphabet which had been presented a few months earlier, and the same deadline of September 2005 was set down for the changeover to the new Karakalpak alphabet. The two alphabets that have been so far proposed for Uzbek in 1993 and 1995 respectively, have been heavily criticized even by the Uzbeks themselves, including Uzbek linguists. From a linguistic point of view, the alphabets proposed can hardly be regarded as improvements on the current Cyrillic alphabet; they are more or less just schemes for Cyrillic-Latin transliteration. The preparations for the change to Latin script continue at a rather slow pace. Nevertheless, a detailed plan has been conceived for the implementation of the Latin alphabet for Uzbek, at least in Uzbek schools and higher institutes.

The first Central Asian republic to make its national language the state language of the republic was Tajikistan. Tajikistan has a large Uzbek population, and concessions were made in the Tajik language law of 1989 for the practice and teaching of Uzbek, in the same
manner as concessions were made for the usage of the international Russian language and Russian-Tajik bilingualism in the republic. Provision was also to be made for the preservation and use of minority languages in Gorno Badakhshan. With little or no further alteration, the entire Tajik language law came into effect on 1 January 1990 and was met with demands for a gradual implementation of the law.

As for Tajik alphabet revisions, there have appeared no official decisions or concrete proposals so far. On the other hand, the Arabic script has made its way back more strongly in this republic than in the others. However, the Latin script has its proponents even among the Tajiks. As regards Tajik in Uzbekistan, this is a sensitive question and one which should be politely avoided, at least during interviews at the Ministry of Education in Tashkent. During the author's visits in Samarkand and Bukhara in May 1996, some of her interlocutors at the universities there were of the opinion that there should be cooperation and coordination between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan on the alphabet issue,
since the Uzbek and Tajik languages and literature are so closely intertwined and ought, therefore, to employ the same type of script. This would not, however, be an easy task.

Language and identity

With new socio-political contexts emerging in present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, most identities in this region are in a sensitive state of readjustment and redefinition, be they ethnic, cultural, national or any combination of these. The new conditions may have effects on every single individual, no matter if he identifies himself in the first place with a majority group or a state minority group.

Surprisingly little attention has so far been paid to the fact that the adoption of Uzbek as a state language is a measure of national re-identification that affects non-Uzbek nationals as much as, and in one important sense, even more than it does ethnic Uzbeks. These other nationals, who are now expected to become Uzbeks both where state loyalty and
national identity are concerned, may have found Russian a more neutral interethnic and official language, insofar as this language was equally foreign to all indigenous groups, ethnic Uzbeks included, and did not interfere with group identities at a lower level. The uncertainty among officials as to the fate of Tadzhik script in Uzbekistan in the event of a change of Uzbek alphabets and possibly a simultaneous change of Tajik alphabets in Tajikistan indicates that not all aspects of the effects of the Uzbek language reform on the statuses and corpora of minority languages in the country have been fully considered.

The state language laws enforced by the Uzbek and Tajik parliaments in 1989 and 1990 were first and foremost language status laws which laid down the rights and obligations in the use of languages and the choice of language in specific public settings and official functions. To a much lesser extent, and merely in the form of general comments or recommendations, the laws referred to language corpus issues such as alphabet, vocabulary and grammar. These matters were to be later regulated
by additional laws and proposals within the few years following the first round of enactment of state language laws and while they were simultaneously the focus of attention in public debates incited by the work performed on establishing state languages.

Much of the follow-up work of language law implementation in these states at the present moment is concerned with not the status but the state of languages. In this regard, arguments are often put forward concerning the necessity to improve not only people's proficiency in the state language of their republic, but also the very corpus of this language. In the lexical field, responsible linguists call for moderation and caution against the threat of anarchy through the allowance of too much spontaneity. At the same time there is greater eagerness among language users in general to resuscitate older vocabulary or to create words from indigenous language material in order to counterbalance the Russian influence on Uzbek and Tajik lexical stock. Evidence of this is, for example, in Uzbekistan, the use of *tajjoragoh* (Arabic and Persian) instead of the Russian *aeroport* for
'airport'. In the fields of new technology and new sociopolitical and economic paradigms, the principle of internationalism seems to be favoured and there is no bias against Western terminology, including Russian: for example, in Uzbekistan Russian komp'juter is used together with biznes, menezher (English).

Central Asian minority languages, which are now under the regime of new official language policies and they are now linked to quite different conditions than they were just a decade ago. This situation offers another challenging field for future linguistic research. We have here focused on official language policies or strategies in the newly-independent Uzbek and Tajik states. As in the case of any political activity, there is also a non-official aspect. Language debate and enforced changes of linguistic behaviour, of which one impact is the above mentioned 'language reform awareness', may also cause reactions and linguistic changes that are in opposition to the official language reform work or some development for which there is not yet any definite plan.
The current linguistic awareness and cultural transformation in large parts of the Central Asian region is of immediate interest to all concerned. Furthermore, this transformation might well add dynamism to linguistic issues and have influence on attitudes towards language and culture even in state bureaucracies.

In the post Soviet Uzbekistan and Tajikistan ongoing cultural change has acquired great significance in the nation-building process. Both their Religion which is predominantly Islam and their language have emerged as the most important aspect of cultural reassertion in these republics. The degree of synthesis of Islam and languages in Uzbekistan and Tajiskatan are thus bound to determine the stability of their regimes, indeed their very future.