Preface
Situated in the very heart of Asia, Central Asia is a landlocked region with its borders touching the Caspian Sea in the west, China in the east, Russia in the north, and Iran and Afghanistan in the south. The region is unique in terms of its geopolitical importance because it was the counterpoint of British and Russian empires in the nineteenth century and still continues to be the same in the twenty first century. Historically, it has been a bridge between East Asia and Middle East as well as between individual countries like Russia, Iran, China and Pakistan. It has now become an East-West and North-South connection bridge, and has thus gained a privileged situation, which the territory of Iran facilitates.

The whole region is a considerable landmass, even if much of it comprises desert, steppe and mountainous areas. The Central Asian countries hold out economic promises in the form of oil, gas, precious metals and minerals. Turkmenistan, for instance, is the world’s second largest natural gas exporter, and Uzbekistan, whose enormous mineral resources include gold, uranium and copper, is a major economic power in the region. Kazakhstan has highest deposits of oil among all the Central Asian Republics and has also large deposits of nickel, gold, cobalt and uranium. Kyrgyzstan also has gold, uranium and coal. The resources of Tajikistan are largely unexplored, but its strategic geographical position makes it crucial to the region. In India’s perception, the Central Asian region is a major force to reckon with and also a force for stability and global security.

India and Central Asia, with common and contiguous borders, climatic continuity, similar geographical features and geo-cultural affinity have long
traditions of socio-cultural, political and economic contacts since remote past. Their relations have been multi-dimensional, deep, old and continuous. There has been an uninterrupted flow of men, material and ideas between the two regions. After the five Central Asian countries declared their independence in 1991, India immediately recognized the sovereignty of these countries and took steps to shore up their independence. In various ways, India worked to foster their development towards politically stable and modernizing countries. India believes that political and economic changes should be evolutionary in character and peaceful in nature. India also supports strong governance as weak central governments are more vulnerable to violent and highly motivated radical groups.

Following the emergence of newly independent five Central Asian countries, India forged diplomatic relations with them by establishing embassies in the capital cities of these new Republics. High profile national leaders from the five Republics were invited on state visits to India and over a period of time, there has been a regular flow of such high level visits. A wide-ranging bilateral agreements and Memoranda of Understanding on economic, commercial, educational and other issues have been concluded between India and the five Central Asian Republics. There are also bilateral programmes to promote defence cooperation and training of Central Asian defence personnel in India. Besides, there are inter-governmental commissions, which meet regularly, and ministerial and official visits are encouraged.
The economic partnership between India and Central Asian countries, particularly with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, has steadily grown in the past one and half decades or so. India has actively promoted establishment of air links and granted concessions to enable the airlines of Central Asian countries to lift traffic from India to destinations to West Europe and North America. Indian companies are keen to make investments in Central Asia particularly in textile sector, oil and gas, minerals and pharmaceuticals. Significantly, in order to promote business to business contacts. India has instituted a programme known as “Focus Central Asia” under which financial support are given both for organising Trade Fairs in the national capitals of Central Asian countries as well as for the participation of Central Asian countries in the trade exhibitions held in India.

It is against this background that this study examines India-Central Asia relations from the historical and cultural point of view and also the developments on the economic front. It discusses the breakdown of erstwhile Soviet Union and its fallout on bilateral ties. It attempts to analyze the need of economic cooperation between a growing economic powerhouse like India and the two nascent economies of the Central Asian Republics of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The possible trade routes as part of India’s economic relations with the two republics have also been explored. Besides, the immense new economic opportunities for India in this resource rich region as well as India’s effort to cash in on these opportunities have been analyzed.
The first chapter of this research study analyses historico-cultural contacts between India and Central Asia, besides examining economic relations between the two sides in the light of needs and opportunities for each other.

The second chapter explores the potential and prospects of energy and transport routes between India, Central Asian Republics and Iran, i.e., the North-South Transport Corridor and the routes such as Mumbai-Chahbahar-Zaranj-Dilaram-Herat-Naibabad-Khairaton-Termez as well as Mumbai-Bander Abbas-Mashhed-Turkmenabad-Bukhara.

The third chapter delves into the country profile of both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. It discusses the diplomatic relations between India and these two Central Asian republics, which have been strengthened by the high profile visits of the leaders of both the regions and subsequent signing of a number of cooperation agreements.

The fourth chapter examines the nature of relationship between India and Uzbekistan with a focus on economic cooperation and exchanges between the two sides since 1991.

The fifth chapter looks into the extent and pattern of economic relationship between India and Turkmenistan since 1991, besides highlighting the prospects of more meaningful economic ties.
The sixth chapter investigates the need for energy cooperation between India and the Central Asian Republics of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan keeping in view the growing energy demand in India.

The last chapter, which is the concluding chapter, sums up the outcome of this research work.

This Doctoral thesis has been carried out under the guidance of my revered Supervisor, Prof. K. Warikoo, Director, Central Asian Studies, Centre for South, Central, South East Asian & South West Pacific Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. I have the highest word of gratitude for his invaluable help, sustained guidance and encouragement I received at every step during the preparation of this work. He took immense pain to go through the rough draft of this thesis minutely and gave insightful comments to spruce it up.

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