CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

The disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R) was an unprecedented epoch-making event of the 20th century. The demise of the Soviet Union resulted in creation of a situation of uncertainty in the vast Eurasian space. Several independent republics emerged across the huge territory extending over 22.4 million square kilometers comprising one-sixth of the world’s total landmass. Five of them are in and around what is geographically known as Central Asia. The five Central Asian Republics are Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

Central Asia lies at the heart of the Eurasian continent. All five Central Asian Republics of the former Soviet Union occupy a vast territory largely as ethnic, and cultural geographical unit extending from Siberia in the north to Afghanistan and Iran in the south, from the banks of the lower Volga and the Caspian Sea in the west to the border of China in the east. They cover an area of 4 million square kilometers, or almost one-sixth of the territory of the Soviet Union. Although there is no comprehensive term for this region in western usage, but terms like ‘Turan’, ‘Turkestan’, ‘Russian Turkestan’, ‘Central Asia’ ‘Middle Asia’ and ‘Russian Central Asia’ all have been used by western historians with various meanings.
In the classical Graeco-Roman works, Central Asia was known as Trans-Oxiana, or the region beyond the Oxus river. The Oxus was only one of many ancient names given to the Amu-Darya river. To the Arabs, Central Asia was known as ‘the land between the two rivers’ – the Syr-Darya and the Amu-Darya. To the English, it was known as the Tartary. It was the fourteenth century Moroccan traveller and writer Ibn-Battuta, who coined the word Turkestan, meaning ‘the land inhabited by the Turks’. The nineteenth century British writer Rudyard Kipling called Central Asia the ‘Back of Beyond’.

In one way or another Central Asia has always gripped the imagination of outsiders, whether Muslims or Christians, Europeans or Asians. For Muslims Central Asia has epitomized the distant and inaccessible, but still the second holiest region after Saudi Arabia - steeped in Islam and mysticism, and the originator of so many Muslim races. For the Russians it has been a reminder of one of the most painful parts of their history, as they lived for centuries under Mangol rulers and their successors, the Tartars.

In the old historical maps, Central Asia appears as an extension of the Persian Empire. Central Asia was well integrated into the great Middle Eastern empires. It was also well connected with India through the Pamirs and the Hindukush, and to China across the Tien Shan mountains. It was a ‘vibrant part of the world economy because it formed crucial corridor that connecting east and west as well as south to north’.

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2 Ibid., p.9.
3 Ibid., p.9.
Topographically, the entire region of Central Asia has extremely varied climatic and natural conditions. Completely landlocked, the region in the west and north are having extensive plains, while in the east and south, the considerable part of territory is mountainous. Lack of high barriers on the north has exposed the region to many invasions. The main Central Asian steppe, bounded by the Caspian Sea in the west, a great mountain chain from Kopet-dagh in the south-west to Pamirs and Tien-Shan in the east, divides Central Asia from the rest of the continent. These areas are full of striking contrast: enormous plains with depressions dropping to below sea level, and tall mountains covered with heavy snow; densely populated oasis surrounded by almost uninhabited deserts; arctic frosts in the mountains and tropical heat in the lower lands. The climate in the north is temperate, while in the south, it is hot becoming intensely dry in the summer. Being far from Ocean, it represent a continental climate.

Most of the region of Russian Central Asia forms a great basin, once the bed of an inland sea, of which today the Caspian Sea, the Aral sea, lake Balkhash and many smaller lakes are all that remain. The important lakes of the Central Asian region are the Aral sea, the lake Balkhash and the lake Issyk-Kul. Most of the rivers of the region are fed by melting snow from the mountains fringing on the basin on the south-east. The two big rivers of Central Asia – the great Amu-Darya, ‘the Oxus River of ancient mythology’ and Syr-Darya have their source in the Pamirs range and Tien-Shan respectively. The lands between these two rivers, which today comprises Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, have produced the main developments of Central Asian history and culture. Both these rivers formed formidable frontiers for the ancient world. The Amu-Darya divided the Persian Empire and its culture from the Turkic nomadic empires of the Central Asian steppe. The same river, later formed the frontier for the Tsar and the Communists,
separating Central Asia from first the British Empire in India and then the Muslim world to the south. Meanwhile the Syr-Darya formed the only northern barriers for the Persian, Greek, Arab and then Turkic kingdoms in Central Asia, protecting them from nomadic invasions from Mongolia and the Gobi desert.

In the centre of the region lies two of the largest deserts in the world. In the south, covering much of present-day Turkmenistan, is the Karakum or ‘desert of black sands’, which covers 3,50,000 square kilometers of some of the most arid terrain on earth, where rains are rare. To its north in present-day Uzbekistan is the Kyzlkm or ‘red sands’ desert, which covers another 3,00,000 square kilometers. Despite the scarcity of water, both these deserts have distinctive fauna and flora and have been the homes for some of the toughest nomadic tribes in the world, in particular the Turkmen. Climatically, the region is governed by the continental conditions of the great Eurasian landmass of which it is a part. The lack of either natural barriers or the modifying effect of moisture exposes it to the full extremes of summer and winter temperatures.5

The geographical location of Central Asia and Kazakhstan has been of decisive importance for trade and commerce. Before discovery of the sea routes, all the main land trade routes connecting eastern and Central Asia with Europe and the countries of the easily across this territory. The ‘Great Silk Route’ connecting Persia and China with the Roman World, passed through Central Asian region. Present day air and land communications lines connecting Russian Federation with Iran, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and China also pass through Central Asia and Kazakhstan.
Central Asia is regarded as one of the oldest centres of civilization. Much of the world's ancient history originated in Central Asia for it was the birthplace of the great warrior tribes that conquered Russia, Europe, India and China. It has witnessed the gradual growth of human civilization from the Palaeolithic age. A large number of relics belonging to early Palaeolithic age, Neolithic age and Iron age have been discovered from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Khorezm, Bactria and Sogdianas. Besides, many Central Asian tribes, for example, those of the Jeitun settled in southern Turkmenistan, were already cultivators and herdsmen in the Neolithic period. Cultivation of land was known to the Anau culture in southern Turkmenia in the 4th millennium B.C. Early Iron Age culture of the 1st millennium B.C. also existed in ancient Khorezon. It was mainly a farming and cattle breeding culture. Other contemporary cultures, which had reached a high level of farming and urban life, were those of Bactria and Sogdiana.

The original population of ancient Central Asia and of the steppe region was of the same Iranian stock as the Persians. The oldest people known to us in Central Asia – the Sogdians of Zeravshan valley and the Khorezmians inhabiting the lower banks of the Amu-Darya belonged to the same stock. Their territory formed part of the first world's monarchy known to history as the Achaemenid State.

The Central Asian region has been exposed to numerous invasions and military campaigns throughout history. The Saka tribes settled around the Caspian Sea and the Arab Sea were the first mounted nomads to found a dynasty in the region. At its height around 800 B.C., this dynasty ruled an area including that of modern day Iran, Western Turkey and Central Asia. From 700 to 300 B.C. the

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Scythian tribes, who were settled north of the Syr-Darya, swept southward conquering Central Asia and then India and Syria.

The Persian Empire founded by Cyrus the great in 550 B.C., ruled Central Asia for next two hundred years, until the arrival of the Greeks. The early Persian kings were the first to demarcate Central Asia. They divided the region between the Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya and stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Pamir Mountains into three distinct regions. From west to east these were Chorasmia, Bactria and Sogdiana. The latter included modern-day Tajikistan, Eastern Uzbekistan and Northern Afghanistan, while Bactria included much of presentday Uzbekistan. In the course of his Persian campaign (334-32 B.C.) Alexander the Great, after crossing the Hindu Kush mountains, marched into Central Asia and occupied Bactria and Sogdiana between 329 and 327 B.C. In his further march towards the Syr-Darya, he suppressed the tribal resistance and finally occupied the valley of Zeravshan. The Achaemenid State was destroyed by Alexander and its territory integrated into ‘the Graeco-Macedonian empire’. After the collapse of the latter in the same century a considerable part of Central Asia was included in the Seleucid State. In the 3rd century B.C., the Seleucids in the western part of Central Asia overthrown by native rebellious, and Parthians succeeded them. Later, an independent Graeco-Bactrian kingdom was formed which annexed Sogdiana and Bactria. In the eastern region of Central Asia what is now Kyrgyzstan, the Sarmatian nomads with their Siberian animal culture moved south from Siberia and dominated the region from around 500 B.C. onwards.

The first raid into Central Asia by Chinese princes took place around 100 B.C. and for a time they captured the Ferghana valley and imposed an annual tribute of 1,000 stallions on their victims. In time both the Sarmatians and the
Chinese were pressed from the east by the Huns, the forefathers of the Mangols, who came out of the Gobi desert to occupy Kasghar in Xinjiang around 200 B.C., crossed Central Asia and reached the Volga river in Russia by 400 A.D. Their empire—the first nomadic Mangol empire stretched from Korea to the Ural mountains in Russia.  

During the first century A.D., a union of nomadic tribes under the rule of the Kushanas, extended its powers over Eastern Turkestan, Sogdiana, Bactria and Afghanistan. The Kushan period was important for cultural and economic expansion of Central Asia. The prosperity of the region was partly due to its location on the ‘Great Silk Route’ connecting China with Persia and the Roman world. At the end of the 3rd century A.D. Kushan power began to decline and in the middle of the 4th century A.D. a related tribe called the Ephthalites or White Huns subjugated Bactria and put a complete end to Kushan rule in Central Asia. But during second half of the 6th century, Turks conquered the Ephthalites from Semirechya and annexed to the great Khagnate stretching from Manchuria to the Black Sea. By the end of the 6th century A.D. the Khagnate separated into two parts, the western part of which was conquered by the Muslim Arabs.

During the first half of the 7th century, the Arabs succeeded in defeating the military forces of Byzantian and of Sassanian Persia, and in 646 A.D. they occupied Merv, and by 651 A.D., the whole of Khorasan. Beginning with the seventies of the 7th century, the Arabs marched into the hearts of Central Asia. The Arabs under Ibn Muslim, the Governor of Khorasan, devastated the fertile valleys of Amu-Darya, and looked towards towns of Bokhara, Ferghana and other

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Ahmad Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?*, (Karanchi, 1994), p.11.
Central Asian territories, and finally in 713 A.D. seized Samarkand. The acts of vandalism of the Arabs have been described with great indignation by the famous historian Al-Beruni. According to him, the Arab Commander Ibn-Muslim killed all scholars who knew the history and language of Khorezm, making it almost impossible to learn the history of pre-Islamic times.

By the middle of the 8th century A.D. the Arab conquest of Central Asia was completed, and Khorezm, Bokhara etc. became parts of the Arab Caliphate. The Arabs ruled Central Asia from the kingdom of Khorasan, which covered what are today Western Afghanistan, Northern Iran and Turkmenistan. The Arab capital, Merv, was called the queen of the world, developed as a major centre of Islamic learning under the Arabs and later the Seljuk Turks. The Arabs introduced the Islamic religion in Central Asia. Along with Islam, spread of Arabic language, too, became the language of administration, letters and science, which played the role of a great force in forging the union of indigenous peoples with a common outlook.

In the course of the 9th and 10th centuries, there arose the State of Samanid (1874-999 A.D.) uniting Iran with Central Asia. Ismail-ibn-Akhmad, founder of the Samanid dynasty, incorporated Mavernahr, Khorezm, Syr-Darya region, part of Turkmenia, Iran and Afghanistan, and Bokhara became the capital of all his domains. During the period of Samanid rule, the Tajik-Persian language became widespread, and it was at this point the great poets Rudaki and Firdausi wrote their monumental works. Besides, the Samanid dynasty produced a number of great intellectuals of different fields. Mohammad Ibn-Musa Al-Khorezm, the founder of

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9 Ibid., p.16.
Arab mathematics, Abu-Nasr Al-Farabi, a great philosopher, called the Aristotle of the East, Abu-Ali Ibn Sina, the distinguished Central Asian Scientist, who authored several books on medicine and philosophy. With a well-organised army and bureaucracy, the Samanids built up extensive trading links with Europe and China, thus regulating the 'Great Silk Route'. During Samanid rule Central Asia became a recognised entity, considered to be not at the edges of the world but at the very centre of the known world.

Al-Beruni, a towering figure of Khorezm culture was a contemporary of Ibn-Sina. He authored 'History of India', an excellent work of history and ethnography, a monograph without parallel in medieval literature. Al-Beruni was also recognised as a great encyclopaedist, geographer, astronomer, mineralogist, ethnographer, historian and poet. A great and fearless patriot who criticized the Arab conquerors for their vandalism, Al-Beruni had great admiration and respect for the culture of other peoples. The scientific and materialistic ideas of Ibn-Sina and Al-Beruni were, however, opposed by the reactionary clerical ideology, which dominated Central Asia at that time. Central Asia, under the rule of the Samanid dynasty witnessed the presence of a whole galaxy of learned scholars.

The defeat of the Samanids by Alptgin, a Turkic officer of slave origin, saw the end of Persian political domination in Central Asia and the advent of Turkic domination. At Ghazni in Afghanistan the Turkic tribes created the Ghaznavid dynasty, which ruled over a region that included parts of Central Asia and India. Its strongest ruler, Mahmood of Ghazni, undertook seventeen campaigns into India between 1001 and 1024 and conquered greater part of Central Asia.

In the 12th century the nomadic Kara-Kitais migrated from the Far-East to form a state in the Semirecheye conquering Maveranahr. But the rule of the Kara-
Kitais in Central Asia did not last long, and at the beginning of the 13th century, was succeeded by the Khorezm Shah who destroyed the Seljuk power and created a grandiose feudal monarchy uniting Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran and Azerbaijan. The rule of the Khorezm Shah marked the highest development of feudalism as reflected in the growth of towns, trade, crafts and culture.\textsuperscript{10}

The Seljuk Chief, Tughril Beg, consolidated his power and for the first time succeeded in uniting Central Asia with Persia and the Arab World under Turkic hegemony. At the height of Seljuk rule, king Malik Shah (1072-92) ruled from Kasghar to Jerusalem and protected the booming trade along the Silk Route between Syria, Central Asia and China. The Seljuks were challenged and finally defeated by the Mangols under Changiz Khan.

In the early 13th century, the Mangols under Changiz Khan marched on Central Asia. In 1220, Changiz Khan's army entered Bokhara, Samarkand, Merv and other towns, finally destroying the state of Khorezm Shah. It is ironic that despite untold massacres carried out by the Mangols and the destruction of entire cities, Changiz Khan was strong protector of trade and the 'Great Silk Route' between Europe and China across Central Asia.

In 1370, Timur Lane, after his campaigns, established a state extending from India to the Volga and from Syria to China. He proclaimed himself sovereign of Balkh and formed his own mighty empire with Samarkand as its Capital. His grandson, Ulugh Beg was a great lover of science and it was during his reign that secular sciences came to be taught in the Madarsas of Samarkand. Subsequently, Herat and Samarkand became great centres of science and learning. Ulugh Beg constructed an astronomical observatory at Samarkand and his name is associated

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p,22.
with such renowned astronomers as Kazizade Rumi, Giyasuddin Djamshed and Ali Kushchi.

The Persian power was again on the rise with the coming to power of the Safavids, who ruled from 1501-1722 and who changed the state religion from Sunni to Shia Islam – a step that considerably reduced Persia’s influence in Central Asia. With the discovery of the sea route to India, the importance of the 'Great Silk Route' had declined and semi-forgotten.

By the 15th to 16th centuries, under conditions of developed feudalism and as a result of long historical evolution, the process of formation of principal national groups of Central Asia and Kazakhstan had begun, and thus with the passage of time the Khanates of Bokhara, Khiva and Kokand were formed. All the Central Asian Khanates were heterogeneous in their ethnic compositions. However, out of numerous tribal nomads, only a few names stand out as pre-eminent. The pre-eminent ethnic groups of Central Asia on the eve of the Russian conquest were the Uzbeks, Turkmen, Tadjiks, Kyrgyz, Kara-Kalpaks and Kazakhs.

The smaller ethnic groups include the Kipchaks, Kashgaries, Turki, Taranchis, Arabs, Sart-Kalmukhs, Dungans, Kurama etc. The Kipchaks lived mainly in the regions of Fergana and in Tashkent. The Kashgaris, said to be a ‘Turkified’ Iranian group, had migrated to this region from Eastern Turkestan. They lived mainly in the Ferghana and Semirecheye region. The Taranchis, an ethnic group of Turkic origin, had also migrated from Eastern Turkestan. The Arabs, the descendents of the Arab conquerors of Central Asia, lived in the Samarkand and Kattakurgan areas. The Sart-Kalmukhs also known as ‘Mangol Muslim’ were different from both the Turkic and Persian groups. The Dungans, an ethnic group formed by the fusion of Turks and Chinese, were also immigrants from Eastern Turkestan. They lived in the Semirecheye region and Syr-Darya
oblast. The Kurama, an ethnic group, formed as a result of the mixing of the Kazakh and Uzbeks, lived in the Angren river valley of Tashkent.

The ancient aborigines of the Turkmen territory belonged mostly to the Iranian language group. However, from the sixth century onwards following the penetration of the Turkic tribes, the indigenous people were subjected to an unceasing process of 'Turkification'. The formation of the distinct Turkmen group of people, in the early stages, was closely connected with the westward migration of the Oghuz tribes, and later, with the establishment of Seldjuk dynasty.

On the eve of the Russian conquest, the Turkmen represented three clear-cut political groups.11

I. The Turkmen tribes of Trans-Caspian, inhabiting from the Caspian Sea to the Amu-Darya, from Kara-Kum to the foot-hills of Kopet-Dag mountain.

II. The Turkmen of Khiva, most of them were enrolled in the army of the Uzbek Khan of Khiva.

III. The Turkmen of Bokhara.

Another ethnic group of Central Asia was the Uzbeks. During the early period of its origin (14th century) the term 'Uzbeks' referred only to the nomadic tribes, who inhabited the eastern lands of 'the Golden Horde' and were enrolled in the army of Uzbek Khan. Uzbek tribes – Sarts, inhabited the Zerafshan valley and the Fergana, Tashkent and Khorezm oases and constituted the bulk of the region's urban population. Now the Uzbeks are predominant ethnic group of modern Uzbekistan.

The other groups – the Tajiks, one of the most cultured people of Central Asia, are the descendants of the ancient aborigines of the lands. They are an Iranian language-group belonging to the Aryan branch of the family of Indo-European people. They become prominent under rule of Samanid Sultan. The term 'Tajiks' is employed today only in a very narrow sense to denote the majority nation of the Tajik republic.

The Kyrgyzs are the ancient people of Central Asia. They were settled in the Tien-Shan region. On the eve of the Russian conquest, it was found that pastoral nomadism was almost the main occupation among the Kyrgyz. Now Kyrgyzs constitute majority population in the modern republic of Kyrgyzstan.

The ethnic composition of the Kara-Kalpaks is rather more complex. It includes the ancient tribes, which inhabited the territory of modern Kara-Kalpak region, some of whom were of Saka-Massagatai and Sarmatian-Alani region. After their arrival in the lower Amu-Darya delta, the Kara Kalpaks were subjugated by the Uzbek ruler of the Khanate of Khiva. The territories inhabited by them were transformed into three kingdoms of the Khanate-Shuman, Kungrad and Kunya-Urgeneh.\textsuperscript{12}

An important ethnic group of Central Asia on the eve of the Russian conquest were the Kazakhs. The Kazakhs, contrary to the popular traditions, do not have a homogeneous social ancestry. They have mingled social heritage, and they have many Mongoloid characteristics as well as other clearly European racial features.\textsuperscript{13} Non-Kazakh population have majority in the present Central Asian Republic of Kazakhstan.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p.21.
The people of Central Asia lived under the rule of the Khans of Uzbeks dynasties for three centuries (16th to mid 19th centuries) until they were incorporated into the Tsarist Russian Empire. Though certain common elements such as language and culture already existed and incipient national consciousness had appeared, conditions prevailing under the rule of the Khans were not conducive to further national consolidation. The Mongol conquest disrupted the progressive development which had started the centralised state of the Khorezm Shahs and brought with it an era of feudal disintegration. Central Asia, divided into feudal Khanates, lagged far behind in socio-economic and political development. Its economy was undermined by internecine wars between the Khanates. The low level of development of productive forces, and stagnation in agriculture and crafts also adversely affected the formation of national groups.

Uzbek Khanates of Bokhara, Khiva and Kokand were heterogeneous in their ethnic composition. In Khiva, there were Uzbeks, Turkmen, Kara-Kalpak and Kazakhs. The Khans of Khiva oppressed the Turkmen and Kara-Kalpak. Thus, Central Asia, on the eve of the imperial Tsarist annexation, was having multi-ethnic composition. The nationalities of Central Asia represent a 'complex mixture of various ethnic groups of antiquity', and the people were all inter-related through old ethnic ties, which account for a number of common features in their culture, economy and way of life. Their common historical development and joint struggle against foreign invaders strengthened these bonds of unity.¹⁴

By the middle of nineteenth century despite the unfavourable conditions, the people of Central Asia had developed their respective national languages, way of living and distinct national cultures. But their ethnic development to a higher

¹⁴ Ibid., p,24.
stage was retarted by their economic, political and cultural backwardness. The whole region was in a state of decay, isolated from the modern world, its population static, and its economy depressed. It was only after the merger of Central Asia and Kazakhstan with the Tsarist Russian Empire that rudimentary capitalist elements began to appear. The construction of railways, expansion of commerce, exploitation of mineral resources by applying modern technology and development of marketable agricultural products such as cotton brought this remote territory of the Russian Empire into the vortex of the World market. On the basis of this new capitalist development, these national groups of Central Asia began to consolidate into ‘bourgeois’ nations.

But this process of consolidation, modernisation, economic development, industrialization, commercialization of agriculture of the region etc., could not be completed, and was retarted by the Tsarist regime’s policy of military feudal imperialism and colonial oppression. It was completed not on a capitalist but on a socialist basis after the victory of the October Socialist Revolution. Even then, ethnic consolidation had not reached the high level as claimed by Soviet scholars. Subsequent events after disintegration of USSR have shown the strong survival of remnants of tribalism in the consciousness of the Central Asian national groups. The October Revolution opened-up for the people of Central Asia and Kazakhstan the path to independent national development. The soviet government’s delimitation of the national state boundries in 1924 helped the people of Central Asia in their national consolidation efforts and speedy cultural and economic advancement.
The 1924 Central Asian delimitation (though it was quite an improvement over the previously existing Bokhara and Khorezm republics and Turkestan autonomous republic having mixed national composition) was however not an ideal one. It left many disputed national territories and dissatisfied national population. The inclusion of the largely Tajik cities of Samarkand and Bokhara in Uzbek republic and the Uzbek populated region of Khojend into Tajikistan has been a source of tension between the two republics. Similarly the Osh valley has been a bone of contention between the republics of Kyrgysztan and Uzbekistan.