Chapter V
CULTURE IN TAJIKISTAN

Introduction

Culture has been described by Raymond William as 'one of the two or three most difficult English words to understand'. The word culture has its origin in the Latin word colo, -ere, its root meaning is "to cultivate". Culture generally refers to the activities performed by the human beings in individual capacity or in groups; it is the recognition of a particular set of population. It also distinguishes it from other groups. Basically the idea of culture arises from the observation that what human beings do and what they refrain from doing when they are brought up in a group as an individual. Apart from biological heredity people also carry social heredity. Culture is learned gradually it is not transferred to human being from the surroundings they live. It has been called 'the way of life for an entire society', it includes codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, norms of behaviour such as law and morality, and systems of belief as well as the arts of the society.

Definitions of Culture

Different definitions of "culture" reflect different theoretical bases for understanding, or criteria for evaluating, human activity. Anthropologists most commonly use the term "culture" to refer to the universal human capacity to classify, codify and communicate their experiences symbolically.

Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn have defined culture in his work 'Culture – a Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions, (1952)' concluding that there are six major types of definitions of culture. The first emphasizes culture as a comprehensive totality and enumerates aspects of culture content. Representative is the formulation of Franz Boas;
"Culture embraces all the manifestations of social habits of a community, the reactions of the individual as affected by the habits of the group in which he lives and the products of human activities as determined by these habits".

The Second group of definitions is built upon the feature of social inheritance. Thus Ralph Linton says;

"As a general term culture means the total social heredity of mankind, while as a specific term, culture means a particular strain of social heredity".

The third type emphasizes culture as a rule or way of life, as a system for living. The biologist Paul Sears writes;

"the ways in which the people in any group do the things, make and use tools, get along with one another and with other groups, the words they use and the way they use them to express thoughts they think."

The fourth group is psychological in the sense that processes such as adjustment, learning, and habits are singled out. Culture as a problem solving device is stressed. Ralph Piddington is the representative of this group of definition, he says;

"the culture of a people may be defined as the sum total of the material and intellectual equipment whereby they satisfy their biological and social needs and adapt themselves to their environment."

The fifth type makes central the patterning or organization of culture, systemic quality. An exemplar is provided by Juhn Gillin;

"Culture consists of patterned and functionally interrelated customs common to specifiable human beings composing specifiable social groups or categories".

The final group focuses upon culture as an accumulated product of group life. Kimball Young, a psychologist says;

"a precipitate of man's social life".
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Oxford English dictionary defines culture as ‘a developed understanding on literature, art, music etc.; the art, customs, etc. of a particular country or society’.

By going through all the definitions of different scholars it can be gauged that culture is a wide and all encompassing activities of human life from birth till death, everything connected with the human being in a way can be said to be the part of culture, and there is continuous evolution in any culture, no culture of the world can remain stagnant or unaffected by another culture.

TAJIK CULTURE

The Republic of Tajikistan is culturally rich and traditionally vibrant, with several languages and people coexisting harmoniously for ages giving it the texture which makes it stand out. Though Tajik culture has its own origin but art, language, culture and tradition heed no boundaries and transcend the man made barriers of geography and religion and the eternity of time, the rich cultural fabric of Tajikistan has influenced and in turn has been influenced by the cultures and traditions of other places, near and far. It has developed over several thousand years, historically Tajiks and Persians are very close in terms of culture, similar stock with a mutual language and are related as part of the larger group of Aryan peoples. Tajik culture can be divided into two areas, Metropolitan and Kuhiston (Mountainous). Ancient towns such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Herat, Balkh and Nishapur Khiva were the nerve centres of Tajik culture but no longer part of the country. More modern cultural centres include Dushanbe, Khujand, Kulyob, Panjikent and Istarvshan. The Pamiri people of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region in the southeast, bordering Afghanistan and China, though considered part of the Tajik ethnicity, nevertheless are distinct linguistically and culturally from most Tajiks. In contrast to the mostly Sunni Muslim residents of the rest of Tajikistan, the Pamiris overwhelmingly follow the Ismaili sect of Islam, and speak a number of Eastern Iranian languages, which is different from Tajik language, including Shughni, Rushani, Khufi and Wakhi. Isolated in the highest parts of the Pamir Mountains, they have preserved many ancient cultural traditions and folk arts that have been largely lost elsewhere in the country.
Development of Tajik Culture

Origin of Tajik culture can be traced back to the Sughdians who lived in this region in ancient times and played an important part in the silk route trade. This was also the region where, Zoroaster, the prophet of Zoroastrianism, was born in the area near the present day Tajikistan. The culture of Zoroastrianism had later on been adopted by Persian emperors as a state religion which became necessary for the expanding empire, teachings of Zoroaster helped them stabilizing. The Zoroaster tradition is still found in the Tajik culture, Nauroz is still celebrated all across Tajikistan with much fervour. When Islam reached in this region it gave another dimension to the culture and enriched it further. The Ferghana valley produced many famous Islamic scholars, the famous Abdullah Bukhari, who collected the Hadith, has the greatest share of enriching the Islamic literature. The epitome was the period when Samanids came to the power, they made Bukhara their residence and a focal point for art and science as well as an administrative centre. In this period, the personal interest and support of the Kings in the arts and sciences, along with international trade, and the relatively stable political situation in the Silk-Route region, all contributed to Tajik art and science at its zenith. A cultural rapprochement took place between the Tajik and Turkic people, who had started long before came and settled in Tajikistan, the later gradually attaining the cultural level of the former.

Gradually cultural degeneration took place due to the political instability in the region. After the discovery of the direct sea route from Europe to Asia, the economy of Central Asia declined, because the silk-route trade was an important source economic activities. In modern times the Tajik culture got impetus, it was revived in the 19th and 20th centuries by the Russians and Soviets. They introduced modern forms of cultural expression drama, opera and ballet. Poets such as Mirzo Tursunzoda, Mirsaid Mirshakar and Loiq Sherali, novelist and historian Sadriddin Aini, all had input, as did Professors M Ishoki and Osimi, scholar Sotim Ulughzoda, novelist Jalol Ikromi, and anthropologist and historian Babajan Ghafurov. In the beginning of 20th century the efforts of many progressive writers of Central Asia who were influenced by the Russian literature and they were experimenting it in Tajik literature, which helped the development of Tajik language and culture around this time. During the 1920s and 1930s, the role of Tajik as the language of official
communication declined with the introduction of Russian, but on the other hand it increased interest and opened a vast field of science and technology for the Tajik people. Due to an influx of the Russians and Europeans to the Tajik Republic, most schools switched from Tajik to Russian as medium of instruction. Tajik children learnt Tajik language at their homes under the directions of their parents. Similarly, mosques and madrassas were closed and the clergy was marginalized. Conferences seminars and classes were organised in the urban and rural centres for teaching the Russian language and the principles of scientific atheism. Many Tajiks participated in these efforts and accepted the change. The Tajiks were told that this change would bring them into the sphere of the technologically oriented West. It was also a means of preparing the way for the next stage in their development as Soviets. After the independence this policy has been reversed, schools are now teaching in Tajiki language and there is debate is going in Tajikistan to switch over the medium in higher education too from Russian to Tajiki.

**TAJIK SOCIETY**

Since the early 1990s Tajik society has branched off into three main divisions. The upper consists of small groups of the high ranking government officials and their close associates, who have access to the most power and prime business opportunities. Professionals such as managers, military and security personnel, land owners and business people make up the small middle class of Tajikistan. The lower class consists of large groups of farmers, industrial workers, and former professionals who had difficulties adapting to a new social and economic environment.

**Social Stratification**

After the industrialisation, most class variation involves the distribution of wealth. People from different classes attend the same parties and celebrations, but the wealthy people usually host a party in a restaurant. Urban residents have the highest social status, especially those who work in the national government and international organizations. Bankers,
directors of enterprises, intellectuals, and professionals follow; at the lowest level are workers and peasants. Military and religious leaders have high status, although they may not be wealthy, but their rank in the government gives them a high status in the society. In the present day Tajikistan people are distinguished more by region than by class.

Tajik society never has been organised by tribal affiliation. The core of the traditional social structure of Tajiks and other sedentary peoples of Central Asia is usually the extended family, which is composed of an adult couple, their unmarried daughters, and their married sons and their wives and children. Such a group normally has joined ownership of the family homestead, land, crops and livestock. The more prosperous a family, the more members it is likely to have. In the 1930s, some particularly wealthy Tajik family had 50 members or more. The strength of the family is sometimes misinterpreted as simply a consequence of Islam’s influence on Tajik society. However, rural societies in general often emphasize the family as a social unit. Family size has been declining, but large families are still common. Traditionally, the youngest son, with his wife and children, stays with his parents. The head of the house is the elderly father or the patriarch of the family, and the mother has authority over her daughter-in-law.

TAJIK POLITICAL CULTURE

For understanding the political culture of Tajikistan we need to understand the political system and the political culture of the society which opens additional details of the subjective side of the political life. "Political life is the pattern of individual attitudes and orientation toward politics among the members of a political system. It is the subjective realm which underlies and gives meaning to political actions" (Almond and Powell: 50). This concept characterizes a system of political convictions, opinion and values predominating in the society in a concrete period of time. "As much the culture contributes to purification of ideas, determines the positions of people, influences on the forms of social activities, it is the main element of the political game" (Dogan and Pelassy 1994: 98), the political culture appears throughout where political relations exist. The transmission of political settings, orientations, convictions, experience, patterns of behaviour is accomplished
through political culture. Producing common political values and roles of behaviour of citizens, the political culture is an integrative and stabilizing element of a political system. The forming of a political culture of the society goes on under the influence of different factors: geographical, historical, economic, etc. The influence of these factors is not similar in different societies. Therefore, each society has its own, distinguishing it from other, political cultures.

Traditionally, the structure of a political culture includes political requirements and interests, knowledge of policy, convictions, orientations, judgments, evaluations of political appearances, political consciousness, political norms, traditions and other categories, which in differing degrees, influence the development of a political system. The peculiarities of the historical development of the Tajik society determined its present political culture. In the historical sense, a lack of continuity in the development of both Tajik statehood and Tajik culture had a great impact on the formation of the political culture of Tajiks. Understanding of the political culture of the Tajik society and its determining components can be:

1) Political consciousness of the society
2) Subcultures which create the society
3) Orientation towards the political system
4) Political clientelism

Political Consciousness

In essence the political consciousness covers;

"inclusion of perceptible and theoretical, valuable and normative, rational and subconscious concepts of individuals through mediation and humanization of their objective ties with power institutions, as well as between each other on participation in government on society and state" (Solovyev 1992: 151).

To put in other words, political consciousness characterizes the spiritual aggregate determining the human capacity of existence in the political sphere.

Talking about political consciousness, we imply a deeper and more spiritual layer in which political culture is formed. Every society has its own types of political consciousness of individuals which reflect the individuals' attitude to the power phenomenon and
identifying oneself with certain political positions. In the present Tajik society we differentiate the following dominating types of political consciousness of individuals: theocratic, communist, and transitional.

**Theocratic**

Islam, being a religion, simultaneously is an ideology with its concept of the social system of society. The basic principles of this ideology are the totalitarian character of the political system and the integration of the secular and spiritual sides of the society's life. Islam was spread among Tajiks after the Arab came in Central Asia in 7-8th centuries A.D. Almost all Tajiks, as well as Uzbeks living in Tajikistan profess Sunni Islam, except Badakhshan Tajiks who are the followers of the Ismaili sect, which is an offshoot of Shia Islam. Spiritual homogeneity contributed to the development of a relatively common social psychology of the society and common mentality. However, the country's population may be differentiated by the extent of religiosity and the place given to religion in the society's life. The society can also be divided as the supporters of the theocratic and the secular forms of the social structure. The main role in the propaganda of ideas of the theocratic state is performed by the Party of Islamic Revival.

**Communists**

They are also known as ‘Sovietists’. They associate their communist ideals with the Soviet Union. They understand that they cannot build a communist society in Tajikistan independently, therefore, their most immediate task is the restoration of the Soviet system. This category of citizens includes a part of the elderly population as well as most of the Russian speaking population. The present day Tajiks who have seen the Russian period, often remember those days, saying them better that today where they used to live peacefully, economy of the society was also satisfactory. The reason behind this may be that these Tajikistan is facing economic problems, there is high unemployment rate, there is housing problem, people can be seen begging in the streets of the cities, and there is also growing number of people who are homeless.
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**Transitionals**

This category includes individuals, who have not formed completely their ideological orientations, or they have recently declared their convictions, but they have not achieved that level of ideological conviction which would allow them to be considered as adherent to some ideology. This part of the population accepts neither theocratic, nor communist ideology. This group includes nationalists, democrats and other individuals without any ideological orientations. It is difficult now to say what is the share of each of the above mentioned groups in the total population? because the majority of people do not share their convictions openly. However, two tendencies can be observed; there is clear increase of theocrats and the decrease of communists. Groups of individuals with different political orientations exist in each of the regions of Tajikistan. The sizes of the groups vary from region to region. However, the groups have not impacted the social structure of the society. The social structure of the society has been determined by its vertical structures - regions.

**Sub-culture**

The process of transformation of the Tajik ethnos into a nation has not been completed yet. After the collapse of the state of Samanids (which is claimed by Tajik scholars to be the first Tajik dynasty) in 10th century, which is considered as peak of Tajik statehood, the process of forming a Tajik nation within a united territory has been suspended. Several smaller medieval feudal states-theocracies under the rule of different Turkish, Mongol, and then Uzbek dynasties appeared in place of the state of Samanids. A long period of disconnected Tajiks living in different states began after that. Tajiks lived in several regions almost isolated from each other. Though Tajiks have a common language and religion, Tajik communities existing isolated from each other's socio-cultural regions led to the development of regional identification, and its domination over national identification. Just after the annexation to the Soviet Union, Tajiks formally restored their state. The national system of education was established during the Soviet era. Newspapers and magazines were published in Tajik, and many other things were done to develop a national culture of Tajiks. However, all that did not accelerate the process of a national identification because the policy of the Soviet state was not aimed at increasing national identification of the ethnic groups living there. It had the goal to create a Soviet nation. The struggle of
regions for power which broke out after independence contributed to the development of a regional consciousness. The boundary of the socio-cultural division in the country is a line dividing North-South. These areas are separated geographically and have been in fact developing isolated from each other over the centuries. Distinguishing conditions of the historical, economic, and social development of the north and the south are reflected on the mentalities of the population of both regions regarding their political cultures. "When a particular set of political orientation is distinguishing from others in the system, we speak of a political subculture." (Almond and Powell: 63) The north is situated close to cultural centers of Central Asian civilization, and this fact has influenced its cultural development. The advantageous geographic location has contributed to its economic development. In general, the northern region has a relatively homogenous political culture. During a long period of co-existence, Tajiks and Uzbeks residing there have developed common value orientations, customs and traditions. The north is distinguished from the south by its more firm kinship-clan relations and conservatism. At the same time, northerners are more pragmatic and obedient.

The socio-cultural panorama is more complicated in the south of the country. The peculiar relief of the south, with its many valleys isolated from each other, stipulated the division of the southern region into several socio-cultural sub-regions. A lack of great cultural centres affected the homogenization of the political culture of the south. The capital city of Tajikistan - Dushanbe, which is situated in the south, was founded as late as in 1924. There are four socio-cultural sub-regions in the south: Gissar, Qarategin, Kulyab, and Badakhshan, a religious and linguistic minority. A different value orientation has led to the development of different psychologies of the population of these regions. For example, Qarategin Tajiks are more religious and it is reflected in their psychology. However, the socio-cultural differences among southern sub-regions are not so deep as they are between the north and the south. Besides, there is the Vakhsh Valley in the south, which was populated in the 30s by people from above mentioned southern sub-regions. Even living side by side over a long period, the people preserved their sub-regional consciousness. It was there, in the Vakhsh Valley that the clashes between the different sub-regional groups began, which then led to the civil war. Ethnic Uzbeks with their particular culture living in the
Vakhsh and Gissar Valley, and Kulyab subregion complicate the cultural landscape of the south. The majority of the Uzbek tribes living in these areas retain their patrimonial lifestyle.

The problem of regionalism today is one of the most significant problems affecting the development of Tajik society. "A deep recognition of one's identity with certain community leads to that citizens show their patriotic feelings within the framework of interests of their communities, but not within the framework of the whole society. This often leads to tension threatening firmness and integrity of the state system." (Morrison and Stevenson: 1972) The Tajik political system faces the problem of nation building. A common cultural heritage, language and religion can be a good background for homogenization of the political culture of Tajiks.

3.c. Orientation Towards Political System

"One way of characterizing political culture is in terms of the distribution of general attributes toward the political system and the input and output processes. We may thus describe a political culture in terms of awareness of these political objects and of their significance in individual activities" (Almond and Powell: 53).

Using these criteria, Almond divides citizens into three groups: parochials, subjects, and participants. Parochials are those who know a little or nothing about the political system of their country. Subjects are those who are aware enough of the political system of their country, but are passive. Participants are those who participate actively in political life. If we try to divide the citizens of Tajikistan based on those criteria, it is obvious that the majority of people will be in the parochial group. A steady legal nihilism and a lack of interest in politics are the results of the previous historical development of the society in despotic, and then totalitarian states.

The subject's group includes a small number of educated people who are interested in the processes ongoing in the society, but for some reasons are not involved in policy. Some of them are apathetic towards political manners and practice existing in the society; others do not believe that they can change anything in the society.
The participant's group, which is probably the smallest one, includes the members of the political parties and movements, deputies, government officers, and some businessmen. The size of these three groups may change. The direction of change will depend on the direction of the development of the political system of the country, i.e., towards democratization or to other directions. In the first case it will lead to the decrease of parochialism and the increase of subjects and participants.

Political Clientelism

"The clientelistic interrelations are one of the forms of personal dependency not stipulated by blood relationship; they are the expression of the link between two persons who have unequal opportunities - patron and client - for mutual support, mutual exchange of services." (Medard 1976: 203). Political clientelism is an important characteristic of social relations of Tajik society. During the Soviet years such relations were popular, mainly in rural areas. With the development of market-oriented relations in the economy, clientelistic relations spread throughout the country. Since the civil war, political clientelism has become one of the major forms of social relations. In fact, the whole country is divided into many patrimonies with their own patrons. Imperfectness of the political process as well as a wild outburst of crime make the majority of businessmen and state officers to look for a patron. They find patrons in the face of former field commanders and some influential state officials. In fact, all state structures are susceptible to personal influence. It is a very difficult task to resolve any question in the state structures without the help of a patron. "Two very important processes contribute to the establishment of clientelism: forming of centralized state and extension of market relations." (Powell 1971: 522) Just these processes are occurring on in the country now.

Secularization of political culture

This process is called cultural secularization and it is one of the indicators used to evaluate characterizing the development of the political system in general. It is closely connected with the development of the political structures, i.e., state structures, political parties and movements, the development of which in turn, depends on the secularization process of the political culture. "The emergence of a pragmatic empirical orientation is one
component of the secularization process. A second attribute of the process of cultural secularization is a movement from diffuseness to specificity of orientation." (Almond and Powell: 58)

**Political Socialisation**

Human societies reproduce themselves by acculturation. As D. Easton assumes, "each society cannot go on existing all by itself; it is preserved only in that case if this code of rules is adopted by each individual, if she or he is prescribed to fulfil a minimum of behaviour norms" (Easton: 1969). This function in the society is performed by political socialization. "Political socialization is the process by which political cultures are maintained and changed" (Almond and Powell: 64). It goes by transfer of social and political experience accumulated by the society and concentrated in cultural traditions, group and human values, norms of status and political behaviour. The task for political socialization is the development of an individual's skill to orient in the political field and to perform specific public and state functions. Today the process of political socialization has a special importance for Tajik society. The transition from totalitarian society to democracy demands not only construction of necessary democratic institutions, but also an appropriate political culture of a democratic society. The democratic political culture is radically different from the totalitarian political culture. Therefore, political socialization in Tajik society has to solve two tasks: firstly, the forcing out of the old totalitarian political culture and, secondly, bringing the new political culture of a democratic society. The complexity of the task of democratic acculturation is that the values of western democratic culture, such as individualism, pluralism, priority of a personality, freedom of speech and others, are not traditional in Tajik society. The values typical of totalitarian and traditional societies predominate. The majority of people do not investigate the essence of the processes happening. Others do not accept democratic ideals and many people do not believe in the irreversibility of the democratization of the society announced by the government. They associate democracy with the anarchy prevalent in many spheres of public life, and associate order with the strict totalitarian regime.
The political socialization is an instrument through which the needed social base for
democratic reforms may be formed. The success of the democratic reforms, to a great extent,
will depend on the content of the political socialization. To understand the essence of the
ongoing political socialization, we need to consider the structures involved in this process
and agents of political socialization.

Agents of political socialization

Every society has its specific channels and mechanisms of political socialization
providing formal and informal, and open and hidden transmission of traditions joining the
predominant political cultures. Prior to independence, there was a well organized Soviet
system of political socialization. The system involved children exposed to ideology from
early childhood, and then the process of socialization continued in school, army, university,
and job. After the attainment of independence and the collapse of communist ideology, the
old system of political socialization collapsed. Adopting a new constitution, the society
officially said good bye to communist ideology, and declared its adherence to democratic
ideals. However, in fact, there is not a system of political socialization adequate with the
goals set. One can enumerate the reasons preventing the creation of a single system of
political socialization: firstly, a lack of national consensus in the society, including the
question of political socialization; ideological disorder in the society, which affects the
formulation of content of the political socialization; thirdly, insufficient knowledge of
democracy; fourthly, the shortage of finances to provide for the normal functioning of the
main channels of the political socialization, such as the education system, mass media, etc.

The shortages of the national system of political socialization, in some degree, are
compensated by external channels. First of all the Russian television broadcast to Tajikistan
influences the political socialization. The majority of the population watches these broadcasts
and receives information on the processes of democratization ongoing in Russia.
International organizations and some western countries play an important educational role in
political socialization. They spread democratic literature, hold seminars, acquaint Tajiks with
life in democratic countries, organize short-term visits of Tajiks to western countries, and provide education of young Tajiks in western schools and universities. At the same time, unofficial channels of political socialization, such as masjids increase their influence in the political socialization. By the term masjid, one should understand not just the official masjid, but many other masjids as well. Islam has its own, distinguished from the official, theocratic program of political socialization.

BELIEF SYSTEMS

For centuries, Central Asia has been home to many religious systems Zoroastrians, Buddhists and later Christians and Muslims. The prosperity of the region’s cities and towns heavily depended on the trade and commercial interchange among peoples of various backgrounds and faiths. People in these areas were more tolerant of a variety of religious practices. In ancient times the people who lived in the land that makes up present day Tajikistan followed various polytheistic systems, believing in numerous gods and spirits. Their religious beliefs were probably close to those of ancient Persia and India.

In the 7th and 6th centuries B.C., Central Asian states such as Persia came under the influence of the teachings of prophet Zoraster (Zartust). He claimed that he received spiritual revelations from the “Lord wisdom” called Ahur Mazda. He set down his teachings in the sacred scripture known as the Avesta. He preached among the people in the region and Darius I and his Xerxes I were kings of Persia who accepted it as their belief system.

Between the 6th and the 3rd centuries B.C., another school of thought began spreading throughout Central Asia-Buddhism. This system was established by the Indian philosopher Siddharata Gautama also known as the ‘Buddha’, who lived and taught in northern India. Numerous followers of the Buddha came to Central Asia spreading his doctrine and establishing Buddhist communities, which peacefully coexisted with other religious communities. Buddhist frescos can still be found in Tajikistan, including in Kalai-Kafirigan and Ajina-Tepe.
Figure 5.1: Largest statue 'sleeping' Buddha in the world
Chapter V Culture in Tajikistan

In the fourth century B.C. Alexander of Macedonia brought the polytheistic religion of the Ancient Greeks to Central Asia. Greek culture flourished for more than a century, significantly influencing the culture of the region. However, the impact of this school of religious practice was limited, since it was most popular among the ruling class. It is not clear to what extent this system affected the religious beliefs of the non-elite people living in urban centres, and if it affected at all the vast population of the rural settlements. Gradually Zoroastrians regained their influence among Central Asians.

Ajinateppe

The Buddhist cloister, Ajinateppe, provides a much clearer picture about the spread of Buddhism in the territory of Vakhsh. It is situated along the same canal (Kafir), lying 12 km east of Qurghonteppa city. The layout of the cloister is rectangular (50m x 100 m). The complex consisted of two parts: the cloister and temple. In the centre of each was a square courtyard, surrounded by buildings. At the southern end of the cloister, the courtyard was not built up. There was a building in two parts consisting of an atrium set into the centre of each side of the courtyard. The atrium opened onto the courtyard. In the back wall of the atrium there was a passageway to the square or semi-square main room of the temple.

The entrance to the cloister was set in the centre of the eastern facade of the building where was located a vestibule with ramps leading up to it. The cells was used as a hall for the meeting of monks from the western side. The temple was in a northern part of the cloister. According to the planning it repeats the first part of the cloister. The distinction is in the central part of the yard which was occupied by a great stupa. This stupa is in the form of a ziggurat. Stupas were placed in the corners of the courtyard, identical to the Great Stupa but ten times smaller. Small stupas were also placed in the northern half of the temple. Tiny clay models found in excavations give us an idea of the sites. Among these models was found a writing tablet inscribed with a Buddhist prayer.

The cloister was richly decorated. The walls and arches of were covered with wall paintings in many places and, in the niches cut into the walls, large and small sculptures on pedestals. A big sculpture of Buddha (with the head the diameter of 90cm) was found in the southern sanctuary, on a central pedestal. There were also figures of Buddha sitting on other pedestals. The surface of the pedestals was reserved for the placing of offerings, as the walls of sanctuary were occupied.

A large number of fragments of sculpture were found in the central sanctuary of the temple, on which were depicted the different characters of the Buddhist pantheon, with different sizes of human being. A number of paintings and big sculptures were found in the corridors of the temple. The walls of corridors were painted from top to bottom. Unfortunately, the bulk of the sculpture is too fragmented to enable reconstruction of the depicted scenes. But there are very well preserved compositions like The scene of Buddha's sermon and The scene of bringing gifts. The wall painting on the arches consisted of thousands of small images of sitting Buddhas in rows. Sculptures of sitting Buddhas one and half times the size of a human being were standing in deep niches of pedestals. All were depicted in canonical postures which differed one from the other, symbolizing the different phases of the life and activity of Buddha (for example the meditating posture of enlightenment etc).

In the eastern part of the corridor on the temple side, on a low flat pedestal, was a giant statue of Buddha in Nirvana, (13m in length) lying in the traditional posture of the "Sleeping Lion", clothed in red samag. Lying on his right side, the right arm is bent at the elbow, resting on pillows (five bolsters) and the left arm is stretched along the body with the palm placed on the hip.

The excavation process, conservation and extraction of the Sleeping Buddha 'Buddha in Nirvana' was very difficult especially as all the sculptures in Ajinateppe were made of clay. The Buddha was cut into 92 pieces, and then fixed together. Further restoration was carried out in the restoration-technological laboratory of the A. Donish Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography, a faculty of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan, and the final restoration in the National Museum of Antiquities of Tajikistan with the participation of V. Pomina, a specialist from the State Hermitage.

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In the 5th and 6th centuries A.D. eastern Orthodox Christian missionaries, also known as Nestorians, arrived in the region. The Nestorians, who came into conflict with the Catholic Church in the mid 5th century over differences in doctrine, were escaping persecution and settled in Persia, Central Asia and as far east as Mongolia. It was, however, the arrival of Islam in the 7th century C.E. that most profoundly changed the religious development of Central Asia for centuries.

Following the Arab conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries, indigenous people of Tajikistan converted to Muslims. Up to the establishment of Soviet regime Islam was the strongest and most durable cultural influence in Tajikistan. Before the coming of Russians, Islamic culture had not only survived but was actually embraced by all non-Muslim invaders such as the Karakhanids and Mongols.

From a theological point of view, Islam probably had its apogee in Tajikistan during the Samanid dynasty, which was overthrown by the Karakhanids at the end of the 10th century. Under the Samanid dynasty, Bukhara became an important centre of Islamic learning and it was here that the madrasa, or Muslim higher educational establishment, had its origin. The heyday of Islamic culture in Tajikistan was during the 14th and 15th centuries, when Samarkand might have been its centre. The state of learning and even of popular education was probably on par with other advanced regions.

After the end of the Timurid dynasty at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the creative power of the Islamic culture declined; but the influence of Islam and particularly of the clergy, on the lives of the people increased. This process continued even during the Tsarist Russian regime. The Tsarist policy towards Islam was inconsistent. During the early stages of the Russian advance into Central Asia in the second half of the 19th century, the Russian government regarded Islam as a stabilizing and pacifying influence, and actually ordered the building of mosques in the region (Wheeler: 186). Later, however, when the authorities realized to what extent justice and agrarian system were tied up with Islamic laws they began to regard the clergy, and particularly the Qazis with strong disfavour.

Events quickly showed that Islam with its distinctive social, educational and judicial systems was much less likely to reach a workable compromise with the new regime than the
Orthodox Church of Russia. The fact that Islam has never experienced a reformation or renaissance, which could loosen the bonds of medievalism and allow it to come to terms with modern life, the chances of a new, vigorous, ruthless and atheistic force such as Bolshevism being able to gain the co-operation of the Muslim clergy were in any event remote. During the Soviet period, Islam was deprived of the patronage and support it used to receive earlier.

In 1941 the Soviet Union installed an "official clergy" to control the religious activities of its Muslim population and to formally their spiritual needs (Benningsen and Wimbush 1986: 21-23). However, only the Sunni and the Twelver Shiite communities received official recognition as ecclesiastical establishments. A Muslim Religious Directorate (Muftiya) was setup in Central Asia, with its headquarter at Tashkent. Tajikistan came under this directorate. The head of Tajikistan's official clergy, Qazi Kalani operated under the tight control of Soviet KGB. Beginning in 1978, a new rapprochement between the Soviet government and Islam resulted in new mosques being built and a certain revival of Islam permitted in Central Asia. Mikhail Gorbachev's accession meant the onset of glasnost, and religious revival as a form of reassertion of cultural identity received a new boost (Haghayeghi, 1995: 41-70). The disintegration of the Soviet Union led to the end of official religious hierarchy and institutions, but throughout the Soviet period, Islam and Islamic identity remained vivid in Tajikistan, especially in the countryside.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN PRESENT DAY TAJIKISTAN

Tajikistan is predominantly a Muslim country, about 90% of its population is Muslim. There are two major groups. Like most of the Central Asian Republics, Tajikistan also has Sunni majority, who follow the school of Islamic thought and practice as taught by Abu Hanifa\(^1\). The smaller group of Tajik Muslims belongs to the Ismaili sect of Shia branch

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\(^1\) Grand Qazi

\(^2\) Nu'man bin Thabit bin Zuta bin Mah was better known by his alias name 'Abu Hanifa'. Abu Hanifa (699 \(-\) 767 C.E.) was born in Kufa, Iraq, he compiled the teachings of Prophet of Islam in Kitaab-ul-Aathar - compiled from a total of 70,000 ahadith, finer details of ahadith are discussed. Aahadith is a plural of Hadith, an Arabic word it means, actions done by the prophet and asked his (sahaba) companions to do. Abu Hanifa was also one of the Tabi‘een, the generation after the Sahaba, because he saw the Sahabi Anas ibn Malik, and transmitted hadiths from him and other Sahaba. His ancestry is generally accepted as being of non-Arab origin as suggested by the etymology of the then names of his grandfather (Zuta) and great-
of Islam. The Ismilis are similar in their teachings and some of their rituals to the Shiites, who dominate Iran and Iraq as well as parts of Afghanistan. In addition to Muslims, Tajikistan is home to small group of Christians, pre dominantly Eastern Orthodox and Jews. But their numbers have declined steeply in recent years due, in large part to the mass immigration of the last decade.

In modern Tajikistan, popular opinion is divided over the role of Islam in political life. The government and a majority of the population believe that religion should be a private matter, separate from the state, and should not interfere with politics. Smaller group believe that Islam should be an integral part of the state and that the religion should play a much bigger role in the political system. In recent times, there are indications that state is moving subtly towards a bigger role of Islam in Tajik national culture, here it can be mentioned that President Imomali Rahmon addressing a meeting dedicated to the 17th anniversary of Tajikistan’s Independence, announced complete separation of Islam from Tajik national culture and separation of Tajik national culture from Islam is not well, and announced that the 1310th birth anniversary of Abu Hanifa in the year of 2009 will be celebrated as the ‘Year of Abu Hanifa.

After the independence Tajiks have got religious freedom and they are practicing Islam openly, which was not possible during the Soviet period, where only elderly people used to go to masjid for namaz, and officials feared of observing the fast during the month of Ramazan for fear of persecution. Now the situation has changed a large number of youth regularly attend prayers at the masjids, officials observe fast. Society in Tajikistan has been religious and even during the Communist period Tajiks used to offer namaz secretly, and read Quran. Some high State officials did these in secret. During an interview, Mir Shaev, a researcher at the ‘Institute of Oriental Studies and Written Heritage’, Dushanbe, told that even Academician Babajan Ghafurov has told his confidants to offer ‘namaz e janazah’ after grandfather (Mah). The historian, Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, records a statement from Abu Hanifa’s grandson, Ismail bin Hammad, who gave Abu Hanifa’s lineage as Thabit bin Numan bin Marzban and claiming to be of Tajik /Persian origin.
He was the founder of the Sunni Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence.
Imam Abu Hanifa is also famous as the Imam e Asam (the greatest imam)
3 Interviewed on 20th April 2009 at the Institute in Dushanbe
4 It is the final prayer offered after the death of a Muslim, and after namaz the body is buried
his death, since there was a ban and people have to be buried as per communist system whatever their faith may be and ‘namaz e janazah’ for him was offered in the night and he was buried in the day. The element of religion remained there in Tajik society, elaborating upon, Haji Husain Musazadah⁵, Raise Shura e Ulama e Din, Vilayat e Sughd (Head of the Religious Ulema Council of the Sughd province and Deputy Chief Qazi of Tajikistan) said (translation) “we remained socialist for seventy years but did not accepted socialism”. Further he added that in pre-independence Tajikistan there were only 70 jama masjids in Tajikistan, no madrassa except one but today there are 260 jama masjid, 3000 general masjids and 21 madrassas spread all across Tajikistan. Remember the Soviet period he said for Haj only one person from each Central Asian Republics was allowed to go to Saudi Arabia, but nowadays more than 6,000 go for Haj annually. He said that the government is very positive about the role of Islam in society and for this “50,000 copies of Quran in Tajiki” were distributed among the masses.

Sufistic Orders

By the 8th and 9th centuries A.D. Islam had become one of the dominant religions in the major urban centres of Central Asia. When Islam had reached there it found other still influential beliefs of Zoroastrians, Buddhists and Nestorians in some parts of the region. Sufism is a mystical movement of Islam and many scholars believe that it was influence by the above mentioned philosophies. Sufism emphasizes the development of personal spirituality and individual understanding of divinity. In the later years Sufism developed into many orders or tariqat. Some of the major orders originated in Central Asia like Naqshabandi, Kubrawiya and Yasawiya. Sufi mystic who belonged to various orders played a major role in bringing the masses to the Islamic fold. They travelled to far and wide areas including Zeravshan, Panj and Vaksh river valleys in Tajikistan. Many sufis settled in the region they preached and made their followers, called murids. And they also played an important role in spreading this religion to the nomads and herders in the whole of Central Asia.

⁵ Interviewed on 3rd May 2009 at his office in Khujand, Tajikistan
Shia and Ismailis

On the basis of selection of Caliph of Islam in the early days led to the division in Islam. One group believed that the Prophet had designated Ali to become the successor. Therefore only the descendants of him could legitimacy become caliphs. Though the two coexisted peacefully barring some aberrations. But during the medieval period the division became prominent, Shia became the state religion of Persia and Sunni were persecuted, Central Asia largely remained a Sunni region.

From the 9th century onwards there emerged the Ismailis within the Shia branch of Islam. Again this was dispute over the succession of Imam. Jafar al Sadiq was the sixth Imam, one group claimed Ismail, his eldest son as his legitimate successor and this group believed that he was the seventh and last Imam. On the other hand most of the Shia believe the 12 Imams (known as Twelver).

Some Ismaili groups became radicals in the political fields. They assassinated several political and religious leaders in the Arab world and Central Asia. They used *hashish* a narcotic substance to indoctrinate their followers gradually they were known as hashishains or assassins. When their opponents started persecuted them, they fled from the major urban centres of the Islamic cities and settled in mountainous regions of Central Asia including Tajikistan and Afghanistan.
Jews

Bukharan and Ashkenazi minorities constitute the tiny Jewish community. Bukharan Jews have lived in the country since the Middle Ages; Ashkenazi Jews arrived after World War II, and worked mainly as engineers and in specialized occupations. In 1989, there were approximately twenty thousand Jews; after the civil war, all but two thousand emigrated to Israel, Russia, Europe and America. Other religious groups include Russian Orthodox, Seventh Day Adventists, Catholics, and Baptists.
SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

There are several other social intuitions which play important role in Tajik culture. These are the medium through which humans come together and form ideas, exchange their thoughts and experiences and pass on their knowledge to the larger members in the society.

Marriage

Marriage is the most important social institution in Tajikistan. Building a family through a marriage sanctified by a religious ceremony is considered one of the most sacred aspects of the life of the Tajik People. It is also a way to develop a social structure with the blessings and support of the community. Often a matchmaker is involved in choosing a bride. A daughter will move to the home of her husband's family, and her parents want to be sure that she will be provided for. They pay close attention to the groom's education and lifestyle, and the economic situation of his family. After the marriage bridegroom side has to organise a feast known as the wedding feast or *tui*\(^5\), friends and relatives are invited. The celebration includes music, dancing, and the recitation of poems. A representative of the bride brings an iron tray filled with burning herbs to chase away illness and the evil eye.

\(^5\) In India it is known as *Taam Walima* (feast of *Walima*), feast from the bridegroom side after the marriage.
Although Islam permits polygamy, with condition, the practice has been illegal in Tajikistan. Monogamy is the more typical form of spousal relationship because of high bride price traditionally required of suitors. In extreme cases Islam allows for divorce and grounds for divorce in Tajikistan include childlessness, emotional estrangements and shortage of housing, drunkenness and economic dissatisfaction. The highest rate of divorce is in Dushanbe, which has not only an acute shortage of houses but a large number of inhabitants belonging to non-Central Asian nationalities. Marriage across nationality is uncommon. Ethnically mixed marriages are almost twice as likely to occur in urban as in rural areas.

Although, these marriages are concluded in the designated offices but an increasing number of young Tajiks go for Nikah\(^7\) after or before registering their marriage. Those who do not get register their marriages often face difficulties in getting their due rights under the law.

**Mohalla (Locality)**

It has its origin probably in the medieval period, even in northern India this word is used indicating a small locality. *Mohalla* is a small community of neighbourhoods, it plays an important role in Tajik society. It is formed by the residents of a small village, town or city, usually run by the elders of the locality known as *aksakals* (elders). After the independence of Tajikistan this institution has gained strength (Abazov 2006: 40). Traditionally feasts (to mark weddings or funerals), for example community projects, such as building *masjids* and repairing irrigation systems), and local charities are organized at the Mohalla level. This institution also helps in solving the petty disputes arising out of local issues.

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\(^7\) Nikah, is the Islamic system of marriage, can be concluded in front of at least three witness, apart from the expressed permission of the girl and the boy
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Chaikhana (Tea House)

Chaikhana is the traditional tea house. It is a common sight in rural areas and can be found practically in every city and town. People usually sit on a special elevated platform or around a low table. A chaikhana normally serves traditional drinks like tea and traditional food, such as Osh pulao, samosa, kurutab, and kichiri mastova.

Naturally a chaikhana is more than a place to eat and drink. It is an important institution in Central Asia for socializing and networking. It serves as a kind of social club where some tables are reserved exclusively for those who gather on regular basis. Over a cup of tea, people discuss community issues and developments at the local level as well as major political, social, and economic topics. Community leaders, specially in rural areas, regularly gather in tea house to hear the opinions and gather the input of the aksakals in order to settle minor disputes or to organize a local charity event. A chaikahana is a place where public opinion can be formed or influenced, family and personal reputation established or ruined, a new businesses accepted or rejected. By and large it is a central place for many activities at a community level.

Figure 5.1: ‘Rahat Chaikhana’, Dushanbe, the most famous Chaikhana of Tajikistan

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Table 5.1: Social Clubs in Tajikistan

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Source: Tajikistan in Figures – 2008, p.66

NATIONAL DRESS

During the last hundred years there has been a dramatic change in the style and types of clothing worn in Tajikistan. Until the 19th century, men usually wore colourful homemade traditional clothes, while women often wore special cloaks called paranjas that covered their whole body from head to ankle. Sometimes even women's faces were revealed with special semi-transparent material. The Tajiks began adopting western style dress in the early 20th century. By the end of the 20th century most of the people wore western style formal clothes at their work place or at public events and more casual western style clothes, such as jeans, T-shirts or track suits, in their free time. During traditional festivals, family events, or visits to rural relatives, however, most Tajik wear their traditional national costumes, often hand made by family members or bought in the bazaars. In more remote areas, this style of dress in more common, specially among the older generations.

Men’s Traditional Clothing

Men’s traditional clothes consist of quilted cotton robes or button less overcoats called jama. They typically reach the ankles and vary in colour and design depending on the region in which they were produced. Generally, however, it is considered more appropriate to chose modest colours for jamas, or sometimes just black. In the past the garments were handmade. They are secured by long scarves tied around the waste. Winter jamas are much heavier and thicker.
The traditional robe was complimented by a white or grey turbans or a special black or white skullcap. Under a jama man wears a button less shirt, though during the last few decades, men have begun to wear western style shirts, typically white or another light colour. The traditional pants are baggy and wide and are often also without buttons. The outfit is completed by boots made of soft leather.
Women’s Traditional Clothing

Women’s traditional clothes consist of a long colourful dress made of cotton and sometimes silk. Women also wear jama in bright colours and patterns, and colourful, baggy wide cut pants under the dresses. Traditionally, women wear leather shoes or rubber boots that vary in design.

The women’s traditional outfit is completed by a head covering that varies depending on age, marital status, regional affiliation, and the time of year. Married women usually cover their hair with long scarfs of varying colours. In some cases, the scarf may just cover the hair, but in other cases it may cover not only the hair but also the neck and face, leaving only the eyes exposed. Girls and young unmarried women, however, can wear special handmade brightly coloured skullcaps.

In recent times both more men and women specially in cities are using western dresses. This trend began with the coming Russians into Tajikistan. But it remarkable that women largely continued with their traditional dress in comparison to men who are more likely to wear coat-pant rather than their national dress.
CONDITION OF WOMEN

Modern day Tajik women are active in every field of life and share a major responsibility in the social, political and economic spheres of the life of the Tajik nation. A large number of Tajik men go outside of Tajikistan to work in Russia or other Central Asian countries increasing the burden on Tajik women to shoulder the responsibilities. Present condition of women was largely achieved during the Soviet period which gave them equal rights and brought them into the public life. Five years of civil war (1992-1997) soon after the independence greatly harmed the condition of women, Tajik women suffered a lot, a large number of them were widowed. While good progresses were been made in this respect during the Soviet time, there still remains immense scope for greater use of the skills of women. Independence of Tajikistan brought a lot of changes, but degrees of prejudice still prevent women resulting to be at the very end of scale for employment. There is a need in Tajikistan the women be recognized as an equal partners with men and fully participate in economic activity and political decision-making. The feminization of poverty is becoming a growing concern, Gender misbalance can be observed all over Tajikistan. Due to heavy immigration of men to Russia and other countries for works, it is becoming difficult to find a proper match for women.

Since the war has ended and society is stabilising Tajik women are once again ready to take up the responsibility and it is very much evident in the streets of Dushanbe as well as rural Tajikistan, where women are shoulder to shoulder with men in all walks of life. It may be noted here that Tajikistan has one of the highest literacy rates in the world, which was achieved during the Soviet period and this has greatly benefited women who can understand their rights under the constitution and demand their rights.
ARTS IN TAJIKISTAN

The arts in Tajikistan have enjoyed a long and prolific history. For centuries, local artists have amazed travellers, adventurers and traders with their incredible skill and craftsmanship. The Tajik masters have long been known as excellent architects, potters, and weapons and jewellery makers. Wool and silk rugs and silk dresses and scarfs made by local women are in great demand in Central Asia as well as in many distant countries. Tajik scholars have traced the deep route of contemporary Tajik arts to the nation’s vibrant history and long standing traditions. These experts find many similarities between Tajikistan’s present day artistic traditions and the many artefacts excavated from the sites of ancient and medieval cities both in Tajikistan and in neighbouring lands.
Early History

Ancient and medieval chronologists claim that the region was a “land of a thousand cities”. Old manuscripts and miniature paintings indicate that hundreds of years ago, cities and towns in the area were well planned with numerous magnificent public buildings, palaces, and places of worship. Ancient crafts people became masters of design producing vivid paintings and imposing sculptures. The pictures and statues of mystical animals from that era still capture people’s imaginations.

Archaeological excavations have found evidence flourishing artistic communities in the states of Bactria and Sughdiana. These communities absorbed the highest achievements of the ancient Greek, Persian and Indian cultures and developed their own styles. Archaeologists have discovered many sculptures and mosaic fragments, produced by local artisans that reflect the influence of the classic tradition of Persian and Greek art. The remains of palaces and fortresses with Hellenic columns, decorative and rituals sculptures, copper medallions, amphora shaped pottery, and many other artefacts have been excavated and put in the display in the Tajik Historical Museum.

Islamic Arts

The establishment of the Islamic Caliphate stretching from the Central Asia to north Africa secured peace in the region and made it safe to travel and trade in these vast areas. With great wealth and stability, the art flourished. Artistic communities were established through the generosity of rulers, princes, and wealthy individual patrons who sponsored writers, architects, and musicians.

Between the 9th and 12th centuries the Central Asian region experienced a tremendous cultural flowering, and many scholars call this era ‘the Central Asian Renaissance’. The surviving historical artefacts show a great outpouring of artistic expression during that time, featuring a continuation of old style as well as the creation of new visual and literary forms.
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Architecture

Many architectural monuments were produced during the golden era of the Islamic culture. Local architects displayed great versatility and ingenuity in creating architectural forms using simple local materials such as brick, wood, and clay. They demonstrated great skills in designing the era’s tallest buildings that were able to withstand earthquakes, hurricanes and other natural disasters. They also built the largest domes without the use of modern machines and technologies. Famous architects and engineers from Central Asian cities were invited to as far as India and Egypt to help design and build palaces and masjids.

Another achievement was the development of the beautiful and colourful tiles and mosaics used to decorate the exterior and interior spaces of public buildings, palaces, masjids. Sky-blue tiles covering domes and minarets were visible from miles away; and for centuries they withstood storms, fires, the hot sun, cold winds, and many other environmental influences without fading.

Figure 5.8: The Mausoleum of Shiekh Maslehuddin in Khujand
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Today the ruins of many buildings of that era can be found throughout the country. Archaeologists have excavated old fortified palaces in such palaces as Kalai-Kakha, Munchak-Tepe, Urta-Kurgan, Penjiken, Kalai-mug, and Kargani-khisor. Khuja-nahsharan and Mohammad Bashar are mausoleums that stand as excellent examples of medieval religious architecture.

Miniature Painting

Since there was no printing technology available during the era, all books were produced by hand. There was even an entire social groups of specialized workers who mastered the art of fine handwriting called calligraphy. The Arabic letters that were used in writing were transformed into beautiful patterns and elegant lines that became works of art in their own right. Such calligraphic writing could be seen not only in books but also adorning the walls of masjids, old public buildings, and homemade oriental carpets.

Miniature painting had a long history in the region. Visual artists captured the beautiful landscapes, historic battles and events, and magnificent architectural monuments of the era. They depicted their subjects in great detail and matchless style. Often these pictures are the only remaining evidence of past glories, since many of the area's cities, villages, and monuments have vanished or destroyed in the wars and calamities that have gripped the region.

Islamic tradition forbids artists to draw humans and animals, to prevent people from worshipping them. Unable to paint large portrait or compositions of humans or animals, the Central Asian artistic masters created miniatures instead. They also adopted the use of more abstract forms, including rich colours and sometimes simple lines in their arts.

Tajik Music

Music has always accompanied everyday life in Tajikistan, especially important celebrations. Typical Tajik musical instruments include various forms of percussion. 

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8 A percussion instrument is any object which produces a sound by being hit with an implement, shaken, rubbed, scraped, or by any other action which sets the object into vibration.
instruments (tabla, nagara, doira, zang and kairok), trumpets (karnai, nai, and sur nai), the fiddle, and the lute like dutar. In ancient times they often accompanied armies and trade caravans. One of the most favourite forms for people’s recreation was story telling accompanied by various musical instruments. In medieval times, when traders and guards of camel and horse caravans stopped for the night, sometimes joined by their local friends and curious hosts, they remained sleepless, on the lookout for bands of marauders and robbers. They kept themselves awake by listening to adventurous tales of past glories, distant travels, and beautiful love stories or gharibi songs. But shashmaqam and Falak sarai are the most important forms of Tajik music.

Women founded a classical national dance that has become a regular feature of family celebrations and festivities. The dances begin slowly, becoming faster and more intense as they progress. The movements are harmonious and subtle, and the costumes are

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9 It is a traditional string instrument with a pear shape body and a long neck resembles two string lute.
10 These are the songs about the difficulties of life far from home.
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colourful and bright. The performers dance according to the emotions of the moment. Folk music is characterized by solo playing and singing in small ensembles. The songs are monophonic, with harmony taking the form of a drone. The *daf* is the most important percussion instrument, and can be traced back to the fourteenth century. Traditionally, the *daf* is one of the few instruments allowed in Muslim ceremonies.

**Storytelling**

Storytelling is an important part of Tajik life and assumes various forms. At family events elders tell stories of their adventure and travels or the battles in which they took part as well as relating the lives of legendary heroes of the past. In an informal and captivating way, they extract moral and personal lessons for their young listeners, whom they hope will make the tales and the art of storytelling part of their own family traditions.

In *chaikhanas* (tea house), storytelling is the part of general entertainment, since there is always a skilful storyteller who remembers hundreds of stories about the life and adventures of one of the nation’s favourite comic personalities, local heroes and colourful personalities of the past and present are also the subject of these vivid tales.

Sometimes colleagues and friends come together to listen to and discuss stories taken from the glorious pages of Tajik literature, history and poetry. Others focus on tales about Islamic characters. Those gathered often invite local musicians, singers, and or poets to present their creative works or to relate favourite legends in the form of songs.

**Contemporary Arts**

During the 20th century, culture and art in Tajikistan experienced significant changes. Several factors contributed to the acceleration of these changes. The government invested extensively in the development of arts after the establishment of Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic in the 1920s in order to promote strong national identity within the newly established Tajik state. Both old and new art forms received support from the state and various state funded agencies. Another factor was the Russian influence. Between the 1930s and 1990s leading Russian universities, conservatories, galleries, libraries, and archives
opened their doors to the most talented Tajik students, scholars, and artists. Tajik student not only received free education but also scholarships, internship and advanced training.

After returning home, these students brought new forms of artistic expressions with them, such as European style theatre, ballet, opera and oil painting on canvas. They established the Tajik Theatre, the Tajik Academy of Sciences, the Tajik National Library, various historical and art museums and many new cultural institutions. The Tajik National Theatre was setup in 1929, the Tajik National Theatre of Opera and Ballet first opened in 1940, Tajik Philharmonic Society was founded in 1938. Artists at these and other smaller centres also experimented with the creation of a new sound by combining local musical and poetic traditions with different kinds of western music and instrumental styles.

Figure 5.10: Rudaki Ballet and Theatre, Dushanbe, constructed during the Soviet time
Table 5.1: Opera and Ballet in Tajikistan

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Source: Tajikistan in Figures – 2008, p.67

Contemporary western – like pop culture arrived in full force in Tajikistan in 1980s and 1990s and influenced the youth culture of major urban centres considerably. During the last decade, several popular bands were established that performed hard rock, rap and jazz, adding a local flavor to prevailing western musical forms.

Yet, in the face of change, thousands of people still keep national traditions and styles intact, creating various handmade artefacts at home or in small workshops. With the rise of national pride and the growing nationalism of the 1990s, there was an increasing interest in traditional Tajik art forms. Since 1991 more people have turned to traditional art as a source to income. Visitors to the colourful rural bazaar find many popular items sold there, such as handmade silver jewellery and colourful traditional blankets, rugs, scarf, shawls, silk dresses, and pottery.

**FESTIVALS IN TAJIKISTAN**

During the communist government used public festivals as a means of organizing people into public display of support for the party’s official policies, festivals were tightly regulated till 1991. After the independence the situation has changed. The government of Tajikistan allows celebrations of all festivals including Islamic festivals without any restrictions. Days on which festivals are going to celebrated are declared as holidays.
Festivals of Tajikistan can broadly be categorized into two parts Islamic festival – Eid ul fitr, Eid ul adha and non Islamic festivals Nauroz, Independence Day celebrations.

Traditional Festivals

These are the festivals being celebrated for a long time and have their origin deep in history, and generally have the religious backgrounds.

Eid ul fitr

It is the biggest and most important festival of Tajikistan. Eid is celebrated according to the lunar calendar, it is the first day after the month of Ramadan\textsuperscript{11}. People wear new clothes and give alms to the poor and offer \textit{namaz} at the \textit{Eidgah}\textsuperscript{12} they embrace each other. Relatives and friends usually visit. In Tajikistan on the occasion of Eid those living outside of their native places are expected to come for the celebration. There is a cheerful and joyous mood in all over the country.

Eid ul adha or Eid e qurban

It is celebrated on the 10\textsuperscript{th} day of the last month of the lunar calendar. It is the day on which \textit{Haj}\textsuperscript{13} is performed in Makkah in Saudi Arabia. After giving alms and performing \textit{namaz}, an animal is sacrificed in the name of God to commemorate the sacrifice offered by Prophet Ibrahim (Abrahm) of his son Ismail. People in Tajikistan on this occasion invite one another for the feast and give food to the needy.

Nauroz

Nauroz, meaning ‘a new day’ is the Tajik/Iranian year, which is national holiday of Tajikistan. It has its origin in Central Asian region and probably in Tajikistan, in the pre Islamic era. It is the first day of spring according to the solar calendar usually on 21/22 March, hence it is called the ‘spring festival’. It is an important occasion when artisans perform their skills in public. Carnivals are organized in big and small cities and towns.

\textsuperscript{11} Ramadan is the month in which Muslims observe fast from dawn till the sunset. It ends with the sighting of new moon, and next day Eid is celebrated.

\textsuperscript{12} A designated place, often big field, to offer the Eid Namaz

\textsuperscript{13} Hajj is one of the five basic tenets of Islam. A person, who is capable of going to Makkah, should perform Hajj. It is performed by circling seven times around Kaba, called \textit{tawaf}. 
Chapter V  

Culture in Tajikistan

Tajiks also believe that Nauroz brings good to them for whole of the year. It is the time when whole of Tajikistan is in festive fervour. People from all religions and regions meet and greet each other with great affection.

Recently this festival has got another dimension as it considered to be the originated during the Zoroastrian period, hence related to the Tajik race.

Contemporary Festivals

There are some festivals being celebrated in Tajikistan after getting independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic.

National Day

On every 9th September, National day of Tajikistan is widely celebrated in Tajikistan. It is the day of independence from Tajikistan from the USSR.

‘Ghalba’ Day

Every on the 9th of May Tajikistan celebrates the ‘Ghalba’, victory of Russia in the Second World War, and it is a public holiday in Tajikistan. But this year (2009) for the first time the parade was not held in Tajikistan and there was no celebration from the State.

FOOD HABITS

Tajikistan has a variety of cuisines. Different regions have their specific specialities and many outside factors India, Central Asia and Middle East, have also influenced the same. Rice, bread, meat etc. are famous across the nation. Contemporary Tajik food habit includes western and Central Asian cuisines. Osh Pulao is the most popular dish prepared on festive occasions, biryani, quorma and kebab are other famous foods which are popular in all over Tajikistan.
Tajiks generally used to have food together and the item is put in one plate each one takes from there, it also indicates the close relations family members share with each other.

**Food in Daily Life**

A large population living below the poverty line, and only small percentage land available for agriculture, food is scarce. A basic breakfast consists of tea and bread. A wealthy family may eat butter and jam and perhaps eggs or porridge. Soup often is served for dinner; it may contain a soup bone with meat, carrots, onions, and potatoes. *Osh*, a rice dish made with carrots, onions and meat, it is usually served two or three times a week. At other times pasta, meat- and onion-filled pastries, and tomato and cucumber salads may be served. All meals are accompanied with large rounds of flat bread. Restaurants usually offer Western and Russian food too, and chaikhanas (teahouses) serve traditional foods. Tea is an integral part of every time Tajiks have meal, it is served without sugar and milk.
Food Customs at Ceremonial Occasions

On holidays and ceremonial occasions, the table is covered with small plates containing delicacies that sometimes represent the pride and wealth of the host. *Osh* is usually served as a meal. *Sumalak*, a dish made from the juice of wheat sprouts, is served during the Islamic New Year. The making of *sumalak* is like small functions, as women while preparing it, recite poetry, sing, and dance.

INDIAN CULTURE POPULAR IN TAJIKISTAN

Indian culture, Indian people, goods and movies are very popular across the Tajikistan. One can find during the visit to Tajikistan that people commonly watching Bollywood movies, and listening Indian film songs. All popular Indian films are dubbed into the Russian or Tajiki languages, which they enjoy watching. Many older people say that they had been watching Indian movies since their childhood days, they particularly mention about Raj Kapoor movies, but nowadays the younger generation of Tajiks like Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Hritik Roshan, Aamir Khan, Aishwarya Rai etc. Indian Embassy in Dushanbe is also playing active role in popularizing the Indian culture there. There are regular Hindi classes, Indian classical dance classes and *Tabla* classes where a large number of Tajik students are enrolled. Cultural programmes are also organized very often. There are also regular exchanges of cultural troupes from India and vice versa.
Goods from India are also popular in Tajikistan, about which people say that it is good in comparison to other countries, like from China. But demand, they are not available much there in the markets probably due to the lack of direct air and road connectivity. Chinese goods are available in abundance but many Tajiks consider them of inferior quality, they want India to increase its business involvement with Tajikistan. Culturally also they find themselves more familiar with India rather than China.

It is amazing to see culturally how rich Tajikistan is, there are many communities living together protecting their own cultural identities at the same time developing a common ‘Tajik Culture’. Coming of Russians brought new dimensions in the Tajik cultural activities, modern forms of cultural expression, cinema, theatre were introduced by traditional festival gatherings were discouraged. The government of Tajikistan is trying to emphasise the exclusivity of the Tajik culture and making people aware of it, which was not properly taken care during the Soviet period. Through this the state tries to define its own identity i.e. ‘Tajik identity’.