PREFACE

The Silk Route is not only an expression that refers to sites, monuments or ruins of the past, but is alive and indicates a direction for the future. Narratives abound of the Silk Route: myths both ancient and medieval, historical annals, religious narratives and tales of conquerors, monks, merchants and diplomats. Silk Route stories have been told in several notable exhibitions over the past few years, most using trade or Buddhism – excavated exhibits to reinforce China’s role on this famous trading route. The Silk Route has become now almost a brand name that inspires thoughts of prosperity, beauty and strength. The Great Silk Route, the first trans-continental trade and diplomatic route in the history of mankind ran from China to the Mediterranean Roman Empire covering, 6,400 kms. This study, analyzes the economic, political and socio-cultural importance of Great Silk Route in the historical context. The main concern of this work is to trace the origin, development and decline of the Silk Route.

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, new independent states of Central Asia came into existence. The itinerary of the ancient Silk Route passed through the territories of Central Asian Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and also through the southern Caucasian Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. Being landlocked, the Central Asian Republics do not have direct access to the world transport network and to the world markets. These Republics having rich natural resources need economically viable, cheap and safe access to the world markets. The Central Asian states are in the transitional period of their social and economic development. The restoration of the Silk Roads opens opportunities not only for expanding trade and regional economic cooperation but also for the interchange of ideas and contacts between Europe and Asia. Hence the revival of the historical Silk Route has become one of the key policy issues of the newly independent Central Asian Republics. This study examines the policies of the Central Asian Republics and adjoining countries of Russia, China, Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia etc. towards the revival of the Silk Road Route.

Numerous meetings have been held on the revival of Silk Route in Central Asian and other Eurasian Countries. WTO at its General Assembly in Indonesia in
1993, decided to create a long term tourism project to promote a special Silk Road tourism concept. The Samarkand Declaration on Silk Road Tourism adopted in 1999 by 19 participating countries under the inspiration of the President of Uzbekistan and the then Secretary General of WTO was a land mark. A special logo of the WTO Silk Road Tourism Project was subsequently adopted to unite all countries organizations and the private sector under a common visual banner.

The transport network connecting Asia with Europe passes through the territory of Eurasia. Russia has been having a monopoly over the transportation network with Central Asia, which has been built assiduously over the past hundred years or so. But after independence, the Central Asian Republics are keen to develop other transport networks and routes, so that they are least dependent on Russia. Hence the proposal to revive the Silk Route connecting Asia with Europe by constructing the transport corridor through Central Asian Republics and the southern Caucasian states to meet Europe has been mooted. The principle objectives of this study are to identify - (a) all feasible rail and land-cum-sea routes forming part of a network of routes connecting Northern Europe with the Persian Gulf through the Caucasus region, Central Asia and/or the Caspian sea (b) the characteristics of these routes in terms of their lengths and the transit times they can reasonably offer, and (c) the possible presence of operational restrictions which might impede the smooth flow of goods along the routes.

Some external powers like United States, Germany, France, U. K. etc. are interested in the revival of the Silk Route and widening the scope of their economic activity in new markets of Central Asia. Huge oil and gas reserves of Central Asia are attracting other countries as these natural resources can fulfill the requirement of energy. USA has particular economic, strategic and political interests along the Silk Route countries. WTO, UNESCO and ESCAP are big organizations which providing funds for the development of Silk Route. This study evaluates the role of these external powers in the revival of the Silk Route and in the economic development of Central Asian Republics.

The concept of Eurasian Land Bridge has attracted serious attention. Presidents of Azerbaijan and Georgia with the support of the European Union hosted
an international conference on “Restoration of the Historic Silk Route” on 8th September, 1998 in Baku, Azerbaijan. Presidents of Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Ukraine, transport ministers and experts from 32 countries, and representatives of international organizations attended this conference. The participants emphasized the importance of the revival of the Great Silk Route and highly appreciated the contribution to that end of the TRACECA project, implemented within the European Union’s TRACIS (Transportation in Commonwealth Independent States) programmed as a Eurasian Land-Bridge. At the end of the conference “Final Communiqué of the Conference”, was signed as the “Baku Declaration”, foreseeing further international cooperation for the development of TRACECA. Five main corridors were discussed in the Euro-Asian Transport Conference in St. Petersburg, Russia on Sept. 12-13, 2000. These are identified as :- the TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe – Caucasus – Asia) corridor, from Eastern Europe via the Black and Caspian Sea to Central Asia, the Central Corridor, from southern Europe, via Turkey, Iran and Central Asia to China, the Southern Corridor, which runs from southern Europe to Iran, as central corridor, but reaches China via Pakistan, India and the Southeast Asia, the Northern Corridor, from Europe via the trans-Siberian railroad to China, North and South Korea, and Japan and the North-South Sail-Ship Corridor, which goes from Northern Europe to Russia, Crosses the Caspian Sea to Iran, and via Iran’s southern ports across the Arabian Sea to India.

These corridors, along with their numerous branches, form a unified network, providing the foundation for the development of a gigantic economic zone of about 4 billion human beings. The construction of Gwadar Sea Port, extension of Karakorum Highway, opening of the Sakhalin Rail Tunnel and reopening of the Nathu La Pass on India-China border are some results of the efforts in the direction of the revival of Silk Route. This study has also examined the problems and prospects in the implications of the Silk Route in Central Asia.

Chapter first gives the geo-political background and historical account of the Silk Route and its role in the socio-economic and political development in Central Asia through history. It also throws light on the political contacts among the countries
and territories along the Silk Route. Chapter second analyses the major factors behind the decline of Silk Route, and its social, economic and political consequences.

Chapter third deals with the political interests of the newly emerged Central Asian Republics in the revival of Silk Route. It examines the problems and prospects of the restoration of historical Silk Route with particular reference to the policies of the Central Asian Republics and their impact on regional cooperation.

Forth Chapter focuses on the role and interests of the external powers like Iran, China, Russia, Turkey, Japan, European Union and USA in the revival of the route. It also details the support of the World Bank, UNESCO and ESCAP in this revival.

Fifth Chapter examines the nature of the New Silk Route being built as the Eurasian Land Bridge. It also explores the implications of this route. The focus has been given on the role of revived Silk Route as an idea of prosperity, peace, modernization, cooperation and development.

Sixth Chapter rounds up this study.