CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION
Central Asia and India have a long history of association for centuries. Ties between India and Central Asia date back to the ancient and mediaeval times. In ancient times Central Asia was the region through which pilgrims and traders passed on their way from China to India and vice-versa. Likewise, trade routes between the west and the east lay through this region which was an important cross-road of civilization and commerce before the discovery of sea route. Strabon wrote about the flow of Indian goods along the Oxus, the Caspian sea, Trans-Caucasia and further west along the Black sea coast.

The ancient monuments discovered on the territory of Central Asian Republics and Sinkiang region of China also indicate the close ties that existed between the two peoples. These political, economic, commercial and cultural ties continued through the middle ages. The friendly visits of the Khwarezm scholars, Al-Biruni and Abdurazzak Samarkandi, symbolized the relation between two peoples that grew further during the course of the three hundred years rule of the dynasty founded by Babar.

On the eve of the Russian conquest of Central Asian Khanates, flourishing trade existed between India and this region. Tsarist Russia's relations with India were also conducted through the Central Asian Khanates. Bukhara which
was not completely annexed continued to serve as a link of commerce and trade with India.

In the 19th Century during the sixties, Indian merchants played an important role in supplying Indian goods to the local population. They brought to Central Asia tea, indigo, muslin clothes, spices and wide variety of Indian and British manufactured goods. Indian merchants sold their goods not only in Bukhara but also in Samarkand and Tashkent. Indian goods worth 5,475,000 rubles and weighing 100,000 poods were exported to Bukhara annually. In return Bukhara exported to India goods weighing 2100 poods. From Bukhara, Indian goods were sent to Russian Turkestan and other trade centers of the Russian Empire.¹

In the beginning of the eighteen nineties, they began to favour the Bombay Batum sea route counting upon the Trans-Caspian railway, opened recently. From Batum, Indian goods were brought to the Caspian by the Caucasian railway and then across the Caspian to Krasnovodsk.² As the transport of goods from India by this route was profitable


to the Tsarist Treasury, transit was allowed along this route in 1895. The opening of this cheap trade route to Central Asia had a favorable effect. Even the extension of Russian tariff regulations to Bukhara in 1894 did not restrict the volume of India's trade.

In the latter half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th Century between 6 and 8 thousand Indian emigrants lived in Central Asia region. A great majority of them came from Western and North-Western regions of India, mostly from Sind and Punjab. A major section of Indians was concentrated in the Emirate of Bukhara, the Ferghana Valley, Samarkand and the Syr-Darya region of Turkestan. They were followers of Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam.

Most of the Indians living in Central Asia were money-lenders and traders, though some peasants, craftsmen and other representatives of working people were also to be found. Although trade between India and Central Asia suffered some considerable setbacks as a result of Anglo-Russian colonial rivalry, cultural contacts did not cease. An important step in this direction was taken with the establishment in Tashkent on April 14, 1901 of a branch of the Russian Society for Oriental Studies.

text books and the Russian-Hindustani dictionary appeared. Along with Russian orientalists, Uzbek scholars also took keen interest in the study of Indian languages and cultural heritage. 4

In this connection, the names of Said Rasul Khoja, Said Aziz Khojayev, Tahirbek Kaishbekov and Khaliluddin Ahmed are worth mentioning. Some Uzbek specialists were also sent to India for practical training in Indian languages. The study of Indian languages in Russia was facilitated by the presence of Indian emigrants in Central Asia at the end of the 19th and beginning of 20th century. 5 Indian traders brought along with them a large number of lithographed books published in India to Central Asia. In Kokand alone 2000 different books published in Delhi, Bombay, Lucknow, Lahore, Kanpur and other towns of India were received in 1913. 6

The Anglo-Russian rivalry, which was constantly alive throughout the 19th Century but for brief pauses, put many restraints on the conduct of normal political, commercial and


cultural intercourse among Central Asia, Kashmir and British India. Thus Maharaja Ranbir Singh's flirtations with the Russians in Central Asia only activated British determination to enforce their paramountcy in Kashmir through the establishment of a full-fledged British Residency Officer to supervise internal administration and conduct the external relations of the state.

If the British were interested in promoting Indian trade with Central Asia through the Srinagar-Leh-Kashgar route with a view to extending their influence in Central Asia, the Russian authorities were equally determined to keep the Indian trade out of Russian Turkestan and the protectorates of Khiva and Bukhara. The Russians even underpriced their goods in Chinese Turkestan in a bid to keep British Indian goods out of their markets. It was usual for both Britain and Russia to dispatch the native agents to Central Asia and India including Kashmir to obtain information of economic, commercial, political, cultural and military values. In a bid to prevent the entry of such agents each power imposed stringent curbs on the over-land journeys of strangers from Central Asia to India.

By 1895 Britain had completed its expansion upto foot of the Hindu Kush, an activity which had not gone unnoticed by the Russians. From the 1890s onwards the Russian desire
to explore the strategic overland routes to India via Leh, 
Gilgit, Humza and Chitral became irresistible. Numerous 
Russian military officers, like Novitsky, Snesarev, Plotsov, 
Shersky-Kunznetsov Kornita and other specialists succeeded 
in obtaining British permission to travel down to India via 
the Karakoram, Mintaka and Lilk passes.

Since the British too were keen to send their officers 
to restricted zones in Russian Central Asia on similar 
pursuits, they utilized the Russian requests for obtaining 
reciprocal permission for British officers.7 Whereas 
Britain wanted to know about Russian weak spots in Central 
Asia, the Russians still regarded India as the sensitive 
nerve of the British Empire. The British agents posted in 
remote listening posts in Tashkurghan and Kashgar (inside 
Chinese Turkestan), who were hitherto playing antagonistic 
roles, now acted in unison during the period of the first 
world war. But this brief period of cordiality came to an 
abrupt end soon after the Bolsheviks came to power in 
Russia.8

---------------------

7. Foreign Frontier, 8 August 1920, pp. 4-11.

8. S.H. Gorfrey to D.W.K. Barr, Resident in Kashmir dated 
14 December 1893, Foreign Secretary, May 1894, pp. 
353-387, Cited by The Modern History of Soviet Central 
Establishment of Soviet power in Central Asia and its
dynamic impact on relations with India was first echoed in
Soviet appeals to the people of the East, calling upon them
to rise against alien imperialist rules. This came at a time
when the British policy towards Turkey and their harsh
measures to suppress the Indian national movement had
alienated a large section of the Indian population against
them. They now began to see the Bolshevik hand behind every
movement in India, which was already simmering with
discontent. British anxiety, which made them desire the
insulation of India from any Bolshevik influence became more
intense due to the Soviets launching a propaganda crusade
against British Imperialism in the East and also due to
their open support of Indian revolutionaries who operated
from Soviet territory. Every activity of Soviets and the
Indian revolutionaries in Central Asia was closely
monitored.

Kashmir played a significant role in India's relation
with Central Asia on account of its geographical proximity
and cultural affinities with that region. Kashmir assumed a
new importance in the context of the Anglo-Russian rivalry
over Central Asia which had lost intensity with the
conclusion of the 1907 Anglo-Russian convention. It again
revived in the wake of the October Revolution in Russia.\textsuperscript{9} The British felt tempted to intervene in Central Asia owing to the chaotic conditions during the civil war there. The Soviet government also tried to embarrass the British by giving encouragement to anti-British activities of Indian revolutionaries which in turn resulted in a further tightening of the British stranglehold over Kashmir and its frontier dependencies.

Interestingly, the period between 1917 and 1923 not only saw efforts by the Bolshevik revolutionaries to restore their authority in various parts of the former Czarist Empire but also witnessed an effort by Lenin to fuel revolution in British India through Indian Marxist and revolutionaries like M.N. Roy. The Bolshevik Revolution revived the British fears as Lenin turned to M.N. Roy to exploit both the anti-colonial and socialist sentiments in British India so as to expand Soviet influence over India's Liberation Movement. The emergence of an independent India in 1947 finally terminated the Anglo-Russian tug of war in this strategic region. Independent India freed herself from the old hangovers of British imperialist policy in Central Asia and established close friendly relations with the Central Asian Republics of U.S.S.R.

Since India's independence, for over a period of nearly four decades the Soviet Union was the principal supplier of sophisticated arms at discounted prices and it also extended immense financial support by accepting payment in Indian rupees for Soviet goods. India's bilateral trade shot up from Rs. 13 million in 1951-52 to almost Rs. 90 billion in 1990. In visible trade, India consistently had a favourable balance that grew from Rs. 2.12 billion in 1980-81 to Rs. 27 billion in 1990-91.10

In the seven decades after the October Revolution of 1917, followed by the formation of the Soviet Union, India renewed its contacts and cooperation with all the five Central Asian republics especially as was evident from the fact that India's second prime minister Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri went to Tashkent and signed the famous Peace Agreement with Pakistan in 1965. The role of successive Indian leaders have been to promote deeper friendship and cooperation with Central Asian Republics of USSR. The transformation of the Soviet Union into a loose association of independent states following the disintegration of the Soviet state created a new situation. India has to adjust

to a situation in which a captive market for almost 20% of its exports is no longer available and spares and replacements for the bulk of its sophisticated weaponry supplied by Moscow at nominal prices have to be paid for in hard currency.

The politically based advantages formerly available to India in its bilateral trade with the Soviet Union have disappeared. Though separate statistics on trade and transactions with individual Central Asian republics are not available, there can be no doubt that India has an uphill task in developing trade, economic, technical cooperation, cultural and educational ties with the Central Asian states under the changed circumstances. Within months of the emergence of independent states in 1991, the new Central Asian states began looking southward in their quest to restore their historical links with their neighbours in the South.11

Though other South Asian countries have also figured in the relationship with the Soviet Union during the decades it was a super power, the impact of the emergence of sovereign and independent states in Central Asia is likely to be felt to a much greater extent by Pakistan and India.

A notable development was the visit of the Uzbek president, Islam Karimov, to India during August 1991. Apart from signing few agreements, he also expressed interest in learning from India's experience in "market economy". President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan also visited India in February 1992. Other Central Asian leaders, all of whom have been emphasising their secular outlook, have shown interest in expanding relations with India.

The Central Asian states have earnestly begun to rediscover their roots on quite a new basis. Iran and Pakistan have stepped in to fill the vacuum by playing the Islamic card. Turkey, on the other hand, is strengthening its linkages with these states on the basis of common historical, cultural and ethnic ties. Due to its geographical proximity to Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Russia and India, Central Asian states are going to play an important role in the geopolitics of this region.

Following the collapse of the former Soviet Union and its economic structures and the disruption of the previous inter-regional economic ties, the newly independent Central Asian states have been trying to diversify their economies and seek new partners in regional and economic cooperation. Having huge resources of gas, oil, coal, ferrous and
nonferrous metals, rare minerals, hydro-electric power and irrigation network, besides being the main producers of cotton, wool, silk, etc., a new realisation about their immense economic potential has dawned on Central Asian states. This has created high expectation among the people who are eager to reap the economic fruits of their independence from the former USSR.

India could play an important role in the training of Central Asian officials in governing and administrative system. India was one of the first countries to recognize Central Asia's independence. India, therefore, has good ground on which to build political relations. All the Central Asian states need to promote a secular identity and democratic system. India will be a great beneficiary as well as of immense help and should work towards this. After carefully assessing the situation in early '90s, diplomatic relationship with Central Asian states at the Embassy level in Tashkent, Almaty and other capitals of Central Asia were established.

India had signed Memorandum of Understanding with all the Central Asian States in 1992, during the visit of Mr. Salman Khurshid, India's Deputy Minister of Commerce. These covered credits from India, agreements on transports, banking arrangement, bilateral relationship and trade
agreements. Then followed the signing of a series of agreements with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in February 1993. 12

There are areas in which India is well developed. India can extend technical cooperation to Central Asian states. The Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan said his country had no experience in the past of establishing independent diplomatic relations with foreign countries and therefore the Indian government proposed to send about 10 members of its foreign ministry. Central Asia needs considerable help from India in many spheres, like political, economic, scientific, technological, management, technical, educational and cultural etc. Countries of this region are eager to have India's operational and material help in the development of computer science, telecommunication system, banking method, economic management and financial institution. They would like Indian specialist in these fields to visit Central Asian states to train their personnel. Uzbekistan is interested in promoting joint research in chemistry of plants in particular and chemistry in general because of its relevance for the production of cotton which is one of their main products.

Conscious of the pitfalls of the market economy and in an effort to stabilize and transform their economies, the Central Asian states have intensified the process of privatisation of the economy and inviting of foreign investment. India can help Central Asian states to work out an effective system of market economy to carry out economic development in the Central Asian region. They also look for help from India specially in areas of managerial services, banking, stock investment and blue-prints for working out a pattern of mixed economy. Underdeveloped production structures, disruption of previous economic ties and shortage of hard currency have forced Central Asian states to look for alternative sources of supply.

The emphasis need not be only on bilateral cooperation between India and the Central Asia states, but also on strengthening jointly the process of South-South cooperation especially in the light of the difficulties being faced in the negotiations between the North and the South. India has long historic, trade, political and cultural contacts with Central Asia. India also possesses a great industrial potential and is advanced in the areas of science and technology.

There is enormous potential for closer contacts between Central Asia and India in the spheres of economic
relations, diplomatic, scientific, technological and cultural relations. India's long experience of functioning within a market economy can be of as much use and value to Central Asia states as India's experience in combining state owned sector with semi-public sector and private sector. As a result of the exchange of visits by various delegations on both sides there is hope that relationship between India and Central Asia would become much stronger in all spheres in the future.

The objective of the study is to look at the possible areas of cooperation between India and the Central Asian states. The inability of the Commonwealth Independent States (CIS) so far to create common economic space has expedited the process of regional realignment involving the Central Asian states. By joining the Economic cooperation organization (ECO) along with Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, the Central Asian states reveal a desire to keep their options open, outside the framework of the CIS. In such a situation India's economic and political cooperation with Central Asia will help the latter in not giving up secularism and democracy under the influence of Islamic states.