CHAPTER ONE

Introduction
Introduction

Since the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991, the re-emergence of Islam as a vital socio-political and cultural force in Tajikistan and other parts of the Central Asia has been the subject of considerable debate both within the academic and political circles, round the globe. The 'Islamic Factor', however, is perceived by some experts as something, artificial, something, thought up by scholars of oriental culture and cultivated by some political analysts interested in continued socio-political tensions. Yet to a good number of scholars, Islam as a religion has a significant role to play in the socio-political set up of Tajikistan as it shapes and regulates their internal life and external orientations. Keeping in view the centuries old dominant Islamic faith in the region, present study is an attempt to give an objective analysis of the role of Islam in socio-political structure of Tajikistan, after it appeared as an independent state on the map of the globe. More correctly formulated, the object of work is not simply Islam per se rather the 'Islamic factor', a notion that comprises;

\[1\text{ It is almost impossible to estimate in isolation the role of Islam in the socio-political phenomena of Central Asia in general and Tajikistan in particular, keeping in view the innumerable developments that took place in the Muslim world, especially the Middle East. According to a survey, Islamic resurgence in Tajikistan originated in the late 1970s and was mobilized by the Iranian revolution and the transnational propaganda of political Islam, just like Islamist movements in the other regions of the Muslim world. The specter of cross border movements, which was earlier confined to social and trade context, changed dramatically after the Soviet armed intervention in Afghanistan. The common ethnic and religious background inhabiting this border region facilitated the cross border smuggling of religious and subversive literature, arms and ammunition by the Afghan Mujahideen into Tajikistan. Afghan Mujahideen leaders also acknowledged that the 1979 Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan “helped re-establish links between their Tajik and Muslim brethren in Afghanistan, who share common language, culture, religion and common ancestors.” See interview of Rabbani, Masood and Khalik with Afghan Press (AFP), dated 15 February, 1990.}\]
a) Islam's impact on social and political life.

b) The resurgence and observance of religious rituals and practices by the common masses in their day to day life.

c) The use of Islam as a political instrument by the ruling elite as well as by the opposition.

d) Islam as an instrument in foreign policy; and

e) Islam as means to strengthen authority of Central Asian states in the Muslim world.

In order to lay a stable foundation and to carry out the research work with an objective analysis of the facts, both theoretical and historical perspectives have been employed for which all sorts of information, comprising of official records, reports, newspapers, journals, periodicals etc. have been taken into account. Internet information available on the subject also constitutes a part of the present study. During the course of study, inter-disciplinary approach has been adopted by borrowing insights from history, geography, economics, political science and philosophy. To accomplish the assigned task, I had to visit some centers of excellence outside the valley, prominent among them are, JNU Delhi, Delhi University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Ali-Garh Muslim University, Jammu University, IDSA, Third World Academy, Teen Murti Bhawan, Sapro House, Congress Library. Collection of material and interaction with scholars of repute in these centres went in a long way in the completion of the present work.
Tajikistan lies in the heart of Central Asia and is bordered on the East by China, on the North and West by Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and in the South by Afghanistan. Far from seas and oceans, Tajikistan is an alpine country, with more than half the country above 3,000 meters above sea level. Tajikistan has a total area of 143,100 square kilometers, most of its population lives in valleys, which constitutes only 7% of the country's territory. According to the (2001) census, the last relatively reliable data available, the total population of Tajikistan was 6.3 million. Tajikistan is inhabited by the people of many ethnic groups; Apart from the dominant Tajik population, other ethnic groups include Kyrgyz, Ukrainians, and others.

Turkistan can be divided into Eastern and Western Turkistan. Eastern Turkistan now constitutes the part of the Chinese autonomous province of Xinjiang and the Western Turkistan stretches to the Caspian Sea. Today, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan comprise the main land of Central Asia which occupies an area over 15 million square miles. About 60 per cent of the region is desert. Given its distant location from the oceans, the region was marked by the lack of precipitation. This led to the conditions of extreme aridity over the greater part of the area which was surrounded by an unbroken chain of mountain ranges, nearly four thousand miles long, from east to west. The region is dominated by two great rivers, the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya, both rivers flow into the Aral Sea. In the western reaches of this centre of gravity, in the southern part of Central Asia, lies Tajikistan. Lattimore, Pivot of Asia, Sin Kiang and the Inner Asian frontiers of China and Russia, Boston Brown Little, 1950, p. 3. See also Martin McCauley, Afghanistan and Central Asia, A Modern History, Longman, London, 2001, pp 21-23.


Germans, Turkmen and Koreans. The people of Tajikistan speak Tajiki, a Western Iranian language very close to Farsi and Dari language of Iran and Afghanistan.

The origin of the word “Tajik” is disputed. Most of the Tajik language scholars currently believe that the word “Tajik” is derived from toj (crown). While as to some scholars the word was originally the name of an Arab tribe (Taj or Tazik) that invaded Central Asia, bringing Islam to the region in the seventh and eighth centuries. In medieval Tajiki-Farsi literature and historical chronicles the word “Tajik” was used in the general sense of “Persian” as the opposite of “Turk”. In Russian usage of the sixteenth century and latter, “Tajik” was applied to the urban populace of Central Asia, distinct from the ruling Uzbek nomads. Currently the term “Tajik” applies to the people of the Central Asian Trans-river, who are Europeans of Pamira-Ferghanian type. Most Tajiks are Muslims and in this respect, they not only resemble with other Central Asian Muslims, but most of the Muslims in the Middle East and South Asia.

Before Islam first took root in seventh century CE, Tajikistan has already been exposed to other religions; like, Shamanism, Hellenism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeanism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity. The seventh century

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5 Europa World Year Book, Vol.-2, 1996, p 2950
6 Encyclopedia of Modern Asia, p 395
7 Encyclopedia of Modern Asia, pp 404-405.
9 Zoroastrianism was believed to be one of the oldest religions of the region. The Zoroastrian religion was the state cult of Iran, founded by Zoroaster, a man who lived about 600 BC. The Zoroastrianism remained a dominant religion in the Central Asian region till third century BC. It was systematized by scholars under the ‘Parthian’ Arsacid dynasty (247 BC - 224 CE), and became the official religion under the Sasanian dynasty (225-640 CE). This gave the region a form of cultural and religious unity. The Zervanist (after Zervan Akarana), with its principles of good and evil, and the infinite struggle between the two, began slowly to prevail. Giampaolor R Capisani, The Hand Book of Central Asia, I B Tauris Publishers, London, 2000, p 118
10 Manichaeanism drives its name from Prophet Mani or Manes, an Iranian born in Babylonia in the third century. This religion deeply influenced the people of the region and extended into and
witnessed one of the most significant changes with the coming of Islam in the region. Since then, Islam had a great impact all over the region and continues to be traditional religion of the great majority of the indigenous people of Central Asia including Tajikistan. After the invasion of Arabs in the Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya region, a new model of faith and way of life came into being in Central Asia. The Central Asians embraced their philosophies and accepted their language for the comprehension and propagation of Islamic culture and Islamic

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11 Buddhism was early introduced into Central Asia from India and Buddhist monuments and art dating from one millennium BC are still extant. Buddhism dominated the region culturally as well as politically till fourth-century CE. Peoples of Central Asia. p 118

12 A small urban community of Jews was established in Central Asia in the middle of the one millennium BC. Judaism has remained an urban creed in Central Asia for the past two and one-half millennia. The Hand Book of Central Asia. p.119

13 Christianity as an urban creed in this part of the world was introduced in the tenth-century CE, by Christian Bishop of Merv in 334CE. The deepest influence of Christianity on the religions of Central Asia came through the teaching of Theodore of Mopsuestia and his follower, Nestorius Bishop until fifth-century. The Hand Book of Central Asia, p 120.

The Hand Book of Central Asia, pp.202-03 Islam coexisted with Zoroastrianism until the tenth century, with Manichaeism until the twelfth century, and with Nestorian Christianity until the fifteenth century. The presence of these religions, together with the constant interaction with the nomadic tribes of the Great Steppe and their Shamanist cults, led to a greater moderation in Central Asian Islam. Hanafî school of thought got currency in almost all parts of Central Asia and the Sufism (mysticism), the least official and orthodox wing of Islam, became the most significant component for the expansion and propagation of Islam in the region. As a result of which during the ninth and twelfth centuries doors were opened for the development of Muslim sciences, philosophy to transform Central Asia into one of the most important intellectual centers of the Islamic world. Beginning in the sixteenth century, however, the rise of oceanic transportation led to a decline in the caravan trade routes across Central Asia, which in turn precipitated a significant contraction of economic and intellectual contact of the region with the outside world. Ties with co-believers from other regions also declined because of two factors, Russian colonization of the Muslim people of the Volga, Urals, and Siberia (to the north and northeast of Central Asia) and British colonization of the Muslim peoples of south Asia (to the south of Central Asia). As a result, Central Asia increasingly found itself on the periphery of the Muslim world, its religious life consequently becoming more secluded and autarchic. Russian colonization in the second half of the nineteenth century further intensified this process, impeding contacts between the Muslims of Central Asia and their coreligionists in the Middle East. As a result, the religious processes unfolding in the Middle East and North African centers of the Islamic world had no impact on Central Asia, till the end of the twentieth century. Evgeny Abdullaev, “The Central Asian Nexus: Islam and politics”, in Boris Rumer. (Ed.), Central Asia: A Gathering Storm. M.E SharpeInc . 2003, pp 248-49.
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Imam Bukhari Mosque
Samarqand
teachings. In the words of Ahmad Hasan Dani, "Islam gave new socio-religious system to Central Asia after the conquest of Arabs". An absolutely new religious ideology, which influenced and fashioned their private, public and state life. As a result, from tenth century Central Asia emerged as one of the great centers of Islamic learning and culture, with special reference to the great Silk Road cities of Bukhara and Samarqand. It was during this time that the city of Bukhara, with its many mosques and religious schools gained its reputation as one of the most sacred city of Islam. Intellectual advances of Muslim scholars of Turkistan, however did not last long given the annexation of Central Asia to Russia in 18th Century. During the Tsarist rule, Muslims underwent unprecedented persecution; mosques were destroyed or used for non-religious purpose. Scores of Mullahs were liquidated and imprisoned. Muslims were subjected to all sorts of discrimination. Islam was considered a mortal enemy because of strong resistance involving several rebellions inspired and led by Muslim religious leaders.

The Communist authorities of the Soviet Union, later on, inherited Central Asia from the Tsarist Russia which collapsed during the First World War. The Communists after the acquisition of Central Asia promised equal treatment to the people, and Lenin (communist revolutionary leader) in a decree declared to put an end to the policy of religious, racial and national discrimination. However, the real purpose of his appeal was to get immediate Muslim support for consolidating the Soviet power. Once victorious, they forgot the promises made to the common masses. After October 1917 revolution, the foundation for an anti-Islamic strategy was laid out as the Bolshevik (Communist

15 Ahmad Hasan Dani, New Light on Central Asia, Renaissance Publishing House, Delhi, 1993, p 60
Revolutionaries) government implemented radical programmes separating religion from the state, and launched violent campaigns against all religious institution in general and Islam in particular. The rationale behind this strategy was derived from the Marxist belief that religion is an obstacle to modernization and social development. As such, Islam became the victim of militant 'atheism' that was integral component of the materialist ideology of the Communists. The Muslims felt the blow of this Bolshevik policy when mosques, Madrasah's, Shariah courts and religious endowment lands (iwafs) were confiscated. Muslim scholars were deported and many were killed during the purges of the 1920s and 1930s. Under Stalin, Lenin's successor, the outward attributes of Islam, such - the payment of the Zakat (alms), the Hajj (pilgrimage) to Mekkah, and the observance of the fast Ramadan, were outlawed. Further Communists in order to cut off the Muslims from their cultural heritage and religious bonds with the Ummah, the script of the language was changed and the teaching and publishing in Arabic language- the Lingua-Franca of the Islamic World was banned, even printing presses were forbidden to publish the Holy Quran. However, in the year 1941, in order to re-establish its credibility among the Muslims within and outside the country, the Soviet Union installed an “official clergy” to control the religious activities of Muslims to formally recognize their spiritual needs. As a result of which, the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) came into being. However, the representatives of ‘official’ Islam were regarded by the Muslims in general as

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18 Ghoncheh Tazmini, “Islamic Revival in Central Asia: A Potent Force or a Misconception”, Central Asian Survey. Vol. 20, No 01, 2001, p 64
20 Culture, Society and Politics in Central Asia and India. p 266.
agents of the Communists because they neither showed any concern for the
defense of Islam against the militant atheists nor cared to voice their grievances.
Instead, they endorsed the policies of the Soviet regime.\textsuperscript{22}

With the coming of Gorbachev to power in 1985, he set out to transform Soviet
society through his policies of \textit{perestroika} (radical economic restructuring and
reform), and \textit{glasnost} (openness). These reforms initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev,
put an end to atheistic propaganda against Islam.\textsuperscript{23} If previously Islam had been
blamed for acting as a roadblock for social and economic progress, it was now
sought to be used for fight against social evils. The relaxed atmosphere created
by the \textit{glasnost} policies led to a resurgence of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism
in Central Asia in general and Tajikistan in particular. However, the pace of
Islamic resurgence over shadowed the other two.\textsuperscript{24} The subsequent declaration
of independence in the year 1991, by the Central Asian Republics including
Tajikistan signaled liberation for Central Asian Islam.

In order to carry out the assigned work in an analytical and systematic manner,
the thesis, besides, introduction and conclusion, has been divided into three
chapters that constitute the structural part of the entire research work.
1. Chapter first is an attempt to highlight the socio-political milieu of Tajikistan.
   Followed, by chapter second
2. Role of Islam in socio-political setup of modern Tajikistan.
3. Finally chapter third is an attempt to highlight the role of religious
   organizations in both socio-political sphere of Tajikistan.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Culture, Society and Politics in Central Asia and India}, p.267.
p.09

\textsuperscript{23} Davendra Kaushik, "Islamic factor and fundamentalist threat in Central Asia", in V D Chopra,
(Ed.), \textit{Rise of Terrorism and Secessionism in Eurasia}, New Delhi, 2001, p 167
1. Chapter first is an attempt to introduce the topic of research in general with geographical and historical description of the country. An attempt has been made to give an account of the ethnic composition, language, culture, religion, education and economy of the region. Besides, political turmoil (between 1992-97), present political structure and foreign influences and interest in Tajikistan has also been discussed in this chapter. The republic of Tajikistan is geographically a divided territory, which possesses considerable natural resources, and is an alpine country. Although the idea of a Tajik nation-state was a twentieth-century conception, historically speaking, there was no name as Tajikistan in ancient and medieval world. Hence, it simply defined a specified portion of land occupied by the peoples of Persian speaking language. They represented the development of one of the early layers of Central Asian civilization, predating the advent of the Turks. The area of present day Tajikistan has always been attractive to foreign powers because of its strategic location and its resources. They were ruled by the aliens like the Achemenids, Greeks, Kushans, Arabs, Mongols and Russian etc. Even though, the Tajiks were of Aryan-Iranian descent, they welcomed the process of acculturation and absorption of other cultural influences. Tajikistan is a multi-ethnic country, but majority of its population are followers of Islam a traditional religion of the indigenous people. Tajiks are divided into many tribes, but like other settled Central Asians, they are strongly identified with their region, which formed the basis for clan like ties based on patron-client relations. Traditionally, Tajik family is an extended family. It is composed of several generations living in one

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27 Encyclopedia of Modern Asia, pp.399-400
household. However, since independence there has been a loosening of family bonds owing to pressures of new economic demands, although, Tajik society is often described as patriarchal. Women are not "weaker" sex among the Tajik but plays an important role. As far as the economy is concerned, under the Soviet Union the Tajik economy was not allowed to develop independently. With the declaration of independence Tajikistan began to conduct its own economic policy, stressing a gradual transition to a market economy. However, transition from a centralized planned economy to a market economy has proven to be very difficult. The recession in its economy, first of all, owes to the destruction of economic ties with the republics of the former Soviet Union, followed by civil war, and natural disasters have all conspired against success. The agrarian and industrial complex, which essentially determines the socio-economic situation in Tajikistan, was in the most complicated position. The bulk of the population is discontented with economic situation, which existed in Tajikistan. In education sector, however, continuing the tradition established by the Soviets, the republic continues to enjoy a high literacy rate of 98 percent. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Tajikistan was the only former Soviet Muslim republic in which Communist party immediately lost power. Although during the presidential elections of November 1991, the former head of the Communist party, Rahman Nabiev, was elected President; his victory however exacerbated political factionalism. Two coalitions fought each other, with different regional

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32 "Tajikistan an overview - Irah Bashiri htm"
identities and ideological alignments. One camp was led by an opposition coalition of Islamic groups and new born secular democratic movements against old Soviet elites. In this civil war one-tenth of the total population of the country fled their homes, and an estimated fifty thousand people lost their lives. Finally, talks sponsored by the United Nations in 1994-97 led to peace and the incorporation of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) into the government. Tajik constitution, adopted in 1994, declared the country to be independent, democratic, unified and secular state with separate executive, legislative and political power, and it’s President as the head of both state and government. In the early 1990s Tajikistan saw the formation of political organization. Although they had different platforms, they jointly advocate the concept of popular sovereignty, civil liberties, and nationalism as well as the desire of the Muslim majority for religious freedom. Prominent among them are, the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT), Rastokhez (resurrection), the Islamic Rebirth Party (IRP), and Lali Badakhshan (ruby of Badakhshan) played an important role in the reconstruction of political scenario of Tajikistan. So far foreign powers are concerned, the geo-political interests of various countries, namely, Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan etc, and last but not least America are interwoven in Tajikistan in different ways and in different places. Although, the post-independence era continued but did not change the scenario to the extent as was

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34 Encyclopedia of Modern Asia. p-404


expected. The future of Tajikistan is based not only how the government broadens its political bases and improves its economy of the country but also on how it manages to balance foreign powers, especially Russian and Uzbek involvement in its domestic affairs.

2. Chapter second of the thesis is an attempt to identify the role of Islam in socio-political setup of modern Tajikistan. In view of the fact that, Tajik identity is historically an Islamic identity. Right from its advent in the region, Islam has played a significant role in how Tajiks defined themselves and how outsiders define the Tajik people. Therefore, in this chapter an attempt has been made to bring to lime light the factors that led to the Islamization of the area and the position of Islam during Muslim, Tsarist and Soviet periods is the main concern of the present chapter. An attempt has also been made to highlight the role of prominent institutions that changed the mindset of the people of Tajikistan with regard to their religious belief, practices and way of life. As the Islamic faith remains a powerful socio-cultural force in the region from the advent of Islam in second half of the seventh century CE, Islam has permeated various aspect of the people’s mode of life and psychology. Ceremonies connected with life cycles, festivals and pilgrimages are synonymous with Islamic beliefs and practices. Islam has even left its stamp of influence on the patterns of dresses, literature and philosophy. So much so that an adage widely current in Central Asia, adequately encapsulates the situation—"You cannot be an Uzbek, or a Tajik or a Kazakh, if you are not a Muslim." It would not be out of place to mention that Islam as a religion has survived in Tajikistan and elsewhere in Central Asia and withstood the storm of suppression despite 150 years of Russian and Soviet

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efforts to eliminate it. The chapter would therefore provide a detailed account of the atrocities meted out to the Muslim population of the area and the amount of resistance displayed by the Muslims. In view of the fact that, collapse of former Soviet Union in 1991, was not only a simple fragmentation of a political entity, but also failure of an ideology which had held most of the Western world in the grip of fear and awe-and maintained a well guarded iron curtain between the Central Asian countries and rest of the Islamic world. With the end of Soviet power, however the world witnessed a resurgence of Islam in Central Asian republics an understandable reaction to Islam's long oppression under Soviet rule.\footnote{Igor Lipovskv. "The Awakening of Central Asian Islam". \textit{Middle Eastern Studies}, Vol 32, No.03, July, 1996, p.11.} The chapter therefore gives an objective analysis of the factors responsible for the disintegration of former USSR and the dominant influence of Islam on Tajik society by way of active participation of Muslims in the promotion of religious ideals the manifestation of which is found in the institutions like, \textit{Salat}, \textit{Ramadan}, \textit{Zakat}, \textit{Haji} and other scores of issues related to their socio-culture life. The rising influence of Islam on Tajik society can be seen from the substantial increase in the performance of religious rituals and practices by the people. The \textit{nimaz} (Salat) or daily five time prayers, which is the most important practice of Islam, is being performed by a majority of the population of the country. In comparison to the Soviet era, the Friday prayers draw large congregation despite the difficulties in accommodation. \textit{Azan} is now heard from every mosque.\footnote{Shireen Akiner, "Islam the State and Ethnicity in Central Asia in Historical Perspective". \textit{Russia and The Moslem World}, Vol 04, No 58, 1997, p 40.} The observances of other Islamic rituals are also on the rise. Fasting during the holy month of \textit{Ramadan} has made a significant comeback. Another noticeable trend in the society is the growing number of pilgrims to Mekkah, which was next to impossible during the Soviet times. Quest for pilgrimage to \textit{Mekkah} has steadily increased since 1990. Although no reliable data is available to estimate
number of pilgrims, however, as per the unofficial report five hundred Tajiks participated in ceremony in 1993.\textsuperscript{43} Zakat, obligatory alms designed to aid the poor, is also practiced by the majority of the people in accordance with the Islamic rules. People in general follow strict Islamic rules in burial as well. The circumcision of every male child is done according to Islamic tradition. Marriages are being performed in Islamic way as the mullah solemnizes it by a formal nikah. Similarly the number of men growing beards on their face has substantially increased.\textsuperscript{44} The growing trend of religiosity in the society is also found in their enthusiasm for wearing of Islamic symbols and amulets by a good number of individuals, and the decoration of car interiors with Quranic verses. \textsuperscript{45} Another example of the revivalism of the Central Asian customs, is the celebration of Novroz and visits to Sufi shrines.\textsuperscript{46} Moreover, on February 25th, 1994, government of Tajikistan officially banned the broadcast of all the programmes “that might offend national traditions and generally accepted moral standard of the society”. The state media has also been cautioned not to carry advertisements for alcohol and tobacco products.\textsuperscript{47} Construction of new mosques gave a phillip to the socio-political reforms carried out by the Muslims of the region. By October 1990, there were a total of 40 mosques in Tajikistan compared to 17 earlier. A year later by October 1991, there were over one thousand new mosques in the republic and a new mosque was being opened almost every day, paid for largely by public donations form the local community.\textsuperscript{48} Moreover, the present Tajik muttiate (Religious Board) has been

\textsuperscript{43} Islam and Politics in Central Asia, p.98-99.

\textsuperscript{44} Shamsuddin, “Geo-politics of Central Asia”, in India and Russian in Changing World, by Indian Council of Social Sciences Research. New Delhi, 1999, p 102


\textsuperscript{47} Islam and Politics in Central Asia , p 160

\textsuperscript{48} Ahmad Rashid, The Resurgence of Central Asia Islam or Nationalism, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1994. p 45
instrumental in the revival of around 2000 mosques and prayer houses. In order to evaluate the socio-political setup of Tajikistan the chapter most humbly gives an account of the factors responsible for the resurgence of Islam in Tajikistan and to find out the role of religious institutions in general, muištiate of Tajikistan in particular and the measures taken up by the government in the propagation of Islamic faith in the region.

Knowledge is generally deemed to be the backbone of socio-political order of a region. Tajikistan just after its independence did not leave this aspect of society unattended. Since the educational establishments are considered to be the predominant institutions of socio-political upliftment in the area, scores of Madrasah’s were opened in almost all major towns of the republic which offer courses in Arabic, Shariah law and Islamic history. The second largest Islamic institute for higher education was opened in Dushanbe in the year 1990. In which, an estimated 1700 students have reportedly been involved in Islamic training. In addition, Tajik muištiate, promoted religious education in state schools, and distributed Islamic literature, including the Qur’an. On the top of it, in February 1992, the Central Asian states including Tajikistan called for teaching of Persian and Arabic, in public schools. Their respective education ministries published literature in these languages to encourage their reintroduction in the Central Asian region. In order to popularize these languages among the masses, it is reported that Tajikistan with the help of Iran is broadcasting Persian and Arabic programmes. The main intention behind the changes is to revive the Islamic culture and tradition. An attempt has been

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49 Yevgeni Abdullayev, “Islam and the Islamic factor in Modern Uzbekistan”, *Russia and The Muslim World*, No 10 (76), Moscow, 1998, p.22

50 *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, p 97

51 *Sociology of Religion*, Vol.64, No 03, pp 405-6

made to work out the role of Madrash's, Islamic Institutions and the muftiate of Tajikistan, coupled with the role of print and electronic media in the dissemination of Islamic literature and revival of Islamic culture.

Since 1925, the Communist Party and state authorities mounted a large scale campaign aimed at the 'emancipation of Muslim women' who were encouraged to abandon the customary veils and to come out of their traditional seclusion—a campaign which was met by a bitter but ultimately futile exercise of the predominantly traditionalist population. However, in the post-independence period, societies in Central Asia including Tajikistan have been affected by certain 're-traditionalization', which is evident in such domains as the use of public space and the regulations concerning women. The chapter, as such, would highlight the role of family in the promotion of religious ideals in the society and the factors that made women to abide by the set rules of Islamic Shariah. There is an increasing expectation that women wear traditional clothing in public. This is the case even in major cities such as Dushanbe. As such, the observance of the Islamic dress code, hijab (veil) for women has again come to the fore-front; little girls (6-17 age group) have been seen going to Quranic schools wearing hijab of Iranian type. Public spaces like, parks earlier regarded as favoured place, are now looked down upon as European styles of leisure, and girls are being increasingly discouraged to spend time in parks. Moreover, education for girls is no longer seen as a guarantee for economic security and marriage is preferred to education, resulting in early marriages and polygamy as they were prevalent in the pre-soviet Central Asian societies.

Introduction


Immediately after independence in 1991, some majority-Muslim states—most notably Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey and Pakistan played a significant role in the Islamic revival of Central Asia. The chapter therefore would highlight the role and influence of Muslim world in the establishment of Islamic institutions that led to the desired socio-cultural changes in the region. Saudi Arabia and Iran have been pumping large amount of money for the construction of mosques and madrasahs. They also send religious teachers to lead the people to true form of Islam.\textsuperscript{56} Turkey, although officially and formally a secular state, has also constructed a good number of schools in Tajikistan, many of which provide religious instructions as a part of its effort to expand its own influence in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{57}

In order to understand the role of Islam in the political structure of Tajikistan an attempt has been made to give an objective analysis of political history of the region. The chapter therefore is an attempt to provide an analytical study of the power game in Tajikistan right from Islamic period to the post-independence period. As Central Asian societies do not have a history of democratic popular participation in politics. Popular sovereignty was not even an issue in the Khanates, where leadership was hereditary. Khans claimed their throne and asserted legitimacy on the basis of their lineage and upholding of the Sharia. The ulama were important players in sanctifying khans and directing the population to submit to their rule. Popular sovereignty was alien to Central Asia. This remained true for the 20th century experience of the region including Tajikistan, for not even the Soviet system with its doctoral rule allowed popular sovereignty to become a political reality. Soviet style democracy made a mockery

\textsuperscript{56} India and Russian in Changing World, p 33
of citizens’ rights and free political participation. This pre-Soviet and Soviet experiences have left a legacy of authoritarian culture.  

However, after the collapse of the USSR the Central Asian states for the first time in their history faced a challenge and the possibility of determining their own independent national politics. The collapse of Communism left many segments of society without any particular direction. If in the past the communist leadership and society was taught to serve the state and the party, now neither the same state nor the party existed. Such situation created a total ideological and moral vacuum in Central Asia which did not have any experience and knowledge about any alternative to Communism. Soon in Tajikistan and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, a power struggle developed over who would rule and over how much of the old system would be preserved; that is, would the government be neo-Soviet or evolve something post-Soviet? Such circumstances created a unique and complicated problem both in Tajikistan and other countries of the region as how to build a state corresponding to the local traditions and political culture. It is in the backdrop of this chaotic situation that an attempt has been made to find a slot for Islam and define its relations with the structures of power. After all, Islam is one of the main components of the country’s cultural, civilizational, and ethnic identity. The increasing influence of Islam in the post-Soviet Tajikistan persuaded all political forces in the region—and not merely the ex-communists—to make serious allowance for this factor in their policy-making.

The role and position of Islam in the political scenario of Tajikistan is the main concern of the present study. An attempt has been made to explore objectively the factors which opened doors for Islam in the political scenario of Tajikistan. Since, all the Central Asian republics including Tajikistan have officially declared

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themselves Muslim states, all the present ex-communist presidents of the Central Asian republics swore oath on the (secular) constitution with a copy of Qur'an in their hands. Another significant fact is that, without any exception, all the presidents of the Central Asian states have been on the pilgrimage (the hajj) to the holy cities of Mekkah and Madinah. Moreover, the 'Law on Freedom of Conscience Organization of Religion' passed in December 1990, states that every individual has a right to freely determine his religion, and to profess religion individually or together with others. The law officially recognizes citizens' rights to receive religious education. Moreover, since the collapse of Communism the religious policy of the government has become more reconciliatory in approach and accommodative in orientation partly because there is no ideological justification to impose restriction that prevailed under the banner of Marxism, and partly because the process of national revival in Central Asia including Tajikistan has a religious component that can not be ignored by those in power. In this connection, an attempt has been made to identify the role of official Islam in the process of revivalism of Islam in the region, as the official Islam has continued to play a significant role in shaping the on going Islamic revival. Most significant change has been the financial support of the state for the construction and repair of mosques and Madrasah's.

It is worth mentioning, that the largely Communist and Secular elite of Central Asia including Tajikistan are in a sticky situation. On the one hand, they have to develop Islamic credentials in order to reinforce their legitimacy, on the other; they have no intention to allow Islamic activism to challenge their own position. As a result, as Martha Olcott has pointed out that, 'the authorities are not scared of the revival of Islam as long as it is limited to the rediscovery of ancient culture

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[60] Law on Freedom of Conscience and Organization of Religion. Law No 297. Issue NO 01 The law was amended in 1991 (law No 297. Issue No.01); and 1992 (Law No 205. Issue No 22); and again in 1994 (Law No.452. Issue No 23-24), which is the final version.
[61] Sociology of Religion. Vol.64. No.03. p.405
and a great participation in religious rituals'. While, the political forces currently in power are doing their best to separate religion from politics. “We are Muslims not fundamentalists” is the official stand of Emomali Rakhmonov, Tajikistan’s present head. To, Islam karimov, Uzbekistan’s President, “fundamentalism begins when religion starts interfering in Politics”.

It is obvious, for the ruling circles’ turning to Islam is probably tactical in character, and the Islamic factor is decisive for some parts of the opposition. The chapter therefore would highlight the role of Islamic opposition parties in the post-independence Tajik politics. In view of the fact that, Islamic parties in opposition openly state that ‘Islamic alternative’ is the only possible solution if the present situation is to be radically improved in view of the severe socio-political and economic problems that are being faced by almost all the republics including Tajikistan. The incompetence of new leadership to solve ensuing problems created the new class which came to be known as opposition. The idealistic hopes of this new class which imagined free elections even if difficult to attain, but at least a future without repression, soon vanished under the exercise of state repression by the regimes of these newly independent republics. The understanding of the ruling elite that the implementation of a new system would require new methods of governance which subsequently made them realize that if such a new system would come into existence the need for their presence in power will disappear. For, the emergence of new political groups and other organizations not controlled by the old political order, appellation of fundamentalism” has become a convenient way to stigmatize all those who have

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64 Maksud Djavadov, "Islamic State in Central Asia”, June 2, 2003
some sort of connection with Islam and who challenge the status quo. This opposition is variously described as fundamentalism, Islamism, extremism or ‘wahabism’.

In case of Tajikistan, soon after independence, tension over the role of Islam in the state-building was a contributory factor to the outbreak of civil war in 1992 (although regionalism and ethnicity played at least as great role as religious or ideological factors in the turbulent Tajik politics). The Islamic Revival Party (IRP) led opposition to former communist regime but failure on both sides to compromise produced bitter fighting that continued until a peace accord was reached in 1997. That agreement legalized the IRP, but in practice President Rakhmonov has gradually undermined its position in the political system, as such, Tajikistan is the only state that permits an Islamist party to participate in politics, though this “accommodation” was achieved only after a bloody civil war. With the emasculation of the IRP, more radical groups have gained influence such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. That is why; growing popularity of religion is characterized as a response to unjust political, social and economic situation of the region. The political conflict in Tajikistan for much of the 1990s also stimulated increased use of “Wahabis”, as the defenders of the old order tried to justify their stance and stigmatize the


67 That is why, when political analysts warn of an ‘Islamic threat’ in Central Asia, they often use the Tajik civil war to back their claims. They refer to this conflict in order to illustrate how Islam, a cultural religious phenomenon, manifests itself in politics. What is more, the media portrayed the conflict in Tajikistan as a model for future conflicts in Central Asia where Islamic fanatics would use force to challenge state authority.

diverse coalition which advocated change by calling the religious elements of that coalition Wahabis (fundamentalists).\(^6\)

Notwithstanding the fact, none of the Islamic forces in Tajikistan have demanded the establishment of an "Islamic State" nor have they promoted so-called "Islamic Fundamentalism".\(^7\) The leadership of the IRP said repeatedly that an Islamic state was only a distant goal. After years of enduring Soviet anti-Islamic policies they simply advocate freedom of religion for Muslims, which was far from a desire to create a theocracy. As Qazi Turajonzoda, declared, even if all mullahs want to establish an Islamic state, it is impossible today. The republic has travelled far down the secular path and people would not give up their habits and way of life easily. When Qazi Turajonzoda spoke of an Islamic state, he described a synthesis of democratic institutions and Islamic values. The head of the IRP, Muhammad Sharief Himmatzoda, and other party members also rejected the equation of Islamic politics with radicalism. The Islamic-based segment of the opposition shared the basic aims of its secular allies which include: political democratization and market-oriented reforms. It acknowledged that Tajikistan presently need a good working relationship with Russia. Islamic political leaders also sought good relations with United States in contrast to the anti-Americanism usually associated with radical Islamic politics.\(^7\)

3. Finally chapter third is an attempt to highlight the role of religious organizations in the socio-political sphere of Tajikistan. The efforts of the religious organizations with regard to the revival of Islam, their point of view of fundamentalism and the response of the government to their ideology is infact


the fundamental concern of the present chapter. Among the religious organizations of Tajikistan, the Islamic Revival Party is the most organized political force, and the most important Islamic organization that came into being at a time when the soviet rule was on its last legs. The leaders of IRP states, the aim of our organization is the Islamisation of Tajik society and politics in terms of real Islam. For this purpose, the party will engage only in constitutional methods of achieving its programme. It rejects extremism and terrorism, and the IRP seeks co-operation with like minded political groups. Thus, the IRP openly declares its adherence to Islam as an important political force, and the Tajik Muslim leaders’ stress, that they simply want the revival of Islam in their newly independent country, not a revolution. Nevertheless, shortly after independence, the government of Tajikistan, in alliance of convince with Russia and Uzbekistan, joined forces to combat the emergence of political Islam in Tajikistan. It was the first Islamic party to have emerged in the former Soviet Union, and then known as, the all-Union Islamic Renaissance Party. The agenda of the party on the eve of its formation duly authenticated by various Islamic leaders of the country was to unite all Muslims. The party was founded on 9 June, 1990 in south Russian city of Astrakhan. The all-Union IRP managed to mobilize the mass support exploiting the deep rooted religious structure in Central Asia and tried to use Islam in the region in its attempt to challenge the Communist regime with Islamic ideology. According to the party manifesto, religion is the main identity of the Central Asian people, which shapes their daily life as well as their moral, cultural and socio-political patterns. Therefore, in this chapter an attempt has been made to highlight the role of IRP in the propagation


of Islam among common masses in the region. As most of the leaders of the all-Union IRP are of the view that initially they were subjected to the Tsarist and then the Soviet social and political environment. Consequently they need, to be educated about the Islamic way of life, and its glorious past. The Islamic Revival Party believes that all moral, legal, economic, and political principles are subservient to the will of Allah; therefore it is necessary to turn to Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunnah, free of innovations and modernization. Fundamentalism therefore, is not fanaticism or reactions but to follow the principles as followed by the Prophet himself.

In Tajikistan, the IRP had become active long before its formation, drawing support from universities, polytechnics, pedagogical institutions, and from the skilled workers at factories and state farms. On October 26, 1991, the IRP got official recognition and declared its independence from the all-Union IRP in Dushanbe 1992 under the name of Nelizat-e-Islami-ye Tajikistan. By 1991 the party had succeeded in developing an elaborate countrywide organizational network, expanding its membership through active involvement in mosques and prayer houses whose numbers had expanded significantly since 1989.

Ironically, The IRP itself is increasingly fractious and politically compromised by its participation in government as such President Rakhmonov has undermined its position in the political system. As a result, with the emasculation of the IRP, more radical groups have gained influence. In the backdrop of this, an attempt has been made to identify the factors which lead to emergence of Hizb-ul-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation) a religio-political organization got general

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75 Nezavisimaja Gazetta. 31st January, 1992. p.05.


recognition in Central Asia. The party has supplanted the IRP as the most popular Islamist party in the country, particularly in the North. Organised in Jerusalem (Israel) in 1953 and having headquarter in London, *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* aims at establishing a single Islamic caliphate incorporating all Central Asian republics of the common wealth of independent states, along with the Muslim regions of Russia, China, and the northern Caucasus, proclaiming a non-violent way to a theocratic state.

*Hizb-ut-Tahrir* has several arguments that attract common people. The chapter therefore would bring to limelight the factors responsible for the popularity of *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* in the region as party claims to support the interest of all Muslims regardless of their national identity and educate post-Soviet Muslims in the right way about Islam. One of the most powerful arguments of *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* is advocacy of regional cooperation across borders. Supporters of the Islamic Caliphate advocate free trade and no borders between Muslim states. The idea of a unified state is supported by traders, customers and many others involved in cross-border trade. In the words of party leaders, 'Hizb-ut-Tahrir presents a moderate concept of life; the aim is simply, to create a heaven on the earth and also to prepare people for heaven (*Janat*) in the life here after.'

Likewise, an attempt has been made to highlight the role and contribution of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in Tajikistan as most of the leaders belonging to the IMU and participated actively in the Tajik civil war as members of the United Tajik Opposition between 1992 and 1997 against the Communist government of Tajikistan. Since Islamic movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) has been one of the established movements of Uzbekistan in the 1990s with an aim to promote

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Islamic doctrines. By 2000 it got currency in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and to some extent in Kyrgyzstan. IMU says it is initially fighting only to overthrow President Islam Karimov and bring Islam to Uzbekistan; later on whole Central Asia would be its consideration. The chapter therefore would bring to light the factors which are responsible for the emergence of IMU. As initially, the leaders of these groups preferred to legalize their political status through legitimate means. The efforts of some Muslim leader from Fargana valley to create a party (as a legitimate opposition) immediately put the government on alert, since officials in Uzbekistan still bear the strong imprint of the traditional Soviet mentality that assumes single party system. With this, in Uzbekistan the first manifestations of Islamism were rapidly suppressed, and an all-out campaign against any Muslim political activity was initiated. IMU activities came to the notice of the international community when it tried to assassinate Uzbek President Islam Karimov in February, 1999 by exploding bombs in Tashkent city. IMU suffered a major setback when the US attacked the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan after the 9/11 incident. Not only were the Taliban, the main supporters of the IMU, defeated, but the IMU also lost number of fighters, including its leader Juma Namangani. However, a number of violent incidents in Central Asia, since late 2002, indicate the signs of resurgence of the IMU. Keeping in view, the role of Islamic organizations an attempt has been made to throw light on the stated objectives of these organizations as one of the

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64 *Institute of War and Peace Reporting*, Reporting Central Asia No 70, September 5, 2001 Available at http://www.iwpr.net

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fundamental themes of all religious organization has been the concept of Ummah, the community of believers. In which the attachments and considerations like nationality, ethnicity, and regionalism are irrelevant and less important. Islam forms a common bond which is above these attachments and simultaneously transcends them.

The present ruling elite’s, however, are a legacy of a bygone era, clinging ruthlessly to power. The political course of these new states is in flux. Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were noted during the 1990s for their pro-Russian stance and orientation. However, during the late 1990s, other major powers have entered the fray, in particular the United States. In the wake of the events of September 11 the United States has furthered its political, economic and now military presence in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These states are presenting themselves domestically as well as internationally as ‘front-line states’ in American-led war against terrorism.

Yet the average Muslim within Central Asia has not received much respite. Many thought the collapse of the Soviet Union would permit them to return to Islam as they whole-heartedly desired. The regimes though have had other ideas. The repression the Muslims suffered at the hands of the Soviet Union continues in a new guise under the newly independent Central Asian regimes. The ‘war against terrorism’ is now permitting states like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to continue their campaign against Islam, albeit now with greater international backing.

However, at the core of the issue, though, there is not Islam, but the social, political and economic problems that trouble the region. It is these problems that one should focus on in the struggle against fundamentalism. In order to understand the Central Asia, solve its problems, stabilise it and stimulate its development it is necessary to abandon the unilateral approach to Islam founded on distrust and fear. Islam as such may destabilise Central Asia, but just as well, it may promote its stability and development.