CHAPTER THIRD

Role of Islam in Socio-political Set-up
3.1 Cultural Evolution of Islam in Central Asia

Tajik identity is historically an Islamic identity. Islam first came to the territory of what was then Turkistan present day Central Asia in the seventh century. Since then Islam played a significant role in how Tajiks defined themselves and how outsiders define the Tajik people.¹ Before analyzing the role of Islam in socio-political setup of modern Tajikistan, it would not be out of place to study the historical background of advent and expansion of Islam in the region. In fact, Islam came to Central Asia not long after its birth in the seventh century. The Arab conquest spanned roughly the period 600-800CE era with further penetration via traders until 1200.² It was however, embraced only gradually by the Iranian and Turkic speaking people of the region, and became the dominant religion by the ninth century. From the tenth century Central Asia emerged as one of the greatest centers of Islamic learning and culture, particularly the great Silk Road cities of Bukhara and Samarqand.³ The first Arab incursion started under the Umayyads, the conquest began in the 680s on the right bank of the Amu Darya (an area known to the Arabs as (mawara-un-nahr). The forces came from Khurasan (Iran), where an Arab governorship had been set up with the town of Merv as its centre. At first the

initial campaigns took the form of predatory raids. At the end of the seventh/beginning of the eight century, Arab policy towards Central Asia underwent a fundamental change. In 704, in the time of Caliph al-walid ibn Abdul Malik, the task of conquering Transoxania (Arabic, Mawara-un-nahr) was entrusted to the governor of Khurasan, Qutaiba-bin-Muslim (705-715), who ushered in a new and decisive stage in the conquest of Transoxania by the Umayyad's. During his first campaigns in Transoxania, his forces included the ruler of Balkh, and the ruler of Chaganiyan who invited Qutaiba into his country to participate in a joint struggle against the rulers of the neighbouring territories. Under Qutaiba-bin-Muslim, who consolidated his military victories by settling Arabs among the native population and through them continued propagation of Islam in the region. For several years after his death, the Arabs launched no major campaigns to extend their dominance during the period 715-720, concentrating instead on consolidating their hold on the region they had already conquered. Towards the middle of 8th century, Khurasan became the staging area for a moment that eventually toppled the Umayyad dynasty and replaced it with the Abbasids. During the Abbasid period the Arab Presence was soon withdrawn, however, administratively the region remained under the jurisdiction of Khurasan, much within the Iranian sphere of influence.

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History of Civilization of Central Asia, p457


History of Civilization of Central Asia, p.457

History of Civilization of Central Asia, p 459

History of Civilization of Central Asia, p 458

The ostensible justification for the "Abbassid revolution" was a desire of the Ummah, the Muslim community, to be ruled by caliphs who belonged to the Prophet's (pbuh) family. Svat Soucek. Inner Asia. Cambridge University Press. United Kingdom, p 62

After the invasion of Arabs in the Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya region including Tajikistan with the new model of faith and way of life, a new type of society 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 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. During the 9th and 10th centuries after the Arabs, the first independent Muslim state in Central Asia, that of Samanids, was founded in 875 by an Iranian dynasty from Khurasan, which established a power base in Bukhara. The Samanid state played a great role in the cultural history of the area including Tajikistan. During this era Tajik-Persian language became widespread, and it was at this point that the great poets like Rudaki and Firdousi wrote their monumental works. The Arabic language, however, continued to be the language of science. Although belonging to the Iranian Stock, the pious Samanid never ceased to acknowledge Caliphs as their suzerains, or to send regular tribute to Baghdad (seat of Caliph). In the late 9th and early 10th centuries great literary upsurge occurred in Central Asia. The 'Founding Fathers' of the science of Hadith (Traditions of Prophet ) and fiqih (Islamic jurisprudence) came into limelight. Among the six scholars responsible for the canonical collections of hadith, five belong to Central Asia or its border lands. Most prominent among them are Muhammad-bin-Ismail

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14 *History of Civilization of Central Asia*, p 465
16 The Samanid built up extensive trade links with Europe and China thus regulating the silk route. *The Royal Hordes: Nomad Peoples of the Steppe*, p 17
17 During the rule of Samanid and even later, when the Turks gained ascendancy, investiture from the Caliph remained a coveted. *Inner Asia*, p 70
of Bukhara, (died 870), Muhammad b.Ismail of Tirmidh, (died 890), Ahmad bin-Shuyab al-Nisai, (died 889). Besides, the contribution made by Central Asian scholars in the field of geography, astronomy, mathematics and philosophy has been recognized by the scholars of repute throughout the ages.

The turn of the millennium coincided in Central Asia with the collapse of the Samanids and their replacement by the Qarakhanids their immediate neighbours. The Qarakhanids were by then Muslims like the Samanids, and the religious fervor of some Khans seem to have surpassed that of their predecessors. The Qarakhanids, who replaced the Samanids, looked up to the Caliph in Baghdad and the holy cities of Mekkah and Madinah as their ultimate spiritual authority.

While discussing Qarakhanids Svat Soucek writes, “Islam and its civilization flourished under this dynasty, a fact attested by the devoutness of the rulers, their deference to men of religion ... the endowments they made to pious foundations”. Like the Qarakhanids, the Seljukids appeared in Central Asia during the tenth century. Like most other Turks of the time, the Seljuk’s were pagans. Of supreme importance to Islam was the conversion of the Seljuk Turks, meanwhile in 956 Seljuk (military commander) migrated along with his clan to the

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19 Some of the prominent scholars among them are Ahmad ibn Muhammad al- Farghani (known to the Latin as Alfraganus,died 861) was astronomer/astrologer. Abu Ma’shar al-Balkhi (Abulmasar), who wrote a great work on astrology. Al-Madkhal al Kabir. Central Asia, produced two of the world’s greatest medieval philosophers. Abu Nasar Tarhan al-Farabi (Alfarabius, died 915), is called the Aristotle of the East. Ibn Sina (Avicenna, died 1037) he wrote several books on medicine. Among his medical works is the famous canon of medical science, which had been translated into Latin in the 12th century and used by physicians of the East and West. On the other hand, Muhammad Ibn Musa al-Khwarezmi is considered the founder of Arab mathematics and from the title of his works ‘Al-Jabr’, the term algebra is derived. Martha Brill Olcott, “Central Asia’s Political Crisis”, in Dale F.Eickelman,(Ed.) *Russia’s Muslim Frontier*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.1993, p 54.

20 *Inner Asia*, p.83.

21 *Inner Asia*, p.83.

22 *Inner Asia*, p 85.

23 The Seljukids clan belonged to the oghuz group of Turkic tribes. Before the great migration southwards started, these tribes formed the majority of nomads in the steppes of what is today central and western Kazakhstan.
province of Bukhara, where he and his people enthusiastically embraced Islam. This was the origin of the famous Seljuk Turks. By the time Sultan Sanjar came to power in 1118, the Seljukid empire seemed firmly established and, if the lateral branches of the family as well as the vassal states are included, it was the most extensive realm that Islam had known since the heyday of the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates; from Transoxania in the Northeast to Iran, Iraq, part of Syria, and a good deal of Anatolia (Turkey). With the subsequent decline of the Seljuk Sultanate, the Khwarazmshahs became the most powerful rulers of the Muslim world. The khwarazmshahs who set up an independent state at khiva (Uzbekistan) in 1077 and within one hundred years ruled whole Central Asia including Tajikistan. The rule of Khwarazmshahs marked the highest development of trade, crafts and culture.

The beginning of thirteenth century saw sweeping changes in Central Asia. This was the time of the great Mongol migration, who erupted from the far-off borders of Manchuria (Mongolia). Mongol invaders under Genghis Khan destroyed the state of Khwarazmshah in 1219-1221. The Mongols brought great devastation and destruction. At the beginning, Mongol rule had strong anti-Islamic character, as many Mongol leaders were Buddhists and Nestorian Christians. Islam survived largely through the efforts of the Sufi brotherhoods, which proselytized

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25 Inner Asia, p.98.
26 The founder of this dynasty was a Turkish slave called Anushtigin, who rose to the office of cupbearer to the Seljuk Sultan Malik Shah (1072). Under a subsequent Sultan, Barkvanq the son of Anushtigin was appointed governor of Khwarazm. Gavin Hamblin. *Central Asia*. Weidenfeld and Nicholson. London. 1969. p 76.
30 Central Asia In Modern Times. P 22 The death of Genghis khan in 12207 hardly affected the course of Mongol expansion, and the momentum of his initial conquests was sustained for more than half a century after wards by his sons and grandsons. Before his death Genghis Khan had divided his conquest among his four sons – Jouchi, Chaghatai, Ogetai and Telui.
extensively among the masses. Eventually important Mongol rulers would become Muslims themselves. According to T. Jeremy Gunn, the most serious blow to Islam was delivered by Genghis khan’s warriors in the thirteenth century. But the Islam ...ultimately swallowed the invading armies and they too became Muslims. The conversion of Mongols to Islam was indeed one of the few unpredictable events of history. Later, a division of the newly founded Mongol empire, Transoxania, with parts of Kashgar, Badakhshan, Balkh, and Ghazna fell to the lot of Genghis Khan’s second son, Chaghtai Khan, the founder of the Chaghtai Khanate, which existed for 146 years till 1370. The mighty Mongols like all the conquerors before them, had their moment of glory followed by a sudden decline. In the fourteenth century, from among the Mongol tribe of Barlas, Who had been exposed to Turk influence, there arose the great conqueror Timur, who after 38 years of continued campaigns established a state extending from India to the Volga and from Syria to China. Until Timur made his capital in Samarqand, he ruled from Balkh in northern Afghanistan and frequently marched through Tajikistan to conquer the rest of central Asia. Timur brought artists and architects from India, Iran and Syria and constructed such impressive shrines as the Bibi Khanam mosque and the mausoleum of Gur Emir in Samarqand. His grand son Ulug Beg was a great lover of science and it was during his reign that secular sciences came to be taught in the Madrasash of Samarqand. He constructed an

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31 The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, p 272 Of the four most influential Sufi tariqas practiced in central Asia, three are indigenous They are Naqshbandiya (14th Century), Kibraviyya (13th century), Yassawiiya (12th Century) The remaining form which is not indigenous to Central Asia but which is of importance second only to that of the Naqshbandiya is the Qadria, which originated in Baghdad T Jeremy Gunn, “Shaping an Islamic Identity Religion, Islamism, and the State in Central Asia”, Sociology of Religion, Vol.64, No.03. 2003, p 389


34 Central Asia In Modern Times, p 22 Timur was born in 1336 in Kesh (modern Shakhrisabz), south of Samarqand. His tribe (Barlas) like many others, boosted a Mongol name and ancestry, but for all practical purposes it was Turkic Inner Asia, p 123

35 The Resurgence of Central Asia, Islam or Nationalism, p 166
astronomical observatory at Samarqand. In fact, as Svat Soucek states, "the Timur period (1370-1507) can be viewed as ultimately its most glorious one" in the history of Central Asia including Tajikistan. Subsequently, the sixteenth century brought with it a new invader of Central Asia including Tajikistan, the Uzbek Turks from the north. The real founder of the Uzbek power was Abul Khayr, who overran Khwarzam and part of Turkistan including Tajikistan, later his son Muhammad Shayabani made himself master of Samarqand and Transoxania (or Central Asia) and was the first ruler of Shaybanid dynasty. During this period Islam scholarship reached its greatest heights. 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. Although located in Uzbekistan, Bukhara remains and is used by the Tajik government as an important cultural symbol of Tajikistan. The line of Shayabani, after holding the government for nearly a century, gave a place to the dynasty of Astrakhan. The Astrakhhanids (also known as Janids) ruled Transoxania from Bukhara for the whole century and the greater part of the eighteenth century, while a branch of the Shaybanids continued to reign in Khwarazm with Khiva as capital. Around 1700 the establishment of an important Khanate at Kokand removed the Farghana valley (including khojend area of Tajikistan) from the control of Bukhara government while both Bukhara and Khiva were further weakened by the invasion in 1740 of the Iranian

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36 Central Asia in Modern Times, p.22.
37 Inner Asia, p 123.
38 Central Asia: A Traveler's Companion, p 14.
39 The Heart of Asia, A History Of Russian Turkistan and The Central Asian Khanates From The Earliest Times, pp.184-85 It was in the course of sixteenth century and under Shaybanid rule that Transoxania became finally isolated from the rest of the Islamic world as a direct result of the relentless Sunni-Shiite conflict between Shayabanids and Safavids which made it difficult for contacts to be maintained with the Sunni states beyond Iran, to the south east. Central Asia, p 168.
41 The Heart of Asia, A History Of Russian Turkistan and the Central Asian Khanates from the Earliest Times, p 192.
42 Central Asia, p 175.
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Thus toward the middle of eighteenth century, the Tajiks from the northern region (Khojend) were placed under the authority of the Khanate of Kokand. Those living on the banks of the Amu Darya, in the south, were under the authority of the Khanate of Bukhara. These three states of Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand divided among themselves the resources of the heartland of Central Asia. Although they maintained the traditional splendour of their respective domains, they failed to unite together to meet the Russian advance.

3.2 Tsarist Colonization of Central Asia

The descendents of Golden Horde (Mongol Empire), though weakened by Timur's incursions, had remained in control of much of Russia and were divided into three Khanates at Kazan, Astrakhan and the Crimea. Every year the Russian princes had the humiliation of paying tribute to these Tatar (Mongol) overlords. In 1480 the Russia ceased its tributary relationship with the Mongol-Tatar Empire. In the middle of the fourteenth century, the centralized Muscovite state began to throw off its Tatar yoke. The Russian finally freed themselves at the end of the fifteenth century, and at that point began an expansionist drive which kept up until the final consolidation of the Russian empire in the twentieth century. The Russians increasingly became aware of their role as defenders of Christendom against Muslim expansion into Eastern Europe. In the sixteenth century king, Ivan "The Terrible" succeeded in breaking the hold of the 'Golden Horde,' beginning a three

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43 Central Asia: p.175. After Nadir Shah invasion the real control of administration passed into the hands of Muhammad Rahim Bey, a chieftain of the Mangit tribe, yet the Mangiti were the real rulers. The full fledged sovereign rule of Mangit dynasty stretches from 1785-1868 CE
45 New Light on Central Asia, p.69
46 Central Asia: A Traveler's Companion, p.15
47 Peoples of Central Asia, p 91
48 The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World. p 272
49 Peoples of Central Asia. p 98
hundred year Russian expansion in Central Asia including Tajikistan. The Tsarist Russia viewed her expansion as a holy war waged against the heathen. The Russian offensive begun with the annexation of Kazan in 1552, and Astrakhan in 1556 and the Khanate of Crimea in 1783. The last Muslim stronghold to be annexed was Turkistan (or Central Asia) which was divided, as already mentioned, into the three Khanates of Khiva, Bukhara and Kokand. The first were reduced to protectorates in 1868 and 1878 respectively and the last was liquidated and absorbed into the Tsarist Empire in 1875. Thus before the end of the century the North of Tajikistan was under direct Russian rule and the South under Emirate of Bukhara. 

The conquest of Central Asia including Tajikistan was of great significance to Russia, because it not only formed a convenient source of raw cotton for the Russian textile industry, but also a good market for Russian manufactures. It also gave the advantage usually furnished by colonies to the military and officials of conquering powers. Gavin Hamblen has argued that, "Russians, like the representatives of other colonial powers of the same period, justified their presence in Central Asia on humanitarian grounds and thought of their expansion as a civilizing mission. Behind this, however, lay the practical but less openly admitted consideration of economic and strategic advantage". By the early years of twentieth century, the Tsarist colonization of Central Asia including had undoubtedly produced noticeable results, with special reference to the economic

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Armenis Wembry, (Tr.), Nafisuddin, Tarikh-e-Bukhara, Majlis Taraqqi Adab. Lahore, 1959, p 16
53 As the Russian Empire steadily expanded southwards towards Afghanistan. Tajik centers such as Kurgan Tyabe and Khojend were annexed; at the same time the Emirate of Bukhara was also expanding and it gained control of such areas as Karategin and Darwaz in 1877-78. Islamic People of Soviet Union, p. 304.

W. P and Zelda K Coates, Soviets in Central Asia, Peoples Publishing House Ltd., Bombay, 1952, p.27
Central Asia, p.221.
sphere of the region. Russia had transformed the region into a supplier of raw cotton materials, with the devastating consequences of loss of self-sufficiency in food production in Central Asia. Equally devastating was the Russian settlement policy in Turkistan, which significantly contributed to the economic decline of the native population.\(^56\) While on the other hand, the ruling principles of Tsarist policy in the conquered territories followed three general lines.\(^57\)

a) Liquidation of the native governing class which was physically destroyed, deprived of feudal rights, disposed of its property and possessions and altogether ruined their might.

b) Campaign against Islam and the issues with Islamic Orientation.

c) Russification.

In view of the inhuman treatment extending by Tsarists through its policies, Muslims in Central Asia underwent unprecedented persecution; mosques were destroyed or used for non-religious purpose. Scores of *Mullahs* were liquidated or 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.\(^58\) Although, the Russians with their superior fire power succeeded in consolidating their domination, a section of Muslim devoted its attention to reforming its traditional system of education in order to mobilize the human resources to challenge the Russian domination.\(^59\) The movement, known as *Jadidism* from the Arabic word *jadid* (modern or new), was made up of mostly Muslim intellectuals who believed that


\(^{58}\) *Culture, Society and Politics in Central Asia and India*, p 265.

\(^{59}\) Islam and the Modern Age, Vol.28 (4), p 366
only by modernizing existing education system Muslim could march ahead in competition with Russians. The Jadidists, who received support from Tajiks, Tatars, and Uzbeks, were modernists and nationalists who deemed Central Asia as a whole entity. They believed that the religious and cultural greatness of Islamic civilization had been degraded in the Central Asia for centuries together. In the closing year of the nineteenth century a new Islamic educational trend inspired by the Jadid movement begun to make its appearance in Turkistan. The Russian strategy was to defeat the movement by supporting the traditional clergy who were against the reformist tendencies of Jadid movement. The logic of Tsarist action stemmed from the overriding principle, in the words of Mehrdad Haghayeghi that "any cultural change should be in the direction of Russification rather than a modification of the existing Islamic culture." However, the Jadidists successfully resisted the policy of Russification and the proselytisation of Muslims to Christianity.

3.3 Islam under Communism

The Communist authorities of the Soviet Union (1917-1991), later on, inherited Central Asia from the Tsarist Russia Empire which collapsed during the First World War. While, the indigenous inhabitants of the Tajikistan or elsewhere in Central Asia played no role in the overthrow of the Russian monarchy in March 1917 or in the seizure of power by the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) in November of that year. Nevertheless, in spite of the political turmoil which existed within the former Tsarist Russia heightened by the civil war which

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The Jadid established schools, which combined Islamic as well as modern scientific subjects. Which threatened the relative success of the Russo-native schools? Determined to spread the Russian central influence in the region Islam and Politics in Central Asia, p.09.

Islam and Politics in Central Asia, p.09.

Culture, Society and Politics in Central Asia and India, p.265.
followed, the newly created Communist regime did not allow the Central Asian region to escape from its clutches. 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. Lenin in 1917 denounced the repressive policies of Tsarist regime against their religion. He promised that beliefs and usages of the national and cultural institutions would be forever free and inviolate. This was explicitly stated in the second proclamation which the new government issued on 20 November 1917. The proclamation addressed itself to the Muslims. 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 the October 1917 revolution, the foundation for an anti-Islamic strategy was laid out as the Bolshevik (Communist Revolutionaries) government implemented radical programme 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, Shariah courts and religious endowment lands (waefs) were confiscated. One of the most serious consequences of this campaign was the Basmachi revolt that began in 1918. The revolt involved


Karl Marx (1818-1883) a German philosopher is the father of Communism. The Communists wanted to persecute the religion on the following basis: Religion hinders the cultural development of the workers. It is the opposite of science. It harms economic life. It supports bourgeois traditions and sanctifies property owning egoism. It diverts from the construction of socialist teaching that the better life is beyond the grave. It is used by the Kulaks and class enemies as a cloak, or weapon against Communist. The clergy of all countries are helping the capitalist in their struggle against the workers.
the Mujahideen Sufis who fought fiercely to resist the establishment of Soviet rule. By 1924, the revolt had weakened but continued in the Pamir region of Tajikistan until 1928 CE. Tajik Basmachis sought refuge in Afghanistan rather than surrender. Throughout 1920s the Communist Party of Tajikistan, largely made up of Russian settlers and cadres sent from Moscow, remained insecure and unable to consolidate their power, due to the threat from Basmachis consequently Tajikistan was the last republic to carry out Socialist reforms such as collectivization. The Basmachi revolt led Moscow constantly to ignore Tajikistan's economic and cultural development except for Northern region. Infact, the Soviet regime kept the entire Central Asia under-developed and less prosperous in comparison to the European part of the Soviet Union.

In order to consolidate their power Communist regime, in 1924 through the National Delimitations Plan (NDP) divided Central Asia into five republics, as a Communist version of the imperial policy of divide and rule, and which has over the decades sowed and nursed the seeds of inter-ethnic conflict among the Muslims of Central Asia, to whom the concept of nationality was hardly known. As Shirin Akiner notes that "republics were entirely new state formations with no basis in historic nation-states. They were not created of any popular demand, but at Moscow's behest". The purpose behind this was to destroy the sense of regional affiliation among the Central Asian states and to replace it with five national identities. Further Communists in order to cut off the Muslims from their cultural heritage and religious bonds with the Ummah, the

67 Central Asian Survey, Vol.20, No.01, p 64
68 The Resurgence of Central Asia, Islam or Nationalism, p 169
69 The Resurgence of Central Asia, Islam or Nationalism, pp 169-70.
70 Russia's Muslim Frontier, p. 54.
71 Culture, Society and Politics in Central Asia and India, p 266.
72 New Light on Central Asia, p.70
The script of the language was changed from Arabic, first to Latin in 1928 and then to Cyrillic in 1941. The harsh treatment continued till 1930 and the mosques and clerics simultaneously in reduced numbers continued to function and preach under conditions of persistent persecution. Under Stalin, the outward attributes of Islam, such as- the payment of the Zakat (alms), the Hajj (pilgrimage) to Mekkah, and the observance of the fast Ramadan, were outlawed. On the other hand, 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. This persecution continued till the beginning of World War second. However only the arrival of the Second World War put a stop to the Soviet authorities' merciless attack on Central Asian Islam. During the war to get the support of local population as well as the positive neutrality of neighbouring Muslim countries, the Communist Party relaxed its policies towards Islam and improved the position of the Muslim clergy. With the beginning of Second World War in 1941, German propaganda called Muslims to do away with the Soviet Union. The Soviet State felt it was the time to soften the religious policy. In autumn of 1943, the first meeting of Stalin with religious leaders of the Soviet Union took place in which he said," We are going to change the policy. Ask what you want". At the same meeting, he gave permission to reopen some of the churches and mosques. Further, in order to re-establish its credibility among the Muslims within and outside the country, in 1941, the Soviet Union installed an "official

75 Culture, Society and Politics in Central Asia and India, p.266
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,® Tajikistan came under the jurisdiction of Tashkent Directorate, which was based in Uzbekistan's capital city of Tashkent. The head of Tajikistan's official clergy, Qazi Kalan, or Great Qazi, operated under the tight control of the Soviet KGB (intelligence agency).® These Directorates were assigned the task of re-opening mosques where ever necessary and starting theological seminars for the training of religious persons for appointments as mullahs and muezzins. These also functioned as watch dogs and controlled the activities of religious communities and clergy.® However, the representatives of 'official' Islam were regarded by the Muslim in general as 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. As against this, the followers of 'unofficial' Islam denounced the anti-Islamic propaganda, unethical practices (such as consumption of alcohol, eating of pork, loose morals), and the obstructions placed in the practice of their faith. 'Unofficial' Islam kept the Islamic spirit alive throughout the Soviet era. Its representatives succeeded in frustrating the designs of the Soviet system of wiping out the influence of Islam from Central Asia.® Because 'unofficial' Islam had the advantage of not being controlled by any of the spiritual directorates and was therefore free from Soviet influence.® What

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83 These directorates had been mainly established for safeguarding the interests of Soviet Union, in Middle Eastern and other Muslim countries. Soviets used them to project the progressive and liberal image of the USSR in different countries by sending their delegations to other countries. Dr A M Rather. *Social Transformation in Central Asia*. Classical Publishing Company. New Delhi, 2004, p. 95.
84 Culture. Society and Politics in Central Asia and India. p 267.
made the emergence of 'unofficial' or 'parallel' Islam possible and contributed to its success was the presence of a strong *Sufi* tradition in Central Asia. These *Sufis* maintained Islamic traditions and served as places of both worship and Islamic education clandestinely.\(^{86}\)

Later, as soon as the war came to an end with Soviet Union emerging victorious, the administrative and psychological offensive against Islam was resumed by Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, in 1953 under his policy of 'back to Lenin', and was to last more than ten years. During this period also, aim to destroy Islam was essential element of a broader campaign which include attacks on traditional patriarchal (authority vested in elder males) framework of the Muslim family which was seen as a move to encourage Muslims to align themselves socially with Russians, and in the second stage to facilitate mixed marriage between Muslims and Russians. The explicit aim was to achieve a new Soviet society, based on the absolute equality of sexes and generations and a monogamous family unit, creating a new Muslim 'Soviet Man' liberated from the social and religious tradition of the past, capable of participating with the Russian comrades in the building of Socialism. Those who oppose these attempts to assimilate the Central Asian culture into Russian cultural were ruthlessly suppressed.\(^{87}\) However, it is their religion which made Central Asians significantly different from an average Soviet citizen and helped them to resist assimilation. According to a Soviet ethnographer, Lev N. Gumi Dev, in Central Asia religious feelings strengthened group identity among the Muslims and deepened their differences with the Russians.\(^{88}\) That is why, in spite of forced assimilation, the social interaction between the Russian or the Slavic people and the Central Asian Muslims was very rare, and this limited social interaction placed the two sides in opposite categories.


which were very different from each other in terms of lifestyles." It has been pointed out that in Central Asia, the traditional Muslim society was preserved by its customs, values, economic practices and age old folkways. Islam remained deeply rooted and it penetrated in all aspects of private and social life with special reference to three major events of human life, birth, marriage and death. Even local Communist leaders and Party members did not completely reject their Islamic identity in Central Asia. In many cases, they actively participated in religious lifecycle rituals like wedding, funerals and circumcision. On the other hand, sociological studies published in the Brezhnevite period document the astonishing persistence of both belief and practice. This was especially true of Islamic rituals including, feasting, pilgrimages, polygamy and the handing out of alms.

Two events in 1979 are especially worth mentioning here, the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan. The success of Iran’s Islamic revolution, "... Strengthened albeit temporarily, the resolve of the Central Asian

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92 On 27th April 1978, the Government of Afghanistan was taken over by a military coup supported by the Soviet Government. President Muhammad Daoud, his family and most officials of his government were killed. The new government received immediate recognition from the Soviet Union. The new President Taraki proclaimed a total break with the past, and promised goals of accelerated technical, social and economic development on socialist lines. Land would be redistributed and the lease system changed, formal education would be compulsory, and secularized, and women would be ‘liberated’ from male domination. These changes, however, were not welcomed by the majority of the Afghan people. They resented both the forced imposition of the reforms and their content. The reforms were seen as interference with their traditional structures, and this became one of the major reasons, why the people reacted strongly against the new regime. In a short period of time, nation wide unrest developed leading to armed conflicts. In September, 1979. Taraki was murdered and replaced by his deputy, Hafizullah Amin. However, resistance continued, it seemed possible that the government would be overthrown and replaced by some form of Islamic Government. The overthrow of a pro-soviet government on its borders was not tolerable for the Soviet regime. Its replacement by an Islamic regime was even more threatened, especially after the 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution. In December 1979, the Soviet army moved into Afghanistan, allegedly at the invitation of the Afghan government and installed a new president Babrak Karmal, a former left-wing deputy, who at the time of invasion was a refugee in the Soviet Union. Central Asian Survey. Vol 17. No 02. pp 274-275.
population, particularly in Tajikistan, to demand religious liberty. The Iranian revolution may have alerted Central Asian Muslim to Islam’s Political potential. But it was the long-drawn-out Soviet-Afghan war, during which the Afghan Mujahideen fought under the banner of Islam and won, moreover the regional and International repercussion’s of the war, had the greatest effect on Islam in Central Asia, particularly in Tajikistan, were activists opposing Soviet intervention in Afghanistan were arrested after 1979. The Soviet Union regime severely restricted any contact with Iran, after the 1978 Islamic revolution, but could not stop the growth of cultural contacts with Afghanistan, where many Tajiks acted as official interpreters during the Afghan-Russian war, as the Russians lacked sufficient knowledge of local languages and conditions. The first direct involvement of Central Asian Muslims in Afghanistan had occurred in April 1979, months before the Invasion took place, when the Soviet government sent large number of Uzbeks and Tajiks there as administrative and technical carders to aid the pro-Soviet government. When the Invasion took place in December 1979, 30 to 40 percent of the troops were of Central Asian background—mainly Uzbek, Tajiks and Turkmen’s. In February 1980, however, the Soviet leaders started to remove Central Asian units from the combat area rapidly and by March 1980, the withdrawn units were replaced by Slavs. This move was necessary because the

95 Islamic Threat to the Soviet State, p 112. A sizable number of central Asian Muslims reservists were called to active duty to participate in the occupation of Afghanistan. The Soviet reasoned that “their” Muslims would be able to fraternize and propagandize freely among Afghans (including Tajiks), because two groups had languages in common and similar cultural heritages. The Soviet estimate proved to be correct, but it backfired. Tajik (and other Muslim troops) had been told they were going to Afghanistan not only to “help a fellow socialist regime in trouble”, but to “drive out the interventionists” —finding only Afghans on the scene, many Soviet Muslim troops became disgruntled. Richard V Weeks. (Ed ), Muslims Peoples, A World Ethnographic Survey. Aldwych Press Limited. London. P 744
Soviet Muslims proved to be 'unreliable' in their task against Afghan people. In a very short time, friendly contacts and 'wide spread fraternization' had taken place between Soviet Muslims and the local population. For example, the two sides became involved in organizing the heavy traffic of Qur'an. After a short time, many of the Central Asian troops had become unwilling to fight against their co-religionists. Units of Central Asian soldiers had refused to fight and deserted the Soviet army and went over to fight alongside the Mujahideen. The religious element of the Soviet Afghan war had a major impact on the Central Asian people. From the very beginning the main slogan of the Afghan resistance movement had been "Jihad against the bad Muslims (Bi-din), and the Russian infidels (Kafir's)". The use of the term jihad with Communist ideology was particularly striking because of the atheist nature of the Soviet regime. It became extremely difficult for the Soviet authorities to counter the Islamic appeal. According to Alexander Bennigsen, "it is probable that the Islamic revival in Central Asia including Tajikistan was a direct consequence of the victory of Afghan Mujahideen against the Russian".

When Gorbachev came to power in 1985, he set out to transform Soviet society through his policies of perestroika (radical economic restructuring and reform), and glasnost (openness). Though intended to remedy an entirely different set of socioeconomic and political ills in the country, Gorbachev's glasnost became an official vehicle for the expression of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, environmental, and religious grievances that had not been addressed openly in recent decades. An

100 The USSR and the Muslim World, p.211.
101 Central Asian Survey, Vol 17, No 02, pp.276-277
102 Alexander Bennigson, "Several nations or one people, ethnic consciousness among Soviet Central Asian Muslims", Survey, Vol 24, No.03, 1989, p.53
inevitable by-product of this process was a gradual revival of religion.\textsuperscript{103} From 1989, a more conciliatory policy towards Islam was followed. 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 such social evils as bride preppies, alcoholism and as wasteful expenditure incurred on lavish wedding celebrations.\textsuperscript{104} The relaxed atmosphere created by the glasnost policies led to a resurgence of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism in Central Asia in general and Tajikistan in particular. But the pace of Islamic resurgence over shadowed the other two. After religious restrictions were removed, there has been a tremendous Islamic upsurge as is manifested in growing performance of rituals, visits to Sufi shrines, opening of old and construction of new mosques and religious seminaries and pilgrimage to holy places aboard.\textsuperscript{105} A survey published in the leninchil-zhash in August 1987, showed that forty-five percents of the respondents in Tajikistan declared themselves “believers” the highest figure ever recorded in post-war USSR. Yet these figures did not seem to surprise Mahkamov (then Secretary of Tajik Communist Party). Three months earlier he had told visiting foreign journalists; “Islam is still a great power [here] and the number of believers had even increased.\textsuperscript{106} The subsequent declaration of independence in the year 1991, by the Central Asian Republics including Tajikistan and latter’s solemn announcement of their Muslim character signaled liberation for Central Asian Islam.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{103} Islam and Politics in Central Asia, p 41
\textsuperscript{107} Middle Eastern Studies. Vol.32. No.03. p.12
3.4 Post-Independence Period & Role of Islam in Social Setup.

With the end of Soviet power the world witnessed a resurgence of Islam in Central Asian republics an understandable reaction to Islam's long oppression under Soviet rule. The first sign of this independent spirit in the Islamic revival was the building of new mosques. By October 1990, there were a total of 40 mosques in Tajikistan compared to earlier 17 mosques. A year later by October 1991, there were over thousand new mosques in the republic and a new mosque was being opened almost every day. Converted homes, schools, social centers and even abandoned factories were turned into mosques, paid for largely by public donations form the local community. By October 1992, thousand of mosques had been set up in each republic. In conjunction with this, Madrasa, or Islamic schools were opened, offering courses in Arabic, Sharia law and Islamic history. They also provide clerical training to young Muslims who wish to make Islam a career. In 1990, the second largest Islamic institute for higher education was opened in Dushanbe, in which, an estimated 1700 students have reportedly been involved in Islamic training. A large number of students (male and female) are being sent abroad for higher Islamic education. 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 namaz (Salat) or daily five time prayers, which is the most important practice of Islam, are 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

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109 The Resurgence of Central Asia, Islam or Nationalism, p 45
110 Central Asian Survey. Vol.20. No.01. p 67
111 Islam and Politics in Central Asia, p 97
accommodation. ³ Azan is now heard from every mosque. ¹ The observance of other Islamic rituals is also on the rise. Fasting during the holy month of Ramadan has made a significant comeback, most rural Uzbeks and Tajiks fast for the entire month of Ramadan. Elaborate ceremonies marking the beginning of Ramadan are held annually in mosques. ¹¹ Moreover, Tajikistan has declared one day during Ramadan (the fast) and Kurban (marking Prophet Ibrahim's sacrifice) as a public holiday. ¹² Another noticeable trend in the society is the growing number of pilgrims to Mekkah, which was next to impossible during the Soviet times. Consequently, quest for pilgrimages to Mekkah has steadily increased since 1990. Although no reliable data is available to estimate the number of pilgrimages, as per the unofficial report five hundred Tajiks participated in ceremony in 1993. ₁³ In a country where the vast majority of people do not have enough food, clean water and health care people manage to go to Mekkah following a general trend. Practices such as bride prices (Kalym) became quiet wide spread in Central Asia. ¹⁴ Zakat, obligatory aims 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. The people have also adopted the Islamic form of greeting that is Assalam alaikum (Peace be upon you). ¹⁵ As to the observance of the Islamic dress code, hijab (veil) for women has again re-appeared.

¹⁴ Culture. Society and Politics in Central Asia and India. p 277.
¹⁵ Islam and Politics in Central Asia. pp 98-99
¹⁶ Nations, Minorities and States in Central Asia. p 115
Little girls have been seen going to *Quranic* schools wearing *hijab* of Iranian type. Similarly the number of men growing beards on their faces has substantially increased.\(^{122}\) As a result of the growing influence of Islam on religion and socio-cultural ethos of Tajikistan, on Feb 25th, 1994, officially government of Tajikistan 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.\(^{123}\) In Tajikistan on July 22nd 1989, quest for cultural revival led to an adoption of the “Tajik S.S.R law on language”. This law established Tajik “Persian” as the official language of the republic.\(^{124}\) The selection of the Tajik language over Russian ensures a linkage of Tajikistan to its pre-Soviet past, and suggests a decision by the government to embrace its pre-Soviet linguistic heritage.\(^{125}\) It would not be out of place to mention here that, the economic destitution and the political polarization to which the Muslims were subjected, did not prevent a cultural revival in Tajikistan just after independence Tajiks have revived their literary past by once again popularizing the writings of Persian poets and philosophers such as Rudaki, Nasir-i-Khusru, Rumi, Saadi, Jami and of course the twelfth-century poet Firdausi. This Persian linguo-cultural heritage was largely ignored and suppressed by the Communists, to underestimate the Islamic tendencies.\(^{126}\) In February 1992, the Central Asian states including Tajikistan called for teaching of Persian and Arabic, in public school. Their respective

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\(^{122}\) *Social Transformation in Central Asia*, p 136

\(^{123}\) *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, p 160


\(^{125}\) Although the language law establishes Tajik as the official language, the text of the law includes the word “Persian” in parenthesis next to the word Tajik. Historically, Tajik and Persian have been viewed as the same language. However, today the Persian language uses Arabic script while Tajik has changed to Cyrillic. This change was a direct result of the Tajik republics incorporation into the Soviet Union. This could open the door to a future change in the Tajik alphabet from Cyrillic to Arabic script. It is worth mentioning here that, all of the works of the Tajik renaissances are originally in the Arabic script. *Texas International law Journal*, vol 38, No 317, pp 366-67.

\(^{126}\) *The Resurgence of Central Asia, Islam or Nationalism*, p 172
education ministries published literature in these languages to encourage their reintroduction in the Central Asian region. It is reported that Tajikistan is broadcasting Persian and Arabic programmes with the help of Iran. The main goal behind the changes is to revive the Islamic culture and traditions. Other sign of growing religiosity in the society, were wearing of Islamic symbols and amulets by individuals, the decoration of car interiors with Quranic verses and a growing number of parents would name their babies with Islamic connotation. In the process of Islamic revival the role of preachers and Sufi Institutions can not be underestimated who performed their duty during the Soviet period and clandestinely ran the institutions. These included unregistered mullahs and otines (women mullah) who emerged on the scene. The foreign missionaries also assisted them. Consequently erstwhile Communist began to re-discover Islam.

The official Islam which was prevalent during the Soviet period has already been fragmented, as the authority of the Soviet muftis was rejected. With the end of Communism, each state created its own mufti. 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. Nevertheless, the official Islam has continued to play a significant role in

127 Islam and the Modern Age, Vol.33, No 02, pp 29-30
128 Central Asian Newsletter, May, 1988, p 14
129 New Strait Times, Kualampur, April, 13, 1993
130 Rasheed ud Din Khan, 'Gearing Up for Mixed Economy' in Hinduston Times, March, 8, 1993
131 Sociology of Religion, Vol 64, No.03, p 405. The board so formed has the following aims and activities: The guidance of the mosques The compilation of fatwah (edicts) The training of religious workers The publication of religious works Contact with Muslim Brethren in foreign countries Organization of trips to Saudi Arabia, for Muslim, who wish to perform the hajj and umrah. Leading of explanatory work among the population on all items, connected with religion, religious rites, correct behavior in the society and personal life etc The financial help of the deserving section of the population
shaping the ongoing Islamic revival. Most significant change has been the financial support of the state for the construction and repair of mosques and madrasahs. In Tajikistan the Tajik muftiate has been instrumental in the revival of around 2000 mosques and prayer houses. The muftiate has also been involved in extensive training and assimilation of unofficial clergy in an effort to consolidate the established clerical structure and the rapidly growing lay clerical network. In addition, subsidized the hajj, promoted religious education in state schools, and distributed Islamic literature, including the Qur'an. During Soviet era, in reaction to "official" Islam, there has been a long tradition of some mosques and imams operating separately from the state-approved muftiates, this phenomenon commonly termed as "parallel Islam". Nowadays, the official and parallel imams are in close communication with each other and have often personal or family ties. This made it possible for clergy to move from being official, to parallel, to official again.

As far as, Tajikistan along with other countries of the region is concerned, there are many external forces which are striving to exert their influence on the region. These countries may be divided into two groups depending on their attitude to the factor of Islamisation. The Islamic countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and to some extent Pakistan play a significant role in the Islamic revival of Tajikistan and other parts of Central Asia. It is reported that the Islamic organizations of the region get help from beyond the border especially from Afghanistan. Even though Afghanistan was devastated by civil war and absorbed

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133 Sociology of Religion, Vol.64, No.03, p 405
136 Sociology of Religion, Vol 64, No.03, pp 405-6
with its own domestic problems it managed to support Tajikistan’s Islamic resistance to the best of its abilities. While, Iran is the most outspoken advocate of the export of political Islam. Iran’s main arena of influence has been in Tajikistan. Iran provided modest support to the Islamist movements in Tajikistan during the civil struggle for power from 1991-93. Moreover, Iran and Saudi Arabia have been pumping large amount of money for the construction of mosques and madrasahs. They also send religious teachers to lead the people to the true form of Islam. With this, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia made an attempt to promote its own wahabism by building mosques throughout the region, subsidizing pilgrims on hajj, distributing copies of the Qur’an and other literature, and subsidizing education. Turkey, although officially and formally a secular state, also subsidized religious education as a part of its effort to expand its own influence in Central Asia. Turkey has constructed a good number of schools in Tajikistan, many of which provide religious instructions. Pakistan has regularly been sending Tablighi Jam’ats to promote the practice of Islamic rituals and solidarity. In contrary, to this, the second group of countries would like the Central Asian republics to be secular state, where Islam would play the role of promoting cultural traditions, without touching on the economic and political spheres of the state. These countries include Russia, USA, Israel, China and India etc. These countries believe that the strengthening of the Islamic factor in Tajikistan or in any Central Asian republic can bring about a change in their political and economic conditions and as a consequence, affect the stability in the region.

139 Central Asian Survey, vol. 20, No 01. pp 80-81

140 India and Russian in Changing World, p 33


143 India and Russian in Changing World, p 33
To conclude, the floodgates of the Islamic revival opened in 1989. It was in fact, a socio-cultural and religious phenomenon, which developed among the Muslims—the instinct of separation from the Communist system and Slavic culture. As such, native people are strongly inclined to adapt Islam as their way of life. In the post-Soviet Tajikistan, even the Communist party officials have now abandoned their former atheism and have embraced Islam both from sincere belief and political necessity. As, the rising influence of Islam in Tajik society can be seen from substantial increase in the performance of religious rituals and practices by the people.

**Islam and politics in the Post-Independence Tajikistan**

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 in the other countries of the region how to build a state corresponding to the local traditions and political culture. It was very important 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.

Consequently, in the wake of Tajikistan’s independence and the announcement of free elections, several political forces attempted to fill the political vacuum in
Tajikistan. The two predominant influences that came to the political process of the republic were those of Islamic and Communist Party persuasion (those who held power and privileges under the old order). A block of four (pro-reformist) parties represented the first one; Rastokhez, Democratic Party of Tajikistan, and Islamic Revival Party and the Lale Badakshan Party. The second one, The Peoples Front of Tajikistan, was composed of members of the former Communist Party. After the defeat of reformist politics in the winter of 1992, many secular and religious elements of the opposition reorganized into the United Tajik Opposition, headed by Syed Abdullo Nuri of the Islamic Revival Party, with Qazi Turajonzoda as his deputy. With this, in Tajikistan tension over the role of Islam in state-building was a contributory factor to the outbreak of civil war in 1992. The Islamic Revival party led opposition to the former Communist regime but failure on both sides to compromise produced bitter fighting that continued until a peace accord was reached 1997. The agreement legalized the Islamic Revival Party but in practice President Rakhmonov has gradually undermined its position in the political system owing to the general fear of Islamic politics in the country. Anti-reformists (old Communist elite) in Tajikistan, along with the leadership of Uzbekistan, played on fears of Islamic revolution to justify their hostility to the opposition and their support for action against it. Although old Communist elite themselves had invoked Islam to garner public support. Rulers of newly independent states adopted select parts of Islam as a means to legitimize their power, but the essence of the religion was discarded. While Imomali Rakhmonov, Tajikistan’s head, gratefully accepted a magnificent edition of the Qur’an from the hands of F.Sharifzade, the mufti of Tajikistan(elected in February

146 Central Asia, Islam and the State, International Crisis Group, Asia Report No 59, 10 July 2003
148 Muriel Atkin, “Tajikistan, reform, reaction and civil war”, p 617
149 International Crisis Group, Asia Report No 59
Role of Islam in Socio-political Set-up

1993), on the other hand, political forces currently in power there are doing their best to separate religion from politics," we are Moslems but not fundamentalists" is the official stand. Nonetheless, the increasing influence of Islam in the post-Soviet Tajikistan forces all political forces in the region- and not merely the ex-communists- to makes serious allowance for this factor in their policy-making. The role and position of Islam in the political scenario of Tajikistan can be evaluated by the fact that all the Central Asian republics including Tajikistan have officially declared themselves Muslim states,\(^{150}\) and all the present (ex-communist) presidents of the Central Asian republics swore oath on the (explicitly secular) constitution with a copy of Qur'an in their hands.\(^{151}\) 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.\(^{152}\) Moreover, the ‘Law on Freedom of Conscience Organization of Religion” passed in December 1990,\(^{153}\) states that every individual has a right to freely determine his religion, and to profess religion individually or together with others,\(^{154}\) and acknowledges the right of religious organizations to have equal access to media.\(^{155}\) The law officially recognizes citizens’ rights to receive religious education.\(^{156}\) A citizen who intends to teach religion however, is required to get permission from the government committee on religion.\(^{157}\)

\(^{150}\) *Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol 32. No 03. p 19.

\(^{151}\) Petra Steinberger. "Fundamentalism in Central Asia. Reasons, reality and prospects. p 236


\(^{153}\) *Law on Freedom of Conscience and Organization of Religion*, Law No 297. Issue No 01. This law was amended in 1991 (law No 297.Issue No 01), and 1992 (Law No.203. Issue No 22), and again in 1994 (Law No.452. Issue No 23-24), which is the final version


In Tajikistan, subsequently after independence, the Islamic opposition functioned much more successfully, Ulema, representing the official Islam, at first found themselves in an advantages position as they received the official support to control the political uncertainty in the region. Some Ulema even were elected to the parliament of the republic. Representatives of official Islam regularly called on their followers to remain loyal to the government and to observe state laws. Thus, a temporary compromise was reached between the government and official Islam. Ulema however, soon registered their displeasure as the government confined their might and domain within the religious matters as against their wish to determine state policy, of transforming Tajikistan into an independent Muslim state. Consequently, leaders of official Islam openly opposed the government and were supported by the democratic organizations. It is worth mentioning, and quiet evident 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, and 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, these regimes have come to recognize that practically the Islamic revival has taken two forms, one they can live with and one which they reject entirely. The authorities are not scared of the revival of Islam as long as it is limited to the rediscovery of ancient culture and a great participation in religious rituals. Nevertheless, as Kazakh researcher Alma Sultangaliyeva rightly observed, practically none of the countries [Central Asian republics including Tajikistan] have avoided registering a special attitude to Islam on the

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Role of Islam in Socio-political Set-up

Flag of Tajikistan
Adopted on November 24, 1992
Green band, representing Islam and a white band are added to the old flag.
part of the official authorities, including the top level people of the states. There are three circumstances that impel the ruling elite to turn to Islam.

- First, the desire to press religion into service to consolidate indigenous Muslim peoples and simultaneously use it as a source of national ideology, and this is more characteristics of Tajikistan.

- Second, to minimize the role of religious leaders whose increasingly criticism of authorities stem precisely from religious positions. A characteristic sign that Islam is being used for political end is the establishment of state control over the activities of the Muslim clergy. Authorities meddle in the appointment of imams and mullahs and try to ‘edict’ sermons. The conformist part of the clergy is paid salary by the state. They are all now promoting, a new ‘official’ Islam that is politically supportive of the interests of the state. Although, officially, there is often a denial of any political control or influence by the state over the muftiate, it is nevertheless quiet clear that Central Asian governments including Tajikistan typically treat the muftis as offices that are subjected to state control. Like ruling elite, the desire to see Islam as only religious phenomenon is also characteristic of some Muslim clergy, who are protected by the secular authorities and who fear that in case of any politicization of Islam, they can lose their influence.

- Third, the authorities turn to Islam in order to firm up their prestige in the Muslim world. As such, the Central Asian leaders, though committed to the development of secular societies, hope to use Islam for financial reasons, since the oil rich Gulf States are potential source of aid and investment. The leaders, with a hope to expand commercial activities in their respective republics, have made well publicized trips to a number of Arab countries. It is obvious, for the ruling circles’ turning to Islam, is probably tactical in character, and the Islamic factor is

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Central Asia and Caucasus Journal of Social and Political Studies. No 04 (5) p 61

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

Central Asia and Caucasus Journal of Social and Political Studies. No 04 (5), p 60

Central Asian Survey. Vol.20, No.01, p.75
decisive for some parts of the opposition. Islamic parties in opposition openly state that 'Islamic alternative' is the only possible solution if the present situation is to be radically improved.\textsuperscript{165} This opposition is variously described as fundamentalism,\textsuperscript{166} Islamism,\textsuperscript{167} extremism or 'wahhabism'.\textsuperscript{168} It means in political, as well as religious matters any Muslim who challenges the status quo is at risk of being labeled a Wahabi. This is how the KGB and its post-Soviet successors have used the term. As evident from the political conflict in Tajikistan for much of the 1990s also stimulated increased use of 'wahhabi' as the defenders of the old order tried to justify their stance and stigmatize the diverse coalition which advocated change by calling the religious elements of that coalition wahabis.\textsuperscript{169} According to D.V.Malysheva, Central Asian regimes, finds it useful... to depict all opposition, including secular parties as Islamic fanatics, and present authoritarianism as the alternative to fundamentalist expansion.\textsuperscript{170} When commentators 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.\textsuperscript{171} To the west and to Russia, the event of spring-autumn 1992 in Tajikistan showed the radicalization of the Islamic

\textsuperscript{165} Central Asia and Caucasus Journal of Social and Political Studies. No 04 (5). p 63
\textsuperscript{166} Fundamentalism implies attitudes that idealize the 'golden age of Islam' and an ideology that give reasons to believe in the inevitabilities and need of going back to the past, restoring values and rules of social and personnel behaviour on the basis of the sharia, which in the final analysis is only possible in an Islamic state. Nevertheless, a lifelong fundamentalist can be simultaneously a law abiding citizen who does not participate in any political activities. Central Asia and Caucasus Journal of Social and Political Studies. No 04 (5). p 63
\textsuperscript{167} Islamism is political action that aims to establish an Islamic state, that is, to achieve the main goal of the fundamentalist ideology. There followers are shaping a trend in public opinion and are fully fledged participants in the political process. Central Asia and Caucasus Journal of Social and Political Studies. No 04 (5). p 63
\textsuperscript{168} The word 'wahhabism' originated in the 18th, 19th centuries and is connected with the name of Muhammad ibn Abdul- al-wahab, who conceived the idea of re-creating an Islamic state of the prophet Muhammad (S A W) times in Arabia. Given the entirely, specific nature of his ideology and practice, this can be described as a special case of 'proto-fundamentalism' and proto-Islamism. Central Asia and Caucasus Journal of Social and Political Studies. No 04 (5). p 63
\textsuperscript{169} Muriel Atkin, "The Rhetoric of Islam phobia", Journal Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol 01, 2000, p 35
\textsuperscript{170} Cited From: Journal Central Asia and the Caucasus, Vol 01, 2000, p 37
\textsuperscript{171} Central Asian Survey. Vol 20, No 01, p 69
movement, especially as the opposition was set to be inspired and armed by militant Iranian and Afghan Islamists with a view to further the cause of Islam. 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. Indeed, on the surface the civil war pitted an “Islamic-democratic” coalition, whose essential component was the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), fighting against the old Communists. And certainly the Islamist exploited the ideological dimension of the conflict; during anti-government rallies they conspicuously deployed the whole vocabulary of Islamic symbolism including the green flag, quotations from the Qur’an and chants borrowed from the Islamic revolution of Iran.172

Notwithstanding the fact, none of the Islamic forces in Tajikistan have demanded the establishment of an “Islamic State” nor have they promoted what the west has labeled “Islamic Fundamentalism”.173 Qazi Turajonzoda and 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. 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 and it did not object to the deployment of Russian troops to guard the border with Afghanistan, an issue of particular concern to Moscow.


Islamic political leaders also sought good relations with United States in contrast to the anti-Americanism usually associated with radical Islamic politics. Further, the leader 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, soon 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. In the backdrop of this, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (FIS) in September 1994 issued a report containing a number of scenarios for the future development of the CIS republics. Under one of these scenarios, 'Scenario B', the position of the "... Islamic extremists in those CIS states having a Muslim population" is expected to become stronger; such a development, according to the FIS would pose a threat to the security not only of Russia, but (consequently) to that of the entire world. This influence was claimed to be strongest in Tajikistan, where the extremists are believed to be stage-managing opposition activities; consequently, when negotiating with Tajik opposition Moscow has concentrated its attention on the IRP and the leading figures of this party. As a further indication of the influence believed to be held by the IRP, Moscow has drawn a parallel between Algeria and Tajikistan (where Islamic political parties had almost come to power through democratic process), and it has been claimed that the Islamic opposition, if not opposed by strong military forces,
could easily propel itself into power.177 While joining hands with Russia to combat emergence of political Islam in Tajikistan, subsequently, when Tajikistan slid into a bloody war between the neo-Communists and the Islamist-led opposition in May 1992, Uzbekistan's President Karimov urged Moscow to act. "Russia should take into consideration the powerful influence of Pan-Islamic forces on the southern border of the CIS", he said. "Fundamentalism will not be limited to Tajikistan or even Central Asia. Russia should be obliged to control to the fullest its interests in Central Asia as it has been doing for the past 100 years."178 In order to neutralize the political Islam within the country, in July 2002, President Rakhmonov criticizes the IRP of Tajikistan (Islamic opposition operates legally and is present in the structure of the government) for disseminating radical ideology, during his speech in the city of Isfara. Since August, i.e. shortly after the US confirmed that three Tajiks from the Isfara district were among the prisoners kept in Guantamano prison camp, the authorities have closed eight unregistered mosques, banned the activities of fifteen imam-khatibs. The real motive behind these measures is probably the authorities' intention to weaken potential political opponents.179 In fact, the new developments in and around Central Asia in the wake of 9/11 incidents in 2001, leading to the military presence of the US in the region, in the opinion of an American political scientist, Pauline Jones Luong "the US military presence has sanctioned the increasing brutality of Central Asian dictators".180 Notwithstanding this, the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan proved the most successful of all, making to the government in 1992 and later playing a key role in opposition. The second period, between 1992 and 1996, led to the impression that Islamists were unable to compete against the ruling regimes any where but

179 "Central Asia after September 11, 2001- Political Islam Draws Back", Centre for Eastern Studies, December 19, 2002
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Tajikistan. This was actively a lull during which Islamists was reorganizing. The breeding ground for Islamists remained, however- the worsening economic situation, growing unemployment, general disappointment caused by failed reforms -and the renaissance of Islam was only a matter of time. The beginning of the third period making a fresh spiral of Islamist activity, came somewhere between 1996 and 1997. This was a time of success for the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), in which Islamists managed to form the foundation. As a result of a negotiating process, the UTO won a number of key positions in the coalition government. In November 2000, Presidential election was held, in which IRP fared very badly. This might be due to the fact that shortly before elections, UTO’s former leader Turajonzoda defected to the President’s side. Turajonzoda also campaigned for Rakhmonov and accused IRP of exploiting the ‘holy canons of Islam’ for self-serving political ends. The IRP won only 7.5 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections in 2000, this vote count translated into two seats in the legislative body, out of the sixty-three seats in the lower chamber. 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. It is noteworthy to mention here that, Tajikistan’s neighbours see its incorporation of the Islamic Revival Party (IRP) into the government, and thus the legitimization of

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181 Central Asia and Caucasus Journal of Social and Political Studies, No 04 (5), p 61
183 Journal of International Affairs, spring 2003, Vol 56, No 02, p 35
185 The pro-presidential People’s Democratic Party garnered thirty seats, the Communist Party thirteen, the Islamic Renaissance Party two, and a group of nonpartisan candidates believed to be pro-presidential garnered fifteen seats. Although the election process was not considered fair, it was the first multiparty election ever held in Tajikistan, with the Islamic Revival Party participating for the first time in the post-Soviet era. Randa M. Slim and Forodun Hodzoda, “Tajikistan, From Civil War to Peace building”, in Monique Mekenkamp, Paul Van Tongeren, and Hans Vande Veen, (Ed ), Search for Peace in Central and South Asia, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, London, 2002, p 180
186 Sociology of Religion, Vol 64, No 03, p 402
a political Islam as a dangerous precedent. But the IRP itself is increasingly fractious and politically compromised by its participation in government. With the emasculation of the IRP, more radical groups have gained influence, such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation) which seeks the overthrow of all secular states in the region in favour of a single Caliphate, although it claims to be committed to non-violence. The party has supplanted the IRP as the most popular Islamist party in the country, particularly in the north.

The growing influence of Islam as a moral and political doctrine as well as religious ideology is, in the opinion of many analysts, the most likely force capable of affecting the political process in Tajikistan and challenging the political authority of the Communist Party. In the opinion of Leon Aron, a number of internal factors are pushing Tajikistan towards the creation of a (Islamic Fundamentalist) theocratic state. To him the reason for such an upsurge is the disastrous economic situation, political instability, unemployment and the demographic explosion. While John Schoeberlein suggested that the failure of governments to reform, in addition to the lack of legal means to express dissent and affect change, has resulted in more people...resorting to radical expression of the religion. Commenting on this, Pauline Jones Luong noted that the rise of radical political Islam in Central Asia is one of several mutually reinforcing trends such as increased militarism, the convergence of authoritarian regimes, and closed economies. Increased poverty and class stratification – the growing gap between societal elites and ordinary citizens- are developments that Schoeberlein suggested were at the root of radicalized Islam. Diminished economic reforms and trade barriers, according to Luong, contribute to discontent.

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To sum up, the Islamic factor is a social and political reality in Tajikistan which has got currency in the contemporary Tajikistan. Islam constantly influences the sociopolitical processes, design the concept of values and regulate relations between the people. Islam is undoubtedly a political tool, whose role will grow to probably intensify the struggle between the various parties and groups, primarily between the ruling class and opposition. 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 efforts to eliminate it. The political forces in and around Tajikistan, who intend to contain and minimize the role of Islam in the socio-political set up of Tajikistan, should take a page from these earlier efforts. In fact, Islamisation is not the cause, but the symptom of problems throughout the region. While, it is the growing secular authoritarianism, and institutional “de-Islamisation” that have caused radical form of Islam to gain a following in the region. In this environment, only political Islam has been able to emerge as a credible rival for official powers and have been the only channel for voicing opposition sentiments of the population dissatisfied with official policy. These shortcomings on the political front, combined with deteriorating socio-economic conditions, created an opportunity for Islamists to frame their struggle as an alternative to the existing abuse of power. As, the present ruling elite's are a legacy of a bygone era, clinging ruthlessly to power. The political trajectories of these new states are 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 there campaign against Islam, albeit now with greater international backing.