

# CONTRIBUTION OF ISLAM IN MODERNIZATION OF CENTRAL ASIA

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The role of Islam in providing legitimacy and state formation, democratization, financial support and easing the people's life is a controversial issue in the contemporary world as per as the radicalism and terrorism is concerned. The research on creative role of Islam and its political, social and cultural contributions for the state formation is not sufficient. In contemporary world the 'The creative role of Islam' sounds weird. Recently American President Donald Trump's decree to restrict certain Islamic countries to enter in USA is most controversial issue which triggered a new debate around the world. The Soviet disintegration in 1991 left Central Asian countries with critical challenges of state formation, democratization, identity, financial support and modernization. Since 1991 onwards, the geopolitics of the region added more in its challenges in terms of newly discovered hydrocarbon and petroleum resources and terrorism. Islam as a religion is playing very positive role in administration, polity and society of Central Asian countries. Islam in Central Asia is responding its challenges in effective manner.*

**Keywords:** *Central Asia, Democratization of Central Asia, Gorvachev, Islam, Islamization, Revival of Islam*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Central Asia is a core region of the Asian Continent from the Caspian Sea in the West, China in the East, Afghanistan in the south, and Russia in the North. During pre-Islamic and early Islamic times, Central Asia was predominantly an Iranian region, Central Asia also became the homeland for many Turkic people, including the Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and, Uyghur that's why Central Asia is sometimes referred to as Turkistan. The Islam in the region is quite evident by finding one of the copies of the holy Quran, which was firstly prepared in the time of Caliph Uthman, which is preserved in Tashkent. The multidimensional development of the Central Asia under Islamic influence determined a new technological and cultural advancements. Up to Russian colonization of the central Asia, Islam was an indigenous culture of the region. With coming into power of Bolsheviks, after the First World War, Muslims started experiencing repression. After long repressions of Islam under Soviet rule an understandable version of Islam emerged after disintegration of the Soviet Union. The Fall of Communism and aperture of state borders not only offered Central Asian Muslim's new prospects to put into practice their faith, but also provided space for the introduction and growth of radical forms of Islam.

Central Asian states are still emerging and fragile. They are trying to deal with immense political, economic and social problems fetched further on by independence. These states are tremendously weak states in terms of organizing principles, beliefs and institutes. The Central Asian elites have not been able to rationally form a national identity, or form unified nation-states. The prime objective of this research paper is to highlight the role of Islam in state formation, democratization, providing identity, financial support and modernization in Central Asia.

### II. CENTRAL ASIA AND ITS CHALLENGES

Central Asia nowadays is a still-uncharted battleground for world powers competing for its massive oil, gas, and mineral resources. Their motivations collide with those of Islamic fundamentalists who see the state as fertile territory for new sacred wars, and with leaders of a hundred or more ethnic groups struggling to carve out new fiefdoms. The consequence of this contest is of immense significance to the future stability of the Asian core, as well as to neighboring Russia, China, Iran, and South Asia. It can be credibly said that Central Asia's problems are primarily internal. In all its states, the lack of genuine economic reform or real development, the persistent centralized controls of a Soviet-minded bureaucracy, and the growing concern of corruption and public suspicion have made its governments gradually fragile. None of the Central Asian states can claim even a bit of democracy or a comparatively open society. State controls over its people's private lives remain almost as throttling as they were under communism. No Central Asian state has had a change of governance since the Communist era ended in 1991, and none are prepared to deal with the noticeable issue of preparing for a transition to a new generation of leaders. This is an increasingly persistent challenge, since more than 60 percent the region's 50 million people are under the age of 20 - a generation impatiently pressing for change that is unlikely to bear a continued decline in living standards and lack of primary freedoms. A social and political bang seems inevitable unless the demands of the young are addressed. Finally, religion remains an intensely ignitable issue. By refusing to accommodate traditional Islam, the governments of the region are only operating the fires of radicalism. There is a tangible cultural vacuum at the core of Central Asia, which cannot be filled with consumerism or imitations of Western culture.

The recent struggles within Central Asia have not consisted of conflicts between civilizations, but conflicts within a civilization that is redefining itself. The most salient conflict has been between Islamists and the states that are attempting to suppress them. Although the governments and the Muftiate of Central Asia apparently consider the Islamists to be a dangerous and an imminent threat, these assessments are not shared by most outside observers.

### III. ISLAM AS AN IDENTITY

The earlier Soviet nations of Central Asia include five states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. These republics became free (mostly against the will of local people) in 1991, when the Soviet Union dissolved. Since independence, the Central Asian nations have experienced rapid financial changes and political displacement. The challenges facing these republics include dropping gross domestic products (GDP), high unemployment, emigration, the collapse of industry, absence of foreign investment, and the saturation of corruption into each sector of public life. Literacy is still close to universal and

education and health systems hold some of the strength of the Soviet era, but even those advantages are declining quickly

With the reforms of Gorbachev in 1989 Islam get revived rapidly. Mosques, shrines, Islamic Students, Foreign funds from Arab Countries, Haj pilgrimage increased rapidly. Islam considered itself as a culture and tradition of Central Asian states rather political identity. Islam has been a shelter of the non-satisfied by the state.

The main reason of people militancy in Central Asian countries are lack of resources, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, etc. Islam provides people a promise to safeguard their rights and an ideological base for struggle like Marxism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Islam gives the platform to resist. It legitimizes the dis-satisfaction of the people and gives direction to it towards a good future of Islamism.

#### **IV. SUPPRESSION OF ISLAM FOR SECULARISM**

During the time of Communist rule, Islam and other religions were suppressed due to the official Soviet ideology of atheism and its view that their practices and beliefs are obstacles to revolutionary change. Prior to this suppression, "The December 4, 1917 declaration jointly signed by Lenin and Stalin said, 'To the Muslims in Russia, be they Tartars of Volga, the inhabitants of Crimea, the Kaukaz of Siberia or Turkistan, the Turks of Kaukaz, the Charks, the dwellers of Kaukaz mountains, to all those whose mosques and worship places and whose faith and traditions were trampled upon by the Tsars of Russia or the other tyrants; Be assured that your traditions and faith and your national and cultural institutions shall be free from this day and nobody will object to these in future. You are free to organize your national life without any interference and obstacles from outside'. The fact that the government took back its promise highlights that the Soviet Union soon realized that Islam is an obstacle to gaining popularity. Anti-Islamic, atheistic propaganda and measures were taken by the state, and lasted more than 70 years. This made "the observance and expansion of Islam impossible and the number of believers, or more correctly, of practicing Muslims has decreased"

It is difficult to conclude where the Islamic movement will move from here for Central Asia due to the governments' strong hold of secularism. Islam has yet to be accepted by the populations as inward spirituality, before it can be used for political or social promotions. The primary goal of governments in the region is to establish stable secular states, and so they see religion as an obstacle, as did the Soviets. Also, Western powers have their own fears of religious revival, because they believe they inflame radical organizations.

#### **V. REVIVAL OF ISLAM**

Islam in central Asia has Turkish heritage which distinguish it from the republics of Russia. Graham Fuller puts Islam as an element of nationalism [1]. Islamic revival and national rebirth are closely intertwined in each Central Asian republic. Islam is national self-identification, instrument of spiritual freedom from Russia, distinct identity from communist system and Slavic culture which were expression of foreign colonial domination. Nationalism and Islam mutually synergies each other rather than act as opposing force. Islamic consciousness shapes National and regional identity of Central Asia and vice versa.

The revival of Islam is accepted to elites of Central Asia only to the extent up to which it serves the purposes of establishment of secular state, the rediscovery of ancient culture and a greater participation in religious rituals [2]

### VI. ISLAM AS A TOOL OF FINANCIAL SOLUTION OF CENTRAL ASIA

The disintegration of the Soviet Union speedily thrown the Central Asian states into the global arena and vividly expanded the economic crunch in the state. In the next two years, the states received a fast lesson in what freedom meant. Olcott has made a very remarkable point since she is signifying that inner economic forces could be accountable for pushing the republics in the direction of Islam. [3]

Actually, the Central Asian leaders, though loyal to the development of secular people, hoped to use Islam for financial reasons, since the oil-rich Gulf States were potential sources of aid and investment. But, the way in which the 'Islamic card' has been played differs among the Central Asian States. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, where the Muslim population is more fervent and consistent, have revealed a lot of inspiration in pursuing acquaintances with the Gulf States. Generally, the states have been careful in playing their 'Islamic card'. Muslim people are good sources of profitable investment, but the problem is that most of their imported assistance programmes are related to schemes aimed to propagate faith, [4] and in light of the risks of Islamic radicalism; the states have been more enthusiastic to work with the rest of the world instead. Central Asia has now started fostering affairs with nations and bilateral institutions where the huge money is accumulated. The United States, Japan, China, Germany, France and South Korea are all on their way to becoming the country's major dealing partners and investors. Malaysia and Indonesia, modest Islamic states, have also articulated interest in becoming commercial partners with the states and in supporting them towards development

### VII. SHARIA LAW IS REPLACING STATE CONSTITUTION

Islamism was not always so conspicuous in Central Asia. After the end of the Tajik civil confrontation in 1997, average Central Asian developed so dissatisfied by the drives of the warring-Islamist groups that several turned their backs on the fustian of religious extremists. However, over the course of the past period, Islam has made major advances in the state. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty updated that "Islamic names are the new fashion" [5] and families are gradually turning to sharia law to resolve clashes. [6]. an noticeable increase in the influence of Sharia on people's everyday lives; more and more people (over 50%) would like to see a compiling of Sharia rules and principles that serve as guiding principle for the lifestyle and ethics, and fewer people attribute this role to secular laws; an increase in the number of devotees who address the Quran as the only source of laws and regulations in Islam, leaving the traditions, customs, and authority of the faqihs (experts in Islamic law)

### VIII. MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONTRIBUTION OF ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA

Recent studies of Central Asia stated that revivalism of Islam in Central Asia is , A manifestation of tensions between Western and traditional cultures , A response to political secularization , An attempt to create a distinct nationalist identity and A local response to failing autocratic rule. Ahmed Rashid says "There is a palpable cultural vacuum at the heart of Central Asia, which cannot be filled by consumerism or imitations of Western

culture.” According to Samuel Huntington: “Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic cultures.” [7] without being western one can be secular and democratic as per as post-Soviat scenario is concerned. Bjørn Olav Utvik, writes: “Many Islamist movements are involved in a bitter struggle for the establishment of democratic rules in a region dominated by authoritarian regimes, and increasingly they move towards a principled defense of popular sovereignty and political pluralism legitimated by references to the holy scriptures of Islam.” [8] Two Scholars Utvik and Adeeb Khalid attributed about the Islam and its attempt to create a distinct nationalist identity in different manners with different conclusions. Where Utvik envisions Islam as an effort towards democratization, Adeeb Khalid sees Islamic revivalism which assist in producing nationalists rather than democratic identities . Islamic revivalism may be seen as not only a vehicle for nationalism, anti-secularism or anti-Westernism but rather as a response to an autocratic ruler which is inefficient and noncapable to provide basic needs to its people such as pensions, educations and healthcare . Kathleen Collins states “Islamism is likely to emerge as a major source of opposition when two conditions are present: when a state is characterized by significant political and economic uncertainty and when Islamist ideologues offer a counter-ideology to failed democracy and nationalism. [9]

### IX. CONCLUSION

In Central Asia, Islam is not less than a boon. The burning issues of Central Asian states are not only keeping them far behind in global competition but also making them the battle ground for the ambition of the developed countries. State failure, lack of identity, religious vacuum, lack of strong ruling class, corruption, financial crisis, under developed infrastructure, less life expectancy, etc. are the issues yet to be resolved but there is no strict plan as well as political determination is visible so far to resolve these basic issues of the people and state. If we analyze the role of Islam in formation of Central Asia , Islam is not only considered as a source of legitimacy but also providing base for state formation, democratization, providing cultural and religious identity to the people, providing financial support and making revolutionary affirmation towards modernization in Central Asia. Where Islam is providing robust response to basic atrocities of the Central Asian States and its society, the political regime is restricting Islam by many decrees and secularism. Civil war in Tajikistan is considered as a battle between Islamic legitimacy and secular forces. [10] . However, the struggle between Islamic forces and secularists is widely evident in the region. The secular political regime is playing a dual character simultaneously. On the one hand, despite of being secular, it supports particular religious groups, however, on the other hand, invited bitter reactions by many Islamic communities for breaking several unlicensed mosques. [11] By a law Majlisi Oli restricted the people under 18 years from attending religious services at Mosques. [12] The government is trying to proceed towards secularism and strict the Islamic institutions by many laws.

Dispite of that, Islamic organizations began to take political shapes and new Islamic institutions started playing a vital role in state formation, lack of identity, religious vacuum, lack of strong ruling class, corruption, financial crisis etc. [13]

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