# Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Central Asia : Theoretical Perspectives

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## Introduction

One dramatic characteristic of the world during the last quarter of the 20th century was the reassertion of non-state identities and especially of more intimate cultural identities within existing states. This occurred inspite of, and partly in reaction to, decades of "state-building" and "political development". Most people have multiple identities: as members of a class, an ethnic group or a national people, as citizen of a state. When demands made in the name of one-identity conflicts with those of another valued identity, it creates a potential for the emergence of movements to defend the threatened identity.

It is essential to recognize that there are many bases of group identity that bind communal groups together. For some, it is language or religion or ethnicity or cultural practice or attachment to land, but none of these is essential to group identity. What counts most fundamentally is the belief by people who share such traits and by these, with whom they interact – that they are inherently different.

One of the unintended consequences of the last half-century of political and economic development is that these processes have brought diverse people into closer contact with one another and thus increased their self-awareness of these differences. In addition, groups that take the lead in modernization often draw comparison between themselves and culturally or ethnically distinct groups. Thus differences in culture often lead to differences in collective interests. Groups that are disadvantaged or threatened on any of these dimensions have shared grievances that make them susceptible to mobilization for collective action that link the Russian minorities of the "Near Abroad" with nationalists in Russia.

These ethno-political groups are so diverse, that we lack a simple vocabulary for labelling them. Some call them 'nations', while dominant groups in those societies often label them 'minorities'. There is no completely natural phrase, but 'peoples', 'communal groups', 'ethnics', and 'identity groups' are among the aggregative terms now used by scholars (Gurr, 1994).

Threats of valued group identities and invidious distinctions, based on cultural and ethnic differences, provide raw material for ethnopolitical protests and rebellion. Ted Robert Gurr in an essay "Minorities at Risk", identifies peoples who are politically significant, on the basis of two criteria:

a) They are, or have been, subject to discriminatory or invidious treatment by other groups because of their cultural, ethnic or religious traits; or

b) They are mobilized for political action to promote or defend their common interests (Gurr, 1993).

Communal groups that meet one or both criteria are called ethno-political groups. In 1990, for example, the Russian people were "minorities at risk" within the Soviet Central Asian Republics. After the five Central Asian countries became independent, the Russian minorities in these Republics have been at risk, subjected to discrimination, pressured to learn local language, and threatened with expulsion if they do not. The consequences of the dissolution of the USSR are instructive. In 1989 roughly half the total population was non- Russian and "at risk". The collapse of the Soviet Union satisfied the nationalist aspirations of many but at the expense of others.

**Conceptual Delineations**

Before we theorize about ethnicity and nationalism, it would be appropriate to make some conceptual clarification of certain terms:

**Minorities**

Contemporary sociologists generally define a minority as a group of people– differentiated from others in the same society by race, nationality, religion or language– who both think of themselves as a differentiated group and are thought of by others as a differentiated group with negative connotations. Further, they are relatively lacking in power and hence are subjected to certain exclusions, discriminations and other differential treatment. The important elements in this definition are a set of attitudes – those of self-segregation from within the group and those of discrimination and exclusion from without (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*,* Vol. 9. 1968: 365).

***Ethnic Groups***

An ethnic group is a distinct category of the population in a larger society whose culture is usually different from its own. The members of such group are or feel

themselves, or are thought to be, bound together by common ties of race or nationality or culture. The nature of an ethnic group's relationships with the society as a whole, and with other groups in it, constitutes one of the main problems in describing and analyzing such societies. It is not on racial or cultural differences that we need to focus our attention, but on group relations (Ibid: 167).

**Ethnic Minorities and Nationalism:**

Ethnic nationalism is defined as that politicized social consciousness centered upon an ethnic identity born out of shared commonalties, seeking to achieve unity, autonomy and group interests by mobilizing ethnic-based constituencies. Central to this definition is the notion of ethnic identity which may be defined as an aggregation of ethnic variables such as race, culture, language, society and so on, by which the ethnic group differentiates itself from generalized others (Norbu, 1992: 181).

In the light of large-scale nationalism, it would appear that ethnic nationalism is not fundamentally different from ideal type nationalism. It exhibits most of the essential characteristics of nationalism. The only significant difference is that ethnic Nationalism is retarded, small-scale and limited in its goals, in comparison with large-scale nationalism. These differences spring not from the logic of ethnic nationalism but from the specific historical situations in which it finds itself, that is, the multinational state whose power is captured by the dominant ethnic group (Ibid: 182).

Apart from such differences, both large-scale nationalism and ethnic nationalism are rooted in ethnicity or what we have called traditional component: since culture is nothing but a way to describe human behaviour it would follow those discrete groups, i.e., ethnic units, to correspond to each culture. And if we choose to regard the culture-bearing aspect of ethnic groups as their primary characteristics, this has far-reaching implications, for our conception of nationalism (Ibid). The ethnic group in a discrete social communication may be effective. And ethnicity provides the potent raw material for nationalism that makes sense to only the members of the ethnic group. Its primary function is to differentiate the group members from the generalized other. It, therefore, calls for an ethnicity specific approach to nationalism because each ethnic group corresponds to a specific culture through which nationalism is expressed (Ibid: 183).

**Social Prerequisites  of Ethnic Nationalism**

Nationalism, despite some of its undesirable consequences, is definitely an advanced political consciousness indicating the optimal unit of integrated social life. Its prerequisites include the following:

a) A complex yet unfragmented society that provides the social basis for national unity;

b) Socially-shared fundamental cultural values that form the psychological basis of general will;

c) A common language or system-wide symbols that facilitate social communication;

d) Considerable stratification and literacy rate so that nationalist leadership may emerge;

e) A pan-ethnic identity that transcends tribal or other particularistic identities (Ibid: 205).

So we can conclude that in our comparative analysis of large-scale nationalism ethnic conflict indicates that ethnic nationalism reveals almost all the essential characteristics of modern nationalism precisely because all the five [(a) – (e)] prerequisites of nationhood as discussed above are inherent within the structure of most ethnic groups. So, nationalism commences with cultural symbols as a principle means of mass mobilization, then crystallizes into national identity as the locus of nationhood but consummates with economic matters, particularly national interests as the *raison d'etre* of the nascent nation-state (Ibid: 206-207).

**Ethnic Nationalism—A Theoretical Perspective**

As post-communist states, the Central Asian States have started a simultaneous triple transition from a centralized economy to a market economy and from authoritarianism to democracy, as well as from a centralized federal state to a sovereign nation-state. As this triple transition process has been going on in the Central Asian Republics, there has been a rise of ethnic nationalism in these republics. My analysis of ethnic nationalism will be based only on Anderson's concept of nationalism.

**Nationalism Defined**

Anderson argues that 'nationality/nation-ness as well as nationalism is cultural artifacts of a particular kind'. He defines the nation in 'an anthropological spirit' as 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, or meets them, yet in the minds of each

lives the image of their communion (Anderson, 1983:22). The word 'imagined' means the creation of the myth of a common historical past as well as a contemporary belief in shared historical/cultural ties and destiny produced by that myth. Print capitalism was the main device in historical development that brought this sense of national unity.

Before analyzing Anderson's theory, we would present the current debate in the vast literature of nationalism including the classical works of E. H. Carr and Selon-Watson. Arguably, despite the existence of vigorously disputed theories many scholars agree with Earnest Gellner's statement:

> Nationalism is not the awakening of nations of self-consciousness, it invents nations where they do not exist…' Nonetheless, there are many different views on the origins of nationalism. For instance, the position of Gellner and Kedourie are often contrasted in the literature while Smith sees their views as identical regarding the imagined. quality of nationalism. This imagined quality is the substance of Anderson's work. (Sarsembayev, 1999: 320-21)

Gellner contends that nationalism stems from processes of social change, modernization, and growing class awareness that alienate sectors of society from traditional culture, notably intellectuals and workers and create a new sense of cultural homogeneity. Kedourie detects nationalism's root in Germanic ideas of language unity and inspiration that forms a will to national destiny, resulting in the creation of a state that is seized by political opportunists… But both would agree that nationalism invents nations, not vice-versa, while perhaps disputing what inspire nationalism (Ibid: 321).

On the other hand, Anthony Smith emphasizes the coreness of ethnics 'which furnish the nation with much of its mythology, symbolism and culture, including it's association with an ancient homeland'. He argues that 'nations require ethnic cores if they are to survive [but] if they lack one, they must "re-invent" one (Smith, 1989). But in essence, Smiths position, on the concept of 'invention/re-invention' seems to be different from those of Hobsbawn and Anderson.

For both, the nation is ultimately a work of invention. The western and non-western peoples were or are in the identical process of creating nations by Hobsbawn's 'invention of tradition and Anderson's invention of 'subjective antiquity', resulting in the creation of 'imagined communities' that serve as the justification of nationhood in the present by establishing a belief in shared values.
Another theory can be found in the social mobilization approach of Karl Deutsch. He distinguishes three phases: the pre-mobilization phase (the traditional state),

the mobilization phase (the onset of the modernization process) and a third one that has to do with the effects of that mobilization in a modernized society. Deutsch needs only one bit of information to predict whether modernization, i.e., social mobilization by means of communication, urbanization, alphabetization etc., will lead to assimilation and integration or to conflict. The criterion is whether the underlying population is relatively homogeneous or heterogeneous in the pre-mobilization phase. In the first case, the forces of modernization will lead to higher integration due to their communicating effects on members of the system. In the second case, modernization will lead – so the powerful prediction of Deutsch – to conflict, at best latent conflict (Deutsch, 1966: 26). Hibbs (1973:18) successfully tested Deutsch's theory in a worldwide study of political mass violence from 1948-1967. The developments after 1989 in former Yugoslavia, in the former Soviet Union and now at the fringes of Russia where heterogeneous populations undergo mobilization and modernization clearly testify to the power of Deutsch's explanation.

## Anderson's Criteria of Nationalism

According to Anderson, first, nationalism is a cultural artifact. Therefore, the history, meaning the emotional legitimacy of nationalism, is central to our understanding of its nature. Second, the logic of print capitalism ensured the rise and spread of the vernacular languages as opposed to the sacred languages of religions. The combination of capitalism, technology of communication (print) and fatality of human linguistic diversity made the new communities imaginable. Third, the result of these languages (language standards) and language-of-power (official languages). As Edward Said noted, an outcome was 'an internal field created and accomplished by language users themselves'. Fourth, there was a special role of language-related professionals as producers for the print-market. Fifth, there was also a problem of the relationship between the rural and urban masses: how far do they share in the vernacularly imagined communities? Sixth, in many cases, 'bureaucratic middle classes' and 'new middle-class intelligentsia' assumed certain roles in the rise of nationalism, especially in the colonial domains. Seventh, language-of-state and official nationalism such as Germanification, Russification and Japanification also– had their own roles in this process. Eighth, schools and universities might be used as the means for the progress of nation building and nationalism. Ninth, the colonial school systems determined educational and administrative pilgrimages indicating the territorial base of a new nation. Tenth, the census, the map, the museum and patriotism as an idea of the ultimate sacrifice were important if not crucial in nation building. Finally, the solution to a problem of creating a new 'imagined community' was also found in History, in inventing a narrative of 'identity'. There was the need for such a narrative since 'nations have no clear identifiable birth, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural… [y] et the deaths that structure the nation's

biography are of a special kind… [b] ut to serve the narrative purpose, these violent deaths must be remembered/forgotten as "our own" (Sarsembayev, 1999.).

Since independence in 1991, nationalism has emerged as a strong social force in present Central Asian Society. It has a crucial impact on the domestic and international politics of the new Central Asian States.

## Ethnicity in the Soviet And Post-Soviet Context: Primacy on Primordialism

The Soviet social science tradition, especially with respect to interpreting ethnicity, is heavily dominated by the primordial approach. Its adherents see ethnicity as an objective 'given', a sort of primordial characteristics of humanity. For primordialists, there exist objective entities with inherent features such as territory, language, recognizable membership and even a common mentality (Tishkov, 1997: 1).

The term 'primordialism' was coined by Shills (1957) and further developed by Geertz, who explained it as follows:

> "By primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the 'givens'
> – or more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters,
> the assumed 'givens' – of social existence: immediate contiguity and
> kin connection mainly but beyond them the givenness that stems from
> being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular
> language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular
> social practice. These congruities of blood, speech, custom and so on,
> are seen to have an ineffable, andat times over-powering
> coerciveness in and of themselves. (Geertz, 1973:259)

The Russian tradition of interpretation of ethnicity stems from 19th century ethnography, with its emphasis on the Russian 'folk' *narod*(). In the 1920s, Sergei Shirokogorov collected materials on the Tungus peoples of Siberia to formulate a general model and 'classification of ethnoses'. Shirokogorov proposed the following definition of ethos: 'a group of people, speaking the same language, who recognize their shared heritage, and have a shared complex of social mores, mode of life, retained and sanctified traditions which differentiate them from other groups' (Tishkov, 1997: 1-2).

Two well-known scholars, Lev Gumilev and Yulian Bromley, together with a number of other Russian experts from 1960 to throughout the 1980s made major contributions to what was called the 'Soviet theory of ethnos', and which has remained a dominant

theoretical paradigm for the study of ethnicity in Russia. For Guimlev, 'ethnos' is a form of existence for Homo Sapiens as a species, but it is also something greater 'a phenomenon on the border of biosphere and sociosphere which has a highly special function in the formation of the biospheres of the earth. Gumilev uncritically included in his category of ethnos practically all historically known cultural, political, religious and other formations, groupings and politics, dividing them into categories of 'super-ethnos', 'ethnos', 'sub-ethnos', 'ethnic relics' etc. Depending on landscape, energy resources, and particularly internal 'passionarism', ethnoses as described by Gumilev live their own lives (of about 1200-1500 years) passing through the various stages or 'phases' of ethnogenesis rise, breakdown, inertia, and finally death (Ibid: 2).

For Bromley 'ethnos is a historically stable entity of people developed on a certain territory and possessing common, relatively stable features of culture (including language) and psyche as well as consciousness of their unity land of their difference from other similar entities (self-awareness) fixed in a self-name (ethnonym)'. Bromley's ethnos theory was mainly based on such key factors as exclusive group membership and status reflected in titular statehoods granted to the major non-Russian nationalities in the Soviet Union. Those who had their 'own' union or autonomous republics were considered 'socialist nations', the highest type of ethnos. Those with a lower status of administrative autonomy (like the Northern indigenous people), or who did not have any status at all (like Volga Germans, Poles, Jews or others) were dismissed as *narodnest* – not an untranslatable term indicating something between a tribe and a nation – not even *ethnikoses*, because many of them did not have their own 'ESO' (ethno social organism) . Thus, according to Bromley and his followers, 'nation' is not an ethnic group with a titular statehood – it is exclusively that part of the group which resides on its 'own' national territory. To mere adequately address Soviet realities and ideological innovation on a 'new entity of people – the Soviet people' (*sovetskii narod*) – ethnographers had to invent a notion of 'meta-ethnic community' or Bromley, echoing Gumilev's rhetoric on 'super-ethnoses' such as Eastern Slavs or Turks (Ibid: 3-4).

To disperse any doubts as to what ethnicity means in post-Soviet academic discourse and in curriculum text, a quotation from the concluding chapter of one University text book:

> "Human history is not only a history of states, of outstanding personalities, and of ideas, it is also a history of the peoples-ethnoses who make states, delegate from their milieu outstanding figures, construct cultures and languages" (Ibid: 4).

With the emergence of ethnic politics in the former Soviet Union, ethnographic primordialism ceased to be merely a marginal and empirical approach and suddenly

revealed its potential for being enthusiastically applied in the quest for new identities, as well as in nationalist political discourse. The term 'ethnos' became a central one in intellectual and political debates of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Many aspects of ethnos theory, posing as pure scholarly exercises, were made part of painful public displays, led to conflict-generating political projects and finally, violent manifestations of ethnic entrepreneurs. Raphael Khakimov, political adviser to the President of the Tatarstan republic and one of the ideological leaders of the local nationalist movement, writes in his pamphlet '*The Twilight of Empire: About A Nation and A State*:'

> Ethnos is a biosocial phenomenon, combining nature and society. Ethnos carries in itself a biological energy and is subject to other laws than those for social processes. Sometimes one can here appeal to forget about ethnic origin and not to divide people according to this category. These appeals are derived from the misunderstanding of the nature of the phenomenon. Ethnic features are not just wishful thinking, nor a devil's plot on the part of 'separatists': they are destined from birth. (Ibid: 4).

In the post-1990's, debates in ethnic discourse revolve around topics like the 'dying out' or 'disappearing' of ethnoses – the actual physical death of great number of people. Concerns about the 'death of ethnos' are expressed by experts writing not only about small, vanishing cultures, but also about large dominant groups, like the Russians in Central Asian Republics Eduard Bagramov in an essay '*Will Russia Share the Fate of the USSR*' has this to say.

> The growing process of uncompromisable reorientations of economic and social relations has put the Russian ethnos to a test of survival. At historical turning points, like the present, not only ethnos but whole civilization disappear. The question, 'what will happen to the Russian' has not been properly asked yet. (Bagramov et. Al, 1993)

Professor Victor Kozlov, of the Institute of Enthology and Anthropology, Moscow, has concluded on the basis of recent demographic tendencies, that 'the Russian nation is dying out'. In his recent text, *The Russian Question: A History of the Tragedy of a Great People*, he ignores Gumilev's thesis on the predetermined 'live of ethnos', according to which the fate of Russian ethnos is prescribed by 'Laws of Nature' and should thus be accepted. 'To avoid the death of Russian ethnos', Victor Kozlov proposes purely political measures:

> There are many difficulties in this issue, the main one being how, under conditions of social degradation, to awaken oriented mass activities. It is a question of how, under presidential rule, to democratically elect a president who can realize his historical responsibility and who is capable of changing a traditionally Russophobic nationalities policy of course, the character of a President and his 'team' should not be limited by Russophobia only,… but a moderate Russophilia is a prerequisite in this situation. (Kozlov 1995: 329)

In recent years, debates on the concept of ethnos have reached a wider audience, with elements of racism and intolerance. In an academic context, Bromley, among others, elaborated a thesis on 'ethnic function of endogamy', meaning that for an ethnos to survive, as a 'stable entity', certain mechanism are needed to provide this stability and ' a reproduction of ethnos'. One of these mechanisms is endogamy, the tendency to marry within one's own group. Bromley is speaking not of primitive tribes or isolated communities, but of 'large ethnosocial organism, like for example, contemporary nations' (Bromley, 1983: 200-11).

So we can come to the conclusion that in the post-Soviet context the 'poverty of primordialism' coexists with the 'power of primordialism', influencing not only intellectual debates, but also political inspirations and the behaviour of social actors.

These observations on the role of intellectual constructions do not deny the reality of the cultural/ethnic mosaic *per se*, not existing collectivistic identities. But defining 'a people' in the sense of an ethnic community needs serious reconsideration. 'People' is most often understood in contemporary scholarship as a group whose members share a common name and common elements of culture, who possess a myth of common origin and a common historical memory, who associate themselves with a particular territory land who share a feeling of solidarity. Shared beliefs and feelings of solidarity are key elements of this definition because they are results of specific efforts and the nation-building process. They are the result of family socialization and education. In the same way, nations are, according to Benedict Anderson's widely accepted definition, 'imagined communities' (Tishkov, 1997: 21).

## Ethnic Situation in Contemporary Central Asia

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the independence of the Central Asian Republics, led to a cultural renaissance in the region and a reassertion of their indigenous cultural roots. The leaders of these Republics reaffirmed their common historical ties by renaming the region Central Asia (*Tsentralnaya Azia*) thereby refusing to recognize the Soviet imposed separation of Kazakhstan from the other four Republics which are grouped together and known collectively as

Middle Asia (*Srednyaya Azia*) (Olcott: 1994). In 1996 Uzbekistan celebrated the 660th anniversary of Timurlane, and has built a grand Amir Timur Museum in the capital of Tashkent which endeavors to collate and collect all significant artifacts of the period. Likewise, in 1995, the Kryghyz celebrated the millennial anniversary of their epic poem, *Manas*, and in similar fashion Turkmenistan has promoted the celebration of its renowned national poet Makhtumkuli. This resurgence has continued apace, with all the national languages being given the status of 'official language of state communication' Soviet streets and place names have been replaced by national ones and historic figures have been elevated to the national heroic status by various states (Glenn, 1999: 103).

According to the official Kazakhs census figures of 1999, the population of Kazakhstan is 14,953,126, whereas it was 14,464,464 as per Soviet census of 1989 (Sinnott, 2003: 104-105). This is because of large scale outward migration of Russians from this region. As estimated in 1996, 1.8 million Russians have left Central Asia to resettle in Russia, of which 6,14,000 have departed from Kazakhstan, 4,00,000 from Uzbekistan, 3,00,000 from Tajikistan, 2,96,000 from Kyrgyzstan and 1,00,000 from Turkmenistan. Many Russians genuinely feared they would become second class citizens or persecuted minorities. In this section we will discuss republic wise the ethnic profiles of the region and some of the major problems these ethnic minorities are likely to face in the near future.
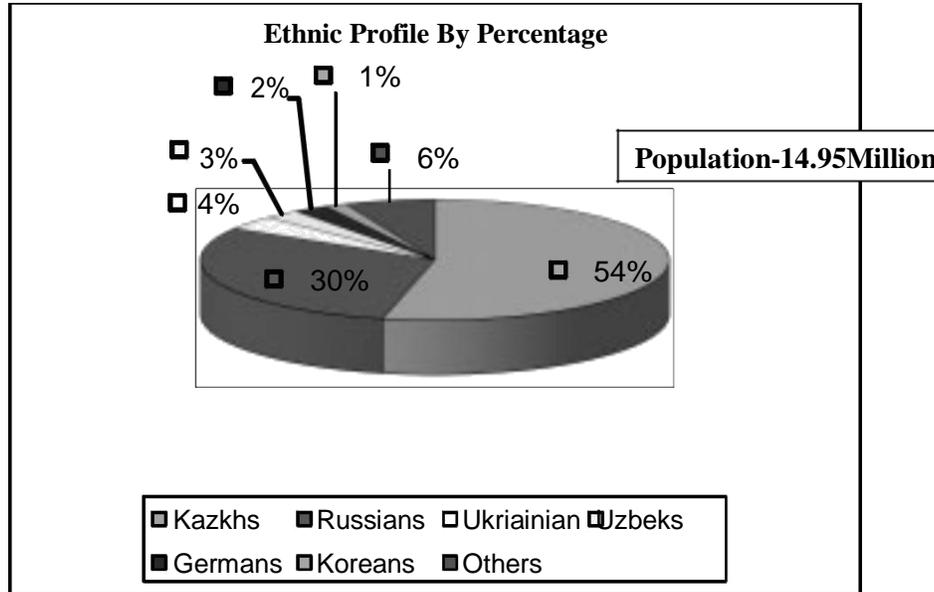
**Kazakhstan**

The ethnic equilibrium which was present in the Soviet era was lost after Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991. Within the Soviet Union, Russians and Kazakhs had worked easily together in Kazakhstan both in government and in the private workplace. But in an independent state, Kazakhs became more vocal in championing "Kazakhstan for the Kazakhs", while ethnic Russians, Germans and other minorities became more pessimistic about their long-term prospects in the country.

According to the 1999 census the Kazakhs accounted for 53.4% of the population. Figure 1.1 gives a break-up of the ethnic minorities of Kazakhstan. The ethnic Kazakh population has grown by about 1.5 million, an increase of 22.9%. Kazakhs now represent 53.4% of the total population, up from 40.1% in 1989 census. Meanwhile, the Russian population has fallen to only 29.96% of the total population, which together with other European and Slavic, groups reaches only 34.7% of the total population (Sinnott, 2003: 104). This is due to two reasons, first, the birth rate among the Kazakhs is significantly higher than among the other minorities, and second, there has been a large influx of Kazakhs from Russia and Mongolia. Slow birth rate and migration of Slavs and Europeans has accounted for the declining presence of Russians and European citizens in Kazakhstan.

The main bone of contention between the Russias and the Kazakhs is the Kazakh language policy. In August 1989 President Nazarbaev put forward legislation that named Kazakh as the state language and Russian as the language of inter-national communication, thereby giving Russian language a secondary status. This was vociferously opposed by Russians. In December 1992 approximately 15,000 Russians demonstrated in Ust-Kamenogorsk in East Kazakhstan Oblast, demanding that Russian be given the status of a state language, dual citizenship be recognized; and that the oblast be given extensive rights of self-determination in language, culture, and exploitation of natural resources. In addition to this the Slavic Culture Soviet of the region has threatened to set up an autonomous Transirtysh republic. The 'Organization for the autonomy of Eastern Kazakhstan' has also been created, its stated objective being for the eastern oblasts to be declared an autonomous region so that they will be exempt from Kazakh language legislation (Glenn, 1999: 112). Large scale replacement since independence of Russians by Kazakhs in the higher echelons of private and public institutions, has become a major discord between the two communities in everyday life. The shifting of the capital city from Almaty to Akmola, which is situated right on the edge of the region in which Russians are predominant; which enables the government to keep a closer eye on events in the north and sends a signal to the Russian population that the unity of the Kazakhstan is inviolable.

**Pie Diagram 1.1** Kazakhstan



**Source-** Sinnott, Peter. 2003. "Population Politics in Kazakhstan", *Journal of International Affairs*, 56(2):104-105

After independence, there has been a resurgence of Kazakh ethno-nationalism. President Nazarbayev has implemented the dual policy of 'Kazakhsation' and a state-building project of 'harmonisation' *garmonizatsiia*() (Bremmer and Cory, 1996: 182). The government has also established the Kazakhs Tili (Kazakh Language) organization whose purpose is to promote the Kazakh language and Kazakh culture in the north of the country where the population has become more Russified. The government has also endeavored to revive a greater interest in Islam by sending several *Imams* to the north of the country to redress the religious imbalance between the north and south (Bremmer, 1994: 621). The policy of 'harmonisation' has included the banning of associations seeking to promote, 'social, racial, national, religious, class or tribal discord'. Organizations that wish to be registered by the state must therefore be ethnically neutral in characteristics. At the same time, although dissension remains over the unequal status of the Russians language, Nazarbayev, in an effort to assuage Russian fears, has endeavoured to dilute the recent language law passed by parliament that makes knowledge of Kazakh compulsory by claiming that it is unconstitutional (Olcott, 1994: 115).

The inter-ethnic discord has been prominent particularly because Germans, Koreans and especially the Russians has been excluded from top administrative jobs, Kazakhstan has to give equal status to the Russian Language and has not accepted of dual citizenship.

## Kyrgyzstan

After independence Kyrgyzstan has emerged as the only true multi-party democracy in Central Asia. President Akayev's major accomplishment in the first three years since he became President has been the creation of a democratic and pluralistic society in Kyrgyzstan. A state towards securing democracy occurred with the adoption of the new Constitution on 5th May 1993 (Almas, 1994: 170).

According to July 2003 estimates the population of Kyrgyzstan is 4,892,808, of which Russians constitute 6,03,201, 13%, and overall drop of 8% from 1989 census. Figure 1.2 gives an account of the ethnic profile of Kyrgyzstan. One of the factors for the decline of Russian population is the better economic benefits of higher wages they are getting in Russia. But the main reason for this out-migration is a similar one to that which pertains in Kazakhstan. Russians are now daily discriminated against and since independence there has been a widespread replacement of Russians by Kyrgyzs in the high-level posts in administration and industry.

Another major irritant between the Kyrgyzs and the Russian minority is the 1990 Law on the Official Language, which laid out a phased transition to adopt Kyrgyz as

the official language. The Russian population began to fear that the institution of Kyrgyz as the official language would seriously cripple its ability to succeed in Kyrgyzstan. President Akaev, recognizing the damage that the out-migration of the Russians has had on the economy, endeavoured to rectify the situation by pushing for Russian to be accepted as an official language in 'industry, health care, technical and other areas (Anderson, 1997). He also prevented the more openly discriminatory bills from being passed, for instance he vetoed the Kyrgyzs Parliament's proposal that land of Kyrgyzstan and its natural resources were to be the sole property of the Kirghiz people.

**Pie-Diagram- 2**

**Kyrgyzstan**

**Population-4.90**

14.00

13%
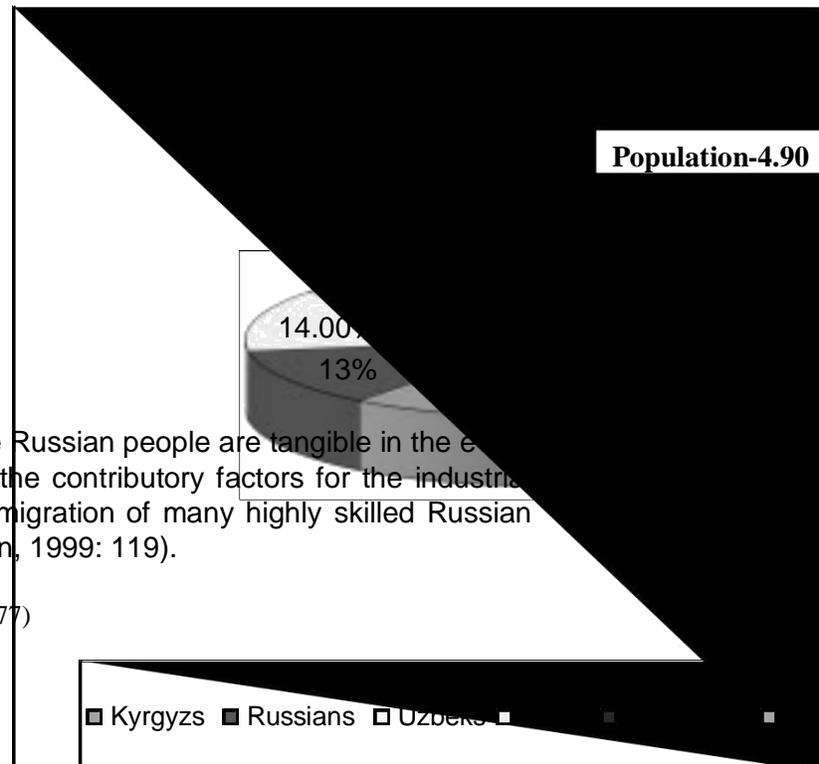
Resentment and antagonism among the Russian people are tangible in the e[...] day life in Kirghizstan and that one of the contributory factors for the industri[...] decline of the country is the large out-migration of many highly skilled Russian [...] personnel as a direct result of this (Glenn, 1999: 119).

(77)

☐ Kyrgyzs ■ Russians ☐ Uzbeks ■
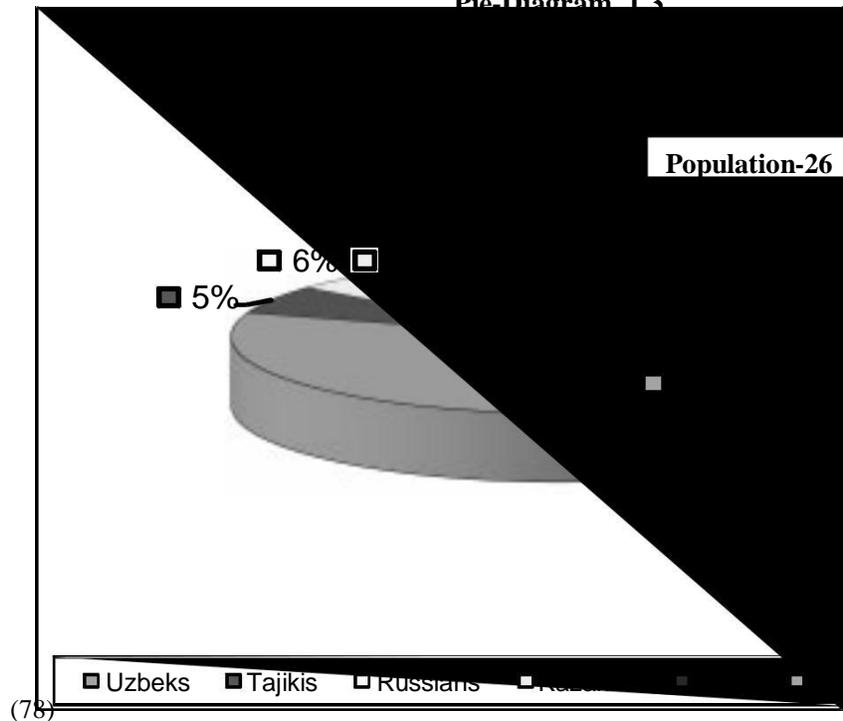
**Source**: *www.cia.worldfactbookcentralasia.com,* 20

**Uzbekistan**

Politics in Uzbekistan circles around five regions- Ferghana, Khorezm, Samarkhand/ Bukhara, Surkhandarya / Kashkadarya and Tashkent with Farghana and Tashkent being the most influential out of the five. The Ferghana Valley, consisting of the Ferghana Namangan and Andizhan Vilayati (administrative regions) has traditionally been the most influential region within Uzbekistan and it is also the most Islamic. The Uzbek government considers the *Islamic Renaissance Party*, and *Hizbul-tahrir* as sources of 'Islamic Fundamentalism' and has banned them from engaging in political activity. Opposition parties like the *Birlik* and *Erk* have been targeted. They are denied to hold rallies, obtain office space, publishing newspaper etc.

The population of Uzbekistan according to the 2004 estimate is 26,410,416 of which Uzbeks constitute 80%, Russians 5% and Koreans 2%. Kazakhs 3%, Karakalpaks 2.5%, Tatars 1.5%, others 6%. Refer figure 1.3, which gives the ethnic dimensions of Uzbekistan. The fact that an estimated two million Uzbeks are unemployed, approximately 10% of the total population, which may further aggravate the apparent

**Pie-Diagram  1.3**

Population-26

□ 6% □
■ 5%

□ Uzbeks   ■ Tajikis   □ Russians   ■ Kaz

**Source**- *www.cia.worldfactbook.uzbekistan.com* , 2

societal divisions.

With this in mind, President Islam Karimov has argued for a slow transition to a market economy, stating that thoughtless action may load to conflicts, civil strife, inter-ethnic clashes. President Karimov has also initiated a cult of Rashidov by erecting monuments to him and naming streets and buildings after him. A statue of Timurlane as Uzbekistan national hero has now replaced the statue of Lenin in the centre of Tashkent. In 1996 state-wide celebrations were held for the 660th anniversary of Timurlane, which was followed by the commissioning of a state Museum of Amir Timur at Tashkent has collected and collated all artifacts of the Timurid period (Glenn, 1999: 112). Karimov is deliberately doing this to replace the Soviet structures and to rediscover the glorious cultural and political heritage which the Uzbeks are proud of.
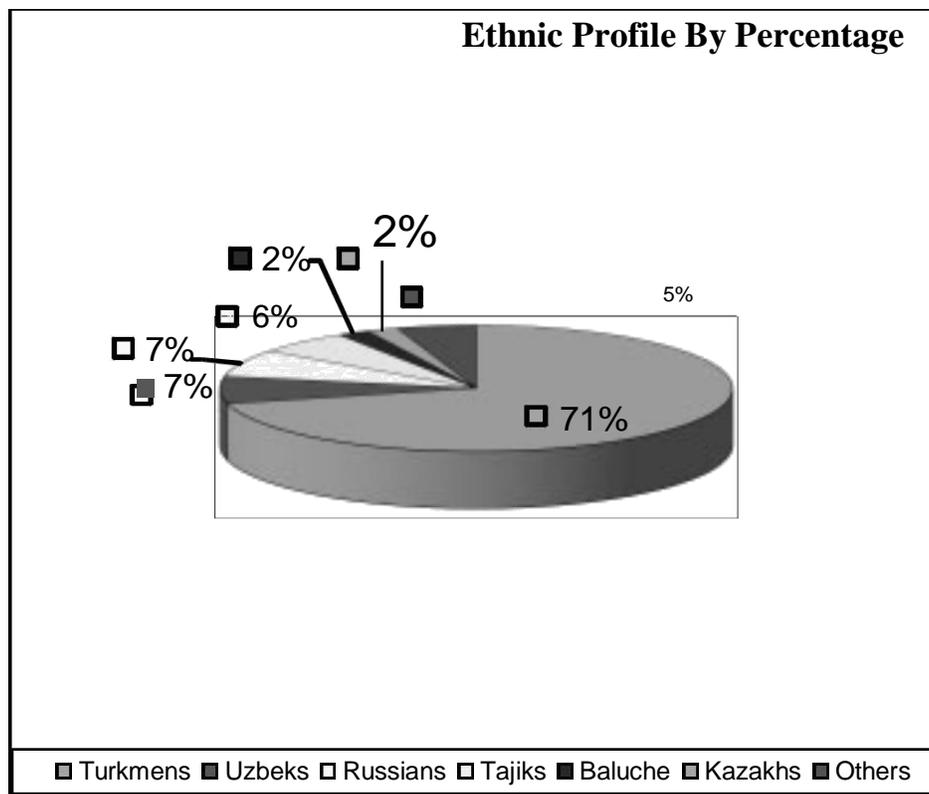
## Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is the only republic in post-independent Central Asia that did not witness ethnic conflict or economic crisis. In fact, Turkmenistan's economic potential is coming to light, which is a source of raw material, oil and gas, cotton and animal husbandry. It is considered by many to be a Central Asian Kuwait with natural gas reserves surpassed only by those of the United States and Russia. Its energy vast resources provide Turkmenistan the potential to diversify and modernize its industry and economy and become the most prosperous republic of the region.

President Sapurmurad Niyazov, adopted on 18th May 1992, the new Turkmen constitution which would reduce the power of Turkmenistan's authoritarian political structure. Although the Constitution guarantees many rights to its citizens, if one looks into the details of the Constitution, it does not appear so. Article 3 guarantees freedom of conscience and stipulates that "exercising the freedom to exercise a religion or other convictions is subject only to those restrictions which are necessary to safeguard public safety and order, the life and health of the people, and morale". So the government manifests its concern for the people's health by increasing control over them. The Constitution also guarantees freedom of speech and the press, but freedom of speech is limited and of the press non existent. Radio and Television are completely under government control and all newspapers must be submitted to the Committee for the Protection of State Secrets before publication. Article 27, for example, guarantees the "freedom of meetings, rallies and demonstrations in the procedure established by legislation". In other words, the legislature is free to pass laws curtailing that right. Article 28 states that "citizens have the right to create political parties and other public associations operating within the framework of the constitution and the law". This same articles also outlines the basis by which political

parties can be banned (Nissman, 1994: 185).

Turkmenistan has a population of 4.6 million; of which 71% are Turkmen, 7% are Russians, Uzbeks 7%, Tadjiks 6% according to 2001 estimates. Figure 1.4 gives a detail profile of Turmenistan's ethnic population. Over 50% of the Turkmen population live in rural regions, whereas Russians numbering somewhere over 3,33,000 in 1989, of which 97% reside in urban areas. In terms of jobs, the Russians are mostly skilled workers, technical personnel, and managers left over from the Soviet period. Turkmen's, on the other hand, are primarily engaged in agriculture, although others are employed in government and the educational system. While the ethnic structure of employment is gradually changing in favour of Turkmens, no effort has been made to pressurise the Russians to leave. The only negative change for Russians is that Turkmenistan has passed a language law that makes Turkmen the official state language. Since Russians did not learn that language, they are now being discriminated in jobs. In due course of time, the language law will enhance Turkmen social mobility and restrict that of the Russians.

**Ethnic Profile By Percentage**



2%
2%
6%
7%
7%
5%
71%

☐ Turkmens ■ Uzbeks ☐ Russians ☐ Tajiks ■ Baluche ☐ Kazakhs ■ Others

**Source-** *www.cia.worldfactbookturkmenistan.com,* 2001

**Pie-Diagram -1.4**
**Turkmenistan**

President Niyazov has centralized control over government and administration by his authoritarian rule. He has cultivated his own 'cult of personality', designating himself 'Father of the Turkmen' *Saparmurat*( *Turkmenbashi*). This has been followed by streets being named after him, and on almost every corner of the capital Askhabad there is a portrait of the patriarchal President. To further legitimize his action he sought the help of religious authorities who called on all Muslims to vote for Niyazov in the elections, and by the promise of prosperity for all citizens by the end of a ten-year transitional period (Glenn, 1999: 124-25).
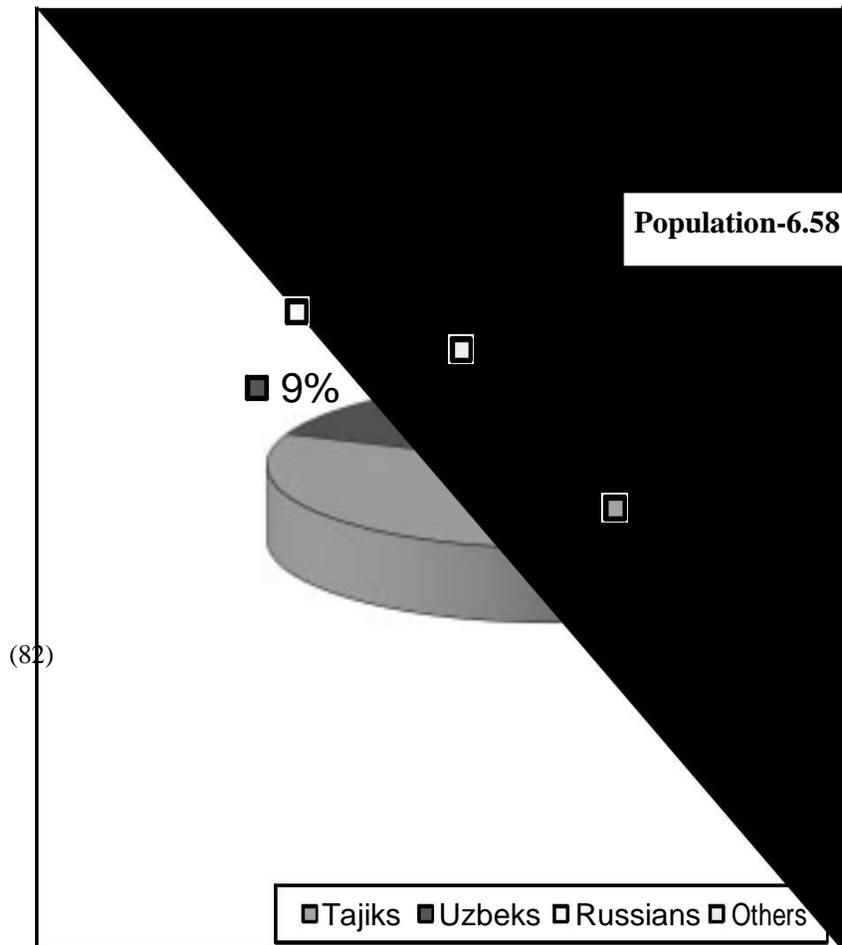
## 1.6.5 Tajikistan

In post independence period, Tadzhikistan witnessed the most brutal conflict in Central Asia. Since the end of May 1992 civil war raged in the south of Tadzhikistan where the estimates in the loss of life range from 20,000 to 50,000. Within a three year period between 1989-1992, 6, 00,000 Tadzhiks and Uzbeks fled the country and out of a total of 5, 00,000 Russians that were there in 1989, only 1, 00,000 remain (Ibid: 125).

The politics of Tadzhikistan revolves around four main regions. The Khodzhent (Lenninabad) oblast is situated in the north-west of the country bordering Uzbekistan and the Ferghana Valley. This region has dominated Tadzhik politics since the creation of the republic in 1929. In the Kulyab Oblast, there is another faction named after the oblast which is centered on Southern Tadzhikistan. Both these regions are pro-communist and represent the old Soviet government. The Kurgan- Tyube oblast has long been a stronghold of the Islamic Party, and is now dominated by the Islamic Renaissance Party. The region contains many of the Gharmi mountain people who were relocated in 1940's and 1950's by the Russians to provide labour for the cotton fields. The lack of assimilation of these peoples within the region means that a separate Gharmi identity still very much exists. The importance of the Islamic religion to this separate identity divides them even further from the rest of the population (Barnett, 1994-94). The Pamiri people of Gorno- Badakshan feel that they are a completely different ethnic group from the Tadzhiks, their party *Lali Badakhshan*, has demanded greater autonomy.

Tajikistan has a population of 6.58 million in 2001 of which 82% are Tajik, Uzbek constitute 9%, Russians 4.7%. Figure 1.5 gives a ethnic profile of Tajikistan. After the disintegration of Soviet Union, Russia has a very vocal foreign policy towards Tajikistan. The interests of the Russian minorities have become an excuse for increased interference in the domestic politics of Tajikistan. The then Russian Foreign

Minister Kozyrev protested about the discrimination sustained by Russians in Tajikistan.

The mass exodus of Russians is due to the discomfort of living in a war situation and in a country which is engulfed by a wave of nationalist violence. The protection of Russian minorities in Tajikistan has been one of the concerns of the Russian leadership. The Russians have deployed the 201st Motorized Rifle Division within the Tajik territory at the instance of Tajikistan. Further Russia wants international recognition for its peacekeeping efforts in Tajikistan. Kozyrev, the then Foreign Minister of Russia called the protection of the Russian interests in foreign lands a "special role" and not at all an "imperial action".

**Population-6.58**

**9%**

(82)

☐Tajiks ☐Uzbeks ☐Russians ☐Others

**Source-** Available at: **www.cia.worldfactbook.tajikistan.com,** 2001

**Pie-Diagram-1.5**
Tajikistan

The future scenario of Tajikistan due to the civil war which has lasted for more than a decade has become a major irritant for Tajikistan to modernize its economy. At present it is relying on Russian peacekeepers for stability and on the Russian Central Bank for heavy subsidies to its economy. But Tajikistan cannot continue to survive on a Russian subsidy. The peacekeeping mission is also becoming expensive for Russia. Russia is now interested in cooperating with international organizations in seeking a solution to the Tajik conflict.

After making a detailed analysis of five republics in Central Asia, one finds a resurgence of ethno-cultural nationalism in the region. The second aspect which becomes most evident is that former Soviet goals of eradicating the pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic movements have not been successful. The influence of Islam in the region has not diminished despite ruthless Soviet attempts to eradicate it, but there are significant developments which should be noted. Firstly, nationalization of Islam has occurred to some degree, so that being a Muslim is part of the national identity of each of these groups. This is most apparent in areas where the population is only superficially Islamized. In these areas the life cycle rituals have become inextricably welded with the national culture so that whether or not a person is a believer they will still have a religious marriage, have their sons circumcised and ensure they are given a religious burial. The often heard statement 'he who is not circumcised is not an Uzbek (or Turkmen, or Tadzhik etc.)' encapsulates the fusion of nationalism and Islam in these regions (Harmstone, 1983). The places where religion has a strong foothold and 'official Islam' have preserved its role as a greater feeling of belonging to a wider Muslim community (*Umma*) is apparent. The clanic structures which existed within each of the ethnic groups at the turn of the century are still very much apparent in contemporary Central Asia. Uzbekistan, the country which had one of the least developed senses of national identity, is now proud of its independence and ethno-nationalism.

The creation of these Central Asian Republics is clearly based on the pre-existing ethnic groups of the region which were 'prior to and independent of the polities whose creation they legitimated'. What is of interest are the long term effects this 'territorial-political crystallization of nationhood' has had upon the ethnic group that these institutions were said to represent (Brubaker, 1996:24). The nation-building process has started in these Republics. With the emphasis that the building blocks

of each nation concerned consist of a 'central fund of culture, symbolism and mythology' associated with each of these ethnic groups involved. Only time can reveal whether there can be a possible transformation of the Central Asian ethnic groups into nations in which tribal and regional identities have been attenuated.

**Notes:**

1. ***FBIS – SOV – 96 – 195*** **,** 3rd October 1996.

2. (2003 estimated) ***www.cia.worldfactbookcentralasia.com***

3. ***www.ciaworldfactbook.uzbekistan.com*** (2004 estimate).

4. Available at ***www.cia.worldfactbook.turkmenistan.com***

5. Available at ***www.cia.worldfactbook.tajikistan.com***. 2001.

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