

Rise of Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism in Central Asia*

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The collapse of the Soviet regime marked the end of centuries of gradual and systematic incursion, penetration and eventual control of the region by the economically motivated, ideologically driven and technologically and militarily powerful Russian and Soviet powers. Though under the Soviet system, the influence of Islam was contained, yet a vigorous, unsophisticated popular tradition remained. (Vitaly, Naumkin, 1992) Two language reforms — changing from Arabic script to Latin and subsequently from Latin to Cyrillic — were contained to crush Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism. Stalinist purges replaced the old elites by a new local ruling class which followed Moscow conducting itself as a true universal ‘Soviet man’ ‘The Homo Sovieticus’. After Perestroika, Islam served as a symbol of identity and a force for mobilization.

The former USSR had the fifth largest population of Muslims in the world. Since its formation, the state pursued a rigid policy of forcing out religion not only from public and political arena but also from the life of the individual. The ideology of the ruling Communist party was atheistic. Officially, religion was separated from the state, but even outside the framework of the state, the transmission of religious ideas was extremely inhibited, primarily due to the strict limitation of the printing and distribution of religious literature and curbs on operation of religious schools.

According to two French scholars on Central Asia and Islam in the Soviet Union—Halene d’Carrere Encausse and Alexandre Benningsen — despite suppression of national customs and traditions during the Stalinist period, the Homo Islamicus emerged like phoenix from the ashes. The liberal atmosphere of the post – Stalin period also contributed to its rise. The Islamic revolution in Iran and the victory of the mujahideen in Afghanistan gave further impetus. Helene Carrere d’Encausse argued that the higher birth rate among the Central

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Asian Muslims, rising unemployment and the growing Muslim self-assertion posed a serious challenge to the Soviet power in that region. (Kaushik D) Michael Rywkin in his work *Moscow's Muslim Challenge* (1982) hinted at "the existence of growing racial antagonism between two non-integrated communities in Soviet Central Asia." It is believed that the Soviet rule had resulted in the establishment of various sub-types of 'Russified Soviet sub-culture' and that the Soviets succeeded in co-opting the elite who stood alienated from their original ethno-cultural milieu.

Impact of Perestroika and Glasnost

With the beginning of Perestroika, an Islamic resurgence emerged in the Soviet Muslim areas that started under the slogans of religious enlightenment, spreading of religious culture among the Muslim people of the former USSR, building and establishing Islamic traditions. Believers expressed dissatisfaction with Party and state control of religious communities and demanded the abolition of the official clergy. The Grand Mufti of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, Shamsuddin Babakhan was accused of godlessness and violation of Islamic laws and was removed from his post. Alongside the trend of purely cultural enlightenment, the tendency of the politicization of Islam emerged in the USSR's Muslim areas in the mid-1980s. For instance, call to set up an Islamic state was raised in Tadzhikistan.

Three main blocs of political forces gradually formed in the Muslim republics: former leaders of the Communist parties and the state apparatus who changed their political face, new democratic parties and movements, and Islamic fundamentalists. One of the most popular fronts, Birlik (Unity) Movement for the preservation of Uzbekistan's Natural and Material and Spiritual riches was started in November 1988 by the Uzbek intellectuals. In its first public demonstration held on 19th March 1989 more than 12,000 people are reported to have attended. (Warikoo, K., 1992:65) Similarly, one of the political and social activist groups set up in Kazakhstan, the Adilet (Justice) seeks to preserve the memory of the victims of Stalinist repression who perished in Kazakhstan. Another society Atmaken was established to promote language and culture.

The establishment of these informal activist groups, most of which have been recognized as such, contributed to the unprecedented national and religious resurgence throughout Central Asia. Local writers, artists and academicians started openly idealizing the medieval past history, their works of history, art and culture. The process of renaming the places and squares on

old Islamic pattern began. Russian form of greeting (*zdrastyte*) gave way to usual Muslim style of *Asalammalaikum*.

At the popular grassroots level one found a strict observance of Islamic rites and rituals including fasting during the month of *Ramzan*, religious marriages, performance of daily prayers and large attendance at mosques during the holy festivals. Restoration work of old and neglected mausoleums and tombs was proceeding quite fast and more often with the active participation of local Communist Party and administrative agencies. (*Sovetskaya Kultura, 1986*) The number of unaccredited mullahs increased and there was proliferation of mosques particularly in rural areas. According to Soviet estimates, the number of mosques had gone up to 5,000 from 160 during these few years. (*Kostokov, V.V 1991*)

Revival of Islam

Among the surprises brought by independence in Central Asia was the discovery that Islam proved to have been much more pervasive in Soviet times than previously imagined. The people of Central Asia would identify themselves primarily as Muslims, and only secondarily in terms of tribe, clan and language. The consciousness of having an Islamic heritage was one of the elements which for the Central Asians continued to define their identities – even if a particular individual knew almost nothing about religion and observed none of its tenets.

Independence made it plain that during the seven decades of Soviet domination most of the people in Central Asia continued to observe important Islamic holidays and rites, even if they called these ‘national’ rather than religious customs and observed them mostly in the privacy of their homes. These rituals included male circumcision and its celebration, marriage and mourning. Even *Ramazan* seems to have been widely observed, at least outside the major Europeanized cities. It is no doubt for this reason that all the new constitutions of Central Asia, save that of Kazakhstan, specify that Islam has a special place in the heritage of the titular people, even as they also specify that these new states will be non – denominational and secular. (*Olcott Martha Brill, 1995:22*) As a consequence, Islam has become a feature of all the elites of Central Asia. This ‘return to Islam’ is most pronounced in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where *Sapurmurand Niazov* and *Islam Karimov*, the respective Presidents, have both undertaken Hajj pilgrimage. Of the two, *Niazov’s* is more public and vocal with the President, sponsoring numerous mosques and madrasas, many of which bear his name. He has even erected a large

statue of himself making pilgrimage, on the site where Ashgebal's main Lenin monument once stood. Even Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbaev, who continues to make his own atheism plan, has praised the historical contributions which Islam made to society, and he has participated in public ceremonies having a religious dimension, such as the burial of his predecessor, Dinmuhammed Kunaev. This new regard for Islam by the Central Asia elite is a reflection of a process which began in Central Asia in the mid-1970s as Soviet life became spiritually and morally bankrupt, many people began to look around for alternate ideologies.

Consequently, the Islamic dimensions of Central Asian life became increasingly evident once again, as an integral constituent of national self – identity. Once Gorbachev began to demand that the leaders of republic validate their positions by parliamentary and popular vote, it became inevitable that the republic's elite would have to mirror, at least to some degree, the growing religiosity of their constituents.

However, during the Soviet times 'official clerics' had managed to retain control of religious life in their respective countries. Certainly such control had been the Soviet intention when the Central Asian Spiritual Directorate of Muslim (SADUM) was established during World War II. This body, fulfilling instructions from Moscow, sharply limited access to religious education, training and worship, and also painstakingly worked out a limited practice of Islam which was compatible with Soviet citizenship. Although they had created SADUM, the Soviet authorities remained suspicious of its leaders. This became particularly evident as the processes of Islamic revivalism intensified in Central Asia, even the Muslim clerics of SADUM were doing nothing to explain that Soviet law took precedence over Islamic law. (Olcott Martha Brill, 1995:22-23)

One of the things which independence has revealed is that during the Soviet period SADUM and its clerics actually played a far smaller role in Central Asian Islam than the enormous network of unrecognized and frequently untrained 'volunteer' clerics, who established madrassas, preserved shrines, presided at burials, weddings and other rituals and in the urban Muslim settings at least monitored the observation of 'traditions' most of which were Islamic. In Uzbekistan this last function was served through neighborhood mohallas while in Turkmenistan the watchdogs of traditional Islamic practice were elates or kinship groups of twenty to forty families. Certainly this is

consistent with findings by Uzbek ethnographer Nadira Azimova, who claims that in 1985, there were 194 unofficial clerics, each with his own congregation, in Namangan oblast alone. The long list of 'unofficial' mosques, Alexander Bennigsen and Enders Wembush provide, seems to omit at least as many as it contains. (Olcott Martha Brill, 1995:24)

In Soviet times only a dozen or so Muslims annually were granted the right to formal Islamic education, through admission either to the Mir-i-Arab Madarsa in Bukhara, which in the late Soviet period had a total enrollment of about fifty, or to the Imam-al-Bukhari Institute in Tashkent, which had about thirty. The number of clergy required to service the network of unsanctioned mosques, shrines and madrasas. A considerable portion of this 'underground' clergy came from the traditional Central Asian elites. Two of the last three SADUM muftis, Muhammed Sadyq Mama Yusupov and his predecessor, Shamsuddin Babakhanov, were from clerical families. Other unofficial clergy were from families known as Syeds (descendants of Muhammad), Khojas (those whose ancestors had made pilgrimage and in Turkmenistan), awlads (alleged descendants of Abu Baker, Uthman and Ali). (Olcott Martha Brill, 1995:24)

The wide-scale return by most Central Asians to some form of Islamic worship might best be called a general return to Islam, as large number of people attempt to incorporate Islamic practices into lives which remain essentially secular. Although Uzbekistan did not pass a law on freedom of conscience until July 1991, SADUM policies began to change dramatically in 1989, after the appointment of a new mufti, Muhammed Sadyq Mama Yusupov. He was no supporter of secular nationalism, as his speech before the second session of Uzbekistan's Supreme Soviet (in June 1990) made clear. He insisted that the Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Tajiks were historically Muslim people, and that efforts to drive them apart should be viewed with suspicion. As the influence of SADUM grew under Mama Yusupov, Central Asia's secular leaders began to see the role that religion was going to play in the national revival of their various republics prompting each to try to guarantee that this return to Islam was at least partly under his control. (Olcott Martha Brill, 1995:27)

In Kazakhstan, even though the Islamic revival was proceeding more slowly than was the case in Uzbekistan or Tajikistan, Islam had become a significant social force in the republic by late 1989. Accordingly, Nazarbaev formally removed Kazakhstan from the jurisdiction of SADUM in November

1989. Qazi Ratbek Nysanbai, who had been the senior SADUM official in Kazakhstan was called back, a decision formalized in January 1990, at the first Kurultai of the Muslims of Kazakhstan. Nysanbai's authority derives entirely from Nazarbaev, and it is not clear how much support the Mufti enjoys among Kazakhstan's believers. (Olcott Martha Brill, 1995:27)

Religious revival has also proceeded by fits and starts in Kyrgyzstan. SADUM – appointed Qazi Sadyqjan Kamalov as Mufti. During the political unrest of 1990 (following the disturbances in June) the administration of Absamol Masoliev kept Sadyqjan Kamalov under close official supervision. After Akaev came to power in October 1990, Sadyqjan's position improved quickly. He and his followers were allowed to create an Islamic centre in an office building on the capital city's main square. When independence the effective end of SADUM, Kamalov was Mufti of Kyrgyzstan. However, in September 1993, at the first kurultai of Kyrgyz Muslims, a new Mufti was chosen. A possible explanation for this was Kamalov's association with Islamic fundamentalists on the Uzbek side of the Fergana Valley. (Olcott Martha Brill, 1995:28)

It is in Uzbekistan that the potential conflicts between official Islam and the secular government have become most obvious. The change in state policy towards religion has made the post of head of SADUM a very powerful one, with the Mufti responsible for collecting and dispensing enormous sums of money. In April 1993, Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov turned against Mama Yusupov, alleging that the Mufti had misappropriated funds. In fact, however, Karimov had targeted Mama Yusupov for dismissal some six months before, when the Uzbek cleric began defending the actions of Qazi Akbar Turajonzade in Tajikistan. It was alleged that the Qazi was advocating formation of an Uzbek branch of the Islamic Renaissance Party. President Karimov spoke out against what he described as "political Islam" and said that he would never allow religious extremism to take root in Uzbekistan. He further said that Islamic extremist centers were spending hundreds of million of dollars to destabilize the situation in Uzbekistan and throughout Central Asia. "They have reached the point where they are trying to recruit our young people to train them at sites in Afghanistan, Pakistan and even in neighbouring Tajikistan". He warned that an Islamic state would throw Uzbekistan "back dozens of years". He further said if a survey were made of the population "the vast majority would be categorically against Islamic forms of state".(SU/3206, G 13, 1998)

The Presidents of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have opposed religious extremism in the Central Asian region. They were addressing a news conference in Astana on 9 June 1998 at the end of the fifth summit of the Turkic-speaking countries. ‘We cannot allow the myth to spread that an ideological vacuum has emerged in Central Asia in the wake of the Soviet Union’s disintegration and that Islamic or other undemocratic states can appear in this region’. Karimov said the fight against “wahhabism” a conservative brand of Sunni Islam, “by no means implies fighting Islam in general. Islam is the religion of 70-80 percent of Uzbekistan’s population and “is sacred to us”. (SU/3251 G12, 1998)

Saudi Arabia has also been at least a temporary current address of another Islamic cleric who got caught in the politicization of religious revival; this is Qazi-Kolen Hojiakhar Turajonzade, who was named Qazi of Tajikistan in August 1988. Turajonzade seems typical of his generation of official clerics, at least in his attempts to reconcile state and unofficial Islam. Turajonzade has also stated consistently that he sees no possibility of establishing an Islamic government anywhere in Central Asia because the seven decades of Soviet rule have so destroyed faith and knowledge among believers that, as he put it, less than three percent of them can read the namaz. (Rassiiskaia Gazeta,1993:1)

What appears to have pushed Turajonzade from clerical activities into politics was the attempt by President Rahmon Nabiev in early 1992 to assert control over the mutuale, of which Turajonzade had become head with the de facto collapse of SADUM’s authority outside Uzbekistan. By May 1992 Nabiev had been forced from office, and an attempt was made to install a coalition government, led by Parliamentary Speaker Akbarshoh Iskandarov, with active participation of the Democratic Party, led by Shadmon Yusuf. The appointment of IRP head Dawlat Usman as deputy premier, however, seems to have convinced both Russia and Uzbekistan that Tajikistan was in the eminent peril of ‘going Muslim’.

Since the collapse of the Iskandarov’s coalition government and the imposition of the Rahmonov government, Turajonzade had portrayed the civil war as a battle of communists, backed by Russia, against a coalition of democrats, IRP supporters, and representatives of his own qaziate. However, Turajonzade was identified by the Rahmonov faction as one of its main enemies, and in December 1992 was forced to flee.

President Enomali Rahmonov stated on 16th May 1998 that the Central Asian region was facing a 'serious threat'. He further said the Islamic Rebirth Party of Tajikistan, the operations of which were suspended in 1993 by the Supreme Court, is holding various events illegally. "Despite statements from party leaders that they are not followers of extremism and fundamentalism, it is clear that all of their political efforts are aimed at coming to power". Rahmonov further added that he could not trust those leaders of the Islamic-led United Tajik Opposition (UTO) who said they had no intention of building an Islamic state in Tajikistan. (SWB,G- SU/3230 1,1998)

The return of UTO first deputy Haji Akbar Turajonzeda from five year exile in Iran and Afghanistan added more problems in Tajikistan. He wanted to ensure the revival of Islam in the republic, but would not force it on the people. (SWB,G- SU/3230 1,1998) This prompted the foreign ministers of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to discuss the threat of Islamic extremism in the region during the talks in the Tajik capital, Dushanbe on 3rd March 1998. The ministers also discussed their issue of "preserving a secular state" in Tajikistan. Tajikistan Presidential spokesman Zafar Saidov ruled out any change to the article in the republic's constitution concerning the secular nature of the state. "Article 100 of the Tajik Constitution, which proclaims the secular nature of the republic, is not subject to revision", he said. Referring to remarks made on 27th February 1998 by Haji Turajonzeda, Saidov said that 'certain political group' was trying to revise this article.. He proposed holding a referendum on replacing the words 'secular state' with 'people state', to ensure that the Islamic Rebirth Party of Tajikistan could compete in the election to a new parliament on par with other parties. (SWB, SU/3167 G/1)

The official response to Islam in Central Asia seems almost designed to transform the general return to Muslim observance, which characterizes society's attempt to reclaim its lost identity into the sort of political Islam that the present leaders fear will lead to the revival fundamentalism. Turajonzade and Mama Yusupov represent relatively moderate clerical position, with the emphasis upon moral and intellectual regeneration of a society artificially cut off from an important part of its identity.

External Influences

The rise of Islamic resurgence in Soviet Central Asia is due to the spillover effects of Khomeini revolution in Iran and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The Iranian ideologues adopted a two-pronged strategy exporting revolution

to vulnerable areas. One was the launching of extensive propaganda of Islamic fundamentalism through the mass media and the second was by fomenting trouble and turmoil in these areas by arousing religious passions.

Several reports had appeared in the Soviet press about the religious propaganda launched by Iran in Soviet Central Asia. An article in *Turkmenkia Iskara* dated 14th October 1984 revealed the widespread existence of radio cassettes in Turkmen, Azeri and Russian languages throughout Turkmenistan. Another report published in *Bakiinski Robochi* of 3 February 1985 described the activities of a Muslim religious group in Baku which reproduced religious books and literature in Arabic. (Warikoo, K, 1992:67) Fifty million copies of Koran were reported to have been printed during the year 1989 alone. This is over and above the one million copies gifted by Saudi Arabia to the Central Asian Muslim Board. Saudi Arabia is also reported to be sending large sums of money to Central Asia in a bid to re-orient the Central Asian Muslims society and politics in the West Asian mould of Islam. (Warikoo, K, 1992:68)

Another influence has been of Wahabism, which has especially gained roots in rural areas of Tajikistan, particularly only the Tajik – Afghan borders. This is a fundamentalist religious-cum-political movement. The Wahabi literature that has been smuggled via Afghanistan lays emphasis on religious absolutism and is opposed to Sufism and holy shrines which represent the traditional tolerant trend in Islam. In Uzbekistan the main support has been in the Ferghana Valley, where Islamic customs and values were preserved through the entire Soviet period Islamist groups draw support mainly from the rural people.

That Wahabism has struck roots in Uzbekistan as well, is evidenced by the sudden removal of Mukhammad Sadyk, the official recognized Mufti and chairman of the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Central Asian headquarters in Tashkent by the council of Imams. The popular movement of Uzbekistan, *Birlik* too welcomed this move as a ‘victory of popular forces’. (Warikoo, K, 1992:70) The growing influence of radical political-religious trends like Wahabism and Khomeinism in Central Asia will be a factor to be reckoned within years to come.

Islamic Movements in Central Asia Since 1991

The people of Central Asian Republics used Islam not only to reestablish their own ethnic and cultural identity but to reconnect with their Muslim

neighbors to the south, who were cut off ever since Stalin closed the borders between Soviet Union and the rest of the world. The first to visit these independent Central Asian Republics were Islamic missionaries from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and elsewhere, who helped build hundreds of new mosques and distributed free copies of the Koran translated into Russian and other native languages. Millions of Central Asians emotionally seized this opportunity to rediscover their identity and heritage, all of which they linked intimately with Islam.

Religion and ethnicity remain intensely combustible issues in Central Asia today. There seems to be a cultural vacuum in Central Asia, which cannot be filled with imitations of Western culture. By ignoring their heritage, which has given so much to their own people and to the wider, Central Asia's rulers now seek to create a modern national identity based on their own past heritage. They have to accommodate traditional Islam. However, the radical Islamic forces in Central Asia are represented by three major Islamic movements, namely, the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (HT; the Party of Islamic Liberation), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). This section discusses their origins, beliefs, influence and activities. The most important inference that emerges from this discussion is that although these movements began with different ideologies, agendas and support bases, the situation in Central Asia – in particular the government repression – is pulling them together and into the orbit of other radical Islamic movement like the Taliban and Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda. (Ahmed, Rashid, 2002:x)

The Hizb Ut – Tahrir: Reviving the Caliphate

One of the most intriguing questions about the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islamic (popularly known as the Hizb ut-Tahrir) is that it is highly secretive. It is a widespread underground movement in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The HT has a vision of uniting Central Asia, Xinjiang Province of China, and eventually the entire Umma (Islamic world community) under a Khilafat (Caliphate) that would re-establish the Khilafat-i-Rashida, which ruled the Arab Muslims for a short time after The Prophet Muhammad's death in 632. HT leaders believe that Central Asia has reached what they call "a boiling point" and is ripe for take-over. As Sheik Abdul Qadeem Zaloom, the current HT leader and one of its most prolific writers, describes the situation: "The issue of transforming the land into the Islamic homeland and uniting them with the rest of the Islamic lands is an objective which the method which ought to be

undertaken to achieve this objective is that of re-establishing Khilafah". (Ahmed, Rashid, 2002:116)

The HT was founded in Saudi Arabia and Jordan in 1953 by diaspora Palestinians led by Sheikh Taqiuddin an-Nabhani Filastyni (the Palestinians). In his famous book, *The Islamic State*, an-Nabhani interprets the life of The Prophet Mohammad, describing how the Prophet first spread the message of Islam secretly, then came open about His aims, and finally preached the call for jihad. Although HT in Central Asia does not advocate a violent over-throw of Muslim regimes, it believes in winning over mass support, believing that one-day these supporters will rise up in peaceful demonstration and overthrow the regimes of Central Asia.

The movement leaders in Central Asia are of the opinion that HT originated in the revivalist Wahhabi movement of Saudi Arabia but that the HT is different from the Wahhabis on several issues. The elusive HT leader who Ahmed Rashid called Ali, in an interview in 2000 told him, "HT wanted to work with people in each country separately and bring about sharia in a peaceful manner, but the Wahhabis were extremists who wanted guerrilla war and the creation of an Islamic army". ((Ahmed, Rashid, 2002:118) Ali further explained that the HT operates through secret, decentralized five-to-seven-man cells throughout Central Asia, making its extremely difficult for the authorities to penetrate the organization. The cells, called *daira* (circle), are study groups dedicated to the spread of Islam and the HT message. The cell chief, the only person who knows the next level of the party organization, set out weekly tasks for his members, who are expected to create new cells. The Uzbek police, have recently cracked down on HT, but are still unable to penetrate the chain of command. The biggest success to date was the arrest in Moscow on 29th May 2001 of Nodir Aliyev, believed to be an important Uzbekistan HT leader, by the Russian police Aliyev was later extradited to Uzbekistan.

In recent times the growth of HT in Central Asia has been phenomenal. According to Uzbek officials the movement was not introduced into Uzbekistan until 1995, when a Jordanian named Salahuddin, came to Tashkent and set up the first HT cell with the help of two Uzbeks. The first HT pamphlets appeared in the Uzbek under language ground in 1995-1996. From Tashkent and the Fargana Valley, the movement has spread throughout Uzbekistan and to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Ali claimed that the HT now has more than

sixty thousand supporters in Tashkent alone and tens of thousands in other cities- a claim that is supported by the large number of arrests of HT in all three countries between 1999 and 2001. HT literature is now translated into Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Tajik, and the party magazine *Al-Vai* (Consciousness) and books like *The Islamic State, The Economic System in Islam, and How The Khilafah Was Destroyed*, written by an-Nabhani and Zaloom, are available in all three languages and also in Russian. The HT's favorite form of propaganda is the shabnama (night letter), which is printed at night and pushed under people's doors like a newspaper.

In Uzbekistan a massive crackdown against the HT began in May 1998 after Karimov's Parliament passed the Law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organization, which severely restricted freedom of worship. Police questioned all men with beards or having more than one wife, as well as anyone who was traveling to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Women could be arrested for wearing the hijab (head covering). Holly Carter, the director of Human Rights Watch for Central Asia, termed the law as one of the most restrictive religious statues in the World. Amnesty International reported that in the first six months of 1999, the courts handed down fifty-five death sentences, and fifteen executions took place – several of them being members of the HT. The US State Department Human Rights Report estimates that between January 1999 and April 2000 some five thousand people were jailed in Uzbekistan. (Human Rights Practices 2000) The Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan has published the most authoritative figures for political prisoners, which show that there were 7,600 political prisoners in the summer of 2001-of which a staggering 5,150 belong to the HT. The deteriorating human-rights situations in Uzbekistan was highlighted by Human Rights Watch's Acacia Shields, who gave chilling testimony to a US congressional panel in September 2000. "Police routinely plant small amounts of narcotics, weapons, ammunition or Islamic literature on citizens either to justify arrests or to extort bribes. The most frequent victims of this illegal practice have been suspected members of HT", reported The Human Rights Watch.

From its cell in the Fergana Valley the HT movement spread rapidly into adjacent areas of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. More than 150 alleged HT supporters were being held in Kyrgyz jails by the summer of 2001, largely in the Osh region. In May 2000 four HT activists aged 18-25 went on trial. "All the accused do not hide their aim and claim that they are ready to make any sacrifice for their sacred goal to create an Islamic State on the territory

of the Fergana Valley”, said Talant Razzakov, head of the Public Security in Osh. (AFP, 2000) Kyrgyz National Guard commander Lt. Gen. Abdy Chotbaev claimed in June 2000 that three hundred Kyrgyz citizens were training in Afghanistan for underground missionary work for the HT. (Jamestown Monitor, 2000) In the first three months of 2001, forty alleged HT activists were arrested and put on trial. Kyrgyzstan’s President Akayev has admitted that religious extremism is being fuelled by the growing poverty of the people, but he appears to be doing little to end corruption within the ruling elite and to address public. “Religious extremists view Kyrgyzstan as a transit country. Their goal is the Fergana Valley, to extend the geographic range of Islam and even to set up a state – an Islamic Caliphate. They are reckoning on the support of the local population, being well aware that poverty and social problems exist in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It is no accident that country people are following those preaching ‘high Islam’. They are being lured by money. Show people a green dollar bill and the people succumb to temptation. We must urgently counter this”. Akayev told a Russian newspaper in May 2001. (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 2001)

The HT is also slowly gaining popularity in Kazakhstan, where Islamic radicalism has so far not penetrated. In 2001, for the first time, Kazakh police reported the arrest of HT activists in the south of the country, whilst Kyrgyz police arrested Kazakh HT militants in Kyrgyzstan. On 6th July 2001, HT leaflets appeared in thousands of mailboxes in Kazakhstan’s largest city, Almaty, shocking the security forces and the population. The day was chosen because it was the official birthday of President Nazarbayev, who only a few weeks earlier had urged his people to resist Islamic radicalism. In a television interview Nazarbayev had stated, “Some people cherish the hope that the Muslim population of our states will support radicals, that the clergy will take us back to the Middle Ages, put the veil on women’s faces and make men grow heard to the waist. This radicalism may start to advance triumphantly in an individual country like Tajikistan or Uzbekistan. But this will be just the beginning. (Reuters, 2001)

The HT is becoming extremely popular in northern Tajikistan, despite the war weariness of the people. During the year 2000 more than a hundred alleged HT members were arrested in Tajikistan and put on trial. (US State Department, 2001) In April 2001, some 7,500 books and 1,500 leaflets were found in a garage in Chkalovosk in Sughd Province, and fifteen alleged members of the HT were arrested. Even the capital, Dushanbe, was not

immune to HT activities. Five HT members, aged 26-40, were arrested in Dushanbe on 16th November 2000, for being in possession of 5,000 HT leaflets.

Clearly the Tajik government feels threatened, and in response President Rahmonov has asked the more moderate IRP to begin Islamic preaching and other Islamic educational activities in Sughd Province. Local IRP leaders have urged the public “to refrain from joining illegal parties and movements” and “be vigilant against terrorists”, by which they mean the HT. (Jamestown, Monitor, 2000) The IRP leaders admit that a new, younger generation of Tajiks are joining the HT. Moheyuddin Kabir, an IRP leader further says, “but most are young men who were just children during the civil war and are being introduced to Islamic teaching for the first time through the HT”.

The aims of the HT are the establishment of the Caliphate in Central Asia. It has simplistic, one- dimensional ideology, imported from the Arab world which is gaining popularity in Central Asia. As Paula Newberg writes, “Many parts of the former Soviet Union are seized by a revolution of diminishing expectations. Armed militancy has grown, not as ideology but as a way to express disagreement when other means are unavailable, or have failed”. (Newberg, Paula, 2000)

Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan

The revival of Islamic militancy in Uzbekistan began in a small agricultural town in the heart of the Fergana Valley, a few months before the breakup of the Soviet Union. A 24 year – old Tohir Abdovhalilovitch Yuldashev, a college drop-out and local mullah from Namangan seized the building which housed the headquarters of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan (CPU) after the Mayor refused to give them land to build a mosque. At his side was Jumaboi Ahmadzhanevitch Khojaev, 22, later adopted his home town name and became Juma Namangani – a charismatic, action-oriented man whom the younger members of the group hero-worship for his daring. This incident set in motion a series of events that have reverberated across Central Asia for the past decade.

With Saudi funds and some five thousand young followers, this group began in 1990 to build a new mosque and a madrassah. Outside the mosque a sign read, “Long Live the Islamic State”. Yuldashev began to impose strict Islamic practices in Namangan. He then demanded that President Karimov impose sharia in Uzbekistan, inviting him to come and debate the issue in Namangan. Karimov arrived in April 1991 to talk to the militants, but the

meeting failed. Karimov left humiliated and told that he would discuss these issues in Parliament. As nothing happened, Yuldashev and his men had attacked the CPU headquarters and set in motion a movement that they claimed was a jihad to remove Karimov from the government of Uzbekistan.

Yuldashev's followers are the disillusioned members of Uzbekistan's Islamic Renaissance Party, which refused to demand an Islamic political state. As an alternative they had set up Adolat (Justice), which demanded an Islamic revolution. "The IRP is in the pay of the government; they want to be in Parliament. We have no desire to be in Parliament. We want an Islamic revolution here and now – we have no time for constitutional games", (Ahmed, Rashid, 1992) as Imam Abdul Ahad explained to Ahmed Rashid. Mosques and madrassahs run by Adolat sprang up across the Fergana Valley, in Andijan, Margilan, Kuvia, Fergana City and even Osh, in Kyrgyzstan, undercutting the influence of the IRP. Other underground militant groups, including Tauha (Repentance), Islam Lashkarlary (Fighters for Islam), and Hizb-i-Islami (Party of Islam), also arose in the Fergana Valley.

For some months the government watched Yuldashev's sway in Namangan. Finally, however, the government cracked down, banning Adolat in March 1992 and arrested twenty seven members, although many of the mosques continued to operate. Adolat leaders, including Yuldashav and Namangani, fled to Tajikistan. In Dushanbe, Yuldeshev studied for a short time at the madrassah run by Qazi Akbar Turajonzoda, the Mufti of Tajikistan and a key member of the Tajikistan IRP. With his heart still set on continuing the Islamic movement in Uzbekistan, Yuldashev began to travel, first to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and later to Iran, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey, trying to learn about Islamic movements and make contact with other Islamic parties.

Namangani fled Uzbekistan in 1992 and arrived in Kurgan Tyube, in southern Tajikistan, with some thirty Uzbek militants and a few Arabs, who were acting as liaisons between Saudi Islamic foundations and Adolat. In 1993, Namangani fought one of the biggest battles of the civil war at the Haboribot Pass. When the Tajik civil war came to an end, in 1997, Namangani opposed the cease-fire and the peace settlement. After that he left Tajikistan and settled at Hoit, a small village north of Garm in the Karategin Valley on the main road to the Kyrgyz border, where he bought a large farm. Namangani's farm quickly became a centre for Islamic radicals, as Uzbeks, Arabs, Chechens and

Tajiks arrived and had to be fed and housed. Majority of them were Uzbeks, some were Arabs and other ethnic groups of Central Asia and the Caucasus who supported Namangani's belief that he was an Islamic Internationalist, giving him a sense of power and purpose.

Meanwhile, Yuldashev had travelled back to Tajikistan in 1997 to meet Namangani in his farm in Hoit. This was a moment of decision for the two men. Facing a new political situation in a region that now appeared to be against them, they had to decide on their future course of action. The Uzbek government had launched a severe crackdown, which led to a renewed exodus of Uzbek militants from the Fergana Valley. These guerrillas arrived as refugees at Namangani's farm in Hoit and put mounting pressures on Namangani and Yuldeshev to respond to Karimov's repression. The two agreed. But first they needed a new sanctuary. Tajikistan could no longer be considered a reliable base for their operations. The answer clearly lay in Afghanistan. Yuldashev had been introduced to the Taliban in Kabul in 1997, and the Taliban had every reason to give him refuge: Uzbekistan was backing the anti-Taliban opposition in Afghanistan and Karimov himself was belligerently anti-Taliban. Yuldashev also met Osama bin Laden, who saw in Yuldeshev an ally for the future in a region where he had few contacts. Some Uzbek officials and Tajik IRP leaders say that it was bin Laden who encouraged Yuldashev to set up a distinct Islamic Party whose aim would be the liberation of the Fergana Valley and Uzbekistan from Karimov's rule. There was no confirmation of this, but US officials subsequently claimed that bin Laden was a primary contributor of fund to help set up the IMU. (Ahmed Rashid, 1992: 148)

That summer Yuldashev conferred with Namangani in Kabul, and together they announced the creation of the IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan). Yuldashev later set out the IMU's goals in an interview for *The Voice of America*, one of the few lengthy interviews he has ever given. "The goals of IMU activities are firstly fighting against oppression within our country, against bribery, against the inequities and also the freeing of our Muslim from prison... Who will avenge those Muslims who have died in the prisons of the regime? Of course we will. We consider it our obligations to avenge them and nobody can take this right away from us. We do have our declaration of jihad against the Uzbek government. God willing, we will carry out this jihad to its conclusion". (Tohir, Yuldeshev, 2000)

It was on 16th February 1999, in a span of an hour that six car bombs exploded in the center of Tashkent in an apparent attempt to assassinate the

President. Karimov had left his country residence and was on his way to attend a cabinet meeting when his driver was alerted by the explosion.

Although no officials were harmed, 13 people were killed and 128 were injured. Demonstrating his bravado, a furious Karimov arrived at the square a few minutes later to review the damage, even though explosions were still going on in other parts of the city. (Ahmed Rashid, 1992:150)

The government went on a rampage, accusing all opposition groups, including the IMU and other political groups like Erk and Birlik, of responsibility for the bombs. But the most common hypothesis offered by Uzbeks themselves is that the bombing was carried out by clan and political rivals of Karimov within the regime who had not been accommodated in the power structure and was fearful that Karimov's policies were running the country. Karimov's concentration of power and his favoritism towards his own clan from Samarkand has been a growing cause of resentment. Moreover, Karimov fears that the regional elite of the Fergana Valley may in future stage endorse or link up with the IMU.

Whoever was responsible, the bombing sent shock waves across Central Asia. Throughout the summer, Uzbekistan government arrested IMU members and on the other hand accused the Tajikistan government of harboring Namangani. Although he was there, the Tajik government was not in a position to take on the IMU. Tajik President Rahmonov did exert pressure on IRP leaders in the coalition government to get rid of Namangani, or at least to send him to Afghanistan. Fearing that his forces would be disarmed and disbanded, Namangani asserted himself in August 1999.

He began a wave of kidnappings and killing, following which he left for Afghanistan. On 25th August 1999, the IMU issued an official order declaring jihad on the Karimov regime and calling for its overthrow (see the Appendix). The events of the summer of 1999, which were set in motion by the Tashkent bombings, unleashed the IMU as the most potent threat to the Central Asian regimes.

Namangani has now become a major figure throughout the region, even a celebrity, yet he still refuse to be interviewed. He even avoided foreign radio stations, which were desperate to talk to him. He cultivated an air of mystery around him. Soon Namangani was being mythologized in the underground of Islamic militancy, not only in Central Asia but also in Pakistan, Afghanistan

and throughout the Arab world. Karimov and the Uzbek government were deeply embarrassed by the speed with which Namangani became a household name across the region. People did not speak so much of the IMU as of Jumaboi- his nickname- whilst his activities, real and imagined, became an obsession amongst Central Asia watchers. (Ahmed Rashid, 1992:153)

Islamic Renaissance Party in Tajikistan

The Tajik Islamicists are unique amongst militant Central Asian Islamic groups. The movement brings together the various strands of Central Asian Islam, which include the “unofficial” Ulema who were forced to go underground during the Soviet period, the registered clergy belonging to “official” Islam, the Sufi pirs and their followers in the Pamir Mountains- and a younger generations in Afghanistan and the reassertion of Tajik nationalism following the collapse of the Soviet Union. These groups all joined in the rapid revival of Islam in Tajikistan after 1991- a resurgence that shocked Central Asian rulers. (Ahmed Rashid, 1992:95)

The Islamic revival was also closely linked to Tajik nationalism. Tajiks had never forgotten the Basmachi rebellion against the Soviets in the 1920’s, despite Soviet efforts to portray it in history books as a reactionary movement led by mullahs supported by British imperialism. After independence came, many Tajiks sought to rediscover their side of the story as part of an effort to forge a new national consensus and identity.

It was during the Soviet period, that an underground political Islam had thrived in Tajikistan more than in any other Central Asian state. In the Soviet era, Mullah Muhammad Rustamov Hindustani was the most influential underground spiritual leaders in Tajikistan. He had studied at the madrassa in Deoband, India, before returning home to open a clandestine madrassa in Dushanbe in the 1970’s. Hindustani brought the new ideas shaping the Muslim world and the ideology of Islamic fundamentalist movements in India, Pakistan, and the Arab states to Central Asia, spreading his message to both Tajiks and Uzbeks in the Fergana Valley. In the Soviet regime, the Russians shut down his madrassa and sentenced Hindustani to fifteen years’ imprisonment in Siberia, where he died in 1989. (Ahmed Rashid, 1992:97)

One of Hindustani’s students was Abdullah Saidov, known as Sayed Abdullah Nuri, who was born in the town of Tavildara in 1947. By 1974 Nuri had helped form an illegal Islamic educational organization, Nahzar-i-Islami

(Islamic Knowledge). Eventually Nuri became the founding member and leader of the Islamic Renaissance Party. Another of Hindustani's student was Muhammad Sharif Himmatzoda, who became a leader of the military wing of the IRP. Nuri and Himmatzoda were already old friends when they helped found the Tajik branch of the Islamic Renaissance Party. The IRP had been established in June 1990 in Astrakhan, Russia, largely by Tatar intellectuals who sought to organize Muslims with the Soviet Union to campaign for the introduction of sharia (Islamic Law) to Russia. With glasnost in full swing under President Mikhail Gorbachev, the IRP registered as a political party in Russia, but it was banned in the Central Asian Republics by their ruling Communist parties. Tajik representatives who had participated in the Astrakhan meeting and returned home determined to set up an IRP in Tajikistan, faced an immediate ban.

With support from Nuri's youth organization, a clandestine branch of the IRP did emerge in Tajikistan. The Tajikistan IRP's (illegal) inaugural conference was held on 26th October 1991, and it was attended by some 650 delegates, who elected Himmatzoda as the party's first chairman, established an Islamic newspaper, and even approved a coat of arms and a flag. The IRP dedicated itself to spreading Islam, promoting a spiritual revival, and working for the political and economic independence of Tajikistan.

As the political situation deteriorated in late 1991, with the disbanding of the Soviet Union and creation of new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), political infighting broke out within the CPTJ (Communist Party Tajikistan) and hard-line Communists in the Tajik Parliament eventually forced through the election of 62-year-old Rakhmon Nabiev as President. Mass protests at his election broke out in Dushanbe, as tens of thousands of people camped out in Lenin Square – renamed Azad (Freedom) Square – in the centre of the city. This was a heady time for the IRP, who fed and cared for the people living in the streets, receiving their first taste of mass mobilization and political agitation in the process. No other Islamic movement in Central Asia had ever been given such a chance at mass contact as Tajikistan's IRP was in those years. When the IRP was registered as a political party by the Tajik authorities in December 1991, just before the collapse of the Soviet Union, it already claimed twenty thousand members. (Ahmed Rashid, 1992:100)

Nabiev was forced to hold a presidential election in the new Republic on November 24th, which he won by a narrow margin of 58% vote. What was

more shocking to the Russian and Central Asian leaders was the opposition candidate, Daulat Khudonazarov. He fought the election with the alliance of democrats, nationalists and Islamcists and won 34% of the vote. Clearly, the Islamic revival was not limited to cultural reassertion, for it was poised for a political challenge to the state of Tajikistan. The controversial election results led to more demonstration and riots in March 1992, which was followed by a severe government crack-down in which many people were killed. By now it was clear that a civil war was imminent, and key IRP leaders took to the mountains to set up military bases in the Karategin and Tavildara Valley north of Dushanbe.

The civil war in Tajikistan lasted from 1992 to 1997. It was during this time the Islamicists working in Dushanbe, related through family, clan, and regional ties, and ensured that the IRP radicals were also in touch with the state-sponsored "official Islam". A key sympathizer was Qazi Akhar Turajonzoda, the grand Mufti (qazi) of Tajikistan's Muslims during the last years of the Soviet Union. Born in 1954 near Dushanbe, Turajonzoda studied at the official, Soviet sponsored madrassah in Bukhara before going to Jordon for further Islamic studies in the 1970's. After his return he worked for a time in the Board of Muslims for Central Asia in Tashkent; he was appointed the first Mufti of Tajikistan in 1988. He developed extensive grass-root contacts and encouraged the spate of mosque building that began in the capital in 1990.

By 1991, he had become immensely popular receiving hundreds of people in Dushanbe's main mosque and staying in touch with the IRP secretly. He confidently predicted the fall of the Nabiev government and the oncoming struggle between the government and the opposition. "Islam is strong, while people mistrust the Communists", he said proudly, even as he attended Nabiev's cabinet meetings. (Ahmed Rashid, 1992:101)

When the civil war began in Tajikistan, Turajonzoda defected to Iran, becoming a prominent leader of the opposition alliance. During the civil war he travelled extensively around the world, seeking support for the IRP. His official status, his Islamic learning, and his popularity gave the IRP a legitimacy that was unprecedented in Central Asia. At the same time, he viewed the IRP with some suspicion, for its hierarchy tried to undercut his own popular status. Turajonzoda's supporters within the IRP argued that a single party could not bring about an Islamic revolution in Tajikistan; instead, society had to be slowly Islamicized from the bottom up. This attitude, which he revived after the civil war ended in 1997, led to his eventual expulsion from the IRP.

When the civil war ended in 1997, the IRP suffered heavy losses. It was unable to reconstitute itself or to offer an economic or political plan for the country's revival which left the party incapable of institutionalizing political Islam, or even retaining its own appeal. Grass-root support for the IRP and political activism was declining, and its influence over the younger generation has become less significant than it had been five years earlier. Instead, regionalism and clan politics had become more firmly entrenched. During the decade of civil war and its aftermath, Tajiks generally became more committed Muslims, but the radical and political Islamicist overtones of the civil war era were gradually disappearing. While they were deeply respectful of Islam, they were not ready for an overt political manifestation of it. Militant Islam had failed in Tajikistan, but it is still not defeated. In the midst of poverty Tajiks still have acute national consciousness which could unite the clans and usher in greater democracy.

Quest for Ethnic Nationalism

The main problem in Central Asia today is the search for a new nationalism. During the communist era the party was organized as the Soviet State. The Soviet Constitution had structured the many national identities in Central Asia as an articulated series from the sub-nations of the Autonomous Oblasts like Badakshan in Tajikistan, through the Autonomous republics like Karakalpakia in Uzbekistan and the five nations of Central Asia, to culminate in the Soviet super-state itself. It did not permit the emergence of Central Asia or Turkistan. The party constituted in itself the major portion of the field of political battle. All the political forces we find today have either emerged from the Party or were its interlocutors and partners in the struggle for power. The 'problem' in Central Asia today, for the five 'nationalities' is to establish their independent identities.

But the modernization process in the USSR, led to the growth in self-assertion by the elites of what were essentially new nationalities. The most articulate native elites of the Muslim nationalists were striking throughout the region, although the individual Republics were only created in 1924. Three distinct levels of ethnic consciousness among Muslims of Central Asia were identified by Alexander Benningsen: sub-national, supra-national and national. National consciousness in Soviet Central Asia can be regarded as a form of culture quite as much as a social movement. The 'cornelian term' nationalism is defined here as an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining

autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population claimed by some of its members to constitute an actual (or potential) nation. (Hyman, Anthony, 1993:296)

National identity and nationalism is still much more prominent within the intelligentsia and the nomenclature in Central Asia. Hardly surprisingly, the search for cultural and historical roots, including the repressed religious heritage, is a striking feature of the contemporary intellectual scene there. The changing cultural and political atmosphere is reflected throughout Central Asia in the renaming of squares, streets and parks. Communism and Russian culture alike are out of fashion. Instead the symbols of Turkistan's own proud history are favoured. A natural choice is the Central Asian adventurer Babur, founder of the Mughal Empire in India, who was born in the Fergana Valley in 1483. In the town of Namangan the central park is no longer named Pushkin Garden but Babur Garden. Statute of Lenin has been replaced by that of Babur. And a brand new museum to Babur's memory has opened in Andijan, his birth place in Fergana. (Hyman, Anthony, 1993:296)

Ethnic nationalism, not various brands of Islam, constitutes the main potential threat to regional stability. The government's support the status quo in state borders. But in nationalist intellectual circles there is an enthusiasm to bring about alterations in the 1924 borders drawn around the new republics and unite with their ethnic brethren living as minorities in neighbouring state. (Hyman, Anthony, 1993:296) The influence of nationalist circles should not be dismissed out of hand. Fervent nationalist sentiments among Tajiks and Uzbeks are out in the open. A "Great Khorasan" state is publicly advocated by a group of irredentist nationalist intellectuals recently formed in Tajikistan, the "Great Arian Society". Their dream is to unite the Tajiks of Afghanistan and Tajikistan as well as to regain the 'lost' Tajik lands (of Samarkand and Bukhara) on Uzbek territory. (Hyman, Anthony, 1993:297)

Pan -Turkic Nationalism

Another gloomy prognosis offered for the future of Central Asia was the evolution of nationhood along the concept of pan- Turkism. Turkey with its secular and democratic form of government was perceived to be the ideal political option as well as the most effective weapon vis-à-vis Iranian religious motives in Central Asia by the West. (Stobdan P., 1995: 64)

Undoubtedly, the concept did evoke emotional response among Central Asian countries. Many leaders, including President Karimov of Uzbekistan,

became advocates of Turkish model. Turkey, on its part made generous offers to assist Central Asian states in their development programmes. Ankara assisted these new states to become members of the United Nations (UN), Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). (Stobdan P., 1995: 65)

Interestingly enough, Central Asians began to take a cautious view of Turkey's interest – especially when they have just freed themselves from Russian “big brother”. Not only did they politically reject Turkey's call for a common market but also realized the relative weakness of the Turkish economy. As the Central Asian States became confident of their diplomacy, they, particularly Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, preferred to deal with the Western world directly, without any mediation of Turkey.

The pan-Turkism concept, at the other level, is confronted with the difficulty of regional complexities and the poly-ethnic population in Central Asia. Although it is extremely convenient for us to lump together all the Central Asian states as one entity, in reality these states are anything but homogenous. The prospects for the forces of disintegration are much powerful than the commonalties which can bring them together. Sub-nationalism, regionalism and tribalism may seriously hinder such concepts taking proper shape. Tajiks are certainly not going to welcome such an idea.

Apart from major divisions between Turks versus Iranian ethnic and cultural background, potential fault lines are existing along nomadic versus settled people, urban versus rural, oasis versus steppe, mountain versus valley and so forth. Moreover, both China and Russia, would not like to see either the pan-Islamic or pan-Turkik perceptions gaining momentum in Central Asia.

Secular Nationalism

Alongside the growth of an Islamic movement in Muslim Central Asian Republics, there is a development of secular nationalist movement. A series of ethnic riots since 1989 helped to strengthen national identity, and chances of building a Pan-Islamic identity receded. In all the Central Asian States, elections brought to power with popular mandate, secular and former communist leadership. Even in Tajikistan where Islamic revivalist forces are relatively stronger as compared to other Central Asian states, their hold over power was brief and secular forces were able to mobilize popular support to

oust the Islamic leadership who had briefly seized power by force. (Patnaik A.K. :254) The Tajik incidents (1992) have underlined factors that work against the growth of Islamic fundamentalism. It revealed that Central Asians are not one homogeneous group with one overriding identity-Islam. They are not just divided on nationality lines, but there are strong ideological and clan regional loyalties that negate and oppose the unifying appeal of Islam. (Patnaik A.K.)

Islamic revivalism is also likely to encounter resistance may be passive, from many Central Asian women who have seen a progressive improvement in their economic and social position during the Soviet era and who would be required to, and might even be forced to lead a subordinate existence. Some are of the opinion that even at the religio-cultural level Central Asian women were more active in the Soviet period, a role that they seem to be losing with the re-assertion of patriarchal values and revival of Islam. Gilliam Telt, during her field work in Tajikistan, observed that with the revival of Islam across the Republic, men are coming to play an even greater role in Islamic practices. (Patnaik A.K. :255)

Assessing the situation, one can come to the conclusion that in Central Asia today, neither nationalism, socialism, secularism nor liberalism have the capacity to mobilize any opposition to the existing regimes in Central Asia. Only Islam is proving a highly effective ideology of resistance. Islam identified what went wrong in Central Asia in the past century like, secular government, corrupt elites, Communism and in the recent times globalization. It also specifies what must be done to set things right; join an Islamic party become a party activist, mujahid or shahid, establish an Islamic Republic, enforce the sharia and return to the true path of Islam. This has resulted in the adverse relations with the non-Muslim minorities in Central Asia, particularly the Russians, Slavic, Germans, Jews, Ukrainians and Belo-Russians. These minorities now feel threatened and are facing numerous problems in these Republics.

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