The Revival of Pre-Soviet Socio-Religious Tradition in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: A Conceptual Summary

Saima Ibrahim*

Abstract

After gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan faced a plethora of issues and challenges. One such challenge was in the sphere of culture. It was realized that the need of the hour was to relook at Uzbekistan's history, because, there is no future without knowing the past. The Year 1991, along with political independence, brought cultural and religious freedom to the Uzbek people and liberated them from the repressive Soviet past. Fundamental changes in society made a great impact on hearts and minds of people and gave a powerful impetus to rebirth of religious, moral, ethic and cultural values of the nation. In order to fully comprehend a nation's self identity, one has to restore the broken links between generations by applying to the past and the history of the soil. The fibre of society is knit by the evaluation of various aspects of life that includes the daily colour of human activity. The socio-religious conditions of a society depict its cultural, religious and historical affiliations. The main objective of the paper is to highlight and traverse of the rebirth and revival of pre-soviet socio-religious and cultural ethos and life pattern in the post-soviet Uzbek society. The paper is conceptual and based upon the secondary sources.

Key words: *Uzbekistan, Cultural revival, Russian communism, Islamic tradition.*

Introduction:

Uzbekistan, the most populous and arguably the most powerful state in Central Asia, has a long and magnificent history. Located between two rivers- the Amu Darya to the North and the Syr Darya to the south, the region that is modern Uzbekistan has been one of the Cradles of world civilization.

***Ph.D Research Scholar, Centre of Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir, Kashmir, India. Email:saimaccas@gmail.com**

Many faiths played a definite role in shaping the cultural aspects of the people, yet the arrival of Islam in 8th century brought most of the Uzbeks under the ambit of Islamic culture. The Arab occupation brought about several changes in the life of the Uzbeks in diverse fields. Before the October revolution, Central Asia was well known for their Islamic culture. Islam was dominant faith in 19th century among khanates of the region. Bukhara was regarded as one of the greatest Islamic centres and all the khanate governments enforced Islamic practices in towns and cities. When Islam was introduced in the social landscape in 8th century A.D, it was redefined to suit the ethnic and tribal peculiarities that had shaped the life of people for centuries. As such, Islam made its lasting imprint, not only as a creed with organized political objectives but also as a way of life. The Central Asian people observed the Islamic practices in accordance with Quranic percepts. System of justice was based on Islamic law (*Shariah*) and customary laws *(Adat*). They universally practised circumcision, marriage, burial rituals and celebrated *Idul-fitr* (at the end of *Ramadhan*) and *Idul-Azha.* .But the situations changed dramatically for the Muslims after the Russian conquest of Central Asia especially after the establishment of communist regime in 1917. During the communist rule, the very fabric of the Islamic culture was controlled, manipulated and eradicated through official anti-religious policy. Islam was forcibly uprooted beginning with the whole sale destruction of mosques and *madrasahs* which were converted into clubs or theatres, strong propaganda was directed against fundamentals of Islam(practice of offering five time prayer and hajj was banned, fasting was strictly restricted etc),Islamic courts were deprived of all power, religious properties were confiscated, Islamic literature were banned, Arabic script was abolished, *nikah*(religious marriages) was banned and all the ties with Muslim world were snapped etc. But the anti-religious campaign of the soviet authorities could not eliminate the Islam from the minds and souls of Central Asian people. However the sudden demise of the communist rule has created an ideological vacuum in the region, providing Islam an opportunity to play effective role. The disintegration of Soviet Union and the independence of Uzbekistan in 1991, gave a further impetus to Islamic revival and re-ascertain of Islamic identity in Uzbek society. Since then, Islam as a religious tradition and as a form of culture and national identity has acquired new meanings. The process of Islamic revival swiftly accelerated as new Central Asian states began to re-establish their historical links with the Muslim world reinforcing their Islamic identity, which had defined Central Asian culture, traditions, and

the way of life for centuries. The present analysis is an attempt to put into perspective the dynamics of the Islamic revival in Uzbekistan and to provide a realistic assessment of its role in the region.

1. Describing the survival of Islam as cultural phenomenon in Central Asia after

Seventy years of the Soviet anti-religious crusade.

2. It is assumed that religion has been a major factor in shaping identity of Central Asia. Religion has once again re-emerged in Central Asia and has influenced the socio-culture fabric of region.

Socio-religious conditions during pre-soviet and soviet period: An Overview

Before the advent of Islam in Central Asia, many of the original inhabitants of Transoxania were Nestorian Christians, Buddhist, Zoroastrians which went hand in hand with the Shamanistic and Animism. (Sinor, 1990, P. 344) Islam was first introduced to Central Asia by the armies of expanding Arab Empire who crossed the Oxus River (today known as Amu Darya) in 673 A.D and had conquered most of the territory by 715 A.D. (Kidayator, 1997, p.15) Under both the Arab caliphate and the Persian Samanid dynasty that took control of the area from the Arabs *'Mawarennahr*' (the land beyond the river) soon became a major cultural centre of the Muslim world. The Islamic faith glorified in the region due to the extraordinary missionary zeal of sufis, besides many more related reasons. (Bathold, 1956, p. 20)The region Uzbekistan became thus an important Islamic centre for having produced the theologian of world repute- *Al Bukhari* and *Al Tirimizi* in addition to such sufi scholars as *Bahudin Naqashband*- the founder of Naqashbandi order of Sufism. (Kidayator, 1997) The *Ulama* had a dominating role in the society as Islamic laws governed the state. (Skrine & Ross, 1919) Governance became Islamic, Islamic jurisprudence became prevalent in administration and important matters were related on the advice of the scholars of Islam and many renowned of them became advisors of the rulers. (Haider, 2004) Even the judicial system supplemented by *Adat* (customary laws such as payment of *kalym*) was based on *Shariat* and courts headed by *Qazi* (Muslim

judges) were appointed by the rulers on basis of their merit for whole life. (Bacon, 1960, p. 77) Educational system in Central Asia was associated with religion and largely based upon the scholastic pattern. Arabic language was popularized so that people read and understand the Holy Quran and Hadith and follow Islamic way of life. Education was imparted through *Maktabs* or primary schools which were attached with mosques and *Madrassas* or seminaries for training of clergy and religious teachers. (Badan, 2001, p. 26-27)

Thus prior to 1917, Uzbek society was more Islamic than it is today. The five pillars of Islam (Shahadah, Prayers, Fasting, Zakat, and Hajj) were all widely practiced. Religious festivals played a major role in pre-Soviet Central Asia. One of these was *Kichik Bayram* (called *Eid al-fitr* in Arabic), which celebrates the breaking of the *Ramadhan* fast. Another even more important feast was *Qurban Bayram* (*Eid al-adhu*), the commemoration of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. Most of the significant rites in Uzbek society were also inextricably linked with Islam, the chief of these being circumcision, the marriage ceremony and the traditional funerals. Islam, unlike most other faiths, is far more than a religion. It is a complete cultural system and served as a cohesive and vibrant force to abridge the diverse ethnic groups. (Rywkin, 1982, p. 84) Thus whole of the life during this period came under the ambit of Islam.

Traditionalism in Central Asia was the backbone of cultural ethos, be it in faith or other family matters. Traditionalism was followed in maintaining life and its other facets. The family system was patriarchal. The authority passed from father to the elder son or from the elder brother to the younger brother. (Krader, 1963) Joint family system was prevalent all over the region. It comprised of many generations living in a house hold. Joint family played an important role in the process of socialization as the system was based on close relations among the members of the family. (Badan, 2001) During the pre-Soviet period, marriages were arranged by close relatives in accordance with the rules of Islamic and customary law; neither the bride nor generally the bridegroom had any say in the choice of their future partner. (Buckley, 1997, p. 265) Girls were generally considered marriageable between the age of 11-15, whereas boys between the age of 15-16. (Bacon, 1960) Polygamy was prevalent but in practice only the rich have more than two wives. (Colette, 1996) The practice of child marriage and payment of *kalym* (bride price) were part of the traditions and customs of society.

There were some social restrictions on women; they were obliged to put on veil. The women were generally not allowed to attend school and work outside the home.

However, after October revolution Soviet Government attempted to change the culture of the people of Central Asia in the name of modernization. On the pretext of creating a culture which was deemed to be is national in form but socialist in context, the Russian communists continued the policy of russification of Central Asian people. As a result, the soviets brought radical changes in all spheres of socio-cultural life of the peoples of region. The most critical components of the soviet cultural and religious policies towards Central Asia consisted of following elements like systematic liquidation of traditional institutions and culture of region and building of new soviet society and culture to replace the old. To meet these goals, the former soviet authority applied several means to liquidate the traditional culture through effective cultural isolation. Soon after the October revolution, the Soviet regime enforced far reaching measures to abolish economic, political and cultural backwardness from region. This step brought about considerable changes in the way of life and habits of people. (Badan, 2001) After coming to power, the Bolsheviks entirely destroyed the existing native family system along with customs and traditions that were obstacles to the growth of nuclear family system. (Shams-ud-Din, 1982) Nuclear family came into existence replacing the traditional joint family. The nuclear family consists of not more than four or six members including parents and unmarried children. The father remained traditional head of the family but he lost his significance as the sole economic administrator and also considered the opinion of children as well. After the October revolution, marriage become the personal affair of young people who usually contracted by mutual agreement. (Badan, 2001) In 1918, the official registration of marriages, births and deaths was made compulsory while religious marriages (*nikah*) were banned. However religious marriages did not wither away but were performed secretly. Between 1921 and 1923, laws were passed banning such practices as polygamy, the payment of Kalym (bride-price) and marriage without the consent of the bride, while the legal age for marriage was fixed at sixteen years for girls and eighteen years for boys. The Soviet regime made attempts to achieve equality of sexes and women were given right

to vote and access to all positions of power. (Buckley, 1997, p. 268) A campaign called emancipation of women (*hujum*) was launched against traditional lifestyles. The first large-scale displays of unveiling took place in 1927, on International Women's Day (8th March), a historic day in the life of Uzbek women. On that day thousands of women marched through the streets, squares and bazaars of Central Asian cities like Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Kokand etc had cast off their *parandzha* (traditional garb which cover the body entirely) and *Chachvan* (a woven screen covering the face) and ceremonially incinerated them on giant bonfires. (Aminove, 1977) The *Khudzhum* was a definitive episode in the social transformation of the region. For the Russians, the success of the *Khudzhum* was an ideological victory. To them, the *parandzha* symbolised everything that they were fighting to eradicate: oppression, ignorance, injustice and human degradation. (Joseph, 2007)The Soviet authorities regarded education as an essential component of political and economic mobilisation. Primary education was made compulsory for boys and girls alike by about 1930s. Special attention was being given to eliminate illiteracy among women. At the same time, network of schools and teacher training colleges was expanded while the Islamic educational institutions were gradually phased out. (Buckley, 1997)

Although the new Bolshevik government inaugurated in 1917 was ideologically opposed to all religions, Islam was considered to be perhaps the greatest threat, since it had its own distinctive social, educational and judicial system. (Wheeler, 1975, p. 97) Thus, once power had been consolidated in Central Asia, the new regime began to erode the influence of the religion. They controlled Islam and regulated Islamic practice through state laws and regulations. (Mott, 1994) Soviet officials also confiscated religious properties, Islamic courts were deprived of all power and either placed *mullahs* under strict government control or forced them out of their religious positions. (Mahew, 1997, p. 25) Among other things, government prohibited the Hajj and *Zakat* and denounced Ramadhan. Mosques were closed by thousands many of them being converted into museums of atheism or youth clubs. In 1905, there had been 25000 mosques and over 50000 Clerics in Russian empire. (Benningsen & Broxup, 1983) The main aim of the anti-Islamic propagation was the elimination of Islamic spirit from the minds of people, weakening the influence of *Ulama* in the society, developing anti-Islamic and communist values and habits and convincing the public that their salvation lays on scientific (communist) Progress. (Brayon,

1986) These measures certainly had a devastating effect on Soviet Islam but the religion which had shaped the entire culture of Central Asian peoples was not entirely wiped out. In spite of the drastic measures adopted by Soviet Government, to uproot the religion, Islam survived with traditions and rituals even among the communist card holders etc. It survived in the original form through clandestine activities and activity of *otines (*a female Muslim dignitary/ female equivalent of the mullahs). *Otines* remained conscious of being the guardians of culture and customs. (Khawja, 1999)

Socio-religious conditions during Post Soviet Uzbekistan

The path covered by the Republic of Uzbekistan in the years since it acquired independence highlights the difficult situations faced by the new Central Asian states. During the past 20 years of independence, Uzbekistan has moved along a path of gradual development of democracy, socially oriented market economy, the nation building process by keeping the indigenous ethno- national culture and traditions as the core of the independent state of Uzbekistan. (Ahmad Khawja & Banday, 2006) The Post-Soviet period set the scene for major political and economic changes in Central Asia with the rise of five independent states in the region leading to a drastic revision of previous ideologies. The revival of indigenous cultural values represented by Islam has become one of the political catchwords of the newly independent states. A clear trend towards a change in the social system emerged during the transition period. The new Central Asian republics which emerged after 1991 is fundamentally a different kind of society from the one under the Russian rule during which a number of new social, cultural, economic and political norms and traditions were laid down.

Society

The most important effect of the revival of Islamic ideals seems to be on the social life of the country. After 1991, Uzbekistan by and large entered the age of changes that took place in the social and economic spheres of life. The main factor which influences the social demographic situation in the country is a strong family institution; the basic unit of

society. The traditional Uzbek family is characterized by complex extended families as it is considered as a cornerstone unit in the Uzbek society. The majority of family members in Uzbekistan consist of 2-8 people. Structurally majority of families consist of two generations mainly parents and those children who do not yet have their own families. (Dadabaev, 2004, p. 156) After independence, new economic policy, privatisation and change in proprietor/ownership structure, high cost of houses etc is forcing families to live together. Society with its rigid structure still continues to be patriarchal. Patriarchy is maintained equally by men and women and in particular through the hierarchal relationship between mother- in law and daughter- in law. The head of the family (husband or father) has a leading role and controls duties in family. The wife has a sub-ordinate position; she has a role of manager of her household, nursing for husband, children and for elder members of family. (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995, p. 70) Social linkages are reinforced through the observance of life rituals and ceremonies. One of the most important of these is marriage, an event that carries great significance to the entire family and often the whole *mahalla*. In post independent period, *nikah* is now a legalized act performed with the approval of the government, (Ibid.,p. 96) though it was performed by people either before or after the registration in the soviet era, it is now performed freely, openly and in certain places the young people perform it in mosques. (Sahadeo & Zanca, 2007) With the legalization of *nikah*, the institute of *mahar* was also restored. During the years of independence, bride money was legalized. Now the people consider it as a part of their ethnic tradition. Many people believe that bride money is paid for lessening the expenses of a bride's family on arranging wedding feasts etc. Money received on its account was usually spent on clothes of bride and its groom. The amount of bride money increased over the years essentially due to inflation and hike in prices of clothes and introduction of a new currency. (Arifkhanova, 2006) Bride price may be paid either in cash or in the form of gifts of clothes, jewellery and household items. (Buckley, 1997, p. 287) In post independence era, wedding is cermonised through traditional rituals which include magic shows associated with the pre-Islamic beliefs of purifying newly wedded couple by burning fire as a means to redeeming a bride, strewing her with candies, and so on, all having entertainment and game value. (Arifkhanova, 2006)

In the social sphere arranged marriage is still the norm; parents decide the fate of their daughters. In Uzbekistan, parents strongly encourage young people to build families as soon as they reach marriageable age. Early marriage is another feature of the Uzbek society. Parents support early marriages because it relieves moral, societal pressure on them to take responsibility for the future of their children. The majority of parents also consider early marriage of their children more preferable because it follows the logic of traditional society, ensuring greater acceptability of the traditional norms as well as greater patience with and loyalty to the traditional authority of family among young generation. (Dadabaev, 2004, p. 156) Although the practice of polygamy is banned by law, it is mostly found in rural areas. Such marriages especially the second marriages are solemnized through a Muslim ceremony *(nikah*) (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995) devoid of any legal status.

The post Soviet period registered a revivalist trend which emphasized traditions and rituals. This was due to a number of factors, firstly, the post Soviet Uzbek government issued directives for discarding European culture and way of life and adopting only those traditions and rituals as were based on their age long customs. Secondly, the revival of Uzbek ethno- national traditions was one of the state priorities in independent Uzbekistan. Thirdly imparting spiritual knowledge about glorious part of Uzbekistan formed an essential agenda of the new government. Fourthly, agricultural restructuring, restoration of rural values and village institutions, contributed to the revival of traditional norms. (Warikoo, 2005) During independence, when religious attitude underwent a marked change, new opportunities for restoration of a number of earlier rites came in e.g. the famous *Akika -tui* – where in a sheep was sacrificed for invoking God's blessing for a baby birth and arguing of a good health both for mother and the baby. The practice was grounded in a thought where in it was believed that every new born baby ran a potent risk of life due to an evil spirit which could catch the baby during first twenty days. In order to ward off the evil spirit, people made immolation of a ram (sheep) or some other animal. However with the dawn of independence and state programme for cultural renaissance, the ritual *muchal-toi* resurfaced. On a child's reaching 12 year age, grand feast was organized in a family. Subsequently, a new form of *muchal toi*

was cermonised by class-mates in a school with the enjoyment of delicious meals, exchange of presents and amateur performances by children. Uzbek television popularized such performances to a great deal. However, the given ritual failed to become a widespread event due to financial constraints following transition and inflation during the post-soviet period. *Sunnat toi* (circumcision), the most important occasion, is performed for several days with as good number of guests as 300-400. (Arifkhanova, 2006) Other rites include *beshiktoy* (cradle ceremony), *chilya guzaron*, the rites in honour of a new born child; these rites cannot take place without the participation of a *mullah* and *otines*. After independence, since traditionalism returned in many ways so the Islamic burial rites and customs also started to reappear, *mullahs* and *otines* plays an important part in the burial rite as the keepers of the traditional religions legacy. (Feride & Ayse Gunes, 2000) The deceased person is brought to mosques where the *Jinaza* is performed in presence of a large number of people and relatives. (Roi, 2000, p. 252)The relatives of deceased both men and women wear black clothes until 4th day for showing reverence towards the deceased one. After 4th day a funeral feast was given by the family of deceased to the relatives and elders of the *mahalla* and locality. (Hutchinson, 1984) In post-independence era, holidays and leisure activities emerged as a complex mixture of Islamic traditions, national festivals and modern, often state-sponsored secular events. Since 1991, the Islamic festivals (*Eid Al-Fitr,Eid Al-Adha*) have made a strong comeback and have become official public holidays on the national calendar. Another example of revivalism of rituals and customs is the celebration of *Nawruz* .It was not celebrated during the Soviet era, but it was re-established after 1991 as a national holiday of spring in all the Central Asian republics. (Abazov, 2007) After independence, the government chose to revive certain historical events and present it as symbol of cultural enlightenment for the "new Uzbekistan". For instance to revive jaded legacy's special features; to highlight Amir Temur's contribution and to declare birthdays of Central Asian saints, scholars, jurists or poets etc as state holidays and to celebrate these festivals with great enthusiasm. (Smith, 1998)

In Uzbekistan, there is a network of neighbourhoods called *mahalla (*neighbourhood community) in which traditional life of Uzbek people is nourished. Traditions and rites in the *mahalla* are carried out by certain groups of inhabitants who form *mahalla* councils. (Feride & Ayse

Gunes, 2000) In the daily life of Uzbek people, the *mahalla* is a real group, determining the daily social relations of individuals, placing obligations and responsibilities upon them in exchange for support and services and it provides unity and solidarity. Members celebrate weddings and festivals, organize rituals and help each other and when required. In each *mahalla*, there is a community centre the so called *Camoat Markazi* with its *Masjid* (mosque) or a room in the administrative building set aside for praying and *Chayhona* (Tea-house). *Chayhona* is not only a place to eat and drink but it is an important institution for social networking and socialization. Over a cup of tea, people discuss community needs and development at the local level, as well as their major political, social and economic activities. *Mahalla* posses a whole range of objects such as tables, benches and kitchen utensils that are at the disposal of members for weddings and other ceremonies. (Ibid., p. 233) The community centre, the *Masjid* or the praying room and the *Chayhona* are by definition men's place. Women have a limited access to them only on specific occasions. As in all Muslim countries, Islamic values in Uzbekistan were reflected in the style of dress. In Uzbekistan, many communities encourage sexual modesty through appropriate dress for girls and women, who typically wear loose long sleeved dress, loose pants and a scarf. In cities and towns, women often wear contemporary fashionable clothing. (Carol & Melvin, 2003)

Religion:

With the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991, a new chapter begins In the Islamic history of Central Asia. A trend of Islamic resurgence began to develop in the whole of Central Asia in general and Uzbekistan in particular. Islam as a matter of fact is in no way a new phenomenon to Uzbekistan. It has been for centuries the traditional faith of the region. However with the revival of Islamic ideology, Islamic activities received a sudden fillip. Over the following years, more mosques were opened, public celebration of Islamic feast days was given official support, copies of Quran and records and cassettes of Quranic recitations suddenly began to appear in state run kiosks. Islamic symbols and references became an accepted part of life. (Akiner, 1993) However after independence the process of re-Islamisation has grown

tremendously though Islam has not been recognized as the official religion in any of the Central Asian republics, nonetheless it is referred to as an element of historic culture which implies an awakening of religion awareness. (Fathi, 1997) The basic dictates of Islam like *Salat*, *Zakat*, *Saum* and *Hajj* from 1991 are being observed with greater zeal and enthusiasm and social institutions like marriage, birth, death are observed more easily in an Islamic way. Wearing of Islamic dresses and use of Arabic once again added to the honour of the Islamic revivalism in Uzbekistan. The number of mosques has increased from 300 in 1989 to 5000 by 1993. Schools and voluntarily bodies began to teach the Arabic script (abolished in Central Asia in 1930) and to give instruction in reading the Quran. *Madrassah* and Islamic cultural centres were opened throughout the region. The finance for these undertakings was provided jointly by local Muslim Communities, district authorities and charitable donations from Muslims abroad. (Buckley, 1997) *Hajj* is now officially sponsored and Karimov has performed it in person. The Muslim Religious Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan has been replaced by Muslim Directorate of Uzbekistan which functions as an organ of the state firmly under the control of the regime. The Muslim Directorate has a monopoly over religions instruction and the organization of contacts with the rest of the Muslim world. New *Madrasas* have appeared under its auspices and it organizes the *Hajj* for several thousand citizens every year. It also controls all mosques and such mosques which are not controlled by the directorate, deemed illegal and have in many instances been closed. The publication department of the board has reprinted the Holy Quran several times. Also Quran was translated into Uzbek for the first time in 1992. (Khalid, 2006) The women clerics (*otines*) have been allowed by the board to teach in some mosques and also in some newly formed *madrasses.* These *otines* supervise young girls and adult women in religious affairs. Since these *otines* are not able enough to teach the modern religious education, a new group of women (Islamists) have taken over, trained in the recitation of Quran with their adherence to Wahabi ideology. Their ability to recite the Quran with *Tajwid* attracts the common people. (Khawja, 1999) These *otines* have studied Islam outside Uzbekistan in countries such as Turkey, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The religions authorities encouraged this type of learning during the first three or four years of independence. Quranic recitation contests were held for both men and women with prizes of significant sum of money in US dollars for the winners. But the activities of these *otines* were severely curtailed

after 1995 when the state clamped down on what it considered Militant Islam and were dismissed from the posts because they started giving virulent sermons in the mosques of Tashkent and traditional ones were given space. (Fathi, Gender, Islam and Social Change in Uzbekistan, 2006) Uzbekistan has made a remarkable contribution in the uplifting of education by establishing *madrasas* in almost all parts of the region. The Islamic State University at Tashkent was established in 1997 with a view to help students to have a deep study of the rich and unique spiritual cultural heritage connected to Islam (Warikoo, 2005) and to prepare highly qualified specialist cadres capable of answering the needs of times. (Khalid, 2006) Uzbekistan is the only country in Central Asia to have two *madrasas* for women, in Tashkent and Bukhara. Although run by women these *madrasas* have no autonomy and are subordinate to the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan in Tashkent (as are all *madrasas* in the country) which appoints the director, the teachers and other personal and also the curriculum is dictated by Muslim Board of Uzbekistan. These *Madrasas* enroll girls and also adult women who receive a diploma after four years of study. (Fathi, 1997) By and large Islamic institutions contributed to the establishment of an era which opened vistas of knowledge and learning. This contribution was not confined to the mosques and *madrasas* alone. Sufi orders also contributed significantly to make Islam compatible to the challenges of modern world. Sufism has flourished in Uzbekistan since Islam was first introduced in the region. The two renowned medieval centres of Sufi learning were situated at Bukhara and Khiva where Bahauddin Naqshband laid the foundation of Naqshbandi order and Najmuddin al Kubra formulated the Kubravi order respectively. It would not be out of place to mention here that government used the institution of Sufism as a tool against Islamists with special reference to the wahabis who are deemed to be the main force behind the activities of demanding an Islamic state. In the contemporary Uzbekistan these shrines are taken with much veneration and are visited by the people especially during the festival days. (Akiner S. , 1986) The patronization of shrines has been one of the most common reference points for the government to mark the rehabilitation of age old traditions. (Louv, 2007, p. 285)

Islam Karimov, president of Uzbekistan has been stressing the importance of the Islam in domestic and external spheres.

"Consideration for religion and Islam plays an important part within our internal and international politics and conduct,"he stated. Speaking on Islam, he state Islam manifests itself in the way of the life of people, their psychology and in building of spiritual and moral values, and in enabling us to feel support with those who practice the same religion. (Dilip, 1994, p. 182) While the Government asserts its respect for the spiritual heritage of nation, it leaves no stone unturned to oppose the dangers posed by new interpretation of religion. Such an interpretation of the religion does not comply with the traditions but denotes backwardness, obscurantism and fanaticism and is bound to knock the nation from its path to progress. (Khalid, 2006) Karimov views Islamic fundamentalism as a threat to Uzbekistan as it would disrupt peace and stability, civil and inter ethnic harmony and also discredit democracy, secular polity, and multi-ethnic and multi religion state of independent Uzbekistan. (Warikoo, 2005) In early 1999, several bombs exploded in Tashkent claimed by Uzbek leadership to be an attempt on Karimov's life. The Government quickly declared the explosions to be the work of Islamic extremists and arrested several dozen alleged perpetrators, all said to be members of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a shadowy group based in the remote mountain valley's of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. (Hanks, 2005) Much like the Taliban, the leaders of IMU speak only of having the Holy Quran as the constitution of Uzbekistan as their highest goal. The Uzbek regime has identified yet another radical threat to its stability from Hizb-ul-tahir (HT), an international organization having branches in many Islamic countries that aims to re-establish the caliphate and enforce Islamic law. (Khalid, 2006) The central focus of Uzbek Government's response has been repression. The campaign against extremism has broadened into a general curtailment of all religious activity not under the government's control. Campaigns of arbitrary arrests, beating and harassment of so called Wahabis, hundreds of men, whose beards were deemed by local police to be Wahabi, were rounded up and forcibly shorn. Since the bombings thousands of people have been arbitrarily arrested on suspicion of belonging to IMU or HTI. For most guilt lies in possessing banned extremist literature, (HTI tracts, but also other literature not sanctioned by the state). Despite all the continuing persecution, torture, killings and abuse of human rights on a large scale but the followers of Islam, Islamic revivalism is getting stronger in Uzbekistan.

An important effect of the revival of the Islamic ideals has been on social life of the region. The Central Asian women who enjoyed almost equal status and rights with man during the communist rule are now being forced to conform to the fundamentalist social mores. Those who follow wahabism have abandoned their cultural dresses for white veils that cover the body from head to toe. Some girls have voluntarily taken to wearing *hijab* (head scarfs).The fundamentalists have also been demanding the withdrawal of young girls from schools.(Badan, 2001) The marriage age for girls is falling, as is the level of female literacy, polygamy although outlawed, continues to exist in practice. This would considerably affect the status of women, if the government of the region fails to protect rights and interests of women. In the backdrop of the above facts it can be said that Islam is in fact an inalienable part of the Central Asia in general and Uzbekistan in particular. Islam is still their religion and the defining circle of their cultural identity. They knew that Islam gave them a distinct identity, thus the basic quest was to retain his culture.

Conclusion

Uzbekistan is a society in wholesale transition at multiple levels, social, economic, political and cultural. After 70 years of Soviet rule during which Uzbek traditional culture was banned, Uzbekistan is now determined to restore its spiritual, cultural and historical heritage and traditions as part of its efforts to built its national identity. Uzbek culture though fundamentally faith oriented underwent various stresses and progressions under soviet rule which influenced the fundamental aspects of living and traditions. In fact it stood as an obstacle to the soviet policy of cultural assimilation and exercised an influential role in society as a constant reminder of obligations vis-a-vis the community and as such the efforts made by soviet authorities to eradicate centuries old traditions never succeed. The traditional way of life never disappeared, even after 70 years of pressure applied in the hope that it would eventually lose its so called barbaric and feudal nature. After independence, the process of Islamisation has grown up tremendously. Islam became a fundamental part of the religo-cultural identity of the Central Asian people and Uzbekistan was no exception to this process of change. Undoubtedly, the revival of Islam and Islamic culture in Central Asia can be seen as

the people's willingness to reassert their Islamic identity. The people of Uzbekistan consider that Islam has provided them a distinct identity and has also promoted a sense of unity and integrity in the Uzbek society. The eagerness of the people to adopt Islamic way of life and the roles played by various forces in the restoration of Islam in Uzbekistan clearly indicated that in post soviet Uzbekistan, Islam emerged as a major force to influence the Uzbek social, political and economic life.

Bibliography

Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of Central Asian Republics.* London: Greenwood Press.

Ahmad Khawja, M., & Banday, A. (2006). *Central Asia: Introspection.* Sri Nagar: centre for Asian Studies, Kashmir University.

Akiner, S. (1993). Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia. *Harvard International Review , 15* (3), 18-30.

Akiner, S. (1986). *Islamic People of Soviet Union.* London: Kegan Paul International.

Arifkhanova, Z. (2006). Post Soviet Tranformation in Uzbek Ritual Life. *Journal of Central Asian Studies* , 1-16.

Bacon, E. (1960). *Central Asian under Russian Rule: A study in Cultural Change.* London: Cornell University Press.

Badan, P. (2001). *Dynamics of Political Development in Central Asia.* New Delhi: Lancers Books.

Bathold, V. V. (1956). *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia* (Vol. 1). (T. Minorsky, Trans.) Lieden: Brill.

Benningsen, A., & Broxup, M. (1983). *The Islamic Threat to Soviet State.* London: Croom Helm.

Brayon, F. (1986). Ani-Islamic Propaganda 1925-1935. *Central Asian Survey , 5* (1), 16-30.

Buckley, M. (1997). *Post Soviet Women; from Baltic to Central Asia.* London: Cambridge University Press.

Carol, E., & Melvin, E. (2003). Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender; Men and Women in the World's Countries. *2* . London, United Kingdom: Springer.

Colette, H. (1996). Women of Sedentary Populatin of Russian Turkestan through the eyes of Western Travellers. *Central Asian Survey , 15* (1), 80-96.

Dadabaev, T. (2004). Post Soviet Realities in Uzbekistan. *Central Asian Survey , 23* (2), 150-170.

Dilip, H. (1994). *Between Marx and Muhammad: The Changing Face of Central Asia.* London: Harper Collins Publishers.

Fathi, H. (2006). Gender, Islam and Social Change in Uzbekistan. *Central Asia Survey , 25* (3), 300-324.

Fathi, H. (1997). Otines: The Unknown WomenClerics of Central Asian Islam. *Central Asian Survey , 16* (1), 31-48.

Feride, A., & Ayse Gunes, A. (2000). Gender and Identity Construction: Women in Central Asia. *The Caucasus and Turkey* , 290-306.

Haider, M. (2004). *Medieval Central Asia.* Delhi: Manohar Publishers.

Hanks, R. R. (2005). *Central Asia, A Global Study Handbook.* Santa Barbari California: ABC-CLIO.

Hutchinson, W. (1984). *Customs of the World, A popular Account of the Manners, rites and Ceremonies of Men and Women in all countries.* London: Hutchinson & Company.

Khalid, A. (2006). Secular Islam: Nation, State and Religion in Uzbekistan. *Middle East Studies* , 580-597.

Khawja, M. A. (1999). *Central Asia: Continuity and Change.* Sri Nagae: Centre for Asian Studies, Kashmir University.

Kidayator, G. (1997). Uzbekistan: Between the Past and Future. *Contemporary Central Asia , 1* (1), 12-25.

Krader, L. (1963). *Peoples of Central Asia.* Bloomington: Indiana University.

Louv, M. (2007). *Everyday Islam in Post Soviet Central Asia.* London: Routledge.

Mahew, M. a. (1997). *Uzbekistan: The Golden Road to Samakand.* London: Passport Books.

Mott, C. (1994). *Understanding Uzbekistan: Your Guide to Effectiveness in Uzbekistan.* London: ABA Limimited.

oseph, S. (2007). ncyclopedia of Women and Islamic Culture. Davis, California, United States of America: University of California.

R, A. (1977). *The October Revolution and Women's Liberation in Uzbekistan.* Moscow: Nauka Publishing House.

Roi, Y. (2000). *Islam in Soviet Union; From Second World War to Gorbachev.* London: Hurst Publishers.

Ross, F. S. (1919). *The Heart of Asia: A History of Russian Turkestan and the Cetral Asian Khanates fron the earliest times.* London: Oxford University Press.

Rywkin, M. (1982). *Moscow's Muslim Challenge: Soviet Central Asia.* New York: M. E. Sharpe Publishers.

Sahadeo, J., & R. Z.

Sahadeo, J., & Zanca, R. (2007). *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and present.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Shams-ud-Din. (1982). *Secularism in USSR: A study of Soviet Cultural Policy in Soviet Uzbekistan.* New Delhi: Allied Publishers.

Sinor, D. (1990). *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia.* London: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, G. (1998). *Nation Building in the Post Soviet Borderlands, The politics of National Identities.* London: Cambridge University Press.

Tokhtakhodjaeva, M. (1995). *Between the Slogans of Communism and the Laws of Islam;The Women in Uzbekistan.* Lahore: Vanguards.

Warikoo, K. (2005). Tradition and Modernity in Uzbekistan. *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies , 9* (1), 70-91.

Wheeler, G. (1975). *History of Modern Soviet Central Asia.* London: Praeger.