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India Uzbekistan Relation: Past History And Present Relation

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Historical Background

India's contact with Central Asia goes back to ancient period. Traders, scholars, religious preachers, etc have been crossing the boundaries of the two areas in spite of climatic changes and political boundaries. These travels were facilitated by large numbers of available entry points from Kashmir in the north to Sindh in the south in our north-west boundaries. ^[1]

Other than the major trading routes that go to Central Asia, there was a land route from China to Burma, Assam and Bengal. The route from India to Central Asia also went through Khyber-Pass. Since from ancient time India was a major exporter, we have ample examples of India's export goods. Different region of India were famous for different variety of goods. ^[2] Sindh exported silk, cotton textile, skin hides, wooden artefacts, ivory etc. Lahore was a centre of export for cotton textiles, paper, while Delhi was an export centre for copper and brass vessels apart from other product. Agra also exported copper and brass articles. Bihar exported salt, pulses, forks and knives.

State investment in the maintenance of trade routes, was a regular practice of Medieval India. The Delhi Sultans were very interested in maintaining a positive climate for trans regional traders, as demonstrated by Wink's observation that Iltutmish (1211-1236) and Balban (1266-1287) both made special efforts to suppress predatory tribal groups that had been hindering commercial traffic along the *carvan* routes. ^[3]

In the early fifteenth century, the Chinese undertook missions to Bengal. The trade was bringing in Gold and silver, silk etc. Ibn Batuta, ^[4] who was sent as a diplomat by Mohammad bin Tughlaq (1325-1351) to China, admired the muslin of Bengal and the Chinese diplomats mentioned cotton and textiles from India. ^[5] The development of the trade and ever increasing demand for products resulted in improvements in agriculture, technology, as well as the method of production of goods.

The contact between India and Central Asia became long ranging and regular, when Central Asian Turks established their control over north India during the early thirteenth century. In Timurid regions Indians formed a segment of the urban population. Babur also found on the banks of river *Baran*, a colony of three hundred families of slaves, who had been brought and settled from the suburbs of Multan to catch birds and fish by members of Timur's family. ^[6] Shah Rukh (1409-1447) sent his envoy Abdur Razzak Samarkandi ^[7] to the King of Vijayanagar where he stayed from 1442 to 1442. Hence by the beginning of the fifteenth century, a very congenial situation prevailed for the overall growth of trade in the entire region. Indians took advantages of new economic opportunities.

It is against their background that we should evaluate the statement of Babur made in 1505 that every year, 'ten, fifteen to twenty thousand Indian merchants, arrived in Kabul with salves, sugar, clothes and medical herbs. ^[8] He has also noted that *Caravans* came to Kabul from Fergana, Turkmenistan, Samarkand, Bukhara, Balkh, and Badakhshan and their use for quick transport from place to place. Babur noted that every year in Kabul arrived seven, eighth or ten thousand horses. ^[9] Bernier, the French traveller (1658-67) put the figure at twenty-five thousand annually. ^[10] Bernier also has noted sale of dry fruits from 'Persia, Balkh, Bukhara and Samarkand in the markets of Delhi. ^[11] Towards the end of the seventeenth century, Manucchi stated that Indian traders purchased horses of Balkh and Bukhara at Kabul numbering one lach. ^[12]

India's northwest caravan's routes continued to be active throughout the early modern era. Despite periods of political hostility, regular overland commercial relations continued between Mughals, Uzbeks and Safavids territories, and those indigenous merchants

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responded to the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean by shifting their trade from maritime to overland routes. The land-route in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries not only competed successfully with the maritime route, but it also seems to have posed a kind of treat to it.

Abul Fazal ^[13] speaks of seven routes frequently between Afghanistan and Transoxiana. The Mughal Emperor, Akbar had made the journey to Kabul, an important departure point for Indians intending to go to Central Asia, easier by making the road across the Khyber Pass fit for vehicular traffic. ^[14] Mir Izzatullah in the beginning of the nineteenth century spoke of twenty-two routes and a couple of decades earlier Mohanlal quoted the number at forty. ^[15] Besides one could cross to Yarkand and Kashgar from north Kashmir and then turn westwards to the *Farghana* Valley and thereafter to Tashkent or the Kazak steppe. But for going to Central Asia, Kabul and Kandhar had emerged, as two most popular exist points. The Mughals also introduced the high police “*Rahdars*” to protect their roads and ensured the safety of travellers. Look at from this angle; we can see the present relation of the region.

Silent points of India Uzbekistan relation

Relations have roots deep in the past; Close friendship after Uzbek independence; warm people to people contact; both are working on Secular issues; both victims of terrorism; and strong foundation for a strategic partnership.

Main focuses on India Uzbekistan relation in present times can be seen as:

Ensure Sovereignty and Independence; to be a visible partner in the Central Asian region; in harmony with regional objectives; encourage strong Secular Democratic Republics; Integration with South Asia Economies; Exit route to energy resources of Central Asia; and Stabilisation of Afghanistan.

Political Issues

Uzbekistan and India shared common concerns from religious extremism and cross border terrorism and underlined the need to further strengthen secular and democratic ideas in international relations.

Importance of Uzbekistan for India in the view of stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan, violent turbulence of which negatively affects both India and Central Asian States. Uzbekistan is considered as a country with huge possessions, immense market and place to invest the capital as well. India's stakes in Central Asia have always been high on account of its vital economic, cultural and security interest in the region. At present India views Central Asian Republics as strategic partner for three reasons. First, good relations with Central Asian Region's could help India to contend with neighbouring power, to guard against the expansion and infiltration of the fundamentalism. Second, good relations with Central Asian Region's would guarantee stable energy supply, which could help India to meet the increasing domestic energy need. Third, India could obtain economic benefits by developing economic and trade relations with CARs, especially with Uzbekistan.

Economic cooperation

Uzbekistan and India have also been developing trade and economic cooperation quite successfully. Despite global financial and economic crisis the countries have managed to increase bilateral trade. At the same time the countries realize that there is significant untapped potential between them for expanding trade, economic and investment cooperation.

The main items of Uzbekistan's exports to India include services (mainly air cargo and passenger transportation), non-ferrous metals, machinery, silver, raw cotton & silk, etc. India's exports to Uzbekistan include drugs, pharmaceuticals, paper, wood products, machinery, garments & fabrics, tea, plastic items, chemicals, surgical items and consumer goods. ^[16]

According to the figures published by the State Committee on Statistics, Republic of Uzbekistan, imports from and Exports to India are given below:

Year	Imports from India (in U.S.\$ million)	Exports to India (in U.S.\$ million)	Total Trade Turnover (in U.S.\$ Million)	Percentage Change Over Previous Year
2008	79.9	11.1	91	23.80%
2009	101.6	23.1	124.7	37%
2010	123.8	27.2	151	21.10%
2011	137.6	22.2	159.8	5.83%
2012	163.4	37.82	201.2	16%

Source: http://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Uzbekistan_Relations.

According to MEA source, many Indian companies have invested in Uzbekistan; these companies have been characterized as the major investor and have been counted in the 5 top non-oil sectors. The Uzbek has entered 5 MoUs with the Indian business enterprise of textile and leather industry. They have agreed upon in allowing the set up of joint ventures for producing textile products, silk processing and other finished products, in both countries. ^[17]

The President of Uzbekistan's visited to India in April 2005, both countries agreed to strengthening of mutually beneficial cooperation, in economic and trade, spheres; more than 10 agreements were signed by both sides. The present Business forum is a practical implementation of those agreements. During the meeting it was mentioned that the development of small business, private entrepreneurship, creation of convenient atmosphere for foreign investments, implementation of mutually beneficial economic collaboration is directly being controlled on governmental level, precisely Orders and Resolution signed by the President of Uzbekistan in this regard are the evidence of this.

During his recent visit to India in May 2011, Uzbekistan President signed more than 30 agreements. It was his fifth visit to India. India and Uzbekistan also issued a joint declaration in the course of this visit which asked for active cooperation in a wide spectrum of areas including political, counter-terrorism, health, education, human resource development, science and technology and culture. India and Uzbekistan have also highlighted absence of surface

transport connectivity several times. President Karimov during his visit to India again raised this issue and sought Indian support to several transport corridors being planned in Central Asia with Uzbek participation. ^[18]

According to Uzbek Ambassador to India, “in recent year we have been able to significantly diversify our economic ties. To be more precise, we have been dynamically developing cooperation in tourism, textile industry, pharmaceuticals, automobile component production, chemical industry and other sectors. ^[19] He further added that ‘India is gradually becoming our number one partner in tourism with over 15,000 Indian tourists visiting Uzbekistan in 2011. India is one of large investors in Uzbekistan’s economy. From 2007 to 2010 Indian FDI in the Uzbek economy totalled US\$33.5 million. The implementation of two another projects with Indian FDI is undergoing now in Uzbekistan. First project – worth US\$143.78 million – is being implemented by Spentex Industries in the textile industry. Another project worth US\$25 million was initiated by the Minda Group which is operating in automobile component production.’ ^[20]

Educational cooperation

between two countries has also been developing for the recent years. Uzbekistan became an ITEC partner country in 1993. Annually 120 professionals from different sectors enhance their skills through ITEC program of the Indian Government. Besides, Uzbek students are granted scholarships of ICCR which allow them study at the Indian institutes of higher education. ^[21] In October 1996 the India Chair at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy at Tashkent was inaugurated. In April, 2006 during the visit of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to Uzbekistan the India-Uzbekistan Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Information Technology was established in Tashkent. ^[22]

Cultural Cooperation

In 1995 the Indian Cultural Centre was established in Tashkent. In 2005 it was renamed as Lal Bahadur Shastri Centre for Indian Culture. It is sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. It is one of the most active foreign cultural Centres operating in Uzbekistan. The Activities of Lal Bahadur Shastri Centre for Indian Culture include implementation of official cultural exchange programmes, teaching activities, special cultural events, lectures and get together, popularization of Hindi and other Indian languages, strengthening Indo-Uzbek friendship and understanding, administering Government of India scholarship programmes, dissemination of information about India, its way of life and culture.

Tourism

Providing infrastructure and supporting Visa will flourish tourism in this region. This could be developed into an integrated international tourist circuit. The region is extremely picturesque. And we have similarities in architectural development.

Conclusion

Projection of India’s culture and strengthening of India’s ancient links with Central Asia have been major policy

objectives of India’s diplomacy after the emergence of newly independent Republics in this region. ICCR has played a central role in pursuing these objectives and has allocated substantial funds and human resources to this area.

Tashkent in particular and Uzbekistan in general had a vigorous exposure to India during the Soviet period. However, in the independent Uzbekistan some other Asian countries particularly Republic of Korea, Iran, China and Pakistan are investing large sums of money to promote their culture sponsor studies of their languages and finance research by local scholars. India is gradually losing ground as it is unable to match the resources expended by some other Asian countries. The lack of employment opportunities after learning of Indian languages or subjects in Indology has also resulted in a diminishing number of students opting for such courses. This concern is expressed with anguish by the Uzbek Indologists during my stay in Uzbekistan, who have devoted their lives to the study of Indian history and languages. Our enduring asset, however, is the reservoir of goodwill for India as well as the people of India both among the masses and the elite of this country. The challenge before us is how to leverage this goodwill to continue to spread knowledge about India’s civilizational heritage not only in Tashkent but also in other cities of Uzbekistan.

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