

## *Pakistan and Turkmenistan: Past and Present*

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Amongst the five Central Asian States (Kazakhstan, Kirghistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan), the Republic of Turkmenistan is one of the first countries to declare independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) on 27 October 1991 under the inspiring leadership of President Saparmurat Niyazov Turkmenbashi.<sup>1</sup> It is under his guidance that the country is flourishing as a modern democratic state with its professed aim to revive its tradition, civilization and historical culture. It is a state with about 5 million population and an area of 488,100 km. In the east the Republic is connected with Uzbekistan and Caspian Sea, in the northwest with the Russian federation, to the north Kazakhstan, to the south Iran and Afghanistan. The country is rich in its natural resources especially minerals, petroleum and natural gas.<sup>2</sup>

With a degree in power engineering, President Saparmurat is a man of ideas who is determined to revive old historic importance of the Turkmen people. It is provided in the Constitution of the country that rights and liberty of the individuals, irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, shall be promoted. President's motto is "Ten years of hard work to (achieve) 10 years of prosperity" has been adopted as the motto of progress. The State is thus open to

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1. Address of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi to the People of Turkmenistan, Embassy of Turkmenistan Library (Islamabad: 27 October 1995), 14.
2. *Ibid.*, 8-20. Also see Tahir Mansoor Farooqi, *Turkmenistan*, (Urdu) (Lahore: N.p. 1999).

economic, political and social developments in the light of modern realities of life.<sup>3</sup>

Turkmenistan is the inheritor of the old Turkmenistan Empire of the Middle Ages when it comprised of the whole of Central Asia from what is now Turkey to the borders of modern China. Qutaiba bin Muslim, the Arab General, conquered Khurasan and most of the areas of Central Asia in 705 A.D. during the reign of the Ummayyad Caliph Walid bin Abdul Malik.<sup>4</sup> Qutaiba governed Central Asia upto 715 A.D., and established Arab Islamic supremacy in the whole of Central Asia.<sup>5</sup> While the Arabs dominated top positions, second tier of authority was in the hands of Iranian Amirs.<sup>6</sup> It was in the third quarter of 9th century that the power passed from the hands of Arab conquerors to those of Iranian Amirs.<sup>7</sup> Turkish slaves were recruited as bodyguards first by Caliph al-Mutasim (833-842 A.D.), son of Haroon al-Rashid, by a Turkish wife. Thus gradually the Turks gained control in the Abbassid court. It was for the first time that Amir Sabuktigin laid foundations of the Ghaznavid Empire, as first Turkish state comprising territories of Afghanistan, Pakistan and parts of Central Asia and Iran.<sup>8</sup>

The second Turkish Sultanate especially of the Turkmen origin was of the Seljuq Sultans who ruled Central Asia, Iran, Arabian Crescent and parts of Africa. The Seljuqs were the descendents of Seljuq bin Yaqub a Turkmen chieftain in the service of the Khan of Turkistan.<sup>9</sup> It was from Nishapur that Toghril Beg, a great Turkmen, revolted against the Ghaznavids and

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3. Naveed Irshad, "Pakistan and Central Asia", un-published M.Phil. Thesis, The National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, 1994, 24-28.
  4. Arminias Vambery, *History of Bhokhara* (Karachi: Indus Publications, 1990), 23-26; Dr. A.H.Dani. "Advent of Turks", *Journal of Asian Civilizations*, Vol.XXII No.2, December 1999, 12.
  5. M.S. Asimov and C.E. Bosworth, *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. IV, (N.p. UNESCO, 1998), 24.
  6. *Ibid.*, 13.
  7. *Ibid.*, 13.
  8. *Ibid.*, 15.
  9. Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Mohammadan Dynasties* (London: Archibald Constable and Company, 1894), 150.

proclaimed himself as first Seljuq Sultan in 429 A.H./1038 A.D. Toghril Beg left his brother Chaghri Beg as ruler of Khurasan, and advanced through Persia (modern Iran) and in 447 A.H./1055 A.D. entered Baghdad where the Abbasid Caliph conferred the title of Sultan upon him.<sup>10</sup> The Sultan was supported by Arab-Persian bureaucracy with Turkish slaves as commanders. During the reign of Alp Arslan and his son Malik Shah the Seljuq Empire reached its zenith.<sup>11</sup> The Seljuq ruled in different areas such as Persia, Iraq, Syria, Kerman upto 1188 when Oghuz tribesmen from Khurasan took over the province from them.

The Seljuq rule contributed towards the intellectual and cultural advancement of the Muslim civilization.<sup>12</sup> The multi-national army under the Seljuqs was better organized and well disciplined.<sup>13</sup> While Mahmud Ghaznavi and his successors were responsible for political and cultural extension of Islam in India, Seljuq Sultans were mostly interested in extending Islam's political and cultural influence towards the West.<sup>14</sup> The discipline of the Seljuq armies, as a matter of fact, "astonished the Muslim world".<sup>15</sup> The Seljuqs were responsible for introducing certain new patterns in Islamic administration. The political philosophy of Seljuq rule was stipulated by Nizam al-Mulk (1018-1092) in his famous work *Siyasat Namah* (Principles of Politics), who functioned as the adviser and *wazir* of Toghril Beg.<sup>16</sup> But the fact remains that both Toghril Beg and Nizam al-Mulk Tusi were very much influenced by Mahmud.<sup>17</sup> Like Mahmud, the Seljuqs encouraged, rather patronized the Sufi traditions in their Empire.<sup>18</sup>

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10. Edund Boswarth, *The New Islamic Dynasties* (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1980), 187.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co., 1991), 158-159.

14. G.E. Von Grunebaum, *Classical Islam: A History 600-1258* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970), 154-55.

15. Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire* (London: Mac Millan, 1967), 51.

16. *Ibid.*, 155.

17. *Ibid.*, 155-156.

18. Hamilton A.R. Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 27-28.

Another contribution of the Seljuqs is that Salahuddin Ayubi, the great Crusader of Islamic history, of Kurdish origin, was trained and helped to rise to eminence by the Seljuq prince.<sup>19</sup> A European historian thus records the contribution of the Seljuq Turks:

The entry of the Seljuk Turks into Western Asia in the second half of the eleventh century forms one of the great epochs of world history. It added a third nation, after the Arabs and Persians, to the dominant races of Islam, it prolonged the life of the moribund Caliphate for another two hundred years; it tore Asia Minor away from Christendom and opened the path to the later Ottoman invasion of Europe; it allowed the orthodox Muslims to crush the Ismailian heresy and provoked in reprisal the murderous activities of the Assassins; it put an end to the political domination of the Arabs in the near East, it spread the language and culture of Persia over a wide area from Anatolia to Northern India, and by posing a great threat to the Christian powers, it impelled the Latin West to undertake the remarkable counter-offensive of the Crusades.<sup>20</sup>

The period of Amir Taimur (1336-1405) is very important from the civilizational viewpoint. It was during the Islamic period that Arab, Iranian, Turkish cultural traditions were promoted and a great intellectual advancement took place. The participation and contribution of Turkmenian thinkers in cultural and intellectual development of this period is quite remarkable. Their contribution would also be discussed and evaluated in this paper.

The establishment of Mughal Empire in Indo-Pak sub-continent owes a lot to the contributions of the Turkmen intellectuals. Bairam Khan, an *Amir* of Zahiruddin Babur, and later an adviser to Humayun, helped Humayun in recovering the Indian Empire. He was so loyal to the Mughals that on Humayun's death, he made Akbar's elevation to the throne, as the next Mughal king, possible. For the first 6 years it was Bairam Khan who, pursued such policies that established Akbar's rule on secure foundations.

The Tsarist Russian conquest of Central Asia began in 1734.<sup>21</sup> This was the time when British conquered Hindustan. Just like the British, the Russians also took a long time to fully establish their

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19. *Ibid.*, 98.

20. J.J. Saunders. *A History of Medieval Islam* (London: Routledge and Lesan Raul, 1965), 141.

21. Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire* (London: Mac Millan, 1967), 72.

rule in Central Asia. The defeat of Turkmens in 1881 at Gok Tepe<sup>22</sup> and the capture of Merv and Amu Darya in 1884<sup>23</sup> proved to be fatal for the Turkmens. Thus the Russians succeeded in capturing the whole of Central Asia, by the time Soviet Revolution completed in 1920.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the Muslim period, the region north of Afghanistan from modern Turkey to Kashghar in China was known as Turkistan. After the Soviet occupation, the Soviet Central Asia was divided into the above-mentioned five Republics. And by 1926 the name of Turkistan ceased to exist.<sup>25</sup> Revolutionary steps towards industrialization and works of public welfare were taken without delay. Silk winding, spinning and weaving factories were established in Ashkabad. The public welfare plans also started showing encouraging results like the spread of mass literacy.<sup>26</sup> These steps started producing encouraging results during 1930s.<sup>27</sup>

The country is also full of historical and cultural sites belonging to the ancient and medieval times like those of Marv. The arts and crafts of the region, speciality of the Turkmens, are to be specially, needs to be much appreciated. This heritage is well preserved under the guidance of the Turkmenistan President. The Turkmen conservators are fully engaged in preserving such great architectural movements as Abul Fazla Mausoleum in Serahs, Talhatan-Baba Mosque in Yolotar Etrap, Dahestan's minarets, 'Alambardar Mausoleum in Atamurat palaces, castles and fortress in the Merv oasis. The Merv *valayat* is taking special initiatives in this connection.

In international politics, Turkmenistan has signified its special importance by declaring it to be a neutral country. Thus after

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22. During October 2000, when the author visited Turkmenistan, he also visited this place. President Niyazov constructed a memorial at this place in the shape of a grand mosque.

23. *Ibid.*, 81.

24. *Ibid.*, 81-86.

25. *Ibid.*, 145.

26. *Ibid.*, 189-216.

27. Devendra Kaushik, *Central Asia in Modern Times* (Moscow: Progressive Publishers, 1970), 247.

Austria and Switzerland, Turkmenistan is the third country in the World, which by an U.N. General Assembly Resolution, passed on 12 December 1995, has been recognized as a country of permanent neutrality. To commemorate this declaration an Arch of Neutrality was built in Ashkabad, capital of Turkmenistan, in 1998 by the Government.<sup>28</sup> This is a good beginning of the country's progress in the world which is divided into various ideological camps. By declaring itself neutral the country has got rid of any specific camp and become open to human progress and economic development.<sup>29</sup>

### **Pak-Turkmen Relations (1991-2000)**

It was under the leadership of Saparmurat Niyazov, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Turkmenistan Republic, that the Republic became independent in October 1991. On 27 October 1991 he was elected as Turkmenistan's first President. Pakistan was one of the first countries to greet and recognize Turkmenistan's emergence as an independent nation.

Soon after Independence and in order to prepare for the 21st century, the President of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Niyazov announced a ten-year programme named "10-Years of Stability and Prosperity". The implementation of this programme will bar any chances of internal and external conflicts that can be detrimental to the period of development and progress.

It needs to be emphasized that the country has huge natural resources that need to be explored. Turkmenistan ranks fourth in the world in items of gas reserves totaling 2.1 trillion cubic meters after Russia, USA and Canada and with prospective annual capacity of approximately 100 billion cubic meters of natural gas. Its power production is estimated at 15 billion kilowatt of which half is exported. Turkmenistan has a large number of *karakul* sheep and produces 12600 tons of wool. The production of raw cotton totals 1.4 million tons.

Vegetables go upto 400 thousands tons while grapes alone yield 60,000 tons. Other products are related to chemicals, petrochemicals, cement, yarn, handmade carpets and salt. Due to

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28. Web site address: [www.trkmmn.org](http://www.trkmmn.org).

29. *Ibid.*

its long experience Turkmenistan has the best breeds of horses in the world known as *akhalteke*.

Besides, the Government has embarked on a massive campaign for educational and scientific researches even though it has acquired 100% in literacy rate. The Agricultural Academy alone supervises 12 research organizations. The Academy of Sciences and its institutes are carrying out researches in the fields of oil and gas production. Material technology, ascismic construction and other sectoral sciences. Besides, there are 12 higher educational institutes and more than 2000 colleges and schools providing education to one million students.<sup>30</sup>

Historically both countries share a lot. Islamic historical link is common in many respects. For about 8 hundred years the official language of Pakistan was Persian which was also the official language of Turkmenistan for centuries. *Mawlana Romi's Masnavi* is one conspicuous example. It is one of the essential components of the curriculum of almost every theological school of both the countries. The works of scholars like Al-Bairuni, Ibn-i Sina, Bairam are also a part of the literary heritage of both the countries. The majority of Muslims in both the countries also adhere to the *Hanafi Fiqh* was prevalent in both the countries. Thus Islamic law is also common to both the countries.

Both the countries are keen to develop close socio-economic relationship between the two countries. For this purpose a number of delegations from the two countries are constantly engaged in exchanging their visits in the fields of culture commerce, economics, and in many other areas. The heads of government and of the states have also exchanged their visits for the purpose of establishing closer relations in all walks of life. But unfortunately the political instability in Afghanistan does not let the process of regional development any remarkable in Afghanistan has not helped in the achievement of these goals.

The visit of Pakistan's Foreign Minister Sardar Asif Ahmad Ali to Ashkabad in January 1994 succeeded,<sup>31</sup> after long parleys with his Turkmenistan counterpart Mr. Khalqberdi in signing an

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30. *Nation*, 22 October 1997.

31. *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 12 January 1994.

agreement by which the Government of Pakistan promised to provide a loan of about US\$10.00 million to Turkmenistan. Both the countries agreed to lay pipeline between the two countries. A road and rail link was also to be established.<sup>32</sup> It was also decided that for the realization of these objectives annual consultations would be held reciprocally under the auspices of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Ambassadors of the two countries.<sup>33</sup>

In August 1994, the President of Turkmenistan visited Pakistan. The meetings between the two heads of government resulted in conclusion of four agreements between the two countries. Three of these agreements were in the field of Science and Technology, Tourism and Sports. The fourth agreement regarding Pakistan's import of oil and gas from Turkmenistan was given great importance. Joint declaration was also issued at this time, promising further cooperation between Pakistan and Turkmenistan.<sup>34</sup>

In this visit Benazir Bhutto and Niyazov exchanged their views on common concerns like Kashmir and Afghanistan and hoped for an early solution of the issues. They also expressed their view that "we have absolutely common viewpoint on Afghanistan and support its peaceful settlement".<sup>35</sup> It was also agreed that Pakistan and Turkmenistan would issue visas to nationals of both countries holding diplomatic and official passports on priority basis.<sup>36</sup>

As a follow up of these agreements Pakistan delegation headed by the then Interior Minister Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Nasirullah Babur along with various experts visited Turkmenistan in September 1994.<sup>37</sup> During this visit it was agreed that Herat-Kandhar-Chaman-Karachi route would be used for transit trade activities between the two countries.<sup>38</sup>

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32. *Pakistan Times*, 12 January 1994.

33. *Muslim*, 13 January 1994.

34. *Dawn*, 16 August 1994.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Jang*, 16 August 1994.

38. *Ibid.*



In October 1994 Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto visited Ashkabad alongwith a high-powered delegation.<sup>39</sup> Turkmenistan President Saparmurat Niyazov accorded warm welcome to Benazir. During this visit it was stressed that without peace in Afghanistan economic and trade cooperation between Pakistan and Turkmenistan was not possible. Therefore, both the leaders agreed to give top priority to bring reconciliation between the warring groups of Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup> They also agreed to explore possibilities of laying 1200 km gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to the coastline of Pakistan. This pipeline was expected to serve as outlet post for export of Turkmenistan gas to the Far East.<sup>41</sup> This visit of Benazir Bhutto was expected to strengthen relations between the two countries.<sup>42</sup>

An experimental trade convoy followed this visit from Pakistan that arrived in Ashkabad in early November 1994 with four trailers carrying articles of daily use, hospital equipment and medicines as gift from Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Pakistan's Ambassador Tariq Usman Haider handed these over to the Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Saparov.<sup>43</sup> On return the Pakistani trailers carried cotton bales from Turkmenistan.

In June 1996 Turkmenistan government announced their intention to build railway line from Ashkabad to Pakistan.<sup>44</sup> This was also to be done after the conclusion of peace in Afghanistan.<sup>45</sup>

In 1977 the government of Mian Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister was installed in Pakistan. The efforts were made to renew the old pacts with Turkmenistan for the construction of three trans-regional gas, electricity and oil supply pipeline via Afghanistan. In this respect agreements were concluded during Pakistan's Petroleum Minister Ch. Nisar Ali Khan's visit to Ashkabad in May 1997.<sup>46</sup> According to these agreements, the entire process of

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39. *Muslim*, 27 October 1994.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Pakistan Times* (Editorial), 28 October 1994.

43. *Pakistan Times*, 15 November 1994.

44. *Pakistan Observer*, 2 January 1996.

45. *Pakistan Times*, 18 June 1996.

46. *Pakistan Observer*, 15 May 1997.

examination in decision-making in this regard was to be finalized by October 1997.<sup>47</sup> It was also announced that the supply of Petrol and Gas to Pakistan would begin in 1999.<sup>48</sup> For this a sum of 2.5 billion US Dollars was to be spent on the gas pipeline and 2 billion US Dollars on building a modern oil terminal at Pasni.<sup>49</sup> For this purpose a US based corporation UNOCAL alongwith a Saudi based partner Delta was to be entrusted the assignment of constructing these projects.<sup>50</sup> It was announced in July 1997 that the work of constructing gas pipeline would start in 1998.<sup>51</sup>

In October 1997, Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif visited Ashkabad for one day.<sup>52</sup> Both the leaders exchanged their views on various regional issues including Kashmir and Afghanistan. Both the leaders stressed the need for an early completion of gas and oil projects between the two countries.<sup>53</sup>

Despite all these efforts on the part of Pakistan and Turkmenistan, Michael Miller, Vice President of California based oil company UNOCAL, announced in March 1998 that work of construction of gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India would not be started until the peace in Afghanistan is restored.<sup>54</sup> He also expressed that he does not see any possibility of completion of this project during the next five years.<sup>55</sup>

Though the project of supply of gas and oil was shelved, trade and commerce between the two countries flourished. During the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Sartaj Aziz's visit to Ashkabad in January 1999,<sup>56</sup> his Turkmen counterpart Sheikh Muratov agreed for the promotion of joint ventures between the two countries. He

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47. *Nation*, 15 May 1997.

48. *Jasarat*, 17 May 1997.

49. *Pakistan Observer*, 17 May 1997.

50. *Nation*, 20 May 1997.

51. *Frontier Post*, 24 July 1997.

52. *Jang*, 18 October 1997.

53. *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 18 October 1997.

54. *Jang*, 15 March 1998.

55. *Muslim*, 16 March 1998.

56. *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 23 January 1999.

also hoped that the construction work for gas pipeline would begin shortly.<sup>57</sup> To revive this project, a deal was signed in April 1999.<sup>58</sup>

It was because of this importance of the country that General Pervez Musharraf, Chief Executive of Pakistan, visited Turkmenistan on 15-16 May 2000 and concluded a number of agreements in the fields of communication, commerce and trade. Thus Pakistan and Turkmenistan have entered into a new phase of economic and diplomatic cooperation and have developed very close and cordial relations with each other.

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57. *Jang*, 28 January 1999.

58. *Dawn*, 30 April 1999.