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India – Turkish World Cultural Relations: History, Heritage and Possibilities

Prof. Dr. Akhlaque A. 'Ahan'

Abstract:

Indian Sub-continent and Khorasan e Bozorg which includes Uzbekistan, Central Asia and parts of the region, has been the cradle of civilization of this part of world, and produced great scholars, poets, Sufis and writers. Both the regions have been connected since the ancient period and exchanged cultural traits and trends and influenced each other. Ever since Timurid rulers converted Herat as the hub of knowledge and cultural activities, scholars and seekers of knowledge and enlightenment flocked to this place and to interact with the greats like Mawlana Jami, Amir Ali Sher Nawai and others. Among Indian scholars who came in contact with Nawai and others were from the kingdoms of Sarqi at Jaunpur, Lodhis at Delhi, Bahmanis from Deccan, and among the individuals the names of Shaikh Jamali, Mahmood Gawan, Shaikh Sadruddin and Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism may especially be mentioned. Besides this, Amir Sher Nawai was also one of the admirers and followers of Amir Khusraw, which is reflected through his writings. Earlier great scholars like Alberuni had contributed to the connect and mutual appreciation.

Key Words: *Indian Sub-continent, Khorasan e Bozorg, Uzbekistan, Central Asia, Amir Ali Sher Nawai, Timurid rulers, Mawlana Jami, Sarqi of Jaunpur, Lodhis of Delhi, Bahmanis of Deccan, Shaikh Jamali, Mahmood Gawan, Shaikh Sadruddin, Guru Nanak, Amir Khusraw.*

India – Turkish Cultural Relation: History, Heritage and Possibilities²

ز فرق و امتياز كعبه و ديرم چه هيپرسى
اسير عشق بودم هر چه پيش آمد پرستيدم
بيدل

*Why do you ask the one who does not care the difference between one and the other shrine, as
I have always been besotted of love, and whatsoever encountered, I fell for.*

Mirza Abdul Qadir 'Bedil'

Professor & Chairperson, Centre of Persian & Central Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi – 110067, akhlaq.ahan@gmail.com

The details could be seen in the forthcoming book of the author on the subject¹

The details could be seen in the forthcoming book of the author on the subject²

Since the ancient period, Khorasan e Bozorg which includes Uzbekistan, Central Asia and parts of Indian Sub-continent, has been the cradle of civilization of this part of world, and produced great scholars, poets, Sufis and writers. Before the notion of nation-state i.e. a colonial and western concept which accurately does not suite to the epistemic background of our part of world. The major part of this cultural region falls in the contemporary Uzbekistan or in its neighbourhood. India and Uzbekistan are the countries or regions, historically having the most intimate relations and therefore the two nations share many socio-cultural, and historical events unfolding throughout the history. Almost all the rulers of mediaeval India including Saltanat and Timurid era came from Central Asia. This migration happened because of the age old common borders and interchanging territories since ancient period.

Both the countries share common heritage and the soft power. Silk Route also passes through the same region. This term (Silk Route) though was first used by Ferdinand von Richthofen, who had termed the Trans-Asian overland networks as the “Silk Route” or “Silk Road” in the late nineteenth Century, which includes various primary arteries and secondary capillaries used for a range of commercial and cultural exchanges, including the diffusion of different religious and socio-cultural ideas, trends and traits including Sufism from the boarders of Europe to Eastern Asia, encompassing Central and South Asia. Roughly, this road extends from Rome to China which includes western and eastern Central Asia i.e. modern day's newly independent republics which were formerly known as Soviet Turkistan and adjoining regions which also connects North Western portions of Indian sub-continent. These routes though sometime not well defined or fixed roads were utilized for spiritual and religious interaction, cultural relations, commercial exchanges and political and military expansion. Therefore, though Silk Road commonly linked with sumptuous exchanges of commercial commodities in the region but its cultural, historical and socio-political importance has been equally significant throughout the ages; thus looking at the relevance of multi-lateral cultural and philosophical exchanges and its impact and legacy in historical context will be enlightening.

I would just highlight a few connecting points and shared soft power of both India and Uzbekistan, and aim to put into perspective the dynamics of the Indo- Uzbekistan historical, cultural and civilizational relation vis a vis the contemporary realities and to provide a realistic assessment of its importance from Indo- Uzbek’s point of view. In today’s context there are many common cultural symbols of Indo-Uzbekistan relation and the waves of civilizational mingling and historical interaction. To say for instance: During ancient period Buddhism became popular in Central Asia, and probably replaced the older traditions and faiths like Mitraism and Zorashrianism. Later, its influence could be traced in the movements like Manism and Mazdakism in Persia (Zoroastrianism was declared as the state religion of Persia in 224AD). It is interesting to note that the great

cultural hub Bukhara, derives its name from Vihara (the monastery of Buddhism). This also shows the role of Bukhara in the propagation of Buddhism in Central and East Asia during ancient period.

There has been deep and engaging linguistic and literary interactions throughout the history between Indian sub-continent and Central Asia, which could be traced in Indo-Aryan Languages, the translation of Panchtantra (as Kartak wa Damnak or Kalila wa Dimna), the lone Uzbeki-Chaghatai words in India languages, thousands of manuscripts on the subjects and topics of common cultural and literary heritage especially to mention Amir Khusraw, Babur, Amir Alisher Nawai, Mirza Kamran, Abdur Rahim Khanekhanan, Mirza Bedil, Mirza Ghalib etc. in the oriental libraries of both countries, translation of books, poetry etc. The legends of Mahmood Pehalwan of Khiwa, Qabristan e Hindi of Bukhara, Indian traders especially from Gujarat and Rajasthan visiting bazars of Samarqand and Bukhara, Taj Mahal and contribution of Indian artisans bear fascinating stories, recounts the vibrant cultural relations throughout the ages.

Abu Rehan Al Biruni is one of the rarest prodigious minds of all time, a great writer, astronomer, scientist and Indologist, Al Biruni's writings, researches, innovations and perceptions has been beacon for the whole academic world for over a thousand years, but the greatest and most interesting aspect of his works is his incisive and deep perception about the cultural, geographical, philosophical and social contours of Indian sub-continent especially Brahminical traditions. His writings and revelation are considered to be the first which gives the real esoteric state of Indian culture and traditions, beliefs and customs and its different positive as well as the deleterious aspects.

Al Biruni, instinctively acquired an analytical mind and was irresistibly enticed to the disciplines of knowledge which suited to his disposition and areas of academic and research interest, and probably his innate leaning towards synthetic and analytical tendencies, he was first attracted to Mathematics and astronomy. It was probably one of reasons why he also got interested to study the contribution by Indian scholars to sciences and other knowledge tradition. Therefore, he decided to visit the country, and became the pioneer scholar of Indology and comparative traditions. Probably his first exposure and opportunity to learn Indian dialects or Sanskrit language happened when he encountered some Persian knowing Indian resident of Ghazna during his stay in Kabul during 1018-20 AD. This possibility is substantiated by his own statements in *Tahqiq ma lil-Hind (Indica)*.

Generally, till the period of Al Biruni, mostly political and military history of a country or kingdom was written. In this regard, *Tahqiq ma lil-Hind* (Researches on India) appears to be an exception and deviation from this tradition where primarily cultural, scientific, social and religious tradition and history of India was written and recorded. Though before Al-Biruni, Greek and Chinese travelers (such as Megasthenes n 3rd c BC ,

Fa Hsien in early 5th c, Huen Tsang, 5th c, I-Tsing in 7th c visited, but their accounts of Indian social and cultural life restricted to Buddhism, also may be because of the Buddhism being the most dominant and apparent religion and social order, (Arab travelers like Abu Zaid Hasan Sirafi 9th, Abu Dulaf 10th, Buzurg bn Shahryar early 10th, Masud 10th, Muqaddas 10th) but most of the writing including Arab travelers contains of erroneous account as mostly based on secondary sources or hearsay and probably had not access to the original sources, while Al Biruni had expertise in Sanskrit and according to Maulana Azad he travelled around ten years in Sind, Punjab and Kashmir.

Ulugh Begh

Ulugh Begh (1394 – 1449) was a Timurid Emperor as well as a great scholar of Astronomy and mathematics. We may also notice the evident influence of Ulugh Beg's writings and contribution in the field of Astronomy and astronomical architecture especially on Raja Sawai Jai Singh's book *Jeech Muhammad Shahi* and the observatories constructed in Jaipur and Delhi.

Rumi's Poetry and the Silk Route

The region of origin and emergence and influence of Mawlana Rumi was traditionally to a certain extent similar to the region of Buddhist expansion alongside the great arteries of the Northern and Southern Routes of the Indian subcontinent, the Old Road to Bactria, and passageways through the mountain valleys of northern Pakistan. Mawlana's spiritual and philosophical impact centers developed distinctive spiritual cultures and played central roles in trans-regional exchanges. Though, Rumi has now a global appeal but traditionally he lived, studied, traveled, interacted, worked and left his legacy within and around the Silk route region. It is also interesting to note that the Naqshbandi Sufis of India subscribed Maulana Rumi's *Masnawi* as the text book for their disciples and has been the most popular text among them. Similarly Rumi's *Masnawi* is also popular among many other mystic and religious traditions of India like Radha Swami Movement etc.

Naqshbandia Order

The establishment of Naqshbandi Silsila or order in Timurid India, which have its roots in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, and what kind of role the silsila played in establishing the historical, spiritual and cultural connect between the two regions during the Timurid period (i.e. 16th-19th century). Khwaja Baqi Billah earned his scholastic education at Samarqand, and he was initiated in the Naqshbandi order by a leading saint of Bukhara, who asked him to make India the centre of his work. Khwaja Baqi Billah came first to

Lahore, where he spent more than a year before moving to Delhi. Naqshbandi Shaikhs came to India with the Timurid conquests in the sixteenth century, and with this a new chapter in the history of the Naqshbandiyya began. More than any other Naqshbandi after Khwaja Baha'uddin of Bukhara, Hazrat Baqi Billah and his disciple Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi were the pivotal figures to redefine Sufism's role in society and elaborated Naqshbandi mystical exercises. The Naqshbandi Silsila was introduced in India by Khawaja Baqi Billah during the late years of Akbar Shah's reign. Khawaja Baqi Billah settled in Delhi, and was seventh in the line of succession from Khawaja Bahauddin Naqshband of Bukhara, the founder. He had received full training in the principles of the order under different Shaikhs and had widely travelled in Central Asia. Besides, he proved himself to be a great organiser, and within a short span of five years, he succeeded in establishing the Naqshbandi silsila firmly and since then it continued to spread over the region without any break. Khawaja Baqi Billah appointed Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi as his Khalifa who earned more renown than any of the other disciples in the propagation and establishment of the Naqshbandi Order in India, and also played a multifarious role in the religious, social and political domains. As a result the Naqshbandi order became the principal mystic discipline for nearly two hundred years (17th-18th c) and exercised a deep influence on the religious life of the Muslims of the sub-continent.

Amir Ali Shernawai

Amir Ali Shernawai has been one of great stars of the region, who at the same time was a poet of Uzbek and Persian, a competent administrator, musician, and a great scholar, who may rightly be called as Versatile Genius. Ever since Timurid rulers converted Herat as the hub of knowledge and cultural activities, scholars and seekers of knowledge and enlightenment flocked to this place and to interact with the greats like Mawlana Jami, Amir Ali Shernawai and others. Among Indian scholars who came in contact with Nawai and others were from the kingdoms of Sarqi at Jaunpur, Lodhis at Delhi, Bahmanis from Deccan, and among the individuals the names of Shaikh Jamali, Mahmood Gawan, Shaikh Sadruddin and Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism may especially be mentioned. Besides this, Amir Shernawai was also one of the admirers and followers of Amir Khusraw, which is reflected through his writings.

Persian-Hindi-Urdu poets of India

Some of the greatest Persian-Hindi-Urdu poets of India like Amir Khusraw, Abdur Rahim KhaneKhanan, Mirza Bedil and Mirza Ghalib's ancestors came from the region falls in the contemporary Uzbekistan. They were brought up entirely in the Indian socio-cultural environment and were ethnically Turks and having no literary background but

sons of soldiers who sacrificed their life on the battlefield. In spite of the fact that four centuries separate these poets, but still we find striking similarities among them. Though all these poets closely observed and were well aware of the changing socio-political situation of their period, but in fact were Sufis by heart and by disposition and their poetry reveals of their profound understanding and experimentations of Sufi way. For instance Bedil follows Ibn e Arabi's doctrine of waḥdatul-wojood in illustrating how the universe, which is not distinct from the pre-eternal divine essence, comes into fermentation like wine and finally develops into man, yet he synthesises the philosophy of Advaita. It is therefore, his works comprising complex philosophical contents, are counted among the most cerebral mystical poems in Persian literature. He also deliberates upon certain Indian beliefs and practices, such as the transmigration of the soul, and the self-immolation of widows. In his long poems or masnawis, Bedil introduces many anecdotes from Indian sources, among which the romance of Kamadi and Madan has been studied in detail by Soviet scholars and repeatedly emulated by Tajik poets. Bedil is primarily important because he refined classical Persian and Indo-Persian poetry to suit the circumstances of the era in which he lived, and one finds in him the culmination of various tendencies in Indo-Persian poetry. His poetry is characterized by a restive effort to realise the paradox of existence. This feature of tedium imparts it a dynamism and also a universalism. Many are of the opinion that the proto-existentialist element in his poetry, is a forerunner of French existentialism. Enlightened approach towards life combined with an intense philosophical skepticism, a distinctive of his mysticism which had deep influence on his successors and followers like Ghalib and Iqbal and reflected in their refreshed reflection on Sufi themes relating to such as the origin of man, the creation of the world, and the relationship between God, the universe, and man. Modern poets and writers like Tagore, Premchand of India, and Zulfia, Rasul Hamzatov of Uzbekistan are mutually translated in both the countries.

To connect, revive and rejuvenate the age-old relation of the two countries the following could be observed and pursued by the two countries:

Re-connecting the Historical Link

- Both India and Uzbekistan being the cradle of the great civilizations and centres of knowledge and philosophical traditions since ancient period, with a rich culture, may harness it in strengthening relations with each other and countries of the region in tangible ways from its Soft Power. for instance:

Showcasing Culture

- There has always been mutual fondness for the cultural heritage in both countries.

This should be utilized to showcase, introduce and popularise various aspects of both cultures, like Languages and Literature, manuscripts in the oriental libraries, architecture, Knowledge Traditions especially philosophical traditions, Science,

Spirituality etc.

- Art, Music and Film, and how both countries have been the centres of variety of great art traditions

Tourism

- This is another less-explored aspect of both India and Uzbekistan. Hardly any country having such richness, abundance and charm of natural, historical and cultural heritage, beauty and grandeur which these two countries have, which should be widely introduced. The maps of the two countries are full of attractions, Incredulities, amazements, wonders as well as connecting points and places which needs to be promulgated.

Educational and Academic Interaction

- Educational and IT institutions, universities, research centres, colleges, schools of excellence should be introduced which would certainly be a source of economic as well as goodwill capital.
- Seminars, symposiums, talks should be arranged for a vibrant and mutual interactions.

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