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ISLAM IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

Abstract

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there have been continuous discussions among observers, analysts and scholars around the world over what role is played by Islam in the political, economic and social realms of life in newly independent Central Asian states. Islam is the dominant faith in Central Asia. The Soviet atheist ideology had strongly influenced Islam during the last seven decades before Central Asia became independent in 1991. In this thesis I analyzed the revival of Islam in Central Asia. The thesis demonstrates that Islam in Central Asia is a natural process determined primarily by internal socioeconomic and political conditions and not influenced by outside forces. The concluding argument is that even if Islam is to be radicalized it will be because of internal factors, such as authoritarianism, violation of human rights and repression of moderate manifestations of Islam from within, rather than because of the influence of Islamic fundamentalist forces from abroad.

According to this work, Islam is a growing power in the region and has gained momentum primarily as a result of internal factors in the region, although regional and global Islamic forces are also looked at. Islam's cultural and political influences are particularly effective in the development of Islam as a power in the region. The thesis has been divided into five chapters.

The first chapter throws light on the historical and geographical background of central Asia. The historical background of Central Asia before and after the arrival of Islam is discussed in this Chapter. After this the geographical review of Central Asia is presented. The geographers are not mutually agreed on the location of Central Asia. The five states of ex-soviet union, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are called Central Asia today.

The second chapter deals with the history of Islam in Central Asia. It starts with the arrival of Islam in Central Asia and goes on elaborating about various scholars who have lived there by whom people have been benefitted. It also talks about Sufis of Central Asia. All the four main Sufi *Silsilas* of central Asia has been discussed followed by people of Central Asia. It also talks about different philosophers, theologians, poets, scientists and mathematicians.

The third chapter discusses the Tsarist conquest of the Central Asian region and the Soviet Union's assault on Islam. In this the Russian strategies in Muslim regions, the efforts to destroy Islamic civilizations and ideology and the movements which appeared as a reaction, in order to hold on to Muslim identity are discussed. It throws light on repressions which were done by the communist regime. It also throws light on the propaganda cells which were used to malign Islam and to disrupt the cultural processes.

The fourth chapter analyses the revival of Islam. The awakening of Islam in these states is analyzed. People want to know more about Islam. The rapid revival of Islamic practices is shocking for everyone including ruling regime and the outside world. The secular regime wants to suppress Islamic revival at every cost. The Islamic movements which are playing a vital role in restoration are reviewed. The introduction of these movements and their beliefs are discussed. Most of the movements are radical in nature. While in the beginning these Islamic movements had different ideologies but the situation of the Central Asia where the most moderate movements were suppressed brutally forced them to be united. The majority of the Muslim population movements in central Asia are led by people who are moderate in their approach. The problems faced by these movements are also mentioned which have internal and external factors working behind them.

In the concluding chapter the researcher has presented his own opinion. Islam in Central Asia has not an outside influence. It demonstrates that Islam is a natural phenomenon in Central Asia. The concluding argument is that Islam is not going to be radicalized in Central Asia. And even if it happens so it will be radicalized not because of any outside interference but because of its internal factors like human rights violations, repression of Islamic beliefs and authoritarianism.