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## INDIA AND CENTRAL ASIA: CONNECTIVITY THROUGH HISTORY AND CULTURE

**Abstract.** Centuries back, India and Central Asia shared a momentous tapestry of historical, cultural, and economic interactions that are reflected in contemporary relations. Emphasising historical bondage and contemporary strategic interaction focuses on the cultural dynamic between India and Central Asia. The current geopolitical landscape and cultural exchanges need to be examined that underscore these relationships in circumstances of economic collaboration, regional stability, and cultural diplomacy. Highlighting the primary purpose of this study has underscored the deep-rooted historical and cultural relationships between India and Central Asia, and how these connections are evolving over time. Also, the purpose of this study is going to serve by examine the variable, such as the role of religion, intellectual exchanges and trade route are decisively shaping mutual interaction. Subsequently, the study has aims to analyse how these historical interactions constantly influence the contemporary cultural and diplomatic relations between India and Central Asia. Along with the study proposed by significant objectives, primarily the study has analysed the historical form from ancient to modern between India and Central Asia. Further study has examined the major variables of cultural exchanges such as the art, religion, tradition and language. The study evaluates the Silk Road, fostering cultural interaction and the impacts of shared heritage. Along with the study has identified the challenges and opportunities to highlight the India-Central Asia relation in historical, contemporary and geopolitical contexts. About research methodology, this study adopts a qualitative and analytical research approach based on primary and secondary sources for proposing the study. Primary Sources: Historical texts, travel accounts, inscriptions, and archival materials. Secondary Sources includes the Books, research articles, government reports, and scholarly publications. While the method of analysis has been followed up with the Historical analysis to trace long-term interactions. Then, an analysis was made to understand similarities and differences in cultural practices. Finally uses the Interpretative method to examine the influence of historical ties on present relations. Major findings of this study have suggested that, from various aspects, indeed India and Central Asia were meticulously linked through trade and cultural exchanges, especially via the Silk Route, facilitating the movement of goods, ideas, and religions like Buddhism. As far as religious and cultural influence is concerned, the expansion of Buddhism from India to Central Asia played a vital role in shaping regional culture, art, and philosophy. As well as major findings regarding medieval cultural interaction are so profound, specifically on medieval period art. As well as the contemporary relevance and soft-power dimension, India must focus on Central Asia through policies like “Connect Central Asia”, which reflects the strategic importance of historical ties in modern geopolitics, particularly rejuvenating through the cultural diplomacy approach to build the institution for promoting the language, tradition, and digitising the education and strengthening their diplomatic relation for better trade connectivity.

**Keywords:** India-Central Asia, Geopolitical, Cultural Relations, Diplomacy, Economic Cooperation

### Introduction

India and Central Asia have a unique relationship in geo-cultural and geo-political stratification. Since the advent of Buddhism through the Silk Route trade in Central Asia, the foundation of mutual understanding and cooperation has been established, which has influenced the present-day landscape in the context of economic aspiration, geopolitical importance, and cultural persuasion. Central Asian countries, owing to their unique geo-location, act as a trijunction link between Europe, West Asia, and South Asia. Because of the changing geopolitical landscape, the cultural link has been rejuvenated, specifically in the context of values sharing, strategic cooperation, and economic cooperation with India. The geopolitical link of India with Central Asia has a historical context, but in the present context, it has a practical manifestation in the strategic arena in the context of regional stability, counter-terrorism, cooperation, and energy security. In order to understand the cultural dynamic more effectively, it would be necessary to understand the Central Asian State (CAS) getting momentum owing to its competitive nature and how India seeks to enhance its influence in order to develop a closer link. It would provide a better insight into the potential scope of cooperation by analysing the strategic importance of cultural cooperation and mutual understanding with the region, which is of prime importance in the geo-political arena. This study was intended to explore the historical and cultural synthesis that frames a relationship between India and Central Asia and the attempts to understand how the reciprocation affects the present-day initiatives in the context of the diplomatic or economic stratum.

### Materials and methods

This study has been conducted using a qualitative, descriptive research approach, analysing cultural relations from historical to contemporary dimensions between India and Central Asia. Underline the influential variable, how the shared history, languages, arts, religions, and education figure out the bilateral relation and provide the narrative outline of the regional interactions and cooperation. Both methods were used in this study, primarily the landed sources of Ministry of External Affairs reports, Government reports, official statements, coverage of interviews, major initiatives of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, and **archival materials** related to cultural diplomacy. On the other hand, the qualitative content analysis method has been used to identify themes, including the role of Silk Road connections, spiritual Buddhist heritage, trade networks, and modern cultural diplomacy, which together cover profound people-to-people interactions. Further study has extended to theories of soft power and cultural diplomacy to highlight the emerging cultural pattern between the region and its modern importance. This theoretical underpinning aims to underscore the promotion of mutual understanding and promote the values of the cultural dimension from both sides. The methodical approach persists in systematic guidance to heighten the constant cultural flourish between India and Central Asia.

### Discussion

The issue of historical and cultural ties between India and Central Asia has been developed in several key directions. I.G. Nizamutdinov, in 1969, looked at how Mawarannahr and India exchanged culture and economy. He showed how the Silk Road spread Buddhism, scientific info, and art styles.

M.Kh. Abuseitova, in 2007, detailed the long-standing relationships between Kazakhstan and India. She highlighted steppe routes as paths for cultural exchanges too. Plus, M. Alam, in 1994, explained how trade caravans between the Mughals and Uzbek khanates shared things like court manners, craft methods, and aesthetic rules.

So the discussion moves from wide-ranging ancient ties to those between Kazakhstan and India, and then to trade and cultural links in early modern times. This all shows the deep, layered connections between India and Central Asia over time.

History and culture are significant variables in understanding the exclusive aspects of regional society and its relationship. India hasn't been new so far as both variables are concerned; it's even more evident to see through long cultural and civilisation analyses in both regions. These interactions indicate deep infatuation and influence migration and mobility from each side. According to Edward Hallett Carr, "History is a discipline of a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts and an unending dialogue between the present and the past. In the same manner, India and Central Asia lie in an unending dialogue, between the present and the past. The significance of the Silk Route's economic development, from its cultural contributions, led to several cultural implications from the 12th to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Indeed, extending their understanding of the cultural tapestry of Central Asia, it was the best illustration of a melting pot of amalgamation of different cultures and civilisations. The occurrence of Buddhism in Central Asia has led to trade flourishing and cultural affinity in the region when Kushan missionaries adopted it as the official religion widely practised and supported in Central Asia even though Buddhism was expelled from Persia in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. Even though the scholars argue that cultural practices such as mixed marriages in social life embellish cultural activity on the silk root. Through the instance, a certain impact can be seen on people from different walks of life coming together to trade and exchange their cultural or entrepreneurial skills and affinity for religious ideas. Due to deep relics of Buddhism connected to northern parts of India, such as Gandhar and Mathura, where many missions for the development of Buddhism have led to Buddhists facilitating language exchanges, and cultural trade networks between India and Central Asia (Mishra, 2012).

The historical step forward since India's Buddhism transmission to the Central Asian State (CAS), Bactria, Gandhar, Ferghana, Samarqand, Bukhara, and Kashmir were hosting a Buddhist legacy from a conference led by Kushan king "Kanishka" in the second century AD. Meanwhile, scholars analyse the importance of diaspora material ties and socio-economic pro-activism, becoming a conduit to promote peace and prosperity through cross-ethnocultural fertilisation through ideological affinity between the Kashmir linkage with Central Asia promotes the statehood and bilateral relations (Kaw, 2012). The silk root becomes a gateway of trade or a cultural pathway, where India has appeared and has a deep cultural imprint, brightly visible in terms of legendary stories, through the Buddha lance and monastic site artefacts. At the present day, Kazakhstan's national emblem reflects the "Sakas" represented by the Kushan empire, which is strongly associated with Indian cultural resonance. It ruled northern India, embraced Buddhism and the Saka king "Maues" and influenced Indian places such as Mathura and the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mathura lion capital honouring all Sakasthanasa. The inducement of cultural relations underlines the example of "Taraz Bazaar", primarily famous for Indian indigo handicrafts, which have had strong demand as garments from Kashmir and Bengal in Central Asia (Stobdan, 2020). Scholar argues that it's often seen that the uniqueness between "Turks and Indians" can understand each other even though they can't find a common language, but therefore they connect through the language of harmony.

The inception of Buddhism and Sufism is a significant variable that illustrates the deep-rooted spiritual connection between India and Central Asia from – Buddhism in the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The leading factor for spreading Buddhism over Central Asia was the Kushan empire's support, which allowed silk roots for trade; Greco-Buddhism flourished in Central Asia; the Sarvastivada school flourished; Mahayana teaching, etc. Later on, Sufism played a vital role from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in the spiritual infatuation between India and Central Asia that persists today. Tracking the spiritual confluence Buddhism dominated Bukhara according to Narshakhi's history. According to George Roerich, he was thrilled to discover that the real meaning of Bukhara's name is "*Vihara*", a Buddhist monastery. With time, Tashkent also must have been a renowned centre of Buddhism and an important centre of political power and economic prosperity (Dwivedi, 2014).

Both regions have had linkage through literary sources, sharing trade, culture, commodity ideas, and so on. The presence of Buddhism was a significant phenomenon that grappled with people's minds, not just as a spiritual or religious sect, but more as a way of life in Central Asia. Buddhism and Sufism are magnificent relics between India and Central Asia, and they can still be seen as commonalities through culture, faith, or practice in most socio-cultural aspects. The most exciting fact is that every Central Asian state looked back for spinning the cultural splendour of India's most prominent leaders, writers, and greatness and was buried on its soil like Amir Khusru, Mir Ali, and Mirza Haider (Haider, 2003).

This incredible moment of history inoculates the cultural tapestries and depicts Buddhism propagation in Central Asia from India via China; many centuries later, Sufism came to India from Central Asia, which exhibited a deep cultural affinity. Sufism carved out a new trend, a bridge to flourish interfaith, spiritual unity, compassion, harmony and social upliftment, resonating across diverse communities in northern India. Famously, Persian scholar Al-Biruni belonged to the Uzbek-Khiva. He made a major contribution to the foundation of Indology, translated literature, the Bhagavad-Gita, and the Sankhya of Kapil, and Indian culture into the Arabic Language. As well as he extended their literature Al-Hind and Tehqiq, a Hind in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. All efforts have been made to provide cultural resonance and harmony with the socio-cultural, political, and religious aspects of Indian society. Another significant spiritual leader, like "Khwaja Syed Muhammad Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki" who belonged to Osh, now a city of Kyrgyzstan, contributed to founding the Chishti order in Delhi after becoming an honorary Sufi saint and the Chishti Order by Moinuddin Chishti.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, another influential Uzbek poet, namely Mir Ali-Shir Nava'i, 15<sup>th</sup> century, devoted himself to greatly influencing India, especially the writing of Baburnama. Its has a profound cultural impact at present; several places in Uzbekistan, like national institutions, are named after Ali-Shir Nava'i, and his name has been resurrected as an essential figure. Further scholarly analysis, several Central Asia scholars served in the Mughal Durbar and later made India their home. Similarly, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century legendary figures called Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dulati, who belonged to Kazakhstan, served as the Governor of Kashmir under the Mughal Emperor Humayun. He is honoured and well known as Mirza Haidar, the son of Muhammad Husain Gurgan, a powerful noble family of the Dughlat tribe in south Kazakhstan near the Jambul region in Indian history (Stobdan, 2020). Further analysis made about Mirza Haidar has undoubtedly become a symbol of old liaison and a good reference of cultural link between India and Kazakhstan. Indeed, Mirza Haidar is considered significant in building Indo-Kazakh relations since its independence in 1991. Significant note on Kazakh officials and academia emphasise this historical aspect of India-Kazakhstan cultural ties, which is an effort to consolidate the cultural affinity. Similarly, another leader, popularly known as Bidel Dehlavi, Mawlana Abul-Ma'ani Mirza Abdul-Qadir Bedil. His contribution remains a symbol of the literary interaction between India and Tajikistan in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. His grave, Bag-Bidel (Garden of Bidel), is strong cultural and spiritual resonance between both sides. It is located opposite Purana Qila at Mathura Road, New Delhi, where Tajiks come to pay their obeisance and respect to their great Persian poet. All these cultural aspects entice the people's mind to underscore their cultural legacy.

Ibn Khaldun a prominent 12<sup>th</sup>-century historian talks about the true history of human life and the world environment which appears from various events, deals with civilisation, is associated with the state and its people's occupations lifestyles science handicrafts and everything else that takes place in the environment. India's Central Asia exhibits long, splendid interactions drawn through deep lineage regarding religious or spiritual interaction. It would be unfortunate if it weren't restored so far as the intimacy of culture and civilisations is concerned. Indeed, history is a reflection of a mirror that reflects what we are and our values lie, which both precious civilisations demand to exhibit in front of the present society. The scholar argues that challenges remain for intellectuals from both

sides to reconstruct scattered historical legacies and bring solid foundations; therefore, India and Central Asia must mutually build a beneficial strategic relationship.

In post-independence, these Central Asian states' questions about how the colonial era changed these dynamics have been engulfed. Yet, India has attempted to revive and strengthen interaction with the newly born semi-authoritarian democracy. Indeed, the colonial era impacted and reshaped the cultural dynamic between India and Central Asia; British rule disrupted trade routes and cultural interaction, therefore sharply declining to undertake direct interaction. The British colonial legacy profoundly influenced India's Central Asia relations because British policy was based on their economic interest, which curbed India's Central Asia traditional route and reduced the flow of cultural exchange through trade. The British colonial administration intended to induce political fragmentation of regional institutions in Central Asian states; therefore, swift changes were undertaken in regional politics and their debilitating interaction. Colonial policy often promoted cultural isolation; the British induced their cultural hegemony or mitigated indigenous culture, dimming the India-Central Asia historical interaction that included the languages, arts, and religious interaction. Strategic perspectives were the most significant concern for the British, and they firmly believed that Central Asia, as an imperial force under the Russian shadow, infringed on a cultural and economic relationship (Hamm, 2013). India has realised the gaps in interaction and has actively revived and strengthened ties with Central Asia regarding historical or cultural heritage matters. Indian approach aligned with enhanced trade relations, regional security, cultural exchange programs, and regional counterbalance from other powers reaffirmed as significant key players in contemporary Central Asian affairs.

**Tab-1: Overview of Cultural Connotation Between India and Central Asia.**

ASPECT	CULTURAL RELATIONS	INDIA	CENTRAL ASIA
<b>HISTORICAL RELATION</b>	Shared heritage through trade, migration, and cultural exchange.	Ancient trade routes, the Silk Road.	Historical connections via the Silk Road.
<b>RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE</b>	Buddhism spread to Central Asia from India, and cultural exchange through religion.	Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam.	Predominantly Islamic, with some Hindu presence.
<b>ART AND ARCHITECTURE</b>	Influence of Indian motifs in Central Asian art and vice versa.	Diverse styles - temples, forts.	Islamic architecture - mosques, mausoleums.
<b>LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE</b>	Linguistic influences and shared literary traditions through historical ties.	Sanskrit, Hindi, and regional languages.	Turkic languages, Persian, and Russian.
<b>TRADE RELATIONS</b>	Economic interdependence fosters cultural exchange and interaction.	Growing trade partnerships.	Rich in resources - oil, gas, minerals.
<b>MIGRATION PATTERNS</b>	Cross-cultural influences through migration and settlement.	Indian diaspora in Central Asia.	Historical migrations from Central Asia to India
<b>MODERN COLLABORATIONS</b>	Increased cultural events, festivals, and educational exchanges.	Cultural exchanges,	B2B partnerships, tourism.

		education initiatives.	
<b>STRATEGIC ALLIANCES</b>	Collaborative frameworks to address regional security and economic development.	Regional organisations - SCO.	Geopolitical significance -China, Russia.

**Source:** Ministry of External Affairs, (Stobdan, 2020).

### Research results

Cultural exchanges played a pivotal role before the independence of Central Asian states, under the soviet era, especially in Bollywood Acting, dance, singing, etc. Subsequently, these states were essentially curtailed from the world mainstream by the soviet regime forces to suppress religious culture and promote the practice of a secular agenda. As a result of post-independence, these new sovereigns sought their cultural identities. India stood as a close partner opportunity to foster its interaction and start the revival of cultural exchange. India gained momentum to revive, embrace, and celebrate its old cultural heritage legacy. These have been exchanged and extended in collaboration with literature, music festivals, art exhibitions, student exchange scholarship programs, etc., to propel foreign policy based on old principles of peace, cooperation, and trustworthiness with new sovereign states.

According to Joseph Nye, cultural exchange is a soft power diplomacy that romanticism serves Nations seeking enhancement and attuned relationships through fostering goodwill between nations - a country's ability to exert influence through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. Contemporary cultural exchange between India and Central Asia functions in innovation in a diverse range, including economic collaboration, improving opportunities and partnerships, and increasing trade, investment, and tourism. Moreover, cultural exchange extended the range of fostering a sense of community among nations, helping to resolve conflicts and promote stability, dialogue, and diplomacy. It connects their past historical footsteps, such as the Silk Road, and focuses on the rejuvenation of culture and heritage practice on a bilateral level to influence together. Contemporary cultural exchange enhances social cohesion in the sense of unity and diversity among people as shared values, and it fulfils the demands of education and innovation.

For matters of the peacebuilding process, Central Asian leaders have realised that their cultural links are not as strong as they thought they were, and in any case, this does not necessarily translate into greater security support (Bhadauria, 2014). The question is how cultural diplomacy has exerted a road map to leverage for India and Central Asia. A foundation of vibrant culture would promote stability through mutual understanding from both sides, which shows regional stability by fostering social cohesion and enhancing communication or identities among communities, encouraging peaceful cooperation and dialogues in the Central Asia states. Cultural ties further effectively counter extremism through moderate ideology and a sense of community and its requirements, promoting peaceful coexistence by promoting social norms. In addition, cultural institutions promote messages of cooperation, harmony and inclusivity (Haider, 2003). Three core variables determine or influence the contemporary interaction between regions that build relationships: education and languages, art and heritages, and culinary and musical exchanges. All three variables are deeply influenced and bear a cemental bond to both regions, depicting the strength of the cultural remains in people's hearts. Efforts from both sides present several exciting prospects, such as strengthening historical and civilizational interactions through cultural and religious heritage and promoting Buddhist cultural heritage. India's soft power strengthens diplomatic ties through yoga and Ayurveda, which are growing in Central Asia and have raised their interest in spirituality and sound health. The enhancement of entertainment and Bollywood will make India a more substantial regional soft power, and educational partnerships will be enhanced to promote Indian language and cultural studies, which

bridge cultural gaps and encourage people-to-people ties. Along with that, India enhances science and technology to create skill development, and exchange research programs to fulfil the growing interest in the region.

The author argues India's economic security and strategic relations with the Central Asian States remain unsatisfactory, even though they have historical linkages; there's a need for fresh momentum at present (Kothari, 2020). Underlying the argument, cultural propositions are more vital than economic ones because they provide common ground for both regions, offering consistency in the contemporary age. It must regain cultural connections by promoting classical dance in (CAS), such as Kathak, Odissi, and Bhangra, for instance centre for Indian Classical Dance and yoga in Almaty and Bahram Kumari Raja yoga, near Abaye Ave street, Micro district, Almaty, as well as Dimond Way of Buddhist Centre at Batyr Street 261 all has reflect deep rooted cultural practice for peace and wellbeing with India. Along with Bollywood cinema, bridges are being formed to fill cultural gaps and connect academia in India and Central Asia with examples of India TV's show "Kulfi Kumar Bajewala" and the popular Shah Rukh Khan classic "Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge" in Kazakhstan. Universities in these regions are increasingly participating in collaborative research projects and conferences focusing on ancient Indo-Central Asian connections, as well as exhibitions of Buddhism, Persian culture, and the Hindi, Sanskrit and Urdu languages, which have garnered significant media attention. It's expanding cultural exchanges through television broadcasts, referencing American political scientist Milton Cummings.

The post-Soviet cultural interaction is intense between India and Central Asia in general, and Kazakhstan in particular, in people-to-people interaction, with the largest diaspora there, including education, Bollywood, and tourism. Some significant instances can take place to analyse the last decade's momentous progress. The President of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev, has greeted and sent a message to the Indian Prime Minister Modi and reassured them that Kazakhstan intends to continue with multifaceted cooperation and a friendly atmosphere between both democratic republics on the grounds of cultural, economic, or humanitarian levels. On Kazakhstan, India, its facts and perspective said by Kazakh Ambassador Doulat Kuanyshev, India is specifically attached and India is the symbol of rituals. And extending their message to Kazakhstan is sure that whoever heads the government of India's Indian policies toward Kazakhstan, as well as the pillars of India's foreign policy, will remain the same which depicts how Kazakhstan is deeply connected with India and its importance. As well as President Nazarbayev chose India to be the first country outside the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to visit, just after regaining independence (Bhargava, 2014).

Prominent diplomat Ambassador Ashok Sajjanhar, in an article, notes area of space needs the demand of Kazakhstan and the expertise and capability of India are complementary to each other. The Kazakh festival "Saltanat" state dance assembly participates in the annual "Surujkunad" mela festival in India, and the "Nauryz" Kazakh base New Year festival in India which symbolizes goodness, wealth, and happiness. On the diplomatic level efforts to promote language education and learning of Kazakh and other languages, ties with the prominent Indian education institution Jamia Millia Islamia and the faculty of Oriental studies, University of Al-Farabi (KazNU), Almaty, Kazakhstan, directed deep enthusiasm and inspiration with cultural assimilation.

In the context of both cultures, education is paramount and remains one of Kazakhstan's top priorities. Leaders acknowledge the barriers to quality education and promote the development of higher education at the university level. Amity University in India has successfully organized international conferences in Kazakhstan since 2014, and in March 2024, the Department of Indology at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Faculty of Oriental Studies, held the first Hindi-language scientific and practical conference in Kazakhstan. All these aspects testify to the deep and enduring cultural affinity and mutual understanding between people, underscoring the importance of exploring new aspects of culture for the development of state-building, bilateral cooperation, peace, and prosperity.

### **Geopolitical Significance**

The theory of Heartland propounded to engross geography in international politics, both literally and figuratively making its firm connotation that the rules of Eurasian control by the country will impose its supremacy over world politics. Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland, who rules the Heartland commands the World-island, who rules the World-island commands the World. The actual balance of political power at any given time is, of course, the product, on the one hand, of geographical conditions, both economic and strategic, and, on the other hand, of the relative number, virility, equipment, and organization of the competing peoples (Scott & Alcenat, 2008). The geopolitical significance of Central Asia determined the pivot location of the Eurasian landmass, which magnified part of the heartland; therefore, global power forces influence its regional controls. Regarding India's regional interests, it picked up the Mackinder theory, which means acknowledging the strategic significance of the Central Asian region to safeguard its interests, to maintain the balance between power forces like Russia, China or even Western penetration. As the underlying significant chunk of a strategic framework for India to Central Asia represents the critical aspects of security, economic and diplomatic aspects are concerns. Accessing India and the challenging aspect of the heartland, primarily to underline that Central Asia is a region of the most strategic importance for India. It is located just beyond the northern part of India and is gaining influence that could enable Central Asia to extend its strategic depth as well. This region is also looking into the exit for maritime from land-based borders; thus, India's geographic position while providing access to the Indian Ocean, limits its ability to exert direct influence over the heartland. With the understanding of Mackinder's theory, Hartland has a source of advantages of maritime power over land power, like India, which surrounds the periphery of Eurasia.

To understand the geopolitical tapestry and the significance of Central Asia, "Curzon" believed that India was in South and Central Asia. India maintains a Consulate General in Kashgar till early 1950. Nehru envisioned the need for India to maintain physical contact with Central Asia, which became apparent from his letter to Joseph Korbel of the UNCIP mission in 1949, urging him not to let Gilgit and northern areas, the frontier areas of Kashmir, having a common border with Xinjiang be part of Pakistan arrangements in Pak-occupied Kashmir so that the community of overland trade and tariff between India and Central Asia could be ensured through mountain passes. Still, this move was not followed up on, even by Nehru himself (Warikoo, 2012). The Soviet dissolution paved the way for India to reestablish its age-old ties with five independent countries. India was forced to evolve policies to deal with the new political situation in these newborn countries. To understand mutual interest through the geopolitics dimension to underline the phase of 1990, decades of changes and uncertainty, both India and Central Asia were revising their domestic policies perspective as well as rejuvenating the international political approach, including the trade, commerce, diplomacy, cultural values, security, and defence etc. with these significant India and Central Asia set out to reformulate their national and regional interest to maintain the larger goal of peace, stability, and security (Pandey, 2012).

By the lights of geopolitical repository India's cultural diplomacy can be a powerful soft power tool for the fulfilment of strategic and economic interests, like Enhancing Regional Cooperation and Connectivity through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the International North-South Transport Corridor connection with Chabahar Port, the most strategically important aspects and best reply to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Promote the strategic use of digital platforms, e-learning and virtual cultural programs such as cultural outreach through online proceedings, social media, webinars, digital content, screening online courses, and regular online cultural programs, like dance, music, tutorial or language courses. Cultural diplomacy can promote regional security and development in Central Asia through tolerance, dialogue, and peace-building through sharing educational initiatives and cultural exchanges. The stage of bringing out the illusion that the three triangulation powers forced putting a lot of cultural baggage, without losing a chance. To understand the instance of China in the Education aspect, the Chinese president proposed a yearly education plan for Central Asia to promise more than 13000 scholarships to study in China and place 10000

Confucius Institute teachers and students for study and 22000 students from all of Central Asia regions (Jiang, 2021). It has been widely promoted as a soft-power agenda through educational institutions that offer learning about the Chinese language, history, culture, and spiritual values. The question is what the comparisons stand for. India's cultural diplomacy counterbalances Chinese influence and could be an apparatus to enhance its presence in the region. All these significant aspects depict geographical proximity to take an advanced step toward grabbing the advantages of natural resources by Russia and China.

As far as the Central Asia case is concerned, culture has always been integral to geopolitics. India has a significant prospect of being strengthened in its geostrategic position. As such, a step has been taken forward: extending the neighbourhood. Throughout the leading instance, India and Central Asia have been historically and culturally connected through silk roots, which flourish in philosophical and religious dynamics. Moreover, enhancing the soft power foothold builds interaction with the local community and promotes regional cultural centres, economic ties, and strategic objectives; thus, the cultural tools have become India's geostrategic advantages in Central Asia.

**Tab 2: India's Projects/ Investment in Central Asia: Worth \$3 billion.**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Sector</i>	<i>Investment</i>	<i>Project</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	Energy in fracture	\$2 billion	Uranium Mining Infrastructure Development	Collaboration in uranium extraction and processing. Investment in transport and logistics infrastructure.
<i>Uzbekistan</i>	Textiles pharmaceutical	\$756.60 million	Textile Manufacturing Investments in pharmaceutical production and distribution.	Establishing textile factories for local production. Investments in pharmaceutical production and distribution.
<i>Tajikistan</i>	Security and Transport	\$ 24.197 million	Community development, road infrastructure, transport communication, and agro-industry.	The development of the capacity to boost security enhances renewable energy. Initiatives to enhance agricultural productivity.
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	IT Education, Culture	\$118 million	Agriculture, textile, hydel power and pharmaceutical Hydropower Project IT Collaboration	Investment in hydropower generation projects. Initiatives to enhance IT infrastructure and services.
<i>Turkmenistan</i>	Infrastructure Education	\$41.26 million	Infrastructure Development Educational Exchanges	Projects to improve transport and connectivity, INSTC. Scholarships and educational programs for students.

**Sources: Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), UNCTAD, IMF.**

### **Economic collaboration**

Leveraging the economic perspective to invest in Central Asia has focused on a tiny trade volume, which shows some political gaps in the regular interaction, but has been induced in just the last decades. Significant issues which need to be underlined are the competing Influence of Russia and China, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), **and Infrastructure Gaps in India,**

especially as trading the inefficient logistic chain becomes less attractive. Regarding financial and investment constraints, Central Asian countries are challenging for foreign investors at the political and economic levels. Indian businesses, throughout the long-term economic level, are hindered by huge potential inefficiency in bureaucracy or a lack of transparency. Issues such as currency and foreign exchange regulations have complex transactions, and currency is not promptly convertible; therefore, it has impacted the trade investment between India and Central Asia. Both governments must promote digital transactions like **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** for trade exchanges to resolve the payment issues. It's better to understand the competitive nature between India, China, and Russia, which is traditionally linked with Central Asia and has become a focal point, particularly in sectors like intrastate energy and trade. India has taken some steps and challenges to secure a share and project a presence in China. BRI has widespread coverage in the Central Asian markets. On the frontal side, Russia has dominated possession over the region in the areas of security and economics, which led to reluctance among some Central Asian states to provide a stronger contestation among the three powers. The highlighting of the significant aspects is to keep greater attention to bilateral cooperation between India and Central Asia gaps where found well establish trade missions, business chambers or connections between corporations etc. along with the limited presence of the Indian private sector in Central Asia on the other hands Central Asia have more tuned position with Russia and China makes difficulties with India footholds in manufacturing, mining, and energy sectors these on these aspects need to make greater attention.

#### **Countering radicalisation**

Meanwhile, the effective apparatus for radicalisation, in a Central Asian region, poses threats at any time, promoting inclusive cultural values including educational diplomacy can provide an alternative to extremist ideology. India has a solace experience with framing its pluralistic society, which offers to extend its valuable lesson to countries of Central Asia by fabricating diverse, religious, peaceful coexistence. Understanding the aspects of religious harmony in the region, there must be emphasis on religious tolerance, respect the diversity, peace programs, and countering radicalisation. To look into the gist of cultural aspects of Central Asia, scholars like “Kutay Oktay” shed light on how tourism functions as a phenomenon that creates income and employment opportunities through the sociocultural aspects of the region, understanding the challenges and prospects. Although making a peaceful policy on tourism by the government initiative plays an essential role in preventing war and other conflicts and promoting intra-regional investment by other countries, especially for sharing common historical and cultural interaction. Propelling the concept of community-based tourism in Central Asia reconciles the potential to attract Wealthy tourists and lead to prosperity in the hands of the people (Oktay, 2009). All republics' respective cultural tourism aspects flourish through sound motives and trickle-down opulence to their peoples. To avoid hindrance, they must focus and exert efforts on intra-regional issues in the region, such as the passive nature of the government or religious extremism.

The threat of radicalization and terrorism in Central Asia, where all five states cite terrorism as a major security threat, may vary in location, as some states have external characteristics, such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan (Buzurtanona, 2010). The issues of terrorism and radicalism are some of the most pressing issues of regional instability in Central Asia, where different radical organizations are prevalent, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, East Turkestan Islamic Party, Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami, and the most famous one is the Kurdistan Workers Party's Lashkar-e-Toyba, and many more. Therefore, it can be stated that stability and security in the regions are important aspects in the development of relations using cultural diplomacy. Instability and security issues in the Central Asian regions can be described in terms of various factors such as border conflicts, religious extremism, water resource conflicts, political instability, and ethnic conflicts. Sociopolitical discourses could be developed in the improvement of cultural relations.

Religious extremism is also a serious problem in this region. For example, the revival of the Taliban movement is a threat to the Central Asian region (CAR). Islamist radical movements in

Uzbekistan or Khorasan Province are a group of militant organizations. Other terrorist organizations like Islamic Jihad Union and Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami are extremely prevalent and are causing instability across all Central Asian states. They are a serious threat to all Central Asian states. Conflicts over water resources are another major reason for instability in all Central Asian states. For example, rivers like Amu Darya and Syr Darya are sources of instability between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Irrigation water is a major resource that is a reason for conflict between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan for agricultural purposes. Kazakhstan is also facing issues with China regarding water utilization in rivers like Irtysh and Ili.

A strong cultural relationship contributes to political and regional stability in the Central Asian state. Likewise press release Security Council states that the efforts to encourage the United Nations regional and subregional organisations can prevent and resolve conflicts and improve collective security. Promoting regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among the countries leads to a strategic culture propounded by “Jack Snyder” and “Sayad Mosaddeq Khalili”, who noted that culture has a significant role in enhancing better relations among countries. Likewise, throughout the way of cultural diplomacy India engages with Central Asia promoting a sense of unity and mutual trust, and the grounds of common culture can serve as a deeper cooperation and foundation aspect of reducing conflict and fostering peaceful coexistence. Framing the importance of power by saying soft power usually takes longer to show results is very effective such as soft power diplomacy bound to do so (Jr, 2020).

It is a multifaceted and comprehensive approach to addressing the issue of extremism and radicalisation in Central Asian states to address socioeconomic conditions, regional cooperation, and governance, to promote adequate religious tolerance can radicalisation of the region and to build a more resilient and stable region. But need to understand the gaps here. The gaps in social cohesion are filled by promoting cultural and social inclusion. It results in ensuring that ethnic and religious minorities are included in the mainstream social, economic, and political fabric of society. It is through this that society can reduce vulnerability and marginalisation and curb extremist ideologies in the region.

Also, youth are a potential source for the direction of the mainstream to engage in meaningful activities like civic engagement, arts, and sports. These steps can prevent the feeling of disillusionment and exclusion from society, leading to efforts by the regional government and promoting inter-regional powers, such as enclosing India from interaction with youths and promoting education exchange programmes. Cultural assimilation has a strong soft-power apparatus on acting silently, gradually leading to profound positive impacts on minds and gradual but effective results so far as radicalisation is concerned.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Navigating several challenges, including competition from other major powers such as Russia, China, and Turkey, and limited cultural institute development and regional instability. Underlining the competition among significant powers, for instance, Russia has shared profound cultural affinity and linguistic and political ties with Central Asia since the legacy of the Soviet Union, such as Russian languages, media and cultural institutions and education are still very influential in the entire region and all five countries are given priorities to Russia presence which shows the Indian cultural outreach is overshadowed. Currently, the volume of Russian economic trade is about 45 billion dollars in 2025. Similarly, China also emphasises making a stronger presence in the entire region. For instance, BRI has leveraged a massive economic and strategic approach. The massive Chinese investment of more than 66.1 billion dollars in major projects like the Digital Silk Roads China Central Asian oil pipeline and hydro-projects etc. furthermore, Turkey have shared their profound cultural relation with the Central Asian state through many Central Asian ethnic belonging to Turkic culture and Turkey has taken advantages and promote the soft power, linguistic, cultural heritage and religious affinity especially formed the festival like Nauruz and modern venues such as Meikin Asia International Music Festival etc. and economic perspective total volume of investment about 8.6 billion dollars.

Lack of education investment in the region is a barrier to India's cultural approach, which is conducted in Hindi or English in a small sphere, including the culture; programs include literature, music and education exchanges, while these countries primarily speak the Turkic languages and Russian. In this instance, there is a need to invest more in languages which can be taught in these language programmes and facilitate better cultural exchanges. Bollywood products are popular among the Central Asian populations, but not as much as Russian and Turkish pop-culture. Even local Central Asian TV channels prefer to watch Russian Films or Turkish or other similar TV shows, which are challenging aspects of Indian cultural diplomacy that attract the Central Asian region. By navigating these challenges, India can make their cultural diplomacy an impactful limit of its foreign policy towards Central Asia; it's still making progressive efforts and deeper political, economic or cultural engagements.

India's cultural approach in Central Asia opens a number of exciting prospects, including strengthening history and civilization through cultural and religious heritage, as well as promoting Buddhist cultural heritage in countries such as Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. India's cultural efforts at the diplomatic level echo the cultural emphasis of Indian-Mughal history on the exchange of arts, caricatures and languages. India's soft power strengthens diplomatic interaction through yoga and Ayurveda, which are becoming most popular among people of middle age, thanks to the World Yoga Day established by New Delhi in 2014, thereby there is a growing interest in these areas as a way to connect with spirituality and strong health. Thanks to a pragmatic approach, improving education, institutional programs and a number of other programs will overcome the cultural gap and encourage people to develop interconnections. In this regard, more effective channels of interaction are the IT sector (educational programs, outsourcing), Bollywood production and ITEC / ICCR scholarship programs corresponding to the priorities of regional development. Along with this, it is necessary to develop science and technology to create an exchange of experience and research programs that will satisfy the growing interest in the region. In the context of the digital platform, as well as such strategic promotion tools as e-learning, virtual cultural programs, online events, social networks, digital content, exhibitions and regular online cultural programs such as dances, music, educational materials, etc., special attention should be paid to cultural diplomacy, which promotes the spread of cultural aspects and comprehensive solutions to emerging problems.

### **Conclusion**

The long culture and civilisation between India and Central Asia highlight the deep-rooted complementary significance of the relationships. This pathway brings the cultural exchange and commonalities interactions dating back centuries, facilitating the flows of arts, ideas, relations, and languages along the long track of the Silk Road. Underlining these exchanges has left an incredible and undeniable mark on both regions' socio-cultural fabric, bringing the need for refabrication or carving out at a contemporary juncture. It's not just to say that the cultural ties between India and Central Asia are merely historical curiosities, but more than a basis of stratification built into modern-day cooperation and the strengthening of long-lasting fondness for brotherhoods. Sharing religious and cultural elements dating back to Buddhism reflects modern commonalities, fosters mutual understanding, and serves as the foundation of contemporary diplomatic or economic partnerships on determination and dedication. These are interactions and particular frameworks to geopolitical contexts where both democratic regions are focused or extended to collaboration on current demand trade, energy, and security. Furthermore, the resurgence of interest is evident in Central Asia from an Indian perspective, a growing aspiration as a regional power deals with broader aspects of Eurasian geopolitics. Meanwhile, Central Asia locations bring out the essential bridges between East and West and align with the strategic ambition to charge cultural diplomacy as a key element to foster mutually stronger ties. Mutual engagements form both sides; therefore, it goes beyond economic considerations and effort to encompass cultural diplomacy as an essential apparatus to shape regional dynamics. The cultural interactions between India and Central Asia serve not merely as a "flow of fluid" for historical

interaction but also as a framework for future strategic alliances to maintain mutual interest. Due to the enhanced nature of cooperation in various domains, cultural linkages will play a pivotal role in realising common interests and advancing regional stability at both levels. In contrast, required aspects also underline the preservation of these elements.

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## ҮНДІСТАН ЖӘНЕ ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯ: ТАРИХИ-МӘДЕНИ БАЙЛАНЫС

**Аңдатпа.** Ғасырлар бұрын Үндістан мен Орталық Азия арасында тарихи, мәдени және экономикалық өзара ықпалдастықтың маңызды кеңістігі қалыптасқан, бұл байланыстар қазіргі қатынастарда да көрініс табууда. Тарихи сабақтастық пен қазіргі стратегиялық өзара әрекеттестікке басымдық бере отырып, зерттеу Үндістан мен Орталық Азия арасындағы мәдени динамиканы қарастырады. Қазіргі геосаяси ахуал мен мәдени алмасулар экономикалық ынтымақтастық, аймақтық тұрақтылық және мәдени дипломатия тұрғысынан талданады. Сонымен қатар, зерттеу қазіргі саяси шиеленістерді атап өтіп, экономикалық теңсіздік мәселелерін қарастырады және мәдени факторлардың екіжақты серіктестікті нығайтудағы рөлін көрсетеді. Мақалада мәдени дипломатияның аймақта тұрақтылық пен өзара дамуды қамтамасыз етудегі маңыздылығы негізделеді. Бұл мақалада Үндістан мен Орталық Азия мемлекеттері арасындағы тарихи және мәдени байланыстар ұзақ мерзімді өркениеттік өзара әрекеттестік, сауда жолдары және мәдени ықпалдастық тұрғысынан қарастырылады. Зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты – ежелгі дәуірден қазіргі кезеңге дейінгі өзара ықпалдастық эволюциясын талдау және оның тұрақтылығына әсер еткен негізгі факторларды айқындау. Зерттеу нәтижелері көрсеткендей, ежелгі кезеңнің өзінде бұл аймақ Ұлы Жібек жолы бағыттарын қамтыған кең ауқымды өңіраралық байланыстар жүйесінің құрамында болған, онда діни идеялар, тілдер мен өнер түрлерінің алмасуы жүзеге асқан. Мақалада тіл, өнер және сопылық ілім арқылы жүзеге асқан мәдени алмасулар қарастырылып, олардың ортақ тарихи кеңістіктің қалыптасуына елеулі ықпал еткені дәлелденеді. Қазіргі кезеңде бұл өзара әрекеттестік аймақтық дипломатия, білім беру және мәдени саясат аясында жаңа мазмұнға ие болуда. Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізін салыстырмалы-тарихи және өркениеттік тәсілдер, сондай-ақ мәдени-антропологиялық зерттеу элементтері құрайды. Зерттеу Үндістан мен Орталық Азия мемлекеттері арасындағы өзара әрекеттестіктің жүйелі әрі көпқабатты сипатқа ие екенін, оның терең тарихи жады мен мәдени өзара тәуелділікке негізделгенін және қазіргі геосаяси үдерістер жағдайында өзектілігін сақтап отырғанын дәлелдейді.

**Кілт сөздер:** Үндістан, Орталық Азия, геосаясат, мәдени байланыстар, дипломатия, экономикалық ынтымақтастық

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## ИНДИЯ И ЦЕНТРАЛЬНАЯ АЗИЯ: ВЗАИМОСВЯЗЬ ЧЕРЕЗ ИСТОРИЮ И КУЛЬТУРУ

**Аннотация.** Много веков назад Индия и Центральная Азия были связаны значимыми историческими, культурными и экономическими взаимодействиями, которые находят отражение и в современных отношениях. С акцентом на историческую преемственность и современные стратегические взаимодействия в исследовании рассматривается культурная динамика между Индией и Центральной Азией. Современная геополитическая ситуация и культурные обмены анализируются с точки зрения экономического сотрудничества, региональной стабильности и культурной дипломатии. В работе также поднимаются вопросы

современных политических напряжений, проблем экономического неравенства и подчеркивается роль культурных факторов в укреплении двустороннего партнерства. Статья аргументирует значимость культурной дипломатии как инструмента обеспечения стабильности и взаимного развития региона. В статье рассматриваются исторические и культурные связи между Индией и государствами Центральной Азии через призму долговременного цивилизационного взаимодействия, торговых путей и культурных заимствований. Основной целью исследования является анализ эволюции взаимодействия от древности до современности с выявлением ключевых факторов, влияющих на его устойчивость. Результаты исследования показывают, что уже в древности данный регион входил в систему межрегиональных связей, включая маршруты Великого шелкового пути, где происходил обмен религиозными идеями, языками и формами искусства. В статье рассматриваются культурные обмены в области языка, искусства и суфизма, оказавшие значительное влияние на формирование общего исторического пространства. В настоящее время это взаимодействие приобретает новое измерение в рамках региональной дипломатии, образовательной и культурной политики. Методологическую основу исследования составляют сравнительно-исторический и цивилизационный подходы, а также элементы культурно-антропологического анализа. Исследование доказывает, что взаимодействие между Индией и странами Центральной Азии носит системный и многослойный характер, основанный на глубокой исторической памяти и культурной взаимозависимости, что сохраняет его актуальность в условиях современных геополитических процессов.

**Ключевые слова:** Индия, Центральная Азия, геополитика, культурные связи, дипломатия, экономическое сотрудничество

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