

**INDIA-TURKMENISTAN**  
**PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORY, CULTURE**  
**AND ECONOMY**



# INDIA-TURKMENISTAN

PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORY, CULTURE  
AND ECONOMY

**Ramakant Dwivedi**

**Ovezdurdy Muhammetberdiyev**



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## Foreword

The book on *India–Turkmenistan: Perspectives on History, Culture and Economy* offers a relevant and thoughtful exploration of the growing ties between India and Turkmenistan bound by deep historical linkages. India wants to deepen its engagement with Turkmenistan and looks to diversify its partnership; this volume offers readers a nuanced understanding of the bilateral relationship shaped by shared history, cultural traditions and growing common economic interest interests.

India and Turkmenistan have long been linked through ancient trade routes, particularly the Silk Road, which facilitated the movement not just of goods, but of cultural and intellectual exchanges. The chapters in this volume reflect on these deep-rooted linkages and explore how they influence the trajectory of the current relations in social, economic and cultural arenas. From the legacy of poets and philosophers to contemporary foreign policy analysts, the contributors shed light on multiple dimensions of the India–Turkmenistan relationship.

Research papers on cultural theme in the book highlight mutual literary influences, and the spiritual traditions that continue to connect the two societies even today. These chapters affirm that cultural diplomacy remains a strong pillar of bilateral engagement.

Economically, the book examines on the key areas like energy co-operation, particularly the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline, connectivity challenges, and digital transformation. These discussions are highly relevant as India seeks more robust integration with Turkmenistan to enhance partnership with Ashgabat.

The book brings together scholars, policy-makers, diplomats and academicians from both the countries, offering diverse perspectives that enrich our understanding of bilateral and regional dynamics. It is an important resource for academics, policymakers and diplomats who seek to comprehend the opportunities and challenges in this relationship.

At MERI Group of Institutions and its Centre for International Studies alongwith India Central Asia Foundation, we endeavour to enhance ties between India and the world community through bilateral and multilateral studies. This volume will make a value addition to the growing discourse on India–Turkmenistan relations and serve as a foundation for further dialogue and collaboration between the two nations.

**Prof (Dr.) Lalit Aggarwal,**  
*Vice-President,*  
*MERI Group of Institutions,*  
*New Delhi, India*

# Message

## Envisioning New Horizons of Cooperation

Dear Readers!

The book in your hands brings together articles by scholars, senior diplomats, and government officials from Turkmenistan and India, dedicated to exploring various aspects of Turkmen-Indian relations. These two nations, deeply rooted in history, continue to shape their cooperation with a vision toward the distant future.

The title of the book, “*India–Turkmenistan: Perspectives on History, Culture and Economy*” carries a profound meaning. It reflects the longstanding partnership between the Turkmen and Indian peoples, which has flourished since ancient times. Moreover, this publication highlights the noble aspirations of our friendly nations as they strive to achieve sustainable development in the modern era.

The extensive relations between India and Turkmenistan have been established since ancient times, during the era of the Great Silk Road and the Indian and Turkmen peoples not only traded goods with each other, but also conducted cultural and humanitarian cooperation.

The relations between our peoples, dating back to ancient times, today have reached the level of multilateral strategic partnership between Turkmenistan and India. When Turkmenistan gained its Independence in 1991, the Republic of India was one of the first countries in the world to establish diplomatic relations with our country, opening a new page in interstate cooperation.

Taking into account the huge determining role in the further sustainable and comprehensive socio-economic development of our countries, strengthening its leadership positions on the world stage. The youth policy pursued by our National Leader of the Turkmen people, Chairman of the Halk Maslahaty of Turkmenistan Hero Arkadag and Highly Esteemed President is aimed at creating the most favorable

conditions for the formation, development and personal growth of young Turkmen citizens, expanding opportunities for the maximum realization of their intellectual, creative and spiritual potential in the interests of society and the state. The strategy involves various measures for the comprehensive development of the young generation of the country, increasing their role in state and public life. It is also planned to supplement with new steps aimed at developing international youth cooperation. Synchronizing its youth policy with global trends in youth issues, the main goal of the strategy is to ensure more active participation of young Turkmen citizens in interaction with their foreign peers in cultural, economic, scientific, educational, sports and other fields.

For our next generations economic and trade relations play a crucial role in our collaboration with India. Both nations actively participate in major international projects such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline and the Central Asia-Middle East and North-South transport corridors. Our countries are acting appropriately for effectively use existing opportunities to bring bilateral trade and economic cooperation to a new qualitative level, significantly enhancing mutual commodity turnover, and diversify its structure.

One of the main directions of Turkmen-Indian relations is cooperation in the humanitarian sphere, which is based on the common history, rich and unique culture and largely similar traditions of our peoples.

As reflected in its title, this book presents a thorough academic analysis of the history, current state, and future prospects of Turkmen-Indian relations, as explored by Turkmen and Indian authors.

It is important to emphasize that this publication is a product of the extensive collaboration between the Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan and numerous universities and research centers around the world. This publication was prepared within the framework of our Institute's close cooperation with the India-Central Asia Foundation and MERI Center for International Studies over many years. Based on our mutual agreement, the book was published in the form of a collection of scientific articles written by authors from both countries on topics related to the history, present, and future of Indian-Turkmen relations.

The contributions of distinguished scholars and experienced diplomats enrich this volume with valuable and contemporary insights, offering compelling perspectives on Turkmen-Indian relations. We do believe that readers will find this book both informative and thought provoking.

In conclusion, we view this publication yet another testament to the fruitful collaboration between our Institute and the India-Central Asia Foundation and MERI Center for International Studies. We are confident that this book will be warmly received by a wide audience interested in Turkmen-Indian relations, and that it will serve as a valuable academic resource for young scholars, university lecturers and students.

We extend our sincere congratulations to the authors and all those who contributed to the publication of this book, and, we wish, as the Turkmen people say, “that there will be many more such publications”!

**Gulshat Yusupova,**

*Rector of the Institute of International Relations  
of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan*



# Preface

## General

India and Turkmenistan celebrated the 33rd anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties in April this year. For India, the developments in Turkmenistan would continue to be important as Ashgabat is part of its extended neighbourhood. In twenty-first century, enhanced co-operation between India and Turkmenistan assumes a higher relevance. There is obvious areas of co-operation to mutual benefit.

In the multi-vectored foreign policy of Ashgabat, India takes an important place. India was one of the first to recognise Turkmenistan's independence. The roots of India-Turkmenistan connections and friendship lie in the centuries-long past. People of India and Turkmenistan enjoyed trade and spiritual relations for centuries. Archaeological excavations at many sites in Turkmenistan testify to this. Turkmenistan's independence has ushered in a new stage of interactions between New Delhi and Ashgabat.

It is against this backdrop that we felt the need for scholarly exchanges on matters of common interest. This joint study has taken the shape of a book after months of planning, discussions and exchanges with the Institute for International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkmenistan.

## Coverage of Topics

This volume is a collection of twenty papers written by scholars from India and Turkmenistan. The authors strive to critically examine a gamut of relationship between New Delhi and Ashgabat especially in historical, cultural and economic arenas.

Professor (Dr.) Ramakant Dwivedi analyzes the political and diplomatic contours of Indo-Turkmen ties and suggests pathways for strengthening bilateral co-operation. Professor (Dr.) Ovezdurdy Muhammetberdiyev examines the intellectual contributions of Turkmen

scholars to Indology, reflecting a shared academic tradition that enhances understanding between the two countries and bridges cultural-historical gaps.

Professor Hem Chandra Pande offers a literary reflection on the translation of Magtymguly's verse into Hindi, emphasising cultural resonance and poetic heritage. Mr. Jumamyrat Gurbangeldiyev sheds light on the significant historical role of Muhammad Bayram Khan, a Turkmen-origin statesman in Mughal India, and his contributions to diplomacy, administration, and Indo-Turkmen historical ties.

Professor P.L. Dash traces the historical and cultural legacy of the Seljuk Empire in Turkmenistan, highlighting its enduring impact on identity and statecraft. Mr. Sapar Berdiniyazov emphasises the symbolic and practical dimensions of Turkmen-Indian relations, underscoring their basis in mutual goodwill, shared historical experiences, and a forward-looking partnership.

Shri Anil Sharma critically examines the current status of economic ties between India and Turkmenistan and outlines pragmatic strategies to deepen bilateral trade and investment. Dr. Chinar Rustemova offers a diplomat's perspective on the evolution of bilateral relations, highlighting key milestones in political, economic, and cultural co-operation since Turkmenistan's independence and India's outreach to Central Asia.

Professor Tabasum Firdous & Miss Fozia Janisa highlights how India's cultural diplomacy and educational initiatives are shaping perceptions and strengthening its influence in Turkmenistan. Miss Maya Atajanova explores how the image of India, or "Hindustan," is poetically revered in the works of Magtymguly Fragi, reflecting deep cultural curiosity and admiration for Indian civilisation in Turkmen literary consciousness.

Miss Ramanshi Dwivedi offers a geopolitical analysis of energy co-operation and pipeline politics, situating India-Turkmenistan ties in the evolving global order. Mr. Baba Saryyev delves into the literary exchanges between Turkmenistan and India, showcasing mutual admiration through translated works, shared themes, and cultural storytelling that bind the two nations beyond politics.

Dr. Anita Sengupta explores Turkmenistan's role in regional connectivity initiatives and India's strategic interests in fostering

infrastructural and trade linkages with Central Asia. Mr. Nurberdi Amanmyradov outlines Turkmenistan's strategic investments in transport and logistics infrastructure as a neutral nation, highlighting its importance for regional connectivity and potential synergy with India's connectivity vision.

Miss Sunita Dwivedi documents the historical and archaeological richness of Buddhist sites in Turkmenistan, underscoring ancient India–Central Asia spiritual exchange. Dr. Ayna Baymuradova explores how India's ancient cultural values—particularly its philosophies of peace and coexistence—have shaped the foundation of its diplomatic ethos, which continues to resonate in contemporary international relations.

Dr. Pramod Kumar assesses the multifaceted dimensions of India–Turkmenistan relations, with focus on political will and mutual economic interests. Mr. Begench Karayev examines how digital technologies are reshaping Turkmenistan's development path, fostering innovation, and enabling stronger international co-operation—including with India—through digital diplomacy and economic integration.

Dr. Kamala Kumari delves into the evolution of Turkmenistan's foreign policy, particularly under the concept of 'permanent neutrality' and its global outreach. Professor (Dr.) Amangeldi Rahmanov presents a historical overview of centuries-old Turkmen-Indian relations, tracing interactions through trade, culture, and diplomacy. The chapter emphasises mutual respect and the enduring nature of bilateral ties over time.



## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the authors of papers published in the book. Without their dedication and persistent hard work, this book may not have seen the light of day. Gratitude to Shri Ashok Kumar Sharma and Shri A Gitesh Sarma, President and Vice-President of the India Central Asia Foundation (ICAF), respectively. A word of special thanks to Amb. K. Raghunath, Former Foreign Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, and His Excellency Mr. Shalar Geldynazarov, Amb. of Turkmenistan to India, for their guidance. It is a pleasure to say a special word of thanks to the ICAF team in New Delhi especially Dr. Beena and the Institute for International Relations Team in Ashgabat, particularly Mr. Jumamyrat Gurbangeldiyev, former Rector, the Institute of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkmenistan. Grateful for co-operation from Renu, Ramanshi, and Ramya.

We would like to thank Pentagon Press LLP for copy-editing and publishing the book in record time.

*New Delhi*  
*Ashgabat*  
*July 05, 2025*

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## *Chapter 1*

# **India-Turkmenistan Relations: Enhancing the Partnership**

*Ramakant Dwivedi*

The close friendly relations between India and Turkmenistan have their roots deep in history. India and Turkmenistan share historical and cultural linkages. Archaeological findings have revealed the said links between the Indus Valley Civilisation and Bronze Age settlements in southern Turkmenistan. New Delhi and Ashgabat have been maintaining contacts even before Turkmenistan's independence from the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in October 1991. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru had visited Turkmenistan in June 1955 when it was part of the erstwhile USSR. India recognised Turkmenistan's independence in December 1991, with formal diplomatic relations were established in April 1992. This year marks the 33rd anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between both countries. Turkmenistan's independence has led to the expansion and strengthening of bilateral ties between New Delhi and Ashgabat in the political, economic, and cultural spheres. The dialogue between India and Turkmenistan has been regular and mutually beneficial. High-level exchanges have indeed set the tempo to chart out the scope and direction of co-operation and have also laid the foundation for understanding of each other's interests and core concerns. Both countries subscribe to common principles of inter-state conduct, peaceful settlement of all differences and rejection of extremism of all forms as well as the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. There is an abiding sense of an intrinsic affinity between India and Turkmenistan. It is this affinity which has been the driving force of the multidimensional exchanges between New Delhi and Ashgabat over the centuries—cultural

and spiritual, as well as commercial and in human movement and contact. Our mutual affinity has made it possible for the extended neighbourhood idea to become a reality. Cultural ties constitute an important pillar of our bilateral relationship. It is rather difficult to separate the past from the present while discussing Indo-Turkmen cultural ties. The past feeds and enriches the present and provides the ambience for the warm relations that exist between the two countries.

We are celebrating 300 years of the rich culture of Turkmenistan and the enduring power of the poetry of Magtymguly Pyragy, National Poet of Turkmenistan, this year. The poetry of Magtymguly Pyragy has become part of Turkmen identity and offers a unique window into the history that has shaped Turkmenistan and the wider region. Thanks to HE Mr Geldynazarov and his team in India for bringing us the work of Magtymguly Pyragy and the samples of the cultural heritage of Turkmenistan. More than any other literary form, poetry has the potential to distil the essence of our collective aspirations of peace and dignity for all. Whether describing deeply personal experiences or bearing witness to historical, political, and social change, poetry conveys shared sentiments and values, the need for understanding and tolerance. These are timeless messages, transcending generations and national boundaries. As such, the poetry of Magtymguly Pyragy is a tool for dialogue and part of an ongoing dialogue between India and Turkmenistan. Magtymguly Pyragy, National Poet of Turkmenistan, message that has two qualities that it is relevant even today and applicable universally. Let's celebrate and cherish the values in the Poetry of Magtymguly Pyragy, National Poet of Turkmenistan and move forward in a positive manner for more happier, secure, and developed world. I hope that the readers of our two friendly countries and others will find the poetry of Magtymguly Pyragy interesting and useful in an age torn with conflict, war, and tension.

Turkmenistan, led by the farsighted leadership of President Serdar Berdimuhamedov, has been contributing in building a more secure and co-operative international order based on the principle of Positive Neutrality. This policy, "Resolution on the Permanent Neutrality of Turkmenistan", was supported and approved at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) by 185 member states on December 12, 1995. This underscores the peaceful foreign policy of Turkmenistan. Neutral Turkmenistan was declared to follow the obligations of being positively

neutral by not joining any military or political block. Thus, building harmonious and peaceful relations with its neighbours and world at large, promoting development through close co-operation and non-interference in other states matters. India respects this choice, which has without question become yet further confirmation of Turkmenistan's desire to build international relations based on the principles of good-neighbourliness, equal rights and respect for each other's interests. Turkmenistan's neutral status contributes to the security and stability of Central Asia. The past three decades have brought a lot of positive experiences in co-operation between New Delhi and Ashgabat within the framework of bilateral co-operation, the United Nations and other international organisations. This multifaceted co-operation between India and Turkmenistan needs to be enhanced.

Energy security is paramount for a developing country like India, which has begun to grow at an accelerated pace. India's energy consumption is likely to grow. Turkmenistan could provide a modicum of energy security to India. In this regard, the issue of the transport corridor assumes significance. If the connectivity issue is resolved between South and Central Asia, it would be a win-win situation for the countries in both the regions.

In the final analysis, one can say that the goodwill existing between two countries needs to be translated into substantive economic, commercial, and investment linkages. Enhancing the economic engagement may be a priority of both the governments. India and Turkmenistan have maintained active co-operation at the multilateral fora, particularly the United Nations.

## Chapter 2

# Services of Muhammad Bayram Khan on the Pages of Turkmen Diplomacy in India

*Jumamyrat Gurbangeldiyev*

Historian J. Hatamov, who has written number of articles about the historical traces of Turkmens in India, highlighting the historical services of Bayram Khan rightly points out: “Often, a lot is written about the rulers, but their close aides who carried out great services in their name are often forgotten. However, history was not silent about Bayram Khan Turkmen. It is impossible to talk about the Great Mughal Empire in India without Bayram Khan Turkmen,” he said. Therefore, we consider it necessary to underline the importance of this personality.

Muhammed Bayram Khan Turkmen was one of the great historical figures who left a worthy mark in the history of statehood and diplomacy of the Turkmen people. Bayram Khan was a Turkmen commander, famous poet, diplomat who ruled the Great Mughal Empire on behalf of Shah Akbar in 1556–1561 and received the title of Khan of Khans. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, the National Leader of the Turkmen people and Chairman of the Halk Maslahaty of Turkmenistan underlying: “The services of Khan of Khans Bayram Khan and his son Abdyrahim Khan, who were from Garagoyunly Turkmen, are limitless in the development and prosperity of the Great Mughal Empire” highly appreciates Bayram Khan [p. 4, 5]. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in his book “Turkmenistan —Home of Neutrality” speaking about life path of Muhammed Bayram Khan Turkmen notes: “Bayram Khan Turkmen’s wisdom and resourcefulness influenced the reconciliation of Humayun, the ruler of the Great Mughal state, with his brothers” [p. 3, 23].

When Bayram Khan was young, he first served the Safavid ruler Shah Ismail Hatay, and from the age of 16, he began to serve the Mughal kings. According to the information provided by Abul Fazl Allami, the personal aide of Akbar Shah, Bayram Khan was a 16-year-old boy when he began serving under Humayun. Ram Kishore Pandey writes in his book “Life and achievements of Muhammad Bayram Khan Turkmen” that Bayram Khan was brought to the Mughal army by Babur, who appointed him as the personal bodyguard of his successor Prince Humayun [19, p. 172].

Babur’s confidence in Bayram Khan was not out of place. Because he was a descendant of Gara Muhammed Durmush, who played a major role in the social and political life of northwestern Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Iraq, and Southern Turkiye in the XIV-XV centuries and founded Garagoyunly Turkmen state. Bayram Khan’s grandfather, Aly Shukur Beg, was known as a noble man who ruled over the whole Hemedan, Kurdistan and Dinavar in the years 1400–1450 [19, pp. 172–173]. Bayram Khan’s maternal grandfather, Shiraly Beg, served in the palace of Sultan Huseyin Baykara (1471–1506), who was governor of Khyrat [20, pp. 10–11].

In 1504, when Zahyreddin Muhammad Babur entered Afghanistan with his army, Ali Shukur Beg’s eldest son, Yar Ali Beg, became one of his close aides and he supported the ruler in properly resolving regional issues. After some time, Babur appointed him governor of Ghazna. Not long after, Yar Ali Beg died, and his son Seyif Ali Beg (Bayram Khan’s father) took over the position of Governor of Ghazna.

Thus, Garagoyunly Baharly Turkmens got closer to the Mughal king Babur. This closeness was not limited only to service relations; even during the last few years, kinship ties were formed between them [19, p. 173]. These historical facts clearly explain the reason why Babur Khan made Bayram Khan his son’s bodyguard. Babur’s saying to his son Humayun: “If Allah had not given me a son like you, then I would have taken Bayram Beg as a son” shows that he valued Bayram Khan a lot [7].

In 1530, after the death of Zahyreddin Muhammed Babyr (Babyr’s mother was a princess from the Akgoyunly Turkmen dynasty), and his son Humayun became the king, Bayram Khan’s influence and reputation increased rapidly. He became one of Humayun’s closest associates and advisers. Abul Fazl Allami, who left many memories about this, writes in his work “Ayin-i Akbari”: “He was a highly skilled commander who managed to create a well-disciplined army of the Mughal state and teach

the soldiers the fine art of military training... Bayram Khan was Humayun's the most loyal companion" [19, p. 173].

In 1535, Bayram Khan, through negotiations on the instruction of Humayun, persuaded Bahadır Shah, who was ready to go to war, to make an agreement. This victory was one of the first independent diplomatic victories of Muhammad Bayram Khan [8, p. 186].

When in 1539, Shershah Suri, an Afghan commander, rebelled and conquered Delhi, Bayram Khan tried to save Humayun and was taken prisoner. He escaped from captivity and returned to Humayun after two years [18, pp. 30–31]. Sher Khan defeated Humayun in two battles and drove him out of Delhi. He began to rule the country under the name Sher Shah [21, p. 83]. Thus, Humayun was deprived of ruling India for 15 years from 1540–1555.

The Great Mughal state, weakened during Humayun's reign, was almost restored with Bayram Khan's ability and resourcefulness. He needed a strong ally to back him up on this issue. Bayram Khan chose the Safavid state as his ally, taking into account his maternal kinship with the Turkmens. In order to gain the support of the Safavid ruler Tahmasp Shah (1524–1578), Bayram Khan successfully arranged Humayun's visit to Khorasan in 1543 with his diplomatic skills.

Bayram Khan plays a role worthy of his title of "high ambassador" in Humayun's meetings with local governors in Iranian cities such as Sistan, Herat, and Mashat. Even based on his acquaintance with the local rulers, he managed to create all the necessary conditions for the Mughal emperor to be welcomed here with respect and honour. Thus, Bayram Khan ensures the safe passage of Humayun on his way to the meeting with the Iranian King Tahmasp I.

Knowing Bayram Khan's respect in Iran, Humayun instructed him to organise meetings and negotiations with the Iranian side and sends him to the royal palace as his ambassador [19, p.174].

The first meeting between Muhammad Bayram Khan and Tahmasp Shah took place in May 1544 in the city of Ghazvin. The second meeting was very important for Muhammad Bayram Khan, Muhammad Humayun Shah, and Tahmasp Shah. The meeting took place on August 16–17, 1544 in the summer palace of Tahmasp Shah. Bayram Khan managed to convince Shah Humayun that it was necessary to accept some of the

conditions imposed by Shah Tahmasp. As a result of Bayram Khan's skillful diplomatic actions, the Mughal-Safavid agreement was achieved [5, p.100].

Another historical fact should be noted here. Bayram Khan, who was brought up in the Persian army in his youth and was adept at military situations, enjoyed special respect in the Safavid palace. It is not without reason that the Iranian King Tahmasp II proposed Bayram Khan to be the ruler of Diyarbakir and Azerbaijan. But Bayram Khan did not accept this offer, he says that he only "first serves Mughals, and then Allah" [18, p. 31].

About this successful diplomatic mission of Bairam Khan Turkmen, Hasan Ali Beg Munshi Debi Prashad, his eleventh descendant, writes in the preface of the work "Hanhanannama": "There were many people who contributed to the administration of the Mughal state, but Khan of Khans Bayram Khan and his family gave particularly special services. This famous family's connection with the Mughal state continued for several generations. The pages of history bear witness to their qualities in army command, science, friendship, and patronage. In the Mughal state, there were many people who distinguished themselves by their ability and bravery. But no one else enjoyed such glory and honour as Bayram Khan and Abdirahim Khan" [7].

According to the information given by the authors of many historical works, including the medieval historian Perishde, the Iranian King Tahmasp during the meeting with Bayram Khan demanded that he shave his hair like the Shiites and put on his head a headdress or a specially prepared crown worn by the Shiites. Since Bayram Khan was originally from the Shiite branch of Muslims, he would have accepted the offer without hesitation. But he turned to King Tahmasp and said that "he was under the service of another sultan."

Meetings between the two rulers were not successful immediately, and it was only thanks to Bayram Khan's tireless efforts and skillful negotiation that the sides were able to reach an agreement.

At the first meeting, Tahmasp I repeats the offer he made to Bayram Khan to Humayun and asks him to wear the Shiite headdress in front of the court officials. The Sunni leader Humayun resented this and considered it a "self-defamation". But Bayram Khan calmed him down

and explained that he should deal with this situation with patience and prudence, because the future fate of the Mughal Empire was closely related to the outcome of the negotiations in this palace. Following Bayram Khan's advice, Humayun behaved very thoughtfully in the consecutive meetings, and taking the Shiite headdress presented to him, addressed Tahmasp and said: "Only winners deserve to wear this crown. At present I am a defeated soldier in battle, and if by Your help in the future I return to my country victorious and deserve to wear this crown received from Your gracious hand, I would consider myself the happiest person."

These words of Humayun decided the further fate of the Mughal kingdom [19, p.175].

Among the conditions of the agreement reached as a result of the negotiations, it was decided to give the city of Kandahar to the Safavids, to announce that Humayun Shah was converting to the Shiite branch, and to marry the daughter of Shah Tahmasp's sister and open kinship relations with the Safavids. In return for these conditions, Shah Tahmasp promised Humayun to give 12 thousand cavalry, 20 thousand gold coins, and other things necessary for war. At first Humayun did not appreciate Bayram Khan's great diplomatic victory, but later he thanked him. In this historical event, Bayram was not only distinguished by his sharp political mind, but also proved his loyalty to friendship, patience, and bravery. Otherwise, Shah Tahmasp offered him to stay in the palace as grand vezir [14, p. 225].

Bayram Khan, who secured the diplomatic support of the first Safavids, raised an army in Afghanistan, commanded a combined Safavid-Mughal army, and returned Delhi to the Great Mughals in 1555. Thus, Bayram Khan's political-diplomatic and military efforts to restore this empire were limitless [20, p. 32]. For this service, by the joint decree of Tahmasp Khan and Humayun, Bayram Khan was given the high title "Khan Khanan", that is, "Khan of Khans". Historian O. Gundogdiyev writes that there was even an idea to declare Bayram Khan the elder of all Turkmen tribes [7].

During his period as Governor of Gandahar, Humayun, for various reasons, visited Bayram Khan to test his loyalty to him, and was fully convinced of his loyalty. After that, he explained the reason for coming to Gandagar to Bayram Khan, and as a sign of his increased respect for him, he gives him the title of "*Yar vepadar*" (Faithful friend) [19, p. 177].

Akbar was born in 1542 when Humayun was in exile. Humayun recognised Bayram Khan Turkmen's bravery and wisdom and appointed him as a tutor-father to his son Akbar. Bayram Khan Turkmen was a teacher who gave Akbar both military training and scientific education. Akbar was a 14-year-old teenager when he ascended the throne. Until he reached maturity, Bayram Khan Turkmen ruled the Mughal state on behalf of Akbar in 1556–1561 as Akbar's tutor-father.

Akbar called Bayram Khan as Khanbaba (Khan grandfather) [7]. Most of the historical works appreciate this service of Bayram Khan and called him "Akbar's brain". The words of Pandey, "The young Mughal King was an immature boy of thirteen and had no idea of war strategy. He always followed the advice of Khanbaba (Bayram Khan)" testifies to this [19, p. 176].

It is true that Babur laid the foundation of the state, but Akbar was the king who strengthened it, cleared it of internal enemies, established equal relations with foreign countries, and tried to eliminate the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India. Akbar succeeded in instilling in the minds of his people that they should look at the country as a single Motherland, regardless of their nationality. Of course, the service of Bayram Khan Turkmen, his tutor-father, was great in Akbar's achievement of great mastery in the art of state administration. Bayram Khan's establishment of kinship with the royal family he served speaks of his skillful use of the subtle magic of marital diplomacy. In 1557, he married Selim Soltan Begum, grandson of Babur (she was Akbar's sister), and established a relationship with the ruling family [15, p. 26]. Humayun himself married Bayram Khan's sister Mahi Çiçek (Aygul) Beg in 1456. Bayram Khan managed to settle Humayun's disputes with his brothers regarding the throne.

Bayram Khan during the reign of Akbar contributed to the establishment of peace protection as a fundamental principle in its foreign policy of the Great Mughal State. During the reign of Muhammad Akbar, "Peace for all!" policy has been announced. The most famous scientists of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews gathered in his palace. These principles also extended to the state's foreign policy. Akbar Uzin Hasan, a descendant of the Akgoyunly Turkmen, maintained friendly relations with Safavid King Abbas, Indian khan-begs and the peoples living in Central Asia [9, p. 58].

Indian historians Jawahar Aftapchi, Bayezit Bayat, Sukumar Ray, Abdylbaky Nehawendi, Ram Kishore Pandey, Kewal Ram, Munshi Debi Prashat, and others reveal in the example of valuable information that Bayram Khan's services reached a decisive level in the establishment, strengthening, and transformation of the Mughal state, as well as its restoration [17, p.196].

The policy of Mohammad Bayram Khan, the grand vezir of the Mughal Empire, to solve the issues arising in interstate relations by a peaceful way without using force wherever possible, becomes the main principle of this state. As the National Leader of the Turkmen people Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov notes: "Bayram Khan, the great son of the Turkmen people, was equally successful in military and state affairs, but he used to say that "compared to the art of peaceful and united life, the art of winning is nothing" [1, p. 44]. Thus, Bayram Khan emphasised that the use of force is the last resort, and first of all, it is necessary to find ways to solve all issues in a peaceful way [5, p.100]. Our Hero Arkadag in his book "Mertler Watany beýgeldýär" emphasises the following lines taken from the work "Life and Achievements of Muhammad Bayram Khan Turkmen" by Delhi University Professor Ram Kishore Pandey: "None of the other commanders could compete with Bayram Khan in bravery, state management skills, science, in good knowledge of literature, and in battle experience, because he was not Mughal, he was Turkmen...". The real Turkmen brave man fully corresponds to such description" [2, p. 228].

Literary scholar R. Kurenov emphasised in his dissertation work entitled "Textological analysis of Zahiruddin Muhammed Babir's Diwan" that "The service of the great statesman Muhammad Bayram Khan Turkmen is great in the comprehensive development of the Great Mughal Empire, which left an indelible mark in world history, in becoming Zahiruddin Muhammed Babir a just king, a master poet, and a famous historian. Bayram Khan Turkmen's life was devoted almost entirely to the establishment, development and strengthening of the Mughal kingdom. Bayram Khan was a commander in his time with skillful use of the sword. He was a civil servant with high modesty, intelligence, tolerance, and patience. Bayram Khan Turkmen hated bad behaviour such as treachery, dishonesty, hypocrisy, lying" [12], [13, 21 p.].

The medieval historian Badauni said about Bayram Khan: "Bayram Khan excelled in generosity, honesty, and kindness." Akbar Shah, who

addressed him as “Khan Baba”, mentioned Bayram Khan in one of his letters and said: “Remember, in Turkish societies, it is known to the whole world that there is no one who is disloyal!”

As the historian O. Gundogdiev rightly pointed out, “Bayram Khan was a great Turkmen poet, statesman, diplomat, and a glorious commander.” Bayram Khan was a person who made a significant contribution to building a strong bridge of friendship between the Indian and Turkmen peoples [16, p.129]. During the years of living far from his Motherland and serving the people, Bayram Khan expressed his feelings and homesickness for his Fatherland in his poems. At the same time, he had a keen eye for writing diplomatic documents related to international affairs. There is a sound reason to say that his peaceful policy in the region yielded appropriate results [6, p.135].

As a tribute to this great son of the Turkmen people, there is a “Turkmen Gate” in Delhi.

In its friendly relations, Turkmenistan and India highly value the services rendered by Bayram Khan, a historical figure who has common value in the history of the countries. In 2000, the 500th anniversary of Bayram Khan Turkmen, source of a joint pride of the two peoples, was celebrated in India and Turkmenistan. In 2009, an international scientific conference entitled “Bayram Khan and the Mughal Empire” was held in Turkmenistan. In one of the parks along Magtymguly Avenue in Ashgabat, there is a monumental statue dedicated to Bayram Khan by the sculptor Mommy Seyitmyradov [7].

The great Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore’s words: “India is a mother. He has two sons, one of them is Indian and the other is Turkmen people” is a clear expression of Turkmen-Indian friendship.

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## *Chapter 3*

# **About the History of Relations between Turkmenistan and India**

*Chinar Rustamova*

Every nation has its own past, its own history. This history has been formed over many years, it becomes a living witness to many events and stages in the lives of historical figures.

Society cannot exist without history, while society itself cannot be considered in isolation from history. Just as humanity continues its lineage, carrying noble traditions through the life and work of its sons and daughters, history and the past are constantly passed on from one generation to another, from one era to another.

Society, the life and work of generations, as well as politics may change, but history remains unchanged. It will not change, it will describe the events of each period and the actions of individuals as they actually happened. Therefore, if you want to study the modern life of any nation, first you must turn to its past and history.

The history of the Turkmen people goes back to ancient times. This story is relevant not only to Turkmen land, but also beyond its borders. Perhaps this is the earliest history that has formed and taken root over most of the earth's surface. It is for this reason that, after Turkmenistan gained independence, the voices of our compatriots, separated from their ancestral lands, began to be heard from all over the world: "I am a Turkmen, my historical homeland is Turkmenistan!"

In the first years of independence, the issue of in-depth study of ancient history and the past of the Turkmen people became one of the main objectives of state policy. First of all, a special commission was created,

which included experienced specialists and experts from the relevant institutes of the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan, to study and truthfully present the history of the Turkmen people. The main task of this commission was to carefully study all historical sources and information related to the rich past of the Turkmen people, preserved in national libraries, museums, and cultural centres of Turkmenistan and abroad, in order to holistically reveal this ancient history.

In June 2005, a scientific delegation made a working visit to the Republic of India for the first time. During its course, Turkmen scientists carried out enormous research and search work in the State National Museum of India, libraries in the cities of Delhi, Rampur, and Hyderabad, and 38 handwritten books about the history of the Turkmens, which had taken their rightful place in the annals of this country, were discovered preserved in them. Based on the data collected as a result of the research of the scientific group, many books have been written and presented to the attention of readers about the life and work of outstanding Turkmen personalities who lived in different periods in the region and in the countries of the world. The results of the scientific expedition revealed rich sources of famous national libraries and scientific and educational centres of India, previously unpublished historical information and scientific resources related to the early and medieval history of Turkmen-Indian relations.

Truly, Turkmenistan and India have close ties of common history and civilisation. As is known, the Dzheitun culture and the Anau culture, which originated on the territory of ancient Turkmenistan, such powerful states as Ancient Parthia, Margiana, and Konaurgench, which not only crowned the history of the Turkmen people, but also played an important role in the development of world civilisation, are flourishing centres of human culture. Located at the central crossroads of the Great Silk Road, they made a significant contribution to strengthening ties between such developed countries as India, China, Iran, Afghanistan, Byzantium, Mesopotamia, and Rome.

Information about this is presented in detail in the two-volume book of the National Leader of the Turkmen people Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov “Turkmenistan—the heart of the Great Silk Road”.

At the same time, in the works of Russian historians M.E. Massona, V.I. Sarianidi, Ch.B. Lurina, B.A. Krachkovskaya, A. Yakubovsky, B.B.

Minorsky, Turkmen scientists Y. Atagarryev, O. Gundogdyev, A. Gubaev and others provide valuable information about the political, economic and cultural ties of states located on the territory of Turkmenistan with neighbouring and distant countries, including India, in the early and middle century. Back in the III-II centuries BC, the Harappan civilisation and the Mohenjo-Daro civilisation flourished in the territories of modern Afghanistan, Pakistan, and north-western India. During this period, the ancient cities of Mohenjo-Daro, Mehrgarh, Bhiranna, Ganveribal, Dholavira, and Kalibangan, located in the Rajasthan region of India, maintained close relationships with such well-known agricultural centres of Central Asia at that time as the Jaitun and Anau cultures.

Agricultural and livestock products grown in Turkmenistan, mainly wheat, vegetables and melons, and ceramic dishes were sent and sold in the regions of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. As Russian Archaeologist A. Semenenko noted, copper beads found on the territory of ancient Mehrgarh dating back to the Neolithic period (before 7000 BC) were similar to artifacts of this type made in the lands of Jaitun 6000 BC. Semenenko also points out that the cowrie fish, which lived in the Indian Ocean and was found in Jaitun, Mehrgarh, and Jaitun, had the same burial traditions, the same architectural methods and the same flints used for cooking, which confirms the existence of connections between India and the Jaitun culture during the Neolithic period.

In turn, things and jewellery made of ivory, wood and copper, as well as other goods imported from India, became widespread in Southern Turkmenistan. Along with trade exchanges, cultural relations continued between these two states, located in different geographical zones. Historically valuable information about this is provided by the scientific works of famous Indian Archaeologists Rai Bahadir Daya Ram Sahni, Rahal Das Banerjee, and their American colleague Gregory Possel, who conducted the first excavations of the monuments of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro in 1921–1922.

The connection of the Harappan civilisation with the states of Central Asia has a positive effect on the development of the economy and culture of Southern Turkmenistan. In the 60s of the last centuries, as a result of archaeological research carried out by Academician Masson, it was established that there was an overland trade route connecting the ancient cities of Merv, Saragt, Nisa, with Harappa.

According to scientists, this overland trade route from Harappa passed through what is now the Northern Baluchistan province of Pakistan and the Afghan trading centre of Shortugay on the left bank of the Amu Darya and returned to Turkmenistan. Along this route, goods produced in Southern Turkmenistan were transported to Harappan markets in caravans made up of local Bactrian camels.

In 1984, during archaeological excavations in the historical territory of Harappa, the bones of two camels were found. Scientists have confirmed that similar bones of a Bactrian camel were found during excavations of historical buildings in Southern Turkmenistan and have suggested, based on the results of careful scientific research, that camels were more widely used in trade between ancient Merv, the Jaitun and Anau cultures and the Harappan civilisation, which could easily overcome these long and difficult routes.

As is known, numerous historical finds have been discovered confirming the continued close connection between the Harappan and Margiana civilisations. It is obvious that the ancient Indian civilisation of Harappa radically influenced the establishment of trade relations with the Altyndepe culture, located in Southern Turkmenistan. Individual impressions made of iron and precious stones discovered in Altyndepe can be evidence of this.

In this regard, the similarity of various types of ivory tools (hair combs, knife handles, pins) found during archaeological excavations on the territory of Margiana with finds in historical monuments of the ancient Indus Valley is noteworthy. The opinion is put forward that ivory was brought to Margiana from India in an unprocessed form, and that local craftsmen created the above-mentioned labour phenomena from it.

That this was indeed the case is evidenced by excavations and research work carried out by the Russian scientist Koshelenko and the American archaeologist R. Pumpelly within the framework of the Bactrio-Margiana archaeological complex, as well as various equipment found during excavations carried out by archaeologists Victor Sarianidi and Vadim Masson in 1950–1990 in five ancient monuments of Margiana of the early period, such as, the fortress of Erk-Gala, Gyaur-Gala, and Gonur-Gala.

Moreover, the Harappan seals with the image of an elephant found as a result of these archaeological studies create the pre-requisites for

asserting that the early urban civilisation of Southern Turkmenistan was closely connected with Harappa, northern Afghanistan and north-southern Iran. Asko Parpola, a Finnish scientist, Professor at the University of Helsinki, who studies ancient written monuments of the Indus Valley, confirms that these seals belong to the Harappan civilisation.

Currently, as a result of excavations and continuous scientific research by orientalists, it has been scientifically and historically established that the connections between the Mergarh culture and Margiana that arose in the territory of north-western India in the 7th–3rd centuries BC (Neolithic era) after the Harappan civilisation and Margiana continue. In the book of Indian writer Radha Raina “India and Turkmenistan: Ancient kinship”, provides interesting information about this, revealing the typological similarity of places belonging to the Mergarh culture and the Jaitun culture.

This scientific hypothesis is also put forward by Russian Archaeologists V. Sarianidi and V. Masson. In their scientific works, they also point out the similarity of copper beads found in the ancient monument complexes of Mehrgarh and Jaitun, which confirms the existence of developed trade relations between the Indus and Jaitun cultures during the Neolithic period.

According to historical data, trade and cultural ties continued between India and the Kushan state, which arose and flourished on the territory of Afghanistan in the 1st-4th centuries AD. The reign of the Indian King Kanishka (78–123 AD) was considered to be the prosperous of the Kushan state. During this period, the territory of the Kushan Empire expanded from India to the Aral Sea and included the south-eastern and northern regions of Turkmenistan, as well as the upper and middle reaches of the Amu Darya River.

In this regard, the National Leader of the Turkmen people Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in his book “Turkmenistan—the heart of the Great Silk Road” noted: “On the territory of Turkmenistan in ancient times, as in the Middle Ages, through Amul, Merv, Sarahs, Abiverd, Nisa, Dehistan, from China to the Middle East, through Kunyaurgench, important trade routes passed from the countries of the Middle East to Russia, from Zemm (the city of Kerki) to India”.

This is evidenced by coins, ceramics, and statues belonging to the cultural layers, material and spiritual culture of the Kushan period,

discovered as a result of archaeological excavations in historical monuments located on the territory of the Lebap velayat. For example, the works of the Tatar archaeologist Albert Burkhanov provide valuable information that the famous city of Amul on the left bank of the Amu Darya, located along the Great Silk Road, was one of the centres of ceramic production during the Kushan Kingdom. Caravans followed from this trade centre to India and the countries of Eastern Europe along land routes, and through Kunyaurgench to Khorezm and China. Amul was not only a transit city for goods, but also contributed to the development of interstate trade, supplying products produced by local artisans to the markets of other countries.

During this period, Buddhism, which originated in India, quickly spread to the territory of south-eastern Turkmenistan. This is evidenced by the discovery during archaeological excavations carried out on the territory of the Merv monument of the Gyaur-Gala fortress, a huge head of a Buddha statue and a Buddhist temple, as well as Kushan coins with images of Buddha and Shiva, considered Indian Gods. Early medieval Buddhist temples built on the territory of Ancient Merv can also serve as proof of this.

Mutual political and cultural ties between Turkmenistan and India began to be characterised by their stability in the 16th century. In 1526, the famous warrior Muhammad Zahiruddin Babur from the Teimur dynasty captured India and founded a unified Mughal Empire in its main part, as well as in the territories of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Babur was a ruler who paid special attention to the development of science, art, and culture. He attracted famous poets, theologians, artists, traders, and warriors from Central Asia, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, and even European Countries. It is worth noting that an indelible mark on state administration, internal and external political-economic and cultural life of the Great Mughals was left behind by brave warriors and wordsmiths, such as Bairam Khan Turkmen and his son Abdul Rahim Khan, who took their rightful place in centuries-old history India.

One of the scientists who bequeathed with us important information about the development of economic and cultural relations between Turkmenistan and India as well as the historical figures of that era, was Abul Fazl Mubarek Allami a close friend of Mughal Empire Akbar, his palace secretary, and a prominent historian of medieval India. He enjoyed

great respect and trust from the rulers of the Mughal Empire. He used to great respect and trust from the rulers of the Mughal Empire. That is why, unlike his contemporaries—historians like Badauni and Nihavandi, he had free access to important manuscripts, documents and other important sources stored in the Mughal palace libraries. He read, studied and mastered books and information written by Babur Khan and Humayun himself. He also became Akbar's closest friend for a long time and gained personal experience through direct involvement in political affairs conducted at the state level.

Abul Fazl—the author of the book “Akbarnama”. This historical work of his provides information about Bayram Khan Turkmen, Khanlar Khan Abdirahim Khan, the Turkmen commander Muhammad Guli Khan, who lived in India in the 16th century and made a great contribution to strengthening the military power of the Mughal Kingdom, Turkmen poets Khoja Huseyn Mervi, Yolguli Anisi.

## Chapter 4

# From the History of Turkmeno-Indian Relations

*Amangeldi Rahmanov*

Numerous historical facts convincingly prove that our ancestors, the Turkmen people, have always been faithful to such notions or principles as living in peace, harmony and friendship with other nations, developing sustainable equal and mutually beneficial relations with them in various spheres. That is why today the history of Turkmenistan's relations with many countries of the world has its roots in deep antiquity.

The history of Turkmen-Indian relations goes back many millennia. For example, ethnic and cultural contacts between the tribes that inhabited the present-day territories of North and North-West India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia date back to the 3rd to 5th millennia B.C. These ties reached special intensity in the Kushan era (1st century B.C.–1st century A.D.), when a number of regions of Central Asia and Hindustan were part of one political entity—the Kushan state, which stretched from Fergana to the Ganges.

With the advent of the so-called Muslim period in the history of the Indian Middle Ages since the 11th century, Indian-Middle Asian contacts received a new impetus. At that time, representatives of various professions moved from Central Asia to India. Indian, and Central Asian peoples were united for centuries by resistance to invaders, from whom they suffered equally. India was a refuge for Turkmens who were forced to leave their homeland because of oppression by various external forces.<sup>1</sup> And Turkmens paid for this friendship with selfless service: they brought new elements of military-feudal organisation of society, and a new stream in material and spiritual culture, enriching especially Indian philosophy,

poetry, music, architecture, etc. Thus, many of the Turkmen poets Muhammad Bayram Khan (1500–1561), Abdirahim Rakhimu (1556–1626), Murze Galib (1777–1869) stood at the origins of modern science and culture of India. Today, they are equally popular both in India and Turkmenistan.

The genetic ties of these Central Asian migrants contributed to the development of Indian-Middle Asian cultural, economic, and political relations. As a result, there was a reverse process of Indian culture's impact on Central Asia. This mutual influence, which began in the eleventh century, continued up to and including the nineteenth century.

Further development of India-Middle Asia ties was hindered by barriers erected as a result of the English colonial conquest of India that began in the middle of the 19th century, and from the second half of the 19th century—under the influence of the aggravated Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia and the Middle East.

With the formation of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic (TSSR) (1924) and India's independence (1947), a new page was opened in the development of centuries-old friendship between the Turkmen and Indian peoples. During the last decades, more precisely, during the Soviet period of Turkmen history (1917–1991), the Turkmen-Indian relations, based on the historical and spiritual closeness of the two peoples predetermined by the objective course of social development of mankind, have been steadily developing and acting as one of the important positive and stabilising factors of the political situation in Asia.

Since the mid-50s, Turkmenistan and India have developed state, parliamentary and ministerial relations, including foreign policy ties. In 1955, Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru visited Turkmenistan and his visit played a great role in strengthening friendship and mutual understanding, co-operation between the Turkmen and Indian people.

Indian diplomats also showed great interest in the life of the Turkmen people. One of the distinctive features of their trips to the republic in the 70-80s was their business nature. For example, the visit of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of India to the USSR T.N. Kaul (1988) contributed to the establishment of direct ties between a number of enterprises of the Turkmen SSR and Indian firms.

In the Soviet Union, the twinning movement (links between local governments of different countries) enjoyed well-deserved authority and active support. It had a wide range of opportunities, but its main activity was to deepen mutual understanding and build respect and trust between peoples.

In Turkmenistan, this form of co-operation began to emerge in the mid-50s, when Turkmenistan became twinned with the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The volume of direct ties between Turkmenistan and the Indian state of Tamil Nadu is evidenced by the following data: from 1955 to 1989, about 70 Indian delegations visited the TSSR and more than 50 delegations from Turkmenistan visited the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. About 70 delegations from India visited TSSR and more than 50 delegations from Turkmenistan visited this friendly country. At the request of Indian friends, various specialists—activists of the Turkmen branch of the Soviet-Indian Friendship Society—also traveled to the twinned state to deliver lectures, assist activists of the Indian-Soviet Cultural Society (ISCO), and help in studying the Turkmen language.<sup>2</sup>

Significant foreign policy work aimed at strengthening mutual understanding and trust between peoples was carried out by public organisations of the TSSR, through which thousands of people were involved in international relations. Since the 1950s, the role of trade union, youth and women's organisations in international relations has steadily increased. In 1988, for example, trade unions of Turkmenistan maintained ties with trade union centres of more than 80 countries of the world.<sup>3</sup> Fruitful contacts were also established with trade unions of India, which is convincingly proved by the following example: in 1989, Ashgabat hosted a Soviet-Indian meeting under the slogan "For friendship between the workers of the USSR and India". During this meeting, not only a scientific and practical seminar was held, but also events with the participation of sectoral trade union committees, meetings and talks of Indian guests in the collectives of enterprises.

The women's organisation of Turkmenistan made a significant contribution to the International Year of Women (1975) proclaimed by the United Nations. In that connection, numerous events were held in Turkmenistan with the participation of delegations of women from foreign countries, which provided an opportunity for in-depth and comprehensive discussion of the status of women and, most importantly, their relationship

to the main problems of contemporary international life. The women's delegation of Turkmenistan, which also visited India, was received by the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi.<sup>4</sup>

The Turkmen Society for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (TurkmODKSZS), established in 1958, played an important role in familiarising the public of foreign countries with the history, culture and life of the Soviet people and the workers of the TSSR and the foreign policy of the Soviet State, as well as in familiarising the public of Turkmenistan with the life of the peoples of foreign countries. While in 1958 the Turkmen Society for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries had contacts with individual institutions in nine countries, in 1988 it maintained friendly relations with 136 organisations in 80 countries of the world.

Such forms of inter-relationships as exchange of delegations, printed materials, exhibitions, films, etc. have found practical application in the work of the TurkmODKSZS. In 1973–1980, the TurkmODKSZS received about 300 delegations. In 1973–1980, Turkmenistan received about 300 delegations and specialised tourist groups from foreign countries. In turn, in 1987–1988 alone, about 200 activists of the Society visited foreign countries. In 1966–1972, TurkmODKSZS sent to foreign countries 900 sets of photo exhibitions, 450 copies of films of the “Turkmenfilm” studio and other information materials.<sup>5</sup>

The republican branch of the Soviet Society for Friendship with India<sup>6</sup> actively worked to strengthen friendship and co-operation with the Indian public.

The Turkmen Committee for Solidarity of Asian and African Countries (TKSAA), the Turkmen Republican Committee for the Protection of Peace, the Red Crescent Society of the TSSR, creative unions of writers, journalists, composers, artists, cinematographers and other organisations contributed to the protection and strengthening of peace and the development of friendly relations between peoples, including the Indian people. The “Maksat” (Purpose) programme, for example, created in 1989 by the board of the TSSR Culture Fund, included more than 15 areas of international co-operation.

Since the late 50s – early 60s, the chemical and petrochemical industry began to develop rapidly in Turkmenistan, which led to the expansion of

the range of export supplies of sulphuric acid, potassium iodide, sodium sulphate, sulphur, petroleum products, etc. The country's industry developed at an accelerated pace. Later on, industry, represented by more than 80 modern industries, developed at an accelerated pace in the republic. Occupying 2.1% of the territory and having 1% of the population of the USSR, Turkmenistan during this period gave 16.2% of the all-union gas production and 1.3% of oil, more than 40% of production of sodium sulfate, bentonite, 1.5% of vegetable oil, 12.6% of raw cotton, 3.5% of wool, 20% of karakul flakes, 10% of cocoons of mulberry silkworms, etc.<sup>7</sup>

In the first half of the 1980s, 60 enterprises of Turkmenistan exported 62 types of products to 60 countries of the world.<sup>8</sup>

Trade, economic, scientific and technical co-operation of Turkmenistan with India was also developing. During this period, fans-units of "Ashneftemash" plant for water cooling at large metallurgical, chemical, mining, and other enterprises were successfully used in India. TSSR enterprises supplied equipment, spare parts and other products for construction of a number of fuel-mining enterprises, organisation of state mechanised farms in India.<sup>9</sup>

Participating in the economic and scientific and technical assistance of the USSR to India, Turkmenistan also systematically sent to this friendly country its geologists, oilmen and railway transport workers. Turkmenistan's specialists participated in the construction of oil refineries in Barauni (Bihar), Koyami (Gujarat), Mathura (Uttar Pradesh); assembled diesel locomotives and trained Indian railroad workers. The first products of the Bhilai Metallurgical Combine were carried by a train of M. Rudenko, a machinist of the Ashgabat branch of the railroad.<sup>10</sup>

The experience of economic construction in Turkmenistan was also of great importance for India. For example, the delegation of Indian specialists headed by Dr. K.S. Rajagopalon, the head of the Centre for Design of Water Management Facilities, who was in Turkmenistan in June 1983, spent 14 days getting acquainted with the introduction of biological method of protection of irrigation and drainage systems from overgrowing. K.S. Rajagopalon stated, "During the trip we received necessary information related to the development and practical application of biological method of cleaning of irrigation and drainage systems from overgrowing. Application of this method in India will also be important

for solving the problem of providing the population with protein of animal origin”.

The culture, art and traditions of the Turkmen people, being a part of the entire world civilisation, occupied an important place in the structure of Turkmenistan’s international relations in general and its relations with India in particular. Decades and days of national cultures have taken an important place in the wide range of cultural events. They are attended by large collectives and performers, and the most representative displays of achievements in literature, music, fine arts and other forms of art are organised. The Days of Culture invariably turned into a major social and political event. Thus, during the Decade of Turkmen Culture in the state of Tamil Nadu (1970, India), the delegation took part in 20 mass meetings, and talks with the Indian public, attended by more than 10,000 people.<sup>11</sup>

In turn, the Decade of Indian Culture held in the TSSR in October 1968 was a significant event in strengthening friendly ties between the Indian and Turkmen peoples. Arjuna Arara, Secretary General of the National Council of the Indian-Soviet Cultural Society, headed the Indian delegation with a large group of Indian artists. Ambassador of the Republic of India to the USSR Kewal Singh visited Ashgabat. Meetings and talks with representatives of the workers of the republic during the days of the decade made an indelible impression on the guests. On his return to Moscow, K. Singh sent two letters to the Council of Ministers of the TSSR, in which he expressed gratitude to the Government of India and himself “for the excellent organisation of the Decade of Indian Culture in Turkmenistan, which was a vivid illustration of close and friendly relations between the two countries.”<sup>12</sup>

Turkmenistan has also widely celebrated the memorial and anniversary dates of the great Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore and other prominent Indian playwrights and musicians. These events, on the one hand, are evidence of the Turkmen people’s respect for the national customs, traditions, and culture of the Indian people and, on the other hand, contribute to a deeper acquaintance of the public with the literature and art of the Indian people and help them to comprehend the historical role of the work of the major cultural figures.

In turn, India also celebrated the anniversaries of outstanding cultural figures of Turkmenistan and its representatives participated in the celebrations held in our republic. Thus, in 1960 and in 1985 the literary

community abroad celebrated the 225th and 250th birth anniversaries of poet and thinker, humanist and patriot, founder of Turkmen literature Makhtumkuli Fraghi as a great holiday. Foreign writers expressed their admiration for Fraghi's poetry and noted the enduring significance of his work for all mankind.

Scientific ties with Turkmenistan and India were further developed. This was given a new impetus by the agreement signed in 1987 between the USSR and India.

Agreement on co-operation in the field of science and technology. The agreement between the USSR Academy of Sciences and the Indian National Academy envisaged co-operation in the field of desert development and desertification control. These topics of co-operation were co-ordinated on the Soviet side by the Desert Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the TSSR and on the Indian side by the Central Research Institute of the Arid Zone (Jorhpur). It was planned to show on the examples of Karakum (TSSR) and Thar (India) deserts the peculiarities of their formation and development, socio-economic pre-requisites influencing the development of desertification processes, the nature of manifestation of these processes and methods of combating them. At the meeting in Delhi (1988) of the heads of the Institute of Arid Zone of India and the Institute of Deserts of the TSSR Academy of Sciences the priority directions of co-operation on the desert problem were defined.

In 1957, the Central Scientific Library of the Academy of Sciences of the TSSR exchanged printed works and scientific information with almost 60 organisations of foreign countries, and in 1988—with more than 320 organisations of 39 countries. At the same time, when concluding agreements, it paid special attention to neighbouring countries, including India, explained by the fact that Turkmenistan is connected with these countries by its ancient history and culture, and this ensured in general a more dynamic development of co-operation.

Speaking of Turkmenistan's co-operation with India in the field of education, it is worth mentioning the direct contacts between the Turkmen State University named after commonly known as Magtymguly Turkmen State University. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the universities intensively exchanged delegations, experience of scientific and educational work, and periodicals. For example, at the invitation of Hyderabad University, academicians of the Academy of Sciences of the TSSR B. Palvanova

visited India twice (1966, 1972). The lectures delivered by our scientist on the Soviet way of development of backward peoples, the liberation of women of eastern nationalities, the development of university education in Turkmenistan<sup>13</sup> aroused great interest among teachers and students.

The ancient philosophers of the East regarded literature as a “science that teaches to live”, and art plays an important role in shaping the world outlook and satisfying the spiritual needs of the members of society.

In the second half of the 40s and 50s, a number of developing countries started translating the works of Turkmen writers into national languages. Thus, in 1949, the first edition of B. Kerbabaev’s novel “The Decisive Step” translated by Indian novelist Yashpal appeared in Lucknow (India). The novel was published twice in Hindi translation. This was explained by the fact that in the works of Turkmen poets and novelists the peoples of young states, including India, often saw the reflection of their own historical destinies, in some cases common folklore, soil.

The deep interest of the public of Turkmenistan in the ancient culture of Eastern countries, in particular, India, was vividly demonstrated by the translation of the Indian epic “Mahabharata” from Sanskrit into Russian by Academician of the Academy of Sciences of the TSSR B.L. Smirnov. Since 1955, translations of the epic have been published in Ashgabat in ten editions. The publication of the epic in Russian was considered by the Turkmen and Indian scientific and literary community as a significant event in the cultural life, a serious scientific achievement, a milestone in the history of inter-relations between the peoples of Turkmenistan and India.

In 1956, the writers of Turkmenistan as part of the delegation of the USSR Writers’ Union took part in the work of the “round table” of Asian writers held in Delhi on the initiative of Indian writers. The participants of the Delhi conference welcomed with approval the proposal of the Soviet delegation to hold the next conference in Tashkent.

Delegates and observers from 37 countries of Asia and Africa and 37 countries of Europe and America participated in the first conference of writers of Asian and African countries (Tashkent, 1958). The conference discussed creative issues and outlined ways to further strengthen solidarity and co-operation of writers in political and cultural life. The Turkmen

writers' organisation in Tashkent was represented by B. Kerbabaev, K. Seitliev, A. Kekilov, B. Seitakov.<sup>14</sup>

In the following years, the writers of the republic took an active part in conferences and meetings of writers of Asian and African countries, held in Tashkent, Cairo, Beirut, Delhi, Alma-Ata, Ulan Bator. "We, Soviet writers, said at one of the conferences of writers of Afro-Asian countries B. Kerbabaev, serve the people. I want the writers of the whole world, no matter what political views they hold, no matter what religion they profess, to jointly contribute to the strengthening of friendship of peoples, cultural progress, protection of peace in the world."<sup>15</sup>

In the 60s, the best stage masters of Turkmenistan performed for the public in India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Hungary. The equestrian-acrobatic ensemble "Jigits of sunny Turkmenistan."<sup>16</sup> carried the flag of Turkmenistan honourably through many countries of the world, including India.

In Turkmenistan, much attention was paid to the propaganda of the musical art of India; programmes about the musical culture of the Indian people and their music were often broadcast on the national radio and television. Works by composers of India, its folk songs and dances were included in the repertoire of professional and amateur groups of Turkmenistan.

Composers of Turkmenistan also created original works about India. For example, in 1972, composer R. Allayarov wrote an oratorio on the words of Indian humanist R. Tagore dedicated to the anti-colonial movement of the peoples of the East. In 1985 Ch. Nurymov composed the quartet "In Memory of Indira Gandhi". This composition—a stirring monologue of the Soviet artist about the fate of the people and the fate of the world—is a gift to the people of India. Already in January of the same year, in 1985, the work was performed in the House of Unions at a meeting of the Society of Soviet-Indian Friendship, and then at the Indian Embassy in Moscow. "It is incomprehensible," said Indian Ambassador Nurul Hasan, assessing the merits of this work, "Russian musicians played on European instruments, but the music of India sounded authentic". In the following years, this work was performed in India, the GDR, the USA, Italy, and Syria.<sup>17</sup>

One of the important spheres of co-operation in the field of art is cinematography. As early as in the 50s and 60s, Turkmen viewers got acquainted with a significant number of Indian films. In 1957, festivals and a week of Indian films were held in the country's cinemas, during which Turkmen viewers were able to familiarise themselves with the works of famous film directors and famous actors.

In the 40-80s, Turkmenistan produced many talented works of cinematography that were recognised not only in our country but also in foreign countries. These are the feature films "Dursun" and "Distant Bride" of the "Turkmenfilm" studio, which were awarded State Prizes of the USSR. The musical film comedy "Distant Bride" was successfully shown on the screens of 54 countries of the world, and the feature film "Daughter-in-law", which was awarded the State Prize of the USSR and honoured with 9 diplomas and awards of international festivals, was purchased by almost 90 countries of the world.<sup>18</sup>

An important role in the internationalisation of spiritual life was played by theatrical performances, represented in the republic by many plays of foreign classics and modern drama. Thus, the plays "Doch Ganga" staged at the Turkmen State Academic Drama Theater named after Mollanepes in the 50-80s enjoyed great success. The plays "The Daughter of Ganges" based on the novel by R. Tagore, "The White Lotus", "The White Lotus", and "The Gang of Ganges" were very successful. The plays "The Daughter of Ganges" based on the novel by R. Tagore, "White Lotus" based on the trilogy by the classic of Indian literature Shudrak, "Chandu's Adventure" based on the plots of Indian fairy tales, etc., staged on the stage of the Turkmen State Academic Drama Theater named after Mollanepes.

In the 50-70s, various exhibitions of India were also organised in Turkmenistan. Thus, in 1957, the State Museum of Fine Arts of the TSSR hosted an exhibition of Indian handicrafts. The exhibitions of folk applied art of India, which were held at enterprises and organisations of Ashgabat (1968, 1971), displayed about 400 exhibits, which were viewed by more than 50 thousand people. Numerous entries in the comment books testified to the fact that these exhibitions significantly expanded the visitors' knowledge of India.

The Soviet and Indian festivals dedicated to the two most important dates of the twentieth century: the 70th anniversary of the Great October

Revolution and the 40th anniversary of India's independence became a clear proof of the fact that the ties between the Soviet and Indian people, which have become a strong tradition, are reaching qualitatively new frontiers. Only in the first two days of the festival of India in Turkmenistan (September, 1987), about 40 thousand people visited the stadium "Kolkhozchi", where the Indian folk festival unfolded. Concerts of Indian artists held in other cities of the republic drew a large audience. Prominent cultural figures of the TSSR took part in the USSR festival in India, showed the Indian people all the best that we have in the field of culture and art.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, cultural co-operation between the TSSR and India during the period under review was constantly expanding and enriched with new forms. In the process of cultural contacts, there was mutual penetration and enrichment of national cultures, dissemination of cultural values of universal significance.

A qualitatively new stage in the development of political, trade, economic, cultural, and humanitarian relations between Turkmenistan and India opened after Turkmenistan gained its sacred independence in the fall of 1991 and the Turkmen people chose the principle of neutrality as the basis of their domestic and foreign policy.<sup>20</sup>

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## Chapter 5

# Significant Contribution of the Turkmen Scholar to Indology

*Ovezdurdy Muhammetberdiyev*

Today, when Turkmen-Indian relations have reached a new level, it is impossible to ignore the name of the outstanding Turkmen scientist, who left a deep mark on the history of national medicine not only as the founder of two research institutes—neurosurgery and neurology, but also as a mentor who trained dozens of his students in these fields of medical science—the name of Academician Boris Leonidovich Smirnov.



However, the special merit of the scientist is associated not so much with his contribution to national medicine, but with his titanic work dedicated to the translation of the epic “Mahabharata” into Russian—the

greatest literary monument of ancient India, an epic that took shape in the first millennium BC, and thereby making a huge contribution to Indology.

The Mahabharata, which appeared 2500 years ago, introducing the reader into the depth of the spiritual and social life of ancient India of that time, is one of the most valuable sources of information and knowledge about the history, philosophical, and religious views of the great friendly Indian people to us. The texts of the Mahabharata, possessing high artistic value, are considered rightfully one of the most outstanding epic works of humankind. (See: Philosophical texts of the Mahabharata. Ashgabat, "Ylym", 1977 (AS TSSR), p. 3.)

After his native Ukraine, where he was born into the family of a district doctor, and Saint Petersburg, where he studied (graduating from high school with a gold medal and the Military Medical Academy with honours), B.L. Smirnov found himself in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan. After the trenches of the First World War, where as a young surgeon he first pondered the nature of evil, after the Kiev Medical Institute, where he taught and was sentenced to execution for participating in a religious-philosophical club and giving lectures on telepathy, which was later replaced by a seven-year exile to Yoshkar-Ola....

Having found himself in Ashgabat in 1935, B.L. Smirnov began working as a teacher at the local medical institute, and his entire subsequent life was connected with this city. It was here that he became one of the leading neurosurgeons of the Soviet Union (which included the present independent Turkmenistan until 1991), having performed the first operation on the spinal disc, became a supporter of the foundation of institutes of neurology and neurosurgery, and introduced the foundations of scientific balneology.

During his years in Turkmenistan, under the guidance of Boris Leonidovich Smirnov, the staff of the Turkmen State Medical Institute successfully defended 15 candidate dissertations. They wrote over 70 scientific works on regional pathology, balneology, neurosurgery, pathological anatomy, anatomy of veins, and raised a whole galaxy of wonderful neurosurgeons. It was in Ashgabat that he was elected one of the first full members of the Turkmen Academy of Sciences. The scientist was able to combine brilliantly his laborious scientific and medical activity, which required a lot of effort and time, with the translation work on the Mahabharata. However, B.L. Smirnov began his work on the translations

of this monument of beliefs, philosophy and state wisdom of the ancient Indians, the sacred code of morals and customs that deeply entered the national consciousness of the modern Indian people, only after he was forced to retire due to a serious illness that accompanied him for many years. Despite being bedridden, the academician found time to work tirelessly on his main work, which later brought him well-deserved fame. We can say that it was precisely with this scientific feat, undoubtedly similar to the heroism displayed on the battlefield, that B.L. Smirnov erected a monument to himself.

From the point of view of translation technique, the translation of the Mahabharata by B.L. Smirnov is fundamentally different from all existing translations. It should be said that Boris Leonidovich came to his own version of the translation, refusing to squeeze the Indian epic into rhymed lines in the form of verse. The tireless translator found his own stylistic equivalent, and the Mahabharata sounded for the first time in Russian as a free unrhymed song, as a drawn-out ballad. Of its hundred thousand couplets, Smirnov translated twenty-three thousand, giving preference to the philosophical content of the epic. Thanks to this approach, B.L. Smirnov was able to penetrate into the inner spirit of the greatest monument created centuries ago by the ancestors of the Indian people, was recognised as the most truthful translator of this work, and single-handedly completed a work that was within the power of an entire institute.

The 23 thousand verses of the Mahabharata translated by B.L. Smirnov make up about a quarter of the epic. These are the most valuable texts in terms of philosophical and ethical content. Each volume of the epic, published in Ashgabat from 1955 to 1977, was accompanied by an introductory article, comments and a dictionary compiled by the Academician. Separate issues were published: articles by B.L. Smirnov "Sankhya and Yoga," "Essays on Vaishnavism."

Boris Leonidovich Smirnov also wrote a detailed work on yoga so that those who want to study this system in practice could avoid some very serious mistakes and not harm themselves. It is a pity that many people do not know this, because such literature is available and easy to read, unlike the translations of the Mahabharata by B.L. Smirnov or his articles on yoga, which have become rare. "As a doctor with almost half a century of experience", the Academician wrote in one of his prefaces "I take the

liberty of briefly outlining the practice of some yogic exercises, taking into account the points that are usually not indicated in translations.“

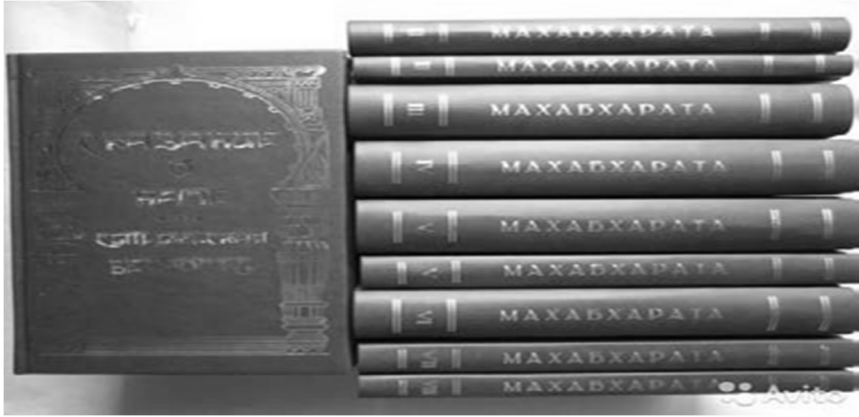
A doctor, philosopher, and linguist, B.L. Smirnov was a unique synthesis of the personality of a researcher, artist, and humanist, which allowed him to serve his life's calling without division, as he understood it. "...I have been working on this creation of the spirit for a quarter of a century, almost two and a half thousand years that have amazed people, calling them to the Himalayan heights of thought and heart," Boris Leonidovich later explained his adherence to the spiritual truth of the Indian epic.

In total, B.L. Smirnov translated ten out of eighteen books of the Mahabharata, including the most significant parts of the epic. A special place among them is occupied by the "Bhagavad Gita" that is one of the most revered books of the Indian people. It is a common saying that whoever knows the Gita knows the essence of the Upanishads. The "Bhagavad Gita" is a work in which, as in focus, all the lines of development of ancient Indian philosophy converge that set out in the "Vedas" and Upanishads.

This idea was expressed vividly in Jawaharlal Nehru's "Discovery of India", where he noted that the Gita's appeal to the Indian people is as great today as it was in ancient times, and that all the philosophical schools of Modern India turn to the Gita. To this day, the translations of the Mahabharata made by Boris Leonidovich Smirnov remain unsurpassed.

It should be emphasised that, largely thanks to the translations of B.L. Smirnov, the Mahabharata, in particular, the philosophical poem "Bhagavad Gita," the epic Sankhya, the philosophical treatise "Anugita," the poems "Nal" and "Marital Fidelity" became available to a wide circle of admirers of ancient Indian literature and philosophy, for Indologists.

The eight books of the Mahabharata published in the capital of Turkmenistan in the translation of the Turkmen scholar from Sanskrit, provided with introductory articles, comments, notes, explanatory dictionaries, bibliographic indexes, representing a separate completed monograph of independent scientific and artistic value, at one time turned Ashgabat into a real centre of Indology, caused a positive response among Sanskrit scholars and orientalists. Yu.N. Roerich, Head of the Department of Indology of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences



of the USSR, wrote: “Your work on the Bhagavad Gita and the great epic of India is a major contribution to Soviet Indology and has made a proper impression in India....” Numerous magazine reviews and newspaper articles noted the great services to science and the “greatest scientific conscientiousness” of Boris Leonidovich Smirnov.

Boris Leonidovich’s exceptional contributions to science and culture were duly recognised through numerous government awards, including the prestigious title of Honoured Scientist.

A distinguished scholar, neurologist, neurosurgeon, talented researcher, linguist, philosopher, and poet-translator, Boris Leonidovich Smirnov left an indelible mark on the history of Turkmenistan’s intellectual landscape.

Even after Turkmenistan gained independence, the fascination with the life and work of the remarkable scholar B.L. Smirnov remained undiminished. In 1992, in recognition of his immense contributions to the advancement of science and culture, as well as the strengthening of friendly ties between Turkmenistan and India, the “Foundation for Education and Revival of Spirituality named after Academician B.L. Smirnov” (abbreviated as “Galkynysh Foundation“) was established in Ashgabat. This charitable public association dedicated itself to developing various concepts and implementing projects aimed at improving the national education system. One of the foundation’s notable achievements was the establishment of the first girls’ gymnasium, “Gulrukh” in Turkmenistan. The foundation also supported talented youth, encouraged scientific research, promoted Smirnov’s life and work, attracted Turkmen

philologists to translate the “Mahabharata” and other Indian cultural, historical monuments into the Turkmen language, promoted intellectual games (mainly chess) among children and youth, and actively collaborated with the Indian Embassy in Turkmenistan.

It is without exaggeration that the translation of the great Indian epic “Mahabharata” undertaken by a Turkmen scholar on Turkmen soil can be considered a significant contribution to Indology, at the same time, an invaluable encyclopedia of ancient Indian philosophy.

## *Chapter 6*

# **Turkmen-Indian Relations: A Symbol of Co-operation, Brotherhood and Friendship**

*Sapar Berdiniyazov*

By declaring Independence, Turkmenistan established friendly and equal co-operation in international relations. Those relations between Turkmenistan and the Republic of India, which have their origins in the depths of antiquity, are now being enriched with new, influential content.

When we say India, you imagine wonderful friendly country. Our grandfather Magtymguly, who wrote, “You dedicated to the Indians, the most fertile lands” informs us that the Turkmen-Indian relations have been important since then. India is a country that presented the best feelings of friendship and brotherhood. In this regard, immediately you remember the poems of the poet Gara Seyitliyev, who wrote praising Indian beauties. Bayram Khan Turkmen’s wonderful poems, such as beautiful Tachmahal continue to live in our hearts. Well, one can give boundless examples of kind feelings when it comes to India.

India recognised the Independence of Turkmenistan on December 26, 1991. Diplomatic relations between Turkmenistan and India were established on April 20, 1992. On January 20, 1994, the Indian Embassy was opened in Turkmenistan. In January 1995, the Embassy of Turkmenistan in India was opened in New Delhi.

The roots of ties between the Turkmen and Indian people were laid in antiquity, from the time of the Great Silk Road. This was the heyday of the great Parthian Empire, the centre of which was the territory of modern Southern Turkmenistan and was one of the main international transport

corridors connecting India with the countries of Central Asia, including Turkmenistan.

The deep roots of the relationship are evidenced by archaeological finds confirming that contacts between the Turkmen and Indian peoples existed for a long time. As it is known, Emperor Akbar's mentor Bayram Khan and his son Abdyrahman Khan, the famous philosopher and poet, were Turkmen who served in the Mughal Empire. The Turkmen Gate in Delhi, built in the 1650s, also testifies to the centuries-old ties between India and Turkmenistan.

In the history of Turkmen-Indian relations, an important event was the visit to Turkmenistan by Jawaharlal Nehru, one of the most prominent political figures in the world, who, after the country gained independence on August 15, 1947, became the right-wing Prime Minister of India. In 1955, Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi made a tour of the Soviet Union, during which they visited Ashgabat.

The famous Indian writer, traveler and researcher Radha Rayana wrote an excellent book "An Ancient Kinship India and Turkmenistan", which also talks about the deep history of interaction between two friendly peoples, dialogues between Turkmen and Indian cultures of many thousands.

The Republic of India is located in the centre of South Asia and its western, southern and eastern shores are washed by the waters of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. India is bordered by Pakistan to the west, China, Nepal, and Bhutan to the northeast, and Bangladesh and Myanmar to the east. The total length of the coastal borders of this country is 7.5 thousand kms of which 5.4 thousand kms belong to the continent and 2.1 thousand kms to the islands. It covers an area of 3.3 million square kms, ranking 7th in the world by these criteria. India is one of the most populous countries in the world with a population of 1.4 billion. India is a Federal Republic, which includes 28 states, 6 union territories and the Delhi National Central District. India ranks third in the world in terms of number of major cities, after Russia and China. Mumbai is one of the largest cities in the world and plays an important role in the life of India. Mumbai is India's port, industry, finance, trade, and cultural centre.

India gained independence on August 15, 1947. In 1950, the Constitution of India was adopted and the country was declared a Republic. According to the Constitution, India is a Parliamentary Republic.

### **Development of Bilateral Diplomatic Relations**

At the moment, the partnerships of India and Turkmenistan over the past 33 years have received an intensive impetus for development in many connections, including economic, political, scientific, and technical and humanitative and a number of basic intergovernmental agreements, including trade and economic co-operation, on co-operation in the field of science and technology, on co-operation in the field of sports, defense, as well as the avoidance of double taxation and a number of others.

The positive dynamics of bilateral relations contributes to the dialogue, which is supported and is conceptualised at the expense of the contacters at the highest interstate and intergovernmental levels, as well as regular meetings and negotiations on foreign policy departments.

In this regard, the meaning of the visit to the summit was so in 2010 the visit of the National Leader of the Turkmen People, Chairman Hulk Maslakhati, Hero of Arcadag Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to India in 2010; The visit of the president of Turkmanistan Arcadagly Serdar Berdimuhamedov in India, as well as repeated visits of the President and Prime Ministers of India to Turkmenistan. Here it is advisable to mention that Turkmenistan will follow five strategic directions in its foreign policy:

- (a) The exchange of peace and security, stability, and sustainable development.
- (b) The development and promotion of neutrality on the world stage.
- (c) The steady increase in diversification of foreign economic relations.
- (d) Comprehensive promotion of sustainable development.
- (e) The humanisation of international relations, introducing into them high standards of morality and justice.

In its foreign policy, India focuses on the development of traditional, ancient relations with the independent states of the Central Asian region, especially with Turkmenistan. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on April 20, 1992. The mutual official visits of the heads of state formed the legal basis for mutually beneficial interstate co-operation.

Economic, scientific, technical, and cultural co-operation between the two countries has become a tradition. In 2007, thanks to the efforts of our highly esteemed Arkadag, an intergovernmental commission on trade, economic, scientific, and technological co-operation was established. Since then, several meetings have been held in Ashgabat and New Delhi. At the 3rd meeting of the group in Ashgabat in February 2010, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Governments of the two countries on the establishment of a Turkmen-Indian Information Technology Centre.

In April 2008, Indian Vice President Hamid Ansari paid an official visit to Ashgabat. During the visit, the Interstate Memorandum of Understanding on energy sector was signed.

The first state visit of our Hero Arkadag to the Republic of India on May 24–26, 2010 marked a new chapter in the history of Turkmen-Indian relations, which has tremendous potential for multilateral co-operation. The visit of our esteemed Arkadag to the tomb of Abdurahman Khan in Delhi at the beginning of the visit was an expression of the boundless respect of our national Leader to our ancestors. During the visit, a number of Memorandum of Understandings, programmes, and joint declarations were signed between the two countries.

The state visit of the President of the Republic of India Ram Nath Kovind to Turkmenistan on April 1-4, 2022 also envisages taking the Turkmen-Indian relations to a qualitatively new level. Our highly respected President Serdar Berdimuhamedov also touched upon the issue at a meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers on March 31 and stressed the importance of a high-level meeting in Ashgabat. The meeting is aimed at further promoting the solid foundation of centuries-old friendship and the rapid development of Turkmen-Indian relations based on historical roots. Our deeply respected President emphasised that there is great potential for intensifying bilateral co-operation in the economic sphere, increasing the volume of trade turnover, and implementing promising joint projects.

In April 2015, a delegation led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of India Sushma Swaraj arrived in Ashgabat. On April 8, 2015, the 5th meeting of the Turkmen-Indian Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, and Technological Co-operation was held in Ashgabat.

A delegation of Turkmenistan led by Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov paid a working visit to the Republic of India on August 13, 2017. The consecutive 6th meeting of the Turkmen-Indian Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, and Technological Co-operation was held on August 14 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of India. The meeting chaired by the Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj, demonstrated great interest in discussing issues related to the expansion of Turkmen-Indian co-operation in the agricultural sector, including chemical industry. Issues of bilateral co-operation in the fields of energy, transport and communications were also discussed. The Protocol was signed at the end of the 6th meeting of the Turkmen-Indian Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Co-operation.

On December 18–19, 2021, the Turkmen delegation led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, Deputy Chairman Rashid Meredov, to New Delhi, the capital of the Republic of India, was warmly welcomed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of India S. Jaishankar. The Turkmen delegation took part in the third session of the Central Asia-India Dialogue on December 19. The meeting was also attended by the foreign ministers of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The meeting, held at the Foreign Ministries level, focused on complex political issues on Afghanistan, as well as trade and regional relations.

At the end of the meeting, the parties agreed to hold an annual meeting of the India-Central Asia Dialogue with the participation of Afghanistan. The parties also discussed co-operation in the fields of energy, gas, and chemical industry, transport, communications, high technologies and agriculture. They expressed interest in further expanding trade and economic co-operation, including the promotion of direct relations between the business community of Central Asian countries and India.

### **Mutually Beneficial Trade and Economic Relations**

Turkmenistan and India are united by centuries-old relations based on the principles of neighbourliness and equal co-operation. Turkmenistan's favourable geo-political and geo-economic location contribute to the continuation of the long-standing traditions of active interstate relations, the development of trade and economic and humanitarian relations between the Turkmen and Indian peoples. The Tejen-Sarabs-Mashad

railway, which was commissioned during the years of Independence, is a vivid example of the great attention attached to the reconstruction of the Great Silk Road and paved the way for the development of trade and economic co-operation between Turkmenistan and India. At present, this internationally important route gives India ample opportunity to communicate with all countries of the continent.

As one of the world's fastest growing economies, the Republic of India has great scientific and industrial potential and a vast and promising market. Turkmenistan and India attach special importance to co-operation in the fuel and energy sector. In particular, there is a great demand for the implementation of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project to meet the growing demands of the Indian economy. The construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, which was launched on December 13, 2015, has taken Turkmen-Indian relations to a new level. With a total length of 1814 km and a capacity of 33 billion cubic metres per year, this pipeline will ensure the sustainable development of the region, energy security, and fruitful co-operation between the two countries.

India is a reliable partner for the countries of Central Asia, including Turkmenistan, on their development path. In this context, the "Central Asia + India" format is of great importance, at a meeting in which priority areas, such as, political issues, trade and economic objectives, security, cultural and human activities, as well as the development of parliamentary relations are discussed.

For example, on January 12–13, 2019, the First Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Dialogue "Central Asia + India" took place in Samarkand; in 2020, in New Delhi, the founding meeting of the Business Council "Central Asia + India" was held at the level of the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the participants, and as a result of the second meeting, which took place on October 28 of the same year in India, a joint declaration and Action Plan of the Council were adopted and four working groups were created—on energy, agro-food industry and textiles; on tourism and air corridors; in Science and Health. The "Central Asia + India" dialogue meeting is held regularly, annually.

In connection with trade and economic co-operation between Turkmenistan and India, intergovernmental commissions play a huge role. The joint intergovernmental Turkmen-Indian commission on trade,

economic, scientific, and technological co-operation was created and was held every year on September 20, 1995 and its meetings are held alternately every year or two years.

Trade turnover between Turkmenistan and India in 2023 amounted to 305.41 million US dollars, of which exports—6.50, imports—298.91 million US dollars. As of 2023, four enterprises with the participation of Indian capital were registered on the territory of Turkmenistan and 13 investment projects were registered for a total amount of 118.8 million US dollars.

Turkmenistan and India also have rich experience in long-term co-operation in the field of healthcare and pharmaceutical industry. As a reliable and effective form of co-operation Turkmen-Indian enterprise “Turkmenderman Ajanta Farma Limited” operates. Frequent flights from Ashgabat to Delhi and Amritsar, which have been linking Turkmenistan and India for many years, are also an indication of active expansion and strengthening of relations.

### **Cultural-Humanitarian Relations**

Active co-operation in cultural and humanitarian ties between Turkmenistan and India is distinguished in the field of education. In 2002, an Indian training and production centre was opened on the basis of the Turkmen Polytechnic Institute. As part of the Indian Technical and Economic Co-operation (ITEC) programme, specialists regularly undergo short-term training in India. Since the inception of the ITEC programme, more than 400 Turkmen citizens have been trained to date.

An important milestone in the development of Indian-Turkmen relations in the field of science was the signing on July 11, 2015 of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan and the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service of India. Co-operation between the two universities is important in terms of training and exchange of specialists in the field of international relations. The parties are committed to the principles of partnership and are making fruitful efforts to take full advantage of co-operation opportunities. A striking example of this is the holding of a round table with the participation of teaching staff of educational institutions as part of the implementation of the Memorandum signed on October 5, 2020 between the Institute of

International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan and the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service of India. During the meeting, having discussed the intended goals for further co-operation, the parties voiced mutually beneficial proposals to improve the level of training of specialists who in the future will work in the diplomatic missions of the two countries.

In April 2015, the Yoga Centre was opened in Ashgabat with the participation of the Prime Minister of India and the opening ceremony of the monument to Mahatma Gandhi took place. The Indian side highly appreciates the support provided by the government of Turkmenistan to the Traditional Medicine Yoga Centre. Today, more than 3,000 citizens of Turkmenistan attend yoga classes.

Culture is a sphere that has always been one of the highest priority areas in interstate relations. Through a living, direct connection with people, with the help of music, songs, poems, dances, theatrical performances of cinema, it serves as a unifying principle between people.

In Turkmenistan, Indian culture is treated with great sympathy and love. This love came into our hearts first of all through our acquaintance with the art of this great country. The older generation still remembers the first impression of watching such Indian films as “The Tramp”, “Mr. 420”, “Sangam”, “Love in Kashmir”, “The Flower and the Stone”, “Sita and Gita” and others. And even now many films produced by the Bollywood film company, especially of a historical nature, are popular in Turkmenistan.

As is known from history, India is one of the earliest centres of human civilisation. The Hinduwan Gate (Hindi Gate) in Merv, one of the largest and medieval cities of Turkmenistan, the Turkmen Gate built in the centre of the Indian capital, the Kutb Minaret in Delhi and the Minaret of Gutluk Temir in Koneurgench are the architectural symbols of the two peoples' culture and interaction.

The 500th anniversary of Bayram Khan Turkmen was celebrated in 2000 in both countries.

Co-operation in the field of education between the two countries is also strengthening. Hindi Language Major was opened at Dovletmammet Azadi Turkmen National Institute of World Languages in 2009. Along with our experts in teaching Hindi to students at the Institute, Indian

professors are also making great efforts. A number of Turkmen students were sent to the Kendriya Hindi Sansthan Institute in Agra for a deeper mastery of Hindi. In the fall of 2011, the Turkmen-Indian Centre for Information Technology was opened in the building of Magtymguly Turkmen State University. The centre has the opportunity to hold video conferences jointly with the high-tech Indian company S-DAS, which has provided it with a special training electronic programme. Also in our country, World Hindi Language Day is held regularly. It should be noted that the Ashgabat Medical School bears the name of Indira Gandhi, a well-known statesman and politician of the Indian people.

Historical and cultural relations between the Turkmen and Indian peoples date back to the depths of millennia. That principle of friendship, which is linked through cultural and spiritual relationships, continues. An example for this above mentioned, the book of Radha Raina, a prominent Indian writer, traveler and scholar, entitled “Ancient Kinship. India and Turkmenistan” which was published in 2013. It should be noted that this book was written after Radha Raina’s creative visit to Turkmenistan. It tells about the ancient history of co-operation between the two friendly peoples, the long-standing relationship between the millennial Turkmen and Indian cultures.

Turkmen-Indian relations are expanding in the cultural and humanitarian spheres. Turkmen-Indian friendly relations dating back to antiquity contribute to the development of cultural co-operation. Numerous events in the field of culture are organised by the Ministry of Culture of our country in co-operation with the Embassy of the Republic of India in Turkmenistan and the Indian Cultural Centre.

Days of Culture are the most reliable way for the peoples of the two countries to get to know each other more closely. The Days of Culture of the two countries play an important role in strengthening the friendship and co-operation between Turkmenistan and India. During the Days of Indian Culture in our country, the audience enjoyed the artistic products of Indian cinema along with the concerts. On February 10, 2011, the Sattariya troupe of the Abhinaya Academy of Culture and Arts performed at the Turkmenistan Cinema and Concert Centre. The Days of Hindi Cinema were held regularly in our country from 2011–2012.

In early September 2012, the Days of Indian Culture were held in Ashgabat to mark the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic

relations between Turkmenistan and India and the 66th anniversary of India's Independence.

From March 18, 2022, an audio-visual guide in Hindi has been launched at the Museum of "Watan mukadesligi" in the "Halk hakydasy" Memorial Complex in Ashgabat.

In connection with the above, it can be stated that today Turkmenistan and India maintain high dynamics of development of interstate dialogue in the political-diplomatic, trade-economic, and cultural-humanitarian spheres. Turkmenistan creates the necessary conditions for strengthening friendly relations between the two countries, preserving, and steadily deepening traditional co-operation.

# **Digital Transformation of Turkmenistan: An Effective Platform for National Development and International Partnership**

*Begench Karayev*

One of the priority areas of national development and international partnership of Turkmenistan is active integration into global infrastructure of digital and innovative technologies.

President of Turkmenistan Serdar Berdimuhamedov in his welcoming message to the participants of the XVI International Exhibition and Scientific conference of telecommunications, telemetry, information technologies, television, and radio broadcasting equipment “Türkmentel – 2023”, which was opened on the 9th of November 2023 especially noted that: “Today the process continues successfully introduction of the latest technologies into the national telecommunications system digital solutions and information and communication developments, meeting international standards. Consistent work is being carried out to create and provide the population with qualitatively updated and competitive communication service. Significant funds are invested in the formation and improvement of a specialised cluster. Cardinal scientific and technical reforms and major projects are being implemented through systematic improvement of structural, logistical, and legal framework of the digital system.”<sup>1</sup>

The head of state gave an example of the “smart city” Arkadag city as implementation in practice of promising areas of application of digital, information and communication and “green” technologies. This city has been built in a short time on the basis of a concept that represents a

synthesis of the best traditions of national architecture and modern design trends. Sophisticated urban infrastructure, fully compliant with international standards, including in the field of ecology, provides a comfortable and favourable living environment population.

Today, it is a generally accepted fact that Turkmenistan has made a qualitative leap in the field of digital technology in strategic areas of public administration, economics and industry, education and science, modern information society as a whole in recent years. For the current stage of the country's development, the main criteria and long-term goals in this area are defined in the successfully implemented Concepts for the development of the digital economy in Turkmenistan for 2019–2025. Also, Turkmenistan is preparing for major changes in telecommunications sector as part of the implementation of the Social and Economic Development Programme country in 2022–2028.

Visual activities are a number of indicators indicating on the pace of development of digital communications in Turkmenistan. In particular, according to message from the National Agency “Turkmenaragatnashyk” (Turkmentelecom) the number of Internet users in the country is now 3,195,919 people, of which 441,010 subscribers are wire line Internet users and 2,754,909 mobile Internet users. On February 18, 2024, the leased part of the external Internet channel in our country reached 170 gigabits/second, and the usage of internal Internet channel is 95 gigabits/second. Currently on the website e.gov.tm there are 515 government service portals, including 41portal of online payments and services, 268 information services, as well as links to 158 websites and 48 services provided by government agencies.<sup>2</sup>

The above-mentioned indicators, as well as the creation of new platforms and services, modernisation of the existing communication infrastructure, indicate that the process of digitalisation is in full swing in Turkmenistan, dynamic development of the modern digital economy and measures are being implemented to fully expand access to advanced technologies.

Implementation of the digitalisation concept on a national scale organically integrated into all government programmes, is an important factor of sustainable economic growth and increased competitiveness of the economy of Turkmenistan as a whole.

In the above-mentioned context, one of the priorities of the socio-economic policy of President Serdar Berdimuhamedov is the implementation of a large-scale digitalisation programme for all sectors of the economy, which is the basis for achieving long-term socio-economic goals. In this regard, a dynamic process of implementation of innovative and digital technologies is in full swing in Turkmenistan. Primarily in such advanced sectors of the economy as the industrial industry, the fuel and energy complex, transport, communications, the agricultural and processing sectors, training of specialists and a number of others.

Speaking about the digital economy, attention should be paid to developing a clear definition of this concept. At the same time, the main paradigm of scientific research comes from turning to English-language resources, since the global Internet and the overwhelming majority of information are formed on the basis of the English language. A number of authors note that the currently popular term digital economy is interpreted in two aspects. In the first version digital economy is a sector of the real economy, in another version—digital economics is a scientific direction. In both cases, we are talking about digitalisation, the properties of information in digital format and its role in the economy, which requires a more specific and clearer attitude to the content of the materials presented on the digital economy.<sup>3</sup>

The growth dynamics of digitalisation in Turkmenistan are especially noticeable in the field of transport and logistics, where information technologies are being widely introduced, new automated systems are being created that help simplify and speed up the interaction of participants in foreign economic activity with customs and other authorities. In this context, measures are being taken to develop cross-border e-commerce in the region, and international regulations governing e-commerce are being studied. As a result of the digitalisation of the customs national information system, it is possible to significantly increase the efficiency of using the transport and transit potential of Turkmenistan and obtain competitive advantages for the country, and in the short term, when organising international, including transit, transportation.

The State Customs Service of Turkmenistan is successfully implementing activities to co-ordinate the system of electronic preliminary notification of customs authorities TIR-EPD with the

international eTIR system, ensuring the secure exchange of data relating to the international transit of goods. With this decision, customs clearance of goods at the borders of Turkmenistan will be fully automated.<sup>4</sup> As part of the concept of digitalisation at all border customs' posts of Turkmenistan, including Altyn Asyr, Artyk, Sarahs, Serhetabat, Imamnazar, Farap, Dashoghuzavtoyollary, and Garabogaz, were also implemented and currently operated in the TIR-EPD system, which helps to simplify and speed up the movement of international shipments across the customs borders of Turkmenistan.

The TIR-EPD system receives preliminary information online about goods and vehicles sent to Turkmenistan and transiting through its territory, and similar information is sent to the customs authorities of the member countries of the "Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods using a TIR Carnet". "This provides the reliability of international supply chains and facilitates the unhindered delivery of Turkmen goods to the countries participating in the Convention.

Turkmenistan's partnerships with neighbouring countries are especially actively developing within the framework of the (CAREC) programme. In particular, as a result of the implementation of the CAREC Improved Transit System project and a number of other partnership programmes, information exchange of electronic data is provided with Russia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Iran.<sup>5</sup>

Along with this, digitalisation programme measures cover the banking system, healthcare infrastructure, and educational institutions. Currently, active work on equipping with digital technologies is underway in urban planning infrastructure, in the sphere of creating a comfortable life for the population. In particular, there is a Unified Portal of State Services, including payment for communication services, utilities, legal assistance, up to registration in the online queue system of the State Migration Service and much more, and they are arranged in such a way that using them won't be hard.

The current catalogue of websites of government agencies provides access to an information resource, within which a voluminous list of organisations and services is provided with the necessary contact information and provided electronic services.

One of the busiest areas of the economy is trade, where modern digital technology systems are being fully implemented. In particular, a national system of online electronic commerce is being actively formed. E-commerce, like many other emerging markets, is growing faster than the physical market space. Therefore, to ensure smooth operation of e-commerce, feature-rich mobile applications and digital payment platforms are being created that allow merchants to accept online card payments using their mobile devices. A “VISA Virtual” bank card has been introduced in Turkmenistan, with which you can pay for purchases in international online stores.

Putting forward demands for an integrated approach to the high tasks of digitalisation, the President of Turkmenistan pays close attention to equipping the international co-operation infrastructure with the latest technologies, where the co-ordinating role is assigned to the country’s foreign policy department. In this regard, today the digital platform of the diplomatic service of Turkmenistan has been significantly strengthened, which has demonstrated high technological potential and readiness to multiply Internet traffic loads, facilitating meaningful dialogue online. The creation, on the initiative and decision of the Head of State, of a unit for digital diplomacy within the structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, as well as the creation of a master’s degree at the IIR of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan in the direction of “Digital Diplomacy” turned out to be in time.

At the present stage, bilateral and multilateral dialogues at the highest, high and official levels via video conferencing, including summits within large international organisations and structures, are becoming commonplace. In particular, in recent years, numerous bilateral negotiations have been held online, which indicate the increased diplomatic activity of Turkmenistan on the digital platform. In particular, video negotiations were held between delegations of Turkmenistan with the Russian Federation, the USA, Canada, France, Norway, Switzerland, the Italian Republic, Romania, China, the State of Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Republic of Turkey, etc. Regular video negotiations on at various official levels were held with the immediate neighbouring states of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Iran.

As part of multilateral digital diplomacy, a wide series of international meetings, negotiations, and conferences were also held, during which a constructive exchange of views took place on pressing issues of modern development. In particular, over the last period, online negotiations of Turkmenistan were held at the level of high-level leaders of the UN, WHO, EU, OSCE, CIS, OIC, WTO, WB, ADB, IEA, OECD. Productive negotiations were also held between the Turkmen side at the level of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Road Transport Union (IRU), THADA, the Preparatory Commission for the CTBTO and other authoritative international structures. Delegations of Turkmenistan also took part in video meetings of multilateral interaction in the “CA5+1” format, as well as “Turkmenistan–European Union” and other international organisations online.

It is also necessary to note the international online activity of higher educational institutions, for the successful operation of which, thanks to the care of the Head of State, all the necessary conditions have been created. In particular, fruitful video conferences took place between the Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan and the University of the Diplomatic Academy of the Republic of Azerbaijan (ADA University). Also, of great interest were lectures for students of the Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan and the International University of Humanities and Development held via video-conference by the Secretary General of the Energy Charter Urban Rusnak, the Executive Secretary of the CTBTO Lassin Zerbo, Tim Williams Professor at the Institute of Archaeology at University College London, who is also UNESCO’s chief adviser on the Silk Roads.

Such online meetings at the Institute of International Relations (IIR) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan are held regularly and several times within one month. In particular, the last days of March 2024 were especially eventful with such events. For example, on March 27, 2024, a round table meeting was held in a hybrid format on the topic “The Creative Heritage of Magtymguly Fragi: cultural and humanitarian aspects”, dedicated to the 300th anniversary of the birth of the Turkmen

poet and philosopher. The event was organised by Astrakhan State University V.N. Tatishcheva. on March 29, 2024, an educational and methodological seminar was held at the Institute of Telecommunications and Informatics of Turkmenistan on the topic “Requirements for scientific articles submitted for publication in journals indexed by Scopus” with the participation of professors and teachers of higher educational institutions of the country. On March 30, 2024, a video conference was held between the Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan and the India-Central Asia Foundation. It was attended by the rector and professors of the Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan from the Turkmen side, as well as the management and representative of the foundation from the Indian side. During the meeting, the participants discussed the issue of preparing a joint scientific monographic book of the India-Central Asia Foundation with the Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan and exchanged fruitful opinions.<sup>6</sup>

The President of Turkmenistan defines high goals and rates of intensified participation in global processes related to the implementation of high-tech infrastructure complexes and increasing the level of knowledge intensity of design solutions. Similar requirements are imposed on the training of future diplomatic service employees, who must be ready to use their theoretical knowledge in the practice of international relations. In this regard, the IIR of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan continues work to improve training programmes, introduce new subjects and special courses that meet the current challenges of our time. In particular, the digital portal of the institute allows the storage and exchange of scientific literature, lecture materials and video courses intended for student audiences, young graduate students and researchers. Significant attention is also paid to the study of world experience in the field of digital diplomacy, the use of computer analysis and modeling methods, the art of diplomatic negotiations and other types of foreign policy activities.

The usage of digital technologies also contributes to more productive research and the integration of scientific representatives into the international expert community. The integrated usage of the capabilities of www allows us to more clearly and realistically comprehend modern world processes, the role and place of Turkmenistan in them, and more

effectively position the national interests of our country. This also helps to improve the quality of analytical materials, develop professional forecasts and recommendations on various aspects of Turkmenistan's foreign policy.

By studying the basics of digital technologies, future diplomats comprehend the theoretical and practical foundations of analytical and expert activities necessary for the development and adoption of foreign policy decisions. It should be noted that students, along with knowledge from the field of humanities, also study the achievements of exact and applied disciplines, which are implemented in the tasks of modeling global and international processes, the development of geopolitical situations and other issues. In this context, fundamental ideas and theoretical developments related to issues of globalisation, sustainable development, energy, transport corridors, water resources, climate change, ecology, and other areas are studied.

In connection with the above mentioned, it should be noted that in the modern era of accelerated development of the so-called information civilisation, the most important component of analytical technologies is the so-called "digital" component, which contains many gigabytes and terabytes of infographic, audio and video materials regarding events both global, and on a regional scale. In these conditions, one has to deal simultaneously with a huge amount of all kinds of information and at the same time an insufficient amount of information and facts necessary to make the most correct decisions in a short time. Therefore, in analytical practice, logical methods are used to formalise initial information, compile algorithms for computer programming, modeling and simulation of geopolitical processes.

The dynamics and diversity of global processes of the modern era indicate that the changes taking place do not always correspond to the generally accepted logic of perception and assessment of situations developed in accordance with the initially agreed upon "rules of the game." In this regard, studying the theory of analysis and modeling of the international situation, young international specialists use research principles within the framework of the so-called "big data".

Speaking about the upbringing and training of the younger generation in the context of global digitalisation, it should be noted that in Turkmenistan all first-graders receive a personal laptop every year by

September 1—the start of school—a gift from the President of the country. Also, this year would not be an exception.

On March 23, 2024, the President of Turkmenistan signed a Resolution on the presentation of laptops as a gift to students admitted to the first grade of secondary schools in the country in the 2024–2025 academic year. According to the Resolution, the Ministry of Education is authorized to enter into contracts with Agzybirlik Tilsimaty and the Economic Society Aýdyň Gijeler for the purchase of laptops manufactured in Turkmenistan, their installation in educational institutions by August 1, 2024 and their maintenance. This event once again demonstrated the state's concern for creating favourable conditions for modern education and upbringing, the formation of the young generation as broad-minded specialists who understand innovative technologies.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the implementation of a clear, deeply thought-out and scientifically based strategy of the Esteemed President Serdar Berdimuhammedov for the digitalisation of the country not only ensures stable, positive dynamics of growth of the national economy, but also responds to changes in the economic environment around the world. And these progressive processes stimulate the development of new technologies, which become a factor in the comfort and quality of life of the people, increasing the efficiency of service and meeting the needs of the population and society as a whole.

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## *Chapter 8*

# **Transport-Logistics Strategy of Neutral Turkmenistan**

*Nurberdi Amanmyradov*

The development of the economy of independent and eternally neutral Turkmenistan is carried out on the basis of medium and long-term planned national and state programmes. Today, Turkmenistan has created a diversified, multi-sectoral economy represented by such facilities as electric power, chemical, petrochemical, oil and gas production and oil refining industries, metal processing, numerous building materials, textiles, light and food industries. The dynamic growth of Turkmenistan's gross domestic product equal to 6.3% per year is one of the highest results not only in the region, but also in the world.

As a result of the creative use of historical experience, our country was able to effectively use the opportunities of state regulation of market economy processes, such as transition to the market and development of private business.

Today, due to the legacy of its historical past, Turkmenistan's transport policy is being paid a lot of attention. Central Asia has been at the crossroads of the most important routes between Europe and East Asia, North and South Asia for centuries now. As history clearly shows, in ancient times, the historical caravan routes of the Great Silk Road passed through the territory of present Turkmenistan.

Owing to its geographical location and national economic interests, Turkmenistan and its neighbours are directly interested in the Eurasian integration, which goes beyond the boundaries of one area and includes the most important development paths of the regional countries. With the development of mechanised transport, the caravan routes that connected

the two parts of the continent eventually lost their original importance. However, with the coming of time, the idea of revitalising the Great Silk Road in new ways found practical expression.

From this point of view, the importance of transport, as an essential part of the economy of Turkmenistan, is determined by the main role it plays in the regional division of social labour and the distribution of productive forces.

Our national leader Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov emphasises that the future will be in the combined transport system, the most convenient co-ordination of the largest international and regional seaports, river, road, railway, and air centres and a transport system that will take full advantage of each of them.

Therefore, today the situation is changing dramatically, and the development of transport infrastructure is becoming one of the priority directions of Turkmenistan's policy. These positive processes are based on concrete integration projects in individual sectors. The transport sector occupies a special place in the foreign policy of Turkmenistan under the leadership of President Berdimuhamedov, which is given evidence by the wide-scale work carried out in the domestic and foreign policy of the country, as well as in international projects at various levels. The international community is widely supporting the positive proposals put forward by our National Leader Hero Arkadag and Esteemed President Hero Serdar Berdimuhammedov in this regard.

In September 2011, at the 66th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN), our leader put forward a proposal to develop a special UN inter-regional programme for transport development. To implement this proposal in May 2012, the Government of Turkmenistan, with the support of the specialised agencies and structures of the UN, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asian (TRACECA), together with the International Road Transport Union (IRU), held an international conference on developing the transport and transit routes in the Caspian region and Central Asia in the future.

In order to advance these ideas, the Turkmen side, in co-operation with several international organisations, in September 2013 in New York, within the framework of the 68th session of the UN General Assembly,

after 2015, called “Directions of international co-operation in the transport sector within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals”, organised a high-profile event.

In order to develop the transport sector, a number of documents were signed between the Government of Turkmenistan and the International Road Transport Union, including a Memorandum of Understanding on the development of Euro-Asian Road transport links passing through the territory of Turkmenistan.

In addition, Turkmenistan joined the Joint Declaration on the Development of Eurasian Railways and the Creation of a Unified Railway Law and the Joint Declaration on the Future Development of Eurasian Transport Connections adopted in Geneva in February 2013.

In early September 2014, a high-level international conference “On the role of transport and transit corridors in ensuring international co-operation and sustainable development” was held in Turkmenistan. The Council, together with the Government of Turkmenistan, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the IRU organised.

As a result of the meeting, the Ashgabat Declaration was adopted, which describes new approaches for increasing international co-operation and deepening the integration processes for the formation of transcontinental transit and transport corridors.

In December 2014, at the 69th session of the UN General Assembly, the Resolution “The role of transport and transit corridors in ensuring international co-operation for sustainable development” was adopted by the President of Turkmenistan. The fact of Turkmenistan being among all countries of Central Asia, most of the Asia-Pacific region countries and states from Europe, Latin America as well as Africa continents—totally 66 countries—in co-authors of the above-mentioned instrument, performs constantly increasing our country’s positive image in the world arena.

In fact, this resolution is the first instrument formalising the UN General Assembly’s proposal to establish a global partnership in sustainable transportation.

In December 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the Resolution “The role of transport and transit in ensuring international co-operation for sustainable development” with the same name for the second time.

On December 25, 2015, at the meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan, with the proposal of the Secretary General of the United Nations, a decision was made to hold the 1st World Conference on Creating a Sustainable Transport System in Ashgabat at the end of 2016.

Our national leader Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov initiated major projects aimed at developing mutually beneficial economic relations and strengthening international co-operation by creating strong transport and communication infrastructure. With his consistent foreseen initiatives, Turkmenistan is becoming an international logistic transnational highways, modern aviation and new airports, the largest port in the region and sea vessels (ferries).

According to the National Programme on Social and Economic Development of Turkmenistan for 2011–2030, Turkmenistan is defined as a transcontinental economic bridge for the interaction of European, Asia-Pacific and South Asian economic systems. Based on this, the priority of this long-term programme is the rapid development of a transport and communication network that can fully meet the needs of the economy and the population for transport services. The main objectives of the above programme are continuous integration into the global transport system and further expansion of national infrastructure.

In the concept of “Foreign Policy Programme of Independent Turkmenistan for 2017–2023”, the transport sector has become one of the priority areas of co-operation with the UN and its specialised organisations. As the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan noted, “work should be done to actively implement initiatives to create transport corridors and turn Central Asia into a major transit highway of continental significance.” The Global Conference on Sustainable Transport held in Ashgabat in November 2016 gave additional impetus to the implementation of key international relations in the transport sector.

The measures taken by Turkmenistan to accelerate the creation of the most modern transport and transit logistics, communication, and telecommunication system and to restore the Great Silk Road contributed

significantly to the development of not only the national economy, but also the regional and global economy.

Turkmenistan's convenient location at the crossroads of regional and inter-regional transport and communication routes in Central Asia provides great transit opportunities. Our national leader guides us to utilise this potential to the fullest extent.

In this regard, the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway launched in 2013 is not only an economically and commercially useful project, but also a serious geopolitical factor that can have a great positive impact on the general situation in the region and outside. At the same time, stability and security in Asia is to provide additional stability to the entire continental political system. The future of the project is clear in terms of strengthening co-operation at the level of several other major international and regional organisations, such as the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO), the Commonwealth of Independent State (CIS) and the Economic Co-operation Organisation (ECO).

Crossing the territory of several neighbouring countries, including Turkmenistan, this railway is the first logistics solution for high-speed delivery of goods from the shores of East China to the markets of the Persian Gulf. Of course, as one of the most important signs of our country's participation in this large-scale logistics project for Turkmenistan, it means the activation of transit opportunities in the world economic relations system in the example of a state with a developed transport system.

The goals of this large-scale project are objectively consistent with the long-term strategy of the UN and its specialised agencies, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, in terms of considering it as a stable strategic structure in the southern part of Eurasia, a promising economic partner, a continental transport, and transit centre.

Today, the issue of creating transnational transport corridors is more urgent. The international initiatives announced by the President of Turkmenistan at the meetings of the UN General Assembly, at the summits of the leaders of the CIS, SCO, and other high-level forums are aimed at strengthening and expanding mutually beneficial trade and economic relations, taking into account the new realities and requirements of the time. In particular, it is enough to mention the development of the UN

Special Programme for Transport Development, which provides for the study of transit and transport opportunities between the Caspian and Black Sea, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

Lapis Lazuli, a historic international transport and transit corridor, is being restored and known as a part of this transport and transit corridor, Serkhetabat–Turgundi, was given serving in February 2018. In the future, this corridor will help strengthen effective economic relations in the large geoeconomic territory, including Central Asia and South Asia, the Caspian and Black Sea, and the Mediterranean region.

At the beginning of March 2024, the government delegation of neighbouring Afghanistan visited the country. As part of the multipurpose programme of the visit, the Afghan delegation also visited Turkmenbashi International Seaport. This facility is an important connection between transportation and logistics infrastructure of Turkmenistan and as well as one of the largest port centres in the Caspian Sea. For landlocked Afghanistan, the development of co-operation with the port of Turkmenbashi opens up new opportunities for increasing exports and expanding trade and economic relations.

The guests were particularly interested in the possibilities of storage and shipping Afghan export goods—vegetables, fruits, dry fruits—in refrigerated containers at the port terminals. This opens up new opportunities for Afghan agricultural producers to reach world markets through Turkmenistan’s transport corridors.

A visit to Turkmenbashi port and a close acquaintance with this modern facility clearly showed for the Afghan delegation the material and technical advantages of co-operation with neighbouring Turkmenistan. Representatives of the delegation highly appreciated the current work on the development of the port infrastructure and expressed interest in using the transit opportunities of Turkmenbashi within the framework of the “Lapis Lazuli Corridor” international transport project.

In other words, the visit to the seaport was an important stage in creating a common initiative of the future of Turkmen-Afghan co-operation in the sphere of transport and logistics. The parties practically believed in the high transit potential, which opens up further outlook for the extension of bilateral trade and economic relations.

Today, international transport corridors have become the main mechanisms for the globalisation of the world economy. Turkmenistan, as accelerator of this process, is one of the important transport centres for the benefit of the state, the region and the entire climate, depending on the strategy created by our National Leader Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, in order to realise the country's sustainable economic and social development and geo-economic potential.

Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railways in the international transport network, modern black road and railway bridges over the Amudayara river, airports in Ashgabat and provincial capitals, highways, international sea port of Turkmenbashi and other already commissioned and currently, the major facilities being built in Turkmenistan aim to become important links.

In accordance with the National Civil Aviation Development Programme of Turkmenistan for 2012–2030, modern airports have been built in the capital and provinces, and new and modernisation of existing airports in the regions is underway. The construction of the Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan border, Turkmenabat–Daşoguz, Mary–Serketabat highways, Ashgabat–Turkmenbashi and Ashgabat–Turkmenabat high-speed roads are also modern projects.

At the same time, emphasising the importance of strengthening the constructive interaction in the development of the international transport system with specialised structures of the UN, the President of Turkmenistan discussed the possibilities of creating a modal highway for Central Asia to Turkey based on the experience of the IRU, EYC and ESCAP had suggested consultation.

Turkmenistan is also an active partner and participant in the Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) programme, because the formation of the Western transport corridor from Central Asia is of great importance for achieving the goals of restoring the Great Silk Road and qualitatively renewing the two global economic poles of Eurasia is to relate to metrics.

Another clear example is the “Central Asia-Middle East” (Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman) transport corridor project initiated by our President.

Turkmenistan, located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, has participated in dozens of international conventions and participates in

several international agreements on international transport and transit corridors. Such documents include the Agreement between the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Sultanate of Oman, Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan on April 25, 2011, and the Agreement between the Governments of Turkmenistan, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Turkey on November 15, 2017, “Transit and Transport Co-operation” Agreement.

A contract was signed between the governments of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan on co-operation in the field of trade and shipping in order to strengthen and develop relations in the field of maritime transport between the countries of the Caspian Sea based on the principles of freedom of movement of ships, equality, and mutual benefit.

Thus, development of transport infrastructure is one of the priority areas of Turkmenistan’s foreign policy. Optimising transport flows in the Eurasian space opens up huge opportunities for providing access to sea terminals in the Black Sea and Baltic regions, South, and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, as well as China, India, Pakistan, and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region.

Turkmenistan considers the development of passenger and cargo transportation by sea as a necessary condition for attracting the countries of Central Asia and the Caspian Sea to the system of economic co-operation. In the implementation of these programmes, a special place is given to the new international seaport in Turkmenbashi, on the coast of the Caspian Sea, which was launched in 2018 and aims to become the main logistics centre of the entire Central Asian region. Ferry, passenger and other vessel terminals were built initiated by the national leader, in this major investment project. At the same time, the complex includes a cargo terminal and a polypropylene shipping terminal, as well as shipbuilding and shipyards.

The large-scale project stimulated the economic development of Turkmenistan, the development of industrial and transport structures, and the creation of jobs. As we mentioned earlier, the TRACECA international transport corridor passes through the Turkmen seashores and will soon become the “sea gateway” connecting Central Asia and Europe, the largest logistics and distribution center in the region. The advantages of Turkmenbashi International Sea Port and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway

give the great opportunities for users to import goods from Turkmenistan, as well as to transfer goods from its territory to European markets.

Issues concerning the Caspian region have always taken an important place in the foreign policy strategy of not only this region countries, but others. Therefore, the Caspian Convention, signed by all Caspian countries in Aktau on August 12, 2018, expands the prospects for the development of cargo transport, opens up new opportunities for the development of logistics and enhancing co-operation in this field. As a result, the convention will improve security in the region and improve the ecological status of the sea.

On August 12, 2019, “The Future of the Khazarian Region, Economic Forum”, a large-scale forum on important issues for many countries, was held in the National Tourist Zone “Avaza”, the solution of which was a comprehensive balanced and co-ordinated approach, perspectives in the future and required detailed comparison of proposals. As a result of the meetings held within the framework of the 1st Caspian Economic Forum–2019, a total of 57 international documents were signed at various levels. These include information technology, trade, economics and finance, diplomacy, transport, electricity, light industry, agriculture, and water regulating.

The prime ministers of the seashore states participated in the forum at the head of their representative national delegations. The participation of delegations from non-Caspian countries (Prime Ministers of Bulgaria and Uzbekistan) signifies the importance of the discussed issues, not only for the seashore states, but the region and whole world.

This Forum gathered delegations from different countries of the world, leaders and representatives of international organisations such as the UN and its leading structures, the CIS, the GCC, the International Transport Union, etc., as well as the largest financial and banking structures in the world.

In his historic speech at the first KEF–2019, our national leader Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said that the Caspian region has strategic importance for Euroasian continent in terms of economy, trade, transport and transit, as well as due to its huge global hydrocarbon sources it gives opportunities provide convenient access to important markets, was

unanimously approved by representatives of other countries participating in the forum, for his words.

Another urgent subject of our national leader's speech on Caspian region countries collaboration, was the transport sector. The pre-requisites for the formation of a multi-vector network of trade routes are created by the geography of the region, but in order to be fully effective, it needs good transport connectivity within it. That is, there is a need for intensive communication between the five countries and connections with all modes of transport. In this regard, the National Leader recalled the idea of creating the Caspian regional logistics centre, where it is necessary to co-ordinate joint actions for the launch and management of transit transport corridors connecting Asian and European markets.

Turkmenistan is taking confident steps towards the creation of a modern and extensive transport and communication network. In this regard, in recent years, thousands of kilometres of roads and railways, which are important links in the country, regional and international transport corridors, have been built. In 2018, the Turkmenbashi International Seaport was put into operation with a cargo through put capacity of 25–27 million tons per year.

According to the official website of the Customs Service of Turkmenistan, in 2023, the volume of transit of goods from the territory of Turkmenistan increased by 17%. Transit cargo flows also increased in February of this year. In the first two months of 2024, this indicator increased by 5% compared to the same period last year.

In order to increase the attractiveness of transit crossroads through the territory of Turkmenistan, modern conditions are created at border customs points. Full automation of customs procedures and the use of advanced equipment in customs checks ensure smooth transportation of vehicles at customs points. These circumstances have increased interest in the transit of goods from the territory of Turkmenistan in recent years. For example, since 2020, the volume of transit goods has increased by 206%, or 3 times. At the same time, road transit transportation increased by 585%, and the amount of rail freight transportation increased by 104%.

As it is known, the creation of a modern transport and communication system is one of the priority directions of the national policy of Turkmenistan, which is being carried out by national leader Gurbanguly

Berdimuhamedov and Esteemed President Serdar Berdimuhamedov. This is clearly evidenced by the large-scale and long-term national programmes adopted under the leadership of the head of state aimed at strengthening the material and technical base of the transport industry, modernizing, and developing the relevant infrastructure and currently being implemented. Its implementation meets the strategic interests of the entire international community and can effectively contribute to strengthening global economic relations, stimulating investment activity, and improving economic and social indicators at the global, regional and national levels.

Turkmenistan's position in global transport co-operation, giving it a consistent and purposeful character, is based on the need to transfer the discussion of these issues from the regional platform to the main international platform—the UN. For this purpose, in recent years, Turkmenistan submitted five draft resolutions to the UN General Assembly, which, as mentioned above, were adopted by the member states in 2014, 2015, 2017, 2021, and 2023 based on unanimous support.

Our country, which is constantly and persistently working with this issue, is promoting more and more new international initiatives. Today, transportation topics are becoming a close and interesting focus of the world expert community. The successful holding of the first UN Global Conference on Sustainable Transport in Turkmenistan, completed with the adoption of the Ashgabat Declaration in November 2016, proved this.

A logical continuation of this process should be the imminent organisation of the Second Global Conference on Sustainable Transport. Taking into account the characteristics and features of multilateral co-operation in the transport sector for landlocked countries, Turkmenistan successfully organised and successfully held the international conference of Ministry of Transport of these countries on August 15–16, 2022 in Avaza. The forum, which was organised under the aegis of the United Nations at the initiative of Turkmenistan, was attended by the delegation of about 40 countries and more than 30 international organisations. The event also brought together leaders of UN agencies, a great deal of international, regional and financial institutions, representatives of the private sector, non-governmental associations and academies.

The main objectives of the forum, held in a hybrid format, are to analyse the achievements of landlocked developing countries in terms of

sustainable transport and related Sustainable Development Programmes (SDPs).

On March 11–12, 2024, at the 15th session of the Council of Elders of the Organisation of Turkic States (OTSs), Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Chairman of the Halk Maslakhaty of Turkmenistan, presented the initiative of the OTS to create a unified transport strategy. As it is known, the transport system is given a special place in the co-operation of Turkish states. The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan said that it is advisable to try to create a unified transport strategy, and that joint efforts will allow us to reach agreements in this field with our international partners and large investors. In this regard, the National Leader of the Turkmen emphasised that the strategy put forward by Turkmenistan to restore the Great Silk Road is of great importance. Taking a comprehensive look at the progress of implementation of the proposals put forward by the results of the 14th meeting of the Council of Elders of the TDG, the parties noted the important role of the organisation in strengthening political mutual trust and co-operation of the Turkic countries. The elders noted that the strategy of restoring the Great Silk Road of Turkmenistan, which occupies a key position in the “Turkish Belt” that has had a huge impact on the development of mankind, is of particular importance.

On March 5, 2024, when the President of Turkmenistan, Serdar Berdimuhamedov, received the Secretary General of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Mrs. Helga Schmid, it was noted, among other important issues, the need for effective establishment of relations in the transport sector, and Turkmenistan’s participation in this organisation in specific directions. It was confirmed that it is ready to expand co-operation.

On March 11–12, 2024, during the business visit of the Turkmen delegation led by the Deputy Prime Minister of Turkmenistan, Minister of Foreign Affairs Rashid Meredov to Austria, at the “round table” meeting held with the members of the business group consisting of representatives of 25 leading Austrian companies, the important areas of co-operation were discussed as energy, transport, agriculture they identified digitalisation, green economy and other areas.

Consequently, Turkmenistan’s efforts in the transport sector at the national level and in co-operation with foreign partners contribute to a significant increase in its political prestige in the international arena. In

fact, the goal of Turkmenistan's transport policy is the political and legal formalisation of a future broad, multilateral agreement to create a transcontinental (Asia-Europe) transport and transit corridor.

International economic relations and foreign trade of Turkmenistan determine the volume of processed cargo flows, the role of existing and newly created large transport centres in our country in the constantly growing service. Our country is rapidly developing the appropriate infrastructure based on the most advanced achievements and innovative technologies in this field. Today, Turkmenistan, being the centre of the continent's huge transnational transport corridors, serves as a catalyst for the expansion of the region's modern multi-modal transport infrastructure.

The main strategy of the President Serdar Berdimuhamedov's foreign policy is to recognise the Central Asian and the Caspian region as a strong connection of strategic stability in the Eurasian continent, and Turkmenistan to take its honourable place as a reliable partner and continental transport and transit centre for all concerned countries.

## Chapter 9

# Turkmen-Indian Literary Relations

*Baba Saryyev*

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of India and Turkmenistan were officially established on April 20, 1992. Over the past 32 years, co-operation in political, trade-economic, scientific-educational, cultural, humanitarian and other fields has shown that both countries are committed to friendly and fraternal relations dating back to the depth of history. As history shows, the historical roots of Turkmen literature extend to different parts of the world. In the Eastern countries, i.e., Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, as well as in Rumystan, and the Caucasus countries, Turkmens settled and created many states, and thus, distinctive features of literature in Turkish, Persian, and Arabic languages emerged. Individuals who glorify the history of Turkmen occupy a special place in the minds of our people. One of such individuals is Muhammed Bayram Khan Turkmen, who lived in India and enjoyed great prestige in the palace, and reached the rank of “Khan Khanan”—“Khan of Khans,” an outstanding commander, warrior, and also a great master of words.

As evidenced by history, the Mughal dynasty was founded by the Turkic communities of India in the 15th–16th centuries. It was founded by Muhammad Babur, the ruler of the Timurid dynasty. His son Humayun continued his legacy. In turn, Akbar Shah, the grandson of Babur, continued the legacy of Humayun. The commander-in-chief of Babur’s army Bayram Khan, originating from the Turkmen tribe of Baharly, played an important role in the formation of the Mughal dynasty. He stood out as an exemplary master of words who brought spiritual pleasure to the nation with his wonderful ghazals, qasidas, odes, rubagis, and poems in Turkmen and Persian languages.

In 1530, after Babur Shah's death, Bayram Khan became one of the closest advisers of Humayun Shah. Humayun Shah kept him close during each military campaign or diplomatic interaction. Their relationship gradually reached the level of friendship. During the reign of Humayun, Bayram Khan earned a high-ranking position. The friendship of Bayram Khan and Humayun Shah turned to kinship when Bayram Khan married Selime Sultan, the granddaughter of Babur Shah and daughter of Humayun Shah's sister. Selime Sultan, too, was a woman well renowned for her wonderful poetry.

Bayram Khan was one of the authors who wrote in two languages. Most of his qasidas were dedicated to the Shahs of the Mughal dynasty Humayun and Akbar. Bayram Khan paid great attention to the artistic expressiveness of his poems.

Most of Bairam Khan's poems are lyrical ghazals. In these ghazals, the poet expresses his love, the tender feeling of a loving heart.

*Eý, seniň gözelligiň arkaly adamlaryň gözleri nurly bolan,  
Baýramyň gözi haçana çen senden nursuz bolmaly!*

The poet's lyrical ghazals are works dedicated to true, pure love. In this ghazal, the poet's lyrical hero turns to his beloved and says:

*Eý, Baýram, sen ol gözeller şasynyň guly bolupsyň,  
Dünýä patyşasyndan hanlyk derejäň bolmagyna garamazdan.*

These examples of ghazals are works translated from Persian to Turkmen. Bayram Khan's ghazals in the Turkmen language are also deeply lyrical.

*Gaşyňda düşgeli eý, serwi-gülgüzar saçyň,  
Meni ýel ösgeňi dek kyldy bikarar saçyň.  
Pyraky-ar tüni boldy, subhy-röwşeni-wasyl,  
Dararda düşgeli ýüzüňe tar-tar saçyň.  
Açylsa nafa ýüki müşk ysy dagylgan dek,  
Muatter eýledi älemni müşkbar saçyň.  
Eseri yşkyň emes, özlügi bilen Baýram,  
Salypdyr any bu söwdaga, eý nigär, saçyň.*

This ghazal, written in Turkmen, testifies to the high artistic skill of its author. It should also be mentioned that the poet's work is heavily influenced by folk poetry. It should be noted that his ghazals are very harmonious and melodic:

*Eý, bihabarym, ha ynan, ha ynanma,  
 Köýdi jigerim, ha ynan, ha ynanma.  
 Gerçi güzeriň ýok maňa, billa ki senden,  
 Ýokdur güzerim, ha ynan, ha ynanma.  
 Senden habarym bolgaly halka ki özümden,  
 Ýokdur güzerim, ha ynan, ha ynanma.  
 Baýram kibi eg-san gijedir zül-pü ýüzünden,  
 Şamu-säherim, ha ynan, ha ynanma.*

If we talk about the theme of Bayram Khan's ghazals in Turkmen and Persian, it is mainly about failed love, the longing of a lover for his beloved, or a description of woman's beauty. As can be seen from his ghazals, the poet managed to work out love lyrics very subtly and delicately. Bayram Khan gathered talented poets, scientists, musicians and artists around himself. Being a poet himself, he valued the true poetic word and supported its masters.

Bayram Khan read the works of modern poets and knew how to evaluate them correctly. He read and mastered the works of the classical poets who lived before him. He read many works of Fuzuli, Hafiz, Navoi, and created works under their influence. His direct role model is the great poet Navoi.

Bayram Khan's life was not always the same. During the reigns of Babur Shah and Humayun Shah, he enjoyed great authority and fame. But during the reign of Akbar Shah, Bayram Khan did not have the same reputation as before. As we know from the pages of history, hostile confrontations took place in palaces. Gossipers who were blind to Bayram Khan's reputation slandered him before Akbar Shah.

Bayram Khan, who had a great reputation in the palace, did not pay much attention to this situation. This is because Bayram Khan was assigned to Akbar as a mentor. He worked hard to raise Akbar to be a healthy and intelligent soldier.

Akbar Shah listened to slanderers and gossipers who reported lies and gossip about Bayram Khan. Akbar Shah was afraid of the glory of Bayram Khan. As a result, Bayram Khan became a victim of slander and was removed from the royal court.

In the last years of his life, he suffered from depression and anxiety. The poet absorbed these sad moments into his lines and poems:

*Baýramga besli garyplyk kär etdi,  
Gurbat ony haru-zary bimar etdi,  
Ýa rep, ki belalarga giriftar olsun,  
Her kim ony gamlarga giriftar etdi.*

The meaning of the verse below fully confirms the ideas presented above. This verse was written and addressed to Akbar Shah:

*Owwal meni hyzmatyňa mährem kyldyň,  
Bezmiň era hemzybany-hemdem kyldyň,  
Ahyry ýene eltipatny kem kyldyň,  
Ryswaýy tamamy ähli älem kyldyň.*

If you pay attention to the meaning of this verse, you can see that the poet is dissatisfied with the actions of the ruler, that his heart is on fire and he is depressed.

A poet and public figure, Bayram Khan is certainly a son of his time. Bayram Khan hated social unrest, tyranny, and suppression of the will of the people. He encourages people to do good deeds. His work is driven by humane ideas. The poetic world of Bayram Khan had a strong influence on readers. This is also due to the fact that in the 16th century he became widely known in India.

According to literary sources, several more poets lived and were engaged in poetic creativity in India in the 16th century. Among them are the son of Bayram Khan Abdurakhim, Yolguly Enisi, Murzeguly Meilini, Molla Sheydayi, Hasan Khan Shamli and others. We will discuss some of them in this article. Muhammad Bayram Khan was the greatest Turkmen poet living in India at that time.

In the conversation about Turkmen literature and the work of Turkmen poets of the second half of the 16th century, a special place belongs to Abdurakhim, son of Bayram Khan, poet and scientist, commander and diplomat, Khan of Khans, close brother of Akbar. Abdurakhim was born in India in 1556 and lost his father at the age of four.

Having lost his father in childhood, Abdurakhim was raised by his father's friends—Turkmens and Indians. He was then brought from Ahmedabad to Agra on the instructions of his mother's relative Akbar Shah. Thus, little Abdurakhim ends up in the Mughal palace and receives an excellent education there.

Muslim and Indian scholars were involved in Abdurakhim's education and training in the palace. He was fluent in five languages: Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Sanskrit and Turkmen. His knowledge of these listed languages is evidenced by the fact that he wrote poems in four languages. Abdurakhim earned a reputation as a genius poet in Indian literature with his poems written in Hindi. Abdurakhim was a very talented, famous, and rich man. He was a contemporary of the eminent Indian poets Tulsidas and Surdas. He was on friendly terms with these poets and provided them with all kinds of support and assistance.

Indian scientists have written articles and special scientific works based on Abdurakhim's poetic works written in Hindi. His Hindi works, which have gained great fame in India, include Rahim Dohavali, Madanashtak and Ras Panchayan, Five Songs of Krishna's Choir. The publication of Abdurakhim's works written in the Turkmen language is a matter of the future.

Abdurakhim greatly respected the work of Bayram Khan's mentor, the great Navoi. He corresponded with some of the most prominent people of his time. In his letters, he quoted individual poems by Navoi. Scientists say that Abdurakhim was also involved in translation. Muhammad Bayram Khan and his son Abdurahim Khan are the people who built the first bridge of friendship between the Indian and Turkmen peoples. Their work is a literary heritage worthy of comprehensive study by Turkmen scientists.

Yolguly Enisi is one of the poets who went to India in the first half of the 16th century and lived there until his death. He belonged to the Turkmen tribe Yolguly Shamly. It is assumed that the poet was born in Khorasan in the 30-40s of the 16th century. He worked as a librarian for his fellow tribesman, ruler Khyrat Alyguly Khan, and earned his living. Here he made his way into the world of books. This young man, whose family did not belong to the upper class, entered the world of poetry at an early age.

Yolguly participated in literary evenings held in the city of Khyrat, read his ghazals in the presence of famous poets and managed to win their trust. "Enisi" means "friendly, loyal." By the time the poet reached middle age, the poet's fame had spread far beyond the borders of Khorasan.

In the second half of the 16th century, the Uzbek ruler Abdullah Khan conquered Khorasan, and the poet Enisi was captured and taken to Transoxiana. Enisi's friend, the historian Nahavandi, sadly wrote that because of this incident, the poet's collection of poems was destroyed. Also, according to Nahavandi, all of Enisi's surviving works were written after his arrival in India. His mother was held captive by Abdullah Khan for more than a year. After the poet was released from captivity, he left Herat and traveled across India. During his travels, he became acquainted with Abdurakhim son of Bayram Khan and developed a friendship with him through their shared interest in poetry.

As we mentioned earlier, Abdurakhim was a talented poet. He respected literature and art. Talented poets, musicians and artists gathered in his palace, separate from the royal palace. His mother also began her former career as a librarian here. The poet married in Lahore and had a son. His mother devoted the last days of her life to serving the palace. Enisi's poems in Turkmen must have disappeared along with his almanac, destroyed during captivity. The poet's odes, ghazals and poems written in Persian testify to his unique thinking. Enisi dedicated his qasidas to the khans who supported and sponsored Khan Abdurakhim.

The poet also wrote several rubagis. In his works he expressed his impressions of what he saw in the cities of India. Several of the poet's poems are dedicated to mourning his painful life.

In another part of his mesnevi, the poet gives advice to his son and wishes him good luck.

Turkmen poets, who by lucky chance found themselves, for various reasons, far from their country and land, left a legacy of wonderful poetic works in their native language, Hindi, and Persian. The above-mentioned poets who lived in India, Bayram Khan, Abdurakhim Khan, Yolguly Enisi, are the brightest poets of literature of the 16th century. These sons of the Turkmens are the first to give rise to Turkmen-Indian literary relations; they are great personalities. The paths they paved lasted for years and centuries. Because this path is the path of friendship and mastery.

This road is the road along which Magtymguly Fragi, the great scientist, philosopher, poet of the 18th century, captivated by the beautiful nature, noble, virtuous, open heart of the Indian country, had walked.

In Magtymguly's work there is a strong desire to see the world, to see countries near and far, to study their living conditions, culture, and art. Magtymguly is not the kind of person who traveled the world and had fun. He himself speaks about this: "I have a thousand dealings but one head." There is a fundamental social-life problem reflected in his words, "My soul wants to travel the world." The problem is in building a state, in becoming an independent, free, sovereign, strong nation. It was in searching and finding an answer to the question of how people can get out of the economic crisis and poverty. In search of a solution to these problems, Magtymguly visited many countries. We listed the names of these countries in the article "Berkarar döwlet islärin." There is no need to repeat them now, but one thing is worth mentioning. During his travels, Magtymguly was involved in the politics of these countries as well.

That's because Magtymguly was sent on this long journey by his people who dearly loved him. He was a representative of his people, an ambassador.

One of these dream countries was beautiful India. In Magtymguly's works, the word "India" is repeated very often. The famous scientist, Professor Myati Kosayev in his book "Conversation about Literature" ("Edebiýat barada söhbet") writes: "To write this article ("Magtymguly and India"), I read the works of Magtymguly again. A strange thing happened: among all peoples and countries, there were twice as many poems dedicated to Indians as to others."

Of course, this can be explained by the adamant great love of the great Magtymguly Fragi for India and the Indian people. Moreover, Magtymguly knew perfectly well the glorious history of the Turkmens, and in which countries and in which tribes they lived. Caravans went to near and far countries. These caravans and merchants transported and brought goods and raw materials. Anyone who had the means could go with them. India is also one of such countries. Indian traders and merchants also arrived on Turkmen lands. Noisy and interesting conversations continued in caravanserais and bazaars. Everyone spoke enthusiastically about the features, beauty and beautiful buildings of their country.

India has an unparalleled masterpiece of architecture known as the Taj Mahal. Since its construction, the mausoleum has become one of the busiest places in the world. There are rumours that its fame has become known throughout the world. Such things awakened love and good

intentions for the country of India in the minds of the Turkmen. This forced Magtymguly to go to India. Because in Magtymguly's poems one can see a strong desire to go to India:

*Ýokarda Hindistany,  
Arkada Türküstanty,  
Öwliýalar ummany,  
Ol Rumystany görsem.*

*...Alla ganat berse, Hindistan uçar.  
Göwün ýola rowandyr—  
Hindistanda hyýalym*

Of course, the wishes and dreams in the poet's poems are not something unheard of. The relationship between the Indian people and the Turkmen existed in the 18th century and even before that. This can be seen in the poet's poem "Chowdur Khan," in the poem "Dolandylar Hindistana baranlar" or in the lines of the poem "Bular gelmedi"—"Hindistana bezirgenlik kylanlar, // Malyn satyp geldi, bular gelmedi," or in Terk eýleme bu mekany"—"Hany hemraýym, ýaranlar, // Hindistan sary ýörenler."

We said above that the poet was not only interested in traveling, but also had a purposeful, important matter, such as, research and exploration of a free, independent life. He is determined to stand up for the law:

*Hak ugrunda gurbandyr,  
Janym döwletim, malym.  
Göwün ýola rowandyr,  
Hindistanda hyýalym.*

Magtymguly Pyragy, with the blessing of his grandfather Dovletmmammet Azadi, goes on a journey with his Syrian friend Nuri Kazym ibn Bahyr, whom he met in the Godeldash madrasah of Bukhara.

Magtymguly Pyragy joined the caravans with his friend, and after a long journey, he reached Kashmir, India, and stayed there for some time. Then he returned safely.

Most Turkmen scholars confirm that Magtymguly Pyragy traveled twice. Similarly, he was twice in India. When he was in India for the second time, he visited several provinces of this beautiful country. According to literature, the poet lived in India for more than 1.5 years. During his stay in India, he studied the country's nature, animal world,

villages, people's activities and customs very carefully. This is confirmed by the poet's own poems:

*Hemra kyldym bazygäri,  
Ýortup gezip Hindistany.  
Durna, gaz mesgenin umman eýlediň,  
Hindige bagş eýläp ýeriň ýagşysyn.  
Tokaýlar bir zaman peleňsiz bolmaz,  
Hindi jandan öter, pilinden galmaz.  
Hindi jyda düşse hemrasy pilden,  
Öten günüň, baran ýolun aňlamaz.  
Mätäçligiň Hakdan özge bilmese,  
Ol rozygär besdir, açdan ölmese,  
Hindi kimin egin-örtüň bolmasa,  
Patyşalyk puşeş çigne saldym tut.  
Diýdim: “Tawus ne kaýdan?”  
Diýdi: “Jaýy — Hindistan”.*

If you pay attention to the content of these lines, it is impossible to describe them with such subtlety and observation without seeing the country in question and living there for some time. In these poems, the poet has skillfully depicted the characteristics of the Indian people.

Magtymguly studied the nature of the country, the animal world, and even the birds:

*Durna aýdar uçar men,  
Bagdat suwun içer men,  
Gyş Hindistan göçer men,  
Läle-zaran içinde.  
Gumrular owaz bilen,  
Tawus işi näzn bilen,  
Kaknus guş müň saz bilen,  
Şol Hindistan içinde.*

The great poet also spoke about India in his love poems. This can be seen in the poet's poem “Gözel sen”:

*Gyzyl diýsem—gyzyl, al diýsem—al sen,  
Hindistanda—şeker, Bulgarda—bal sen,  
Yşk bilen açylgan bir täze gül sen,  
Ýusup-Züleýhanyň taýy, gözel sen.*

As can be seen from the example poems, our great poet sage Magtymguly Pyragy has special love and respect for the Indian people. His poems awakened the love for India and the Indian people in the entire Turkmen nation. The Turkmen people, who wanted to become an independent, free state, had to look far away after the hope of support and sponsorship from the neighbouring feudal states was lost. That is why the true young men of Turkmen, who love and respect their people and country, had to go on trips. They did not spare their talents, abilities, and efforts to satisfy the hunger of the people:

*Magtymguly, dili otly, ot saçar,  
Ýüz görmez näkesiň aýbyny açar,  
Alla ganat berse, Hindistan uçar,  
Çoh garaşdym, ajap eýýam gelmedi.*

The 18th century, when Magtymguly lived, was a very difficult, tragic, oppressive century for the Turkmen people. But the inspiring words of Dovelettmammet Azadi and Magtymguly Pyragy were spiritual support for the people, they created a love for life in them. The words “Garyp sen ýyglama şir dek bolar sen” gave strength to the poor. He created great confidence that a country with such a brave, intelligent, wise, scientist, scholar, philosopher, and great poet will reach a wonderful age.

Summarising the meaning of Magtymguly Pyragy’s poems related to India, one can see in these poems the great love of the poet for India and the Indian people and a feeling of satisfaction coming from the depth of the heart. The poet found his soul there. The poet’s wonderful poem “Ýeldim tut” which appeals to the public is also a product of those feelings and emotions.

In the 19th century, several great Turkmen poets arose in Magtymguly Pyragy’s literary school. One of them is Mollanepes, who has the title “the king of the land of love.” Mollanepes is a perfect student of Magtymguly who has read and mastered all his works. He was strongly influenced by Magtymguly’s poems related to India. He also dreamed of seeing the places which Magtymguly had visited. This is also confirmed by the poet’s lines “If I go to India” in the poem “A dream will come true.” Mollanepes in his famous poem “Ansa” described the signs and characteristics of the Indian people very clearly:

*Hindiniň awçysy çykça şikäre,  
Özge aw islemez, pil sesin aňsa.*

From these sample lines, it can be seen that the Indian people care deeply about elephants.

In general, the poet has turned to the descriptions of Indian life in several other poems. In the poem “Konlum” he says, “Rumuň gülşeni hindi tawusy,” and in the poem “My Beauty” he mentions the traditions of painting the faces of Indian girls, saying, “Ajap nakgaş nigärdir ak ýüzde hindi haly.” Through the poet’s lines about India and the Indian people, one can see his boundless love and respect for this country and its people.

The path set for Turkmen-Indian literary relations in Bayram Khan’s times continued in modern Turkmen literature. When talking about this, of course, one cannot forget to mention the works of the poet Gara Seyitliev. An enthusiastic singer of peace, freedom, and brotherhood, G. Seyitliev created several poems dedicated to India and the Indian people. The theme of brotherhood and friendship of peoples is reflected in the poet’s book “Flowers of India.”

In the collection of poems “Flowers of India,” he poetically praises the beautiful nature of this country, its world-famous historical monuments, historical personalities, the warm heart of the great Indian people, and their wonderful humanitarian qualities.

Gara Seyitliev, who visited India, created many memorable works after returning from the trip. The poems included in the collection “Flowers of India” were among such works. His wonderful works such as “Tagoryň myhmany,” “Ýagş ýagsa, ýagşylykdyr,” “Kelketde,” “Zülfiýanyň sözleri,” “Çökýän minara,” “Muşaýyra aňsamy,” “Faiz Ahmed Faiza,” “Gözlerimde saklansyn” were warmly welcomed by the readers. These poems are still being recited by people. The poet’s poem “Gözlerimde saklansyn” is one of his most successful works:

*Owadandan owadan gyzlar gördüm dünýäde,  
Emma seniň ýüzüň dek nurly ýüzi görmedim.  
Owadandan owadan gözler gördüm dünýäde,  
Emma seniň gözleriň dek nurly gözi görmedim.  
Ýörişiň messan-messan,  
Her bakyşyň bir dessan.  
Seni dünýä baş eden,*

*Gözel ülke Hindistan.*

*Seniň röwşen gözleriň gözlerimde saklansyn,*

*“Gara saňa aşyk!” diýip, goý, çaklansa, çaklansyn!*

Gara Seyitliev visited the beautiful country of India with great love and passion. The tendency for peace of this country inspired the poet to study the life of India. No matter what part of the country the poet spoke about, he managed to express deep thoughts and reflections about it. For this reason, this collection delves deeply into various aspects of life.

One of the prominent representatives of modern Turkmen literature, Berdinazar Hudaynazarov, in his work, addressed the life of India and the Indian people, known for their ancient history and culture, and created wonderful poems. The poet, who writes that “this ancient country with a difficult history is proud of it,” dedicated the poem “Mahabharata” to the great famous epos of the Indian people.

In “It is beautiful, in this wonderful land,” the poet expressed his love for the beauty of the nature of India.

Berdinazar Hudaynazarov wrote the poem “A conversation with the actress,” as the name of the poem suggests, in the form of a dialogue, in a humorous tone. The essence of this poem is about the greatness of the cinema and music of the Indian people.

What has been said about Turkmen-Indian literary relations corresponds to the phrase “toýdan topukça” as the Turkmen people say. It is very encouraging that there is so much information to say about this topic. Today, the traditional relations between our countries are strengthened based on deep historical roots and the will of the peoples. Turkmen-Indian co-operation is being developed in many directions, including Turkmen-Indian friendship which is unbreakable and eternal.

## *Chapter 10*

# **Ancient Indian Culture: The Source of Indian Diplomacy**

*Ayna Baymuradova*

India is one of the cradles of human civilisation. As historians often note, people can be figuratively compared to a mighty tree with each passing century forming rings like those in a tree trunk. These rings represent a chronicle of people's life and preserve their historical memory. Just as a tree's strength is determined by its rings, a people are shaped by their centuries of history. The ancient Indian culture and the character of its people laid the foundation of Indian diplomacy. The first of these rings is India's ancient civilisation, which became the basis for all its further development.

In this article, we would like to provide an analysis of the origins of Indian diplomacy from a cultural perspective. Culture and diplomacy are interconnected to such an extent that it is impossible to understand the diplomacy and foreign policy of this state and conduct relations with them without knowing the culture of this people. The religious, philosophical, moral and political monuments of ancient Indian society give us an idea about the formation of the foundations of international relations. The peculiarity and uniqueness of the culture made it possible to form a peaceful and tolerant character of the Indian people. Civilisational differences and characteristics that formed in antiquity and influence relationships between states in the present time objectively require attention and study. This is why objective researches of the ancient political and cultural life of India is especially important. The system of Indian methods of diplomacy is of intellectual interest, and its study is especially important for political scientists and historians who study international relations. By exploring the principles and goals of diplomacy

of the ancient state, it is possible easily talk about its now days international relations.

We would also like to note the interconnection and similarity of the cultures of the two ancient peoples, which date back to the III millennium BC.

Esteemed President of Turkmenistan Serdar Berdimuhamedov noted about relations between the ancient civilisations in his book “Anau: Culture Originated from the Millennia”: *“Bronze vessels, silver and bronze seals, ivory jewellery, and gold figurines of a bull and a wolf discovered in Altyndepe gave historians a reason to think about the co-operation of that place with Mesopotamia and India.”* [1, p. 233].

Comparing the remains of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro—the central cities of the Indus Valley Civilisation, as well as the Altyndepe “Stonehenge” and Gonur-Depe, the capital city of Margiana, one can be convinced that there were fairly close contacts between these two civilisation centres. The Harappa Civilisation existed simultaneously with the civilisations of Southern Turkmenistan. Recent archaeological researches show that the Harappa Civilisation not only covered the Indus Valley, but it was spread over vast territories. The Harappan settlement Shortugai was discovered on the middle reaches of the Amu Darya, where purely Harappan ceramics were discovered in the lower layers. As archaeologists note, the relationship between the Southern Turkmen and Indian Civilisations began to form in the earlier era [12, p. 47], [7, p. 210], [14, pp. 9–10]. Scientists believe that Harappa had active contacts with Namazga, as evidenced by the found figurines [6, pp.12–13].

And also, many Turkmen tribes, who settled in Indian territory in different historical eras, made a huge contribution to the enrichment of local Indian culture and the development of science. The Aryans are one of them [7, p.139]. At all times in history, the Turkmen and Indian peoples had close relations and a strong historical foundation was built on it for further dialogue and interaction between the cultures of related peoples and countries in antiquity and the Middle Ages. The commonality of the history and the national values makes it possible to deeply discuss Indian culture.

Culture is a special language of humanity, with the help of which all good things can be achieved. “As expressed through language and art,

philosophy and religion, education, and science, films and newspapers, radio and television, social habits and customs, political institutions and economic organisations, culture heightens the skills of an individual and a society in its totality in all walks of life because it is by culture that a man or a society gets an insight into the whole. Culture includes not only art, music, dance and drama, but a whole way of life. In fact, culture is 'sanskriti', or a process of refinement. It is in this broader sense that culture has to be viewed" [13, p.10].

Based on these words, it must be emphasised that, over the ages, there has gradually developed a composite Indian culture with its own unbroken history. The story of Indian culture is a story of unity and synthesis, of reconciliation and development, of harmony and assimilation, of fusion of old traditions with new values.

One of the striking features of Indian culture over the millennia has been that peace and empathy have always been a part of public discourse. For example, the most frequently quoted is the concept of the world as one family—'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' is a floating verse, often quoted to express the harmony of human relations and associated with the Vedic world view [13, pp.10–11].

The Indian philosophy about one united family and well-being became the basis of the domestic and foreign policy of ancient India.

The main source for studying the ancient Indian theory of foreign policy is the Arthashastra, dating back to the first centuries A.D. Other monuments of "political literature" are also of great importance for the study of ideas about the foreign policy in ancient India: treatises such as the *Nitishastra*, the main content of which consists of ethical instructions for kings, as well as recommendations on foreign and domestic policy. The most famous works of this kind are "*Nitivakyamrita*" by Somadeva Suri and "*Arthasutra*" by Brihaspati. The oldest major work of "political literature" after the "Arthashastra" is the treatise "*Nitisara*" by Komandaki (V-VII centuries A.D.) [11, pp. 178–179].

These sources are also part of Indian culture. As scholars have noted about Indian cultural diplomacy, "the phenomenon of cultural diplomacy acquired prominence since the reign of Ashoka (304 B.C.–232 B.C.). Ashoka adopted dhamma as an instrument of state policy and renounced warfare. He approached the question of effecting harmony among people

and co-ordinating relations with neighbouring countries and beyond, in accordance with dhamma. Purely from the angle of governance, Ashoka's genius lies in making dhamma amenable to implementation in day-to-day life [13, p.11]. Ashoka says in one of his inscriptions: "I will publish the rules of piety. I will give instructions providing for piety" [15, p. 421].

The *Mahabharata* is indisputably the most vivid distillation of Indian thoughts on statecraft. Unlike the *Arthashastra*, it is not a compendium of clinical principles of governance. Instead, it is a graphic account of real-life situations and their inherent choices. Focusing on the importance of the sense of duty and the sanctity of obligations, it is also a description of human frailties. The dilemmas of statecraft permeate the story, among them takes risks, placing trust, and making sacrifices. The courage required to implement policy is, perhaps, its most famous section—the Bhagavad Gita. But there are other elements of perennial politics as well, including tactical compromises, utilising obsessive players, undertaking regime change and ensuring balance of power [8, pp. 48–49], [5, pp. 215–223].

Indian diplomacy, as Arrian noted in *Indica* (IX), did not seek conquest beyond its natural boundaries. The name of this principle is *Niti*, it is based on the harmonious development of humanity in equal importance with the correct implementation of policies [4, pp. 176–177].

The *Arthashastra* is undoubtedly the most important work in Hindu political thought. It is interesting to note that Kautilya was a diplomat par excellence. His strategies to enable a ruler to become a *chakravartin*, king of the world, include peace, war, neutrality, marching, alliance, dual policy, and he carefully explains which strategy should be adopted and when. "Who is inferior to another state must make peace with it; he who is superior in power must wage war; who believes that no enemy can harm him and strong enough to crush the enemy must maintain neutrality" [9, pp. 22–25, 505–512]. Kautilya's diplomacy is based on moral responsibility and does not justify the concept of immoral sovereignty. Thus, it is a tribute to the laws of ancient India that, despite political upheavals and cataclysms, the fundamentals of diplomatic method and practice did not undergo changes, were not distorted for the sake of achieving a momentary result.

In this context, Chatur Upaya's concept about instruments of diplomacy, such as, *sama* and *dan* deserves special mention.

*Sama*, as a method of diplomacy, means friendship, courtesy, reason, peace, negotiation, persuasion, and reconciliation. The word *sama* literally means melody, “which denotes a special branch of priestly teaching in the Vedic tradition of rituals, which deals with the melodies with which various stanzas of the *Rigveda* are performed” [9, pp. 510-511], [4, p. 179]. The enormous importance for the timely world community of non-aggression pacts, negotiations, negotiations at the preliminary level is a reflection of this ancient Indian diplomatic method.

The literal meaning of the word *dan* is “gift.” In modern diplomacy, it is reflected in compromise and the idea of mutual concessions to ensure interstate understanding and partnerships. To avoid misunderstandings, negative assessments and tendencies to deteriorate relations between states, it is necessary to be able to conduct dialogue in a special environment and with a special message. With moderation, goodwill, tolerance, and patience, this becomes not a difficult task [4, p. 179].

The ancient Indian collection of *Manu* laws states: “No one knows the outcome of a war. Therefore, it is reasonable to avoid such a catastrophe”. The norms of war were very developed in India in the second half of the first millennium B.C. and in the first centuries AD. *Manu* laws highlighted war as a form (method) of politics. At the same time, it was recommended to “make attempts to overcome the enemy through peaceful negotiations” [10, p. 82]. The call to attempt a peaceful resolution of the conflict is a characteristic phenomenon of international relations and international law of Ancient India. Give up the battle, because war does not deserve approval under any circumstances. If “peace negotiations between those who strive for peace by all means and do not want war end in failure, then war becomes inevitable. After all, the failure of peace negotiations results in terrible consequences” [16, p. 154].

As already mentioned, war usually receives negative characteristics in ancient Indian “political literature”. War was considered as the last resort when all others had already been used. There are aphorisms in Sanskrit literature like this: “When victory can be on one side or the other, a hostile clash of troops should be avoided” [11, p. 192].

The *Manu* Laws emphasise the importance of negotiations, there is a call for negotiations “...whatever opponents he (the king) strives for conquest, let them all be subdued...—by negotiations and others”.

Scientists always recommend negotiations and force for the prosperity of the country” [16, p. 150].

Facts in the *Agni Purana* say that diplomacy is better than open military conflict. Special envoys handled diplomacy. Kautilya, who understood the true meaning of diplomacy, believed: *Nayya*—diplomacy—will conquer the whole earth [16, p. 151]. He further named five types of peace negotiations: praising the positive qualities of the enemy, promoting family ties with him, pointing out mutual benefits for both sides, a favourable outcome, and setting a personal example.

Even when war was inevitable, there were numerous restrictions on the conduct of hostilities and the use of weapons. It was considered unacceptable to kill old people, children, and women, as well as parliamentarians and surrendered prisoners. Equally, the wounded should not be killed (depending on the nature and severity of the injury). We read in the *Manu* Laws: “Do not kill a person who has descended to the ground (if he himself remained on the chariot), the one who has folded his hands (with a plea for mercy) ... the one sitting, the one who says “I am yours.” Do not kill a person who is sleeping, one who does not have chain mail, naked, unarmed, not fighting, but (only) looking, fighting with another. Neither the one whose weapon is broken, nor the one stricken (by illness), nor the seriously wounded, nor the frightened, nor the one who has taken flight” [16, p. 154]. Temples and other religious buildings were not subject to capture and destruction. Their guardians, as well as the guardians of bridges, wells, etc., enjoyed immunity. This also applied to some other categories of the population. They are provided for the existing norms of international law and some restrictions on the types of weapons and methods of their use. Prisoners cannot be killed, according to the rules of the *Mahabharata*, and those who were wounded should even be released.

It should be noted that the institution of state neutrality was known to the international law of Ancient India. Kautilya believed that it was better to resort to neutrality than to war. During war, neutral parties enjoyed all the rights that flowed from their international agreements, subject only to the actual restrictions imposed by the state of war. The provision of any advantages by a neutral party to one of the warring parties automatically led to the loss of neutrality [9, pp. 513–532]. A neutral state was to be treated with respect and no belligerent was allowed to bring that state to its side.

In ancient India, ambassadors were of particular importance in interstate relations. Because, as they say in the source books, peace or war depended on them [10, p. 82]. According to commentaries on the *Dharmashastra* of *Manu*, the ambassador's influence on "unification and separation" largely depended on how he read the message and what he added. A traditional Indian aphorism stated that "kings speak through the mouths of ambassadors" and ambassadors were considered inviolable [11, pp. 195, 201].

We can find such sentences in *Manu Laws*: "An ambassador (*duta*) should be appointed who is knowledgeable in all the *Shastras*, who understands [the hidden meaning of] involuntary movements, facial expressions, gestures, who is honest, capable, well-born. An ambassador for the king is recommended to be loyal, honest, experienced, memorable, knowing the [proper] place and time [for action], representative, fearless, eloquent. Only the ambassador unites and separates allies, [it is] the ambassador who manages the matter by which people are separated;" "...the peace and its opposite depends on the ambassador" [16, p. 148].

Ancient Indian epics note that an ambassador must belong to a high-ranking noble family; be skillful, eloquent, truthful in carrying out one's mission, and have an excellent memory. The head of state did not have the right to sentence the ambassador to death. Any official, having killed the ambassador, took upon himself an irredeemable sin, which extended to him and his deceased ancestors.

Ambassadors and messengers enjoyed personal immunity: "Let swords be drawn, let relatives lie in blood, let abusive speeches be heard—you cannot kill the messenger (ambassador)" (*Panchatantra*) [2, p. 112]. Ambassadors could carry money, travel items, and products of their country, which were not subject to duty. The recognised ambassador was given the right to communicate with his sovereign. The rulers of former times, true to their word, made peace on the basis of (only) their word of honour. In case of the possibility of violation (of such an agreement), they swore an oath to touch fire, water, furrow, city wall, a lump of earth, an elephant's shoulder, a horse's back, the inside of a chariot, weapons, seeds, incense, wine, gold or money, saying: let the one who breaks the oath perish from these or lose them" [2, p. 114].

Talking about co-existence, peace and non-violence it must be noted that Ashoka was the first among other rulers to include moral principles in

his political structure as a guide for administrative and national policies. Ashoka ruled almost the entire Indian sub-continent and ruled the Mauryan Empire. It was under Ashoka's rule that the Mauryan Empire reached its greatest geographical extent and power, but during his early reign, the remarkable transformation of the kingdom did not take place through violent means. He achieved his goals through his adoption of Buddhism, as well as his messages of ethics, tolerance, and non-violence throughout his vast Empire [3, p. 120].

As Indian authors note, "Cultural Diplomacy" is the "Mother of all Diplomacies", as it lays the foundation stone, over which the diplomatic structures are built. Cultural Diplomacy plays a larger role, as a 'Connectivity Bridge' in enhancing 'Understanding' among peoples and nations, as it does not push in the direction of converting others into one's viewpoint" [13, p. 17].

Studying the culture of ancient India, one must say that they are a unique people who consider morality, ambition, and peace above all else.

As the above historical facts testify, the philosophical origins of the ideas of the political leader and "Father of the Nation" Mahatma Gandhi originate from the depths of centuries. His ideas "Satyagraha" are the philosophy of the ancient people, who have always been against violence and wars, and have always believed that everything can be resolved diplomatically and peacefully. We wanted especially to emphasise these principles. Because this theory of foreign policy was also characteristic of the Turkmen people. Peace, co-existence and good neighbourliness are the basis of foreign policy of Turkmenistan in the 21st century.

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## *Chapter 11*

# **Glory of “Hindustan” in the Poems of Magtymguli Fragi**

*Maya Atajanova*

Our beloved Motherland—the Independent, permanent Neutral state of Turkmenistan, after gaining its independence, international relations were established between the Republic of India, and international co-operation with it as an important and reliable partner is continued on an equal and long-term basis. Today, Turkmen-Indian relations are becoming more and more active, and we can witness the effective development of systematic co-operation in this field in the example of the activities conducted between the two countries. The reason that, based on the positive experience of co-operation in various fields, our country maintains friendly, equal, and mutual respect for inter-governmental relations.

It is an integral part of intergovernmental relations built on the powerful foundation of mutually advantageous co-operation relations. Effective work on studying, preserving and increasing the cultural values of the Turkmen and Indian peoples continues. Presenting Turkmen-Indian arts and organising joint cultural events have become a noble tradition. This is of great importance in studying the centuries-old history of peoples, life culture, art production and modern achievements, exchanging experiences and enriching them.

Turkmen-Indian relations go back to ancient times. The famous poet of the Turkmen people and the creator of the classical literature Magtymguly Fragi have lines that are an example of Turkmen-Indian relations in his poems. Magtymguly, a prominent poet who made a valuable contribution to our literary heritage and the gold reserve of world literature with his works, wrote poems not only important in educating

young people with pure morals, patriotism, humanity, loyal, but also in creating a physically and spiritually healthy society. Magtymguly Fragi has created poems on various themes (patriotism, humanitarianism, humanity, unity, love, manners, health, music, neighbourhood, life, praise of the beauty of brides and women, admonitions). Every Turkmen who reads his wonderful creation, which has become a nation, sees his heroic past, present, and future of his/her nation.

According to historical data, Magtymguly Fragi was a poet-traveler. A wise poet was on the path of enlarging his own point of view to the world through travelling.

He traveled to Central Asia, the Middle East, Afghanistan, Iran, India, and his travels in these countries are confirmed by folk legends and information in his poems. Travels deepened the creativity of the poet. Magtymguly travelled to many countries and wrote about them in his poems. Reference to India are often found in his verses, revealing the divestify and depth of his creative expression. In the poet's poem, "Bady-sabany görsem (I'd Like to Feel the Wind of Down)" one can feel the strong passion of his desire to travel the world:

Ýokarda Hindistany, I would like to see India located up on the map,  
Arkada Türküstany, Turkestan, which is behind on the map, Öwliýalar  
ummany—I'd like to see Roman Empire, Ol Rumystany görsem. The  
ocean of cemeteries.

In the poet's poem "I have a dream of India":

*Göwün ýola rowandyr—Soul is on its way—Hindistanda hyýalym. [4.] I  
have a dream of India.*

He expresses his dream of India. In this line of the poet's poem "Light will not fall", he writes that he was in India, saying "I have seen India". Magtymguly Fragi visited different parts of India and was familiar with the ancient Indian culture, art, and traditions.

Magtymguly describes the Indian land, its beautiful nature, and the fact that such a beautiful land was given to the Indians by God in the poem "Ýaryň ýagşysyn (The best of Beloved)" as follows:

*Binamysy dertden aman eýlediň, You saved the impudent from trouble,  
Baran jaýyn meýlis-mekan eýlediň, Made a party where he moved in.*

*Durna, gaz mesgenin umman eýlediň, Made Ocean the home of ducks and cranes Hindige bagyş eýläp ýeriň ýagşysyn. [4.] Gifted the best land for Hindi.*

The great lyricist describes the wonders and beauty of the Indian land in his poem “Jan içinde (In the Heart)”:

*Durna aýdar: uçar men, The crane will say: I fly, Bagdat suwun içer men, I drink Baghdad water, Gyş Hindistan göçer men, I migrate to India in winter, Läle zaran içinde. [5., 297s.] In the beauty of a land.*

Or:

*Gumrular owaz bilen Humming-birds are in songs*

*Tawus işi näz bilen Peacocks—with their flirts Kaknus guş müň saz bilen Phoenix with thousands of songs*

*Şol Hindistan içinde. [5., 297 p.] At the Hindustani land.*

In the following lines, Hindustan was stated as the motherland of peacocks, which considered as the beauty of Indian nature:

Diýdim: “Tawus kaýdandyr?” I asked: “Where is the peacock from?”  
Diýdi: “Jaýy—Hindistan” [6., 176s.] He replied: “His home is Hindustan”  
Staying of the wise poet in India left a great mark on his poetic legacy. In his works, the poet not only mentions the Indian people but also comments on the Indian life.

The following lines of the poet’s poem “Ýeldim tut (Imagine)”.

*Mätäçligiň hakdan özge bilmese,  
Ol rozygär, besdir, açdan ölmese.*

*Hindi kimin egin örtgiň bolmasa,*

*Patyşalyk püşeş çigne saldym tut. [5., 184s.]*

*If no one, except God, knows that you are in need,*

*The living is enough if one does not die of hunger,*

*If you do not own clothes like Indians do,*

*Imagine that you possess a whole bundle of the Shah’s clothes*

[7., p. 189]

And in the following lines, he urges the young man or travelers to become skillful in their life:

*Çyn—Maçynda, Rumda, Hindde, Hebeşde, Bolan-bolmuş hünärleri bildim tut. [5., 184s.]*

*Imagine that you have skills in many crafts, both old and new,  
In countries, such as, China, India, the Roman Empire and Ethiopia [7.,  
p. 189]*

Magtymguly Fragi's poem "Terk eýleme bu mekany (Don't leave this land)" emphasises that India is a wonderful place:

*Gördüm men bir mekan ary, Kylmyşam bihet nisary, Hemra kyldym  
bazygäri, Ýortup gezip Hindistany. [5., 184s.]  
My friends, where is my companion?  
Those who toured to India,  
Those who saw the light of God's countenance,  
Did you see Hanmengli? [7., p.43]*

In his "Ýaşlar içinde (In the Age)" poem he mentions that the elephant has a great place in the life of the Indian people and that it is bad for Indians to be separated from the elephant.

*Tokaşlar bir zaman peleňsiz bolmaz Hindi jandan öter, pilinden galmaz.  
Forests will never be without lions,  
Because of the Indian soul, it will not left without elephants.*

Difficulties of the Indian people's lives were described in the following lines of the poem "Pisat dünýädir (Peasat World)" written in Sufism:

*Çyn-Maçyny goýdy zulum astynda,  
Dowzah açar boldy zemin üstünde,  
Hindistany ahu-zaryň kastynda,  
Goýup baran, görüň, pesent dünýädir [6., 98s.]  
Chin-Machyn was left under oppression,  
Hell broke out on earth,*

India is in the caste of the household. Look, it is the old world [6., 98 p.]

The poet connects the beauty with India not only in his religious life poems but also in his love for poems. This can be seen in the poet's poem "Gözel sen (You are beautiful)":

*Gyzyl diýsem—gyzyl, al diýsem—al sen, Hindistanda—şeker,  
Bulgarda—bal sen. Yşk bilen açylan bir täze gül sen Ýusup-Züleyhanyň  
taýy, gözəl sen. [5., 41s.]*

If I say red—you are red, if I say scarlet—you are scarlet Sugar in India, honey in Bulgaria.

You are a new flower blooming with love  
 Yusup-Zilleyha’s pair, you are beautiful. [5., 41p.]

Or:

*Hindistanyň reňkli gyzyl meşesi,  
 Surayı çilimiň näýy gözel sen! [5., 41s.]  
 The colored redwood of India,  
 You are beautiful as the tobacco pipe of Surai!*

In Magtymguly Fragi’s verses praising India, one can hear that his trip to this country broadened his horizons; the beauty of Indian nature, historical past and life at that time created unforgettable moments for the poet, and had a great impact on his poetic creativity. Based on the analysis of the poet’s poems about India, we come to the following conclusion:

- (a) Lines expressing the poet’s desire to see India.
- (b) Lines describing the impact of the poet’s journey to India.
- (c) Descriptive lines comparing the events of the poet’s life poems with the memory of India.

Magtymguly Fragi, a great wordsmith and philosopher, who left an indelible mark on Turkmen literature, has been inherited as works of art, inspiration, nationalism, and deep meaning in the hearts of his readers. This heritage is the treasure, literary, and eternal spiritual wealth of the Turkmen people.

Today, the happy Turkmen people, living in an Independent state—in the dream era of the great thinker Magtymguly Fragi, pay great attention to the creativity and the study of literary heritage of the classical poet. “The greatness of every nation is equal to the greatness of the individuals which has brought forth and given to the world,” said our Hero Arkadag, who pays unlimited respect to the creativity and literary heritage of the wise poet. The poet of hearts and times, the singer of the most beautiful and pure feelings of humanity, Magtymguly Fragi is the spiritual greatness of the Turkmen people. Noting that the legacy of the great poet is a unique educational school”, the decision to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Magtymguly Fragi’s birthday in 2024 creates endless joy in our hearts.

Currently, under the leadership of our Hero Arkadag, our Esteemed President the works of Magtymguly Fragi are translated into different languages. In various countries, great efforts are being made to restore the

monument of our great poet, to study his rich literary heritage in depth. Readers of different countries read with great enthusiasm the poems of Magtymguly Fragi, who learned the language and culture of many peoples of the world and skillfully expressed it in his creativity. This is a boundless happiness for the Turkmen people.

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## Chapter 12

# Magtymguly's Poetry in Hindi Translation

*Hem Chandra Pande*

The legendary poet of Turkmenistan, Magtymguly (1724–1807), was a multifaceted personality who was also a thinker and a great humanist. As a great traveller of his time, besides several other countries, he had also visited India. Magtymguly was born and is also buried in the province of Gulestan (Iran). He symbolises the genuine Turkmenian spirit, which is expressed not only in his poetry but also in his actions, as he was concerned about the unification of displaced Turkmen tribes. Magtymguly largely imbibed most of his qualities from his father Dauletmämmed Azady (1695–1700/1760), a great personality of his time. Thanks to his father Magtymguly acquired a good knowledge of Turkmenian, Persian, and Arabic languages. In his time Persian was more popular as a language of poetry. But Magtymguly, in the spirit of a true Turkmenian, chose Chagatai—a classical Turkic language—to write his poems, even though he could not avoid the legacy and heavy influence of Persian. That is why it is often referred to as Persianate Turkic. Gradually, Chagatai acquired its own characteristics. Thus, credit for elevating Chagatai as a language of poetry goes to Magtymguly. It is a well-known fact Chagatai was also the court language of the Khān rulers of Central Asia. The first Mughal Emperor of India, Babur (1483–1530), who came from the same region, also wrote his autobiographical memoirs *Bāburnameh* in prose in Chagatai language. This was about three centuries before Magtymguly. The tribe to which Babur belonged also bears the identical name. Thus, we see how Magtymguly laid the foundation of Turkmenian poetry.

To mark his 290th birth anniversary, a collection of 200 selected poems of Magtymguly has been published in Hindi recently.<sup>1</sup> Going through this collection, one is impressed by the realistic as well as humane

content of his poems. Though Magtymguly belonged to the early modern period, the basic ideas of many of his poems seem to echo the subtle thoughts expressed by many Hindi poets belonging to medieval and late medieval periods of Hindi poetry, and also in some couplets (*shlokas*) composed in Sanskrit. In this context, we are reminded of eminent poets like Kabīrdās (1398–1518), Sūrdās (1483–1584), Malik Mohammad Jāyasī (1492–1548), Tulsīdās (1511–1623), Abdul Rahīm Khānkhānā (1556–1627)<sup>2</sup> and some others. It may also be interesting to mention that the word *-dās* ‘servant or slave’ occurring in the above-mentioned names of Kabīrdās, Sūrdās, and Tulsīdās expresses the same meaning as *-guli* occurring in the name of Magtymguly, it is meaning being ‘*slave of Magtym*’. Thus, in Hindi Magtymguly should become *Magtymdās*.

The present article will analyse Magtymguly’s poetry available in Hindi translation, and we shall also see how the same idea echoes in Hindi poetry belonging to the medieval and early modern period of Hindi literature. It may be mentioned that Hindi poetry of that period was mostly composed in *Braj* and *Awadhi* languages and is recognised as an inalienable part of Hindi literature.

While going through the Hindi translations of Magtymguly’s poems, we are struck by the diversity of themes and depth combined with simplicity in their expression. There are poems devoted to old age, love, welfare of human beings, fate, deceit, devotion to duty, *etc.* In the last stanzas of his poems, Magtym generally uses his pen-name *Fragy* (sometimes spelt as *Piragy*).

In the first poem of the Hindi collection Magtymguly laments about lost prosperity and wealth when he used to help the needy (*kyā karū mē becārā hū* ‘*What To Do, I Am Helpless,*’ p. 1):

*mē ek khān thā apne mādare vatan kā,  
hukum mere kī ahmiyat thī, khānō kā mē sardār thā.  
bīmārō o besahārō ke dukh-dard ka ilāj thā,  
zarūratamand or garībō kā madadgār thā,  
nāummīdī mē zindagī kī duā thā.*

. . . . .

*kyā karū vaqt kī is mār kā,  
chhīn lī amīrī jiskā shukraguzār thā.*

These lines from the poem also reveal one more trait of personality of the poet—even when he was prosperous, he did not live a lavish life; rather he always tried to help the needy. And now he is lamenting that he has been deprived of all the noble duties that he used to carry out when he was physically, as well as financially, able to do so.

Magtymguly has emphasised that man should not be swayed away by empty pride, that one should nurture humane qualities and keep oneself away from evil deeds as expressed in the following poem (*kadam uthāte ho tum* 'While Taking Your Steps,' p. 11):

*Dūbā rahtā he gaflat mē insāniyat bhūlkar insān,  
Dag bhartā he itarātā huā, kartā he dāṅvādol use abhimān,  
karte ho bār-bār mālik ke ādesh kā apamān,  
kyō karte ho apane man ko itanā tucch, insān.*

.....

*bhulnā mat kabhī ādamzād kī pahcān,  
dar tū bure karmō se, E insān.  
gar hotā hE mot se khatare jān,  
karoge tab bhalā kyā tum, e insān?*

These lines emphasise that one should remain aware of humane deeds, and no one should be swayed by false pride.

Magtymguly is critical of hypocrisy and shows his fearlessness even when criticising those who consider themselves above criticism, as we can see in the following poem (*acchā zamānā nahī āyā* 'Good Times Have Not Come', pp. 15–16):

*kitnā jāhil hū mē, phās gayā bhāgya ke jāl mē,  
kiyā bahut intazār, par acchā zamānā nahī āyā.  
nahī kah saktā judāī kā sitam,  
kiyā bahut intazār, par acchā zamānā nahī āyā.*

.....

*merī sac bātō ko mullā batātā he galat,  
jhūthī bātō kā kartā he vah sammān.  
piḡhalāte hē dil sabhī ke khākar qurān kī qasam,  
kiyā bahut intazār, par acchā zamānā nahī āyā.*

These lines, especially the one which has been underlined, amply prove that Magtymguly had the courage of calling a spade a spade, and he was a man of conviction.

Magtymguly says that one should not be too proud of one's material wealth as it will not go with him in his last journey (*cale gae sab* 'All Have Gone', p. 117):

*na karo tum gumān dhan-dolat par apanī,  
āe the jo khālī hāth mar gae sab.  
karke arthahīn kukarm mat karo tum ghamand,  
dub gae hē is kīcar mē na jāne kitne log.*

These lines, especially, the first two lines have surprising similarity with the thought expressed in the couplet of some unknown poet of Hindi:

*nārāyan sansār mē bhupati bhae anek,  
mē merī karte rahe, le na gae trin ek.*

Here, the poet is referring to kings who, having amassed immense wealth, departed from this world, leaving everything accumulated by them in the material world. This idea has been beautifully expressed by Magtymguly in the words—*khālī hāth mar gae sab*, while the Hindi poet has expressed it using a different metaphor—*le na gae trin ek*.

One of the favourite themes of Magtymguly's poetry is poverty and poor people. He is very much realistic when he says in one of his poems (*ekākī* 'The Lonely', p. 256):

*āenge sab log dhanī ke dehānt par,  
rahte hē sab bekhobar garīb kī mriyu se.  
samajhanā mushkil he, kyā hotā he,  
calnā partā he jab akele hī esī rāhō par.*

In these lines, the poet says that people remain ignorant about a poor man's death while crowds gather to hear the news of prosperous ones.

In the following stanza, Magtymguly is talking about friendship, and he has expressed the wish that true friendship should flourish and remain like a thread without any 'knots or joints' (*josh mē na ā jāe* 'Let there be no zeal', p. 159):

*dikhtā he har kisī kā ācaran  
va buddhi uske man mē.  
na pare do sacce mitrō ke sambandhō mē  
kabhī gāth.*

Almost a similar thought has been expressed by Abdul Rahīm Khānkhānā (1556–1627) in the following couplet (*dohā*) which describes friendship as a thread of love which should remain unbroken:

*rahiman dhāgā prem kā, mat toro catkāy,  
tūte se phir nā jure, jure to gāth par jāy.*

Thus, we see that there is a striking similarity (*na pare kabhī gāth—*Magtymguly;—*jure to gāth par jāy—*Rahīm) in the thoughts of Rahīm and Magtymguly, even though Rahīm lived almost two hundred and fifty years before the Turkmenian genius.

Also worth noticing is the stanza given below from Magtymguly's poetry (*tumhē le jāegī* 'You Will be Carried Away,' p. 19):

*khudā kī sevā karo,  
karo na vyarth apanā jīvan.  
bin dvār va bin jharokhe ke,  
le jāenge tumhē band ghar mē.*

This stanza is worth comparing with the couplet (*shloka*) by an unknown poet of Hindi:

*nārāyan hari bhajan mē tū jani der lagāy,  
kā jāne yā der mē shvāsā rahe ki jāy.*

The essence of both the instances is the advice that one should devote some time to devotion of the Almighty, as nobody knows when one would stop breathing. Magtymguly has expressed his thinking more metaphorically as indicated by the underlined relevant part of the stanza above; while the Hindi poet has expressed the same idea by indicating 'stoppage of breathing' (*le jāenge tumhē band ghar mē—*Magtymguly;—*shvāsā rahe ki jāy—*unknown Hindi poet).

Somewhat similar idea has been expressed in the stanza given below (*marne se pahale* 'Before Death', p. 200):

*ā jātā he yād musibat mē khudā,  
na ātī he yād uskī sukhamay jīvan mē.  
mat bitāo vyarth zindagī milte hī mokā.  
murjhā jāoge phūl kī tarah āne par musibat.  
mat bhūlo apne pushp ko murjhāne se pahle.*

As already mentioned above, Magtymguly was also a great traveller, and he has expressed his desire to travel widely (*dekhñā cāhtā hū* ‘I want to see’, p. 6):

*dehistān kī pahāriyō mē,  
subah kī havā dekhñā cāhtā hū mē.*

.....

*vah tāj jo zannatō kā nūr he,  
vah jiskā nām duniyā mē mashahūr he,  
jise cāhte hē donō jahā mē,  
boltā he jo arabī zubān,  
usase milnā cāhatā hū.*

.....

*ūpar sthit hindustān ko,  
pīche se jure turkī ko,  
dargāhō ke mahāsāgar  
va roman sāmrajya ko  
dekhñā cāhtā hū mē.*

These lines are an ample proof of Magtymguly’s lust for travel.

It is believed that Magtymguly was not able to marry his beloved, and the poet’s feelings of sadness in this regard have been expressed in the following extracts from one of his poems (*duniyā jānatī he* ‘The World Knows’, pp. 4-5):

*O! mere dosto, mere pyāre dosto!  
he azīz merī priyatamā merī zindagī se bhī zyādā.  
basī he bankar rūh ab bhī mujh mē,  
yah bāt sārī duniyā jānatī he...*

.....

*dukh-dard mē sarābor hū mē ek asahāy insān.  
bahārē āᅅᅅgī-jāᅅᅅgī, guzarā vaqt banegā merī pahcān...  
par na mānegī vah bat merī,  
udās ākhō mē dūbe raheᅅge mere armān.*

These lines are also an expression of lamentation for the beloved. The wishes of the poet remain unfulfilled, as we can read in the last line of the poem (*udās ākhō mē dūbe raheᅅge mere armān* ‘My sad eyes will forever be carrying my unfulfilled wishes’).

In conclusion, we can say that Magtymguly's poems are highly realistic, and they leave a deep impact on the minds of the readers. Their similarity with the writings of the Hindi poets of medieval and late medieval periods shows that there are no geographical boundaries when it comes to the basic traits of human beings and their depiction in poetry. Magtymguly's poetry is a shining example of this. It is all the more appealing to Indian readers who find these translated poems very close to their hearts.

### **Endnotes**

1. *Magtymguly kī saṅkalit rachnāē* (Selected Poems of Magtymguly), Editor Professor Abhai Maurya, Translated by Shirin Jepbarova, Gulnara Muhammedova, Oguljennet Chariyeva, Magtymguly Institute of Language, Literature and National Manuscripts, Turkmenistan, Goyal Publishers and Distributors Private Limited, New Delhi, 2023.
2. It is believed that the forefathers of Abdul Rahīm Khānkhānā had come to India from Turkmenistan.

## Chapter 13

# Turkmenistan: The Seljuk Legacy

*P.L Dash*

Heritage, legacy, culture, and other categories of understanding the historical contribution of a particular people in the annals of history come into the life of all peoples. The Turkmen, from the days of yore, were no exception. The present-day territories of Turkmenistan have had a hoary past. Located at the confluence of three Asias, this was the territory through which the ancient Silk Routes from China and India ran to Europe.

As a result, such pre-Islamic cities as Nisa and Merv were famous not only as ancient city centres, but also for their sterling contribution to art, science, culture, town planning, army, defense, and so on. Before the Mongols invaded Central Asia, Turkmenistan was ruled under the Great Seljuk Dynasty, which established their administrative city centre in Merv, fought with neighbouring emirates, conquered them and set up Seljuk Wazi rates, annexed them to their empire and spread their influence and clout far and wide. It is these Seljuk rulers who taught others the art of statecraft, establishing a solid hierarchical administrative system that brought the crowning glory of efficient rulers. As the aura of this glory spread to the neighbourhood, two adjacent empire-building regimes fell under the influence of the Seljuks. They were Persia and Anatolia. The Seljuk's administrative system inculcated a definite political culture emulated by many in later years.

The Seljuk rulers ruled Turkmenistan for just a brief period of 150 years. From the advent of the Great Seljuks to the invasion of the Mongols in 1220. However, their political contribution in laying the foundation of a solid Empire was peerless. The Medieval Mary was the capital of the Seljuk Empire. In and around the city, there are archaeological monuments unearthed to tell us the glorious epoch of the Seljuk rulers, their

administrative system, interactions with the neighbours in the periphery and beyond. This paper briefly highlights some aspects of the political administrative system of the Seljuk Empire between the XI and XIII centuries by dwelling on the political legacies of the Seljuks, which have contemporary relevance and bearing.

### **The Seljuk State**

The Seljuk was the chief of a nomadic Turkic tribe, who ruled Central Asia and most territories of the Middle East between the XI and XIII centuries. From Mary—then called Merv—in Turkmenistan to Isfahan in Iran and from Nisapur in Turkmenistan to Ray in Iran and Anatolia in Turkey, this is the breadth of the empire the Seljuk Sultans had built. In their heydays, they had exerted a strong influence on the territories they ruled. Their Empire cut across present-day Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey as well as a part of Afghanistan. The empire almost stretched across most of Central Asia and the Middle East. It has had a locational advantage of a trade route between Asia and Europe. It developed city centres and provided sanctuaries to Traders of all hues from various countries. Thus, the locomotive of progress business and the Seljuks facilitated it. Businessmen brought with them different cultures from their land of origin, thereby creating a fertile ground for assimilation of cultures and social mores prevalent then in those medieval societies. The Turkmen Seljuk culture thus had embraced whatever came from China and India in the East and the Roman Empire in the West. And the Seljuk Empire was at the very centre, at the crossroads of Civilisational assimilation of different cultural values. Since it was an Islamic Turkic tribe, nomadic in nature, it had the bitter experience of moving from place to place in Central Asian deserts and oases, in the Insalubrious climate on a treacherous terrain. Therefore, the main objective was to transit to a settled lifestyle and consolidate power around the oases and rivers from Amu Darya to Tigris and Euphrates, as well as westward to the Mediterranean and eastward to the Indus Valley. It is on this swath of Landmass the Seljuks consolidated their empire and left behind a legacy of Statecraft that most countries continue to follow even today.

The Seljuk Emperor was sovereign. He taught the world the significance of Sovereignty. His power was absolute and unchallengeable on the territories he ruled. It was perhaps the first time the idea of state sovereignty was firmly inculcated by the Seljuks in their political and

administrative activities. Like a modern president, the Seljuk Sultan had the power to pardon any criminal of any crime committed on his territory. But the punishment was invariably harsh and meted out in the most truculent manner so as to send a message to all not to commit such a crime in future. It required valour on the part of the head of the state to institutionalise a justice system that would carry out exemplary punishment in consonance with the degree of the crime committed and that too within the prescribed limits of the Law of the land. The administrative system the Seljuks had put in place was solid, and the subjects did not have grievances against their rulers.

The Seljuk emperors enthused and encouraged their local administrators to innovate different forms of governance. They taught that administration and statecraft were never a cul-de-sac, but rather a versatile, open-ended journey to innovation in tune with the changing realities and mutating situations. The best thing was to serve the people and their cause; anything that comes in that way ought to be ruthlessly overcome. It is this adventurous mission that singled out the Seljuk Sultans from their contemporary rulers elsewhere and this is precisely what had endeared them to the people in their neighbourhood. They evolved an administrative system that was open to all citizens depending on their competence, training, education, and capability. “Although administrators tended to be drawn from the class of professional bureaucrats, the society was fluid and mobile enough to permit entry to public office from other social and economic classes, if the individuals concerned were able to acquire the necessary education and training....”<sup>1</sup>

This clearly implied that the Seljuks had a professional bureaucracy as a necessary ingredient of efficient governance and they had a system in place for the recruitment of various public officials. The bureaucracy at the Central and provincial levels that was drawn from across various provincial Bureaus through a rigorous test of merit cum performance was the mainstay of administration. Merit was the crucial criterion for selection and patriotism to the ruler reflected in the loyalty of the concerned bureaucrat to the Sultan. Wazir was the chief bureaucrat at the central level under whom there were several rungs of officials at the provincial and local levels, thereby providing a hierarchical subordination system for running day-to-day administration. The administration was run in the name of the Seljuk Sultan, run for and on behalf of him by the Wazir

appointed by the Sultan. His appointment depended on his merit, performance and loyalty to the Throne. In many advanced democracies of today, we see a similar system of administration. The sense of this governance was inculcated by the Seljuk Sultans all across the territory they ruled.

The Seljuk Sultans realised that effective administration was essential to hold on to power. However, that era was different. It was an era of intense rivalry with other competing rulers, who aspired to conquer adjacent lands. It is in this sway of rivalry, the Seljuks succumbed to the Mongols, whose ruthless conquest devastated an efficient system put in place by Assiduous efforts by Seljuk Sultans. Although the Seljuk Empire is no more, its legacy is evident in the excavations and its political heritage continues to be felt not only in Turkmenistan but also in many adjacent countries, which are neighbours of today's Turkmenistan.

A cursory look at the city of Mary tells a telling tale of urban culture under the Seljuk dynasty. This was the capital city of the Seljuk Empire. This was the city that served as the epicentre of east-west commerce and trade. This was the Turkmen city that modeled itself on the cosmopolitanism of that epoch. This was the city that taught everyone religious tolerance from the glorious Era of Nisapur. The Hindus travelled from India to Europe via Turkmenistan and Russia. The Buddhists did so from China as much as the Confucians. The Roman Catholics travelled along the entire space from Rome westward. Mary embraced them all on its pervasive multicultural platform and provided them a safe sanctuary, a venue for undertaking diverse activities: trade, commerce, religious preaching, scientific research, Philosophy, poetry, *et al.* The urban centre of Mary encouraged all these activities in a true international and cosmopolitan spirit. And the Seljuk Sultans, such as Sanjar, ensured cross-cultural connections in their empire.

Two symbols in the city of Mary are reminiscent of the past patronage of the Seljuk Sultans and the way they facilitated the moderate Sufi trend in Islam under Seljuk reign. The Nakshabandi and Yasvi Sufi orders are still prevalent in many Islamic countries. The spiritual guru of these orders, Khwaza Yusuf Hamadani, whose mausoleum is located in Mary and is well preserved to date the tomb of Sultan Sanjar<sup>2</sup> is the historical heritage of the Turkmen people. There are many such places of historical significance in the territory of Turkmenistan and UNESCO, therefore,

rightly declared and conferred on the ancient site of the city of Nisa, not far away from Ashgabat, a world heritage site status in December 2007.

### **Education and Culture**

The Seljuk Sultans considered education as the cornerstone of statecraft. They nurtured the merit of their citizens, encouraged them to be creative in their chosen profession and innovate in whichever way they considered could contribute to their state. It is this contribution by the citizens that made the Seljuk rulers famous far and wide. As the consolidation of Territories demanded adequate manning of the state, the Seljuk Sultans introduced a system of Wazirate. Wazir was the administrator in chief, who *De facto* ran the administration. The system drew its personnel and cadre from the Madrassa system of education and combined administrative training of the Wazirs, rooted in Islamic ideology. However, with a view to rooting it in line with Islamic teaching, the state patronised a Madrassa around a particular scholar, whose abilities surpassed all others and whose intellectual acumen was par excellence. The state gave free land, built a house and set up a library, provided all other training facilities and ensured that the Madrassa emerged as a reputed centre of learning, popular among the people and famous in the state and beyond.

Toghrul Beg, after his arrival in Nisapur, ordered a Madrassa to be set up. The idea was to popularise Sunni Islam, particularly its Sufi moderate trend that appealed to the people against the extreme orthodoxy of Shiite dominance. Besides, the Seljuk rulers were to draw from somewhere else their administrators and judges to rule over the territories they had conquered. Islam was already practised in Khorasan and it was from the Khorasan schools that the Seljuks initially drew many of their judges, administrators, secretaries, and ambassadors.<sup>3</sup> These eminent people, who in fact, ran the state in the name of Seljuk Sultans, subsequently left their diaries and memories that described in detail the politico-administrative system under the Seljuks, the spread of education and culture, the emphasis on an effective system of governance and their foreign relations with neighbours. Some Madrassas specialised in a single subject, such as, jurisprudence, philosophy, and medicine. These specialised schools, albeit few in numbers, were centre of excellence and famous for their high standard of learning. Invariably, they received state patronage. Many of the faculty working in such institutions served in the panel of advisors to the Sultans and advised them on intricate issues of statecraft.

Although the Madrassa system of education was the mainstay of Seljuk educational institutions, it was meant for the masses and the elite alike. The specialised institutes were exclusively reserved for the most brilliant scholars, thereby filtering the best from the rest and the most intelligent from the mediocre. Mediocrity was never encouraged, while meritocracy pre-dominated. Once the system of an institution was set up and had established its reputation, the Sultan did not personally intervene in its functioning, but received input from his secretaries and Wazirs regularly as to whether it was running well or not. Sometimes, he received scholars, greeted them and sought their advice on crucial issues of public administration, always, however, keeping in mind the interest of the people and the state.

The other system of education that provided the Seljuk state with personnel private educational facility. Education was standardised around the Madrassa. Yet there were people who preferred private tutors to public institutions. Bureaucracy emerged as a distinct class in the Seljuk state. It wished sometimes to segregate the best from the banal. And in that quest, influential bureaucrats often took recourse to private tutors to train their children. However, such schools were far and few and their popularity was always frowned upon. Yet there was evidence to prove that some of the most brilliant administrators and financial advisors were trained privately and excelled in their professional lives.

However, the Madrassa-type education was conducive for the Seljuk state as long as it provided a workforce for both religious institutions and for effective administration. The system was, however, narrowly rooted in creating a wider ethos for an inclusive system of education in a state where people professing other faiths also existed side by side with the Muslims.

Although the Seljuk education system laid the solid foundation of Cosmopolitanism—an education system that encouraged various disciplines and specialities through its exclusive centres of learning, it failed to address the needs of those with other ethos and requirements. Yet the system inspired many scholars and continued to prevail for centuries even after the Seljuk Empire ceased to exist. The Mogul emperors of India were apparently inspired by the exclusive system of specialised education that they had encouraged in Mogul India. Although Akbar the Great was unable to sign his name, the Seljuk education system inspired him to a great extent and he tried to apply it in Mughal India.

The interlink between the Indian tradition of education based on the Gurukul system and education in the Seljuk state had much in common. Both systems laid emphasis on traditional values, while inculcating an attitude to embrace changes as and when they impacted society. The Hindu traditional system in Gurukul taught students to respect the tradition and create a value-based system that would respect the elders and learn from them. The Quran and Islamic teachings also taught similar values the Seljuk state followed for its citizens. Since there were no territorial boundaries in the pre-Islamic age between southern Turkmenistan and the Mohenjo-Daro civilisation of north-west India, there were many common things in the value system of olden empires.<sup>4</sup> Teaching and preaching played, therefore, a crucial role in the system of education in training scholars and patriots, who inspired generations through their eminence of knowledge and jurisprudence.

### **Defence System**

No great state could ever exist without an effective mechanism of defence. Since Seljuk rulers were warriors *par excellence*, their motive always centred on how to build a good and powerful army. Cavalry was the mainstay of defence and the Turkmen were famous as good horsemen. Thus, breeding of different types of horses was a unique profession that the Seljuk rulers undertook as a pastime. It is heartening to note that present-day Turkmenistan has a special Ministry of horse breeding even today. The Seljuks employed special people to be in charge of horse breeding, and, in turn, when the horses were reared, they used them in warfare. A definite defence system was in place. The Sultan was the Commander-in-Chief of the army, which consisted of an army of soldiers with a stratified command structure responsible for conducting warfare whenever it occurred in the Empire.

The military history of the Seljuks was a glorious chapter written with success in the chronicle of the history of medieval Turkmenistan. When the Empire began to spread its physical attributes of effective administration and governance, the neighbouring territories, which had weak administration, gradually succumbed to a superior structure. The army always served as an integral part of the ruling structure because all Seljuk Sultans had a high sense of discipline. Therefore, the state organisations of the great Seljuk state of Turkmenistan repeated its common features in all tutor principalities in Turkey, Kerman, and the

Syrian Seljuk states with little or no modifications. The Seljuk Sultan had a developed mindset about inviolable state sovereignty that included such elements as state titles, coins, throne, crown, flags, trumpets blown five times a day, imperial rescript, enrapture, and the tent of the Sultanate. The sultan occupied the highest rung of sovereignty as the supreme leader and ruler of all territories of the state. The Seljuk state was composed of the following four elements:

- (a) Palace organization.
- (b) Governmental organization.
- (c) Military organization.
- (d) Hierarchical organisation of learned men.<sup>5</sup>

As one could notice, the army was an integral part of the state system and nearly the mainstay of its prowess. The Seljuk state had the greatest and the mightiest of the military of that epoch, comprising of the following:

- (a) Brigades of guards, including bodyguards of the rulers.
- (b) The forces obtained from Turkish staff officers, who owned fiefs cavalrymen.
- (c) Forces of the vassal states.
- (d) Forces of the cities and regions.
- (e) Volunteers who joined the military.
- (f) Turkmen forces.<sup>6</sup>

The frontier locations of the empire, both in villages and towns, had marksmen. The headmen of these places, called Salar, had their own forces known as Ghazi. Both got a salary from the state. The army was generally paid a general quarterly salary. They were the vanguards. There were rear guards too. The army also took a central position in the state and there were right and left flank forces too. Co-ordination of action in the event of a War was the duty of the general commanding officer, who took salute of sub-ordinates, who were in charge of the centre, right, left, rear and front. He reported the matter on a daily or weekly basis to the Supreme Commander of the armed forces, who was the Sultan himself.

The two major branches of the armed forces were infantry and cavalry; in fact, the cavalry pre-dominated the Seljuk Army. Within them, there were specialists known as archers, sharpshooters, lance bearers, mace bearers, catapult shooters, naphtha soldiers, and sappers. The Seljuks were famous for making their indigenous weapons, such as, arrows, Bows,

swords, shields, lances, and daggers. This implied that the art of blacksmithing was fairly developed in Seljuk times. They also devised a special device called an arrade that threw at great speed small stones at the target and inflicted injury on the enemy. These weapons were used by all, particularly by catapult shooters. However, what made the Seljuk armed forces formidable was their daring nature, meticulous was their daring nature, meticulous planning and adventurous zeal. Renowned for their ferocity and invincibility, the Seljuk Army held forts on all the territory they conquered until they were quelled by the Superior forces of the Mongol hordes, who drove them from east to west until they were cornered and conquered in Anatolia. The Turkmen still believe that, scared of the Seljuks, the Chinese hastened the completion of their Great Wall of China to avoid Turkmen cavalry attacking them.

### **Conclusion**

The Seljuks had a great empire on the Turkmen territory, great with regard to teaching their subjects the art of warfare, running an effective system of governance and popularising their rule in the neighbourhood. They also established a definite judicial system that dispensed timely justice across the empire, a recruitment procedure for the bureaucracy that valued merit over everything else, and an army that gave the people a sense of safety, stability and pride. All these elements put together provided the Seljuk state with the ingredients of effective governance. They also had a developed education network that made provisions for teaching of subjects such as Mathematics, literature, medicine, philosophy, and theology. The Seljuk spiritual life was based on the teaching of Islam. In the whole system of education, the library played a great role and all renowned institutions had their libraries patronised by the Seljuk state. In a nutshell, this was a highly cultured political system of medieval Turkmenistan, the footprints of which are visible in the innumerable excavations across the countries of Amu Darya–Sir Darya–Caspian and Tigris–Euphrates basins.

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## **Indo-Turkmenistan Economic Relations: Present Status and the Way Forward**

*Anil Sharma*

Turkmenistan, a multifunctional economy, is represented by the electric power industry, chemical, petrochemical industries, oil and gas production, oil refining industries, mechanical engineering, and metal-processing, facilities for the production of building materials, light, and food industries.

In recent years, traditional industries, the oil and gas complex, power generation, agriculture, construction, transport and communications, have developed significantly. New sectors of the economy: the chemical industry, the textile industry, the construction materials industry, telecommunications, and other high-tech areas are also being developed.

Turkmenistan is turning into the largest international transit, transport and telecommunication corridor of world importance. Turkmenistan attaches particular importance to the development of the transport and communication system (railways and highways, sea and river ports, pipeline transport) as the most important component of the infrastructure that ensures the sustainable development of the entire economy of the country.

### **Economic Growth**

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Turkmenistan was worth 59.89 billion US dollars in 2023, according to official data from the World Bank. Growth rose slightly in 2023, led by gas exports and public investment. Inflation eased, reflecting tighter credit policy and continued price and foreign exchange controls. A positive outlook for energy and continued public investment indicate accelerating growth in 2024. Inflation is

projected to rise on structural issues despite continuing price and foreign exchange controls. A young labour force needs expanded education and more high-quality jobs, both essential for inclusive and sustainable growth.

Industry expanded by 4.3%, with gas production rising by 3.0% to 80.6 billion cubic metres. Agriculture grew by 4.4% as targets for cotton and wheat production were achieved, and from expansion in horticulture production for domestic and foreign markets. Services expanded by nearly 9.0%.

The current account surplus narrowed from 7.1% of GDP in 2022 to 5.9% in 2023. This reflected some relaxation of import controls, along with stable energy prices and People's Republic of China (PRC) and additional exports to Azerbaijan and Iran under existing gas swap agreements. With extensive repayment of external loans, external debt in 2023 was expected to have declined to 5.1% of GDP.

The government projects growth at 6.5% in 2024, with a small deceleration in 2025 from the elevated base in 2024. In February 2024, Fitch affirmed Turkmenistan's long-term foreign-currency issuer default rating B+ with a positive outlook.

### **Investment Policy**

Investment policy of Turkmenistan is aimed at the provision of high rates and improvement of efficiency of the economy and to achieve these objectives as well as for further promotion of marketing reforms, structural changes of national economy, improvement of innovative component in the conditions of active integration to the system of global trade, scientific, and technological relations.

In the oil and gas industry, the Government is working on creating alternative options for bringing Turkmen energy to the world market through the construction of an extensive pipeline system and long-term partnership with leading international companies in the effective development of natural oil and gas reserves, deep exploration, and development of hydrocarbon deposits both on land and on the Caspian shelf sea in order to increase their production, processing, and export.

In the chemical industry, it is expected to have an increase in the production of chemical products, including construction of new

complexes for the production of carbamide, phosphorus fertilisers, caustic soda, iodine, chlorine, bromine, and their products.

In the textile industry, the Government wants to increase cotton fibre processing volumes within the state through the creation of new highly profitable textile enterprises, the introduction of advanced technologies, as well as the production of competitive products to saturate both the domestic and foreign markets.

In other industries, diversification, development of both export-oriented and import-substituting industries based on the use of local raw materials were chosen as a strategic task.

The investment policy in the agricultural sector provides for the production and processing of grain and cotton, as well as the preparation and processing of wool and leather raw materials.

In the field of transport and communications, the main flow of investments is directed to the development of automobile, air, rail, river, and sea transport, and the creation of logistics centres.

### **Foreign Direct Investment**

Turkmenistan has foreign trade relations with more than 100 countries of the world. The share of foreign investments in the Turkmen economy is steadily growing from year to year, and the number of joint ventures is increasing. Turkmenistan is interested in projects for the export of its energy resources in the European direction.

The legal aspects of the activities of foreign investors and enterprises with foreign investments in the territory of Turkmenistan are regulated by the laws of Turkmenistan “On foreign investments,” “On hydrocarbon resources,” “On licensing of certain types of activities,” “On foreign exchange regulation and currency control in foreign economic relations” and other legislative acts and international treaties are in force in the territory of Turkmenistan. According to the current legislation, foreign investment can be carried out by equity participation in enterprises together with legal entities and individuals of Turkmenistan or the creation of enterprises wholly owned by foreign investors, branches of foreign legal entities or the acquisition of the ownership of existing enterprises.

Turkmenistan provides legal protection, guarantees, and benefits to enterprises with foreign investments from the date of registration of the

investment project. The legislation of Turkmenistan provides a guarantee of legal protection of foreign investors; transfer of payments related to foreign investment, protection of intellectual property rights and a guarantee of the return on foreign investment in connection with the termination of investment activity.

The Law of Turkmenistan “On Free Economic Zones” defines the legal, organisational, and economic foundations for creating free economic zones on the territory of Turkmenistan.

### **India-Turkmenistan Bilateral Relationship**

India and Turkmenistan share historical and civilisational linkages. India was amongst the first countries to recognise Turkmenistan’s independence in December, 1991 with formal diplomatic relations being established in April, 1992. The ties between the two countries are shaped by security, energy, and corridors. Both countries have established mechanism such as Inter Governmental Commission for Trade, Economic, scientific and Technological co-operation at the level of Foreign Ministers.

### **Economic Relations**

Bilateral trade between India and Turkmenistan has been modest despite the huge potential. Although it was affected by COVID-19, following opening up of transport links, there has been an increase in trade volumes. In 2023–24, bilateral trade stood at \$112.39 million. The following table shows bilateral trade (in million US\$) over the years:

<i>Items</i>	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Total Trade Turnover	80.46	66.27	37.89	60.94	114.36	192.01	112.39
Imports (Turkmenistan to India)	26.15	20.63	3.99	0.30	10.07	101.72	74.93
Exports (India to Turkmenistan)	54.31	45.64	33.90	60.64	104.29	90.29	37.46

Major items of India’s exports are pharmaceuticals, agricultural products, sugar, meat, electronic and electrical items, machinery, woven apparel, and tyres. Turkmen exports to India largely comprise fertilisers, inorganic minerals, chemicals, dyes, etc.

## **Impact of China-Turkmenistan Trade on India**

The five Central Asian republics possess significant oil and gas reserves and have subsequently attracted the attention of countries looking to procure energy resources. India and China are two of the most consequential actors involved in Central Asia on the basis of their geographical proximity, massive populations, and substantial energy demands. The Central Asian republics' abundant energy resources and geographical vicinity to China have made it into a vital region for China's geo-energy strategy—especially in terms of constructing pipelines for both economic and diplomatic gain. However, it could also render the states of the region susceptible to excessively heavy Chinese influence, especially since China may import 50 per cent of the oil and gas exported from the Central Asian region by 2025.

China and Turkmenistan, together with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, are jointly building the China-Central Asia natural gas pipeline, taking into account the interests of all countries participating in the energy co-operation, whether they produce, transit, or consume energy. Up to now, Turkmenistan has supplied more than 380 billion cubic metres of natural gas to China over the past decade, with the cumulative value of direct natural gas trade exceeding \$72 billion. Natural gas trade revenue has become the core source of foreign exchange income for Turkmenistan.

In terms of energy security, China is currently edging out India for influence in Central Asia. India is particularly interested in energy diplomacy with the Central Asian republics in order to secure reliable energy sources and reduce its dependence on Middle Eastern oil and gas. This diplomatic approach strengthens Central Asian links for long-term energy security. Despite diplomatic and strategic co-operation, India's Central Asia energy policy has experienced obstacles and delays.

In recent years, China has become Turkmenistan's largest trading partner, while Turkmenistan has become China's second-largest trading partner in Central Asia. Both sides actively implement the plan to enhance bilateral economic relations in the fields of digital economy and green development, steadily expanding the scale of trade and mutual investment, promoting trade diversification, and accelerating non-energy sector co-operation between the two countries. Among them, the digital economy sector is an important area of co-operation.

With the changing international political and economic landscape and Turkmenistan's adjustments in geopolitical positioning, the country's economic independence is gradually increasing. Due to historical reasons, Turkmenistan's economy was significantly dependent on Russia. However, in recent years, Western countries have intensified economic sanctions against Russia, leading to a decline in Russia's influence in Central Asian countries. This has further fuelled Turkmenistan's willingness to strengthen economic co-operation with other countries. Second, Turkmenistan has faced a reduction in natural gas exports to the West, prompting the need to find new partners. Turkmenistan is keenly interested in co-operating with China.

The documents signed by the two governments to promote scientific and technical co-operation and transport and logistics co-operation in November 2023 are a milestone for China-Turkmenistan co-operation. Under this co-operation, both sides will not only enhance co-operation in nanotechnology, new materials, natural resource processing, biomedicine, seismology, information, and communication, but also promote international exchanges in transportation and take the transportation and logistics co-operation between the two countries to a new level.

Along with physical connectivity, it is imperative that India also invests in the digital connectivity of the region to counter China's own footprint. India is now a party to multilateral initiatives like the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) and Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), which will aid its engagement with the region.

### **Developments on the Transportation Front**

India and Turkmenistan are part of the Agreement on the establishment of an International Transport and Transit Corridor (Ashgabat Agreement), which India joined in February 2018. It envisages the establishment of an international transport and transit corridor between Iran, Oman, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Gas Pipeline Project is an energy project that will connect Central Asia with South Asia. Within the scope of this project, Turkmenistan plans to transfer a significant amount of natural gas to India. Both the administrations of Ashgabat and New Delhi want this project to be implemented as soon as

possible, and the strong connection established through energy will contribute to a robust win-win relationship. In this context, the security factor is of great importance. One of the countries that the TAPI passes through is Afghanistan, and the security of this country will contribute to the economic and energy security of Turkmenistan and India.

INSTC is a 7,200-kilometre Multimode Transit Route linking the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran and onward to northern Europe via St. Petersburg in Russia. It connects ship, rail, and road routes for moving cargo between India, Iran, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia, and Europe. It was launched on 12th September 2000 in St. Petersburg, by a trilateral agreement signed by Iran, Russia, and India at the Euro-Asian Conference on Transport in 2000 for promoting transportation co-operation among the Member States. Since then, INSTC membership has expanded to include 10 more countries (total 13)—Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, Syria, Belarus, and Oman. Turkmenistan has formally expressed its desire to join INSTC. It has also evinced interest utilising Chabahar Port (Iran), built with Indian assistance, for the transshipment of goods.

INSTC allows India to bypass chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea (Suez Canal route), making its trade more secure. The Israel-Hamas conflict and the Houthi attacks on ships in the southern Red Sea have highlighted the significance of having alternative trade routes. Through this, India can bypass Pakistan and unstable Afghanistan to reach Central Asia. The INSTC significantly reduces transit time by 20 days and freight costs by 30% compared to the Suez Canal route.

It is important for India that the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) becomes operational. India aims to reach Russia and European countries through the INSTC, thus accessing both the European markets and Russia's energy resources through a shorter route and at a lower cost. Additionally, within the framework of the INSTC, Ashgabat serves as New Delhi's gateway to Central Asia.

### **Constraints in Enhancing Bilateral Trade**

Two large pipeline projects failed after years of labour and conversation. India joined the TAPI pipeline in 2008, but the security situation in Afghanistan, as well as tribal parts of Baluchistan province in Pakistan, has made construction difficult for international investors. In 1999, India

joined the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline, referred to as the “Peace Pipeline.” Despite its economic and strategic benefits, New Delhi withdrew from the proposal in 2009.

Turkmenistan aims to establish itself as an important hub for logistics and transportation, facilitating both North-South and East-West routes. Despite various agreements, many studies highlighted several challenges. For instance, India is deeply concerned about the insecurity in Afghanistan. The security situation in both Afghanistan and Pakistan is precarious, and involvement in the project may include direct engagement with, recognition of, and indirect financial support to the Taliban’s Islamic Emirate. This could result in the Taliban becoming a stakeholder and beneficiary of the project. These issues operate as deterrents for India.

Second, India’s concerns are also based on its susceptibility to potential gas supply disruptions, which could occur depending on the condition of relations between India and Pakistan. The participation of China and the actuality of the Sino-Pakistan connection may exacerbate this vulnerability.

Therefore, an accord or pact is necessary to guarantee the protection and safety of pipeline infrastructure during transit. It is possible to search for joint agreements or legal instruments among TAPI member states that pertain to the security of infrastructure and the uninterrupted flow of natural gas. India has already emphasised its security concerns over the pipeline infrastructure. Any agreement on this issue can establish a comprehensive framework to handle India’s specific concerns about the project. India might utilise international organisations, for instance, the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO), to formulate and implement a unified transit guideline.

Since the beginning of Russia’s special military operation in 2022, Turkmenistan has engaged in many bilateral and trilateral agreements on connectivity. For example, Turkmenistan and Iran first inked a transit agreement in November 2023, about the building of road infrastructure. The agreements also emphasised Turkmenistan’s connection to Chabahar Port (Iran) through railways, giving it direct access to international waters. Second, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have signed a contract regarding transport connectivity. Companies, such as, the Russian Railways Logistics (RZD Logistics), the Kazakhstan Railways (KTZ Express), and the Transport and Logistics Centre of Turkmenistan entered into an MoU

for international and transit freight transportation in 2023. These initiatives demonstrate that attempts are ongoing to strengthen the connectivity infrastructure on the Turkmen section of the Caspian Sea.

## **Way Forward in Indo-Turkmenistan Economic Ties**

### *Engaging in the Energy Sector*

Possessing high proven reserves of natural gas in the world, as well as taking into account the peculiarities of its geographical location, Turkmenistan pursues a policy of diversifying its international co-operation, in particular, in the energy sector, based on equal access of partners to sources of Turkmen hydrocarbons and means of their delivery.

It is crucial not to overlook the opportunity to explore the energy potential of the INSTC as experts have so far concentrated solely on corridors commercial, and trade dimensions. In the future, India should give significant attention to either supporting new infrastructure or utilising the present transportation network to enable the efficient transfer of oil and gas from Turkmenistan.

The Central Asian country has invested heavily in the construction and improvement of a large number of transportation infrastructures, including the completion of one international seaport in Turkmenbashi and six modern airports across the country. In Turkmenistan, a railway linking Kazakhstan and Iran was launched in 2014, which provides a direct route to the Persian Gulf. Connecting with freight routes between China and Central Asian and Middle Eastern countries, this railway can accelerate freight speed between China and Western Europe and reduce transportation costs.

In 2022, Turkmenistan exported 35 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas to China and overtook Russia, which is now China's second-largest gas exporter at 10 bcm per year. This increase comes even as China pays 30 per cent for Turkmen gas than for Russian gas. Reuters news agency quoted industry insiders claiming that China has failed to negotiate a lower cost for Turkmen gas because the Turkmen government insist on staying "in line with global pricing practices."

However, India's role should not be overlooked. It has strong diplomatic and political ties with the Central Asian republics, and its connectivity projects, such as the INSTC, could disrupt the current *status*

*quo*. One fact that is abundantly clear is the geoeconomic significance of the Central Asian republics and this region, will be critical for understanding future energy trends and geopolitical competition the Ministry of Transport of Kazakhstan announced that Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan signed the development roadmap of the eastern route of the INSTC for 2024–2025. The implementation of this document will increase the operational capacity of the corridor to 15 million tons per year by 2027 and to 20 million tons by 2030.

The Kazakh minister of transport said that Kazakhstan plans to continue its active participation in the development of the eastern route of the North-South International Transport Corridor, which has the highest capacity for cargo flow growth until 2030. He continued asserting that this corridor is the safest and shortest transportation route to the Indian Ocean.

Though Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are not members of INSTC, in 2012, they agreed to extend support to member countries to complete the missing links along the corridor. India is also mulling air corridor connectivity with the Central Asian region, similar to the India-Afghanistan air freight corridor, and talks to secure this are ongoing.

The North-South Corridor, which was the product of the will and determination of Russia, Iran, and India in the year 2000 to create a cargo transportation corridor, witnessed the joining of a number of other countries to this transit route during the following years. What motivated these countries to join this transit route was that the common routes for sending goods from India to St. Petersburg, Russia, which passes through the Suez Canal, is about 14,500 km long, but Iran's corridor in this route is only 7,200 km, and the use of this capacity reduces 40% of transit time and 30% of transportation costs.

### *Prospects in the Chemical and Pharmaceutical Industry*

A look at the composition of India's export basket to these countries reveals that India is primarily a supplier of consumer goods (for example, pharmaceuticals) and capital goods to these countries. Turkmenistan, too, has developed a market for Indian consumer goods.

Apart from being a reservoir of still untapped mineral resources, such as petroleum, natural gas, antimony, aluminium, gold, silver, coal, and uranium, Central Asian countries provide opportunities for Indian investment and co-operation in areas such as hydro-power sector, mining

and metallurgical industries, construction industry, information technology, and tourism. Moreover, these states are key for sourcing the raw materials needed for India's manufacturing ambitions.

### *Opportunities in the Textile Industry*

Over the years of independence, an export-oriented textile industry equipped with modern high-tech machinery has been created in Turkmenistan, over 60 textile complexes and enterprises equipped with the most advanced and high-performance machinery have been built and put into operation. Currently, about 80 per cent of the manufactured textile products are exported to the countries of the European Union, the USA, Canada, Russia, Turkey, Hungary, China, the Baltic countries, Ukraine, and other countries.

### **Enhanced Role in Indo-Russian Trade**

The INSTC is set to revolutionise trade between India, Russia, and other key regions through a multi-modal network spanning 7,200 km (4,500 miles). This expansive corridor, involving ship, rail, and road routes, is designed to streamline freight movement across India, Iran, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia, and Europe, enhancing connectivity and reducing transportation costs significantly.

The INSTC represents a transformative development in international trade logistics, offering a promising avenue for enhanced economic co-operation and growth across the involved regions. By reducing transit times and costs, the corridor is set to significantly boost trade volumes, fostering closer economic ties and mutual prosperity.

Initiated to provide a more efficient alternative to traditional shipping routes, the INSTC is poised to cut both time and expenses for transporting goods. Studies indicate that the corridor can reduce transport costs by "\$2,500 per 15 tons of cargo." The route primarily navigates through India, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia, incorporating strategic ports and railways that form an integrated network aimed at fostering economic ties and trade efficiency. Key Infrastructure and developments are:

- (a) Chabahar and Bandar Abbas Ports: India and Iran's longstanding agreement, established in 2002, focuses on developing Chabahar into a full deep-sea port. Meanwhile, Bandar Abbas, which manages 85% of Iran's seaborne trade, faces congestion issues

that Chabahar's development aims to alleviate.

- (b) **Kazakhstan–Turkmenistan–Iran Railway Link:** Operational since 2014, this 677-km (421 miles) railway connects Uzen in Kazakhstan to Gorgan in Iran, through Turkmenistan. It integrates into Iran's national rail network, linking to Persian Gulf ports, thereby extending the reach of the INSTC.
- (c) Russia is set to export coal to India using the INSTC, with cargo transiting through Iran's Bandar Abbas port. This initiative was highlighted during the 27th Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum. By leveraging the INSTC, Russia aims to enhance the efficiency of its coal exports to India, reducing transit times from 45 days to just 15 days.
- (d) Iran and Russia are also working together in the maritime sector to utilise the Caspian Sea, further shortening the transit route between the two nations. The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) has allocated 300 containers for transporting goods between Russia and India, with plans to increase this number based on demand. In 2023, Russia transported 600,000 tons of freight through Iran. This volume is projected to surge to four million tons per year by 2024, underscoring the INSTC's pivotal role in regional trade. Through these collaborative efforts, Russia aims to bolster its trade links with India, utilising Iran's strategic location to facilitate the swift and cost-effective movement of goods. The results showed transport costs were reduced by "\$2,500 per 15 tons of cargo". Other routes under consideration include via Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

### **Export Hub for the Caucasus Countries and Europe**

After the beginning of the Ukraine conflict and the Western sanctions against Moscow, Central Asia has increased its strategic role in Eurasia as a logistics hub and energy market. The Ukraine conflict marked the beginning of a 'new era' for the Central Asian republics, which sought to achieve regional co-operation, integration, and balance between superpowers and regional actors' competition.

India's increased political influence and economic presence in Turkmenistan and other Central Asian republics confirms that New Delhi might become an active actor in the regional New Greater Game, which

currently sees the United States, Russia, and China oppose each other with different strategies and foreign policies.

Indian businesses should explore setting up joint ventures in Turkmenistan and use that as an export hub for the Caucasus countries, namely Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia and through these countries to Iran, Türkiye, and European countries. The INSTC as an alternative to the Suez Canal route can result in a delivery time up to 40% and cost savings by 30%. Additionally, using local raw material and labour, Indian firms can with manufacturing expertise, can create a win-win situation for both the countries.

# India's Winning Soft Power Aspirations in the Central Asian Countries: A Case of Turkmenistan

*Tabasum Firdous & Fozia Janisa*

## ABSTRACT

*India's soft power strategy in Central Asia, particularly Turkmenistan, reflects its broader aspirations to enhance regional influence through cultural diplomacy, economic partnerships, and strategic co-operation. Leveraging historical ties and cultural affinities, India has focused on promoting its cultural heritage, educational exchanges, and the Hindi language. Initiatives, such as, the International Day of Yoga have garnered significant participation, fostering people-to-people connections. Economically, India aims to bolster trade and investment, particularly in energy sectors, given Turkmenistan's vast natural gas reserves. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline is a cornerstone of this economic engagement, promising mutual benefits and energy security. Additionally, India's commitment to regional stability and development is vivid through its participation in multilateral forums like the Central Asia Regional Economic Co-operation (CAREC). Regarding strategic diplomacy, India's stance on terrorism and its balanced regional approach underscores its role as a responsible player. However, challenges, such as, competition from China and logistical hurdles persist. Overall, India's soft power approach in Turkmenistan displays a blend of cultural diplomacy, economic collaboration, and strategic partnerships, positioning itself as a key player in Central Asia's evolving geopolitical landscape.*

## Introduction

India's cultural diplomacy in Central Asia is a cornerstone of its broader foreign policy strategy. It aims to strengthen ties and foster goodwill

through both regions' rich and diverse cultural heritage. This diplomatic endeavour is rooted in historical connections, geographical proximity, and shared cultural legacies that date back to ancient times. Central Asia, comprising Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, has witnessed a resurgence of interest from India, driven by geopolitical, economic, and strategic imperatives. This abstract elaborates on the multifaceted role of India's cultural diplomacy in Central Asia, encompassing historical bonds, soft power initiatives, and contemporary strategic interests.

The historical connections between India and Central Asia are deep and multifaceted, encompassing trade, religion, and cultural exchanges. The Silk Road, a network of trade routes connecting the East and West, facilitated the movement of goods, ideas, and cultures, creating a rich tapestry of interactions. Central Asia played a crucial role in disseminating Buddhism from India to the broader Asian continent, with numerous archaeological sites and relics standing testament to this historical connection. With its roots in Central Asia, the Mughal Empire also left an indelible mark on Indian culture, influencing art, architecture, and cuisine.

India's cultural diplomacy leverages its soft power, focusing on cultural, educational, and people-to-people exchanges to build and sustain its influence in Central Asia. Key initiatives include promoting Indian art, music, dance, and cinema, which resonate deeply with Central Asian audiences. Bollywood enjoys immense popularity, serving as a cultural bridge that fosters a positive image of India and enhances mutual understanding. Indian cultural centres, established in major Central Asian cities, offer language classes, yoga sessions, and cultural events, further strengthening cultural ties.

Educational exchanges are another vital component of India's cultural diplomacy. Central Asian students are increasingly drawn to Indian universities, attracted by the quality of education and cultural affinity. Scholarships and academic partnerships facilitate this flow, fostering long-term relationships and creating a network of alumni with strong ties to India. Joint research projects, particularly in areas of mutual interest, such as, history, archaeology, and the humanities, further enhance academic co-operation and cultural understanding.

India's cultural diplomacy in Central Asia is also intertwined with its economic and strategic interests. The region's rich energy resources,

including oil, natural gas, and uranium, are of significant interest to India, which seeks to diversify its energy sources and enhance energy security. Cultural diplomacy helps create a favourable environment for economic co-operation, paving the way for trade agreements, investment opportunities, and joint ventures. Central Asia's strategic location, bordering key regions such as Russia, China, and the Middle East, makes it a vital area for India's broader geopolitical strategy. Cultural diplomacy helps build trust and goodwill, essential for advancing strategic objectives and enhancing regional stability.

India's cultural diplomacy in Central Asia, particularly Turkmenistan, is pivotal in fostering mutual understanding, strengthening bilateral relations, and promoting India's soft power. This paper explores how India's rich cultural heritage, including its arts, literature, yoga, and Bollywood, bridges the two countries, enhancing people-to-people connections and contributing to geopolitical and economic ties.

India's cultural diplomacy strategy in Turkmenistan emphasises the shared historical and cultural links that date back to the Silk Road Era, highlighting commonalities in traditions, values, and historical experiences. Cultural exchange programmes, academic collaborations, and the promotion of Indian culture through festivals, exhibitions, and educational initiatives have been instrumental in deepening the cultural resonance between the nations. Furthermore, India's efforts to promote yoga and traditional medicine have found a receptive audience in Turkmenistan, with a growing interest in holistic health practices. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCRs) and other governmental and non-governmental organisations play a crucial role in these initiatives, ensuring sustained engagement and collaboration. This chapter also examines the impact of Bollywood as a significant tool of cultural diplomacy, attracting a large following in Turkmenistan and serving as a medium for cultural exchange. The widespread popularity of Indian cinema fosters a positive image of India and facilitates an emotional connection with the Turkmen.

The cultural linkages between India and Turkmenistan have evolved through centuries of historical interactions, trade, and shared cultural exchanges. These linkages are a testament to the deep-rooted connections between the two regions, influenced by various dynasties, trade routes, and cultural exchanges. The Silk Road was crucial in the early cultural

exchanges between India and Turkmenistan. This ancient trade route facilitated the movement of goods, people, and ideas between the Indian sub-continent and Central Asia, including present-day Turkmenistan. Through the Silk Road, there was a significant exchange of art, religion, and culture. Buddhism originated in India and spread to Central Asia and beyond via the Silk Road. Turkmenistan, being an essential stop along this route, saw the influence of Buddhist culture, artefacts, and monasteries, indicating the deep spiritual and cultural linkages established during this period. The interaction between Indian and Central Asian cultures led to a unique blend of traditions and practices. This syncretism can be seen in art, architecture, and religious practices. The fusion of Indian and Central Asian styles is evident in various historical sites and cultural artefacts. Its roots in Central Asia played a pivotal role in strengthening the cultural ties between India and Turkmenistan. The Mughal rulers, who had Turkic and Mongol ancestry, brought Central Asian cultural influences, which they integrated with Indian traditions. This period saw a significant exchange of ideas, art, and architecture. Persian, a prominent language in both regions, served as a cultural and intellectual exchange medium. Literary works, poetry, and manuscripts from this era blend Indian and Central Asian influences. This linguistic exchange enriched the cultural heritage of both regions. Post-independence, India and Turkmenistan established formal diplomatic relations, strengthening their cultural linkages. Both countries have actively participated in cultural exchanges, showcasing their heritage through festivals, exhibitions, and academic collaborations. In recent years, there has been a significant emphasis on educational and cultural exchanges between India and Turkmenistan. Indian universities and cultural institutions have welcomed students from Turkmenistan, promoting mutual understanding and cultural appreciation. Contemporary cultural collaborations include various initiatives, such as, film festivals, cultural troupes, and art exhibitions. These initiatives aim to celebrate and preserve the shared cultural heritage while fostering new connections.

### **The Cultural Exchanges Between India and Turkmenistan**

Cultural exchanges have been pivotal in strengthening contemporary relations between India and Turkmenistan. Both countries have a rich cultural heritage that they proudly showcase through various initiatives. Cultural festivals, art exhibitions, and performances by artists from both nations have become regular features of their bilateral engagements.

Indian culture has a significant following in Turkmenistan. Bollywood movies, music, and dance are immensely popular among Turkmen. The Indian Embassy in Ashgabat regularly organises cultural events, including film screenings, dance performances, and yoga sessions, to promote Indian culture. The annual International Day of Yoga is celebrated enthusiastically in Turkmenistan, reflecting the growing interest in Indian spiritual and wellness practices. Moreover, Indian classical music and dance forms such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, and Odissi are appreciated by Turkmen audiences. These performances often receive substantial coverage in local media, further promoting cultural understanding and appreciation.

Turkmenistan has also tried introducing its rich cultural heritage to the Indian audience. Cultural troupes from Turkmenistan have participated in various cultural festivals in India, showcasing traditional music, dance, and crafts. The Turkmen Embassy in New Delhi frequently organises cultural events highlighting Turkmen traditions and customs. The shared heritage of the Silk Road is often celebrated, emphasising the historical connections and the mutual influence that shaped the cultures of both regions. These events help to build a sense of kinship and mutual respect between the peoples of India and Turkmenistan.

Educational co-operation is another crucial aspect of contemporary cultural relations between India and Turkmenistan. Scholarships and exchange programmes have been established to facilitate the movement of students and academics between the two countries. Indian universities, known for their quality education, attract students from Turkmenistan who seek higher education in various fields, including engineering, medicine, and the humanities. The ICCRs offers scholarships to Turkmen students, enabling them to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate studies in India. These scholarships provide educational opportunities and promote cultural exchange and mutual understanding. In addition to student exchanges, academic collaborations between universities and research institutions in both countries have been initiated. Joint research projects, faculty exchanges, and conferences on topics of mutual interest have become more common, fostering deeper academic ties.

Tourism is an area with significant potential for enhancing cultural relations between India and Turkmenistan. Both countries boast rich historical and cultural landmarks that attract tourists. Efforts have been

made to promote tourism through bilateral agreements and co-operation between tourism authorities. With its diverse cultural and natural attractions, India is a popular destination for Turkmen tourists. The Taj Mahal, Jaipur's palaces, Kerala's backwaters, and the spiritual atmosphere of Varanasi are among the attractions that draw Turkmen visitors. Indian tour operators and travel agencies have been working to create customised travel packages for tourists from Turkmenistan, highlighting the cultural and historical ties between the two nations. Conversely, Turkmenistan, with its unique cultural heritage and historical sites like the ancient city of Merv, the Silk Road remnants, and the modern marvels of Ashgabat, is increasingly attracting Indian tourists. The Turkmen government has been actively promoting its tourism potential and has taken steps to improve infrastructure and services for international visitors.

Both countries have worked on simplifying visa procedures and promoting direct flights to facilitate travel. The establishment of direct flights between major cities in India and Ashgabat has made travel more convenient, thus encouraging more people-to-people exchanges. These efforts are expected to boost tourism and significantly enhance cultural relations further. Language and literature also play a significant role in the cultural relations between India and Turkmenistan. Language learning initiatives and literary exchanges help to bridge cultural gaps and foster mutual understanding. Hindi and English language courses are offered in Turkmenistan and are often organised by the Indian Embassy and cultural centres. These courses attract diverse students, including professionals, students, and enthusiasts of Indian culture. Promoting the Hindi language helps improve communication and deepens appreciation of Indian literature and media. Similarly, efforts are being made to introduce Turkmen language courses in India. This initiative aims to promote a better understanding of Turkmen culture and heritage among Indians, encouraging more profound cultural connections. Literary exchanges, including book fairs, author interactions, and translations of literary works, have been instrumental in cultural diplomacy. Indian literary works, both classical and contemporary, are translated into Turkmen, making them accessible to a broader audience. Conversely, Turkmen literature is introduced to Indian readers through translations and literary events. These literary exchanges provide insights into both countries' societal values, historical experiences, and cultural narratives, fostering mutual respect and understanding. Joint cultural projects and initiatives are

pivotal in promoting contemporary cultural relations. Governments, cultural organisations, and institutions have been actively involved in collaborative projects highlighting their shared heritage and modern cultural expressions.

Joint archaeological and historical research projects have been undertaken to explore the shared heritage of the Silk Road. These projects enhance academic knowledge and promote cultural tourism by highlighting historical connections. Exhibitions and publications resulting from these research efforts are showcased in museums and cultural institutions in both countries, educating the public about their intertwined histories. Film and media collaborations have gained momentum, with filmmakers and production houses from both countries exploring joint ventures. Co-productions and partnerships in the film industry not only enhance cultural exchange but also have the potential to reach global audiences. Documentaries and films highlighting India and Turkmenistan's cultural heritage, contemporary life, and shared values contribute to a deeper understanding between the two nations. Art and craft exhibitions featuring works from Indian and Turkmen artists and artisans have become regular events. These exhibitions showcase the rich artistic traditions and encourage interactions between artists, leading to collaborative projects and exchanges. Handicrafts, textiles, and traditional art forms from both countries are displayed, promoting appreciation and preserving cultural heritage.

### **The Soft Power Perspective**

India's engagement with Central Asia has been shaped by its geostrategic interests, energy needs, and the potential to counter China's growing influence. Central Asia, including Turkmenistan, holds significant importance due to its rich natural resources and position along crucial transit routes. India's soft power approach is a multifaceted strategy to deepen ties through cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and capacity-building initiatives. According to P. Stobdan, a strategic expert on India-Central Asia relations, India's use of soft power in Central Asia has been gradual but deliberate. India has been building goodwill in the region through its historical connections and cultural diplomacy, and this is increasingly evident in sectors like education, healthcare, and technology transfers.

Turkmenistan is a critical player in India's Central Asian strategy due to its vast natural gas reserves, essential for India's growing energy needs. India's soft power approach toward Turkmenistan complements its economic and energy diplomacy, mainly through projects like the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline. While Turkmenistan is known for its closed-off political environment, India's soft power diplomacy has found unique pathways to cultivate a relationship based on mutual interests.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

While numerous positive developments mark contemporary cultural relations between India and Turkmenistan, some challenges must be addressed to enhance these ties further.

- The regional security situation, particularly in Afghanistan, challenges initiatives like the TAPI pipeline and broader regional co-operation. Ensuring stability and security is crucial for the successful implementation of such projects.
- Despite efforts to simplify visa procedures, bureaucratic hurdles impede people-to-people exchanges. Streamlining visa processes and promoting direct flights can facilitate greater cultural and educational exchanges.
- Language differences can sometimes hinder deeper interactions. While language courses are offered, more comprehensive language training programmes and translation services can help bridge this gap.

### **Opportunities**

- There is significant potential to further enhance cultural diplomacy through increased cultural festivals, art exchanges, and literary collaborations. Expanding cultural centres' reach and establishing more cultural interaction platforms can deepen mutual understanding.
- Strengthening educational and academic co-operation through more scholarships, exchange programmes, and joint research projects can foster long-term relationships. Collaborations in science, technology, and innovation can also contribute to mutual development.
- Joint efforts to promote tourism can lead to economic benefits

and more significant cultural exchanges. Developing thematic tours highlighting the Silk Road's shared heritage and creating more tourist-friendly infrastructure can attract more visitors.

- Leveraging digital platforms and technology for cultural exchanges, virtual exhibitions, and online language courses can overcome geographical barriers.

## Conclusion

Despite the successes of India's cultural diplomacy in Central Asia, several challenges persist. The region's political instability, security concerns, and varying openness to foreign influence pose significant hurdles. Additionally, competition from other major powers, particularly China and Russia, necessitates a nuanced and proactive approach. To address these challenges, India must continue to innovate and expand its cultural diplomacy initiatives, leveraging new technologies and platforms to reach broader audiences. Enhancing collaboration with regional organisations and multilateral frameworks can also amplify the impact of cultural diplomacy efforts.

India's cultural diplomacy in Central Asia is pivotal in strengthening bilateral and regional ties, leveraging historical connections, soft power, and educational exchanges to foster goodwill and mutual understanding. By intertwining cultural diplomacy with economic and strategic interests, India can enhance its influence and secure its position as a key regional partner. As Central Asia continues to evolve, India's cultural diplomacy must adapt and innovate, ensuring it remains a vital component of the broader foreign policy strategy. Through sustained efforts and strategic engagement, India can continue to build on its historical bonds and create a future of shared prosperity and cultural richness with Central Asia.

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# **Bridging Energy Corridors: A Strategic Analysis of India-Turkmenistan Relations in a Multipolar World**

*Ramanshi Dwivedi*

## **Introduction**

India and Central Asia share a profound historical, cultural, political, and economic relationship that has evolved over the centuries, gradually transforming into a dynamic and multifaceted strategic partnership. The significance of Central Asia, particularly in the context of India's growing energy demands and the region's vast natural resources, has taken on new dimensions in recent years. Central Asia's proximity to India, along with shared interests in economic development, trade, energy security, and regional stability, has made it an increasingly important focus of India's foreign policy. In the post-pandemic world, the geopolitical landscape has shifted, and India's engagement with Central Asia, especially Turkmenistan, has intensified. The historical linkages between India and Turkmenistan—dating back to the Indus Valley Civilisation and the ancient Silk Route—have laid a strong foundation for the modern-day partnership. Archaeological findings, including the discovery of a Buddha statue in Merv, Turkmenistan, underscore the cultural and trade exchanges between the two regions. The Turkmen Gate in Delhi, built to honour the revered Sufi poet Shah Turkmen Bayabani, further symbolises the deep-rooted relationship that has evolved over centuries. Since Turkmenistan's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, India has played a key role in fostering diplomatic and economic ties. India was one of the first countries to recognise Turkmenistan's sovereignty and establish diplomatic relations, laying the groundwork for the strategic engagement

that has grown over the past three decades. However, the relationship is no longer confined to historical ties alone; it has evolved into a modern-day partnership addressing pressing global issues, including energy security and regional connectivity. This partnership has increasingly centred on energy co-operation, with Turkmenistan's vast natural gas resources positioning it as a central player in India's energy security strategy.

The growing strategic co-operation between India and Turkmenistan is largely driven by the latter's substantial natural gas reserves, one of the largest in the world. Turkmenistan, positioned as a key energy player in Central Asia, offers India a critical opportunity for energy diversification at a time when India is seeking to reduce its dependence on oil and gas imports from volatile regions. The need for reliable energy supplies has become even more pressing as India looks to ensure the security of its growing economy. Energy security is at the forefront of India's foreign policy and economic strategy, and Turkmenistan's role as an energy partner aligns with India's long-term objectives. Through energy collaboration, particularly with regard to natural gas, India aims to secure its energy future, ensuring a more diversified and stable supply chain. Endeavours such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline serve as a crucial component of this energy partnership and exemplify the geostrategic implications of India-Turkmenistan relations. The TAPI project holds the potential to transform regional energy flows, enabling India to access Turkmenistan's abundant natural gas resources via a secure and stable route. This pipeline is not only significant for energy security but also has broader geopolitical implications. It offers a direct link to Central Asia, bypassing potentially unstable regions, while also enhancing regional connectivity and sustaining economic interdependence. The strategic importance of the TAPI pipeline lies in its potential to reshape energy trade, reduce reliance on traditional sources, and provide an alternative to other pipeline projects from the region.

India's energy diversification strategy has led to a recalibration of its foreign policy towards energy-producing nations like Turkmenistan. The energy deficit in India remains a critical concern, and access to natural gas from Turkmenistan can play a pivotal role in bridging this gap. Moreover, Turkmenistan's geographic location at the crossroads of regional powers, such as, Russia, China, and Iran—further amplifies its strategic

importance. As these global players continue to expand their influence in Central Asia, India's engagement with Turkmenistan also serves to assert its own strategic footprint in the region. The growing alignment between India's energy security goals and Turkmenistan's resource wealth is, therefore, not merely economic but also part of a broader geopolitical vision. As India seeks to diversify its energy sources and ensure a stable, secure, and sustainable energy future, its partnership with Turkmenistan becomes increasingly crucial. The TAPI pipeline, combined with the broader energy and geopolitical dynamics of Central Asia, positions this bilateral relationship as not only vital for India's energy security but also as a significant factor in the evolving geopolitics of the region. India's growing energy needs, coupled with Turkmenistan's resource wealth, have created a unique opportunity for co-operation, and this partnership stands to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of energy trade and regional stability in the coming decades.

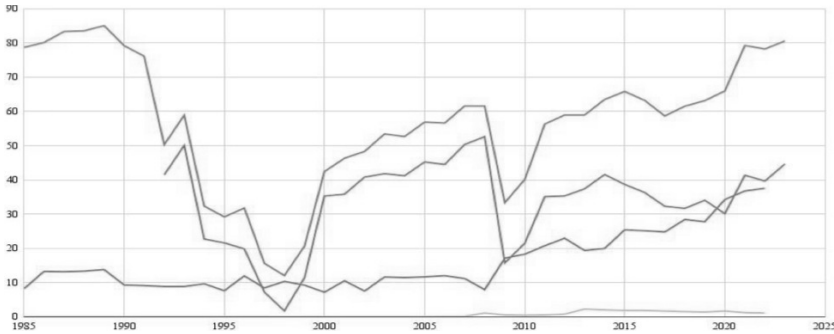
### **Evolution of India-Turkmenistan Relations in the Context of Energy Security**

The historical role of Central Asia in regional connectivity, and especially India-Turkmenistan relations, has its roots in ancient trade routes, such as, the Silk Road, where Turkmenistan, located at the crossroads of Asia, served as a pivotal transit point for goods and resources. In modern times, the energy sector has become the cornerstone of bilateral ties between India and Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan's energy reserves, particularly its natural gas resources, have long been a point of interest for India. India's energy security concerns, driven by its growing demand for natural gas, have prompted the government to engage with Turkmenistan since the 1990s. However, it was in the 2000s that tangible projects, such as the TAPI pipeline, were envisioned as a way to directly access Turkmenistan's natural gas. The construction of TAPI, which is now in the advanced stages of development, has been central to the evolution of India-Turkmenistan relations. For India, TAPI presents a way to diversify its gas supplies and reduce its dependency on the volatile Middle Eastern market. For Turkmenistan, the pipeline serves as a strategic outlet to international markets, thus reducing its over-reliance on China and increasing its geopolitical clout in the region.

## **Energy Corridors in a Multipolar World: A Conceptual Analysis**

In the evolving global energy landscape, energy corridors serve as critical conduits for transporting energy resources across regions, contributing to the economic stability and geopolitical leverage of nations. The concept of energy corridors in multipolarity reflects a new phase of energy geopolitics, wherein multiple regional powers assert their influence over the energy supply chains. In this scenario, energy corridors like the TAPI gas pipeline and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) offer not just energy security but also a strategic mechanism for fostering regional connectivity and interdependence.

In a multipolar world, no single nation can dominate energy flows; rather, power is distributed across several countries, each with their strategic interests and economic requirements. Holding 'positive neutrality, on one hand Turkmenistan also carries 'open door policy' on the other hand. This shows the country's interest in building relationship with others without bothering its internal affairs. Through the 'open door policy', Turkmenistan encourages foreign trade and investments. This helped the country in making commercial relationship with many countries, mainly India, Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, US, and Turkey. The TAPI project stands as a key example of a collaborative effort to connect Central Asia to South Asia, fostering a mutually beneficial energy security framework. This is especially crucial for India, a growing energy consumer, which seeks to diversify its energy sources beyond traditional suppliers. A multipolar approach to energy corridors involves co-operation across diverse stakeholders, with multiple countries working to optimise the use of shared resources. For Turkmenistan, energy corridors present an opportunity to reduce dependency on any single consumer or transit route, thus mitigating risks associated with geopolitical uncertainties, especially with its reliance on China for energy exports. India's participation in the TAPI project, despite its security concerns, reflects a pragmatic approach to securing long-term energy supplies while engaging with regional partners in a shared vision of energy diversification and interdependence.



**Map 1: Turkmenistan's Gas Balance**

### **Regionalism and Strategic Interdependence: India-Turkmenistan**

India and Turkmenistan's energy co-operation can be understood within the framework of regionalism and strategic interdependence, where both nations seek to reinforce their economic and energy security through co-operative partnerships. Regionalism, as seen in the context of TAPI and INSTC, represents a framework for promoting closer economic ties and reducing vulnerabilities through collective action. For India, energy imports from Turkmenistan provide a critical alternative to traditional suppliers in the Middle East, Russia, and Central Asia, which are either politically unstable or geographically distant. Strategic interdependence goes beyond mere economic co-operation and delves into the security dimension of energy infrastructure. TAPI, as an example, demonstrates how energy projects intertwine national interests and security concerns. India's involvement hinges not only on the potential for energy diversification but also on the alignment of strategic interests in maintaining peace and stability in the region, particularly in relation to Afghanistan and Pakistan. In addition, Turkmenistan's energy strategy is informed by its goal to reduce dependency on any one transit corridor, which is why it is keen on developing multiple energy routes like TAPI and INSTC. The diversification of these corridors allows Turkmenistan to mitigate risks associated with the vulnerability of a single route or partner. India, therefore, plays a crucial role in this diversification strategy, facilitating its own energy security while contributing to Turkmenistan's long-term energy export goals.

**TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) Pipeline**

The TAPI pipeline is a flagship project that has the potential to reshape regional energy dynamics. Completed in the Turkmen segment, the project continues to face challenges, particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, with ongoing negotiations and the eventual construction of the pipeline's Afghan leg, the project holds significant promise for ensuring the security of energy supplies to India while fostering greater economic interdependence between the countries involved. Legal instruments for security are essential for ensuring the stability and resilience of critical energy infrastructure like the TAPI pipeline. A binding agreement among TAPI member states, explicitly addressing security concerns, could mitigate risks arising from regional conflicts and geopolitical tensions. Such a framework would not only safeguard the physical infrastructure but also reinforce mutual accountability, fostering trust among participating nations. For India, assurances through legally enforceable mechanisms would enhance confidence in the pipeline's reliability, enabling it to play a more proactive role in advancing regional energy co-operation. This paradigm underscores the importance of institutionalising transit security to establish a robust foundation for sustained collaboration in energy corridors. It represents a significant milestone in the development of Turkmenistan-India relations, with its 1,680 km route set to connect the South Yolotan-Osman field in Turkmenistan to Fazilka in India. The pipeline will traverse key regions in Afghanistan and Pakistan, passing through Herat, Helmand, and Kandahar in Afghanistan, and Quetta and Multan in Pakistan. The agreement among the four countries stipulates the delivery of 90 million metric standard cubic metres per day (mmscmd) of natural gas, with 38 mmscmd allocated to both Pakistan and India, while Afghanistan will receive 14 mmscmd.

Turkmenistan, endowed with vast natural gas reserves, is well-positioned to meet the demands of the pipeline. As per the BP Statistical Review 2011, Turkmenistan holds 7.94 trillion cubic metres of natural gas reserves, ranking it fourth globally, just behind Qatar. The newly discovered South Yolotan-Osman field, containing between 4 to 14 trillion cubic metres of gas, could potentially produce up to 70 billion cubic metres annually, which is roughly equivalent to Turkmenistan's current total annual production. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has estimated the pipeline's cost at \$7.6 billion and has offered to act as both the co-ordinator and financier of the project. ADB's involvement not only

provides a crucial financial backbone but also serves to mitigate political risks, offering an important stamp of approval from its member nations. The construction and maintenance of the pipeline will be managed by a consortium of private companies, ensuring a smooth flow of gas from Turkmenistan. For Turkmenistan, the TAPI pipeline offers a critical economic advantage by enabling the country to diversify its markets, as it is landlocked and borders energy giants such as Iran and Russia. Although relations with Russia have deteriorated, the TAPI pipeline provides an opportunity for Turkmenistan to tap into India's expansive market and strengthen its bilateral ties. The backing of the ADB further solidifies the pipeline's potential, offering both financial support and political assurance from international stakeholders.

India stands to gain significantly from this pipeline, primarily through cheaper, more efficient access to natural gas compared to costly LNG imports via sea routes. The pipeline is expected to contribute 12.5 to 16 per cent of India's future natural gas demand, and its successful implementation could pave the way for a second pipeline along the same route, further boosting supply. The TAPI pipeline serves as a critical entry point into Central Asia, potentially unlocking future energy deals and other infrastructure projects in the region. Once operational, the pipeline could also facilitate the establishment of a broader trade corridor linking the four countries and extending potentially to Kazakhstan.

The strategic advantages for India extend beyond energy supply, with the TAPI pipeline serving as a platform for deepening economic relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the wake of NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan, India could play a key role in enhancing security and stabilising the region, thereby ensuring the safety of the pipeline. Additionally, the project could offer new economic opportunities, such as, increased trade between India and Pakistan. For example, India's Bhatinda refinery in Punjab could supply petroleum products to Lahore, creating a mutually beneficial economic exchange. Furthermore, India could leverage the TAPI project as a foundation to enhance its involvement in Afghanistan and Pakistan's development by offering financial support and credit lines in return for guarantees regarding the pipeline's security. Despite the promising benefits, the TAPI pipeline faces significant challenges. The project's successful implementation hinges on overcoming complex obstacles that require lengthy negotiations, sustained

diplomatic efforts, and the collective will of the participating governments. While the solutions are not insurmountable, they demand time, strategic vision, and strong political commitment from all parties involved.

### **INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor)**

In addition to TAPI, Turkmenistan's strategic focus on INSTC present another avenue for regional co-operation in the energy sector. The development of INSTC as a multi-modal transport network connects India, Russia, and Central Asia, facilitating the efficient flow of goods, including energy resources. Turkmenistan's active participation in this initiative allows it to enhance its logistical capabilities while fostering closer ties with India and Russia. By leveraging the INSTC, Turkmenistan can further integrate itself into global energy supply chains, ensuring both economic and energy security through diversified export routes.

- **Joint Infrastructure Development:** To ensure the sustainability of energy corridors like TAPI and INSTC, both countries should invest in joint infrastructure projects that not only focus on the energy sector but also facilitate greater trade and economic co-operation in other sectors like transportation, manufacturing, and technology.
- **Security Framework:** Establishing a robust security framework, involving both regional and international stakeholders, could mitigate the risks associated with pipeline construction and ensure long-term stability.
- **Technology Transfer:** Leveraging technology for the efficient extraction, transportation, and processing of energy resources could be beneficial for both nations. Collaboration on clean energy technologies, such as solar and wind, could also be explored, further diversifying Turkmenistan's energy mix.

### **Synergising Prosperity: The Economic and Strategic Ramifications**

The TAPI gas pipeline project holds immense promise for the participating nations, offering a plethora of economic and strategic benefits. Foremost among these is its potential to drive economic growth by creating significant employment opportunities across all four countries involved. By reducing unemployment rates and bolstering Gross National Product (GNP), the project could serve as a major economic stimulant, with

Turkmenistan poised to benefit most prominently, according to economists.

For India, the TAPI pipeline represents a major leap in energy security, offering the country a more affordable and reliable energy source. With India's rapidly growing economy, the need for sustainable energy to power its industrial sectors and meet the demands of an expanding population has never been more urgent. The pipeline will provide India with access to cheaper energy, particularly in the form of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and electricity, which will directly benefit its industrial parks and energy consumers. This will not only reduce energy costs but also enhance India's competitive edge on the global stage, enabling its economy to continue on its trajectory of growth. The project will help India achieve its long-term goals of energy diversification and economic sustainability. Furthermore, the successful operation of TAPI will bring economic benefits to Afghanistan, notably through transit duties, which are projected to generate an estimated \$500 million annually. While Afghanistan's role as a transit hub is vital, its economic contributions serve to strengthen the overall project, providing a foundation for broader regional co-operation and growth.

In addition to the direct economic gains, the TAPI pipeline is expected to act as a catalyst for regional co-operation, facilitating trade, peacebuilding, and energy partnerships between Central and South Asia. It has the potential to transform the political dynamics of the region, reducing historical tensions and promoting collaboration, especially between India and Pakistan. The successful implementation of the project will establish India as a central figure in the regional economic landscape, solidifying its strategic importance. The project's timely execution is crucial not only for energy security but also for positioning India as a leader in regional connectivity. The TAPI pipeline, once operational, will be a symbol of mutual growth and will enhance India's role in a geopolitically complex landscape, making it a pivotal player in the region's future economic and strategic developments.

### **Navigating Pathways amid Opportunities and Obstacles**

India is today one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing economies in the world. It constitutes not only a vast and ever-growing market but also a competitive source of technology and knowledge-based services.

Nations across the globe increasingly view India as an indispensable economic partner and actively seek to establish mutually rewarding economic and commercial links with its emerging economy. This recognition has amplified India's role in fostering regional connectivity, particularly with Central Asia, where historical, cultural, and geopolitical linkages have laid the foundation for deeper collaboration. As an extended neighbour of the Central Asian Republics (CARs), India's strategic and economic interests in the region are significant. Central Asia serves as a crucial gateway for India's pursuit of energy security, trade expansion, and geopolitical influence. Turkmenistan, with its vast energy reserves and strategic location, is a linchpin in these efforts. Co-operation in projects, such as, the TAPI pipeline underscores the potential for transforming regional connectivity through energy partnerships. However, achieving this vision requires addressing complex challenges, including political instability and infrastructure gaps. Turkmenistan's energy landscape is marked by abundant natural gas reserves, positioning it as a major player in regional and global energy politics. Its strategy of diversifying export markets aligns with India's growing energy demands, creating a convergence of interests. The TAPI pipeline, if successfully implemented, could redefine energy flows in the region, offering Turkmenistan access to South Asian markets while enhancing India's energy security. Yet, the pipeline's progress has been impeded by security concerns, particularly in Afghanistan, and the absence of binding legal frameworks among stakeholders.

India's commitment to regional connectivity extends beyond energy projects. Initiatives, such as, the INSTC aim to create efficient trade routes linking India to Central Asia, including Turkmenistan, and beyond to Europe. The potential inclusion of Turkmenistan in the INSTC could enhance its utility as a multimodal corridor. Additionally, the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway, envisioned as a linked corridor of the INSTC, presents opportunities to streamline the movement of goods. Despite these promising developments, logistical inefficiencies and the lack of direct surface connectivity between India and Turkmenistan remain significant obstacles, necessitating innovative solutions, such as, leveraging air connectivity and fostering public-private partnerships. India's historical and cultural ties with Central Asia provide a strong foundation for deepening regional co-operation. Rooted in centuries of civilisational exchange, India and Central Asia share a common heritage that continues

to shape their diplomatic and economic relations. As contemporary challenges, such as, terrorism and transnational crime threaten regional stability, India's role as a stabilising force gains prominence. Collaborative efforts to counter these threats are essential for advancing connectivity initiatives and ensuring sustainable development.

Turkmenistan's neutrality in regional politics further enhances its role as a critical partner for India. By maintaining balanced relationships with major powers while prioritising economic co-operation, Turkmenistan contributes to regional stability. Its position as a gateway to other Central Asian nations and the Caspian region amplifies its strategic importance in regional connectivity frameworks. India's proactive engagement with Turkmenistan, particularly in exploring alternative transport corridors and enhancing bilateral trade, reflects a shared vision for mutual growth. The interplay between India, Turkmenistan, and regional stakeholders offers immense potential for transformative collaboration. Addressing challenges such as infrastructure deficits, security risks, and political instability requires a pragmatic and multifaceted approach. Leveraging Turkmenistan's energy resources and India's technological expertise, while integrating them into broader regional frameworks, can unlock opportunities for sustained economic growth and enhanced connectivity.

### **Bridging Regions: The Enduring Impact of India-Turkmenistan Symbiosis**

Central Asia's geopolitical significance, paired with its vast energy resources, positions the region as a key player on the global stage. Yet, this region is not without its challenges, particularly in the realm of security. Addressing these security concerns through enhanced regional co-operation can play a vital role in ensuring lasting peace and stability. Such stability is essential not only for the region's security but also for promoting steady economic growth and development. The scope and speed of economic and political integration in Central Asia and Eurasia will depend largely on the readiness of national economies to undertake essential reforms and adopt best practices in governance, both politically and economically. Turkmenistan, as a critical player in this region, stands to benefit significantly from these transformations, leveraging international experiences to enhance its own political and economic structures.

For Turkmenistan, the development of alternative regional transport corridors plays a crucial role in its long-term national strategy. By fostering transport links to the East and South, Turkmenistan aims to integrate more effectively with its neighbouring countries, which will not only boost national development but also increase Central Asia's overall connectivity. A well-developed transport infrastructure will not only facilitate domestic trade but will also make Central Asia an attractive destination for foreign investment, which could help foster economic growth across the region.

India, as a rising global power with an increasing need for energy, sees immense potential in strengthening its ties with Turkmenistan, particularly through collaborative energy projects like the TAPI pipeline. This partnership can be a cornerstone for regional co-operation, allowing both nations to tap into Central Asia's energy-rich resources while simultaneously strengthening their political and economic ties. By enhancing these bilateral relations, India and Turkmenistan can work together to ensure the stability of Afghanistan, a shared priority. Afghanistan's stability is crucial not only for Central Asia's security but also for broader South Asian interests. In this context, India's involvement in Afghanistan can help bring about regional peace, through both direct involvement and support for multilateral development initiatives. India's vast market presents a tremendous opportunity for Turkmenistan's energy exports, and the TAPI pipeline stands as a key project to unlock this potential. Through this energy corridor, Turkmenistan will be able to access a broader market for its gas resources, while India can diversify its energy sources, thereby increasing its energy security. The potential for additional pipelines and trade routes along this corridor could lead to enhanced economic co-operation between India, Turkmenistan, and their neighbours.

India and Turkmenistan's deepened collaboration can serve as a model for peace and stability in the region. By working together to secure energy supplies and develop infrastructure, both countries can pave the way for regional prosperity. The shared goals of economic growth and stability between the two nations also align with broader geopolitical objectives, where both countries can bridge the divide between Central Asia and South Asia, overcoming historical barriers created during colonial rule. This partnership not only strengthens India's influence in Central Asia but

also establishes Turkmenistan as a vital energy partner in the global market. The strategic importance of this partnership extends beyond economic and energy co-operation, promoting broader regional integration. As both countries work to stabilise Afghanistan and encourage its reintegration into regional trade and security frameworks, they lay the groundwork for a more interconnected and prosperous Eurasian region. There is a lot of untapped potential in this partnership, and much more can be expected from it as the relationship continues to evolve. Ultimately, the collaborative efforts of India and Turkmenistan could contribute significantly to shaping a more secure, stable, and economically integrated Central Asia, which in turn could offer substantial benefits to the global community.

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## **Connectivity between India and Central Asia: A Case Study of Turkmenistan**

*Anita Sengupta*

Two Central Asian states Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan along with Afghanistan agreed to enhance transit and transport infrastructure in Afghanistan at a trilateral meeting between Kazakh Deputy Prime Minister Serik Zhumangarin, Director General of the Transport and Communications Agency under Turkmenistan's Cabinet of Ministers Mammetkhan Chakyeov, and Afghan Minister of Commerce and Industry Nooruddin Azizi in Kabul on April 2024. In the meeting, Zhumangarin emphasised the need for calculations and reorientation of traffic flows, highlighting upcoming infrastructure development initiatives. The intention of all three parties is also to establish a connection with India, which can be achieved through Iran's Chabahar Port. This will contribute to the development of Turkmen infrastructure as well as our own along the Beineu-Aktau-Bolashak."<sup>1</sup> The three sides noted that the eastern branch of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) had gained new impetus to become a key route for transporting goods from Russia and Belarus through Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, India, and West Asia. Following the negotiations, they agreed to establish a working group to implement the agreements reached. Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan route is one of the branches of INSTC.

India has been admitted to the Ashgabat Agreement for the establishment of an International Transport and Transit Corridor between the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Sultanate of Oman, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan signed on 25 April 2011. Turkmenistan, as depository State of Ashgabat Agreement, informed India on 1 February 2018, that all the four founding members have consented to

the accession of India and that India's accession to the Agreement will enter into force on 3 February 2018.

Ashgabat Agreement envisages facilitation of transit and transportation of goods between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf. Accession to the Agreement would diversify India's connectivity options with Central Asia and have a positive influence on India's trade and commercial ties with the region. Upon receipt of approval of the Union Cabinet for India's accession to the Ashgabat Agreement, India had deposited the Instrument of Accession with Turkmenistan on April 2016. This is reflective of the fact that there is today an infrastructural logic to most global political events and an increasing significance of 'infrastructural alliances', where the strength of ties measured by connectivity and volumes of flows is significantly higher than encounters over varying perceptions of political frontiers and frontiers of influence. With the increasing recognition of trade and connectivity as the impetus driving relations among states, there has been in recent years an increasing focus on connectivity as the determining centre of South and Central Asian relations.

Reflective of this was the fact that lack of connectivity and measures to overcome this lacuna was one of the principle foci of discussion during the first India-Central Asia Summit along with security. On 27 January 2022, a virtual India-Central Asia Summit was held with leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. The Summit focused on co-operation, consistent engagement, and regional connectivity while focusing on all round regional development and transparency. The Summit reflects India's renewed engagement with an extended neighbourhood, which now looks not just eastwards but also towards the northwest. It also reflects a willingness on the part of the Central Asian leadership to engage with India through an alternative multilateral format in addition to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) of which India and the Central Asian states are already a part along with Russia and China.<sup>2</sup> Connectivity, trade and developing a framework for co-operation on the Afghan situation were part of the Summit agenda. Afghanistan, of course is a crucial for connect between the regions and it is unfortunate that the present political situation complicates matters. As a reflection of this, joint working groups on Afghanistan were constituted. There was a proposal to make the Summit a permanent yearly event with

a permanent Secretariat for greater engagement at the ministerial level, a change from the foreign minister level at which India-Central Asia summits currently exist. The hosting of the Summit elevates the bilateral relations that India has with the states to a formal multilateral level. It also indicates a move towards creating a regional connectivity network that has often been a challenge for both South Asia and Central Asia, given its poor infrastructure, problematic diplomatic relations and limited formal trade. It is also significant that the Summit was not an isolated engagement, as it followed the Delhi Regional Security Dialogue which was hosted in New Delhi on November 2021.

India's trans-continental connections to its Northwest predates the age of globalisation with historically located networks that re-orient conventional cartographies and spatial configurations. For India, the contemporary connection to the wider Central Asian region had been formally visualised through the Connect Central Asia Policy launched in 2012 as an alternative infrastructure and transport connectivity plan that sought to enhance trade and educational rights and encourage expanded joint commercial and security initiatives with Central Asia. It is also an initiative to include the states in the North-South Transport Corridor with the aim to involve Central Asian states wherever possible and with this in mind expand land routes to include Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. India faces connectivity challenges regarding land routes to Afghanistan and Central Asia which limit direct communications and part of the effort to relieve these connectivity bottlenecks has been through greater emphasis on participation in multilateral organisations, the SCO being an example. What is significant is the focus on the importance of interconnectedness between the South and Central Asian regions. Here, the Chabahar Port has been identified as the fulcrum of connectivity to Central Asia which builds on the previous trilateral dialogue between Iran, Uzbekistan and India to promote connectivity through the port. Uzbekistan has been invited to join the International North-South Transport Corridor which would enhance connectivity in the larger Eurasian space and has agreed in principle. Identifying Chabahar as a connectivity solution is not new. In fact, in June 2018, following an earlier meeting on the sidelines of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation summit, the significance of Chabahar Port as an additional connectivity route had been underlined.

There are alternative north-south lines that intersect the east-west one,

linking Central and West Asia to South and Southeast Asia. The Central Asian Infrastructure Integration Initiative which was launched by the US in October 2005 and was designed to turn Afghanistan into a link between Central and South Asia and integrate them into a single region is an example. As part of the initiative, priority has been given to the Almaty-Bishkek-Dushanbe-Kabul-Karachi highway, a transportation and energy corridor that would cross Afghanistan and tie Central and South Asia together. In addition, the creation of direct air corridors between the two countries and the entire region for both passenger and cargo flights had already been emphasised by India's external affairs minister, Subramanian Jayshankar when he hosted the India Central Asia Business Council in February 2020. All of these, taken together, indicate that there is today a vision of re-engaging with the region as well as a set of integrated structures that will be put in place to ensure that this re-engagement becomes a reality. This article focuses on some of these initiatives as part of an effort to reflect on the interconnectedness of the South and Central Asian regions with focus on Turkmenistan.

### **Engagements with the 'heartland'**

The 16th SCO Summit held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on June 23–24, 2016, concluded the process of inclusion of India and Pakistan as permanent members in the SCO. However, even before the beginning of the Summit, reports tended to argue that the process of inclusion may not be the foregone conclusion that it is being assumed to be and that in any case the level of engagement that India would be offered in the organisation shall be determined by existing members. At the Summit in Ufa (Russia) on July 10, 2015, Putin announced that the organisation was turning a “new page as the process of including Pakistan and India are being launched.”<sup>3</sup> More significantly the members reiterated their willingness to create a Development Bank and Development Fund and supported China's proposal to create a Silk Road Economic Belt across the SCO member states. The SCO Summit which followed the BRICS Summit underlined the importance of stability in Afghanistan with the withdrawal of international forces.<sup>4</sup> There remained unresolved issues including disagreements on the level of involvement in Afghanistan. Russian President Putin supported increased involvement of the SCO in Afghanistan, whereas Uzbek President Karimov defined Afghanistan as a “smouldering war with no end in sight” and argued that the SCO needs to

focus on long-term interests, principally economic issues and increasing bilateral trade and investment.<sup>5</sup>

It is this understanding that was reflected in the decision on inclusion of India with clear indications that geoeconomics rather than traditional political rivalries had been the decisive factor in the acceptance of their membership. For China, the SCO as a geopolitical platform was no longer crucial as the question of disputed borders has either been resolved or is no longer significant as they have become shared Special Economic Zones (SEZs) that can be easily navigated by Chinese trucks carrying products for the Central Asian markets. It is the One Belt One Road, an infrastructural project with its own funding agency, the AIIB that has assumed importance and SCO meetings reiterate commitment to both as an integral part of the organisation. It was the need for combined material and political commitment in infrastructural development that became the motivating factor for the acceptance of the expanded membership among the states.

India's own decision for entry into the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation was through a much-debated process where the advantages and disadvantages of membership into a multilateral forum that would include not just Russia and China but also Pakistan has been subject to intense scrutiny not just by commentators from within India but also globally. A recent rather positive editorial begins with the argument that entry into the SCO opens up opportunities for India to its North.<sup>6</sup> A refreshing change from many others that have argued that 'look north/northwest' would never be a viable policy option for India given the intractable position of Pakistan and the continuing conflicts in Afghanistan that make 'Look/Act East' the only available Indian alternative, the editorial goes on to argue that entry into the SCO would resolve the issue of non-contiguity with the Central Asian region by opening up lines of communication through Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Connectivity therefore, played a large part in the Indian decision to apply for membership with the general agreement that for India joining the SCO was about "raising its stakes in Central Asia", of greater connectivity to a wider resource-rich region and an opportunity to work on common issues of concern. This in conjunction with Iran's SCO membership, would ensure that India would be able to move towards developing a platform for trade and transit through Bandar Abbas and

Chabahar, eventually linking with the North-South Corridor. There also remains the possibility of the SCO acting as guarantor for projects like Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline and the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline which have been pending for a number of years. This would also provide a useful interface for interaction with Afghanistan and its neighbourhood. However, there is also the counter argument that SCO engagement need not be over emphasised as bilateral engagement with the Central Asian states work just as well as illustrated by the uranium supply deal with Kazakhstan during Prime Minister Modi's visit. The Indian alternative through 'Connect Central Asia' that was projected as the policy initiative on the west that would complement its Look/Act East Policy with emphasis on the four "Cs": commerce, connectivity, consular and culture.

The 18th Shanghai Co-operation Organisation Summit held in Qingdao (China) on June 9–10, 2018 with India and Pakistan as full members was attended, among others, by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain. An euphoric Chinese media hailed it as a commitment to multilateralism by more than half of the global community and a reiteration of the 'Shanghai spirit' based on mutual benefit, equal consultation, respect for diverse civilisations and pursuit of common development. Reflecting this positive note the global media highlighted the sharp contrast between two iconic images, one from the G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States) meeting in Charlevoix (Canada) of a defiant US President confronting a combative Angela Merkel juxtaposed against the smiling SCO group led by Chinese President Xi and Russian President Putin. While the US President instructed US representatives not to endorse the G7 final statement, the SCO was reported to have managed an 'almost' unanimous one with India opting out of extending support to the Belt and Road Initiative and non-signatories opting out of support for non-proliferation. A 'breaking apart of the West' and a 'consolidating East' dominated headlines and was identified as the marker of the emerging global scenario.

### **Regional Connectivity and Development**

Regional connectivity is regarded as the level and effectiveness of regional networks to facilitate flows of goods, services, people, and knowledge. This extends the traditional focus of public policies beyond either physical

or non-physical parameters to encompass both dimensions. Enhanced connectivity is projected to play an influential role in shaping regional integration through development in Asia. The contribution of “hard”, or physical, infrastructure networks to economic and social development, however, depends on “soft” infrastructure, including the policy, legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks in which they are located. Trade and transport connectivity within the region will continue to be important, particularly as countries look towards regional markets to counterbalance the slowdown in the global economy. At the same time, new drivers of growth are expected to shape future patterns of economic and social development and with them, other types of regional networks will become increasingly important. Given that the effectiveness of each network is increasingly dependent on the connectivity of other networks, it is clear that any analysis of regional development would have to take note of various networks of connectivity.

However, analysts note that efforts at creating infrastructure, which are restricted to various sub-regions, are actually creating greater possibilities of disengagement as they tend to be focused on certain states and not on the entire region. An example of this is the recent announcement by Pakistan’s energy minister of negotiations with Russia for a gas pipeline from Kazakhstan to Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> This strengthens Pakistan’s connections with Central Asia but not the rest of South Asia as there is little in the blueprint on the expansion of the line to the rest of South Asia. In addition to concerns about connectivity adding to regional tensions rather than diffusing them, there remain concerns about the practical delivery of enhanced connectivity. For example, when the Yiwu to Madrid train was launched in 2014, the cargo had to change tracks three times due to gauge differences. There are also other issues on which there is a need for broader discussion, including interaction and harmonisation of different tariff systems (such as those of the WTO, the Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union) and about the kinds of goods that will be transported. For freight to be cost-effective it would have to focus on high-value goods. There also remains the possibility of access to infrastructure being blocked by countries with poor bilateral relations or internal political rivalries. The alternative is larger regional projects that have been in the pipeline like the Central Asia-South Asia Energy Infrastructure Project, which would supply surplus hydropower from Central Asia to communities in South Asia. A more comprehensive project, the Central Asia Regional Economic

Co-operation Programme brought together eleven countries across South Central and East Asia to promote regional development.

The pandemic itself also brought into question regional and sub-regional arrangements with the apprehension that with world-wide decline in foreign direct investment development initiatives and infrastructure would see a negative trend in Asia. On the other hand, dependence on global value chains left most regions in Asia susceptible to economic vulnerabilities due to the pandemic. Policy response in most states for mitigating the adverse economic impacts of the pandemic led to changes in trade and investment terms, with export bans and a reduction in the import duties of medicinal products. However, it also led to protectionist responses aimed at supporting the domestic industries. Part of the response was also in terms of ‘re-shoring’, moving production back to the domestic location or ‘near-shoring’, shifting to a substitute produced within the same region. The supply side shock due to the pandemic led to a search for alternative destinations and this can prove to be an opportunity for greater engagement between the two regions.

As the pandemic persists beyond two years, there is today increased awareness about an over-dependence on China for manufactured goods including pharmaceuticals and medical equipment and subsequent calls for greater resilience in supply chains. There was also recognition of China’s influence on global multilateral organisations like the WHO. The global pushback led by the US had already begun prior to the pandemic and was strengthened by tariffs on the one hand and greater attention to strategic initiatives on the other. A renewed focus on the Indo Pacific and the QUAD was followed by AUKUS, strengthening Australian partnership through transfer of nuclear-powered sub-marines. For India, China’s intransigent position in the Himalayas, despite continuous engagement at the military, diplomatic and political levels, has required further reassessment of its China policy. While a realistic reassessment has resulted in closer engagement with Washington, there has also been a persistent effort to create partnerships with states like France or Japan. The US rethinking its priorities in traditional areas of significance like the Middle East and Eurasia, provides India with the opportunity to transcend traditional policies and moving towards greater engagement, particularly at the regional level. These would include building resilient supply chains and strengthening security coalitions.

The need of the hour is to focus on broader regional co-operation through seamless connectivity (which includes sustainable infrastructure, seamless logistics, regulatory excellence, digital connectivity, and mobility), the new buzzword, whether one is talking about the Chinese-led BRI or the much less ambitious sub-regional corridors. It is generally agreed that land connectivity between contiguous neighbours, be it through road, railways or inland waterways, can facilitate enhanced trade, cross-border investment, more people-to-people exchanges and tourism and overall development for neighbouring regions. Neighbours can also serve as transit countries for exchanges with third countries if some of this connectivity can be extended. Two aspects are considered to be relevant here. One is the establishment of suitable physical infrastructure to enable connectivity and the other is putting in place necessary legal, institutional, and other instruments that may have to be concluded for uninterrupted transit for goods and passengers across the border as well as for the delivery of goods and services. Putting in place efficient border trade and transaction arrangements would also be very important along with banking facilities, easy payment modalities, quick food safety checks, an efficient customs brokering system, single window clearances for transactions and bringing transactional costs to a minimum. Other recommendations include an integrated check post, items that would be allowed to be traded as border trade and strictly implemented with minimal or no duties.

The assumption is that enhanced connectivity would induce greater development in the region and that connectivity-induced development would lead to a solution to conflicts that are identified to be mostly driven by competition over scarce resources. In the South and Central Asian region, identifying Afghanistan as the fulcrum of routes connecting a network of maritime ports and inland connections to the region assumed significance in this context. Constructing mobility technologies, however, is an inherently political act involving financial, regulatory, and technical relations that bring together the interests of actors at various levels of interest.

If one then examines this from a perspective of connectedness as the basis of development then there are for instance, several industries where regional value chains could be developed in and between Central and South Asia: (a) fresh and chilled fruits and vegetables; (b) processed foods; (c) agricultural raw materials; (d) herbs and spices; (e) precious and semi-precious stones; (f) other non-ferrous and ferrous metals; (g) slabs of

marble and other stones; (h) garments; (i) carpets; and (j) pharmaceuticals, and herbal medications.

Natural resource-intensive industries in minerals and fabricated metal products generally support government revenue-generating objectives, particularly in Central Asia. And technology-intensive industries like those of pharmaceuticals create opportunities for market development. India is one of the largest producers of bulk pharmaceuticals and other countries like Tajikistan and Uzbekistan could form part of regional value chains. Having said that, there are certain issues that act as impediments to trade between the two regions. Trade costs remain high for all Central and South Asia economies, both at the border and behind the border. The multiplicity of licenses, permits, and certificates affects not only the international competitiveness of businesses in both regions, but also the ability of small enterprises to understand the complexity of those measures. Also, lists of sensitive and prohibited goods protecting domestic producers are often in conflict with potential intra-industry trade opportunities that could otherwise take place between trading partners in the regions.

There is more importantly the need to realise that all transportational corridors have two components; they are both a spatial description of something happening on the ground and also the projection of something to be realised. As such they tend to shape a new imagination that follow existing supply chains but also the possibility of development powered by logistic connectivity. In recent times logistic strategies have sought to re-organise and consolidate politics/economics/cultures and everyday existence along the routes that they traverse. While the focus is on geopolitics and economy, especially their potential to develop business opportunities, there is also the realisation that it is the cultural interaction that these corridors will engender that will make them the gateway for mobility and interaction among people. This has been historically true as Buddhism was one of the most significant commodities to travel along the 'Silk Road' together with musical instruments and tea. Also, the routes that these economic corridors traverse have been pathways of connectivity for people over generations and have been an integral part of their everyday life. While there is attention on geopolitical strategy, resource utilisation and power lobbying in the states these corridors traverse, there remain regular non-elite movements for economic/social/cultural/religious exchanges that also negotiate state borders and move beyond 'regional'

confines. The motivation for these mobilities and the corresponding flow of remittances and commodity trade is the flip side of larger visions of logistic spaces and brings into focus debates on development.

Such schemes also ignore the fact that the present system of informal cross-border trade in Asian regions has many participants—women traders, professional carriers, wholesalers, distributors, transporters, retailers, and consumers. Along most of the borders, informal trade is also significantly higher than formal trade and has the added advantage of not affecting local sensibilities and environments. Large scale logistical visions for economic corridors tend to flatten both the physical, political and cultural geography of the terrain the corridor negotiates thereby ignoring the fact that just like each state border is different and has to be dealt with differently, each terrain is also different and the corridors of connectivity have to be in sync with this diversity.

It is in this background that one needs to examine issues of connectivity between India and Turkmenistan. The two states have established mechanisms, such as, Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) for Trade, Economic, Scientific, and Technological Co-operation at the level of Foreign Minister and Foreign Office Consultations (FOCs) at the level of Deputy Foreign Minister. The last IGC was held in New Delhi on August 14, 2017 while the last FOC was held in online format on January 13, 2021. High-level visits have provided momentum to further strengthening of bilateral ties. From Turkmen side, the first President Saparmyrat Niyazov visited India twice in 1994 and 1997. Former President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov visited India in May 2010, during which five bilateral documents were signed. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi paid a visit to Ashgabat from July 10–11, 2015, as part of his Central Asia tour. Besides meeting with President Berdimuhamedov, he also inaugurated the Yoga and Traditional Medicine Centre in Ashgabat, the first of its kind in Central Asia & unveiled a bust of Mahatma Gandhi. Seven MoUs in sectors, such as, chemicals, S&T, tourism, yoga & Ayurveda, defense, sports, etc. were signed during the visit. President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind visited Ashgabat on April 2022. Four MoUs were signed during the visit on finance, disaster management, culture and arts, as well as youth affairs. President also inaugurated an India Corner at the Institute of International Relations, Ashgabat. Recently, Nurmhammet Amanepesov, Cabinet Minister for Health, Science &

Technology, and Education participated virtually in Voice of Global South Summit hosted by India in January 2023.

Turkmenistan has been a part of the India-Central Asia Dialogue framework since the beginning. In the first ICAD held in Samarkand (Uzbekistan) in January 2019, EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj met Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov. The second ICAD was held in virtual mode on October 28, 2020 wherein Turkmenistan was represented by FM Meredov. Under the framework of ICAD, 4-member Turkmen media delegation visited New Delhi and Bengaluru as part of a “familiarisation visit for Central Asian journalists” from April 22–28, 2019. The 2nd India-Central Asia Business Council meeting was held on October 28, 2020, convened by FICCI, wherein Chairman of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan Dovletgeldi Rejepov participated. Former President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov virtually participated in the first India-Central Asia Summit (ICAS) held on January 27, 2021. Within the framework of ICAS, Turkmenistan participated in the first India-Central Asia Culture Ministers meeting (held virtually in April 2023), JWG on Afghanistan (held in New Delhi in March 2023) and JWG on Chabahar (held in Mumbai in April 2023). Turkmenistan also sent a 20-member delegation to participate in the 2nd Central Asia Youth Delegation.

Bilateral trade between India and Turkmenistan has been modest despite the huge potential. Although it was affected by COVID-19, following the opening up of transport links, there has been a surge in trade volumes. In 2023–24 bilateral trade stood at \$112.39 million. The following table shows bilateral trade (in million US \$) over the years:

<i>Items</i>	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Total Trade Turn Over	80.46	66.27	37.89	60.94	114.36	192.01	112.39
Imports (Turkmenistan to India)	26.15	20.63	3.99	0.30	10.07	101.72	74.93
Exports (India to Turkmenistan)	54.31	45.64	33.90	60.64	104.29	90.29	37.46

(Source: Department of Commerce, GoI) <https://eoi.gov.in/ashgabat/?0760?00#:~:text=India%20enjoys%20warm%20and%20cordial,level%20of%20Deputy%20Foreign%20Minister.>

Major items of India's exports are pharmaceuticals, agricultural products, sugar, meat, electronic and electrical items, machinery, woven apparel, and tyres. Turkmen exports to India largely comprise fertilisers, inorganic minerals, chemicals, dyes, etc. Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, Turkmenistan Airlines used to operate 3 direct flights to New Delhi and 6 flights to Amritsar (with connection to Birmingham) in a week from Ashgabat. Direct flight operations have restarted from March 2023 with two flights a week (Wednesday, Thursday) between Ashgabat-New Delhi.

## Conclusions

From the Indian point of view the last decade of the 20th century presented a major strategic challenge as far the Central Asian region was concerned. However, one also needs to take note of the fact that the Indian engagement with the Eurasian region extends beyond recent conceptualisations to periods when connectivity was defined not just in strategic terms but also cultural terms. Multilateral engagement on various fronts would thus prove to be an effective means of reconnecting with the region. Here, recent geopolitical imaginations or even 'area' based divisions are of less significance. The identification of common developmental frameworks and the legacy of connectivity on various levels would prove to be more useful.

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## Chapter 18

# Monks and Monasteries of Murghab Valley

Sunita Dwivedi

### ABSTRACT

*Several inscriptions in Brahmi and Kharosthi recovered from ancient sites in the deserts of Margiana narrate an interesting story of the spread of Indian settlements, scripts and languages in Turkmenistan as a result of a flourishing east-west trade passing through the Trans-Caspian region. We learn of ancient Buddhist monasteries along Turkmen routes in the delta of the Murghab. In the opinion of historians and archaeologists the country around the delta was in close communication with the land of the Indus upto the Ganga plains through caravan trade, bringing about close cultural and political interactions.*

**Key words:** Turkmenistan, India, Karakum, Trans-Caspian, Margiana, Merv, Murghab, Buddhism

When and how the Buddha's Dhamma and Buddhist art journeyed along the gigantic web of river and land routes of Central Asia into Turkmenistan is an interesting story. It is a story narrated by some of the largest and most magnificent Buddhist cities that arose in Central Asia as a result of trade and movement of new ideas and faith, art and literature, science and technology along the Asian trade routes.

Archaeologists in the 19th and 20th century excavated numerous Buddhist monasteries and antiquities from ruined sites in the river valleys of Central Asia. Such centres arose not only in the valley of the Kabul River in Afghanistan but also in the neighbouring Murghab Valley in Turkmenistan, along the Amudarya [Oxus] and Syrdarya [Jaxartes] in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, along the Chuy in Kyrgyzstan and along the Ili

and its tributaries in Kazakhstan. The Seven Rivers region called the Zhetysu or Semiirechye in Kazakhstan became the renowned centres of Buddhist faith and learning.

In Turkmenistan some of the largest and most enchanting Buddhist settlements in Asia sprang up along the fertile valley of the Murghab valley in the deserts of Margiana. The barren land that we see today, north of modern Merv, far from being a desert in the dry and desolate Karakum, was a green zone as Edvard Rtveladze traces the etymology of 'Margiana' to 'Marg' meaning a meadow or a ground grassed over.<sup>1</sup>

### **Trade Route Along the Kopet Dag**

*The Cities and Routes of the Great Silk Road* and *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India* both inform us of the trade routes through the territory of Turkmenistan.<sup>2</sup> We learn that among the ancient Silk Road cities and major settlements of Turkmenistan nestling in the plains between the Kopet Dagh and the Karakum Desert, ancient Merv/Margiana flourished chiefly due to its strategic position on the Silk Road. Routes led from Merv towards the east and south-east into Afghanistan and through the Kabul valley connected with the Northern Highroad of India. Towards the south-west routes ran through Sarakhs and Nishapur into Iran. Towards the north the road from Merv joined the one coming over the Caspian to reach Astrakhan and onwards to Russia.

The Northern Highway or the Uttarapath running from Bengal to Balkh was the focal point of all major routes inter-connecting India, Central Asia and Iran. Starting from near the Bay of Bengal it went along the Ganga valley and through the region of north-west India [now Pakistan] and Afghanistan reached the Oxus. The highway connected with the corridor running between the Kopet Dagh mountains and the Karakum Desert through the territory of north-eastern Iran [today the land of Southern Turkmenistan]. The ancient highway, remodelled in modern times as the international highway M-37 nurtured the famous oasis cities of Nisa, Bagabat, Abiverd, Merv, and Amul. At Amul eastwards the highway joined the Oxus, while westwards it ran along the Southern Caspian through Iran up to the shores of the eastern Mediterranean. This was the most favoured route travelled by the Indians trading with the Black Sea Region.

E. Rtveladze, while describing this ‘Great India Road’ that ran to the shores of the Mediterranean writes of a branch road running towards Margiana. He informs that the Indian road, a compound of land and waterway routes started from north-western India, and crossing the Hindu Kush range followed the Kokcha, Kunduz Darya, and Balkhab rivers to the Oxus (Amu Darya), and then down the Oxus toward Chorasmia. At Amul, or Chardzhou, a route branched off towards Margiana, Parthyene and the Atrek valley.<sup>3</sup>

Today the province of Herat in Afghanistan shares its western border with Meshad in Iran and through Towraghundi with Turkmenistan in north making it an important trading hub. The route enters trans-Caspia through the small oasis settlement of Tagtabazar, on the Murghab river, 214 km south of Mary. The road runs through the town of Kushka [Serhetabad], 90 km from Tagtabazar on the Afghan border<sup>4</sup> reaching the Caspian coast and across it to Baku in Azaerbaijan. A branch route skirts the Southern Caspian and reaches Teheran and onwards through West Asia to reach Turkey and countries of Europe.

### **Indian Settlements**

In the opinion of historians and archaeologists, close communication of the country around the Murghab delta with the Indus Valley upto the Ganga plains through caravan trade brought about close cultural and political interactions between Turkmenistan and India.

Trading centres and halting stations emerged along the trans-Caspian routes as a two-way trade in horses bred in the Trans-Caspian region and Indian ivory coming from eastern and southern parts of India flourished on the Uttarapath which was linked with the Kopet Dag trade route into Margiana.

Several inscriptions in Brahmi and Kharosthi recovered from ancient sites in the deserts of Margiana narrate an interesting story of the spread of Indian settlements, scripts, and languages in Turkmenistan as a result of a flourishing east-west trade passing through the Trans-Caspian region. Buddhist manuscripts written in Sanskrit in Brahmi characters and inscribed on birch bark were recovered from Merv.<sup>5</sup> Quoting V.M. Masson, T. Shirinov mentions images on seals found in Altyn-depa [in Southern Turkmenistan] which are said to be a form of proto-Indian

writing, indicating “cultural relations between India and Turanian civilisations as a result of direct contacts....”<sup>6</sup>

We learn of ancient Indian settlements existing on the territory of eastern Iran during the Kushan period when Indian traders and craftsmen had settled along Turkmen routes. One such locality was found near the Parthian capital of *Nisa* called *Hindugan* where Siva worshippers are said to have lived.<sup>7</sup>

The foremost among the Indians who set up colonies in ancient Turkmenistan must have been the horse buyers from India who explored foreign lands for horses. As early as the period of Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* we read of the excellent horses from Persia which once included land of modern Turkmenistan.

Speaking of Horses Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* says “of those fit for use, the best come from Kamboja, Sindhu, Aratta, and Vanayu. The midling from Bahlika [Balkh] Papeya, Sauvira, and Titala. The rest are inferior.” The notes by Kangle elaborate Kamboja as an ancient kingdom north of Gandhara; Arattu as being a part of Punjab; Vanayu as Arabia or Persia.<sup>8</sup>

We also find that in the 7th century stables of Kannauj king Harsha’s palace his favourite horses included those from Persia. “...a stable filled with king’s favourite horses from Vanayu, Aratta, Kamboja, Bharadvaja, Sindh, and Persia.”<sup>9</sup>

Horses became the main component of trade, the bulk supply of which was produced by pastoral nomads in the Turkoman wastes east of the Caspian Sea besides the Kalmuk and Qazak steppes of southern Russia, and further to the south east in Afghan Turkistan, according to Muzaffar Alam.<sup>10</sup> Writes Ibn Batuta that the steppelands of southern Russia, touched by the Trans-Caspian routes, exported horses in droves of 6000.<sup>11</sup> According to historian Sukla Das, Persian vessels were touching Indian coasts, bringing horses and taking away silk and spices.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, there were silk traders who trudged the Trans-Caspian routes with Indian and Chinese silk.<sup>13</sup> The silk was brought along the Great India Road which had its eastern extremity running through Assam into China’s southern province of Sichuan.

Thirdly there were ivory traders on the southern Caspian route. It is said that the tusk of the Indian elephant was traded along the Herat-Merv and Balkh-Nisa routes with the Parthian state and on the western routes to

Rome, where the tusks were turned into jewellery, chess pieces and the unique drinking vessels, called rhytons. Excavations in Old Nisa Complex have uncovered articles of ivory with fabulous decorations and rare treasures lying sealed inside rooms of the massive Treasury or the 'Quadrate'. The ivory drinking vessels depicting Greek gods<sup>14</sup> were used for libations.

Fourthly, there were traders of precious gems and Indian painters who are known to be trudded the Laghman-Susa route passing through the southern Caspian region used as early as the 6th century BCE. The route is said to have carried raw materials and painters from India to help in the building of the royal palace of Darius—the Naubahar. It is said that the precious lapis was brought from the mines of Bactriana [at Badakshan]; gold was transported by camels from India; precious stones from the Paropamisus [the Hindukush]; Indian painters worked on the frescoes; linen produced in India, turtle breastplates from Taxila inlaid with ivory and coral and the precious yaka wood came from Gandhara. All travelled along the road to Susa.<sup>15</sup>

Wine traders were also scouring the Susa route as early as the 4th century BCE. Mauryan King Bindusara, son of Chandragupta, is said to have requested his Syriac counterpart to buy for him fine wine, figs and a sophist and probably used the Susa route.<sup>16</sup> Bindusara's son, Mauryan emperor Asoka, too, dispatched his missionaries to the Greek kingdoms, probably along the same route through the heart of Afghanistan and Turkmenistan.

That the western routes were frequently used by the Indians is also evidenced by the art depiction on the walls of the Apadana at Persepolis. Indians carry gifts in bamboo baskets and holding swords and shields and pulling buffaloes as presents for the great king Darius.<sup>17</sup> Herodotus mentions in *The Histories* that the Ionian states of Asia Minor, together with the north-west regions of India, were included in the list of the 20 satrapies of Persian Achaemenid ruler Darius in the sixth century BC. We read of the Gandharians in the seventh satrapy and Indians in the twentieth satrapy from whom Darius derived his revenues. Herodotus also informs that Indian troops formed part of the expedition of Xerxes I against the Greeks in the battles of Thermopylae (480 BC) and Plataiae (479 BC).<sup>18</sup>

## Spread of Buddhism

It is important to note that the spread of Buddhism in Turkmenistan was facilitated by the fact that the region of ancient Turkmenistan and North-Western India were often under the same political regime. Both regions were under the Persian Achaemenids, Seleucids, and the Graeco-Bactrians.<sup>19</sup>

According to Indologist B.N. Puri, the propagation of Buddhism in the Merv oasis could have taken place during the time it was part of the Seleucid kingdom by Asoka's missionaries, some of whom, according to Pali sources [*Mahavamsa*], were Greek Buddhist monks.<sup>20</sup> The Mauryan emperor Asoka [273–232 BC], after convening the Third Buddhist Council [250 BC] at Pataliputra, sent his '*dhammadutas*' or missionaries to the land of Merv/Margiana. Being part of ancient Persia, Merv was the centre of world trade and commerce. Asoka's 13th Rock Edict describes the effort made by him to propagate the faith throughout the Hellenistic world, which at that time stretched from the borders of India to Greece. This included the land of Margiana.

Writing about Buddhism in Margiana [Merv] in Southern Central Asia, Edvard Rtveladze mentions the opinion of leading archaeologists of our time. According to E. Zurcher, Buddhists first appeared in the region [which includes Margiana in Turkmenistan] in the 1st BC. B.J. Staviski believes that the first Buddhist group established itself in Margiana in the 4th AD, while G.A. Pugachenkova and Z.I. Usmanova attributed the first monument to the 3rd-4th AD. G.A. Koshelenko assigned the first Buddhist monument to the early 1st century AD. In his view, the spread of Buddhism in Margiana was between the 2nd century AD and the first half of the 3rd century AD.<sup>21</sup>

It is suggested by G.A. Koshelenko that the Parthians made their acquaintance with Buddhism not later than the beginning of our era and its appearance in Margiana in the 1st century AD.<sup>22</sup>

With the spread of Buddhism in Turkmenistan, some of the largest monasteries of the Buddhist world came up in Gyaurkala, Erk Kala, Sultan Kala in the Murghab delta [now dried and desertified] in the deserts of the Karakum. An idea of the flourishing state of Buddhism in the river valleys of Turkmenistan in the early centuries of our era can be had from the *Mahavamsa*. Canto 37-39 [p.194] of *The Mahavamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon* [trans. Wilhelm Geiger informs that at the founding

ceremony of the Great Stupa by King Duttagamani in Sri Lanka, on the full moon day of Vesakha, when the ‘Visakha -constellation’ had appeared, bhikshus [monks] from foreign countries had arrived to participate in the consecration ceremony. Among these were four hundred and sixty thousand bhikshus from Pallavabhogga led by the ‘wise Mahadeva’, while from ‘Alasanda, the city of the Yonas came the Thera Yonamahadham-marakkhita with thirty thousand bhikkhus.’<sup>23</sup>

According to B.N. Puri, *The Mahavamsa* [Buddhist chronicle of the 6th century CE] refers to the visit of Parthian monks as Pallavas are associated with Pahalavas, i.e. the Parthians who had gone to Sri Lanka to participate in the celebration at the laying of the Mahastupa in the time of King Dutta-gamani [108-77 BC].<sup>24</sup> Thus indicating the popularity of Parthian Buddhism in the first century BC. Parthia lay to the west of Central Asia, east of the Caspian Sea and was once part of ancient Persia and later ruled by Arabs (8th century CE).

### **Merv Monasteries as Universities**

There is a piece of evidence that the monasteries on the Murghab were not simple dwellings of monks but served as a great cultural and educational centre under eminent scholars. Archaeologists discovered in one of the stupas in Merv [Gyaur Kala] and in another stupa in Bairam Ali vessels with two Buddhist manuscripts. Both were written in Sanskrit in Brahmi characters and inscribed on birch bark. One of them is said to have been restored and preserved at the Institute of Oriental Studies in St. Petersburg and the other is undergoing restoration in Moscow.<sup>25</sup> The manuscript in Indian Brahmi found at Bairam Ali in the Merv oasis has been dated to the 3rd-4th centuries AD.<sup>26</sup> A copy of the birch bark manuscript, an excerpt from the canon of Sarvastavadins, was displayed at an exhibition by the Bharat Soka Gakkai at the Indira Gandhi National Centre of Arts, Delhi in 2009, among several other manuscript copies of the Lotus Sutra on birch bark.

It is amazing to note the great contribution of Central Asian monks in the propagation of Buddhism, especially in China, by translation of texts into Chinese and in the flourishing state of Buddhism in their homeland. The fact that the Parthian and other Central Asian scholars could move out for evangelical work in distant lands speaks of the ‘prevailing prosperous condition of Buddhism in their homeland,’ says Puri. It is believed that

Central Asian monks were also engaged in Buddhist activities in North-West India in the Gandhara region.<sup>27</sup>

Great scholars emerged from the Buddhist centres of Turkmenistan. According to B.N. Puri [*Buddhism in Central Asia*], Chinese accounts refer to a number of Parthian Buddhist scholars who went to China in the 2nd and 3rd century CE and collaborated in the translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese. Among these, he mentions the Parthian prince An Shih-kao, who appeared in the western frontier country of China with a burden of Buddhist texts, after the fall of the Arsacid dynasty in 148 CE. Prince An Shih-kao [Lokottama] of the local dynasty [who abdicated the Arsacid royal throne]. To him alone have been ascribed 179 works of translation of Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit to Chinese. He is said to have left his throne in favour of his uncle and left the family to become a Buddhist monk at an early age. He worked on translations till 170 CE. He translated more than 100 Buddhist texts, of which 55 are recorded by Nanjio, informs Puri.<sup>28</sup>

We find mention of another Parthian Buddhist scholar named Ngan-Hiuan, who went to Luoyang as a merchant. Here he received royal favour in the form of military service, which he soon gave up to become a Buddhist monk—an *upasak* of Anxi [Xinjiang].<sup>29</sup> At another place, we find the name of An-Fa-chin engaged in the translation of canonical works between AD 281 and AD 306.<sup>30</sup> We learn of four other Parthian scholars who were engaged in rendering Buddhist texts into Chinese.<sup>31</sup>

### **Gyaur Kala: Largest Monastery Outside India**

Among the Buddhist sites found in the Murghab delta, the monastery and stupa of Gyaur Kala is said to have been one of the largest outside India. Archaeologists excavating at the site recovered a massive Buddha head, part of a large painted statue, several 'Sitting Buddha' images, manuscripts in Brahmi on birch bark, terracotta heads of the Buddha, inscribed clay tablets from a reliquary and ruins of the monastery itself. Many stamped terracottas reminded of the tales from the Buddhist stories of the *Jatakas*.

The Buddha head, measuring a little less than a metre, was part of a giant statue and is believed to be the most amazing discovery in Turkmenistan. Dated to the second or third century CE, the head could be one of the first colossal statues of the Buddha in Central Asia. Since the

nose and a part of the huge face appeared to be damaged, it was sent to St. Petersburg for restoration and was never heard of again.

### **‘Mother of all Buddhas’**

Z.I. Usmanov informs of a big headless terracotta statue which he called ‘Mother of all Buddhas.’ It was found lying on the sufa of the Buddhist sanctuary at Merv. Usmanov describes another terracotta head found at the site of Merv with curly hair and ‘Buddha-like’ smile that was also found at the *sagharama* [monastery] of Merv.<sup>32</sup>

A Gubaev also informs us of the evidence of the dissemination of Buddhism in northern Turkmenistan based on archaeological findings from the ruins of Kandym-Kala and Ak-Kala. From the latter settlement located in the Karabekaul oasis, a sitting Bodhisattva was found, which he surmised was made locally.<sup>33</sup>

### **Jatakas from Bairam Ali**

As evidence of the exceptional popularity of Jatakas and Avadanas and ‘moral and ethical exhortations in verse form’ in Central Asia, M.I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya informs us of the recovery of a synopsis of a collection of Jatakas and Avadanas that had been borrowed from the Buddhist cannon and compiled for Buddhist homilies from Bairam Ali in manuscripts of the 3rd-4th centuries.<sup>34</sup> According to M.I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, about 1500 verses of this kind, in which the customary and favourite forms of folk poetry were employed in Buddhist poetry in the Turkic language.

The discovery of a birch bark manuscript in Sanskrit in Brahmi script at the monastery of Bairam Ali and that recovered from the painted vase at the basement of the monastery of Gyaur Kala in Merv informs us of the spread of Indian languages in Central Asia.

### **Monastery at Sultan Kala**

It is believed that a Buddhist temple also lay in the suburbs of Sultan Kala, where lay a Buddhist settlement with a monastery and a shrine which was decorated with bells stamped with the image of the Buddha. This evidence came with the recovery of bronze bells and ceramic masks stamped with the image of the Buddha and pressed terracotta with zoomorphic figures displayed at the State Museum in Mary. Such bronze bells with images of the Buddha were numerous. Apart from being used as temple decorations,

the bells could have been offerings by worshippers who arrived at the shrine.

The Mary State Museum displays Buddha figures stamped on terracotta and ceramics. One terracotta fragment was engraved with the image of the sitting Buddha, accompanied by a legend in Brahmi. The piece could have been a bulla (clay ball with inscription) for stamping temple offerings.

## Conclusion

The cities of the Ancient Merv today stand as ruins or have collapsed and remain buried in the sands of the Karakum. The dry bed of the Murghab indicates that once the delta city of the Merv oasis must have harboured rich meadows. However, we can still see surviving examples of sculptural art and ruins of monasteries in the desert regions of Merv. Remains of the antiquities that were recovered from the Buddhist sites of Erk kala, Gyaur kala and Sultan kala can now be seen in the museums at Ashgabat and Mary. They are perhaps the only link to Turkmenistan's Buddhist past, when the Buddha's Dhamma had flourished along the river Murghab. Their memory is preserved only in the art objects displayed at the museums in Ashgabat and Mary. There is no trace of the Buddhist settlements. However, with renewed excavations along the Silk Road going westwards towards the Caspian, the archaeologists may locate other areas where Buddhist communities were set up in Turkmenistan.

**Note:** The Above article is based on the author's visit to Merv Archaeological Park, National Museum Ashgabat, Mary State Museum in Turkmenistan and her published historiographical travelogue 'Buddha in Central Asia' [2014] in addition to the following sources:

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## *Chapter 19*

# **India and Turkmenistan Relations: Growing Partnership**

*Pramod Kumar*

India and Turkmenistan share historical and civilisational links. As Sapar Berdiniyazov writes that India and Turkmenistan's historical interactions date back to ancient times when trade routes like the Silk Road facilitated cultural and economic exchanges.<sup>1</sup> Archaeological evidence has revealed contacts between the Indus Valley Civilisation and Bronze Age settlements in South Turkmenistan. A Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscript of more than 300 palm leaves, dating from the seventh century AD, was found and a statue of Buddha was also found in the ruins of Merv in Turkmenistan, which shows that trade and cultural links between the two countries have existed since ancient times.<sup>2</sup> Merv was an important point on the famous Silk Road in Turkmenistan region. India had close links with the region since the Kushan Empire. In India, Central Asian relations, Turkmenistan has played a very important and historical role that constitutes the most significant aspect of the cultural heritage of both these countries in the Middle Ages. Some of the Delhi Sultans who ruled before the founding of Mughal rule by Babur were scions of the Turkmen tribes. Bayram Khan, the tutor and guardian of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, was also a Turkmen. His son, Abdul Rahim Khan E-khana, was a poet who wrote verses in Hindi as well. The Turkmen Nobility also founded a ruling dynasty in Hyderabad.<sup>3</sup> The contacts between Indians and Turkmenistan in various fields, such as, culture and art and architecture, facilitated by various Sultans, had also been a source of great historical progress in the formation of the cultural heritage of Turkmenistan in medieval times.<sup>4</sup> In the 17th century Mughal Empire Shah Jahan built 14 gates in Delhi, one of which was named in honour of Turkmen. The presence of Turkmen

Gate in Delhi is an honour for the Turkmen Sufi poet Shah Turkmen Bayabani, also highlighting the age-old links between the two countries.<sup>5</sup>

The new phase of contacts between these two states began after India's independence in 1947. In the first inter-Asian conference organised in Delhi in April 1947. The delegation from Turkmenistan was also invited. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, accompanied by his daughter Indira Gandhi, visited Ashgabat on June 14, 1955. This visit left fairly deep memories in Turkmenistan. Since their visit to Turkmenistan, hundreds of girls have been named after Indira Gandhi in Turkmenistan.<sup>6</sup>

The disintegration of the Soviet Union has opened the way for the present-day Turkmenistan to appear on the map of the world. The establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1992 marked a new era, emphasising mutual interests in enhancing regional co-operation and fostering economic ties. India was among the first countries to recognise Turkmenistan's independence in December 1991. The diplomatic relationship between India and Turkmenistan was set-up in April 1992 with the first visit of then-President of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Niyazov to India. India opened its embassy in Ashkhabad in January 1994. One year later, the diplomatic mission of Turkmenistan was established in New Delhi. In 1995, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visited Turkmenistan. Since then, regular visits by the heads of state and ministerial level are conducted regularly in both the countries.<sup>7</sup>

Turkmenistan is energy-rich country of the region. The country is geo-strategically located, sharing borders with Iran, Afghanistan, and the Caspian Sea. Turkmenistan evolved a "distinctive foreign policy" under the former President, Saparmurat Niyazov, which made it stand out in the region. On 12 December 1995, the UN General Assembly approved resolution No A/50/80, which recognised Turkmenistan's neutral status. President Niyazov, who was the President of the country since independence till his death in December 2006, termed Turkmenistan's neutral status as 'positive neutrality', which he described as not practicing 'self-isolation' but taking a "positive" and a "constructive position".<sup>8</sup>

After Niyazov's death, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov became the new President in January 2007 and was in power till 2022. In February 2022, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov announced that step down as the President to give way to young leaders. Subsequently, in the election held in March

2022, Serdar Berdymukhamedov, son of Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, was elected as the third President of the energy-rich country.<sup>9</sup>

### **Areas of Co-operation**

As Meena Singh Roy highlighted the strategic importance of Turkmenistan to India in three-fold namely energy (TAPI gas pipeline), transportation potential and regional context. India attaches great importance to its relation with Turkmenistan. India was one of the first countries to recognise independence in 1993 India opened its resident diplomatic mission in Turkmenistan and since then ties between the two countries have been developing in beneficial manner. There are two great commonalities of interest between the two countries. India appreciate Turkmenistan's pragmatic foreign policy of positive neutrality and Turkmenistan has also supported India's candidacy to various international organisations and forums. India is keen on working towards developing close political and economic ties with this resourceful country.<sup>10</sup>

### **TAPI Pipeline**

With the area in energy resources Turkmenistan stands strategic reserve of natural gas and oil make it an important country in the region. Today Turkmenistan has become an area of competition for existing and aspiring powers like, US, Russia, EU, China, India, Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran. From the Indian perspective the importance of Turkmenistan's energy resources has to be viewed in the context of its rising demand for energy. As India imports almost 70% of its oil requirement and likely it will go up to the higher level in future decades.<sup>11</sup> In this scenario the TAPI gas pipeline is of great significance for India. The 1680 kilometre long pipeline is to be built to connect Turkmenistan and India through Afghanistan and Pakistan. This pipeline is technically feasible. Although it will pass through some of the highest mountain ranges. It seems to be a view that security and viability issue regarding TAPI can be resolved in the due course of time. Several visits of higher officials from the government have been conducted to carry out this project.<sup>12</sup> The TAPI pipeline would run from Daulatabad gas field in Turkmenistan to Afghanistan. From there, it would run alongside the highway from Herat to Kandhar and then via Quetta to Multan in Pakistan. The final destination of the pipeline is to be Fazilka in Indian Punjab.<sup>13</sup>

This TAPI project was financed by the Asian Development Bank and was backed by Russia initially. However, Turkmenistan's unilateral decision to drop GAZPROM from the project has annoyed Moscow, while the pipeline got the US backing. Yet the project could not meet its 2019 target of completion due to regional tensions in South Asia, political unrest in Afghanistan and lack of clarity about whether enough Turkmen gas is available for the project.<sup>14</sup> However, despite its promise, the TAPI pipeline has faced numerous challenges that have delayed its implementation. Security concerns, particularly in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, have raised questions about the viability of the project. The uncertain geopolitical climate, exacerbated by the withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan and the rise of the Taliban, has further complicated matters. Additionally, financing the pipeline and co-ordinating the interests of four countries have proven to be major hurdles. India remains committed to the TAPI project, but until these challenges are resolved, the full potential of this initiative will remain unrealised. TAPI stands as both an opportunity and a challenge in the India-Turkmenistan relationship.<sup>15</sup>

### **INSTC**

The International North South Transport Corridor is 7200 kilometres long Multimodal network of ship, rail, and road routes for moving freights between India and Russia through Iran, Europe, and Central Asia. Although the concept is not new, the project was proposed and initiated by India, Russia and Iran in September 2000 in St Petersburg. The objective of the corridor is to increase trade connectivity between major cities such as Mumbai, Moscow, Tehran, Baku, Bandarabas, Astrakhan and so on. The agreement was signed in 16th May 2002 and first dry run of two routes was conducted successfully in 2014. The result was amazing, as the cost of Transportation were reduced.<sup>16</sup>

Turkmenistan become a member of the INSTC project in 2023. Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan have undertaken the task of establishing a joint venture to facilitate the advancement of the corridor. The objective of the joint venture is to enhance transportation services reduce cargo delivery times and expedite customs procedures by implementing standardised information system referred to as the unified window by the Kazakh Ministry.<sup>17</sup> Since India is facing roadblocks and materialising the TAPI pipeline project due to its transit through Pakistan. It offers India an opportunity to sideline Islamabad by working out INSTC option through

Bandar Abbas and Chabahar Port of Iran that connects Mumbai through the Arabian Sea. It seems that it is cost beneficial, and this is less expensive than other available routes. The important factor is that it is secure and free from any sort of hostages.<sup>18</sup>

### **Political Relations**

High level visits have provided momentum to further strengthening of bilateral ties between these two countries. From Turkmen's side, the first president, Saparmyrat Niyazov, visited India twice in 1994 and 1997. Former President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov visited India in May 2010 during which five bilateral documents were signed from Indian side. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi paid a visit to Ashkhabad on July 10 and 11, 2015 as part of a Central Asia tour.<sup>19</sup>

President of India, Shri Ramnath Kovind, visited Ashgabat on April 2-4, 2022 the first Indian President to visit Turkmenistan as well as the first head of the state to visit Ashgabat after the election of President Sarder Berdimuhamedov. Four MoU's were signed during the visit on finance, disaster management, culture and arts, as well as youth affairs. President also inaugurated an Indian corner at the Institute of international relations. Ashgabat.<sup>20</sup>

### **India-Central Asia Mechanism**

Turkmenistan has been a part of the India-Central Asia Dialogue (ICAD) framework since the beginning. In the 1st ICAD held in Samarkand (Uzbekistan) in January 2019, EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj met Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov. The second ICAD was held in virtual mode on October 28, 2020, wherein Turkmenistan was represented by FM Meredov. Under the framework of ICAD, 4-member Turkmen media delegation traveled to New Delhi and Bengaluru as part of a "familiarisation visit for Central Asian journalists" on April 22–28, 2019. The 2nd India-Central Asia Business Council meeting was held on October 28, 2020, convened by FICCI, wherein Chairman of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan Dovletgeldi Rejepov participated.<sup>21</sup>

Former President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov virtually participated in the first India–Central Asia Summit (ICAS) held on January 27, 2021. Within the framework of ICAS, Turkmenistan participated in the 1st India-Central Asia Culture Ministers meeting (held virtually in April 2023), JWG on Afghanistan (held in New Delhi in March 2023) and JWG

on Chabahar (held in Mumbai in April 2023). Turkmenistan also sent a 20-member delegation to participate in the 2nd Central Asia Youth Delegation (from 06–12 March, 2024).<sup>22</sup>

### **Culture and Education**

Cultural and educational exchanges play a pivotal role in strengthening the bonds between India and Turkmenistan. These exchanges not only foster mutual understanding and respect, but also enhance people-to-people contact, enriching the bilateral relationship. Indian TV serials as well as music are popular with Turkmen people. Bollywood movies are routinely shown on Turkmen TV Channels and Indian actors and actresses are well known among the local population. Indian film festivals are held on a regular basis in different cities in Turkmenistan.<sup>23</sup>

Yoga continues to be one of the most important bridges in India-Turkmen relations. Pursuant to ICCR's guidelines, a local yoga teacher has been hired since June 2023 who conducts yoga classes 6 days a week. An Ayurveda expert (from Ministry of Ayush) is currently deployed at the Yoga and Traditional Medicine Centre at Bagtyyarlyk Sports Complex, offering free Ayurveda consultation to visitors. He also teaches at the State Medical University in Ashgabat. International Day of Yoga is being celebrated in Turkmenistan every year since 2015 enthusiastically. Further, Hindi language is also being taught at the Azadi Institute of World Languages in Ashgabat.<sup>24</sup>

Some recent cultural exchanges include the inauguration of Rabindranath Tagore's statue in the recently inaugurated Magtymguly Cultural Complex in Ashgabat, the visit of representatives of the State Committee of Turkmenistan for TV/Radio Broadcasting & Cinematography to India for filming a documentary on the poet Magtymguly Pyragy in April 2024, the visit of a seven-member Kathak dance troupe from ICCR to Turkmenistan in January 2024 who conducted a master class of Indian Classical Dance in the renowned Magtymguly theatre in Ashgabat for Turkmen dance practitioners and students. They also performed at the Mukam Palace in Ashgabat on the 75th Republic Day of India. An eleven-member Turkmen dance group "Nazli" participated in the 9th India International Dance & Music Festival held in New Delhi in October 2023. Indian Bihu folk-dance troupe 'Gandarbha Kala Kendra' from Assam participated in the International Folk Dance Festival 'Awaza – 2023' in June 2023. The

troupe also performed at Cinema & Concert Theatre ‘*Watan*’ in Ashgabat on June 17, 2023. An eight-member Bharatnatyam troupe from ICCR visited Turkmenistan in January 2023 and performed in Ashgabat and Mary.<sup>25</sup>

India is offering full scholarships for 17 Turkmen students every year in different Indian Universities in different fields along with scholarships in the field of AYUSH and Yoga. Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra also extends scholarships for study of Hindi Language.<sup>26</sup>

Prime Minister Modi expressed India’s keenness to invest heavily in Turkmenistan’s energy sector besides proposing Turkmenistan to be part of International North South Transport Corridor. India formally became members of ‘Ashgabat Agreement’ on 3rd February, 2018 to work on establishment of an international transport and transit corridor along with other member countries.<sup>27</sup> India has defence and military deal with Turkmenistan. The national strategy for prevention of Violent Extremism and Counter Terrorism for 2020–2024 adopted and designed by Turkmenistan.<sup>28</sup>

## **Conclusion**

India and Turkmenistan share a relationship characterised by mutual respect, common interests, and significant potential for collaboration. While energy co-operation, particularly through the TAPI pipeline, remains the cornerstone of their relationship, there are numerous opportunities to expand economic, cultural, and diplomatic ties. India Turkmenistan relation can be located in the prism of historical geocultural continuity.<sup>29</sup> India made a slow entry into the central Asian region in the initial years of 1990s but has emerged as an important player in Central Asian geopolitics. This has become possible due to the warmth and goodwill that India earned over the years in this geopolitical space. India over the years has been assisting the Central Asian countries in diverse areas, ranging from health, education, infrastructural development communication, energy, and renewable energy.<sup>30</sup> Turkmenistan has also appreciated India’s assistance with vaccine during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Central Asian countries are also keen to harness renewable energy through joint co-operation with India. In this regard, India’s initiative on international solar alliance needs special mention. India can provide technical assistance to central Asian countries to harness solar

energy and green hydrogen food security and agriculture are the other areas where India can assess Central Asian countries.<sup>31</sup>

India's economic and security interests requires that Turkmenistan consolidate its newly attained independence without interference from outside power in the name of religion or ethnicity and developed balanced friendly relationship with both north and south, including India and neighbouring countries along with major powers of the global politics on an equal and mutually advantageous basis.<sup>32</sup> There is a huge scope for future multifaceted co-operation and contact between India and Turkmenistan from economy and trade to culture, science, technology, and education. Although it is a well-known fact that a lack of direct access is a major entrance that has been pointed out time and again. The situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan makes it nearly impossible to implement any route passing through these two countries. The security and stability and central issue is important for India because of missing potential markets. Currently, there are certain problems and issues which could not be easily resolved especially at the regional connectivity. India is lagging behind as an important actor in central Asia, both in the strategic and economic domains Also India is almost absent from the new great game because it is still relatively a non-significant actor. No Indian citizens are settled in Turkmenistan as the local law doesn't permit citizenship to any foreigners. Therefore, there is no Indian diaspora as such in Turkmen, which can become influential.

Pursuing their mutual objectives of economic growth and stable neighbourhood, India and Turkmenistan, by deepening their partnership and understanding can help bring stability in the region and emerge as two nodes connecting the people and businesses of India and Central Asia. However, several challenges persist, including connectivity issues, regional instability, and the growing influence of China in Central Asia. Addressing these challenges will require both countries to invest in infrastructure, strengthen diplomatic engagement, and explore new sectors for co-operation. Despite these obstacles, the future of India-Turkmenistan relations looks promising. By capitalising on shared interests and working together to overcome challenges, both countries can build a robust and mutually beneficial partnership that contributes to regional stability and prosperity.

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## Chapter 20

# Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy: New Dimensions

*Kamala Kumari*

### ABSTRACT

*Turkmenistan is situated in the heart of Asia, Central Asia, at the centre of the Eurasian continent. Turkmenistan is one of the five landlocked Republics of Central Asia. It borders Kazakhstan to the northwest, Uzbekistan to the north and east, Afghanistan to the south, and Iran to the southeast and to the west of the country is the Caspian Sea, which offers abundant natural resources of gas and oil deposits. Turkmenistan's gas reserves are estimated to be the world's fourth-largest and it is classified as an upper-middle-income country.*

*Turkmenistan, over the years, with its positive neutrality foreign policy, has been playing an important role in the region and has initiated several initiatives under the aegis of the UN. This is an endeavour to delineate the new Dimensions of Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy.*

**Key words:** *Turkmenistan, Foreign Policy, Positive Neutrality, Relations, India, Diplomacy*

### Introduction

Turkmenistan, with its vast landscape of an area of about 491,000 square kilometres, is the world's 52nd largest country. It is dominated by the Karakum Desert, though it also contains fertile agricultural regions along the Amu Darya River. Despite its natural beauty and abundant resources, Turkmenistan is most well-known for its vast energy reserves, particularly in natural gas. The population of Turkmenistan is around six million, and primarily consists of Turkmen ethnicity, though the country is home to various minority groups, including Uzbeks, Russians, and Kazakhs as well. The main language is Turkmen, which is from the Turkic language family;

some people also speak Russian. Turkmenistan has a disaster risk profile and its population and economy are exposed to earthquakes and floods, with earthquakes posing the greater risk of a high-impact, lower probability event.

The gender stats of the country are very good, as key indicators show gender equality and effective policy interventions by the government, keeping in mind that gender equality fosters productivity gains, minimises losses in wealth, reduces poverty, boosts shared prosperity, and supports green, resilient, and inclusive development.

### **History, Society, and Culture**

Turkmenistan has a rich cultural heritage and history that traces back to ancient civilisations. The modern-day Turkmenistan became an independent republic in 1991. Its capital, Ashgabat, is a symbol of the nation's growth and modernisation, characterised by grand architecture and expansive avenues. The society in Turkmenistan has undergone significant changes since independence. The country though, is deeply rooted in its traditions, which include strong family values and a deep respect for elders and has been consistent in its developmental path with a growing interest in modern education and technology.

The younger generation is increasingly engaged with global digital platforms, while also maintaining strong ties to their cultural heritage. The culture of Turkmenistan is rich in traditions, with a strong emphasis on oral storytelling, music, dance, and art. Turkmen carpets, famous for their intricate designs and craftsmanship, are a national symbol. Traditional songs and dances remain an important aspect of Turkmen celebrations and social gatherings. Turkmenistan's society, with its deep cultural roots, has adapted in various ways to modernity. Turkmenistan has promoted a national identity, with the importance of patriotism and unity (Jones, M. 2021). The government takes an interest in promoting national unity, patriotism, and the celebration of traditional cultural elements like the Akhal-Teke horse as a symbol of national pride (Report Government of Turkmenistan, 2022).

Women have been central to the key effective development in the country. Women in Turkmenistan have played a pivotal role in the social and economic development of Turkmenistan, and their contributions to education, healthcare, and public administration are worth noting. Besides,

women also play a role in Turkmenistan's development efforts, focusing on policies aimed at improving gender equality and empowering women (Kamala CCA, 2014). There have been achievements and advancements made by women in Turkmenistan, particularly in leadership roles and as agents of social and economic development (Report, Government of Turkmenistan, 2021). Women's participation in key development initiatives has increased and at the same time continues to influence in shaping of the nation's progress.

### **The Pearls on the Silk Road**

There have been several historical places on the Silk route, which are considered to be the pearls of History like Merv, Dagestan, Nisa, and others.

#### **Merv**

The Ancient Gem of the Silk Road and a key hub as well. Merv, which is sometimes transliterated *Marw* or *Mary* and which has been called differently in different languages, is an ancient oasis-city, on the historical Silk Road. The ancient city of Merv is a UNESCO World Heritage site today and is recognised for its archaeological significance. The remains of its impressive monuments and city walls still stand as a testament to its former grandeur. Merv's legacy continues as a symbol of the vibrant cultural exchange that took place along the Silk Road. Its ruins speak of a rich past that connected diverse civilisations and facilitated the spread of knowledge, technology, and trade across continents (Kamala Kumari, 2014).

#### **Dagestan**

Dagestan, an ancient town, is a lesser-known yet historically significant site on the Silk Road. Located along the route that connected the Persian Empire to Central Asia and beyond, Dagestan served as a key stop for merchants, travelers, and explorers crossing through the region. Dagestan is known for its rich cultural and archaeological significance as it is an archaeological heritage, with findings that reveal a blend of Persian, Turkic, and Central Asian influences. Its ruins are home to numerous historical artefacts, including pottery, coins, and architectural remnants that shed light on the daily lives and trades of ancient Silk Road travelers.

Dagestan was a vital point for the exchange of goods, such as, textiles, ceramics, and spices, making it an essential stop for both commerce and communication. Although not as famous as Merv, Dagestan is a hidden gem in modern Turkmenistan. The town's ruins continue to be a source of pride and research, reminding us of its once prominent role in one of history's most important trade routes (Nirmala Joshi, IGNCA, 2014).

### **Nisa**

Nisa is another pearl on the Silk Road. It was the ancient capital of the Parthian Empire. Located near modern-day Ashgabat, Nisa was a pivotal political and cultural centre, laying the foundations for the Parthian dynasty that would dominate much of ancient Persia. The city's significance lies in its role as a key player in the Silk Road trade network, facilitating commerce and cultural exchanges between the East and West. Nisa was a thriving centre of art, culture, and commerce. It also had a strong intellectual and cultural influence, particularly in the realms of Persian and Greek interactions. The city's position as a Cultural and Technological Exchange, as it was a trading centre which led to a significant exchange of goods, ideas, and technologies.

The ruins of Old Nisa today are a UNESCO World Heritage site, famous for their monumental fortifications, well-preserved temples, and royal tombs. Excavations at the site have uncovered a wealth of artefacts, including coins, pottery, and inscriptions that offer invaluable insight into the early Parthian Empire (Kamala, Kumari, 2012).

### **Foreign Policy**

Turkmenistan has a very active, vibrant and dynamic foreign policy. Positive neutrality, which is the fundamental basis of its foreign policy course, organically combines the firm principles of international law and diplomacy as well as constructive practice of peace-making dialogue and realisation of preventive measures.

Turkmenistan is committed and steadily develops relations with all countries, both in bilateral format as well as multilateral formats, under International Organisations and the UN. Turkmenistan's foreign policy has traditionally been defined by a commitment to neutrality and non-interference in the affairs of other states. The country declared its neutrality in 1995, and this status was recognised by the United Nations. As a neutral state, Turkmenistan refrains from participating in military

alliances, maintaining a policy of peace and diplomacy. Turkmenistan is committed to positive neutrality, its strategic diplomatic practices, and its engagement with both bilateral and multilateral relations under international frameworks like the UN (Berdimuhamedov, G., 2018).

The country's foreign policy strategy is centred around the concept of 'positive neutrality.' This principle allows Turkmenistan to build strong bilateral relations with different countries while avoiding involvement in international conflicts. Turkmenistan has a dynamic approach to foreign policy and is committed to neutrality, peace-building efforts, and its diplomatic outreach to global powers (Khalilov, R., 2019).

As such, Turkmenistan has positioned itself as an intermediary and a facilitator of dialogue between larger powers, seeking to preserve its sovereignty while promoting regional stability. The government places a strong emphasis on maintaining good relations with both its neighbours and global powers, taking advantage of its vast energy resources as leverage in diplomatic negotiations. Turkmenistan's foreign policy principles, especially its "positive neutrality," has shaped the country's diplomatic relations and efforts to promote peace and stability globally (Government of Turkmenistan, 2020).

### **Policy of Neutrality**

Turkmenistan, after gaining independence, in accordance with its basic priorities, formulated its foreign policy. It declared 'positive neutrality' to be one of the two major components of its foreign policy. Positive neutrality is defined as gaining international recognition of the republic's independence, agreeing upon mutual non-interference in internal affairs, and maintaining neutrality in external conflicts. The policy was adopted on December 12, 1995, through the UNGA Resolution 50/80, on "Neutrality of Turkmenistan", and subsequently, the establishment of the UN Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia with headquarters in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, marked the beginning of a journey along the path of peace and development. Turkmenistan's choice for Neutrality as a tool for achieving its commitment to remain non-aligned and non-partisan, at the same time staying actively involved in diplomatically resolving serious issues of global concern, remains unabated and neutrality presented an optimal solution for those plans to be realised which

harmoniously absorbed the essence of foreign policy priorities and goals (Kamala Kumari, 2022).

The neutrality of Turkmenistan and its basic characteristics, such as, peacefulness, active peacemaking, non-participation in military conflicts, alliances and treaties, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, respect for their sovereignty and territorial integrity-confirm their compliance with the national interests of the country, the long-term goals of the international community, the principles of the UN Charter, is a criteria for a constructive, balanced approach to ensuring international stability and security (<https://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/news/1570>).

The adoption of two similar UNGA Resolutions of 2008 and 2013 on Reliable and Stable Transit of Energy Resources and of 2014 on “Role of Transport and Transit Corridors in Ensuring the International Co-operation for Sustainable Development” is part of the logical chain of the foreign policies priorities, being pursued by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and the essence is: a world through development, stability and implementation of the principles of humanism (Kamala K. 2022).

Marking the 20th anniversary of the Partnership for Peace programme in the Central Asian partner states, a high-level event was organised jointly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan and the office of the NATO Liaison Officer in Central Asia. This was unprecedented in the history of Turkmenistan's partnership with the Alliance. Besides, it was part of Turkmenistan's official programme celebrating the 20th anniversary of the “Year of Neutrality and Peace” of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution recognising the country's neutrality ([https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_117959.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_117959.htm?selectedLocale=en)).

Turkmenistan is striving for and accomplishing to assist and mobilise additional resources to bring peace, security, sustainable growth, and economic development to the country and also to use them to bring more attention and awareness to the broader region. Turkmenistan uses the UN structures to bring awareness and, at the same time, inform the international community about the needs and necessities, and about the risks and challenges. All these illustrate the firm commitment and dedication of Neutral Turkmenistan in the effort for a peaceful and sustainably developed world.

The Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan's capital promotes a dialogue between the governments of the Central Asian countries in finding solutions for emerging problems and eliminating potential threats; to keep regular contacts with international organisations, operating in the region, to stimulate their peace-making efforts and initiatives; to co-operate with other UN Agencies, working in the field of sustainable development and conflict prevention. In its activity, the centre follows a principle of impartiality. It does not insist on the application of already existing solutions to the problems, but tries to facilitate the elaboration of local models, adapted to the specifics of the Central Asian region.

### **Relations with Neighbours**

Turkmenistan shares borders with several countries, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. Its relations with these neighbours are of critical importance, given the country's geographic position and economic interests, particularly in terms of energy transit routes.

### **Relations with Kazakhstan**

Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan share a long history of co-operation. Both countries are part of the Caspian Sea region, and their economies are interconnected through trade, particularly in energy and agriculture. Turkmenistan exports gas to Kazakhstan, and both countries have collaborated on various infrastructure projects, such as, transportation corridors linking the two nations.

President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, Rashid Meredov reiterated their commitment to advancing strategic partnership during May 27, 2024, meeting. Tokayev noted a steady growth of the Kazakh-Turkmen relationship in the spirit of friendliness, good neighbourliness, and strategic partnership, reported the Akorda press service. "The volume of mutual trade between Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan has increased almost fourfold over the past five years. In 2023, this figure showed an increase of 28%, reaching \$563 million. In January-March, the volume of trade between the two countries exceeded \$100 million" (Dana Omirgazy, 28 May 2024).

The diplomatic relations between the two countries have been marked by mutual respect and a commitment to maintaining peace along their

border. In recent years, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have worked closely on initiatives to preserve the ecological health of the Caspian Sea and to enhance trade and economic co-operation.

### **Relations with Uzbekistan**

Turkmenistan's relationship with Uzbekistan is historically significant. The two countries share deep cultural, historical, and linguistic ties, with both countries focusing on expanding co-operation in trade, water management, and infrastructure development. The ties between the two have never been so strong. The situation is producing tangible results. The bilateral trade turnover has grown fivefold since 2017 to reach the \$1 billion mark ("Turkmenistan: Uzbek to the Future", Akhal-Teke: A Turkmenistan Bulletin Sep 5, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-uzbek-to-the-future>).

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have collaborated on a range of initiatives aimed at improving regional stability and economic development, particularly in sectors, such as, transportation, energy, and water resource management. The opening of new border crossings and the establishment of direct rail and road links between the two countries have helped solidify their growing relationship.

### **Relations with Afghanistan**

Turkmenistan's relations with Afghanistan are strategically important, particularly in the context of energy infrastructure. The active position of Turkmenistan on involving Afghanistan in economic integration processes through the implementation of international projects is important. A cornerstone of this is the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline, a major infrastructure project designed to transport natural gas from Turkmenistan to India via Afghanistan. The TAPI pipeline is a key element in Turkmenistan's broader energy strategy, and it reflects the country's commitment to strengthening its ties with Afghanistan while facilitating regional economic integration. Turkmenistan has invested in the construction of the TAPI pipeline, a major infrastructure project that will transport natural gas from Turkmenistan to India via Afghanistan. Turkmenistan's Afghanistan Policy is about balancing risks and untapped opportunities, as Turkmenistan has a delicate balance to maintain between its traditional neutrality and mitigating potential threats from Afghanistan (Eldaniz Gusseinov, April 23, 2024).

Given Afghanistan's political instability, Turkmenistan has emphasised the importance of fostering peace and stability in the region, while also providing humanitarian aid and supporting reconstruction efforts. Turkmenistan's role as a neutral party has allowed it to engage diplomatically with all parties involved in Afghanistan's development (<https://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/news/2967>).

### **Relations with Iran**

As a neighbour to the southeast, Turkmenistan has had a long-standing relationship with Iran. The two countries share historical, cultural, and economic ties, particularly in the areas of energy and trade. Turkmenistan exports natural gas to Iran and has also participated in joint energy projects with its southern neighbours.

The trade between Iran and Turkmenistan at present is at \$500 million and is expected to reach \$1.0 billion shortly. Despite political differences with the West, Turkmenistan and Iran maintain a co-operative relationship. The countries have explored joint infrastructure projects, such as, rail and road links, and have held bilateral discussions on improving trade ties, particularly in energy (<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/491513/Turkmenistan-a-strategic-partner-of-Iran-Iranian-minister>). Turkmenistan and Iran share a spectrum of collaborative efforts across various sectors. One prominent initiative involves the development of a railway corridor linking Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran, substantially bolstering regional connectivity. This corridor not only facilitates trade but also plays a pivotal role in fostering stability and prosperity within the region (<https://www.specialeurasia.com/2023/12/11/iran-turkmenistan-culture-ties/>).

### **Turkmenistan's Relations with Other Countries**

Turkmenistan has good relations with several other countries outside the region, like Russia, United States of America, EU, Turkey, China, and India.

### **Turkmenistan's Relations with India**

Turkmenistan and India have strong ties, particularly in the areas of energy and trade. India is an important partner for Turkmenistan, with both countries focusing on developing the TAPI gas pipeline and enhancing bilateral trade. India has also shown interest in Turkmenistan as a partner

in the fields of education, science, and technology. The two countries have co-operated on various projects aimed at improving regional connectivity and facilitating cultural exchange. Turkmenistan maintains a policy of neutrality in global politics, but it has fostered strong diplomatic relations with India as a partner in regional security and stability. Frequent visits by leaders from both countries, such as, the official visits by Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow to India, have strengthened political co-operation.

Both countries have co-operated on Security and collaborated on counter-terrorism efforts, particularly in the context of Afghanistan's security situation. Turkmenistan's neutral stance allows it to serve as a bridge for dialogue in South Asia. Turkmenistan and India share common interests and have a partnership in regional peace and security.

Turkmenistan and India have a robust partnership in Trade and Economic Co-operation and particularly in the energy sector. For example, the TAPI pipeline aims to deliver Turkmen natural gas to India. This is a key project in their bilateral economic relationship. Trade between the two countries is expanding, especially in sectors like agriculture, textiles, and engineering. India exports pharmaceuticals, machinery, and electronics to Turkmenistan. India is also involved in infrastructure projects in Turkmenistan, including the construction of roads, railways, and power plants. Indian companies have expressed interest in investing in Turkmenistan's growing energy market. The two countries are working to improve financial and banking co-operation to support economic transactions and investments (<https://indianexpress.com/article/world/india-turkmenistan-mou-cooperation-bilateral-trade-7849665/>).

Both countries share a long history of cultural interactions due to their geographical proximity and historical Silk Road ties. Cultural diplomacy plays a crucial role in strengthening bilateral relations. Turkmenistan and India engage in various cultural exchange programmes, such as, festivals, exhibitions, and educational collaborations. Many Turkmen students pursue higher education in India, particularly in science, technology, and engineering. Turkmenistan promotes cultural tourism in collaboration with Indian tour operators, focusing on historical sites and traditional Turkmen culture, encouraging visits by Indian tourists. Both nations have worked to enhance their cultural ties through the exchange of literature

and academic programmes focused on the languages, arts, and history of their respective countries.

Turkmenistan's relations with other countries are also important, for example, with Russia. Russia has traditionally been an important partner for Turkmenistan, particularly in the context of the energy sector. Turkmenistan has extensive natural gas reserves, and Russia has historically been a key market for Turkmen gas exports. Russia is one of the leading trade and economic partners of Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan has also balanced its relationship with Russia by pursuing stronger ties with other countries, particularly China, as part of its strategy to reduce its dependence on any single country. Despite this, Russia remains a critical partner for Turkmenistan, especially in terms of trade, security co-operation, and regional stability.

Turkmenistan has good relations with the United States and the US has also been keen to establish stronger ties with Turkmenistan. The Government of Turkmenistan engages with the United States in many areas, including border co-operation and regional security programmes. There are efforts to mitigate climate change, trade, educational and cultural exchanges, and English-language training as well. The United States and Turkmenistan have a most-favoured-nation trade agreement (<https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-turkmenistan/>). The United States also looks to further expand co-operation with Turkmenistan, particularly in the areas of energy, security, and counter terrorism. The two countries have co-operated on regional security issues, especially in relation to Afghanistan. Turkmenistan has also taken steps to improve its diplomatic engagement with the United States, balancing its relations with other world powers.

Turkmenistan and Turkey share deep cultural and historical connections rooted in their common Turkic heritage. Their relationship is characterised by mutual respect and a shared interest in promoting regional stability and development. Turkey has been an important economic partner for Turkmenistan, particularly in trade, construction, and infrastructure projects. The two countries enjoy balanced special relations based on mutual respect and co-operation. They have been co-operating in the fields of foreign policy, trade, economy, culture, and education. Turkish contracting companies have accomplished more than 1,400 projects worth 50 billion USD. Textile is another field in which Turkish

companies are quite active in Turkmenistan. The two countries have collaborated on a range of initiatives, including the development of transportation corridors and the promotion of cultural exchange. (<https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-turkmenistan.en.mfa>). The relationship between the two countries has continued to grow, with Turkey being a key partner in Turkmenistan's efforts to modernise its infrastructure and diversify its economy.

Turkmenistan and China have also developed a close political relationship, with China being a key partner in Turkmenistan's foreign policy. As part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, Turkmenistan plays an essential role in enhancing connectivity between Central Asia and China, particularly through infrastructure projects like railways and highways. China is a key market for Turkmenistan's natural gas, with the Central Asia-China gas pipeline being a significant part of this relationship. This pipeline is essential in meeting China's growing energy demands (<https://www.ONLYNATURALENERGY.COM/the-role-of-bri-and-energy-in-china-turkmenistan-relations/>). The trade volume between the two countries continues to grow, with China exporting machinery, electronics, and textiles to Turkmenistan, while Turkmenistan primarily exports energy resources. Besides, China has invested heavily in Turkmenistan's infrastructure, particularly in energy and transportation. Chinese companies are involved in the construction of roads, railways, and the development of industrial zones in Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan and China are increasing co-operation in technology transfer, with China providing Turkmenistan with expertise in areas, such as, construction technology, agricultural machinery, and renewable energy (<https://mfa.gov.tm/en/news/4129>).

### **New Dimensions of Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy: Connectivity Projects and Initiatives**

Turkmenistan is striving for sustainable growth and economic development and is accomplishing its aim of assisting in peace and security in the region.

One of the key dimensions of Turkmenistan's evolving foreign policy is its focus on connectivity projects, particularly in the context of infrastructure development. Turkmenistan is strategically positioning itself as a regional hub for trade, energy, and transportation, with

initiatives designed to connect Central Asia with global markets. (Kamala Kumari, 2025).

The TAPI pipeline is one such example of Turkmenistan's commitment to enhancing regional connectivity. The project aims to transport natural gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India, creating economic opportunities for the region and helping to bolster Turkmenistan's economic position (Kamala Kumari, 2021). In addition to energy projects, Turkmenistan has focused on enhancing transportation infrastructure, including road, rail, and port development, to facilitate trade and economic integration with its neighbours and beyond (Kamala Kumari, 2022).

Turkmenistan's growing emphasis on regional connectivity reflects a broader trend in its foreign policy—a desire to increase economic integration with the global community while maintaining its neutral stance. Through its initiatives, Turkmenistan is striving to being at the heart of new Silk route and tries enhance its economic future and the transportation links like, Lapis Lazuli, TAPI, CASA that would connect Afghanistan with the outside world, shows that Turkmenistan has played a crucial role along with the UNRCCA in exploring the peacemaking potentials (Kamala Kumari, BCA, 2020).

There is immense peacemaking potential of neutrality and preventive diplomacy and Turkmenistan's effort with regard to a number of humanitarian projects that have been taken up by it, for example, building hospitals, schools, and mosques in the neighbouring Afghanistan, speaks volumes about the dimensions of its Foreign Policy.

## **Conclusion**

Turkmenistan has been consistent with its overall development and its foreign policy has evolved significantly in the 21st century. Through its relationships with neighbours and other powers, Turkmenistan is actively shaping a foreign policy that is more outward-looking and focused on connectivity and economic integration. As the country continues to develop its infrastructure and enhance its diplomatic ties, it is poised to play a key role in regional and global politics.

And with a new dimension of its foreign policy, Turkmenistan is bound to play a pivotal role in connecting and integrating the region and

at the same time work towards sustainable peace and development in the region and beyond.

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