

## THE ROLE OF PERSIAN AND TURKISH LANGUAGES IN THE NATIONAL IDENTITY OF THE MIDDLE ASIA

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### ABSTRACT

The entrance of republics of middle Asia to expanded, politic geography area in southwestern countries of Asia gave many changes in traditional and regional meanings. Many political, economical, social and cultural structures have been changed. In spite of some racial, national and lingual distinctions in a few past centuries and new political borderlines from 1917 A.D. to the fall of soviet union of Russia, agreement, and coreligionist, of Middle Asia's people with Iranian and Turkish people have created so unity that there is no objection to break this relationship and co genial.

Certainly, cultural relationship and lingual links have played an important role in the continuation of cultural integration between the nations of this region. Persian Language has played as an effective factor in the firmness of cultural relationship between Persian - speaking nations. (Especially in Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan) All of countries in the region and will be effective in national identity. Among this, Turkish language causes to spread riches of culture and identification, especially in Turkish- speaking nations.

To recognize lingual and national identity in Middle Asia, firstly must recognize historical and cultural backgrounds. Cultural process of Middle Asia can divide to four periods:

(3000-1000B.C): Mad and Pars tribes, Sekaae

(1000 B.C. - 600 A.D.): Soghdia, Kharazmian, Tokharestan and Easter Iran cultures.

(600- 1917A.D): from 6 century A.D. to grow Russia in Middle Asia.

(1917- appearance to independent republics of Soviet Union lingual identity of Middle Asia is related to Turkmen, Ozbak and Tajik languages. In this article, we cast a glance to perspective of these languages and Persia and Turkish language in Middle Asia.

**Key Words:** Persia and Turkish language, National identity, lingual and cultural process of Middle Asia.

## INTRODUCTION

The entrance of the Middle Asian Republics to the political and geographic widespread districts of the countries of the southwest of Asia, after breaking the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics up, caused various changes in the traditional regional concepts. Many of the political, economical, social and cultural structures of the region have changed. An interval round eighty years long kept the Iranians away from Persian speaking acquaintances in the middle Asia - and now, we, Iranians, are faced to this very old cultural and intellectual area of the Greater Khorasan and Transoxiana. Undoubtedly, the common language, literature and men of letters and of art as well as the common friendly atmosphere are considered as the main foundations of this new structure in uniting the Middle Asia and Qafqaz with their cultural interconnections. Despite some lingual and ethnical differences in the few past centuries as well as the new political demarcations since 1917 till the collapse of the Soviet Union, the same religion and congeniality of the Middle Asian people with Iranians has united them so as to all of the preventive factors have not been able to rupture this union, unanimity and confederacy.

There's no doubt that cultural combinations and common lingual connections have played a very important role in the continuation of cultural union of these nations. Here, Persian language along with Turkish, as the communicating factor, plays a significant role in the consolidation of cultural relations of the other nations speaking this language. Strengthening of this common cultural factor unites and connects people of this region with each other. Persian language is a factor which has a special function in the concept of national identity and leads to a kind of national and cultural development in the three Persian-speaking districts: Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

But to understand the common national identity of Iranians and the other Persian-speakers, we should consider the cultural collection of the Greater Khorasan and Transoxiana as an interdependent one with its specific characteristics. The first characteristic of this collection is its culture-based orientation which one of its efficient factors is language.

To achieve this goal, firstly the lingual structure of the Middle Asian people should be studied well to have a deep knowledge of their lingual process and its relationship with Iran and Turkey, since the Middle Asian Republics are still faced to such problems as determining national identity and presence of lingual and ethnical challenging factors. Lingual identity has always been one of the most important parameters of the international politics. To understand the lingual identity in the Middle Asia, first of all, understanding the historical and cultural background is necessary.

## I. The Cultural Process of the Middle Asia

Preceding the collapse of the former Soviet Union, it is possible to divide this process into four phases and to investigate each phase in the southern republics of the Middle Asia separately as follows:

**1. The first phase:** from 3000 Bc to 1000 Bc, the common culture of Caspian-black sea had covered this area from the north of black sea to the northeast of Oxus (Amu Darya). Indian and Iranian tribes such as *Cits*, *Sakas*, *Sarmads* and *Alans* included this common culture. From the beginning of the second millenium BC, Iranians were separated from their other Aryan ethnic groups, Indians and Sakas, gradually and set foot in the centre of the Iranian Plateau from the east of this plateau where once was their Aryan homeland.<sup>1</sup>

**2. The second phase:** from 1000 Bc to the end of the sixth century, Median and Parthian tribes were separated from the Iranians of the east of Iran and were expanded in the west of Iran . With the passage of time, Medians and Parthians established a united new governmental system and tried to be released from the dominance of the Ashorian Empire.<sup>2</sup> This phase coincides with the establishment of the Achaemenian dynasty. In 600 Bc, Tajikistan , Uzbekistan and Modern Turkmenia were considered as some parts of this dynasty. At that time, four great cultural centers had been formed in this region.<sup>3</sup>

**A. Saqdi culture:** in the ancient days, this culture was the most widespread one in this region. Probably, Sakadians were an Iranian tribe in origin, and possessed an outstanding culture. They resided in Bukhara, Samarkand and Panj *kont*, but by the entrance of the Arabs to these areas, they migrated to such more suitable areas as *Chach* (Tashekand) and *Farkaneh*.

Some of Sakadians were resided in *Samircheh*, Chinese Turkistan, China and Mongolia due to their job as a merchant. Sakadian language is one of the languages of the Middle Iran's eastern group. It was the widespread dialect in sakad, a place between Jaxartes and oxus, in 1000 Ad. This language was the most famous Middle Iranian language in the Middle Asia; Also the linguafranca in this region. It was like a communicational bridge between the cultures of the west and the east of Asia and its influential domain had been extended to china. A lot of such words as lapidation, ornament, tip, etc have been entered into the ancient Persian dialect from Sakadian language. Some of these loanwords are available in Asadi Tosi's dictionary named Loghat-Al-Fors.

<sup>1</sup> For more information, look at Mac Evedi,Calin, **The Historical Atlas of the World**, Translated by Fereidon Fatemi, Markaz Publication, Tehran 1985 ,P. 43-79.

<sup>2</sup> The Same Source.

<sup>3</sup> **This classification is based on: Varahram, Qolamreza, The Cultural, Geographical And Historical Process in the Middle Asia, (the 4th century of Lunar Hijira), Geographical Researches Quarterly**, vol. 25, Summer of 1992, P.5.

**B. Kharazmian culture:** This cultural center was expanded in the southern and eastern parts of *Uromia* and the southern parts of Oxus. According to Kharazmi's yearbook, Kharazmian government dates back to 100 Ad. Kharazmians also had a great civilization in the east of Iran until 900 Ad. The language of the residents of this region was Kharazmian which had a close affinity with Sakaian language and culture. Merchants and their economical and political relationships were the important factors in developing Kharazmian cultural center which itself was one of the Iranian cultural centers.

**C. Takharistanian culture:** At the end of the first millennium Bc, Sakaian tribes passed a large area of the Middle Asia, but after a while, "*ue chi*" tribes pushed them back to the South and India.<sup>4</sup> It coincides with the beginning of the Christian era. *Takhars* reached this district which was known as *Bakteriya*. And from then on, this region was called Takharistan. One of the Takharian tribes conquered the other tribes and established *Kushan* Empire.<sup>5</sup> From 100 to 300 Bc, Kushan was considered as the strongest government in the Middle Asia. Takharian culture was also called Bakhtar which was divided into two parts: the northern Bakhtar in the northern areas of Oxus and the southern Bakhtar in the southern areas. The names of these areas were derived from a river named Bakhtar. Its famous city was Bakhtar which was later called Balkh.<sup>6</sup> After residing in the area, Takharians accepted the Iranian language soon. At the beginning of Islam their cultural and geographical realm was spread even to the eastern areas of Balkh.

**D. The culture of Iran's eastern areas:** The influencing realm of this culture was limited to Harat, Marv and its surrounding areas. Iranian culture and specially Zoroastrian traditions in Marv and Harat had a great influence on migrants from India and also on the residents other than Aryans. By Islam's genesis, this process has been stronger and has continued up to the present time. Marv was the military center of the east of Iran in the Sassanid's border and was of more importance politically and culturally. In the south of Marv, Harat had a similar cultural status. At the end of 300 Ad, Kushan Empire was faced to decadence and in 425 Ad; the aggressive Bakterian *Houns* exiled the last governor of this empire.<sup>7</sup> In 600 Ad, the two great worldwide governments, china and Rome, alienated and competed against Iran. The eastern Roman Empire was satisfied with the Turk's entrance to the Middle Asia, and it fought against Iran Empire and its supporters, the eastern *Khaqenat* and *Adars*, by being united with Chinese empire, the western *Khaqenat* and *Khazaran*. The main residents of a large area of the middle Asia

<sup>4</sup> Refer to, Akiner, Shirin, **The Moslem Tribes of the Soviet Union**, translated by Ali Khazaie Farid, the cultural assistance to Astane Qudse Razavi, Mashhad, 1987, p. 367.

<sup>5</sup> The Same Source, p. 368.

<sup>6</sup> Refer to, **Varharam, Qolamreza**, the same, p.7.

<sup>7</sup> Refer to, Akiner, Shirin, the same, p. 68.

communicated by the Iranian languages (the eastern group), but by the entrance of Turkish aggressive migrants to this area, the Turkish culture was mixed with the Iranian culture.

**3. The third phase:** From the end of 600 Ad to the beginning of the process of Russianizing the middle Asia. In the middle of the seventh century, Moslems ruled over the middle Asia. In the tenth century, the Turkish *Qarakhanians* and in the eleventh and twelfth century, Seljukians went toward this area. In addition, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Uzbeks attacked this area from *Ghabchan Plain*. In fact the Turkish Uzbeks' attack on the region and their residence in the land is the exact time of expanding the Turkish language and culture in the land. But in spite of cultural dominance and ruling over some parts of the Middle Asia by means of the Turks, the cultural language of the land and its non-migrant residents was Persian till the beginning of the 20th century and therefore Turkish could not set aside Persian.

In the sixteenth century, Uzbeks, Shah Esmael Safavi and Baber fought for appropriating Transoxiana and some parts of the middle Asia so that these regions were passed on among these three authorities. In the eighteenth century, Uzbek *Khanat* was established as some rather independent and small local governments, and Khanat of *Khive* in Kharazm, *Astrakhan* in Bukhara and *Khuqand* in *Farqaneh* fought against each other endlessly up to the Russians' supremacy.<sup>8</sup>

**4. The fourth phase:** The onset of Russianizing process of the Middle Asia and communist authority to the establishment of the independent Republics; The phase has started since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, ie the time of Russians' gradual predominance over the Middle Asia and Transoxiana. Russians and, later on, the soviets used several methods to supervise the region and to expand their authority. They tried to wipe off native Islamic atmosphere in the region by compulsory prevalence of Orthodox (at the time of *Tezar* government) and Marxism-Leninism (at the time of Bolsheviks) as the only religion of the land. Some of these methods were as follows: vanishing the Islam, compulsory migration, using rough treatments, Russianizing the region and exercising central supervision.

## II. The lingual identity of the Middle Asia

**A. Turkmenistan:** The language of Turkmen is Turkman which is based on the group of the southern Turkish languages and is a subdivision of the Qoz-Turkman group. Turkman includes some loanwords from Arabic, Persian and Russian. The new Turkman vocabulary has been enriched by using the special potentiality of its words and direct loaning from the other languages, especially Russian. Also, Turkman dialects helped developing standard Turkman to a large extent<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Refer to, the Same Source, pp. 328-329.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 18, Eds. 15, 1978, pp. 400.

According to the statistics, at the beginning of the 80's, 98.7 % of Turkmen and at the beginning of the 70's, 65.3 % of them used their native language. Up to the independence of Turkmen Republic, the amount of using Turkman in the southern Republics of the Middle Asia was less than that of using other native languages. Arabic alphabet was used in Turkmenistan until 1929, but Turkmen used Latin between 1929 and 1940 and from then on Cyrillic alphabet and language has been used.

**The characteristics of Cyrillic language:** Its alphabet is a combination of Latin and Greek ones which centuries ago had been created for Slavic language. It contains thirty- nine symbols that each symbol signifies just one sound. Cyrillic script should be read in the same way as it is written and also follows phonetic rules. In comparison to Persian script, Cyrillic has some advantages:

1. It is free from some defects of the ancient scripts such as signification of one symbol to various letters.
2. It is so easy to learn Cyrillic script so that can be learned in a few sessions.

Although Cyrillic script can depict Turkman phonetics and loanwords to some extent, its using is accompanied by some defects:

1. Since dialects and modes of speech were reflected in Cyrillic script, contrary to previous characters, each person preferred to write words in his own hometown's dialect. So, many words had several written forms, and there were disagreements in writing words thanks to the existence of various dialects. For example, the word "chador" was written in three ways, "chadar" in one dialect, "chador" in the other and "chader" in the third one.

2. In Cyrillic script, some words due to their situation in the sentence or the reader's preference were read in several ways. For example, "vav" as a conjunction could be read in four forms.

3. We can't show the difference between the short and long vowels by Cyrillic alphabet.<sup>10</sup>

**B. Uzbekistan:** Uzbek language is based on the eastern Turkish group that is a subdivision of *Karlok-Kharazm*. This language includes various dialects and is divided into two main groups: The first group includes the central dialects which are those of Tashkent, Samarqand, Bukhara, *Andijan* and *Khuqand*. There is no phonetic harmony in these dialects. They contain just six phonemes. Dialects of the second group which are in harmony phonetically contain ten phonemes.

Uzbek vocabulary is mainly Turkish, but it also consists of lots of Arabic and Persian loanwords. Now in Uzbek language, there is a balance between Russian words and words loaned from Arabic and Persian. Due to borrowing the language

<sup>10</sup> Refer to, Akiner, Shirin, the same, pp. 392-394.

changing factors from other subdivisions of Turkish, Uzbek lingual understanding has been damaged to some extent. So, a Turkish in turkey may understand an Uzbek to a large extent, but an Uzbek can't understand what a Turkish means.<sup>11</sup>

According to the statistics, 65.4% of Uzbeks learned their native language in 70's and 98.5% of them learned it at the beginning of 80's.<sup>12</sup> Uzbeks script and alphabetical differences are similar to those of Turkman.

**C. Tajikistan:** The language of Tajik tribe is called Persian Tajiki which is based on the south-west group of Iranian languages. Originally, *Dari* (the ancient Persian language) has been the source of the three other prevalent Persian languages, ie Farsi, Tajiki and Afghan Dari. But since 200 years ago, some changes have been seen in these three united languages. So, in studying these three languages we encounter to one language having a common practicality in surface and deep structures in Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. It is called Persian in Iran, Dari in Afghanistan and Tajiki in Tajikistan.

Generally speaking, there are three systems in each language named phonetics, semantics and syntax. One language can not be considered as two or three ones in accordance with its phonetics and semantic differences. Differences among Persian, Tajiki and Dari results from their differences in phonetics and semantics, and there is no difference in their syntax.

### III. Turkman, Uzbek and Persian Tajiki Outlooks

It was mentioned that Uzbek and Turkman are based on the group of Turkish languages, and Persian, Arabic and Russian languages have lent them a lot of words. Although Uzbek and Turkman languages have some similarities with the modern Turkish etymologically, and all of them are based on the group of *Altaian* languages, nowadays, Turkish, Turkman and Uzbek are so different that understanding Uzbek and Turkman is an arduous task for the Turks and so is the opposite.

All ethnic groups and nations who have lived in these districts for hundreds of years could not live without Persian language and culture. Developing under the influence of Persian language and culture, smaller languages have received all cultural characteristics influenced by the Persian language, literature and culture. Due to constant relationships during the centuries with the deep and rich Iranian culture and the capable Persian language, all non-Khorasanians, non-Iranians and even *ghazes*, the valiant Turkish people, have been impressed. As the result, they have developed a kind of Korasanian and Iranian identity. With a short glance at the Turkish works of Amir Alishir Navaie and some Uzbek writers we soon find

<sup>11</sup> For more information, look at: Mirzaov, **Thoughts About Tajik Dictation**, Sedaye Shargh Publications, 1989, Vol. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. **The New Encyclopedia Britannica**, Vol. 10. P. 665.

out the great influences by the Persian language and culture as well as the Persian speakers. Even in the poetry of the poets of Transoxiana, there are a lot of Persian poems that have been composed at the time of *Sheibani* Uzbeks.

Uzbeks' high culture and history coincide with Persian, Iranian and also Turkish languages and cultures. The beginning of Turkish written literature in the Middle Asia under the influence of Persian language, literature and culture dates back to the time of Seljukian and *Qarakhanian* dynasties. Amir Alishir Navaie, the father of Turkish literature, wrote under the influence of Persian language and literature. Many of his works are the translations of Nezami and other Persian poets. He had practiced many Persian themes and motifs in his works. Even in Asia Minor, we can easily see the effects of the poems of Rumi and *Sultan Valad*, who were brought up in the Persian cultural atmosphere, on the works of all Turkish poets. Up to the beginning of the twentieth century, Persian was at least the cultural language of the non-migrants in the Middle Asia, but Turkish was not the region's cultural language and could not outrun Persian.

Even in the two non-Persian-speaking Republics, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, there are some districts which are the smaller realms of Persian language separately. Such districts as Samarqand, Bukhara and Farqaneh in Uzbekistan and Abiverd, Meihaneh, Nesa and Marv, in Turkmenistan are the smaller examples of the old cultural and lingual realms of Persian language, literature and culture.

Considering the old cultural background of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and their affinities with the Persian language and culture in one hand, and centrality of Persian in Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan as well as its influence on the Uzbek and Turkman languages on the other hand, it can be believed that Persian shall be the standard language in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, also in all non-Persian regions of the Middle Asia. Using Persian, the residents of these regions can find a stable identity and communicate with the modern world better. They can also use their cultural and literary background as new weapons for utilizing the modern technologic, economic and scientific achievements more skillfully.

The significance of each language in each district is in fact dependant on the historical, political and cultural situations of that district. Due to the richness and ancient history of the Persian language, also its influence on the common culture in the Middle Asia, as well as the common history, literary authorities and friendly relationships with this area, it can find a more important status.

Persian language has been one of the most stable factors in our vernacular relations for centuries. By the help of Iranian culture, tradition and language the Greater Khorasan and Transoxiana have been unchanging and everlasting. So for encountering with the new problems of the modern world we should attempt more to strengthen the foundations of our national and intellectual identities.

In the new world and its coming new world order, political borders (in its traditional concepts) will give their places to the cultural borders and cultural capabilities. This new system is not definable just by such traditional criteria as economy and technology. Human and cultural factors have a notable propriety. From now on, political challenges will take new forms. Cultural and intellectual attitudes, thinkers and the educated play a very important role in solving the individual and social problems. Cultures and thoughts are reflecting the world and contain an ideology, while language and literature reflect cultures and thoughts. Since Persian language has carried the load of traditional, cultural and national believes of Khorasan and Transoxiana's people, and its richness and depth has played an important role in deepening and enriching these regions' national culture, it can play its specific role in the cultural stability and national identification of this area.

But what is identity truthfully? National identity is a common psychological sense among a number of people in a common geographical unit ruled over by a national government. National identity possesses a common culture, religion, language and race during the history. The Iranian's national identity also belongs to this group. This national identity, which was dept into weakness, lassitude and consternation after Sassanid's decadence and Arab's entrance to Iran, became stable again by its two characteristics: Persian language and history. Iranians who had lost their political independence, could regain their national identity by recognizing their history in one hand and restoring Persian language on the other. Language reinforced the national sense of being an Iranian and united the scattered people and made an allied and consolidated nation. Iran has got a new tradition since accepting Islam. Iranians followed Islam, but they had other history and language, so wrote and composed poems in their own language. They were different from other Moslems. They were independent. When all attempts and methods for wiping off the Iranian nationality and identity were abortive, Iranians returned to their history once more. They stood under the protection of their language. So, Iranians were nationalized in the fourth century. They rescued and were grown up by a bag of history on the land of Persian language, the tree of Iranian identity and the Islamic climate.

Undoubtedly the authority of Persian language has an inevitable effect on the authority of the Persian-speakers' culture; also attempts in qualifying and productivity of the Persian language play an important role in developing and strengthening the political and cultural relations among the three Persian-speaking regions, Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, from one hand, and among these three regions with Uzbekistan and Turkman Republics on the other hand. Generally, these attempts have a notable effect on increasing the region's political authority. Iran, thanks to sharing a common language and nationality with Afghanistan and

Tajikistan, should function as a communicating bridge between Afghanistan and Tajikistan in one group and the two other Republics in the southern Middle Asia in the other group. Doubtlessly, Turkish and Persian languages play a notable role in the national identity of the Middle Asia.