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Historiography and State Administration in Uzbekistan

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This article explains how the state administration in Uzbekistan is using historiography as an instrument for diverse objectives consist of legitimization of its political authority among common masses, establishing the country as a great power and achieving its geopolitical ambitions. The author argues that new historiography is anti-Soviet in nature, aimed at the erosion of Soviet past, constructing the myth of lengthy freedom struggle, depicting Tamerlane as a national hero and establishing the Uzbek President Islam Karimov as brave leader equiseta to Tamerlane. Subjective construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of historical events are the prime features of new historiography of post-Soviet Uzbekistan. Though, this might be a source of legitimacy for the Karimov regime and helpful to get recognition for Uzbekistan as a great power, but it has its adverse consequences in the domestic circles as well as in the foreign affairs which could be seen in the form of validation of Karimov's authoritarianism, emergence of anti-Russian feelings and the imperialistic geopolitical designs of Uzbekistan in Central Asia.

Keywords: Karimov, distortion, construction, deconstruction, reconstruction, historiography, Soviets, Russians, Uzbeks, Tamerlane.

Introduction

Historiography contains the elements of modernity theoretically, but it is dominated by post-modern ingredients in reality. Reason being, irrespective of the existing norm of objectivity, it is not free of subjectivity (Hopkins, 2007: NP). Credible level of objectiveness is difficult to achieve in the said area (Janhunen, 2010: 127). In other words, it is neither an objective science nor has ability to discover the absolute truth (Miller, 2010: NP). History writing involves a person or group of persons called 'historians' who are influenced

by diverse social, economic, cultural and political factors while recording and evaluating the historical events. Time to time, having own political proclivities or preferences, they adopt diverse methodological approaches to write, re-write, interpret and reinterpret the historical events/accounts (Blake, 1955: 61). Thus, historiographical picture which is constructed, deconstructed and then, transmitted to the common masses by the historiographers rarely presents the losers' perspective. In a way, historiographers write for winners and not for losers. They justify the actions of winners

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against losers. For example, it happened after the defeat of axis powers in Second World War. Circumstances which were 'favourable' for the losers were ignored or distorted systematically in the post-war international historiographical discourse. Actions of winners against losers were justified. Similarly, losers of the Cold War especially Soviets received little sympathy or objectiveness from the New World Order led by the United States (Janhunen, 2010: 127). Thus, on various occasions, historiography is used as an instrument by the states and their governing regimes in order to legitimize the present politics and achieve the other desired goals.

History is politicized with public practices and norms which may involve commemoration measures such as building monuments and museums, establishing archives, celebrating anniversaries of significant events of the past and highlighting certain episodes in history while ignoring or marginalizing others (Janhunen, 2010: 127). Governing elite, explicitly or implicitly, influences the politics of memory and historical research by regulating access to archives, setting standards of historical education and practicing priority funding of scientific research and publications on history problems (Miller, 2010: NP).

Collective historical roots and memories ensure the continuity and solidarity within a community/nation. Without a shared history nation can't exist and survive for a long period. It is bound to diminish. As the feelings of nationalism are pre-requisite for the survival and solidarity of nation, historiographers play decisive role in the creation or/evolution of such national sentiments by writing and recording shared historical events, celebrations, ceremonies, and days of joys and sorrows along with the heroes, warriors, martyrs and liberators of the past (Miller, 2010: NP). As Eric J. Hobsbawm and David J. Kertzer also write:

...historians are to nationalism what poppy-growers ...are to the heroin-addicts: we supply the essential raw material for the market. Nations without a past are contradictions in terms. What makes a nation is the past, what justifies one nation against others is the past, and historians are the people who produce it (Hobsbawm and Kertzer, 1992: 3).

Since the past of a nation determines its future, today, a vigorous growth of politicisation of history to create or promote nationalism is being observed in the third world in general and post-Soviet Central Asia in particular. In order to legitimize the existing external boundaries, internal governance and enhance its mass support base, the governing elite of ex-Soviet republics of Central Asia are indulged in the process of nation-forging by using historiography as an a significant instrument to obtain the said objective. Construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of historical accounts in a subjective manner are the key features of historiography in making it instrumental for achieving the desired ends. The present article explains how the state administration in Uzbekistan through some non-professional historians and state controlled media is indulged in using historiography as an instrument for its personal and public ends. Besides, attempt has also been made to analyse implications such historiography in domestic circles as well as in the foreign affairs.

Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: Need For New Historiography

After the coup of August 1991 and subsequent demise of the Soviet Union, the governing elite in newly emerged state of Uzbekistan faced certain fundamental problems which demanded immediate solution. First, the leadership in the post-Soviet Uzbekistan was not changed even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The old

Soviet loyalist leader, Islam Karimov became the President of the new Uzbek republic. It was essential for Karimov to establish himself as the viable and legitimate leader of common masses. Second, the Soviet collapse and withdrawal of Russians from Central Asia including Uzbekistan created an ideological vacuum in the newly emerged republic (March, 2003: 312). And wherever an ideological vacuum arises, it is obviously filled by another ideology. Thus it was crucial for the governing elite to introduce a new state ideology to replace Communism and fill the said vacuum. Third, though, Uzbekistan emerged out of ashes of Soviet Union, but even then, being a part of Soviet Union, there was no popular demand for freedom or separation in the territory against the mighty state. Thus, no mass movement was emerged or existed for the said cause. Fourth, since Uzbekistan emerged as a sovereign political entity on the globe theoretically, it was pertinent for it to be the same in reality as well. For this, it was necessary for Uzbekistan to develop a national culture to remove the Russian influence from Uzbeks' lives and come out of the aura of the ex-Soviet Union which was dominated by the Russian traditions, culture and values. Lastly, nationality question was one of those factors that had led to disintegration of Soviet Union. This question had remained unresolved even in new post-Soviet republics. Amidst, the inherited multi-ethnic demographic structures having trans-border affiliations and vice versa irredentist claims, Uzbekistan required to cultivate a national loyalty that may subordinates the parochial allegiances and accomplish the twin tasks of nation-forging and state-formation on priority basis (Weisbrode, 1997: 54 and Kumar, 2005: 334-336). Thus, the fundamental problems such as viability and legitimacy of leadership among common masses, post-Soviet ideological vacuum, replacement of communism with state nationalism, dominance of Soviet (Russian) traditions and requirement of

de-russification, the question of nation-forging and state-formation amidst the multi-ethnic population and cross-border irredentist claims compelled the governing elite of Uzbekistan to think and develop an effective strategy to resolve said problems. Consequently, the leadership felt the need of new historiography for republic and to make it instrumental in resolving the problems faced by them.

Post-Soviet Historiography: Nature and Ingredients

As the circumstances necessitated, the governing elite of Uzbekistan decided to strengthen its position among the common masses by indulging itself implicitly or explicitly in writing and rewriting the new distorted and manipulated version of historiography and then propagating the same in public. This work has been done by the governing elite through non-professional historians by using its state apparatus. New Uzbek historiography is anti-Soviet in nature. It also encompasses elements such as the glorification of Uzbek's past, protuberance of heroism and greatness of the existing leadership and projection of Tamerlane as the 'Father of Nation'. Propagation of such history is being done through school text books, through state controlled media, public ceremonies, public monuments and public museums.

Negative Characterization of the Soviet Union

The new history of Uzbekistan reflects strong anti-Soviet feelings as it is intended to characterize the Soviet Union negatively. Although, Uzbekistan was the part of Soviet Union for more than seventy years long period, yet the Karimov regime seems to be fascinated in the absolute rejection or disassociation with that period. No doubt, the Soviets had also used historiography as an instrument, but

they did so to create a broader Soviet identity, legitimize the greater entity, bring ethnic harmony and promote patriotism among diverse nationalities while stressing on the superiority of the Russians as ‘natural leaders’ and the ‘elder brothers’. They highlighted the absence of ‘ethnic hostility between Russians and non-Russians’ and emphasized that the non-Russians were not ‘conquered territories.’ They had joined the Tsarist or Soviet empires only through ‘unions’ and ‘re-unions’ which had only brought positive benefits for these territories. As per the Soviets, it was ‘better’ for Central Asian territories including Uzbekistan to have been ‘reunited’ with Russia than conquered by the British Empire. Furthermore, in the Soviet view, non-Russians were irrational, backwards and incapable of creating their own independent states and hence, ‘civilizing mission’ of the Russians was ‘beneficial’ for the people and territories of Central Asian region (Critchlow, 1991:119; Ersanali, 2002: 346; Kuzio, 2001: 111 and; Kuzio, 2002: 245-246). Thus, the Soviets, in a way, used historiography to rationalize these territories as a part of the Union and also to maintain the ethnic harmony and co-existence.

Now, the post-Soviet governing elite in its new historiography is deconstructing the Soviet historiography by downgrading the Russia’s ‘civilizing mission’ and terming the Tsarist and Soviet periods as ‘colonialist’ which had harmed identities and cultures of indigenous populations. A new but negative image of the Russians, as ‘violent invaders’ who brought ‘sorrow and pain’ to the Uzbek people is being constructed. Thus, new historiography gives over-stress on the negative impacts of Soviet rule on its economy, environment and gene pool of population. It terms the entire era of Uzbekistan as being a part of Soviet Union as a period of fear, degradation and dishonour in which Moscow had only goal of creating ‘enslavement’ of the Uzbeks on the

country’s boundless cotton plantations(Samari, Ashurov and Ibragimov, 2002: NP).

A range of incidents of ethnic clash that the Soviets had played down in order to uphold the ethnic harmony between Russians and Uzbeks, have been included and glorified in the new historiography. For example, a new textbook of historiography, written by Jumaboi Rakhimov, the occurrence of an Uzbek rebellion against the Tsarist conscription during the First World War in which 4,000 Russians were killed by the Uzbeks, has been re-evaluated. The new interpretation not only terms the same Uzbek rebellion as a ‘heroic action’ of the ‘courageous sons’ of the Uzbek people but also defend the killings of the Russians(Samari, Ashurov and Ibragimov, 2002: NP).

No doubt under the Czarist Empire, Central Asia was a colony and Tsarist regime used this territory for its strategic and economic benefits especially in stopping a British advance from India. The Soviet authorities claimed that post-Tsarist Central Asia was no longer a colony. Nevertheless, the experience gave resemblance of post-Tsarist Central Asia or Soviet Central Asia as ‘colony’ and the Soviet Union an ‘empire’. The Soviets built a railroad connection to Russia, encouraged the planting of cash crops such as cotton and controlled most sensitive industries such as gold and military production. It had fixed high import tax for foreign goods in Central Asia and, thus, turned the region into a ‘captive market’ for Russian industrial products (Pipes, 1983: 155-174). Irrespective of the colonial nature, under the Soviet rule these territories were benefitted in different ways. The Soviets constructed schools, hospitals, roads and railways. They established industrial and infrastructural development while creating the huge employment and educational opportunities for the local population which is a positive contribution of the Soviets that benefitted the people during and after the demise of the

said regime (McAfee, 2011: 7 and 36). Besides, Moscow had done national delimitation of the region. It was also the Soviets those who created and allowed the existence of autonomous regions such as Gorno-Badakhshan (Tajikistan)¹ and Qaraqalpaqstan (Uzbekistan)² which are unique models of autonomous units for specific ethnic groups even today in the world. Thus, depiction of the Tsarist and Soviet regimes merely as 'destructive' and 'oppressive' 'colonizers' in the new Uzbek historiography reflects the subjective and illogical approach of the Karimov regime which is undermining the positive contribution of the Soviets (Russians) in the modernization and development of the society, economy, and institutions in the Central Asia region.

Erosion of Soviet Past

Apart from the negative construction and anti-Soviet nature, new Uzbek historiography is aimed at the erosion of Soviet past from the collective memory through which reflects in the various policies and actions of the Karimov regime. The Uzbek leadership has not only shown its commitment to political stability, insistence on privatization instead of political liberalization, vigorous defence of sovereignty and territorial integrity, but also pronounced shift away from country's dependence on the Russia for communication and transportation and reduction of Russians' dominance in the military (Kuzio, 2002: NP). It is believed in the ruling circles that alongwith the construction of negative and anti-Soviet history, the corrosion and deconstruction of the Soviet past from the Uzbek people's memory is the key to prospective prosperity of the state and people in Uzbekistan. Guided by such beliefs, the governing elite have replaced various symbols of the Soviet period from the museums, parks and streets. Thus, in 2009 monument installed in front of the Armed Forces Museum depicting Soviet soldiers erected during the Soviet era, was

dismantled by authorities in the middle of one night and on 12th January, 2010, a new monument representing a soldier kneeling and taking an oath while kissing the flag of Uzbekistan was installed at the same place by the Uzbek soldiers in the Military Glory Park. Other symbols of Soviet period met with the same fate throughout the new country. The Soviet period monuments have been toppled or dismantled. Authorities have not just toppled or dismantled the monuments only those of Lenin, Stalin and other communist leaders, but also those were commemorating the Soviet fight against fascism during the Second World War. Names of streets have also been targeted in the politics of new historiography. In the north of the Qaraqalpaq Autonomous Republic, the city centre of Nukus there once was a sculpture of Qaraqalpaq and Russian girls symbolising the friendship of the two peoples. The monument had a few adjustments made to it: the Russian girl was removed and the Qaraqalpaq girl remained. Authorities dismantled the entire monument. Furthermore, the Uzbek Armed Forces Museum has brought now under the Academy of Arts, which will display art that symbolises the power of the new Uzbekistan. Abdmalik Kudratokhunov, Curator of the Academy also opine that an extensive campaign to rewrite the history of Uzbekistan has occurred in which all the streets that were named after scholars who lived in Soviet times are receiving 'neutral' names. For example, the street upon which the new monument now stands was named after the academician Habib Abdullayev, a famous geologist who contributed greatly to the establishment of the country's metallurgical industry. However, this street now carries the name of 'Mirzo Ulugbek' (Kurbanov, 2010: NP). Thus, destruction/deconstruction of history which belonged to the predecessor state is a key feature of new Uzbek historiography. Primary objective of such attempt is to bring out the people from the Soviet aura so that they may

feel the citizens of a new independent sovereign country.

‘Lengthy Freedom Struggle’

A significant feature of the new historiography is the construction of a false long freedom struggle of Uzbekistan against the Soviet Union. Charles Kurzman argues that “Uzbekistan ...had almost no nationalist movement prior to independence ...Uzbekistan was both created and granted independence at Moscow’s command, not through nationalist mobilization”(Kurzman, 1999: 78). In spite of the fact that Uzbekistan lacked an ‘organized dissident’ or national democratic movement in the Soviet era, the independence of the Republic from Soviet Union is being depicted a product of a ‘lengthy Uzbek struggle’ and not a result of dissolution of the Soviet Union (Critchlow, 1999: 120 and Kuzio, 2002: NP).

Often it is argued that Karimov was one of the ‘most brutal dictators’ of the former Soviet Union and deceleration of independence of the country was an opportunistic move on his part (Trevelar, 2004: NP). A coup had been attempted against the Gorbachev government by disaffected hard-liners in Moscow in August 1991, which was a catalyst for independence movements throughout the Soviet Union. In the absence of a popular movement in Uzbekistan, initially the pro-Soviet elite in Uzbekistan were reluctant to support the August coup. Anyhow, when events brought them to that point, the governing elite adapted themselves quickly to the new realities and the Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan declared the independence of republic on 31st August, 1991. Beyond doubt, this step was approved by the people of Uzbekistan through a referendum which was held in December, 1991 and was passed with 98.2 percent of the popular vote (Curtis, 1996: NP). Despite all these developments, there was no freedom struggle which is being claimed by

the Karimov regime. But even then, it is being argued in the new oral and written historiography that in the so-called ‘freedom struggle’, people of Uzbekistan faced various difficulties to get rid out of the shackles of ‘obsolete totalitarian’ Soviet system. They fought against terrible political repression of the ‘colonial regime’. And during this, their dignity and honor were trampled and lives were broken (Karimov, 2011: NP). In this context, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of independence of Uzbekistan which was celebrated under the topic “Dearest, Holiest Motherland – Independent Uzbekistan”, President Karimov, in his “Independence Day Address” on 31st August 2011, told the people of the country to remember the difficulties that they had witnessed during the ‘independence struggle’. He said:

...,we all should recall once again how difficult it was to free ourselves from the shackles of a totalitarian regime, how the situation in the country in the last days of that regime’s existence, on the eve of independence, exacerbated, getting dangerous, more and more menacing (Karimov, 2011: NP).

Karimov also said that during the anti-colonial struggle they were determined for freedom of the country and that is why they had rejected the Soviet regime decisively in 1991. To quote Karimov:

...whatever troubled days we had to endure, no matter what difficulties and obstacles on the path to independence we had to overcome, no matter what threats to our country might sound, in moments of toughest tests we remained faithful to the idea of independence, put the interests of Uzbekistan above everything, have not turned off from the chosen path and..., will never do (Karimov, 2011: NP).

Thus, the construction of the history of freedom struggle against the Soviet Union gives

an appearance of the Karimov administration's instrumental approach towards historiography in creating an ideology of national independence which may prove a catalyst in consolidating the new state and getting mass support to actions and policies of the current regime.

Tamerlane: A National Hero

The usefulness of Tamerlane's 'powerful personality' in state legitimating makes him a prominent figure in the new historiography of Uzbekistan (Manz, 2002: 15). Karimov regime's search of glorious and usable past and new heroes has made, Tamerlane as the 'central icon' of new historiography. He is being illustrated as the 'spiritual founder' or 'Father of Nation' while his era is termed as the "Golden age" of the Uzbek nation (Akiner, 1997: 369; Cassandra, 1994: 30; Hegarty, 1995: 28-29; Radnitz, 2006: 658; and Suleymanov, 2004: NP). The centralized state under Tamerlane's leadership is being depicted as a model for modern Uzbekistan. His statecraft is portrayed as inspiration for various contemporary policies from taxation and agricultural reform to the creation of a unified Central Asian market (Hegarty, 1995: 28-29). This sort of historiography could be noticed in the state exhibitions, erection of Tamerlane's monuments, depiction of his portraits in public places, construction of Timurids museum and celebrations of his anniversaries. Same thing can also be seen in the naming of schools, streets, administrative districts, public organizations, and state medals and awards (March, 2002: 376).³ Various academic events are being organized to honor and study his life, legacy and historical importance. Hyper-Tamerlaneism is also observed in the enormous publications and speeches by academicians, public officials and the Uzbek President (Adams, 2010: 30-32). Nevertheless, this hyper-Tamerlaneism in historiography is far away from objectivity as it has both omitted brutal

campaigns and authoritarianism of Tamerlane or has been justified by describing a 'necessity' of time period and size of his empire (Suleymanov, 2004: NP).

Tamerlane, throughout his life, conquered and killed innocent people. He invaded India in 1398. During this invasion, he massacred the entire population of Delhi, destroyed everything in his way and built towers from 100,000 of his victims' skulls. In 1401, he took Damascus and slaughtered 20,000 people (McCray, 2004: 48-49). While describing Tamerlane as conqueror of the thrones of 27 kings who ruled over the kingdoms of Turan, Iran, Rum, Magrib, Shom, Misr, Iraq, Mizandaran, Gilon, Shirbon, Azerbaijan, Fars, Khorson, Jete, Dashti, Khorezm, Khotan, Kabulistan, Bakhtarzamin and Hindustan, Stephen Kinzer says that he "...cemented whole populations into towers to starve, massacred as many as 100,000 civilians in a day, bombarded ships with human heads shot from cannons and left pyramids of skulls to mark the cities he destroyed" (Kinzer, 1997: NP). Tamerlane killed 17 million people (McCray, 2004: 48-49). Thus, he was a cruel and destructive ruler who contributed nothing. As Thomas R. McCray (2004: 49) also observes:

...he [Tamerlane] was a brutal conqueror and a terrible ruler. He built no societies, helped no one, and improved nothing.

Despite all these things, in the post-Soviet historiography, the Karimov regime has not only tried to rationalize and deconstruct the brutal and bloodthirsty image of Tamerlane but also has attempted to construct a positive sketch of his personality and contribution to Central Asia (McCray, 2004: 48-49). For example, Director of the Tashkent State Museum, Nozim Khabibullaev, said that he had assiduously searched for a contemporary account attesting to the truth of stories related to Tamerlane's brutalities including that he built pyramids of skulls but found none.

On the other hand, Karimov regime tells the people of Uzbekistan that most of the stories of Tamerlane's brutality are a product of hyperbole and exaggeration by the outsiders who have twisted these to blacken the reputation of Central Asian region including Uzbekistan (Kinzer, 1997: NP). As Karimov (1996: 135) says:

The name of Amir Temur was blacked out from the pages of our history in an attempt to bury him in oblivion. The goal was to remove the national consciousness from the soul of the people so that it might lose its sense of pride and reconcile itself to its dependence and subordination. Our people, trapped for so many years in the clutches of the colonial vice, are no longer deprived of the opportunity to honour our great compatriot and render to him his historical due.

Therefore, Karimov regime lauds Tamerlane for eliminating chaos and establishing order. It is being argued that Tamerlane converted a 'black hole' in the heart of Eurasia from a Hobbesian space of 'war of all against all' into a 'zone of peace' (Megoran, 2004: 351). Islam Karimov, in his speeches and writings, depicts him as "...a wise leader, the creator of a centralized state, and an enlightened ruler and protector of the arts and sciences" (Suleymov, 2004: NP). Karimov also says that Tamerlane was a man of destiny who was sent to liberate and uplift homeland at a difficult time (Manz, 2002: 23). While de-constructing the Mongol tribal identity of Tamerlane, efforts are being made to construct his Uzbek identity by terming him ethnically an Uzbek who unified the Uzbeks in the 14th Century. In reality, he never belonged to Uzbek ethnic community. He belonged to a Mongol tribe and came to power through personal and tribe alliances while showing a mastery and endurance in the same. He and his descendants had actually fought with the Uzbek tribes, who at that time occupied

territory in between the Syrdaria, Volga, and Irtish rivers. Tamerlane and his descendants were exterminating the Uzbek tribes rather than uniting them into one nation (Soucek, 2000: 124). Thus despite all this, Karimov, in his words commemorated on the Tashkent museum wall, argues that "If somebody wants to understand who the Uzbeks are?" and "if somebody wants to comprehend all the power, might, justice and unlimited abilities of the Uzbek people, their contribution to global development, their belief in the future, he should recall the image of Amir Temur [Tamerlane]" (Suleymanov, 2004: NP). Besides such developments, a comparison is being drawn between the Tamerlane's Empire and modern Uzbekistan and populist slogans of Uzbekistan as a 'State with a Great Future' and 'Greater Uzbekistan' are being made in the political circles (March, 2003: 308).

Uzbekistan did not fight for the independence, and hence, it lacked any major figure of national resistance from Tsarist Russian and Soviet period (Manz, 2002: 21). Regardless of the disadvantages of Soviet rule, Uzbekistan was as a part of a superpower which was a matter of pride for it. But now, it is no longer a part of the superpower, and looking for recognition as a great power. Alongwith other global and regional powers, it has geopolitical ambitions to introduce a new political order in Central Asian while filling the power vacuum that was created with the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Weisbrode, 1997: 60). Reportedly, the Karimov regime feels that territory was a 'seat of high culture' and thus, central to world history. But it lost its centrality to world politics due to the Soviet domination (Manz, 2002: 22). After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Uzbek leadership feels that it has again an opportunity for a higher role in the world affairs and to become regional potentate in its own right to be the deal-makers and peacekeepers in the world politics as once it was under Tamerlane

(Weisbrode, 1997: 58). Furthermore, the Uzbek people are subject to regionalism. They divide themselves according to the area of their residence such as Samarkand-Jizzakh, Tashkent, Bukhara and Ferghana valley. Thus, Tamerlane can serve the purpose of Uzbekistan. The breadth of his conquests and his reputation are major assets which boost the prestige of Uzbekistan within Central Asia, and give it an independent place in the world history (Manz, 2002: 22). Tamerlane had achieved worldwide prestige and recognition. He built a multinational empire by integrating the region into a world actor that was powerful enough to influence events throughout Europe, Asia, and Middle East (Weisbrode, 1997: 57). Therefore, claim of the Uzbekness of Tamerlane in new historiography could be handy to fulfil the geo-political ambitions of Uzbekistan. It provides a historical base to establish Uzbekistan a great power and hegemonic of the region while undermining the regional divisions (Hegarty, 1995: 28-29).

Karimov: "The Brave"

President Islam Karimov is being presented a brave leader and champion of the freedom of Uzbekistan. Visual and oral historical programmes broadcasted by the Uzbek Media and textbooks that are taught in the schools focus on the heroism and great leadership of Karimov and, as it appears, are determined to elevate President as a 'superman-type' figure (McCray, 2004: 48). These text books and programmes not only exaggerate the role of Karimov in securing Uzbekistan's freedom but also in the various situations of crisis in the Soviet and post-Soviet period. Karimov has been trained and skilled in totalitarian methods. He is formulating domestic and foreign policy single-handedly. Thus, as McCray (2004: 48) writes:

President Karimov is the unchallenged star of television news. Every day, he is shown

in meetings, greeting dignitaries, delivering speeches, writing his programs, signing agreements and travelling around the country...Even his past activities are shown and re-shown, sometimes with stirring background music and often without reference to when the activities took place. It is sometimes difficult to believe than one man stay so busy.

The Uzbek television on the occasion of country's 20th Independence Day in August, 2011 telecasted a series devoted to Karimov and the leadership he showed before, during and after demise of Soviet Union. One programme of the series entitled "On the Eve of Independence, or The Last Agony of the Soviets" was mostly based on Karimov's book, "On the Threshold of Independence." This programme was started with women picking cotton in the snow which portrayed Uzbek people's 'meaningless' 'depressed' and hopeless life under Soviet rule. After this, said programme highlighted the heroism of Karimov. He was presented as a 'man of action.' Ethnic animosities were occurred in the Fergana Valley in 1989 in which local Meskhetian Turks were assaulted by Uzbeks and Uzbek and Kyrgyz were clashed in the Kyrgyz city of Osh. Moscow showed determination to purge the violence and thus, appointed Islam Karimov as first Secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan. The appointment of Karimov, non-local party elite, signified that Moscow was interested in the reduction of tensions by appointing an outsider who had not been involved in the purges. However, the telecasted programme boasted that when there was violence against the Meskhetian Turks in the Central Boka District of Tashkent Region, Karimov went on horseback and tried to stop the violence. Another thing which was highlighted in the programme was that when Osh riots took place between Uzbeks and Kyrgyzs and rioters attacking Uzbeks arms and helicopters,

Islam Karimov arrived at the scene immediately. He calmed the feuding Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. Programme concluded that a great victory was scored due to the conscientious efforts of Karimov. This incident is missing in the annals of history. Prior to this, it was established that famous Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov was the person who calmed the rioters in Osh. Karimov also showed up after thousands of Soviet troops poured into the Osh area (Yusupov and Pannier, 2011: NP).

Programme also distorted the incident of December 1991 where in Namangan, Karimov was forced to sit down in hall and listen to Tohir Yuldash, the future leader of the Al-Qaeda-linked Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and lecture him on government and Islam. The Uzbek television in the said programme offered a very different but distorted interpretation of the incident. It said that Karimov went to meet a group of people in eastern Namangan region who had seized local government offices to demand Uzbekistan be declared an Islamic state. Karimov arrived at the scene of the riot. It was a tragic scene. There were a lot of youths whose minds were poisoned with religious extremism. Karimov then took a microphone from Tohir Yuldash, the leader of the crowd. As in Osh, according to Uzbek television programme, Karimov's words were adequate to resolve the volatile situation. There is no mention of Birlik activist Nosir Zokir, who actually took the microphone from Karimov and demanded that freedom of assembly be resorted in the country. Karimov, again according to Uzbek television, championed his nation's independence from the very beginning and seized the opportunity when the 'putchisti' were downed in Moscow. He is portrayed as a leader who cut short his visit to India in order to take matters into his own hands once he heard about the coup. The programme did not mention that in March 1991 Karimov led the campaign to

maintain the Soviet Union. In those days he told the people of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic that "our rivers will run with milk if we stay within the Soviet Union, but if we leave it, our rivers will fill with blood". Thus, Islam Karimov in the new historiography is being projected as a great leader equalling to the Tamerlane who is believed to be a great leader, who created a great empire, who glorifies the region, and who had his capital in Samarkand. All this is being done by the state through its propaganda machine to construct parallels between the two rulers. Karimov is also from Samarkand. He glorifies Uzbekistan in his writings and speeches. He is also trying to unite the people. Whatever his policies are, similar to those of Tamerlane. His policies are demand of the time (Yusupov and Pannier, 2011: NP). Thus comparison between the Tamerlane and Karimov in new historiography establishes that the main agenda of the governing elite incorporates the creation of a strong 'Uzbek state' as was the Tamerlane's Empire and the establishing Karimov as a great leader as it was the Tamerlane. It has been observed that Karimov regime has not met the material needs of country's population. Loss of subsidies from Moscow, deeply rooted corruption and the expenditure of maintaining own cronies in power by the Karimov administration have slowed down economic growth and kept much of the population in poverty. Pensions and real wages have been massively devalued, universal healthcare system has crumbled and full employment has evaporated. Mass arrests and imprisonment of political suspects, their trials, executions, torture and extra-judicial killings are the evidence of prevailing deceptive democracy and authoritarianism in the country (Treveler, 2004: NP). Thus, in the prevailing political atmosphere, new historiography is key instrument to defend and consolidate his position among the common masses.

Bangs of New Historiography

The new Soviet historiography which brings anti-Russian scenery while eroding the Soviet symbols and omitting the Soviet past and its contribution to the modern Uzbek state has received a strong reaction from the people of Uzbekistan in domestic sphere and from Russian Government in external spheres.

Reportedly, teacher community is not satisfied with the new textbooks of history prescribed by the authorities for schools. Though they are being forced by the government to teach and work with the new textbooks, according to them, new historiography would be destructive for the ethnic harmony. Since a significant number of Russians are residing in Uzbekistan, the anti-Russian historiography would, as they suspect, fuel animosity among the Uzbeks against the Russians. Keeping such threats in their mind, some of the teachers in urban areas are trying to interpret and teach the historical events objectively. An Uzbek history teacher Samira Tashmukhamedova, in a meeting of history teachers explained that in each lecture she offers objective interpretation of events and after each lesson she reminds her students not to think negatively against the Russian people. Opposite to this, teachers of rural areas do not offer objective explanations of events related to Russians which that have been incorporated in the books of new historiography. They simply teach the students whatever has been written in the books. In other words, they blame the Russians for all the troubles of the Uzbek people as they killed their ancestors, robbed natural resources and turned them into slaves (Samar, Ashurov and Ibragimov, 2002: NP).

The attempts to erode the Soviet past through the wreckage of monuments of Soviet period have also not been appreciated in the different quarters. Infact, the move against the monument of Second World War in Tashkent has been disapproved by

the people. As Abdurakhman Tashanov, a human rights activist said:

Here stood a monument of a soldier with a gun in his hands ... striving forward. ... And, what did we get in return? A soldier with a bowed head.... You see all this, and your heart immediately goes cold (Kurbanov, 2010: NP).

This move of the Uzbek government also frustrated even the war veterans. Jalol Sultanov, a war veteran, criticized the government for the destruction of monument related to Second World War by saying that the Great Patriotic War (World War II) affected the fates of millions of people, and the Uzbek people were not an exception. Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs also expressed following discontent against the said move of the Uzbekistan:

Today, the demolition of the Soldier-Liberator Monument is an axe blow to history, to the memory of the veterans who fought for the liberation of the great Motherland. We are now presented as mercenaries who fought for another country (Kurbanov, 2010: NP).

The Uzbek Foreign Ministry had responded that the demolished monument had no 'intellectual weight' and was merely an ideological reflection of the old regime. Thus, as per the representative of Uzbek Ministry of Defence, on the eve of the 18th anniversary of the independent country's national army, the said monument was important to raise the morale of soldiers and officers of national army(Kurbanov, 2010: NP).

The governing elite are satisfied with these developments. They justify the inclusion of anti-Russian feelings and erosion of Soviet past from the new historiography. In their opinion, as Uzbek President Islam Karimov has told parliament in August, 2002, the 'shadow' of the Soviet Union was a major *raison d'être* for problems of Uzbek society. With the introduction

of new historiography now new generations are growing up free of the 'totalitarian heritage' of the Soviet Union. New generation now, does not even know the names of the Soviet leaders which in the eyes of Uzbek government is a positive development. Uzbek President explained the Parliament that:

Having visited one of the schools, I asked adolescents, if they knew who was Brezhnev? They answered, 'No, we don't'. Then I asked them, 'Who is Gorbachev?' They again said that they didn't know. And I told them that they are doing great (Samar, Ashurov and Ibragimov, 2002: NP).

These developments may ensemble the Karimov regime but not the country. Such things would generate a vicious atmosphere among the rural areas leading to the destruction of ethnic fraternity. Besides, this would undermine the Uzbekistan and Russian relations. Such apprehensions have even been raised by the independent journalists from Samarkand like of Artur Samari, Kamiljon Ashurov and Uktam Ibragimov (Samar, Ashurov and Ibragimov, 2002: NP).

Though, from the state perspective, nothing seems wrong in promoting Tamerlane as a symbol of Uzbek national pride, as a 'just ruler' and 'fountainhead' of Uzbekistan or as an emblem of Uzbekistan's re-emergence as an independent regional power (Melvin, 2000: 46). But from a broader non-state perspective, use of Tamerlane-centric historiography, to rectify Karimov regime's decisions, policies, values and choices to make them historically inevitable, is destructive for the evolving democratic culture in the political arena as it is instrumental in promoting and legitimizing the Karimov's authoritarianism (March, 2002: 382). President Karimov has even himself confessed and validated the authoritarian tendencies that prevails in his administration. He says:

I admit: perhaps in my actions there are signs of authoritarianism. But this I explain as follows: in certain periods of history, especially during the construction of statehood, strong executive power is necessary. It is necessary in order to avoid bloodshed and conflict, to preserve in the region inter-ethnic and civil harmony, peace, and stability, for which I am prepared to pay any price (Karimov, 1996: 135).

Whatever reasons may have been given by the Karimov regime to justify his authoritarian administration but this can not validate the deteriorating situation of the human rights in the country. Amidst the Karimov administration's attempts to use the history for explaining and justifying the present policies and actions, as Russell Zanca (2000: NP) opines, Uzbekistan has already become:

... a bit undemocratic, corrupt, nepotistic, and oligarchic. It has become superlatively dictatorial and cruel -- it is a vicious state. Its treatment of its citizens is neo-Stalinist to the core.

Hence, endorsement of personality cult and heroism through new historiography is harmful for civil, democratic and stable future of Uzbekistan.

Apart from this, Karimov administration has already pursued an 'assertive', 'provocative' and 'unilateralist' foreign policy. Uzbekistan boasts the largest military in the region. It allowed the US forces on its territory, intervened in the Tajik and Afghan civil wars and also engaged in confrontational border policies with its neighbouring states (Horseman, 2003: 51 and Cornell, 2000: 115). Tashkent has tried to strengthen its influence among its weaker neighbours – Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan by resorting to both tactics – economic pressure as well as force because of Kyrgyzstan's dependence on Uzbek gas and

electricity supplies to the Northern Afghanistan. Karimov government, as the Tajik President Imomali Rakhmonov had accused, had supported the Colonel Khudoiberdiev's unsuccessful rebellion in the Northern Tajikistan and even some of the guerrillas of Khudoiberdiev had been hidden in Uzbekistan (Rotar, 1999: NP). Amidst such developments, Uzbekistan's neighbouring countries tend to take such historiography austere. Slogans of the revival of Tamerlane's empire may provoke the trans-border ethnic Uzbeks for secession from their parent state to kin-state Uzbekistan (Weisbrode, 1997: 58). Russian Embassy in Tajikistan, in 1999 had viewed that "Uzbekistan was undoubtedly trying to establish itself as the region's superpower, and the new Uzbek historiography was designed to provide an academic basis for Tashkent's geopolitical claims"(Rotar, 1999: NP). Thus, new historiography of governing elite has created a suspicion of "imperialist designs" of Uzbekistan at global and regional level.

Conclusion

To conclude, historiography has emerged a prime instrument for the state administration in Uzbekistan to achieve the various ends. With the assistance of this sort of historiography, the said administration is not only attempting to legitimize its current politics among the common masses but also looking for achieving its geopolitical objectives at the regional and global level. The new historiography contains three contradictory elements – construction, deconstruction and reconstruction. First, this historiography has constructed false history of long national freedom struggle against the Soviets, a struggle which never occurred in reality. This has also constructed a myth of Karimov's heroism and great leadership during the mythic freedom struggle. Second, Soviets' concept of 'big brother' and their 'civilizing mission' vis-à-

vis non-Russians have been deconstructed. Their image has been reconstructed as 'aggressors', 'colonialists', and 'suppressors'. Their 'civilizing mission' has been reconstructed as mission of enslavement of Uzbek people. Tamerlane's image has been reconstructed from a brutal invader to a wise ruler. The governing elite is well aware of the fact, as George Orwell has viewed: Who controls the past, controls the future; who controls the present, controls the past. That is why with the help of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of past, Karimov administration not only wants to strengthen its control over the future politics of Uzbekistan but also of the Central Asian region. And having its control over the country's administration in present, it is capable of doing so because of the immense control and support of the official machinery. Thus politics of new historiography may serve the purpose of Karimov government to strengthen its position and gaining the mass support but it is harmful for the development of democratic culture in the country. Moreover, it is generating anti-Russian feeling among the indigenous populations which threatens the Russian minority residing in the country. This also reflects the geopolitical ambitions of the country which are a threat to regional peace and security. In the larger regional and global context, Uzbekistan needs an objective historiography.

Notes

1. Gorno-Badakhshan is an autonomous province in the East Tajikistan which was created in January 1925 by the Soviets and was attached to the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic in 1929. It is located in the Pamir Mountains. During the Civil war in Tajikistan in 1992, initially, the local government of Gorno-Badakhshan had declared its independence from the Republic of Tajikistan but later on it backed down from their call for independence

and thus, it remains an autonomous province within Tajikistan.

2. Qaraqalpaqstan (Karakalpakstan) is an autonomous province of Uzbekistan which is in western part of the country. Qaraqalpaq Autonomous Oblast was created on 19th February, 1925 by separating territories of the ethnic Qaraqalpaqs from the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and Khorezm People's Soviet Republic. Initially, it was located within the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Then, it was transferred to the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) from 20th July, 1930 to 20th March, 1932, at which time

it was elevated to the Qaraqalpaq Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Qaraqalpaq ASSR). The Qaraqalpaq ASSR was attached to the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic from 5th December, 1936. Since then it remains a part of Uzbekistan while enjoying an autonomous status.

3. An exhibition titled "Unique Treasures of the Timurids Epoch in World Collections" was opened at the State Museum of Timurids History in Tashkent on 25th August, 2011. The exhibition which was devoted to the 20th anniversary of the Uzbekistan's independence demonstrated ancient items, works of crafts and paintings from Museums of Russia, Turkey, USA, France and Britain.

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Историография и государственная власть в Узбекистане

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В данной статье рассматривается использование историографии государственной властью Узбекистана в качестве инструмента для достижения различных целей, а именно узаконивания ее политического авторитета среди народных масс путем провозглашения страны в качестве великой силы и удовлетворения ее геополитических амбиций. Автор утверждает, что новая историография является антисоветской по своей сути и направлена на уничтожение советского прошлого, создавая миф о длительной борьбе за свободу, преподнося Тамерлана как национального героя, а узбекского президента Ислама Каримова в качестве смелого лидера по его примеру. Субъективная конструкция, деконструкция и реконструкция исторических событий являются основными чертами новой историографии постсоветского Узбекистана. Несмотря на то что такой подход может послужить источником узаконивания режима Каримова и сформировать понимание Узбекистана в качестве великой силы, это также может привести к неблагоприятным последствиям как во внутренних кругах, так и в международных отношениях, так как будет восприниматься как форма легализации авторитарного режима Каримова, возникновение антироссийских настроений и империалистических геополитических проектов Узбекистана в Средней Азии.

Ключевые слова: Каримов, искажение, конструкция, деконструкция, реконструкция историографии, Советы, русские, узбеки, Тамерлан.
