

# Historical Legacy, Tradition, And Modernity Of Central Asia And India

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## I. Introduction:

The long-standing historical interactions between Central Asia and India have been instrumental in shaping regional dynamics, fostering trade, and influencing socio-cultural landscapes. The cultural interconnection, spanning centuries, has left a lasting legacy that continues to impact modern geopolitics, even in the context of recent trade relations. Central Asia's geographical position as a crossroads of civilizations has established a deep-rooted historical bond between these regions. The cultural ties between Central Asia and India date back to ancient times, primarily through the Silk Road. The movement of people, goods, and ideas facilitated exchanges in art, language, religion, and governance. The Silk Road linked India with Central Asia, enabling merchants to trade goods such as spices, textiles, and precious stones in exchange for horses, furs, and metals. Indian artisans and traders established settlements in Central Asian cities like Samarkand, Bukhara, and Kashgar, contributing to the local economies. In the 11th century, Al-Biruni's observations during Mahmud of Ghazni's invasions provided a detailed ethnographic study based on Indian texts. His work offers an outsider's perspective on medieval Indian society, culture, and religion. The text particularly highlights Hindu customs, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and governance (Al-Biruni, M., 1910). The Kushan Empire, which flourished between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE, also played a pivotal role in fostering Indo-Central Asian economic relations by controlling crucial trade routes. The spread of Buddhism from India to Central Asia played a crucial role in shaping the region's artistic, philosophical, and doctrinal development, ultimately influencing China and beyond. Sanskrit texts from India were translated into several Central Asian languages, fostering the region's philosophical and literary traditions.

Islamic scholars from Central Asia, such as Al-Biruni, traveled to India and meticulously documented its sciences, traditions, and governance systems. His works provided valuable insights into Indian knowledge systems, including mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy. The Major Central Asian dynasties, including the Kushans, Hephthalites, Ghaznavids, and Timurids, wielded important influence over northern India at Kushan Times. The Kushan Empire between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3rd century CE played a significant role in Indo-Central Asian trade. The trade route not limited for commerce but it became major source for the spread of Buddhism. Secondly the Hephthalites period between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6th century CE impacted Indian politics and culture through their invasions. Third the Ghaznavids period between period of 10<sup>th</sup> and 12th century CE, under invader like Mahmud of Ghazni, expanded their influence into India, bringing Persian and Central Asian cultural elements. Lastly, the Timurids between the 14th and 16th century CE shaped Indo-Persian artistic and architectural traditions, laying the foundation for the Mughal Empire.

Buddhism, which originated in India, spread to Central Asia through the efforts of monks, traders, and travelers along the Silk Road. This transmission was facilitated by Chinese pilgrims such as Xuanzang and Faxian, who traveled to India to study Buddhist scriptures and carried teachings back to their homelands. Monasteries in Central Asian cities like Dunhuang, Khotan, and Samarkand became important centers for Buddhist learning and cultural exchange. The interaction between Indian and Central Asian scholars helped shape Mahayana Buddhism, influencing its artistic, philosophical, and doctrinal development in China and beyond. Bhat's explore provides an in-depth analysis of Indo-Central Asian relations from ancient times to modern geopolitics. It highlights the trade, cultural, and political exchanges that shaped the region's history, particularly through the Silk Road. The book effectively connects historical ties with contemporary policies, such as India's 'Connect Central Asia' initiative. It a key reference for scholars studying regional connectivity, trade diplomacy, and strategic partnerships between India and Central Asia. (Bhat, M. S. (2017) Chaudhuri's book presents an economic history of the Indian Ocean trade network, emphasizing the role of merchants, states, and maritime routes. The study connects India's economic interactions with Central Asia and other regions, highlighting how trade facilitated cultural and technological exchanges. The book's strength lies in its use of diverse sources, from trade records to travelers' accounts. However, its focus on economic structures

may not appeal to those looking for a broader sociopolitical narrative. It remains a crucial text for understanding how historical trade networks influenced regional development and global economic patterns. (Chaudhuri, 1985). Frankopan reinterprets world history through the lens of the Silk Roads, emphasizing the centrality of Asia in global developments. The book challenges Eurocentric historical narratives, demonstrating how trade, migration, and conquests shaped civilizations across Central Asia, India, and beyond. Frankopan masterfully integrates economic, political, and cultural history, making it accessible to both scholars and general readers. However, some critics argue that his broad scope occasionally leads to oversimplification. Despite this, the book is a compelling and engaging read, offering fresh insights into the interconnected history of Asia and the world. (Frankopan, 2015).

The Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire were founded by rulers of Central Asian origin, shaping the political landscape of the Indian subcontinent. Military campaigns and alliances between Indian and Central Asian states were instrumental in defining territorial boundaries and power structures. Despite historical transformations, the relationship between Central Asia and India remains geopolitically significant in the modern era. Economic partnerships, strategic cooperation, and cultural diplomacy continue to strengthen these ties. India's 'Connect Central Asia' policy aims to enhance economic engagement through trade, investment, and energy collaboration. The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a key initiative linking India to Central Asia via Iran, improving trade routes. Central Asian nations supply India with critical resources such as uranium, oil, and natural gas, reinforcing energy security. India's growing involvement in regional security through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) underscores its commitment to Central Asian stability. Counterterrorism cooperation between India and Central Asia is crucial in addressing radicalization and transnational security threats. Military and intelligence collaborations have strengthened India's presence in the region, balancing influence against other regional powers. Central Asian students pursue higher education in India, particularly in medical and technical fields, strengthening people-to-people ties. Festivals, music, and literature exchanges continue to celebrate the shared heritage of both regions. The influence of Bollywood and Indian television dramas remains strong in Central Asian countries, reflecting cultural affinity. The historical and modern interactions between Central Asia and India illustrate the deep-rooted connection between these regions. From ancient trade routes to contemporary strategic alliances, their relationship has evolved while retaining cultural and economic significance. The legacy of historical exchanges continues to shape contemporary partnerships, making Central Asia and India integral to regional and global dynamics. Singh's article evaluates the geopolitical importance of India's relationship with Central Asia, analyzing both historical interactions and contemporary strategic interests. It discusses economic partnerships, security cooperation, and India's growing role in regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The study is well-researched and provides a balanced perspective on opportunities and challenges in India-Central Asia relations. While insightful, it could include more empirical data on trade volumes and investment flows. Nonetheless, it is a crucial read for policymakers and scholars exploring India's evolving regional strategy. (Singh, 2020).

## **II. Corridor Diplomacy And Strategic Partnership: The India-Central Asia Corridor**

The India-Central Asia Corridor represents efforts to enhance trade, connectivity, and strategic partnerships between India and the Central Asian nations. A significant challenge for India in this endeavor is its lack of direct land access to Central Asia due to geographical constraints posed by Pakistan and Afghanistan. This limitation has necessitated India's approach toward both its immediate and extended neighborhood, focusing not only on developing alternative trade routes but also on strengthening its engagements within the India-Central Asia Corridor. A key initiative in this context is the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which has introduced new challenges and opportunities for the growing partnership between India and Central Asia. The INSTC is a proposed 7,200-kilometer-long transnational corridor comprising a network of railways, roads, and maritime routes that seeks to connect India, Iran, and Russia via Central Asia. The corridor aims to reduce freight transportation costs and transit time between India and Central Asian markets, thereby playing a crucial role in reshaping the geopolitical landscape of the region. The maritime component of this corridor includes transit points such as Mumbai, Chabahar (Iran), Bandar Abbas, the Caspian Sea, Russia, and Central Asia, further reinforcing India's strategic outreach in the region. Xuanzang's travelogue is a first-hand account of 7th-century India, providing detailed observations on its culture, governance, and religious traditions. As a Chinese Buddhist monk, Xuanzang documented his journey through Central Asia to India, describing monasteries, trade routes, and interactions with scholars. The text is invaluable for understanding historical India-Central Asia connections, particularly the spread of Buddhism. However, the translation may pose challenges for readers unfamiliar with classical texts. Despite this, the book remains a fundamental historical source, offering rare insights into the intellectual and cultural exchanges of the period. (XuanZang, 1996). Grousset's work is one of the most detailed studies on the nomadic empires of Central Asia, including the Kushans, Hephthalites, and Mongols. It explores their political structures, military strategies, and

interactions with neighboring civilizations, including India. The book is meticulously researched, drawing on historical records and archaeological findings. However, its focus on military and political aspects means that cultural and economic exchanges receive less attention. Despite this, it remains an essential text for understanding the historical forces that shaped Central Asia's geopolitical landscape and its historical ties with India. (Grousset, R. (1970).

### **III. India And Central Asia Relations After The G20 Summit**

India's engagement with Central Asia has gained renewed momentum following the G20 Summit, reflecting its commitment to strengthening regional connectivity, economic partnerships, and strategic cooperation. The summit underscored India's vision for a multipolar world where connectivity and trade corridors play a crucial role in fostering economic growth and geopolitical stability. One of the key initiatives in this regard is the Chabahar Port in Iran, which India has developed to bypass Pakistan and gain direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia. Sen's book explores the historical interactions between India and China, focusing on Buddhist exchanges, trade, and diplomacy. While primarily centered on Sino-Indian relations, it also sheds light on the role of Central Asia as a bridge between these two civilizations. The book provides an engaging narrative supported by historical records, travel accounts, and trade documentation. It is well-structured and accessible to both scholars and general readers. However, those specifically interested in India-Central Asia relations may find its focus on China slightly limiting. Overall, it is a valuable resource for understanding the broader regional dynamics. (Sen, 2003) The ongoing Chabahar-Zahedan railway project is expected to further enhance connectivity, facilitating smoother trade and transit between India and Central Asia. India is also a participant in the Ashgabat Agreement, a multimodal transport initiative involving Iran, Oman, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. This agreement aims to streamline trade routes and improve logistical efficiency between India and Central Asia, reinforcing regional economic integration. Energy cooperation remains a crucial aspect of India's engagement with the region. The TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) Pipeline, a proposed natural gas pipeline supplying Turkmenistan's resources to India, continues to face challenges due to security concerns in Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, India remains invested in exploring alternative energy corridors to enhance its energy security. Beyond connectivity and trade, India's extended western neighborhood—covering West Asia, the Persian Gulf, and parts of Central Asia—holds strategic importance for India's energy security, economic interests, and geopolitical outreach. The G20 Summit reinforced India's role as a key player in global connectivity initiatives, including the development of alternative trade routes that link South Asia with Central Asia and beyond. By leveraging these initiatives, India aims to solidify its presence in Central Asia, ensuring mutual economic benefits while navigating the complexities of regional geopolitics. Kumar provides a historical overview of India's interactions with Central Asia from ancient times to modern geopolitical developments. The book covers trade, cultural exchanges, and political alliances, emphasizing the long-standing influence of Indian civilization on the region. It also discusses contemporary diplomatic and economic engagements, such as energy trade and regional security cooperation. While the book offers a well-rounded perspective, some sections could benefit from deeper economic analysis. Nevertheless, it is a valuable resource for scholars of history and international relations interested in India-Central Asia connections (Kumar, 2012). Mukherjee's article critically examines India's 'Connect Central Asia' policy, focusing on its strategic and economic implications. The study highlights India's efforts to enhance trade, security, and cultural ties with Central Asia, particularly in light of regional power dynamics involving China and Russia. The article provides well-researched insights into energy security, transport corridors, and multilateral partnerships. While it effectively analyzes policy implications, it could provide more case studies to illustrate real-world impacts. Nonetheless, it is a significant contribution to understanding India's contemporary engagement with Central Asia. (Mukherjee, 2014).

### **IV. Conclusion**

The historical and modern interactions between Central Asia and India have forged a profound and enduring relationship, characterized by a rich exchange of trade, culture, and ideas. From the ancient Silk Road trade routes to contemporary geopolitical partnerships, the cultural and economic ties between these regions have shaped the course of history and continue to influence global dynamics today. The historical legacies of the Kushan, Hephthalite, Ghaznavid, and Timurid empires, as well as the spread of Buddhism, have left lasting imprints on both Central Asia and India's social, philosophical, and political landscapes. The current era sees these historical bonds evolve into strategic collaborations, particularly in areas such as trade, energy security, and regional stability. India's initiatives like the 'Connect Central Asia' policy and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) further underscore the importance of these historical ties in fostering modern-day partnerships. Ultimately, the relationship between Central Asia and India serves as a testament to the enduring relevance of historical connections, as both regions continue to work together to navigate the complexities of the contemporary geopolitical landscape, ensuring mutual growth and stability for the future..

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