

Central Asia-Geopolitical impact on Art, Culture and Literature

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Abstract

The United Socialist Soviet Republic was once made up of fifteen strong republics Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. And the superpower unfortunately bogged down in the cold war, disintegrated, and ultimately experienced dissolution in 1991. The Collapse of the Soviet Union witnessed the birth and rise of few countries which were once part of erstwhile Soviet Russia. Though part of the Soviet republic, they have their distinctive culture and identity. And to preserve their heritage, they demanded a separate identity fuelled by the cold war. History has proven that every volatile region geographically or politically has its own distinctive cultural identity. So can Central Asia be far behind?

Keywords

Central Asia, Persian, art, culture, Silk Road

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Central Asia is a region in Asia that extends from the Caspian Sea in the West to China and Mongolia in the east, Afghanistan, and Iran in the South to Russia in the north. The region consists of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It is colloquially known as "the Stan's" as all the countries are from the same region and all have

names ending with the Persian suffix "Stan", meaning "land of" Various neighboring areas and also means part of the region.

The essence of central Asia is nomadic. Historically closely associated with nomadic tribes and the Silk Road. The Silk Road is the epicenter of the conflict, the conflict for identity...of culture, literature, art. The Silk Road acted as crossroads for the movement of ideas, goods, and people between Europe, West Asia, South Asia, and East Asia. This crossroad intensified conflict between tribalism, traditionalism, and modernization.



Image 1: Silk Road Region

Historically built political geography and culture are two significant parameters widely used in the scholarly literature about the definitions of central Asia. There are many definitions of Central Asia. Humboldt's definition composed of every country between 5°North and 5°South of the latitude 44•5°.

But many questioned the latitudinal definition of central Asia. According to one definition, all countries located in this region being landlocked without water bodies. Another

alternative definition is to define the region based on ethnicity, and in particular, areas populated by Eastern Turkic, Eastern Turkic, Eastern Iranian, or Mongolian people. The UNESCO History of the civilization of Central Asia, published in 1992, defines the region as Afghanistan, northeastern Iran, northern and central India, western China, Mongolia, and the former Soviet Central Asian republics.

Geography and Climate

Central Asia is an extremely large region of varied geography, including high passes and mountains, vast deserts, and treeless, grassy steppes. The vast steppe areas of Central Asia are considered together with the steppes of Eastern Europe as a homogenous geographical zone known as the Eurasian Steppe. For cultivation and farming, central Asia is rugged and arid. A majority of the people earn a living by herding livestock. Industrial activity centers around a few cities.

Water is an elusive and therefore valuable resource in arid central Asia. Most water bodies shrunk in recent times due to industrialization. As central Asia lacks large water bodies, temperature fluctuations are often severe. In most areas, the climate is dry and continental, with hot summers and cool to cold winters with occasional snowfalls.

The history of Central Asia is defined by the area's climate and geography. The aridness of the region made agriculture tough and also distance from the sea made trade difficult. Few cities developed. As a consequence, nomadic culture influences the region. The region was marked by a lot of conflict and wars.

During pre-Islamic times, central Asia was inhabited by speakers of Iranian languages. The main migration of Turkic peoples occurred between the 5th and 10th centuries.

The dominance of the nomads ended in the 16th century, as firearms allowed settled peoples to gain control of the region.

Russia, China, and other powers expanded into the region and had captured the bulk of central Asia by the end of the 19th century. As a result of outside invasion, the region saw the suppression of local cultures. Finally, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, five countries gained independence. And they fought and defended their own ethnic culture, art, and literature.



Image 2: Nomadic Life

Art

Central Asia art is visual art created in central Asia. The art of ancient and medieval central Asia reflects the rich history of this vast area, home to a huge variety of peoples, cultures, and ways of life. The art of central Asia reflects their multicultural ethnic nature. The silk

route road transmission of art, Scythian art, Greco - Buddhist art, and more recently personage culture, are all part of this complicated history.

As mentioned earlier, due to rough terrain and lack of water bodies, the lifestyle is predominately nomadic. The grasslands were home to migrate herders. The prehistoric animal-style art of these pastoral nomads not only demonstrates their zoomorphic mythologies and shamanic traditions but also their fluidity in incorporating the symbols of sedentary society into their artworks. Central Asia has always been a crossroads of cultural exchange, the hub of the silk road.

The arts of recent centuries are mainly influenced by multi-culture art, and the varied cultures were also influenced by the art of China, Persia, and Greece, Iran, Russia as well as the animal style that developed among the nomadic people's of the steppe.

As a consequence of Russian influence, European fine arts, painting, sculpture, and graphics started developing in central Asia. And it reflects the appearance of modernism, which took inspiration from the Russian avant-garde movement. Until the 1980s, Central Asian arts had developed along with general tendencies of Soviet arts. In the '90s, the arts of the region underwent some significant changes. Institutionally speaking, some fields of arts were regulated by the birth of the art market, some stayed as representatives of official views, while many were sponsored by international organizations. The years of 1990_ 2000 were times for the establishment of contemporary arts. In the region, many important international exhibitions are taking place. Central Asian art is represented in European museums, and the Central Asian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale has been organized since 2005.

Languages

Russian is the de facto, lingua franca throughout the former Soviet Central Asian Republic.

The language of the majority of the inhabitants of the former Soviet Central Asian Republics belongs to the Turkic language group. Turkmen is mainly spoken in Turkmenistan and as a minority language.

Literature of Central Asia

Many central Asian ethnic groups have a tradition of epic verse, singer-storytellers, and legends. Important writers include Abu Abdulrh Rudaki, a 19th-century Samanid court poet regarded as the father of Persian literature, and Omar Khayyam, the composer of 'Rubiyyat poetry, and the Soviet-era ,Kyrgyz writer Chinghiz Aitmatov.

Central Asian literature traditionally had no written form but was handed over orally in the form of stories, verses, and poems by bay traveling minstrels and bards. They often gathered in the square and performed in front of local crowds. Some of the magnificent epics of Central Asia are "Alyp Er Tonga" and " Shu Batir".

The Soviets make the region literate but did not unfortunately encourage the written format and publications of the epics and ballads out of fear that it would lead to nationalistic sentiment.

Hamzanama: Another mesmerizing book with illustrations also commissioned by Emperor Akbar during his rule. It has over 1,400 huge illustrations, many of which were displayed in an exhibition at the Sackler Gallery in Washington DC.in 2002. The Hamzanama was one of the greatest oral epics of the world. A magical, adventurous heroic saga. It is said to be the

longest single romance cycle in the world. Also known as "The adventure of Amir Hamza", its fullest printed version, the last volume of which was finally published in 1917. Later, we see much wonderful translation of this magnificent saga in various languages.

And every language retained its original splendor. Even in translation, it didn't lose its appeal, it is wondrous, magnificent. Because the book gives a unique insight into a lost Indo- Islamic courtly world. The adventures of Amir Hamza can be compared with those of king Arthur...his battles with dragons and pagan foes.

The Hamazanama has a special place in India as it absorbed endless myths and legends and was regularly performed in public during the Mughal era. Today however Hamza epic is extinct as a living oral tradition. But its fragrance is fresh in the alleys of world literature.

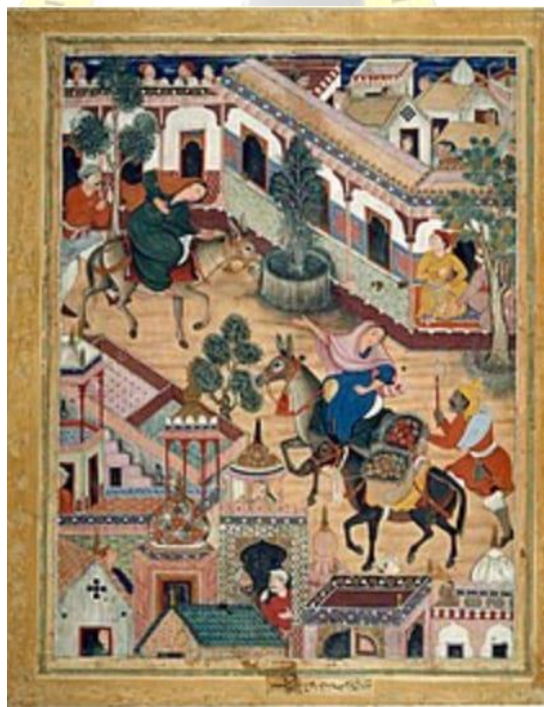


Image 3: The Hamazanama

Thousand and one night: Another famous book is Arabian Nights...A collection of stories that may have descended from an old Persian book called "Thousand and one night". No

one knows where the stories originally came from. But even now it is very popular. We all are familiar with the stories of Sinbad, Aladdin, and Ali baba storybooks, films, and television serials.

No original copy of Thousand and one night exists as the stories continued to be passed on orally with different storytellers telling the stories until around 1400 when Egyptian scholars compiled and put it down on paper.

The leading lady of the Arabian night is Shehzade, a prudent woman who save the lives of many women from Sultan Shahriyar. Shahriyar, once deeply in love with his wife but she betrayed him. As a result, the sultan decided to take revenge on women by having new young women every night and executed the following morning. Shehzade married him finally and every night she tells him incomplete stories and the sultan waited to hear the complete stories and it crossed 1001 stories. Later his heart melted and he forgives her.



Image 4: Arabian Night Glimpse

Mulla Naseeruddin: Almost every child in Central Asia and the Middle East learns Mulla Naseeruddin stories. He was a 13-century sage, humorist, storyteller, mullah, and a Sufi. He

was famous for his wisdom and the use of humor to draw the attention of listeners. His stories always have a moral message.

Jalaluddin Rumi: was a most versatile poet of Central Asia. His poems are profound and spiritual. The son of a Sufi master, he was trained in Muslim theology and Persian literature. He was a traditional teacher until he was 37 when he met a wandering enlightened master Shams of Tabriz, who changed his life. Remembering his first meeting with his master he wrote, "What I thought of before as God, I met today in a human being". But their partnership was short-lived as Shams was killed by Rumi's jealous followers. Rumi was shattered by the loss. Many verses he wrote, poured his melancholic feeling.

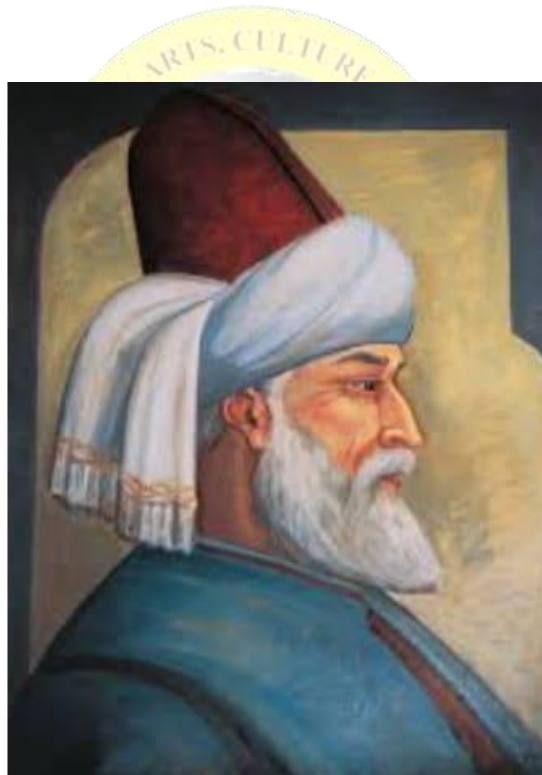


Image 5: Jalaluddin Rumi

Rumi was known as "drunken Sufi" because he found ecstasy in dancing, poetry, and music.

References

- Sources: Various Journals
- Images: Pinterest and other sources on the internet

About the Author

Ms. Mousumee Baruah is a freelancer by profession at Gurgaon. She is a Master's in English Literature from the University of Pune/ Fergusson College Pune. She had started her carrier as a lecturer in a College in Assam. During her college days she worked as a sub-editor at the "Eastern Clarion" an English Daily published from Jorhat, Assam.

She is a bi-lingual writer and poet. Many of her poems and short stories are published in various National & International literary platforms, Anthologies, Blogazines, etc. She has also won a few awards for her literary Endeavor.

