

## THE PLIGHT OF TURKIC MUSLIMS IN SINKIANG

### INTRODUCTION

During the twentieth century, the Muslims have succeeded to secure independence in several parts of Asia and Africa. Unfortunately, there brethren in Sinkiang who embraced Islam more than one thousand years ago are still under the Yoke of the Chinese chauvinists. They have faced them in the past with tremendous valour. But since the Communist take over in 1949, they have been victim of all types of oppression merely because they love the Islamic faith and traditions. Their continuing sufferings in all fields of life, as will be noticed in this paper, solicit attention of the Muslim Ummah to help them against nefarious designs of the Chinese Communists.

### GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION OF SINKIANG

2. Sinkiang is the largest province of the Peoples Republic of China, occupying about one-fifth (19,28,418 square kilometers) of the country's total area. It is situated on the Western side of China proper and has common borders with India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, USSR and Mongolia. By its location, the geographers have termed it 'heartland of Asia' (photo copy of the map attached).

3. It is rich in minerals like gold, uranium, iron, coal, petroleum etc. According to knowledgeable

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sources, its oil reserves are as big as those of the entire Middle East. Exxon Petroleum Company including certain other companies have started exploration work. Petroleum production from the area is estimated to be between 4-5million tons by 1985. Eight uranium mines have been discovered so far, out of which four have abundant quantity. Coal reserves of Sinkiang are said to be enough to meet the needs of whole of Europe for sixty years.

HISTORICAL  
BACKGROUND

4. The historical name of Sinkiang is 'Eastern Turkistan' and it is known as such among its natives and their kinsmen across the borders in Western Turkistan (Central Asia). The Chinese named it 'Sinkiang' in the last quarter of nineteenth century and in 1955, it was designated as 'Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region'. The word 'Sinkiang' or Xinjiang in Chinese language means 'new dominion', 'new frontiers'. It signifies that this area was not a part of China prior to its annexation in 1884. In view of the above, it shall be quite appropriate to refer it as 'Eastern Turkistan' onward in this discussion.

MUSLIM MOVES  
OR INDEPENDENCE

5. Eastern Turkistan has been a scene of rivalry between the native Turkics and the Chinese long before the dawn of Islam in this area. The Chinese however finally succeeded to establish their rule in 1759 A.D. Since then the Turkic Muslims have made 42 attempts against them and declared Eastern Turkistan independent



on three occasions as under:-

- a) Emirate (1865-1877).
- b) Muslim Republic of Eastern Turkistan(1933-34).
- c) Eastern Turkistan Republic (1944-49).

The Muslim Republic (1933-34) was ransacked by the Chinese with the active support of the Russians whose forces carried out a large-scale massacre of the Muslims. The last Republic(1944-49) was about to gain international recognition when again the Russians colluded with the Nationalist Chinese and ultimately the Republic fell to the Communists in 1949. In fact { the Russians have never liked an independent Muslim State to exist in this area. They are seized with the apprehension that an independent Muslim State of Eastern Turkistan shall be a source of inspiration for the Muslims of Western Turkistan to demand independence or maximum autonomy.

POPULATION/ETHNIC  
GROUPS

6. According to July 1982 census, the population of Eastern Turkistan is slightly over 13 million (13,081,681); out of which 7 million are Muslims. The Muslim population mainly consists of Turkic ethnic groups such as Uighur, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Uzbek, Tajik, Tatar. The number of Tungans\* is only nominal. The remaining 6 million population is composed of Hans<sup>@</sup>, Russians, Mongols, Sibos, Manchus etc. Among the non-Muslim population, the Hans are the largest group at present.

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\* - Chinese Muslims are called Tungans.

@ - Chinese by origin (but not Muslims).



7. The composition of population in Eastern Turkistan has been radically changed by the Communist regime since 1949 by shifting the Hans from China proper to Eastern Turkistan. The population of some of the important ethnic groups as of 1949 and 1983 is given below to help understand how far the position has been changed:

<u>Ethnic group</u>	<u>Population in 1949</u>	<u>Population in 1983</u>
Uighurs	75%	46%
Kazakhs	10%	6%
Other Turkic groups.	5%	1%
Hans	5%	45%
Tungans	3%	1%
Others	2%	1%

From the foregoing table it will be observed that the population of Turkic Muslims has been reduced from 90% in 1949 to 53% in 1983 while that of the Hans increased from 5% in 1949 to 45% in 1983. The position shall further change because the Chinese government still continues to shift the Han population from various parts of China to Eastern Turkistan with a view to increase the Han component to out-number the Turkic Muslims.

8. The resettlement of the Han population in Eastern Turkistan is a deep-rooted conspiracy against the Turkic community. The ulterior aim of the Chinese government is to reduce their 'majority' to 'minority' so that no scope is left for them to demand self-determination. By reducing the Turkic Muslims to a minority, the Muslim character of Eastern Turkistan shall also be ended.



THE HAN  
SETTLEMENT

9. On the strength of their over-whelming majority, the Turkic Muslims had been able to maintain their identity and traditions in spite of sinification efforts by the Chinese past regimes. The Communist government interpreted all old traditions a hurdle for the completion of the Revolution. While it struck against these traditions directly, it also planned to weaken the numerical strength of Turkic Muslims by shifting the Han workers, middle school graduates, teachers and the youth to Eastern Turkistan. Shanghai was ear-marked for shifting its population to the new place. The scheme was initiated in 1950 and is continuing uptil now with the result that the Han population in Eastern Turkistan has been increased tremendously. The native Turkic Muslims have been resenting this scheme and there have been clashes between them and the new comers. But the government is adamant to achieve its vicious goals.

10. It is but natural that people do not want to be uprooted from one place for resettlement at another distant place like Eastern Turkistan where conditions are altogether different from the mainland China. To encourage their shifting to the new place, they are provided free passage, accommodation, employment and recreational facilities in Eastern Turkistan. The Communist Party workers and officials keep regular contact with them to solve their problems, if any. Every effort is made by the authorities to make their stay permanent in the new area. As against this, various types of pressures are used



against those who go back to their original places in China. Their parents are asked not to give them shelter. Resident permit, identity card, ration card etc. are refused to them. All these tactics are being applied by the government to force them to go back and settle down in Eastern Turkistan. There are reports that a section of the Han youth resents this forced resettlement. But they cannot do any thing. Opposition to the Party or the government is construed as an 'unpatriotic' act which entails punitive action.

POLITICAL  
POWER

11. There were some very seasoned political leaders among the Turkic Muslims who had worked for Eastern Turkistan Republic(1944-49). Instead of granting the right of self-determination, as earlier promised in 1945, the Communist leader Mao Tse-tung launched a vigorous campaign to eliminate them from the political scene. A number of them were executed while several were victimized within a short period to keep the political field open for the Communist Party.

PARTY:- In Communist countries, the real power lies with the Communist Party. Similar is the case with Eastern Turkistan which is being ruled by a Party Committee of the Chinese Communist Party(CCP). In the Party Committee of Eastern Turkistan, all important posts viz. First Secretary, Second Secretary and Third Secretary are held by the Hans. Only two Turkic Muslims viz. Ismail Amat and Caodanoufu Zhayier are in the Party Committee; the former is Secretary while the latter is Member of a Standing Committee.



ADMINISTRATION:- The Administration of Eastern Turkistan is dominated by the Hans. Most of the political posts are occupied by them. In 1981, the ratio of the Han and the Turkic Muslims in the political hierarchy was as follows:

	<u>Total No. of posts.</u>	<u>Posts held by Hans</u>	<u>Posts held by Turkic Muslims</u>
Ist Political Commissar.	1	1	-
2nd Political Commissar.	1	1	-
Political Commissars.	2	1	1
Dy:Political Commissars.	5	4	1
Director Political Department.	1	1	-
	<u>10</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>2</u>

It will be seen from the above that the Turkic Muslim Natives have been given only 20% of the total posts whereas they are 53% in the population. The posts held by the Hans are far greater than their population(45%). Similarly, about 90% of the important administrative posts are also occupied by them. The remaining ten percent posts are held by the Turkic Muslims but they are powerless. Wherever a Turkic Muslim is a head of the department, his deputy head is essentially a Han. Because of the blessings of the higher echelons of government and the Party, the Han deputy head is empowered to do what a Turkic Muslim head cannot do. This position has made them only figure-heads.

12. Political power is a far cry for the Turkic Muslims; they are not even allowed to talk of their rights. Those



who raise a voice are termed subversionists, counter-revolutionaries, Pan-Islamists and the like. For the last several years, fifteen thousands of them are undergoing hard labour in a camp at Peylo in the Taklamakan Desert. By all definitions, they are political prisoners but the Chinese government is treating them as criminals; because it considers political activity a crime, if done by any body other than the Communist Party. They can be released only if the Party recommends them which is very unusual. Thus they are doomed to remain in the camp for the whole of their life.

ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION

13. The Turkic Muslims have faced untold hardships at the hands of the Communist government. During the 'Great Leap Forward' and 'Commune Campaign', their lands were confiscated, livestocks taken over by the government and markets were closed. The government cared little for their traditional life style. They were driven to communes to work under the Han officials.
14. The task of agricultural development in Eastern Turkistan has been entrusted to the Production & Construction Corpse (PCC). It has 2.2 million members and is a military-type organization with strict discipline. Its 90% officials are Hans who exploit the labour of the native people. In spite of hard work, they are not paid adequate remuneration. If they talk of a fair share, they are sent to hard labour camps. According to a recent report, their labour time has been increased from 8 to 10 hours a day while monthly ration reduced by about 16% viz from 30 catties to 25 catties per head.



15. The industrial sector too is under the control of Production and Construction Corpse. All important posts of this organization such as Commander, Vice Commander, Political Commissar and Deputy Political Commissar have always been held by the Hans. In the lower ranks, their number is regularly being increased. In 1955, they were 66% of the skilled labour force. This percentage rose to 75 in 1965 and in 1973, it further went to 78. It is believed that 90% of the industrial manpower is now composed of Hans.

16. The communication network which is a pre-requisite for all types of development has been neglected by the Communist government. Even big commercial centres like Kashgar in the Southern Region have not been linked by rail/road with the provincial capital. Thus the mineral wealth and their hard work has not helped the Turkic Muslims improve their lot. In fact, they have been reduced to the position of suppressed tenants in their own land with no right to express their plight.

PRESENTATION 17. The composition of Armed Forces of a country reflects  
ARMED FORCES inter alia the degree of confidence posed by the nation in various nationality groups. Over or under-representation of any nationality group in any branch of the Armed Forces becomes a pertinent question-mark. It is therefore quite important to know the representation of the Turkic Muslims in the Military, Air Force, Militia, Navy etc.

18. Since the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, the Chinese government has given the Western frontier regions



a strategic entity as the "Urumqi Military Region"(UMR). The UMR is composed primarily of the Eastern Turkistan territory. It has been divided into three Military Districts; Northern, Southern and the Eastern. The position of Hans and Turkic Muslims in the UMR's Army, Air Force and Militia was as under in 1981:

	<u>Total No. of posts</u>	<u>Posts held by Hans</u>	<u>Posts held by Turkic Muslims</u>
<u>ARMY</u>			
Commander	1	1	-
Ist Deputy Commander	1	1	-
Deputy Commanders	8	7	1
Chief of Staff	1	1	-
Director Logistics Department.	1	1	-
District Commanders	3	3	-
	<u>15</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>1</u>
Lower Ranks.	2,50,000	2,12,500 (85%)	37,500 (15%)
<u>AIR FORCE</u>			
Commander	1	1	-
Base Commanders	3	3	-
Pilots	Not available	Dominating	Only a few taken in 1980-81.

NAVY

The UMR does not include Naval troops as Eastern Turkistan is a land-locked territory.



MILITIA

The UMR has two types of Militia - Ordinary Militia and Armed Militia. A good number of Turkic Muslims have been given training in Ordinary Militia. But very few of them have been taken in the Armed Militia. The Chinese government is perhaps afraid of giving arms into the hands of the Turkic natives of Eastern Turkistan.

19. The Northern Military District of the UMR covers the Ili area from where the movement for Eastern Turkistan Republic had started in 1944. It is significant to note that this Command is entirely composed of the Han soldiers. Similarly, the Army technicians posted on nuclear installations at Lop Nor and electronic Intelligence-gathering equipment are all Hans.

20. From the aforesaid details it shall be observed that representation of Turkic Muslim Natives in higher ranks of the Armed Forces is almost Zero. In the lower ranks also, they are far below the ratio of their population. More appalling aspect of the situation is that those few who have been taken in various branches are not being trusted for their posting at important points; instead they are closely watched by the Han supervisors. This state of affairs does not augur well to defend the area against enemy attack.

SUPPRESSION  
OF RELIGION

21. The Communists consider religion as the main obstacle in the way of Communism. On coming to power in 1949, they looked upon the Turkic Muslim Natives with



this frame of mind and launched vigorous campaigns with particular reference to the Cultural Revolution(1966-76) to eliminate the Islamic faith. This offensive included the following measures:

- (i) Village mosques in Eastern Turkistan were closed.
- (ii) Big mosques and religious institutions in urban areas were closed and used as Party offices, barracks, slaughter houses etc. The properties attached thereto were confiscated.
- (iii) Qazi Courts established in 1933-34 during 'Muslim Republic of Eastern Turkistan' were abolished. In their place, 'Peoples Courts' were established.
- (iv) All copies of the holy Quran, Hadith and other religious works were destroyed.
- (v) Teaching of religious education in schools was stopped.
- (vi) Imams of mosques were arrested, tortured and engaged for cleaning of streest/drains. Some of them were asked to breed pigs and forced to eat pork.

These steps were bound to cause opposition from the Turkic Muslim Natives who had made many sacrifices in the past for their faith. The opposition to the Communist measures was termed as 'unpatriotism' and violence was let loose on them by the Red Guards with the result that 3,60,000 Turkic Muslim Natives were executed, more than 1,00,000 fled to Central Asian Republics (Western Turkistan) and 5,04,000 were driven to 10 hard labour concentration camps. They were released only after undergoing various terms of sentence and "political re-education".



22. These oppressive measures which continued till Mao's death in 1976, however, failed to eliminate the Islamic faith. Instead China incurred bad name both at home and abroad for its anti-religion policies. Taking a note of this situation, the present leadership of the Communist China has relaxed the position. It is reported that a few mosques have been opened. An Islamic Institute has been set up at the provincial capital for training of 'Ulema' appointed by the government. A limited number of copies of the holy Quran have been printed. A 20-member official delegation has started visiting Makka Mukarramah for Haj.

23. The relaxation in restrictions on religion in fact has been necessitated by China's foreign policy considerations. It seeks to gain influence in the Muslim world. Nevertheless, the present leadership is also strongly committed to the Communist ideology and it would like to contain religious activities, as is clear from the following:

- Propagation of religious belief is prohibited to children under the age of 18.
- No body is allowed to use the religion to oppose the Party's leadership or the Communist system.
- The mosques and Imams are under official control.
- As a special case, the Party members in Eastern Turkistan are allowed to participate in religious functions just to keep contact with the masses. Ideologically they are required to be loyal to Communism or leave the party.



The Chinese government refuses permission for Haj to the Muslims on the plea that it has no foreign currency. In actual fact it is reported to have US\$ 14.07 billions foreign exchange reserves. By this denial, the government attempts to suppress their religious spirit.

The latest Constitution of China enforced in 1982 does provide the 'freedom of religious belief'. But the Party apparatus has instructions from the top leadership to remain watchful about religious activities. The Turkic Muslim Natives are closely watched even in religious places by the Party workers. Thus the scope for them to pursue religious activities shall remain limited as long as the Communist Party and the Administration are dominated by the Hans.

LACK OF EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

24. Eastern Turkistan is the largest province of China composed of two distinct regions, Northern and the Southern. Topographical conditions of the area demanded atleast two universities, one in each region. But the Chinese government has provided only one at the provincial capital which is quite distant from the Southern and Western parts of the province. Long distance and poor communication system has handicapped many Turkic Native students to acquire University education. On the top of all this, the existing University is under the control of Han teachers brought from China proper who encourage the Han students to capture more and more seats.

25. The number of Secondary and Primary Schools in Eastern Turkistan viz. 800 and 14000 respectively is also



insufficient. In other provinces of China, the ratio between population and primary schools is 600:1 whereas in Eastern Turkistan it is 934:1. This shows lukewarm attitude of the Communist regime towards the Turkic natives. The inadequacy of educational facilities impels one to remark that the authorities want to keep the Turkic Muslim Natives below the level of political consciousness. Education is the basic requirement for human advancement; the calculated indifference of the Chinese government in this field is deplorable.

DESTRUCTION  
OF CULTURE

26. The Chinese rulers have made every effort to smother the culture of Turkic Muslims with a view to dislinking them from the Islamic heritage. The Uighurs and Kazakhs used Arabic script. It was replaced by the government first by Cyrillic and then Latin alphabet. Communist terminology was intensively introduced to acquaint the new generation with Mao Tse-tung's ideas. During the Cultural Revolution, 360,000 books written in Arabic script were destroyed by the Red Guards. Mixed marriages between the Turkics and the Chinese were encouraged, with the result that now 30 to 40 percent children born as a result of mixed marriages are being registered as the Chinese. The Party and the authorities are continuing propaganda for mixed marriages. The Turkic Muslim Natives had their own traditional tribe/family system. This has been shattered by forcing them to live in communes alongwith the Han population.

It is however reported that now the government has agreed to the reinstatement of the Arabic script as the



official means of writing the Uighur and Kazakh languages. But it is yet to be seen when it takes the practical shape. Certainly the Turkic Muslims shall welcome it as it shall help link them with their cultural heritage.

SOCIAL STATUS

27. By economic deprivation and denying them their political rights, the Communist government of China has placed the Turkic Muslim Natives in a third-rate position. They are addressed by their nick-name 'turbaned' people. The Chinese writers have been showing them in the books as 'barbarians' and justifying every inhuman act with them. In day-to-day life, they are discriminated against the Hans who are given preferential treatment. The Han officials treat the native Turkics as the menials and ask them to show undue respect as if they are their slaves. This social discrimination is likely to have a very adverse effect on the ego of Turkic Muslims who have a history of their gallantry. By adopting such methods the government is brain-washing them to accept domination of the Chinese.

DEMANDS OF  
THE TURKIC  
MUSLIMS

28. The Turkic Muslim Natives have been in over-whelming majority and still they are in majority. Eastern Turkistan has been their homeland for the last several centuries and it has been an independent state on three occasions in the past. On the basis of these historical facts, they demand the right of self-determination. Pending that, their



other demands are:

- a) The Hans resettlement in Eastern Turkistan be stopped and their population reduced.
- b) The Turkic Muslims be given due share in political power; the domination of Hans be ended.
- c) Discrimination between the Han and non-Han population be done away with.
- d) The province be named as 'Eastern Turkistan' or Uighuristan.
- e) The Turkic Muslims be given due remuneration for their work.
- f) Mixed marriages between the Han and non-Han population should not be given official patronage.
- g) Turkic political prisoners be released.
- h) True autonomy be given to the people of Eastern Turkistan in accordance with the 'autonomous status of the region'.

It will be observed that the demands are quite genuine and deserve positive interpretation by the Chinese government in the light of officially declared autonomous status of the province. But the Chinese government is quite indifferent to these with the result that resentment among the Turkic Muslims is increasing. If not heeded to by the Chinese government, it may flare up the existing communal hatred between the Han and non-Han population.

29. The emergence of China as a big power in Asia has set the USSR and USA in a new motion to seek friendship with her to strengthen their respective power politics blocs.

SUPER POWERS  
INTEREST



each one of them is interested in the Turkic Muslims to use them as a leverage against China.

30. To this end, the American-controlled 'Radio Liberty' started broadcasts in Uighur language for the Turkic Muslims some time back. The programme was an overtone to gain influence; it succeeded to find credibility with them. However, this was stopped just a fortnight before the first official visit to America by the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in February 1979. Since then the programme has not been resumed, perhaps due to the on-going contacts between the American and the Chinese government for strategic partnership against the USSR. They have since agreed on industrial and technological cooperation during the Chinese Prime Minister's talks with the US President in Washington (January 10-12, 1984). Reagan's planned visit to Beijing in April 1984 is likely to result in nuclear accord between the two countries. Hence the US may now cease its interest in the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkistan.

31. Soviets are interested in Eastern Turkistan right from the time of Russian Czar, Peter the Great who considered control over this area essential to rule the Asian continent. Their renewed interest in the Turkic Muslims is manifest from the Western reports that it is giving army training to 60,000 Turkic expatriates who fled to Central Asian Republics from Eastern Turkistan during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. As compared to USA, the USSR is in a better position to exploit the situation to its advantage. In the past it has always betrayed the Turkic Muslims. Now too it will not support them to establish independent Eastern Turkistan. There



are however chances it may use them as a lever to (a) stop China from supporting the cause of Afghan Mujahideen and (b) restrain her from establishing strategic cooperation with USA. Alternatively, it may use these expatriates to create disturbances in Eastern Turkistan. In either case, the situation will go in its favour to consolidate position in Afghanistan which would ultimately enable it to make thrust towards Pakistan and then the Middle East. Since the start of border talks between China and the USSR in 1982, the Uighur programmes from Radio Tashkent have been stopped. It indicates that the Soviet Union is not sincere to the cause of the Turkic Muslims; it wants to achieve its own objectives by making false overtones of sympathy with them.



CONCLUSION

33. The officially declared autonomous status of Eastern Turkistan is an illusion. The province is being ruled by the Chinese Central Government through the Communist Party which is dominated by the Hans. All key figures in the Provincial Government are Hans brought from China proper. None of them is a native of Eastern Turkistan. The Turkic Muslims who are original inhabitants of the area and form a majority have not been given their due rights, much less political power.
34. The resettlement of Hans in Eastern Turkistan is a conspiracy against the Turkic Muslim Natives. By this, the Chinese government may succeed to reduce their majority but ultimately it shall be confronted with law and order situation. The two communities are altogether different from each other in faith, race, language, culture and outlook towards life. There have been clashes between them and the situation is likely to flare up if this resettlement is not stopped. Communal disturbances shall result in instability of the area and threat to its security which will benefit only the foreign hostile forces.
35. The religious policy has been slightly relaxed by the present leadership of China due to the fact that religion in Eastern Turkistan has a mass character and it could not be suppressed despite all types of oppression. Hence the present government is somewhat accommodative to the religion. The basic attitude of the Chinese government



is to remain unaltered because of its being the Communist after all. Thus there is need to follow all developments which directly or indirectly have a bearing on the religious activities of the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkistan.

36. The US interest in Eastern Turkistan or the Turkic Muslims is only remote. The scope of its efforts to win over them is also limited. As against this, the USSR is in a better position on account of close proximity to exploit the situation to its own ends. To the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkistan, it has never been sincere in the past. It shall not at all like an independent Muslim Eastern Turkistan emerge on its front-door. If the Turkic expatriates take a row with the Chinese government with the Soviet support, it shall only cause fresh oppression of the Muslims in Eastern Turkistan without any gains to them.

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