

THE POLITICAL EFFECTS OF NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE  
IN KYRGYZSTAN, 1991-2005

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "**Political Effects of North-South Divide in Kyrgyzstan, 1991-2005**" submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other

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## CERTIFICATE

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CEC	Central Election Commission
CRS	Congressional Research Service
ENEMO	European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations
ETG	Eurasia Transition Group
FAO/WFP	Food and Agriculture Organization/ World Food Program
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRP	Gross Regional Product
HDI	Human Development Index
ICG	International Crisis Group
IEOM	International Election Observation Mission
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
INGOs	International Non-governmental Organizations



IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks
LSMS	Living Standards Measurement Study
NHDR	National Human Development Report
OSCE/ODIHR	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe / Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
PMK	People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
TI	Transparency International
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republic
UNDP	United Nations Development Report

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Kyrgyzstan is a deeply divided country. A strong internal fault line runs across the country and it has been robust enough to undermine the process of both nation building and building of national identity in Kyrgyzstan. This internal conflict line is regional in character and has informally divided the country into two halves – the north and the south. The origin of this divide can be traced back to the policies of both Russian empire of 19<sup>th</sup> century and Soviet empire of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, this divide is not only territorial in nature. It correlates with the tribal and clan based divisions of Kyrgyzstan, which further complicate the nature of the conflict between the two regions.

There is a continued mistrust between the two halves and each perceives the other as a competitor in gaining greater control over the country's resources. This remains a matter of concern for the politicians and scholars alike as it presents a threat to the very peace and stability of the country. Temirkulov (2004:94) agrees and says that the problem is widespread and touches on all-important aspects of social and political life, complicating both the development process as well as the state building in Kyrgyzstan. He considers the Aksy shootings of 2002<sup>1</sup> as the clear manifestation of the rivalry between the northern and southern regional tribal groupings. The Tulip Revolution of 2005 is another such example when this rivalry between the two regions over the sharing of power and other scarce resources boiled into a widespread protest.

The apparent misgiving between the two regions has an economic basis too. The Soviet rule led to the setting up of a number of industries in the north Kyrgyzstan, which made its economic profile different from that of southern Kyrgyzstan. While the southern population remained largely dependent on agriculture as a means for

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<sup>1</sup> Five Kyrgyz citizens were killed and several were injured in a police fire in Aksy locality of Jalal-Abad province while they were holding anti-government protests and demanding release of a Azimbek Beknazarov, a politician belonging to south Kyrgyzstan.

livelihood, the north became more industrialized and developed. The north prospered more under the Akaev's rule as well, as there was greater flow of resources and investment in the north as compared to the south. Disparity in economic development of the two regions thus became the main bone of contention, as poverty and unemployment were more rampant in the south while north was seen as more prosperous in comparison to the former. This was apparent during the Soviet rule also.

*“The historical divergence between the north and the south of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic was increased further by differences in economical development, creating a situation of rivalry between the two regions.”* (Temirkoulov 2004:95)

After independence, the severe downturn in the economy accompanied by a scarcity of resources led to further aggravation of the conflict between the north and south as there was a greater competition between the two for gaining greater control over the resources. The 'capture' of power by the northern clans, for almost 15 years after independence, also ensured that northern population received more benefits than the southern half.

Growth of corruption and nepotism in the political and business circles has been an inevitable fallout of this rivalry as elites, in order to maintain their own support base, favoured members of their own clan and region over people from the other regions and clan groupings in both the distribution of resources and political appointments.

*“Typically, representatives of a president's region are expected to do well during his time in office, while the others are aware that their chances will be limited.”* (Matveeva 2010:2)

This led to skewed development in the country as instead of a national orientation, parochial mindsets guided by traditional linkages dictated decision-making and hampered the development of genuine democratic institutions in the country.

While the cultural and economic differences between the two regions may sometimes appear as quite stark to an outside observer, the political differences are also equally apparent. In fact regional consideration is such an important variable in the Kyrgyzstan's politics that the motives of the political actors can be understood better if their actions are analyzed through the prism of their regional affiliations. Regional considerations also figure dominantly within the masses while choosing their

representatives. Radicalization of Islam in the country has been another serious fallout of the economic and political policies of the Akaev administration. This study undertaken here will especially focus on the impact of the north south divide on the politics of the Kyrgyzstan. The scope of this dissertation will be limited to the Akaev's reign i.e. from 1991 to 2005.

This particular chapter will make an attempt to lay bare the differences that constitute the north-south divide in Kyrgyzstan. Secondly, for a more nuanced understanding of this conflict, this chapter will also analyze the problem from a historical perspective and find out the factors that were responsible for the deepening of this divide. In addition to this, the chapter will also examine the correlation between the geographical divide and the tribal/clan divide as the two can't really be separated in the case of Kyrgyzstan.

## **THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE**

The regional fault line in Kyrgyzstan has been a recurring source of conflict between the people of the two regions. Geographical features of the country have reinforced this divide, which has both cultural and economic dimensions and also manifests constantly in the political arena. The various aspects of the north-south divide i.e. geographic, economic, social and political will be discussed in the following section. Kyrgyzstan is a landlocked country in the Central Asian region, which shares borders with Kazakhstan in the north, Uzbekistan in the west, Tajikistan to the south-west and China to the east. The Tien Shan range, covering nearly 80 per cent of the territory, divides this beautiful mountainous country into northern and southern halves with limited communication between the two. The presence of only one road link, the Bishkek-Osh road, further complicates the problem because, as Matveeva (2010:79) says, it precludes intense social interactions between the two halves.

*“In a certain respect, the physical features of the country divide it into northern and southern sections that are separated by extremely high mountains and few transportation routes.”* (Gleason et al 2008:45)

*“Towering, and often impassable, mountains have severely restricted communication and commerce between the ethnic Kyrgyz. Because of limited contacts, the Kyrgyz*

*have developed fierce regional identities.*” (Huskey 1997:243)

The northern half of Kyrgyzstan comprises of the Chui valley with capital Bishkek, Talas, Issyk-Kul and Naryn oblasts, while Osh, Batken and Jalal-Abad provinces form the southern half.

Another significant impact of the geographical features has been on the nature of occupation in Kyrgyzstan, which has varied according to the variations in the topographical features that range from valleys, ravines, mountain plateaus to high mountain highlands. Gleason (2008:45) accepts the vital role of geography in influencing the occupational choices across Kyrgyzstan and says that the livelihood of the people had been historically influenced by the mountainous and rugged topography found in the country. For example, the presence of the fertile Fergana valley with ample water supply in the south of the country led to the early development of farming techniques and the eventual settlement of population in the region. Thus, settled agrarian population became a defining feature of southern Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, nomadic tribes chose to rove in the highlands of the north and accordingly practiced animal husbandry and seasonal herding. Thus while the settled tribes emerged in and around the Fergana valley, the nomadic tribes became dominant in the north of Kyrgyzstan.

So, the high mountain ranges have not only divided the country into two halves, which has made communication and contact difficult between the two sets of populations but has also led to the development of different patterns of livelihood in different regions of Kyrgyzstan. The latter acts as the first point of divergence between the two regions.

### ***Social Difference***

Along with the regionalism based on the geographical divide, “regionalism within the ethnic groups” (Weyermann 2005:27) is also present in Kyrgyzstan. Fletcher and Sergeyev (2002:253) say that the ethnic dimension has further compounded the regional differences in Kyrgyzstan. At the time of independence, while the Kyrgyz constituted 52 per cent of the population, Russians were around 22 per cent and Uzbeks formed nearly 13 per cent of the population (Elebayeva et al 2000:343).

While the Russians formed a substantial portion of the population in the north, the Uzbeks were mostly settled in the southern provinces of the country. In addition to this, the inter-ethnic relations especially between the ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks had always been tense in the country. On the eve of independence, in 1990, bloody ethnic conflict broke out between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the southern province of Osh over a land dispute, which led to the death of hundreds of people. This paved the way for tense inter-ethnic relations between the two even after the independence although in Akaev's reign the relations remained devoid of any large-scale conflict.

On the other hand, relations with the Russian minority had always been peaceful in nature. In fact many Kyrgyz attribute the relative economic and social progress of the country to the greater Russian influence (Weyermann 2005:30). This positive perception of the Russian influence and the simultaneous negative portrayal of the Uzbek minorities is another point of divergence between the north and the south.

According to the popular perception, the people in the northern oblasts are considered to be more Russianized and westernized than the people of the southern oblasts, who have remained more traditional and religious in nature. The northern population is considered to be both linguistically and culturally more Russified than the south (Anderson, 1999). Lewis (2010:46) agreeing with the more Russified character of the northern population says that it is the result of greater contact of the north with the expanding Russia in the nineteenth century and more integration with Soviet's educational and political structures in the twentieth century.

The Soviet rule did modify the ethnic makeup of the country. During the 70 long years of Soviet rule, large numbers of Europeans, primarily Slavs and Germans, later joined by Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Chechens, Georgians and other ethnic groups, either migrated or were exiled to Kyrgyzstan (Dukenbaev and Hansen 2003:56). This great influx was meant to satisfy the huge demand of the newly setup industries of Kyrgyzstan for a skilled labour force. Many of these migrants settled down in the north of the country due to concentration of industries in the northern provinces. This changed the demographic profile of the country as the Slavs came to dominate in the northern provinces of Kyrgyzstan. At independence, Slavs formed almost a quarter of the Kyrgyzstan's population (Dukenbaev and Hansen 2003:21).

*“The level of linguistic and cultural Russification in the north has led to the claim that the Russified northerners are no longer “real” Kyrgyz”* (Dukenbaev and Hansen 2003:21).

While the north had more marked influences from Russia, the south was incorporated within the traditions of Uzbekistan due to the longstanding presence of large Uzbek population in the Fergana valley. The influence of Islam was also greater in the southern provinces as compared to the northern population (Anderson and Pomfret 2004:6). Olcott (2005:108) says that not only the Uzbeks settled in southern provinces were more observant than the northern populations but also the Kyrgyz in the south were more observant than the northerners. The greater presence of religiosity in the southern population along with economic hardships and high unemployment rates has been cited as one of the reasons for the growth of radical Islamist groups here.

*“Radical Islamic groups like the Hizb ul-Tahrir are gaining members much more quickly in the south (among Kyrgyz as well Uzbeks) than they are in the north.”* Olcott (2005:108)

After independence, attempts were made not only to create a national identity but also to accord protection of the ethnic minorities. Akaev promoted the idea of “Kyrgyzstan is our common home” to make the minorities feel included. Melvin (2011:9) says that despite the positive discourse of initial years and the protection accorded to the minorities, the issues at the heart of the ethnic problems remained unresolved and genuine integration of ethnic communities could not take place.

*“There has always been a great difference in opinions, both culturally and politically, between Northern and Southern Kirgizians. The Kirgizians from the north accuse the southerners of acting and behaving like Uzbeks (Uzbeks have historically been the main enemies of the Kirgizians). The Southern Kirgizians on the other side, accuse the northerners of behaving like Russians and taking up a dominant role in politics.”*(Hvoslef 1995).

Melvin says that Akaev cultivated the support of the Uzbek minority to his rule as he enjoyed little support in the south of the country. This was done to block the rise of any powerful opposition to his government from the south, which had been the political center during the late Soviet rule. Melvin says that through this not only Akaev thwarted attempts by southern Kyrgyz leaders to challenge his rule but also controlled rise of any powerful or unified Uzbek oppositional group.



*“In this way, interethnic relations in the south became interlinked with the struggle for power in Kyrgyzstan through an interaction of north-south, rural-urban, patronage (clan) and ethno-political elements.”* (Melvin 2011:10)

Apart from the ethnic differences in the country, clan based divisions also reflect the north-south divide of the country. Since the clans in Kyrgyzstan have had territorial affiliations so clan groups have often been identified according to their regional linkages. Further, there has been a competition between the regional clan groups over greater access of the country’s resources, which only increased after the independence. This aspect will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

### ***Economic Difference***

The dictates of geography made the people in southern Kyrgyzstan opt for a settled way of life and agriculture became the main source of livelihood for them. On the other hand, people in the higher reaches remained nomadic pastoralists who preferred moving around in high pastures and lower valleys. Thus, the nomadic lifestyle came to dominate in the north of Kyrgyzstan. Although this distinction between the nomadic and settled population got blurred with the Soviet intervention in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the nomads were forcibly settled down as part of former’s policy (Graubner 2005:6), this historic distinction continued to hold sway over people’s mind. Identities have continued to revolve in Kyrgyzstan around this historical distinction between the sedentary and nomadic populations. As a result of this, interaction between the two has been affected negatively and marred by mutual suspicion.

*“The delineation between nomadic and settled people continues to be real in the minds of Central Asians and represents the primary cultural fault-line in the region.”* (Eurasia Transition Group 2010).

Roberts (2010) points out that before the Soviet rule was established in the region the antagonistic socio-economic interaction between the nomads and the sedentary population was a constant source of friction.

*“Prior to Soviet power, nomads and sedentary populations most often encountered each other at market and on the trade routes between oases. In the market, nomadic groups found themselves at a disadvantage vis-à-vis sedentary people, who were far more experienced traders. Between oases in nomadic herding areas, sedentary people*

*were at a disadvantage and their trading caravans were often the victims of raids by nomadic groups.” (Roberts 2010:4)*

The economic disparity between the two regions continued to grow both under the Soviet rule and after the independence, which further led to the aggravation of this mutual distrust between the two regions. The coming in of the Soviet Union in 1920s changed the economic profile of northern Kyrgyzstan significantly. Area in and around Bishkek witnessed a period of heavy industrialization and modernization while southwestern half around the Fergana valley remained largely agrarian in nature. The population got divided functionally as well with mostly farmers and herders in the south and industrial workers more dominant in the north in keeping with the nomadic past of the latter and the sedentary settlements of the former. Concentration of capital, industry and investment in the Chui valley and Bishkek brought prosperity while the southern half continued to witness rampant poverty and unemployment, even after independence. Bishkek emerged as the technological, educational and administrative center of the country while the southern oblasts felt marginalized in the developmental process of the country. The presence of this economic disparity and different levels of development in the two regions reinforced the rivalry between the clans of both the regions (Berdikeeva 2006:6).

The situation in the south is particularly problematic due to high density of population along with overdependence on agriculture. Due to this, the competition over arable land has become more acute with time. Further, although South is considered to be more agrarian in nature than the north, the FAO/WFP (Food and Agriculture Organization / World Food Program) report (2010), notes that manual farming practices were still common in south. On the other hand, the main farm operations had been almost entirely mechanized in the northern part of the country. 2011 UNDP (United Nations Development Report) points out that agriculture in country's southern regions was not only low-income but also dominated by low-productivity subsistence activities and this explained the increasing share of northern regions in the country's agricultural output which was 56 per cent in 2009.

The socioeconomic indicators released by many international organizations like UNDP and ILO (International Labour Organization) also highlight the difference between the two regions. All through the Akaev rule, the northern provinces

especially Chui and Bishkek fared much better than their southern counterparts in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI) released by UNDP. Poverty and unemployment rates have also been much worse in the southern oblasts than in the northern oblasts. High population density is another point of problem in southern Kyrgyzstan. According to the 2009 census, the three southern Oblasts (Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken) were the most densely populated, accounting for 43 per cent of the total population and so competition over natural resources such as land, water and pastures was higher in the South (FAO/WFP 2010). The FAO/WFP report also notes that the food security situation was worst in Osh while the best food security situation existed in Bishkek town and Chui Oblast. The socio economic comparison between the two halves will be discussed in much detail in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter.

### ***Political Difference***

The north south divide has always been relevant in the politics of the country. Many studies have been conducted to not only understand the impact of regional tendencies and outlook on the politics of the country but also how the politics has aggravated the divide further. The economic disparity between the southern and northern oblasts have been a direct outcome of the political disparity between the two regions as capture of power by leaders of one region automatically led to the marginalization of the other. During Akaev rule Bishkek emerged as the fulcrum of political and economic power of the country. It was not only because the seat of the government was based in Bishkek but also because the northerners were favoured over the southerners in important political and economic appointments. Lewis (2010:46) agrees with this and says that under Akaev, Bishkek became the center of politics and business and the southern regions were relatively ignored. Luong (2002) says that southern Kyrgyz perceived an unfair monopolization of central government offices by northern elites, and thus pursued an uncompromising policy with the central government during the period of Akaev.

The tendency in the elite circle in Kyrgyzstan has been to use to their clan regional networks to create a loyal support base that could be leveraged in times of crisis. Even Akaev, in order to maintain his hold over power, indulged in nepotism by appointing and promoting his own regional clan members to important political and bureaucratic positions. This led to the further strengthening of the patron client

networks as the government officials preferred to appoint their own people, regional clan member to create and maintain a loyal support base. This led to a capture of political and economic power by the northern clan groups in first 15 years after independence, which came at the expense of the southern clans who felt politically marginalized. The latter held this grievance against the northerners all along the rule of Akaev and time and again demanded appropriate representation for themselves in the government circles.

*“Attempts of the northern political elite to eliminate competition and maintain control over resources and the distribution of power in the country met resentment from southern clans, which to this day seek better representation in the government.”* (Berdikeeva 2006:6)

This sidelining of the southern population by an administration largely run by northerners became such a source constant source of discontent that it finally found an expression in the Tulip revolution of 2005 when people in the southern provinces rose in protests against the Akaev administration.

### ***Is the regional identity distinct in Kyrgyzstan?***

The north south division is so often discussed in the political writings on the country that it often almost assumes a formal character. The question then worth analyzing here is whether the identities in the two regions are really so specific and the economic, political and social differences so much distinct that a clear-cut demarcation line could be drawn between the two regions? Dukenbaev and Hansen (2003:24-25) disagree with this. The authors point out that much part of the Naryn, a northern province, lies south of the Jalal-Abad province and has been one of the poorest regions of Kyrgyzstan because of rampant poverty and lack of resources. Further in the political sphere, Naryn has been “shut out of the political power equation as any other “southern” province”. They further point out that Issyk-Kul has also not been a very important political player despite its location in north. Also, terming the entire Chui and Talas province as economically powerful than the southern provinces would be inaccurate as wealth has generally been concentrated in and around Bishkek. However, despite the comparative prosperity of Bishkek, urban poverty is also a matter of concern here.

*“The capital, Bishkek, contains most of the people in the country who have money and, therefore, gives the impression of being relatively well off. Perhaps it is, but there is also immense and grinding urban poverty. Beggars are ubiquitous. Many are the elderly and children and the problem of homelessness in the capital is obvious.”* (Dukenbaev and Hansen 2003:25)

Thus, to paint the picture of all north provinces as economically well off than the south would be an anomaly. Dukenbaev and Hansen add that so a “simplistic rich north/poor south dichotomy should be avoided” in case of Kyrgyzstan as many differences in both economic and political terms exist within both the north and south oblasts. Berdikееva (2006:9) also supports this viewpoint and says that political loyalty and allegiances are also present among the various clans within the regions. Thus, a very strict categorization and eventual stereotyping of north and south oblasts should be avoided.

In the next section the clan identities in Kyrgyzstan will be analyzed. It is essential to do so as the regional divisions in Kyrgyzstan also correlate with clan-based divisions here which also reinforce each other.

## **CLAN IDENTITIES IN KYRGYZSTAN**

Kyrgyzstan along with other Central Asians states has been a very traditional society, where the clan based or tribal based identities have influenced the lives of the people to a very large degree. Tribal, clan and family ties and loyalties have always been important in the Kyrgyz society. Even the Russian rule of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent Soviet rule of 70 years could not dislodge the position these ties held in the lives of Kyrgyz people. To understand the politics of the region it is important to understand the clan divisions within Kyrgyzstan and how they correlate with the regional division of the country.

### ***What is a clan?***

Collins (2003, 2004) describes clan as an informal social organization in which kinship or fictive kinship is the core unifying bond among the group members. Collins (2004:231) says that since clans form an informal organization so there are certain informal and unwritten “rules, norms and practices” which regulate a member’s behavior in the public and private life. In addition to this, since clan

membership is an important source of identity in Kyrgyzstan it has led to the formation of “identity networks” which link members both horizontally and vertically in kin based relations (Collins 2003:174). Collins further adds that blood relations and marriages form the bedrock of these clan relations as from these actual and fictive kinship ties have emerged that link the elites with the non-elites.

In Kyrgyzstan, the clan-based divisions also correlate with the regional divide as the clans are often regionally based as, suggested by Collins (2003:174), localism helps in maintaining ties. However, she adds that since clans are based on genealogical relationship they can also endure migration.

Tribes and clans are also closely related to each other. Hvoslef (1997:99) says that clans that make up a tribe are related to each other through common ancestors and they feel that their roots are located in a certain region. A tribe branches off into sub-tribes and sub-sub-tribes all the way down to the level of a clan.

*“Tribes are conglomerations of a large number of inter-related clans which have same patrilineal descent”*(Collins 2004:234).

### ***Clan Structure in Kyrgyzstan***

Kinship-based groupings have always been very significant in the Kyrgyzstani life. The very name ‘Kyrgyz’ is a reference to the forty clans of Manas, which were united to form the country. Sometimes the traditional tem ‘avlod’ and Russian term ‘rod’ or ‘clan’ is also used by the Kyrgyz to refer to their clan identities. Lydia (2003:133) says that clan identities have always been very strong in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz men frequently wear traditional black on white felt headgear to inform others of their clan status and degree of respect that should be accorded to them.

*“The present social structure of Kyrgyzstan is based on 40 tribal unions called “Uruks” which are based on kinship relations. Each tribal union is further subdivided into different kin subdivisions known as “tops” which are based on “imaginary and not real, blood lines.”* (Temirkoulov 2004:94).

The Kyrgyz society has three tribal unions/clan groupings known as '*Ong kanat*' which is the right wing and also called as Otuz Uul, '*Sol kanat*' or Arkalyk which is the left wing, and '*Ichkilik*' which is neither. Curtis (1996) says that Kyrgyz identity in public and private life is determined primarily by membership in one of three clan groupings known as "wings" and secondarily by membership in a particular clan within a wing.

Temirkoulov says that these tribal groupings are also associated with the informal regional divide in the context of Kyrgyzstan and adds that historically each tribal union had its own territory and political sovereignty. The Sol kanat is based in north and west of the country and has 7 clans under its wing. These northern clans include Sary Bagysh, Kushchu, Solto, Tynay, Sayak, and Saru tribes that fought with each other at one time or other for gaining political influence. The Buguu clan which were politically dominant in the Kyrgyz republic during the Soviet era and "provided the first administrators" (Curtis 1996), was replaced by the Sary Bagysh clan in the 1930s when Stalin's purges removed many of their leaders. President Askar Akaev is also from Sary Bagysh tribe.

On the other hand, both Ichkilik and Ong form the southern tribes. The Ichkilik tribe includes several clans but not all of them are ethnic Kyrgyz in origin, for instance Kapychaks. However, the Kapychaks, with time, have assimilated with the ethnic Kyrgyz. This 'wing' resides in Osh, Batken and parts of Jalal -Abad provinces in the south.

The Ong group has only one clan, the Adygine, who is considered to be the most genuinely Kyrgyz clan because of their legendary status (Curtis 1996). Ong are geographically based in Jalal-Abad and Osh provinces of southern Kyrgyzstan.

These clan divisions are very strong in Kyrgyzstan and continue to play an important role in the forming the identity of a Kyrgyz. Clans form an important basis for loyalty as well. Lydia (2003:133) says that Kyrgyz are very conscious of their clan membership while competing for social and economic advantages. She adds that support for clan members has especially been strong in the northern provinces. Collins (2004:232) says that it is not easy for an individual to enter or leave a clan as

easily as one can leave a voluntary organization as although the clan boundaries may not be fixed but they are still difficult to permeate. Apart from these tribal and regional ties, other pre-Soviet Kyrgyz traditional principles such as 'adat' and 'tuuganchylyk' (kinship) also provide basis for clan solidarity (Berdikeeva 2006:6) and still hold relevance in the Kyrgyz society. Adat is system of strict social control, which requires respect for elders and ancestors. Tuuganchylyk, on the other hand, is one of the basic postulates of adat and requires extreme clan loyalties and thus has been a source of solidarity between clan members.

*“The social significance of this traditional solidarity has always been very important. The current solidarity among members of different clans can be partially explained by this concept. Relatives and kin maintain solidarity in their everyday life, showing that this rule has been internalized.”* (Temirkoulov 2004:96)

Temirkoulov says that the principle of Tuuganchylyk which was elaborated during centuries of constant threats and warfare can be invoked during a crisis situation as it can lead to fast mobilization of masses which was evident in the 2002 Aksy movement.

Later on, Temirkoulov says, with the introduction of Islam in the region between 9<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Islamic idea of 'achabyya', a solidarity group based on family and personal relations, further strengthened Kyrgyz tribal affiliation, loyalty and allegiance. Aksakal court or the court of the elderly in another traditional structure, which is still very prevalent in the Kyrgyz society and are many a times used to settle disputes. The aksakals have also been incorporated into the state structure and represent the lowest level of judiciary. Thus, traditional structures and group solidarity and loyalty continue to remain valid in present Kyrgyz society.

*“According to adat, the decision making role is given to aksakals (white beards) - elders of the community, which take decisions within a council.”* (Temirkoulov 2004:97)

## **ORIGIN OF THE NORTH-SOUTH DIFFERENCE**

The creation of identities based on regional divisions has its roots in the history and is not of a recent creation. The Akaev rule may have strengthened the divide and used it



for selfish purposes but the regional identities existed much before the creation of independent Kyrgyzstan.

*“The north-south divide was an important political and economic reality that had developed over centuries, but had been particularly emphasized by the differing impacts of Russian (and Soviet) colonial rule in the north and south.” (Lewis 2010:46)*

### ***The Russian Period***

The Kyrgyz were predominantly nomadic tribes that migrated with their herds for pasturelands and settled into the current territory of Kyrgyz Republic during 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the mid-eighteenth century, the present tribal and social structure started to take form. Aksakal (a ‘white beard’ or elder) ruled different tribal-clan units with the advice of the tribal council and ‘manap’ administered smaller units (US Department of Justice 1993:2). Huskey (1995:2) says that by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Kyrgyz started developing an ethnic consciousness but did not translate into rise of national consciousness as loyalties in the Kyrgyz society still lay with the family, clan and the tribe. In early 19<sup>th</sup> century the southern part came under the control of the Kokand khanate and Kyrgyz lost to the Kokand all four wars during 1845 to 1873.

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the Russian army began expanding in the region. During this time the northern tribes pledged their loyalty to the Russian empire as a means to avoid aggression from the Kokand Khanate. The southern clans, however, remained loyal to the Kokand Khanate and revolted against the expansion of Russia in their region. While the northern half of the Republic officially became part of Russian empire in 1855, the southern part got incorporated into Russia after almost 20 years later. This planted the seeds of conflict between the two regions as they fought from different camps. Luong (2002:76) adds that although the southern region got annexed into the Russian empire but it didn’t lead to the administrative integration of the northern and southern halves. Thus, the two remained as separate entities. Graubner (2005) adds that since the northern clans came in contact with the Russians much earlier than the southern clans, they occupied higher positions in Kyrgyzstan after it was incorporated into Russian empire. The clans from the Talas region especially

enjoyed a predominant position. Fletcher and Sergeyev (2002:253) say that overt tensions between the clans of the two regions became apparent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century itself with the north playing more dominant role in the political life than the southern clans. Graubner adds that the Russian imperialism also brought literacy in Russian language to the northern region, which had a direct bearing on the recorded history.

*“This lead to the somewhat bizarre situation that all national heroes around which national identity could be focused are actually from the North, although before the Russians arrived the South had, due to its more frequent contacts with traders and caravans along the Silk Route, a much more richer and more dominant culture.”* (Graubner 2007:7)

Temirkoulov (2004:94) holds two factors as responsible for the creation of cultural and economical differences between the north and the south during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The first factor was sedentarization under which the nomadic northern tribes were made to settle down. Secondly, under the Russians *volosts* (small rural districts) were created as a unit in administrative-territorial system. This territorialized the tribal allegiances as tribes were now connected to piece of land. Further, Temirkuolov says that the *volosts* consisted of mixed clans in order to avoid development of any rivalry between the *manapstvo* (traditional Kyrgyz administration) and the Russian administrators. Thus, a number of different clans came to be based on same territory, which on one hand weakened inter-clan rivalries and on the other hand strengthened the affiliation of clans with their land. This is how Russian policies changed the system of clan and tribal loyalties into a system of territorial loyalty.

In the 1920s southern tribes again resisted the growth of Soviet empire in the region in the form of *‘basmachi’*, which was Kyrgyz part of the Central Asian resistance movement. Temirkuolov says that the cultural divergence between northern and southern Kyrgyz was reinforced by the fact the two fought on opposing sides.

*“In fact, one of the subtextual political accusations used by southerners against the northern clans is that it was several of them whose collaboration with the Russian Empire in the mid-nineteenth century allowed the Russians a foothold in the first place.”* (Dukenbaev and Hansen 2003:12)

### ***The Soviet Period***

Following a brief period of independence after the 1917 Revolution, Soviet rule was

established in the region in 1919, and the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast was created within the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic. Matveeva (2010:1) says that the term 'Kara-Kyrgyz' (black Kyrgyz) was used until the mid-1920s by the Soviets to distinguish the modern Kyrgyz from the Kazakhs, as both belonged to the same ethnic and linguistic Kyrgyz group. In 1936, the territory of Kyrgyzstan achieved the status of a Union Republic.

The regional division, which had its origin both in geography as well as the long Russian rule, got further reinforced during the 70 years of Soviet rule.

*"The Soviet system had been aware of historical rivalry between northern and southern Kyrgyz, and ruled Kyrgyzstan in such a way that neither group fared too badly."* Matveeva (2010:2)

Matveeva adds that the political appointments were made in a manner that ensured equal representation to both the regions. She cites the example of the position of the Communist Party First Secretary who was the chief executive of a Union Republic, which rotated between the two halves. Many scholars, however, argue that while the Soviet rulers were mindful of the regional cleavages that were existing in many of the Central Asian societies, they followed many such policies which both intentionally and unintentionally, strengthened instead of weakening the divide.

Luong (2002) says that a Soviet brand of 'regionalism' was exercised in Central Asian states including Kyrgyzstan which on the one hand strengthened regional identities and on the other hand, weakened traditional institutions like tribes and religion. The Soviet exercise of administrative territorial divisions within the republics also territorialized the traditional identities as they were "deliberately drawn according to real and perceived distinctions among the titular nationalities".

*"The Soviet administrative territorial structure in Central Asia fostered regional rather than national cleavages due to its coincidence with very weak (or nonexistent) national identities and very strong (preexisting) local identities. The latter was thus systematically, and perhaps unwittingly, reinforced at the expense of the former."* (Luong 2002:64)

The Soviets were also responsible for maintaining regional differences as well as creating divisions to hold on to power. The territorial units came to represent systems of patronage centering around clans and regions. Luong (2002:63) adds that the

Soviet policies and institutions in Central Asia had two effects. First of all it created and politicized regional identities by building interests and capacities based on regional affiliation, and secondly, it promoted these regional identities while minimizing or even excluding sociopolitical cleavages based on tribe, religion or nationality.

Patnaik (2006:154) agreeing with Luong's idea of Soviet promoted regionalism says that Soviet administrative division within each republic along with cadre recruitment and placement policy institutionalized and politicized the regional division. He further adds that a competitive atmosphere for economic and political resources was created between the regions (oblasts), which fuelled the cleavage further.

Further, the economic policies of the Soviet Union had an important role to play here. Regional administrative heads were given economic and political power in exchange for toeing the official Soviet line and policies. Further, the Central Asian republics were the major supplier of agricultural products to the Centre. The Soviet policy placed agriculture under the complete control of regional heads and republic leaders merely acted as a mediator between Moscow and the regional heads (Luong 2002:69). On the basis of their performance and the ability to fulfill Moscow's demand some regions grew more important than others, within the Republic and thus gained more importance in both national politics and economics. Luong terms this as the Soviet system of "economic specialization".

*"The Soviet system of economic specialization also reinforced regional rather than national ethno-political cleavages in Central Asia, both by contributing to the economic authority of obkom first secretaries and fostering economic competition between regions within the republics."* (Luong 2002:67)

Luong says that economic specialization within the republics not only led to an intense rivalry between regional leaders of different oblasts but also a close relationship among regional leaders in same oblasts.

Also, Luong argues that division of labour on ethnic lines within the republic also led to the growth of patronage networks in the Central Asian countries. While the skilled Russian and Slavs dominated the industrial labour force, members of titular nationality were confined to unskilled jobs in agricultural sector. Huskey (1999:814) says that there was a Balkanization of the economy in Kyrgyzstan as Slavs assumed a

dominant role in the urban-based industrial sector which limited the access of ethnic Kyrgyz to the jobs in the modern industrial sector. As a consequence of this, patron-client relations got formed in Kyrgyzstan between the regional leaders and the agrarian population as the former emerged as representatives of the latter. Patnaik says that the non-titular groups were not affected by this 'regionalism' and thus there was a large sphere in which traditional loyalties could be used for material benefits.

The national cadre policy also 'inadvertently' led to politicization of regional cleavages (Luong). The policy of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) was promoted by Soviets to promote indigenous cadre in national republics. However, the method of selection of cadre was biased in the favour of regions that either had shown strong support to the Bolsheviks during the revolution or were economically dominant with huge agricultural potential. Luong argues that since then, political and economic power at the republic level continuously rotated between leaders of different regions. Luong contends that region instead of tribes became the most important political category for the elites as under the Soviet system the status and performance of oblasts decided the career growth of the regional leaders. Limited opportunities for promotion to serve in Moscow or outside the titular republic also motivated the regional leaders to remain in their respective regions and cultivate a loyal support base through patron-client networks.

Collins (2003, 2004) accepts the role of Soviet policy in territorializing the traditional affinities but disagrees with Luong's argument that it weakened the traditional identities. In fact Collin argues that Soviet rule led to further strengthening of the clan and tribal based loyalty structure in the Central Asian societies. Collins (2003:176) argues that the Soviet regime had a visible homogenizing effect on clans' social structure. By settling down the nomadic clans and collectivizing agriculture the Soviets preserved and fostered kin and clan villages and increased clans' territorial attachments. Collins (2002:142) says that even though the Soviet Union tried to remove these traditional clans and tribal institutions as they were seen as a threat to Soviet power and ideology, by terming them as 'pre-modern', the idea and sense of loyalty behind these clans proved to be too enduring to eliminate. Further, the policy of collectivization tried breaking the tribes and ending the clan pastoral ties. However, Collins (2004) says that this policy also inadvertently created institutions that clan

networks could use to persist. While on the one hand, the collective farms `kept the extended kin unit intact; on the other hand a patronage system evolved where kin based appointments became common. Collins (2002) says that the clan members also learned to use Soviet affirmative-action policies for titular nationalities as channels for promoting kinfolk within the Soviet system. Thus clans remained as an important feature in the Kyrgyz society. The perestroika and glasnost policies launched by the Gorbachev again gave a boost to clan/tribal identities. As the party structure eroded in later period of Soviet rule, Collins says, the clans started asserting themselves against Moscow as the former had to suffer a lot when Russians were put in economically and politically important positions during the Gorbachev rule. The ethnic unrest and riots of 1989–90 were used by clans to delegitimize Gorbachev’s appointees and put forward their own candidates for the high post of republic first secretary.

Berdikeeva (2006) has given another perspective on the continued importance of regional clan identities in Kyrgyzstan. She says that part of the reason for the continued importance of clans and regional divisions in Kyrgyzstan lies in the fact that the nation did not modernize through the evolutionary process of gradual transformation.

*“In fact, it rapidly jumped from a feudal structure to Communism within a relatively short period of time. Although the Soviet Union dramatically shaped and changed the Kyrgyz society, the change was not thorough, whereas the mentality of the people retained the characteristics of the pre-Soviet era.”* (Berdikeeva 2006:7)

The old tribal/clan ties remained intact because of the absence of the intervening stage of capitalist structure, which could have helped in loosening of pre-modern notions like tribes and clans. Thus, it can be said that the Soviet rule led to a growth in both territorial as well as clan based identities, both of which correlate to a great degree in the case of Kyrgyzstan.

### ***The Post-Soviet Period***

The identity politics and regional cleavage in the country further got sharpened after independence due to the manipulations carried out by the political leaders on both the sides for gaining political leverage. The tendency of manipulation of regional/clan loyalties by the regional elites became evident in Kyrgyzstan soon after independence. For instance, when Askar Akaev, a northerner, became the first

president of independent Kyrgyzstan, important posts went specifically to the northern regions of Chui and Talas.

*“Under Akayev, the northern capital, Bishkek, became the center of politics and business, and southern regions were relatively neglected. An incursion into the far south by armed militants from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in 1999 led to some ineffective measures to develop the south, but in practice southern political leaders and business elites felt marginalized, and the population in the south experienced particularly high levels of economic dislocation.”* (Lewis 2010:46)

The perceived marginalization of the southerners led to the growth of a strong opposition in the south of the country against Akaev’s administration. Lewis says that it not surprisingly that many of the strongest opposition politicians such as Omurbek Tekebaev, were from the south. He adds that these leaders had a powerful local base in kinship groups, which could be mobilized when needed.

However, it is not only that the political leaders have misused the traditional ties for their advantage; the masses also tend to get mobilized on the basis of regional clan loyalties. The deep patron-client networks that have been an outcome of these traditional loyalties have been used by the masses as well to get a better access to economic and political resources. Voting pattern during the elections also point towards the trend of voters being biased in favour of candidates from their own region as was seen in the 1995 elections (Patnaik 2006).

Patnaik (2006:153) says that the continued presence of these traditional ties even after the independence can be explained by economic and political uncertainty that prevailed in Kyrgyzstan after the break-up of Soviet Union. The environment of uncertainty drove the people into tribal and regional affiliations for security, which led to strengthening of these informal institutions. Further, the state’s continued failure to cater to the needs of its population led to strengthening of regional and clan identities. The lack of social protection compelled people to seek comfort in social institutions. This created a network of patronage where members of a community were expected to express solidarity with the administrative and political elite of their clans or territory in return for affiliation. In order to assure their own security and insure a loyal support base, officials fostered this self-serving network of hierarchical

patron-client relations. Corruption and nepotism emerged as the offshoots of the patronage system that existed in the Kyrgyz society.

Temirkoulov (2007) considers the emergence of super presidentialism in Kyrgyzstan as responsible for the aggravation of regional divide, after the independence. He says that during the 15 years of independence, the Constitution in Kyrgyzstan was amended three times for strengthening the hand of the president each time. This led to an eventual weakening of the Parliament and emergence of a super president who controlled all the local and national executive and judicial appointments in the country. This obviously led to the growth of nepotism and corruption in Kyrgyzstan as power came to be concentrated in the hands of one leader, Akaev. Temirkoulov says that under such a system where one man controls all the appointments, loyalty to the president becomes the major principle in personnel selection. This happened in the case of Akaev as well, as key positions were given to people belonging to the same clan or region. However, this system of personnel selection on the basis of loyalty did not end at Akaev and fanned out in the system as even the president's appointees put their own relatives and friends in important positions. Temirkoulov says that this led to the usurpation of power by the elite of one of the two regions which further strengthened the authority of the president as it gave him even more informal mechanisms of control over state institutions, which he termed as the 'state capture'.

*“Thus, power is concentrated in the hands of one person, someone who, in the opinion of some, is not only head of the state but also personifies, first of all, the region of his origin; and, via this, personifies the rule of the country by natives of this region. That is why the majority of the inhabitants of the president's region support his rule – and, in the main, those persons from the non-presidential region deplore the situation; so that there is a geographical split in opinions.”* (Temirkoulov 2007:9)

In Kyrgyzstan, all through Akaev rule, the northerners were promoted in official appointments over the southerners and this led to the development of a divisive situation where the northern population praised Akaev and the southerners felt marginalized.



## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### ***Definitions, Scope and Rational of the Study***

The primary objective of this dissertation is to study the political ramifications of tribal alliances, which lead to such sharp distinctions between the north and the south. This study delves into the political manifestations of these rivalries, which destabilize the national polity and central leadership in Kyrgyzstan. Since independence, Kyrgyzstan has played host to a number of clashes traced to the north-south divide. The asymmetrical development in the two halves of Kyrgyzstan also contributes to these conflicts.

This study will also analyze another aspect of the north-south rivalries, which is the manipulation of tribal ties for political leverage. Politicians fuel north-south tensions with populist rhetoric and the abuse of regional clan ties perpetuates the divisive idea of a distinct regional identity in the population.

Undertaking a study like this is important because the north-south divide is acknowledged as perpetuating a political, social and economic divide in Kyrgyzstan. Since the socio-politico-economic aspects are all linked it is vital to address all these differences to understand why this cleavage exists. Instability and conflict also affects democratic sustainability, which can't always withstand the pressures of traditional divides. Sectional differences can be problematic for Kyrgyzstan's stabilization prospects. In the present, tribal ties have transcended their reach from rural areas into urban spaces with increased migration and this has been reflected in the politics of the region as well. Tribal loyalties and a form of clientelism have been imported into politics with these loyalties taking precedence over all else even in administrative circles. In fact in more dominant administrative and political seats of power, this emphasis on clans, regional and tribal support is even more marked as their support is crucial to hold on to power.

The northern and southern ethnic, regional, cultural and political divide in Kyrgyzstan is one that concerns researchers and policy makers as a source of national instability. It is theorized that the claims over the distribution of assets after the dissolution of the Soviet Union also sharpened the regional distinctions in Central Asia, which could have contributed to the same within Kyrgyzstan.

## ***Research Questions***

This dissertation will answer the following research questions:

- 1) Do tribal rivalries serve to undermine democratic institutions in Kyrgyzstan? Conversely, does the strengthening of democratic institutions in Kyrgyzstan lessen tribal rivalries and in what way can democracy be strengthened?
- 2) In what way have political leaders used the north south divide to further their political objectives?
- 3) Will mainstreaming all the citizens into the political process reduce the impact of these north-south rivalries?
- 4) Will balanced economic development reduce regional rivalries in Kyrgyzstan?

## ***The Hypotheses***

The following hypotheses are sought to be tested in the course of the proposed research:

- 1) Regional violence in Kyrgyzstan has been witnessed from time to time due to lack of inclusive political representation and regional-clan based interest articulation.
- 2) Periods of economic decline and deep fall in social welfare provisions have coincided with political instability and sharpening regional divisions.

## ***Research Methodology***

This dissertation employs the analytical method and is based on primary and secondary data on Kyrgyzstan's ethnic and geographical north-south divide. The secondary sources referred to are articles, books, newspaper reports and editorials. The primary sources of information are field reports as well as reports and assessments by international organizations like the UNDP, ILO etc. The analysis is done through a socio-political approach emphasizing the developmental and

economic links with regional conflict. To explain the genesis of this north-south cleavage, a historiographical approach has been adopted which consolidates the various theories as to why the north and south developed such distinct identities and what factors contribute to the conflict between the two. The political ramifications of this divide are studied from a developmentalist perspective, which discusses how asymmetrical development (economic) in the two halves of Kyrgyzstan fuels conflicts.

### ***Chapterization***

The first chapter of the dissertation has already laid down the differences that constitute the north south divide in Kyrgyzstan. Apart from this, the chapter has also tracked down the events and policies that led to the development of this divide. Also, the correlation between the regional identities and clan/tribal identities has also been discussed in this chapter.

The second chapter (**THE POLITICS OF REGIONALISM**) will explore the political impacts of the divide and discusses the regional power play employed by different regimes to hold on to power.

The third chapter (**THE SOCIAL-ECONOMIC ASPECT OF REGIONALISM**) will analyze the social-economic aspect of the north south divide on the Kyrgyz society.

The fourth chapter (**THE TULIP REVOLUTION**) will explore various manifestations of the north south divide in Kyrgyzstan in the form of inter-regional tensions, leading up to the 2005 Tulip revolution.

The final chapter will summarize the findings of the study in context of the research questions sought to be answered.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE POLITICS OF REGIONALISM

#### INTRODUCTION

Upon independence in 1991, after 70 years of Soviet rule, Askar Akaev as the first president of Kyrgyzstan quickly adopted many measures to steer the country towards a liberal, democratic architecture supported by a market economy. Akaev, in many of his early pronouncements as the president of the country, promised to pursue the path of democratic and economic reforms.

The West hailed Akaev's efforts as they saw a reformer in Akaev who had both the agenda as well as the will to transform this post communist country into a democratic one. Situated in the midst of authoritarian regimes, whether veiled or open, Kyrgyzstan soon earned titles like 'Switzerland of Central Asia' and 'island of democracy', for adopting policies of open polity, society and economy. To supplement his effort, western countries as well as international financial organizations rushed in with huge sums of money, as, Huskey (1995:16) says, the latter was able to successfully capture the imagination of the West. However, there cannot be any denying in the fact that western countries also wanted to create an example out of Kyrgyzstan in front of other post-soviet regimes that had retained authoritarian form of government, although of different degrees.

*"In the early 1990s, Western states and Japan backed Akayev's reform agenda and the introduction of a new currency, the Som, in the hope that Kyrgyzstan's success would set an example for other Central Asian states."* (Rashid 2000/2001:42)

However, the initial optimism started to unravel by the mid 1990s when authoritarian tendencies became apparent in the Akaev rule. In addition to this, divisive feelings also continued to remain relevant in the post-independence period.

Despite several measures taken up by the then President Akaev for establishment of a democratic polity and market economy in Kyrgyzstan, including many reform-

minded steps like freedom to press and multiple political parties, strong regional feelings continued to hold sway over the minds of the Kyrgyz people which undermined the development of democratic and independent institutions in the country. The public administration and governance in Kyrgyzstan also got compromised, several times, due to the presence of these divisive tendencies, which existed both in the minds of masses and the politicians. Lack of a nationalist feeling and agenda further complicated the problem. Berdikееva (2006:1) says that the continued lack of national unity and national ideology in Kyrgyzstan had been the contributing factors to the divisions of the society along long-standing regional, tribal and clan lines.

The other serious fallout of this informal but undisputed divide between the north and south of the country had been the growth of corruption and nepotism in the political and bureaucratic circles where regional/clan considerations dictated the decision making process, many a times.

*“In particular, clans, which form informal influential entities, wield influence in politics and decision-making, undermining state building efforts based on the rule of law, democracy and meritocracy.”* (Berdikееva 2006:2)

Temirkoulov (2007:8) says that corruption further deepened the regional divisions when the corrupt elites and officials started using them for their own personal advantage, as the regional feelings as such were not a menace to the stability of the state. Further, politicians including former President Akaev were accused of using this divide for their own narrow interests and for gaining some political leverage. During the rule of Akaev, southern clans, time and again, complained for the lack of interest shown by Akaev and his administration in their region. The southern opposition leaders accused the administration of cornering the economic resources of the country and leaving the southerners high and dry.

*“Attempts of the northern political elite to eliminate competition and maintain control over resources and the distribution of power in the country met resentment among the southern clans, which to this day seek better representation in the government.”* (Berdikееva 2006:6)

Thus, an uncomfortable relationship got formed between the politics and the society of Kyrgyzstan where on the one hand, the nationalist attempts of politicians proved to be futile due to the continued importance of regional/clan identities in Kyrgyz society;

on the other hand, the politics itself led to further deepening of the divide.

For analyzing the politics of Kyrgyzstan it is essential to look into this regional/clan division, which has divided the country into northern and southern halves and how it acts as a determining factor in the politics of the region. After an analysis of why regional and clan divisions continued to matter despite many efforts to evolve a national ideology, the role of this divide would be analyzed in the context of politics of the region. Matveeva (2010:2) says that the regional divide mattered in Kyrgyzstan, as the identities of the North and the South have been distinct and parties and business groupings tended to have their strongholds in one part of the country or the other.

## **REGIONAL IDENTITY POST-INDEPENDENCE: WHY IT HAS STUCK?**

In the previous chapter we have already analyzed how Soviet policies led to the strengthening of both the regional as well as the clan based divisions in the Kyrgyzstan (Luong 2002, Collins 2002, 2003). After independence the Akaev administration, made many attempts to subsume the regional/clan identities to a national identity for a greater cohesiveness in Kyrgyz society. However, this failed to yield the desired result.

### ***Building a National Identity of Kyrgyzstan***

Akaev on assuming the President's post in 1991 promised to build a national identity that would overshadow the other regional and clan based identities as the latter were seen as an impediment in the building of a modern Kyrgyz nation. It was argued that through nationalism and building of a Kyrgyz national identity the continued relevance of divisive forces like clanism and regionalism could be undermined.

*“Akaev's challenge as a northerner was to create policies that addressed the various interests within the country without alienating ethnic Kyrgyz or his own northern networks. As a foundation for his policies, Akaev stressed a conception of national identity that rested on citizenship while incorporating traditional Kyrgyz symbols and stories.”* (Spector 2004:12)

An increasing stress was laid on the history, language and the cultural roots of the

country as, Berdikееva (2006:2) argues, Kyrgyzstan lacked a strong national ideological direction and a vision for its future. This endeavor became all the more important when inter-ethnic riots erupted in Kyrgyzstan in the southern city of Osh, in 1990, which were seen by many scholars as the largest and most violent in territory of former USSR (Tishkov 1995).<sup>2</sup> Berdikееva (2006:2-3) says that other problems like mass exodus of the Russian and German population, border disputes with neighbours, and failing economy further compounded the problem and convinced the leadership to consolidate their control over the country. Thus, the Kyrgyz national identity, which was a subject of suppression during the Soviet years, began to be openly discussed after its independence.

The figure of 'Manas' was used to give a historical character to Kyrgyzstan. Manas was invoked to give a national symbol to this newly independent country and unite a multi-ethnic society, which already was displaying disrupting tendencies.

*"Manas became a ubiquitous national icon. He is pictured on national banknotes, statues and posters of him are displayed across the country, the international airport and a new university in Bishkek are named after him, and schools have integrated studies of the Manas epic. Secondary schools began inculcating Manas's seven principles to students since 1997."* (Berdikееva 2006:3)

Manas along with Kyrgyz national values like Kyrgyzchilik replaced Soviet heroes of the revolution and the Soviet concept of internationalism and *bratstvo narodov* (people's brotherhood) (Elebayeva et al 2000:345). However, this failed to serve the desired purpose as clan and regional divisions became even more pronounced post the independence.

*"Despite the Kyrgyz state's attempts to redefine the "sovietized" Kyrgyzstan by underlining its national identity through the emphasis on its powerful national symbols such as Manas and the Kyrgyz language, most such attempts did not resonate with the Kyrgyz population at large, where identity may often be defined by diverse loyalties and allegiances."* (Berdikееva 2006:1)

### ***Why regional clan identities didn't erode?***

After independence, despite all the discourse on nationalism and creation of new

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<sup>2</sup> In the summer of 1990, two ethnic groups, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, clashed with each other in the Osh region over a plot of land, leading to many deaths on both sides. For details, Tishkov, Valery, "Don't kill me, I'm a Kyrgyz: An anthropological analysis of Violence in Osh Ethnic conflict", Journal of Peace Research, Vol 32, No. 2, 1995, Page 133-149, Jstor

identity, the government failed to address the basic needs and requirements of its citizens. Poverty and unemployment continued to mar the people and the newly formed but weak institutions couldn't offer any solution. Patnaik (2006:153) argues that in an uncertain environment people tend to get closer to the solidarity groups that are available to them, at that moment. The Soviet Union break-up was one such instance when an environment of insecurity made people fall back on traditional institutions like clans or regional groupings to feel secure and protected.

*“With central control loosening, chauvinistic tendencies in the form of not only nationalism but also of tribalism and regionalism in the republics increased.”* (Patnaik 2006:153)

After the break up of Soviet Union, tough economic situation prevailed in Kyrgyzstan, which forced people to seek the help from the same traditional patron client ties that had been created during the Soviet rule. Temirkoulov agrees with this and says that in face of social vulnerability people were compelled to seek help from informal social institutions.

*“After independence, the practice of solidarity by means of informal institutions gained wide application in society; and one such institution was the patronage network that was based on a ‘synthesis’ of belonging to a specific administrative-territorial unit and kinship”.* (Temirkoulov 2007:7)

Secondly, as Berdikееva (2006) argues that the ‘nationalistic’ steps taken by the government failed to consolidate the Kyrgyz identity as first of all, these ideas were not related to the daily lives of the people and couldn't offer solutions to the problems that they were facing because of a declining economy and secondly, even the government failed to internalize these ideas. Thus, the clan and region based identities continued to remain a part and parcel of the lives of the people.

Thirdly, these traditional institutions had always been important in the Kyrgyz society and polity and it wasn't easy to undermine them within a short span of time.

*“Since regional and clan networks have been a tacit constant of politics in various forms in all Central Asian states even during the Soviet times, not surprisingly there is a speedier revitalization of these traditional institutions.”* (Patnaik 2006:153).

Many of the scholars have termed it as “informal politics”. Formal institutions had always been weak in Central Asia and so historically the people of the region had shown little respect for formal rules and institutions as they had proved to be



ineffective many a times (Dukenbaev and Hansen 2003:24). Due to the tradition of strong kinship loyalties people relied on traditional institutions like clan solidarity more whenever they faced a problem. Thus in the hour of crisis many in Kyrgyzstan opted for these “informal channel of communications or contacts” (Dukenbaev and Hansen) as traditional solidarities continue to hold sway here.

Lastly, despite the overwhelming discourse in favour of building a Kyrgyz identity and unity based on that, the political class of Kyrgyzstan in order to survive in the difficult transition period, marred by economic and social chaos, fell back on the same regional/clan divisions for their own political consolidation. Berdikeeva (2006:5) calls it the most striking feature of the post-Soviet Kyrgyz leadership as it itself acted against the ideas of unity and consolidation by either tapping into those very divisions for its own empowerment or simply giving into the inertia and ignoring the country’s regional and clan divisions.

## **REGIONALISM AND POLITICAL PROCESS**

The nation building process in Kyrgyzstan has been severely compromised due to the region and clan based politics. Politicians for their own narrow gains like maintaining their support base manipulated these region/clan ties leading to aggravation of rivalry and mistrust between the two regions. Many experts on Kyrgyzstan’s politics point this out.

Patnaik (2006:156) says that party and government elites have long been divided into northern and southern families in Kyrgyzstan. When the leadership changes then the personnel of the government changes accordingly as the incoming leader places his own clansmen and regional supporters in important economic and political positions to create a loyal support base. Dukenbaev and Hansen (2003:7) say that the north-south division in Kyrgyzstan is taking on a “class” aspect as the state political class comes primarily from the North and thus controls far greater resources than the South. Since independence the northern Sarybagysh clan, Akaev is from the same, has wielded more power in Kyrgyzstan. According to Berdikeeva (2006:7), Akaev relied on the support of northern clans, including that of his wife, Mairam, to maintain power, although he also had supporters from the south in the government.

In 1985, when Absamat Masaliev, a southerner, replaced the first secretary of Kyrgyzstan, Turdakun Usubaliev, who is from a northern clan, then, Berdikееva says, that it led to the purge of the latter's entire network of associates, cronies and relatives. He adds that this chain of events was repeated when Akaev became the President and 'humiliated' Masaliev by placing his own cronies and supporters in important economic and political positions, which was at the expense of the southern clans. Important appointments were made not only from the north but especially from the Talas and Chui provinces of the north.

Patnaik (2006) says that after the removal of Masaliev in 1990, there was a rising demand from the southern clans for greater regional autonomy, equal representation of the both north and south in republican bodies, formation of a federation etc. The southerners feared that the administration run by a President belonging to a northern clan would ignore their interests and demands.

*“In all such demands the fear of loss of power by the regional elite and their marginalization was evident. Unlike the Soviet years, there is no Centre to mediate and balance the interests of various regional groups. In those times Moscow saw to it that power alternated between various regional leaders so that no group felt permanently deprived. In the post-Soviet period, however, some regional groups fell more vulnerable since they have less influence over the republican power structures. This has resulted in increasing regional/clan rivalries.” (Patnaik 2006:158)*

Their fear was not totally unfounded in the sense that regional and clan considerations did creep in the political and economic appointments made under the Akaev's regime. Since Akaev didn't enjoy the support of the Party, as he was 'not the part of old Soviet era nomenclatura', he tried to create his own loyal support base by appointing people from his own clan and region in key positions. Thus, Akaev relied heavily on both his clan as well as the clan of his wife (Collins 2002).

This fear on the part of both regions that an administration run by the opposite camp will not take care of their needs got manifested in different manners. While sometimes the grievances took a violent turn as happened during the Aksy shooting of 2002, sometimes the expression of discontent had been in more peaceful manner like the in the Parliamentary elections voting pattern continuously showed a regional bias.

## ***Voting Behaviour***

Voting pattern of a region is an excellent indicator for gauging the loyalties of masses. The sociological approach to voting behaviour emphasizes the impact of social structure and the role it plays in influencing voting choices. Social alignment reflecting various divisions of the society in form of class, ethnicity, gender, religion and region decides the voting pattern in the elections.

Keeping the sociological model in mind, Kyrgyzstan has deep clan and region based affiliations, which continue to divide the society. The regional and clan identities are so strong here that they are not only reflected in the economic and social life but also in the political life of its people. In addition to this, the patron-client relations are very strong in Kyrgyz society where the elites in return for vote and support ensure economic and political wellbeing of their clan members and regional groups. Thus, while the northern voters prefer to vote for people who either belong to their region or clan, the southerners prefer to vote a southerner to power. This became evident in the parliamentary elections held in the country at different times. The rational choice theory of voting pattern also suggests that personal self-interest decides the voter's choice to a large extent.

Berdikееva (2006:8) says that in the legislative branch of the government in Kyrgyzstan the region and clan based loyalties are most pronounced and adds that Parliamentary elections have not been transparent in Kyrgyzstan because of the tendency of the electorate to vote for individuals affiliated with a corresponding region or clans. Berdikееva opines that a lack of clear ideology and a platform by most political parties may also be the reason for continued clan and region based voting in Kyrgyzstan. Thus, instead of a candidate's proposed reforms, agendas, ideology etc. regional considerations dominated the voter's choice as the voter preferred his personal well being to the national well being.

Patnaik (2006:157) points out that in both the 1995 Presidential and Parliamentary elections the north-south division of masses was evident. While Akaev could secure 97 per cent of the votes in Naryn district then Masaliev, a southerner, showed a strong showing in Osh with 46.5 per cent of votes in his favour.

The region/clan based voting was so entrenched in Kyrgyzstan that Collins (2002:147) says that nothing, including corruption and electoral rigging, undermined the democratic process in Kyrgyzstan the way clan based voting had done. Clan considerations reigned supreme over other national issues when choosing one's representative. She says that in Kyrgyzstan, numerous election-monitors' reports from 1994 through 2000 noted that local elders typically determined the vote of everyone in their family networks. She adds that the strength of personalized voting in Kyrgyzstan was so high that parties like the communist party failed to gain much foothold in Kyrgyzstan since they didn't appeal to the regional or clannish mindset of the masses. The latter gained just 19 per cent of the seats in parliament in 1995 and its tally got further reduced to 15 per cent in 2000 elections.

Thus this pattern of voting, which shows biasness for region and clan identities has been a defining feature in the politics of Kyrgyzstan. The political parties, in order to gain foothold in a region, have exploited this region/clan based voting pattern.

### ***Nature of Political Parties***

Kyrgyzstan after independence adopted a democratic form of government in which competitively held elections formed one of the basic features. This gave birth to a distinct space for the opposition forces in Kyrgyzstan.

After independence a number of political parties became active in Kyrgyzstan. Ashar (Key), the Kyrgyz Democratic Movement, Asaba, Erkin Kyrgyzstan, Atameken were some of the political parties that came up in the initial period of independence in opposition to the Communist Party (US Department of Justice, 1993:6). Here also, the regional considerations have been strong enough to decide the nature of political parties, which could be divided on the basis of region. In a party whose leaders are from the south, the majority of members are also from the south and vice-versa (Centre for strategic and Political studies, 2009:96).

Berdikeeva (2006:9) contends that elections for the parliament provide an opportunity for the opposition groups to fight for power and they do so by tapping into their ties with supporting clans. Many of the political parties and their leaders, in Kyrgyzstan, have had strong regional or clan based roots which they have used to mobilize the

masses against the administration as was evident in the Aksy event of 2002 and 2005 Tulip Revolution.

Thus, there have been both northern and southern political parties in Kyrgyzstan, which draw their strength from the respective regions that they represent. Telekova (2004:11) points out that in the early independence period, the southerners formed the main opposition parties in Kyrgyzstan. She adds that Absamat Masaliev, Adakhan Madumarov, Omurbek Tekebaev and other southern opponents were affiliated to the different opposition political parties. Azimbek Beknazarov, Bektur Asanov, Dooronbek Sadyrbaev and Ismail Isakov were other strong politicians who had strong southern constituencies.

On the other hand, the northerners founded most of the centrist parties, including “Adilet” and “My country”. Both these parties supported Akaev and also found favours from him as during the 2002 parliamentary elections (Telekova, 2004). Berdikееva says that the centrist parties along with independent candidates made up the majority of the parliamentary seats till 2005, which allowed the President to control decision-making process in the Parliament. That is the reason why the fears of yet another capture of Parliament by the northern leaders in 2005 Parliament elections made the southern opposition figures rise in protest. Telekova says that the northern opposition figures had been less popular in the political circles barring Felix Kulov and had been mostly engaged with the southern-led opposition bloc. On the other hand, many of the candidates who won parliamentary seats from the South won with the President’s support.

Thus, political parties and leaders in Kyrgyzstan draw their strength from the traditional regional clan ties whose interests they purport to represent at the national stage. However, these ties have been subjected to manipulation by the regional political figures time and again to create a loyal support base and to mobilize action against administration when required. The regional leaders have often portrayed the interests of the two regions as antagonistic to each other and thus have exploited the economic and social needs of the people to create a secure support base.

*“They (clan solidarity and regionalism) are also effective tools to establish a power base for the elite and ambitious local politicians, who often get ahead not necessarily*

*because of their policy agendas but mostly because of their clan or regional ties or loyalties to the ruling elite.” (Berdikeeva 2006:2)*

### ***Aksy Event of 2002***

The death of five Kyrgyz citizens in a police firing which wounded several more remains one of the controversial events in the history of Kyrgyzstan. The shootings that took place in the Aksy province of Jalal-Abad province on March 17’ 2002 depicted the extent of mistrust that existed between the north and south of the country. Five people were killed and between 50-100 wounded when police opened fire on a group of demonstrating citizens who were demanding the release of Azimbek Beknazarov, a member of Parliament from the southern Jalal-Abad region. The event is sometimes termed as the “Beknazarov affair” as the arrest of this local representative of Parliament on charges of abuse of office became the rallying point of the protests.

The seeds for this protest were laid as far back as in 2001 when the Akaev regime decided to cede a part of disputed territory to China after long negotiations between the two countries which had been a point of contention in the relations between the two. Since independence Kyrgyzstan had been engaged in a number of negotiations with its neighbours over disputed territories.

The decision of Akaev government to cede the disputed territory to China led to a string of strong criticisms from many Southern members of *Jogorku Kenesh* especially Beknazarov who came at the forefront of the opposition. Many wondered that why the cessation created such a furor in the southern provinces when the ceded territory was regarded as “remote and politically unimportant, was virtually unpopulated and far away from the center of opposition activity with no involvement of southern kinsmen” (Dukenbaev and Hansen, 2003:8). The authors argue that the opposition by the southern leaders was not only about the cessation of territory to China but also about the various regional and clan disputes in southern Kyrgyzstan. The southern provinces had already been involved in a number of territorial disputes with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan around the Fergana valley and thus became wary of government’s move with regards to China as national legislature was required to approve any border changes, which didn’t really happen in the latter case.

*“...The southerners were certainly uncomfortable with the idea that the Administration could so cavalierly violate constitutional procedures and cede national territory by executive decision. If they could do it with China could they not do it with territory in Jalal-Abad, Osh or Batken with citizens waking up one morning to find that a secret executive decision had made them residents and citizens of another country?” (Dukenbaev and Hansen 2003:9)*

Thus, the southern opposition groups launched a widespread criticism of the government for the cessation of territory to China. The extent of territorial affinity in Kyrgyzstan can be understood from this very incident. As the protests erupted, Akaev ordered the arrest of the prime opposition leader Azimbek Beknazarov in February 2002, which was seen by many as a move to undermine the opposition.

*“The government feared that Beknazarov would be able to mobilize support for his nationalist campaign against the border treaty. Most observers believed the charges against him were politically motivated, and his trial provoked mass protests by his supporters in his home region of Aksy.” (Lewis 2010:47)*

In order to silence the critics Akaev also ordered the closing down of several opposition newspapers. To rally support for Beknazarov, regional allies and clan members organized protests especially in the Aksy province which got wide support from the people. Dukenbaev and Hansen say that Akaev’s relatively liberal image took a beating when five protestors got killed in the police firing on 17 March’ 2002. This was the first time in the history of independent Kyrgyzstan when political protests had turned violent. Akaev accused the protestors for provoking the police into firing, however, evidence in the form of a videotape of the firing clearly showed that the police were not sufficiently provoked to fire on the protestors (Dukenbaev and Hansen). However, the opposition’ continued with the relentless protests in southern districts of Osh and Jalal-Abad and demanded the dropping of charges against Beknazarov. Later the demands from the protesting groups became more radical when they started calling for Akaev’s resignation and threatened to march on Bishkek. The government finally had to relent in the face of growing protests and Beknazarov was set free. Charges against him were dropped later on by the appellate court.

This move brought a halt to the protests and a temporary peace prevailed but the issues at the heart of the protest still remained unresolved. The arrest of a southern leader only triggered the protests, the main galvanizing force behind the Aksy event was both the perceived threat to the territory as well as the widespread discontent in

the southern politicians owing to the political marginalization by the northern clans. The protests also had an ethnic aspect to it. Melvin (2011:11) says that while the Kyrgyz groups employed increasingly nationalistic rhetoric and protested in front of Jalal-Abad regional court, the Uzbek groups started demanding greater political representation along with equal status for the Uzbek language. Thus, distinct ethnic agendas emerged during the protests as the Uzbeks had gotten increasingly disenchanted by the Akaev administration. However, Melvin says, that the Uzbeks continued to support the Akaev administration due to the increasingly nationalistic agenda of the oppositional groups, which many a times was also critical of the Uzbek population.

Lewis says that the Aksy event clearly showed the extent to which Akaev and his close officials had lost touch with the feelings of the ordinary people, especially in the south. Khamidov (2002) says that the various clans, especially those with their power bases in southern Kyrgyzstan had grown increasingly discontent with the reluctance of President Askar Akaev's clan to share the perquisites of power. All this prompted the southern elites to protest against the government at a wider scale. Akaev took number of conciliatory measures to pacify the opposition group. He reshuffled his government and dismissed Kurmanbek Bakiev who was the Prime Minister at that time. He also appointed joint Constitutional Council comprising of both government and civil society members for recommending constitutional reforms for the country. However, the immediate measures taken by the government in face of protests lacked a vision as they were only taken to handle the current situation and no concrete plan was devised to address the long held grievances of the southern elites and masses. Dukenbaev and Hansen termed the post-Aksy actions taken by the government as the actions taken by a “beleaguered political class”.

The success of the Aksy uprising in southern region against the perceived biasness of the Akaev's administration set the stage for the final showdown in 2005 when in the face of massive protests Akaev was forced to resign. Many observers have interpreted the Aksy protests as the precursor to the 2005 Tulip Revolution. In fact many reports soon after the Aksy event had expressed this possibility. For example the International Crisis Group (ICG) report of 2002 had noted that Kyrgyzstan was entering a period of



uncertainty as the protestors emboldened by their apparent success would renew the demonstrations again.

Lewis (2010:48) says that three important consequences of Aksy had a major impact on shaping the 2005 movement. First of all, Lewis says that Aksy made people realize the potential of mass action and how the state could become weak in the face of it. Secondly, Aksy gave birth to a range of effective protest strategies like blocking of roads, which were reused in the Tulip revolution as well. Lewis adds that the method of mobilization based on traditional and kinship ties also proved to be quite effective and was used again in the 2005 protests. Finally, Aksy event had a fatal impact on relations between the government and police as the latter felt betrayed when Akaev ordered investigations against the policemen who were involved in the firing. This had serious consequences during the Tulip revolution as well.

## **POLITICAL EFFECTS OF THE DIVIDE**

The 2002 protest in the South of Kyrgyzstan or the 2005 Tulip revolution provide a good research material to analyze that how the regional divisions in Kyrgyzstan became a source of constant conflict, discontent and mistrust between the north and south. Berdikееva (2006:2) says that the enduring strength of clan solidarity and regionalism increasingly became a problem because they were the sources of nepotism, corruption and divisions in the country faced with potential crisis and failure. The political effects of the regional divisions, thus, have been myriad in Kyrgyzstan. On the one hand, it gave birth to patron-client networks where both the patrons and clients were symbiotically linked to each other, on other hand it fostered nepotism and corruption in the political and business circles as decision makers often favoured their own regional groups over others. Growth of radical Islamic groups in the southern Kyrgyzstan was also interpreted as a reaction to it. Dukenbaev and Hansen (2003:25) say that there is a symbiotic interrelationship between clan, region, elite and class where each feeds into the other and derives benefits out of it. Thus, in order to understand the politics of the country it is required to understand the vast patronage-client relations that have emerged in Kyrgyzstan, which also feed into the massive corruption in the country.

## ***Patron-client Networks***

Clientelism has been a reality of Kyrgyzstan where elites in return for support, grant many favours to their clan members or regional groups and this happens usually at the expense of other clans and regional groups. This led to the development of an informal network of patron-client relations, which with time proved to be a factor of instability in Kyrgyzstan.

### ***What is Clientelism?***

Clientelism operates when people in power or control act as “patrons” and indulge in power and resource sharing in a manner to maintain their support base. Political appointments, job opportunities etc. are some of the ways through which the patrons try to maintain a network of “clients” or receivers who are expected to help and support the former in the political arena by either supporting their policies, acting as a dependable vote bank or as a major opposition force in hours of need. This obviously excludes a large section of the population whose demands and requirements get ignored in the process of resource distribution as considerations like personal relations, support base etc. play the deciding role.

*“Clientelism involves asymmetric but mutually beneficial relationship of power and exchange i.e. a non-universalistic quid pro quo between individuals or groups of unequal standing. It implies mediated and selective access to resources and markets from which others are normally excluded.”* (Roniger 2004:353)

*“The term refers to a complex chain of personal bonds between political patrons or bosses and their individual clients or followers. These bonds are founded on mutual material advantage: the patron furnishes excludable resources (money, jobs) to dependents and accomplices in return for their support and cooperation (votes, attendance at rallies).”* (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002:2)

This “mediated and selective access to resources” gives rise to a network of patron – clients where both the giver and the receiver get mutually benefitted from each other. Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (2002:2) says that the patrons have a disproportionate power and a wide latitude for how to distribute the assets that fall under their control and so the poor and the marginalized usually get drawn to them. The authors add that especially under difficult economic situations people tend to focus on immediate consumption rather than on long term and abstract gains. Clientelism has proved to be particularly useful in the field of politics and has been practiced and used extensively

in Kyrgyzstan as well.

*“It entails votes and support given in exchange for jobs and other benefits. It can become a useful strategy for winning elections and building political support through the selective release of public funds to supporting politicians and associates or the acceptance of political nominees as personnel in state-related agencies. It is therefore a strategy of partial political mobilization that differs from more universal patterns, such as programmatic appeals or mobilization motivated by parties' achievement records.”* (Roniger 2004:354)

### ***Patron client relations in Kyrgyzstan***

In Kyrgyzstan, patron client networks have been a dominant feature of politics. Many scholars support the idea that the Soviet policies had a definite role in the growth of these informal networks. Berdikееva (2006:7) supports this viewpoint and says that although the Soviet nationality policy attempted to weaken the traditional structures in Central Asian societies, some of the important aspects such as clan-based informal patronage governance were overlooked as long as the Kyrgyz ruling elite remained loyal to Moscow.

Radnitz (2010:78) also agrees that the centralized Soviet structure led to the growth of patron-client networks and says that the subordination of the regional officials by the centralized soviet economy in the form of a ‘hub-and-spokes structure’ was responsible for this. Radnitz says that in the face of continuous shortage of resources these networks emerged in the Republics as a form of ‘adaptive’ mechanism where receivers pledged their loyalty to distributors in exchange for goods, which otherwise they were unable to secure in the scarcity prone Soviet economy. The latter’s privileged position in the Soviet structure like in “state procurement agencies, party organs, collective farm management etc.” came in handy here. Thus, this led to the growth of patron client relations between the elites and the non-elites, which got reinforced by the Soviet practice of rarely promoting indigenous Party elites to positions outside their native republics. Radnitz says that since the opportunity of promotion was limited for the ‘ambitious cadre’, they continued to cultivate support in their own native regions by providing various economic benefits to the people to at least gain a position of prominence in their native republics. Regional considerations crept in here too, as competition over resources along regional lines led leaders

(obkoms) to reward followers within their regions at the expense of people in other regions (Luong 2002). Berdikееva (2006) says that Moscow's "indirect rule" of its satellite states through representatives of titular nationalities also led to the development of patron-client networks as it provided an opportunity to the ruling elite and powerful clans in Kyrgyzstan to promote their kin in the system.

Apart from the economic and political reasons that supported the growth of the patron client networks in Kyrgyzstan, feeling of insecurity under a foreign rule also created conditions for the latter's sustenance. Nezihoglu (2011:23) contends that with the suppression of the traditional institutions under the Soviet Union rule, people started feeling 'alone and threatened' in the absence of the former and the 'formal and alien' institutions couldn't compensate for lack of traditional institutions. This led to the growth of networks based on personal and family ties as these were more familiar and so more secure too. Nezihoglu says that tribal network and clan clientelism have been more of a shelter and an umbrella for solidarity in order to escape from loneliness and alienation for poor and powerless people. Thus, the prominent tribal members who got a position in higher government or bureaucratic position provided political, social and economic opportunities to their tribe members in exchange for loyalty and respect.

After independence, due to the economic privatization initiated by the Akaev regime this informal network got severely weakened (Radnitz 2010:80) as agriculture and industry fell into private hands, which deprived the state of its monopoly on the distribution of resources as a means of political control. Radnitz says that it led to the emergence of "subversive clientelism" in Kyrgyzstan as it did not depend on 'traditional or primordial attachments' and gave the patron a 'latent source of power' as the clients could change their disposition towards the new patron due to the failure of the incumbent. Radnitz holds several reasons responsible for development of this new institution in Kyrgyzstan. With the state's failure to provide the sufficient public services, lack of strong political parties and civil society and the growing frustration amongst the people because of poor standards of living, a "new institutional environment" emerged in Kyrgyzstan, according to Radnitz. He says that 'independent elites' moved into the vacuum left by the state and in the process gave both relief to the masses and also strengthened their positions amongst the respective

natives.

However, it would be inaccurate to say that that this new class of patrons could undermine the traditional ties. In Kyrgyz society clan/ tribal identities coupled with regional identities has been a reality, which cannot be ignored. Nezhoglu (2011:23) supports this viewpoint by saying that clans, as informal identity networks and strong bases for cooperation and solidarity, have played a very central role in the course of transition in post-Soviet Central Asia. According to Nezhoglu, these informal networks especially become strong in the transition period as in a 'weakly institutionalized state' with uncertain future, clan networks can help in not only securing the future but also provide access to resources and power.

During the reign of President Akaev, clientelism was used as method to consolidate control by winning supporters. Patronage was not only used as a tool by the opposition for fast political mobilization of masses but also by ruling elite to create a loyal support base.

*"Where it is a practice used by (usually ruling) parties to mobilize voters in semiauthoritarian systems or emerging democracies, clientelism tends to reinforce the regime's hold on power."* (Radnitz 2010:81)

### ***Nepotism in Kyrgyzstan***

Nepotism is another evil that has been rampant in Kyrgyzstan and has severely undermined the development of strong, unbiased institutional structure in the country. The dominant idea amongst the elite has been to appoint close relatives and kin members in important political and economic posts so as to ensure a loyal support base, which could be useful in the hour of crisis.

*"In Kyrgyzstan, clan networks have penetrated the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. When Akayev got the chance, for instance, he named his distant kinswoman, Cholpon Baekova, to chair the constitutional court. While she was a leading democratic reformer and most of her decisions were impartial, Akayev relied upon her kin loyalties and other informal means of leverage when he needed judicial support in moments of crisis."* (Collins 2002:146)

The trend has been that whenever a political leader occupies the highest position of the President in the country then people from his region and clan get maximum

benefits, which naturally leads to a feeling of alienation in the other region. Many important posts that had a direct bearing on the stability and security of the government as well as the economy of the country were awarded to people on basis of their loyalty to the president instead of merit.

In Akaev's government the representation from the northern clan (Sarybagysh) was disproportionate when compared to other southern clans. Berdikееva (2006:10) says that despite the repeated rhetoric of professionalism, merit and competency of government employees, former President Akaev himself became strongly dependent on the close circle of cronies and northern clans to maintain his power base. Many government positions were specifically given to northern clan members.

Collins (2004:250) says that since Akaev had the discretionary power to allocate public goods, the main beneficiaries were reportedly the northern Kemin, Aitmatov and Sarygulov clans as well as that of his wife. For example, Temirbek Akmataliyev who was the minister of finance came from Akaev's village and clan. Similarly, Tashtemir Aitbaev who was the minister of Interior, Osmanakun Ibraimov who was the secretary of state, Bolot Dzhanzakov who was chairman of National Security service, Amanbek Karypkulovs as chief of presidential staff all represented the north of Kyrgyzstan (Central Asia Executive Summary Series, 2009). Collins says that Akaev's clan members also controlled the national bank, ministry of gold mining and privatization.

The executive branch of the government also smacked of nepotism. Berdikееva (2006:100) says that since the constitution of Kyrgyzstan granted overwhelming powers to the President over the executive branch, Akaev often made appointments on basis of loyalty and support. He also maintained a tight leash on the regional governors who although had been granted enough leeway to run their constituencies autonomously.

Temirkoulov (2007) holds the strong presidential system responsible for the growth of nepotism along with corruption in Kyrgyzstan. He says that concentration of power in the hand of the president fuelled nepotism as president enjoyed overwhelming powers in state appointments. President appointed people whom he considered to be loyal so that he could have a secure support base. In Kyrgyzstan, as clans and regions often

form basis for loyalty, it led to the capture of state power by the northerners.

Collins (2002) says that this clan-based distribution of economic and political resources has led to two serious fallouts. First it cost Akaev a popular legitimacy and secondly, it enraged those clans, who felt excluded. Akaev, who came to power with a lot of promise and enjoyed overwhelming support amongst the masses in the initial years, lost the legitimacy when he promoted northerners at the expense of the southerners. This had been the constant grievance of the southern clans who had time and again accused Akaev of not according equal importance and representation to the southern clans and favouring the northern clans over them. Berdikeeva says that the informal patronage system and clanism helped maintain the stability of the Akaev regime.

On the top of this, Akaev even appointed northerners to positions in southern provinces, which further enraged the southern population.

*“Akaev started appointing northerners to southern governor positions as he felt his control over local resources slip.”* (Spector 2004:22)

For example, in the southern province of Osh, five consecutive governors after independence had been from the north, which enraged the population in the southern provinces. Berdikeeva (2006:10) says that the 2002 clash between the southern population and the police was not merely because the President had ignored the south but because of the appointment of political protégés in the key post of governor of Osh.

*“Akayev’s frequent reshuffling of northern governors, who were perceived by southerners as rivals against the southerners coming to extract resources for personal enrichment, had increased frustration in the south.”* (Central Asia Executive Summary Series 2009).

### ***Corruption in Kyrgyzstan***

Administrative corruption is one of the most dangerous ills plaguing the Kyrgyz society and one of the biggest impediments in the development of democratic institutions in the country. A 2006 World Bank report noted that despite several institutional measures taken by the government the corruption had only risen in

Kyrgyzstan.

*“In 2005 it (Kyrgyzstan) rated first among all countries surveyed by the BEEPS (Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Survey) in the frequency of bribes, second (to Azerbaijan) in the level of the bribe tax, and second (to Albania) in the extent to which corruption is a problem for business. Moreover, two of the three indicators—the frequency of bribes and the extent to which firms see corruption as a problem for business—increased from 2002 to 2005, in contrast to the trends in most of the countries in the region. And these trends are occurring despite efforts at economic and institutional reforms since the early 1990s.” (World Bank Report 2006:12)*

The Transparency International (TI) research regarding the prevalence of corruption across nations, gave 130<sup>th</sup> rank to Kyrgyzstan out of 150 countries in 2005. These reports provide ample evidence for the presence of corruption in Kyrgyzstan, which afflicted all the levels of the official machinery. The ineffectiveness of the government in dealing efficiently with the socio economic problems of the country could also be attributed to the prevalence of corruption in the country. Corruption aggravated the social inequality because the poor had limited access to basic social services like education, public health services, pensions etc. Brinkerhoff, and Goldsmith (2002:15) say clientelism also bred corruption and there were many instances of non-transparent staffing being prevalent in the state system in Kyrgyzstan. Abazov (2003) supporting this viewpoint says network of loyal supporters and kin became extremely important in Kyrgyzstan as the level of corruption grew and penetrated into all corners of public life. Abazov adds that for the maintenance of this particular institutional structure it became important for its beneficiaries to keep political power as long as possible. Any loss of power meant the entire removal of the network of beneficiaries that were connected to any corrupt leader. Temirkoulov (2007) says that if the solidarity groups had remained outside the state structure then there wouldn't have been such a cause for concern because solidarity based on clan/region often got misused by the corrupt officials.

*“The practice of such solidarity would not create any problems if it remained outside the structures of official state organizations. However, this phenomenon not only takes place within the parameters of official bodies - it also (and often) takes up a dominating position not only in personnel selection but also when there are political moves made by groups of elites seeking power and to gain access to resources.” (Temirkoulov 2007:7)*

Further, corruption and nepotism go hand in hand as corrupt politicians always try to



bring their own people, from same region or clan, in important positions. Berdikееva (2006:11) says that institutions such as fiscal agencies, customs and various government bureaucracies became riddled with nepotism and corruption. According to Temirkoulov this ensured a degree of security to the corrupt official/chief as instead of directly indulging in corrupt practices, subordinates engaged in the negotiations involving bribes and this prevented the chief from being caught 'red-handed'. Temirkoulov says that for an effective functioning of this 'scheme' the chief required mechanisms of informal control over his subordinates. Clan and regional affiliations were such loyal institutions in Kyrgyzstan that chiefs used to gain a measure of control over their subordinates. If there was any possibility of a subordinate pointing to the complicity of his chief, the chief had the power to put pressure on the subordinate via common relatives, family, aksakals, etc.

The judiciary in Kyrgyzstan has also not remained immune of corruption. Since the constitution grants the President the power to appoint judges to high courts, military tribunals and local courts Akaev appointed people who could help him in maintaining his control. Thus, even in the appointments in the judiciary, clan and regional considerations cropped up in Kyrgyzstan. There have been many evidences where judiciary had been misused for barring opposition candidates from contesting in elections on flimsy grounds as had happened in the 2005 Parliamentary elections. The sanctity of judiciary also got questioned when head of the Constitutional Court, Cholpon Baekova, granted Akaev the ability to run for reelection in 1998. Baekova belonging to the same clan as that of Akaev was not a mere coincidence.

Temirkoulov says that it is corruption that explains the continued presence of regionalism and tribalism in the state's structures and not the perceived hostility between the two regions. However, the idea of conflict between the two halves has been so entrenched in the minds of ordinary Kyrgyz, argues Temirkoulov, that even if a person saw corruption in a certain state institution and found out that the given official was a native of the other region then too he was bound to believe that the cause of their seeking bribes and a biased personnel selection was hostility and antipathy towards natives of his region.

*"Thus, corruption, faulty interpretations of occurrences and erroneous estimations will lead to the formation of negative opinions about natives of the other region; and*

*such divisive opinions may potentially threaten stability and undermine national unity.” (Temirkoulov 2007:7).*

Corruption is considered to one of the many reasons that led to Akaev’s downfall in 2005. Several reports indict Akaev for not only accumulating a great deal of personal wealth but also not doing enough to check the growth of corruption that became entrenched during his rule.

*“Akayev's improper accumulation of wealth was only part of Kyrgyzstan's overall corruption picture. During his administration, graft became so embedded in the political culture that it severely eroded public confidence in government.” (Gullette, 2005)*

## **Growth of Radical Islam in Kyrgyzstan**

Another significant but dangerous fallout of the politicization of the regional divide in Kyrgyzstan has been the growth of radical Islamic groups, which especially became active in the southern provinces of the country after 1991. Both the resurgence and radicalization of Islam in the region has been a post-independence development when the lack a clear identity and economic hardships forced the people as well as the leaders to seek shelter under more familiar institutions. This development especially has posed a greater risk to Kyrgyzstan considering that inter-ethnic relations have always been very tense in nature here. For example in June 1990 serious clashes occurred in the Osh province between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks over some land dispute due to which the borders between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan had to be closed down. Many observers have also noted the growing foothold of radical groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir in the southern oblasts of Kyrgyzstan in their studies and have expressed fears regarding their potential to undermine institutional stability in the country.

*“The area around Osh, and indeed the whole Ferghana Valley, remains a potential tinderbox of ethnic disputes, exacerbated by the concentration of the most avid Islamic groups in this densely populated area.” (Anderson and Pomfret 2004:4)*

Connery (2000:12) says that unlike in Uzbekistan where Islam had been a very old tradition, Islamization could complete in Kyrgyzstan only by the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 70

years of “atheistic Soviet rule” further relegated religion to the background. Connery adds that it was only after the independence that leaders of Central Asia embraced Islam in search for a unique identity. Akiner (1996:91) has divided the growth and influence of Islam in the Central Asian region into three phases. While he labeled the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century as the period of ‘Islam Triumphant’ and the Russian and Soviet rule as the period of ‘Islam shackled’, he termed the period after independence as ‘Islam resurgent’ when Islam reemerged as a religious and socio-political force in the country. Thus, it was only in the 1990s that Islam again started gaining ground in Kyrgyzstan and the policies of the leaders including Akaev had a definite role to play in this reassertion of Islam in national identity (Lipovsky 1996).

Akiner (1996:117) in support of this viewpoint says that since the Central Asian states acquired freedom without any warning or preparation it led to the creation of a ‘psychological vacuum’, which could have led to the implosion of the society. In the face of this, the elites started promoting Islam vigorously as the basis of new ‘state ideology’ and dismissed the Soviet policies as only an aberration that had ‘corrupted the moral fiber of the region’. To reassert his Islamic identity Akaev not only took the oath of office on both the Quran and the constitution of the country but also declared that the new Kyrgyz constitution should reflect the moral values of Islam. As a consequence of this, a number of mosques and madrassahs became functional in the country. While in 1987 there were only 34 mosques open for worship in Kyrgyzstan, by 1994, almost a 1000 mosques opened up (Akiner 1996:118). According to official data from the governmental Commission on Religious Affairs at the beginning of January 2002, there are now 1,388 Muslim mosques 22 madrasas (religious schools and institutions of higher learning), and eight Islam institutes in Kyrgyzstan (Tabyshalieva 2002:83). However, the influence and acceptance of Islam has been of different degrees in the northern and the southern halves of Kyrgyzstan.

Radical groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir could find a greater foothold in the southern oblasts of Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken as compared to the northern provinces in Kyrgyzstan because of many reasons. First of all, while the northern provinces enjoyed a deeper integration with Russia and its culture during the Soviet rule, the southern population came under greater influence of Uzbeks who had settled down in the fertile valleys of Fergana. The influence of separate cultures on the two halves led

to the development of diverse societies in Kyrgyzstan. While the northern population became Russianized and secular, religion and traditionalism dominated in the southern society. Fletcher and Sergeyev (2002:253) agreeing with this viewpoint say that Islam did play a greater role in the southern provinces of Osh and Jalal-Abad and add that even during the Soviet era religion retained a significant role in the southern provinces. Thus, Islam and its traditions became more pervasive and widely followed amongst the southerners. Consequently, the southern population became more religious and observant than the northern population (Olcott 2005:108).

*“The north, geographically and culturally closer to Russia, does not have a strong connection with Islamic tradition. In contrast, Islam in the south has played a central role in society. Cut off from the north both literally and figuratively, the southern population of Kyrgyzstan identifies itself with Islam, Sharia law, and the customs and traditions of Islamic life.”* (Connery 2000:13)

Secondly, after independence, the country witnessed deep economic recession, which affected the population of Kyrgyzstan severely. However, the economic deprivation felt by the southern population was especially acute since the administration run largely by northerners ensured a greater flow of resources and investment to the north as compared to the south. Spector (2004:22) says that investments continued to favor heavily the northern regions, even though more than 50% of the population lived in the south and agricultural and industrial opportunities were concentrated in the Ferghana Valley.

*“In Kyrgyzstan, politics are characterized by a winner-takes-all element. The lion's share of the benefits of state largesse in the forms of appointments and subsidies goes to the region, clan or ethnicity in charge of the state.”* (Karagiannis 2005:141).

In addition to this, the poverty and unemployment rates also skyrocketed in the southern provinces. In 2002 government figures indicated that 52.4 per cent of the population in Osh, 44.1 per cent in Batken and 54.9 per cent in Jalal-Abad lived below the poverty level (Karagiannis 2005:141). Further, the per capita income in 2002 in Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken provinces was about half of Bishkek's (Karagiannis 2005:142). The unemployment rates were especially high amongst the youth in southern provinces, which provided rich recruitment grounds to radical Islamic groups who often manipulated the sentiments of the people for their own

advantage. Tabyshalieva (2002:91) holds both poor living standards as well as lack of political participation of the people as responsible for radicalization of Islam in the southern provinces and says that successful economic reforms along with greater democratization of society would be vital in prevention of homegrown religious extremism.

*“...the neighbouring regions of Kyrgyz Republic (Jalal-Abad, Osh and Batken) are fertile grounds for Islamic extremists and will become more so if these regions continue to lag economically.”* (Anderson and Pomfret 2004:27)

In addition to these factors, the geographic location of Kyrgyzstan has also had a definite role to play in the growth of radical Islamic groups in the south. Fletcher and Sergeyev (2002:254) say that powerful Islamic forces have been active just outside Kyrgyzstan. These Islamic groups wish to establish an Islamic state in whole of Fergana valley of which the southern provinces of Kyrgyzstan form an important part. In 1999, around 200 IMU armed guerrillas stormed into the Osh province from neighbouring Tajikistan to establish a free corridor through Kyrgyzstan running from Tajikistan to Uzbekistan. The Kyrgyz army successfully forced these Islamic rebels, who were mainly ethnic Uzbeks out. However, it gave rise to widespread fear in the government circles of further radicalization of Islam in the southern oblasts and as a consequence, a new province of Batken was carved out from the Osh province where the invasion had taken place.

Karagiannis says that in order to gain more members groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir offered solutions like the overthrow of capitalist system, which found much resonance with the population, which was suffering hard during the transition to a market economy. Thus, the radical Islamic ideas could find greater supporters in the southern provinces as compared to the northern provinces. The ICG Report (2003:18) expressed the fear the mass migration of southerners to Bishkek might lead to growth of these radical Islamic ideas in the northern provinces of Kyrgyzstan as there were some reports of activity in Bishkek, Tokmok and Issyk-Kul. Thus, the ethno-regional difference compounded by the economic disparity between the two halves has fuelled the radicalization of Islam in the southern region.

## SUMMARY

Akaev after his election as the President of the country promised to set up a democratic institutional structure in the country. In this direction he took a number of reform minded steps, which showed some positive results especially in the beginning of his rule. His initial enthusiasm for democracy led to establishment of a vibrant civil society in Kyrgyzstan along with the establishment of an independent press and a network of NGOs. A number of opposition groups also mushroomed in Kyrgyzstan that represented different societal interests. Thus, the country became one of the most democratic countries in the Central Asian region. However, by the mid 1990s the tide began to turn and authoritarian tendencies began to emerge in the government. By 1995, the Kyrgyz economy was in shambles and poverty and unemployment rates were high. The Akaev administration increasingly came under criticism for its failure to revive the economy. The opposition members also blocked many of Akaev's reform proposals in the Parliament. In order to deal with this, Akaev resorted to authoritarian techniques to reign in the opposition and maintain his control over the country.

Further, Akaev who entered the President's office as an "outsider" (Spector 2004:19) wanted to maintain his powerbase. For this he created a loyal coterie around himself by appointing people from the same clan and region to important political and economic positions in the country. Wide networks of patron client relations emerged in Kyrgyzstan, which led to the capture of power by the northerners. Nepotism and corruption became rampant in the country. Eventually, the southerners started to feel neglected and increasingly disenfranchised and started demanding a greater representation in the power structure of the country. This also undermined the establishment of independent democratic institutions in the country, as people from one region got favoured at the expense of the other region. This became a major threat to the peace and stability of the country as a conflict line got drawn between the two regions in Kyrgyzstan. Mistrust and suspicion dictated the interaction between the populations of two regions. In such an uncertain environment, democratic institutions seldom function independently and this happened in Kyrgyzstan as well.

Thus, it can be said that practices like clientelism, nepotism and corruption, on the one hand, strengthened the regional clan divisions in the country and, on the other hand, were very much sustained by the same regional clan considerations. This greatly undermined the development of impartial and independent democratic institutions in the country as these traditional identities continued to hold relevance in the politics and proved divisive in the long run.

The next chapter will analyze the economic transition of Kyrgyzstan from a command economy to a closed economy. It will also delineate the socio-economic differences between the two regions and how it fuelled the regional divide in the country. Along with this, the chapter will also try to analyze the reasons for the economic backwardness of the southern provinces in comparison to northern provinces especially of Chui and Bishkek.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECT OF REGIONALISM**

The political effects of the north-south regionalism in Kyrgyzstan have been manifold. During the 15 years of Akaev government, the southern populations including both the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz felt marginalized by and under represented in the politics of the country. This finally culminated into the 2005 protest in which the southern population galvanized together to topple Akaev government and capture the political power from the northerners. However it is essential to point out here that the political disenfranchisement was not the only grievance felt by the southerners against the Akaev administration. The south had also repeatedly complained about the lack of social economic development in their region in comparison to the north of the country. Various reports and surveys conducted by international organizations have confirmed that south of the country was indeed poorer than the north especially when compared to Bishkek and the surrounding Chui valley. The comparison on the basis of the socio economic indicators between the two halves also supplements this fact. However it needs to be analyzed that whether the economic and social disparity between the two regions was a result of deliberate policies of the government led by a northerner or was it due to the inherent nature of the economic and social structure of the societies in the two halves.

When Kyrgyzstan gained independence in 1991, it immediately adopted the market economic model for itself and rapidly took several economic measures to ensure the same. The initial period proved to be particularly difficult for the people as the country witnessed hyperinflation, significant drop in growth rate and increasing unemployment and poverty rates. This made many of the observers especially from the gradualist school of thought question the strategy of rapid economic transition adopted by Akaev and his administration. Others wondered if Kyrgyzstan was even ready for this scale of transformation undertaken by the then government.



*“The issue of sustainable transition was complicated by the fact that the republic was not prepared for independence, and did not have enough time to adjust to the new political environment.” (Abazov 1999:197)*

Others like Mogilevsky and Omorova (2011:3) also agree with this and say that the lack of experience with independence, democracy and market economy presented a difficult set of initial conditions for Kyrgyzstan.

The country witnessed six years of continuous economic recession, which lasted up to 1996 when the economy finally registered growth. In 1996 the country's GDP was only half of 1990's level. Rising inflation further complicated the economic difficulties of the population. In 1991 inflation reached 85 per cent, in 1992 it leaked to 855 per cent, and by 1993 it had jumped further to 1,209 per cent (Abazov 1999:214). The number of unemployed in the economy also increased rapidly.

By mid 1990s the economy showed signs of resumption as GDP of the country improved over the previous years. However this did not reflect proportionately in the poverty and unemployment rates in the country, which continued to hover at higher levels. Only after the year 2000, poverty rates registered a decline in the country. An important factor over here is that the poverty and inequality rates have a regional character in Kyrgyzstan. Both poverty and unemployment have been more rampant in the southern provinces from the time of independence itself and this has also triggered migration from the south to the more prosperous regions of the north. This is another bone of contention between the north and the south.

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to understand the continued 'spatial inequality' (Anderson and Pomfret 2004) that exists in Kyrgyzstan. The scope of the study will be limited from period 1991 to 2005. In addition to this, the chapter will analyze the transition process from a command economy to a market economy in Kyrgyzstan and will also summarize the differences between the two regions from the perspective of socio-economic indicators.

### ***KYRGYZ ECONOMY UNDER THE SOVIET RULE***

The 70 years of Soviet rule brought about a deep transformation in the character of

both the society as well as the economy of Kyrgyzstan. Rapid measures were taken both in the agricultural as well as the industrial sector in the Central Asian region, in the name of reforms.

Kyrgyzstan, which had been a country of nomadic pastoralists, witnessed forcible settling down of the populations when collectivization of agriculture was carried out on a mass scale in the Republics of the Soviet. In chapter one we have already discussed that how there had been a continuous tension between the settled populations and the nomads and how each perceived the other with skepticism. In Kyrgyzstan, the domination of Uzbeks in the south led to a more settled life in southern provinces as compared to the northern provinces, which were inhabited by the Kyrgyz nomads. The settlement of nomads brought the two groups or regions into direct conflict with each other, as there was an increased competition between them over the limited resources.

Under the Soviet policy of collectivization of agriculture, small private holdings of land were brought together to form large state run collective farms, which were also called as 'kolkhoz'. Under this system, a number of families worked together on a large kolkhoz instead of a single family tilling a piece of land, which was the case earlier. Usually member of the same clan were grouped to work together in the Kolkhoz under the supervision of traditional elites, which further strengthened the clan identities in Kyrgyzstan. Graubner (2005) says that this led to an overlapping between the formal and informal institutions, as traditional elites became part of the regionalized administrative hierarchy.

*"Their status changed from being elites of informal institutions to being elites of formal, Soviet institutions. Because they were regionally anchored, regional identity became an important part of the clan identity."* (Graubner 2005:7)

The Soviet intervention also brought a change in the ethnic makeup of the country as during this period there was a manifold increase in the migration of people from other parts of USSR to the Central Asian region. Abazov (1999:239) says that the Soviet campaign had a long lasting impact on the Kyrgyzstan as it not only led to large scale farming and rapid mechanization of the agriculture sector but it also brought considerable changes in the social and ethnic structure of the Kyrgyz ail (a kind of tribal and extended family unit). The latter one was the result of both large scale

migration as well forcible settling down of populations from other parts of USSR to Kyrgyzstan under Stalin's social and ethnic policy in 1930s and 1940s. The migrants from Russia and other parts of Soviet Republics formed the industrial labour force, technicians and professionals in the country (Mikhalev and Heinrich 1999:4). Abazov adds that many of these Russian and Ukrainian migrants worked as mechanics and tractor drivers or in worked in repair shops and small assembly plants. Thus, the percentage of Slavs and other Europeans increased in the population and altered the ethnic makeup of the country. However, since many of these farms were oriented towards the Russian market they were often unprofitable and inefficient.

Apart from the reforms in agriculture, heavy industrialization was carried out, especially in the north of Kyrgyzstan, under the system of central planning. The industries operated as part of the Soviet unit and were deeply integrated into the all-Union division of labour and production.

*“During the period of the USSR (1917–1991), Kyrgyzstan had a highly specialized economic niche in the communist economic system. Kyrgyzstan served primarily as a provider of primary commodities for industries located in the European parts of the USSR.”* (Gleason 2008:46)

So, instead of the domestic needs, the focus of industrialization in Kyrgyzstan, as in other Central Asian countries, was to satisfy the demands of Soviet economy.

In the industrial sector huge stress was laid on development of heavy and agricultural machinery, electric motors, military equipment and light manufacturing. These were largely concentrated in and around the capital Bishkek. Abazov (1999:239) argues that the Soviets made such large-scale investment in the industrial sector in Kyrgyzstan as they were facing continuous shortage of labour in the European part of Soviet Union and Siberia due to low birth rate. On the other hand, Central Asian countries along with Kyrgyzstan provided ample labour force due to increasing population in the region. Thus, availability of cheap labour in the Central Asian region made the Soviets invest heavily in the industrial sector here. Further, since the indigenous population lacked the technical know how, many skilled workers from other parts of USSR moved to Kyrgyzstan, which changed the ethnic composition in the country. The northern provinces witnessed an increasing population of Slavs in

the region, which had many social ramifications. The indigenous population in the north became more Russianized and modern as compared to the southern population, which remained traditional and religious under the Uzbek influence. This increased the already existing ethnic gap between the two regions.

Thus through rapid development of industrial sector, collectivization of the agriculture sector, the Soviets tried to transform the Kyrgyzstani economy which till then had been largely agrarian and nomadic in nature. This had a long lasting impact on not only changing the nature of the economy in Kyrgyzstan but bringing changes in the composition of society as well.

*“This (Soviet) policy sometimes ignored both cost-effectiveness and social factors. Only a belief in the unlimited potential of social engineering could explain the ways and methods of the economic development of Central Asia in general and Kyrgyzstan in particular since the late 1920s.”(Abazov 1999:239)*

## **TRANSITION PERIOD (1991-2005)**

The decoupling of the economy from the Soviet economic unit was both a moment of challenge as well as opportunity for Kyrgyzstan. The situation was challenging as the dissolution of USSR led of the disruption of the demand and supply chain that had existed between the various regions of the Soviet Union and had been the mainstay of every economy in the Central Asian region. This naturally had a direct bearing on Kyrgyzstan also as most of its industrial machinery and agricultural production was geared towards satisfying the needs of the other regions of the Soviet unit.

*“In 1991, about 98% of the republic’s trade was with other Soviet republics; over 40% of the republic’s imports came from Russia (Anderson 1999:67).*

*After the USSR collapsed, Kyrgyzstan’s mining and industrial enterprises underwent rapid contraction due to the loss of orders from northern buyers and the inability of the existing transportation infrastructure to make possible a rapid entrance into other markets.” (Gleason 2008:46)*

In addition to this, the termination of budget subsidies from the Soviet center further made the task of new leadership difficult. The period after the independence was thus marked by hyperinflation, fall in wages and a drastic decrease in output. There was

also spontaneous erection of various types of trade barriers which led to the loss of potential markets, increase in transaction costs, trade risks etc. (Dabrowski Marek. et al. 1995:7).

However this was also a moment of opportunity for the new Kyrgyz leadership as for the first time in its history Kyrgyzstan enjoyed the status of an independent sovereign state with no external power dictating and controlling its economy. Akayev, soon after assuming the position of President decided to follow a market oriented model for the country and took a radical approach towards this process. While other countries adopted a more gradualist approach to economic transition, Kyrgyzstan soon emerged as the most active reformer in the region.

Many observers especially belonging to the gradualist school of thought questioned this shock-therapy approach adopted by Kyrgyzstan especially when growth in Kyrgyzstan registered a marked decline in the initial period. Gradualists for long have prescribed a slow and piecemeal approach to economic transition and often cite the example of China as a successful example of gradualism. Shock therapists on the other hand prescribe a complete set of opposite prescriptions for the appropriate speed of transition. They prescribe a rapid break from the past accompanied with decontrol of prices and speedy privatization, which is also sometimes called as a big bang approach to transition (Popov, 2007). Kyrgyzstan under Akaev opted for the latter approach to transition. Abazov (1999:200) says that newly independent states in 1991 had the advantage of learning from the 'mistakes and errors' of their predecessors, which wasn't available to countries that got freedom in 1950s. Thus, the choices regarding the appropriate strategy of development were many in front of Kyrgyzstan. Abazov (1999:201) further adds that

*“...the choices of the Kyrgyzstan's government were determined by a number of factors, including the legacy of its economic and political development during the Soviet era. Other factors also included post-Soviet political environment and leadership, and international and regional economic situation.”*

For the purpose of analysis, the transition period of Kyrgyzstan has been divided into three sets of period here.

## ***Reforms From 1991 to 1995***

In 1992, Akaev adopted a slew of measures as part of his economic reform strategy for building a market economy in Kyrgyzstan. Abazov (1999:243) says that the Akaev administration made its intention of deregulating the economy, liberalizing prices, implementing a deep restructuring and decentralizing of the system of state administration clear as soon as he assumed the control of the country. Kyrgyzstan was among the first country in the region to introduce a national currency (Som) in 1993 although, as Abazov says, Kyrgyzstan initially wanted to preserve integration within the CIS. Along with this, government ordered privatization of state owned enterprises along with development of the private sector and liberalization of trade and commerce. Between 1991 and 1994, approximately 4,700 enterprises – including small trade outlets and retail and service establishments, were privatized. In the second phase (1994-95), approximately 1,300 medium- and large-scale enterprises, particularly in industry, transport, and construction, were privatized (ILO 2008). Most of the price and capital controls were also done away with. Many observers were surprised with the alacrity with which reforms were being carried out in Kyrgyzstan.

*“The pace with which market reforms were promoted during the first decade of the transition was high compared to leading transition countries in Eastern Europe.”* (ILO 2008).

Reforms were also carried out in the agriculture sector, which went on in the next decade as well. The Soviet structure of large state run farms was dismantled and land was redistributed to peasants, which gave rise to small private farms in Kyrgyzstan. Land was distributed based on a family size and was granted for 99 years. In addition to this, the Akaev administration tried providing an enabling legislative environment for the stable functioning of the newly liberalized economy (Abazov 1999:243).

However the period from 1991 to 1995 was a period of deep economic decline in Kyrgyzstan, which continued till 1996. Ofer and Pomfret (2004:226) say that the production almost halved between 1992 and 1995 and with that the living standards of the people also went down. Many observers (Abazov 1999) opine that Kyrgyzstan’s lack of experience with new statehood and economy was responsible for the economic downturn.

*“At the initial stage of the transitional era (1991-92), Kyrgyzstan’s government did not have a clear picture of the directions, methods and speed of implementing the economic changes.” (Abazov 1999:202).*

The economy reported sharp decline in output and income along with rapid rise in inequality in distribution of income (ILO 2008:20). Between 1991 and 1995 the cumulative decline in GDP amounted to 50 per cent of the 1990 level (ILO 2008:21). The 2003 World Bank report points out that both the economic restructuring as well as loss of direct transfer from central union budget were responsible for this. Along with this, the economy reported hyperinflation with rising unemployment and poverty. While in 1992 inflation touched 2033 per cent and remained high even in 1993 (930 per cent), it registered a decline thereafter, coming down to 32 per cent in 1995. Prices of consumer goods jumped up over 500 times (Ofer and Pomfret 2004:226). With economic restructuring and privatization, employment rates also declined in the country due to shortage of jobs. There were increased dismissals as well from both the private sector, to reduce surplus labour and increase profit, and from the government sector. (ILO, 2008:29). Ofer and Pomfret (2004:227) say that in this period the agricultural became the most important sector of the economy even though production in agriculture had declined sharply.

### ***From 1996 to 2000: Economic Uncertainty***

The economy showed signs of resumption after 1996, however, the period was marked by both upturns and downturns. In 1996-97 the economy registered a growth, which was mainly concentrated in agriculture and manufacturing sector (ILO 2008:21). The national currency got stabilized and balance of payment also improved over this period. The current government budget deficit also got reduced significantly, from 11.5 per cent of the GDP in 1995 to 4.7 per cent of GDP in 1997 (Ofer and Pomfret 2004:226). Privatization and liberalization continued in this period as well.

*“By 1998 over half of the industrial sector had been privatized, a two tiered banking system had been created with new private banks operating in parallel to state banks.” (Mikhalev and Heinrich 1999:5).*

However the financial crisis of 1998 in Russia had a negative impact on the Kyrgyz economy and the economy witnessed a downturn in the latter half of the period. Inflation rate showed a decline as compared to the previous period when the economy

reeled under hyperinflation. Inflation touched as low as 9.6 per cent in 2000, which still was high by international standards. Barring the year 1999 when it touched 40, inflation rate remained relatively low during this period.

Despite the growth witnessed in the earlier part of the period, poverty rates only showed an increasing trend in Kyrgyzstan. According to the expenditure aggregate method used by the National Statistics Committee for poverty assessment, poverty rate increased from 43.5 per cent in 1996 to 55.3 percent in 1999 (ILO 2008:24). Experts hold the Russian financial crisis of 1998 as responsible for the increase in poverty rate.

### ***From 2001 to 2005: Economic Recovery***

From 2000 onwards, the economy in Kyrgyzstan showed an upturn. ILO (2008:22) reports that the GDP growth in 2000-2001 was more stable and relatively broader as growth took place in traditional sectors like agriculture, mining, construction, power trade and catering. On the other hand, the growth witnessed in 1996-97 was on account of higher investments in the economy. However, in 2002 the GDP growth fell to zero due to negative growth in mining and construction sector. The highlight of this period was the rapid growth witnessed in the service sector, which led to an increase in the contribution of the service sector to GDP. The ILO (2008) report points out that the handsome growth of 7 per cent in 2003 and 2004 was on account of the service sector and non-gold industry sector. The inflation rates also remained single digit from 2001 onwards till 2005, touching as low as 2.3 per cent in 2002.

The highlight of this period was the decrease witnessed in the poverty rates in the country. The poverty rate, which was as high as 62.5 per cent in 2000, went down to 46 per cent in 2004. There was a reduction in extreme poverty as well, which went down from 20 percent in 2000 to 13 percent in 2003 (ILO 2008:24).

Thus, the period after 2000 had been particularly positive compared to the previous decade as far as the economy of Kyrgyzstan was concerned. Not only the GDP of the country showed a climb, the poverty rates also showed a decline.



## ***SOCIO-ECONOMIC COMPARISON BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH KYRGYZSTAN***

In a span of 15 years a number of surveys and studies were carried out by international organizations including World Bank and UNDP to delineate the economic and social differences between the northern and southern Kyrgyzstan and suggest policy recommendations to fill the gap between the two. The socio-economic disparity between the two halves remained a recurring feature in all the studies and pointed towards the apparent failure of the Akaev administration to pursue an all-inclusive and balanced regional growth in Kyrgyzstan. Individual observers both domestic as well as foreign also accept the fact that the southern Kyrgyzstan has remained poor in comparison to the northern half. Further, since independence, the intra republic differentials appear to have widened. Anderson and Pomfret (2004:7) point out that the people in the capital city, Bishkek, were best able to benefit from the opportunities of the market economies and were able to protect themselves from the huge negative shocks. In the section below a comparative study of the northern and southern oblasts, in terms of socio-economic indicators, has been done to present a clearer picture of the disparity between the two regions.

### **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**

The data below represents the GDP per capita at purchasing power parity (PPP) for different oblasts of Kyrgyzstan from 1996 to 1999 (UNDP, 2000:64-65).

**Table 1 Gross Domestic Product, Province-wise Data, 1996-99.**

<b>Oblast</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>
<b>Bishkek</b>	3,663	3,762	4,231	4,340
<b>Chui</b>	3,651	3,927	3,617	3,776
<b>Issyk-Kul</b>	1,577	2,734	3,372	3,517
<b>Naryn</b>	1,890	2,200	2,131	2,218

<b>Talas</b>	1,766	1,794	1,656	1,718
<b>Jalal-Abad</b>	1,470	1,424	1,380	1,421
<b>Osh</b>	1,117	1,088	997	1,024

(Source: UNDP 2000)

By comparing the figures for GDP per capita at PPP at the oblast levels in Kyrgyzstan, the regional inequality becomes apparent. In the year 1996 the growth resumed in Kyrgyzstan. However the financial crisis in Russia in 1998 led to a decline in growth in Kyrgyzstan as well.

- 1) The GDP per capita at PPP for all the southern provinces was lower than all the northern provinces from 1996 to 1999.
- 2) Although the period from 1996 to 1999, witnessed an upswing in the initial two years and a downturn in the later two years, the GDP rate was better in 1999 than 1996 in the northern provinces except Talas. However, both Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces had a lower GDP in 1999 as compared to the 1996 level. Thus, while the northern provinces especially Chui, Bishkek, Issyk-Kul registered a positive growth in the period, the southern provinces witnessed a decline in growth.
- 3) The Naryn oblast in north Kyrgyzstan is considered to be one of the poorest oblasts in north Kyrgyzstan. During the 1996-1999, even Naryn had more GDP per capita at PPP than the southern oblasts.
- 4) The extent of economic disparity between the different oblasts is also apparent from the above figures. While the GDP per capita at PPP for Bishkek was 3663 in 1996, it was only 1470 for Jalal-Abad and 1117 for Osh in the same year. In 1999, while the GDP increased to 4340 for Bishkek, it was only 1024 in Osh and 1421 in Jalal-Abad. Both southern oblasts registered a decline from the 1996 level. Chui province also registered a handsome growth from 3651 in 1996 to 3776 in 1999. Anderson and Pomfret (2004:16) say that while the per capita GDP differences widened between the north and south from 1996 to 1999 with Bishkek and the surrounding Chuy oblast enjoying an increase while the poor oblasts of the south became poorer.

To supplement this argument, the data from 2000 to 2003 is also given here that compares the regional disparity in Kyrgyzstan on the basis of Gross regional product (GRP) per capita at purchasing power parity (NHDR, 2005).

**Table 2 Gross Regional Product, Province-wise Data, 2000-2003**

<b>Oblast</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
<b>Bishkek</b>	3,469	4,492	5,465	6,426
<b>Chui</b>	3,190	3,608	3,883	3,590
<b>Issyk-Kul</b>	4,890	5,078	3,521	4,819
<b>Naryn</b>	2,150	1,927	2,089	2,193
<b>Talas</b>	2,245	2,154	2,489	2,855
<b>Jalal-Abad</b>	2,403	2,051	2,026	1,992
<b>Osh</b>	1,309	1,129	1,427	1,543
<b>Batken</b>	1,112	1,095	1,140	1,246

*(Source: NHDR 2005)*

From the above data it is again clear that GRP per capita at PPP rates was lowest in the southern oblasts of Osh and Batken. Jalal-Abad also didn't fair very well, although in 2000 and 2001 its GRP was higher than some northern provinces (Naryn and Talas). Another point to note is that Chui, Bishkek and Issyk-Kul remained the leaders with Bishkek's GRP touching as high as 6426 in 2003. The extent of economic disparity between the two halves is also clear from data as the GRP for Bishkek and Chui are well ahead of the GRPs of all the southern oblasts in all the years.

### **Human Development Index (HDI)**

The Human Development Index (HDI) released by UNDP is another valuable indicator for comparing regional disparity in Kyrgyzstan. The HDI of a country is

calculated by taking longevity of the population, education and income (gross domestic product per capita, by purchasing power parity in US dollars) into account. Here, the HDI figures of all the oblasts for three different years 1995, 2000 and 2005 have been compared and these point out towards the extent of inequality between the north and south.

**Table 3 Human Development Index (HDI), Province-wise Data, 1995-2005.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Kyrgyz</b>	<b>Batken</b>	<b>Jalal- Abad</b>	<b>Issyk- Kul</b>	<b>Naryn</b>	<b>Osh</b>	<b>Talas</b>	<b>Chui</b>	<b>Bishkek</b>
<b>1995</b>	0.642	-	0.633	0.646	0.638	0.621	0.641	0.660	0.664
<b>2000</b>	0.684	0.638	0.688	0.718	0.677	0.654	0.678	0.681	0.719
<b>2005</b>	0.696	0.638	0.661	0.697	0.656	0.641	0.675	0.687	0.762

*(Source: NHDR 2009/10)*

- 1) In 1995, while the national HDI figure was 0.642, the HDI for Osh and Jalal-Abad was less than the national figure. While it was it was for 0.633 for Jalal-Abad it was only 0.621 for Osh, which was lowest in the country. All the northern oblasts had HDI higher than the southern oblasts and the national HDI barring Naryn. Bishkek and Chui and Bishkek recorded the highest HDI in the country with Bishkek at 0.664 and Chui recording 0.660.
- 2) In 2000, Jalal-Abad improved its score and recorded 0.688 HDI, which was marginally higher than the national HDI of 0.684. It was also higher than northern Oblasts of Naryn, Talas and even Chui. However, Osh and Batken oblasts of south recorded the lowest HDI in the country. Bishkek recorded the highest HDI of 0.719, which was way ahead of the HDI scores of southern provinces.
- 3) In 2005, HDI figures again showed a decline in both Jalal-Abad and Osh provinces from the 2000 level and it was lesser than the indices of all other northern provinces barring Naryn. It was also lesser than the national HDI. On

the other hand, both Chui and Bishkek again registered an increase in HDI over the 2000 level.

### ***Poverty rate***

Poverty has been one of the most persistent problems plaguing Kyrgyzstan. In the initial decade after independence, owing to the difficult transition period, the poverty rates hovered at higher levels only. The regional aspect of poverty was also clear at that point as the southern oblasts consistently performed poorly as compared to the north. Anderson and Pomfret (2004:13) say that even before the transition to a market economy was fully under way, locational differences were already significant as, in 1993, households in the urban south were 24 percent poorer and households in the rural south were 69 percent poorer than a household with the same characteristics in Bishkek. In addition to this while the rural south performed far worse than Bishkek, rural Chui was only 27 percent poorer than Bishkek. Thus, disparity between the rural households of the north and the south was huge in 1993.

Anderson and Pomfret further add that the completion of the transition process in Kyrgyzstan didn't fill the gap between the north and the south as it only increased further in this period.

*“In 1997, when the transition to a market economy was well established, these locational differences had widened to 27 percent (rural Chuy), 65 percent (urban south), 83 percent (rural south), 80 percent (urban mountain), and 105 percent (rural mountain) relative to Bishkek and the urban north.”* (Anderson and Pomfret 2004:14)

It was only after 2000 that poverty rates started registering a decline in the country as the economy also stabilized. However, rate of decline in poverty rates was not constant across the board as the rates in southern provinces still remained higher than that of Bishkek and the Chui valley. The data below compares the poverty rate (percentage of people including the extremely poor, below the poverty line) of all the provinces of Kyrgyzstan from 2000 onwards to 2005.

**Table 4 Poverty level, Province-wise Data, 2000-2004.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Batken</b>	<b>Jalal- Abad</b>	<b>Issyk- Kul</b>	<b>Naryn</b>	<b>Osh</b>	<b>Talas</b>	<b>Chui</b>	<b>Bishkek</b>
<b>2000</b>	69.0	67.9	60.9	81.4	51.6	72.7	28.1	29.9
<b>2001</b>	41.2	55.0	55.2	70.4	56.1	67.3	29.2	29.5
<b>2002</b>	45.5	54.9	44.1	67.8	52.4	56.2	23.1	28.2
<b>2003</b>	84.9	57.7	52.1	72.1	56.4	55.4	27.7	22.5
<b>2004</b>	77.8	50.1	54.1	66.3	57.0	51.3	21.7	16.5

*(Source: NHDR 2005)*

1. In 2000, while Naryn and Talas (both are northern oblasts) had the highest percentage of poor living below the poverty line, both showed a decline in the later years. In 2004, both had poverty rates lesser than that of the southern province of Batken where number of people living below the poverty line showed much increase over the 2000 level.
2. Osh was another southern province to have higher number of people below poverty line in 2004 as compared to 2000. Thus, poverty rates increased in all the southern oblasts barring Jalal-Abad from the 2000 level.
3. On the other hand, all the northern provinces showed a declining trend.
4. Number of people living below the poverty line was much lesser in Bishkek and Chui as compared to all the other provinces of Kyrgyzstan. While in Chui it was 21.7 percent, in Bishkek it was a low as 16.5 percent.

### **Other Social Indicators**

In terms of other social indicators like education and social services, the northern provinces of Chui and Bishkek perform much better than their counterparts in the south. On the basis of the 1997 LSMS (Living Standards Measurement Study conducted under the guidance of World Bank) data, Anderson and Pomfret (2004:23) conclude that mountain and southern areas of Kyrgyzstan had fewer kindergartens, lower quality teachers, inadequate facilities, and lower enrolment in school than the northern areas of Chui and Bishkek. The authors also add that although healthcare

facilities were comparable between the two regions, in terms of availability of services, like road, water, sewer etc. Chui and Bishkek performed better than the mountainous regions and the southern agricultural area. Further, the highest density of population in Central Asia is found in the Fergana valley (Jalal-Abad oblast: 26.1 people/sq km, Osh oblast: 40.3 people/sq km and Batken oblast: 22.5 people/sq km) with a high percentage of youth (40 percent in the Kyrgyz Fergana valley) and a high birth rate (3.1 to 3.2 per woman) which aggravates the economic problems of the region (Bisig 2002:11).

## **REASONS FOR THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKWARDNESS OF SOUTHERN PROVINCES**

The socio economic data, discussed above, lays bare the extent of socio-economic disparity that existed between the northern and southern halves of Kyrgyzstan during the Akaev's rule. The realization of this difference between the two regions existed not only on the paper but was also a part of the consciousness of the population of Kyrgyzstan especially of the southern half. This is the reason why scholars time and again pointed out the potential the economic divide had in causing instability in the country (Temirkoulov 2004). The prophecy did come true in 2005 when finally the southern elites led the masses to revolt against a President who had increasingly become unpopular in south.

In order to understand the finer nuances of this socio-economic divide we need to analyze both the policies as well as the inherent structural problems of the southern economy.

### ***Structural Problems of Southern economy***

Growth in Kyrgyzstan resumed in the latter half of Akaev's rule and this was accompanied with an overall decline in poverty rates in the country. GDP also recoded a positive trend from 2000 onwards when it increased from 5.45 in 2000 to 7 percent in 2004. However, 2002 and 2005 were years of decline in GDP rate in Kyrgyzstan. Along with this inflation also registered a decline when it dropped from 18.7 percent in 2000 to 4.9 percent in 2005. Thus, overall the period after 2000 was

economically favourable for Kyrgyzstan as compared to the previous decade. However, post 2000 was also a period of political turmoil as twice the southerners rose against the perceived insensitivities of the administration towards their problems. It needs to be analyzed here that despite the popular perception that economic growth brings peace and stability, why Kyrgyzstan witnessed these protests. The answer here lies in the structure of growth in Kyrgyzstan and its incompatibility with the southern economy.

Islam (2004:1) says that growth alone is not sufficient to reduce poverty and adds that both the pattern and sources of growth as well as the manner in which its benefits are distributed are extremely important for achieving the goal of poverty reduction. Employment here forms the key link between growth and poverty alleviation. Torm (2003) says that for growth to be pro poor it should translate into growth of productive and remunerative employment.

*“In other words high economic growth which leads to a sustained increase in productive capacity will generate employment opportunities with rising productivity allowing the unemployed and/or poor to increase their incomes either in existing occupations or shift to new occupations involving higher level skills.”* (Torm 2003:2)

In Kyrgyzstan, the growth witnessed in the economy in latter half of Akaev’s rule didn’t translate into employment generation. In fact the unemployment rate in the country increased from 7.8 percent in 2001 to 9.7 percent in 2005. Thus, overall the number of unemployed increased in the economy during the growth period.

*“In the recovery period (from 1996 to 2004) average economic growth was about 5.5 per cent, while employment grew by an average rate of about 2.2 per cent.”* (ILO 2008:43)

However, one significant aspect of the Kyrgyz economy was that since independence the structure of employment had undergone a significant change in terms of employment status as well as sectoral shifts in employment (ILO 2008:33). After rapid deindustrialization witnessed after independence the mid-1990s economic revival was on the account of growth in agriculture and the services sector.

*“Deindustrialization has led to the increased dominance of agriculture and services respectively making up 39 per cent and 37 per cent of GDP in 1996-2005.”* (ILO 2008:23)



Torm says that although the share of agriculture in the employment rate increased after independence but it wasn't productive in nature as many people who came back were on account of loss of employment in the industrial sector. There was increasing number of lay-offs due to decrease in production. In first half of 1994, 19,000 people were laid-off which was twice more than the number of lay offs of the previous year (Howell 1996:55). So, there was an additional burden on the agricultural sector to provide employment to these unemployed people, which subsequently resulted in underemployment in the agrarian sector. Thus, agriculture growth was accompanied by underemployment in Kyrgyzstan and although the number of people working in agriculture increased in Kyrgyzstan, productivity remained low. And, eventually underemployment led to falling wages and poverty.

*“Reforms in agriculture have resulted in an increased number of people becoming engaged in this sector, absorbing some of the surplus labour force. In terms of providing employment, this may be perceived as a positive development, yet from a poverty reduction perspective one might question the desirability of this trend, given that labour productivity in the agricultural sector is lower than in manufacturing, which in turn means lower wages and underemployment, making it more difficult for people to improve their living standards.” (ILO 2008:10)*

We have already discussed that the southern oblasts are heavily dependent on agriculture. Thus, even after the reforms in agriculture and increased share of agriculture in GDP of the country, poverty remained high amongst the southern population due to factors like underemployment and falling wages. On the other hand, the share of services sector showed a substantial increase after 1995 in country's GDP, which explains the prosperity in the north especially in Chui and Bishkek where the service industry was largely concentrated.

*“The capital city of Bishkek and other urban areas have experienced particularly strong reductions in poverty mainly due to solid and sustainable growth in the service sector, which is more developed in urban areas.” (ILO 2008:260)*

Thus, while the northern oblasts prospered on account of growth in the service sector, southern oblasts remained comparatively poorer owing to their continued dependence on the agricultural sector. This is the reason why despite a decrease in the poverty levels have in Kyrgyzstan, the regional nature of poverty couldn't be erased.

### *Administrative negligence*

In the previous chapters we have already analyzed that how administrative policies during Akaev's rule tended to favour the northern oblasts over the southern provinces in terms of allocation of economic resources. Development of wide patron-client networks along with the capture of the administrative machine by the northern clans in the first fifteen years after independence ensured greater flow of resources and investment in north especially in Bishkek and Chui.

*“Investment continued to favor heavily the northern regions, even though more than 50% of the population lived in the south and agricultural and industrial opportunities were concentrated in the Ferghana Valley.” (Spector 2004:22)*

Thus, along with the huge dependence of southern population on agriculture the government policies also had a definite role to play in the comparative backwardness of the south.

### ***REPERCUSSIONS OF THE ECONOMIC DIVIDE: MIGRATION***

Migration in its different forms, both external and internal, has had a significant impact on the Kyrgyzstan's economy and society. While on the one hand, external migration (from USSR to Kyrgyzstan during the early period of industrialization) had led to deepening of the divide between the north and south of the country, on the other hand, internal migration (which was largely from the impoverished south to more prosperous north of the country) led to an increased animosity between the two regions.

In the previous chapters we have already looked into issue of external migration from Soviet Union to Kyrgyzstan, which was one of the reasons for the deepening of regional divide. The internal migration was one of the outcomes of this regional divide as since independence poorer population from the south had been migrating to more prosperous Bishkek in search for greener pastures. The population in the south facing increasing population pressure, shortage of arable land and some other economic problems (Abazov 1999:241) migrated to the northern part of Kyrgyzstan, especially the Chui valley and the area around the capital Bishkek since the latter

were considered to be more prosperous than the south, which had been a victim of growing population, unemployment, poverty, shortage of land and administrative negligence.

The population dependent on the agriculture sector especially suffered during the transition period. The 1991 reforms implemented under the guidance of the international financial institutions like IMF had a deteriorating impact on the agriculture of Kyrgyzstan.

*“The shock therapy approach to the ‘transition’ to a market economy has had negative consequences on the Kyrgyzstani agricultural sector, and indirectly on urban slums and land invasions.”* (Sanghera 2010)

Sanghera holds the small allocation of land in the 1990s, as part of the privatization program, responsible for the ‘pauperization’ of southern Kyrgyzstan and says that it had not only made the living of farmers tougher but also led to un/underemployment. Farmers were unable to absorb excess labour force. Sanghera says that this led to abandonment of farming by some who either leased their land to larger farmers or gave back their tenancy rights to *ayil okomotu* (local state administration), who could then lease them to rich farmers. These deteriorating economic and social conditions led to active internal migration from the south to the north of the country which Sanghera says, made Bishkek a dumping ground for displaced rural surplus labour force.

*“The gravity of the problem can be ascertained from the fact that there are around 300,000 people living in 28 slum settlements on the outskirts of the city known by different names like ‘Ak-Jar’, ‘Ak-Bata’, ‘Kelechek’, ‘Nijnyaya Ala-Archa’ etc.”* (Sanghera 2010)

However, Thieme (2012) argues that young men and women have also migrated to Bishkek for educational purposes. Whichever be the cause, the increased south to north migration is another factor of dispute between the two halves as this has led to an increase of population pressure in Bishkek along with growth of slums, and greater competition over jobs and resources.

## ***SUMMARY***

In this chapter we analyzed the socio-economic disparity that existed between the northern and southern provinces of Kyrgyzstan between 1991 and 1995. The various socioeconomic indicators released by international organizations, during the period, provided ample evidence for the backwardness of the south in comparison of the north. Although in the later years of Akaev's rule, the economy showed increased signs of growth along with an overall decrease in poverty rate but this did not mitigate the economic gap between the two halves. The northern provinces especially Chui and Bishkek continued to perform better in terms of most of the socio-economic indicators as compared to the southern oblasts. Batken in the south emerged as one of the most backward oblast in the country during this period. Many reports including that of ILO hold the very structure of the southern economy as responsible for its continued backwardness. The government of Akaev can also not be absolved of administrative negligence. An administration largely run by northerners ensured greater flow of resources to northern provinces, which ensured greater prosperity there.

One immediate outcome of this regional disparity was an increase in internal migration from the southern provinces to the more prosperous north, which further pitted the two against each other as it led to increased competition over land and resources. In the previous chapter we have already discussed another outcome of this economic disparity, which can prove to be dangerous in the longer run. Radical Islamic groups have been able to find greater foothold in the southern provinces as the unemployed youth proved to be easy recruits for groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir and IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan). Many studies also hold this regional economic divide as responsible for the 2005 Tulip revolution when the southerners rose in protest against Akaev which finally culminated in latter's resignation.

The next chapter will analyze the 'Tulip Revolution' of 2005 that led to Akaev's ouster. Along with the analysis of the events that finally culminated into the 'revolution', a theoretical perspective will also be provided to gain a better understanding of this event. Further, the study will also list down the factors that led to the 'revolution' and will especially analyze them from the north south perspective.

## CHAPTER 4

# THE TULIP REVOLUTION

On 4 April 2005, the fifteen-year uninterrupted rule of President Askar Akaev in Kyrgyzstan came to halt. Akaev tendered his resignation on account of widespread protests that had erupted in the country against his rule. The protests, which began in the southern provinces of Osh and Jalal-Abad, after the official declaration of the results of the Parliamentary elections held in the earlier part of the year, soon spread to the rest of the country. Serious allegations of vote rigging and electoral malpractices had been leveled against the Akaev dispensation by international observers. The protesting crowds not only targeted government buildings but there were reports of widespread looting of supermarkets and shopping centers in Bishkek, many of which were owned by Akaev's family and close associates (Sari and Yigit 2005). In the face of the mounting protests, Akaev along with his family fled the country to Moscow. In the mean time an interim government under the leadership of Kurmanbek Bakiyev was established in Kyrgyzstan.

This people's movement, which toppled the government in Kyrgyzstan, came to be known as the **Tulip revolution** and was part of a series of other such revolutions that had overthrown entrenched regimes in other Post-Soviet countries in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Countries like Russia and China and many other observers questioned the role of United States and the international NGOs working in Kyrgyzstan, in eliciting the Tulip revolution as part of their global democracy promotion project. Escobar (2005) says that the whole arsenal of US foundations - National Endowment for Democracy, International Republic Institute, Ifes, Eurasia Foundation, Internews, among others - which fueled opposition movements in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine, were deployed in Bishkek as well. He further adds that at least 170 non-governmental organizations charged with development or promotion of democracy were created or as well as sponsored by the Americans in Kyrgyzstan.

However, there are many who argue that although US did play a role in supporting the movement but it was not that substantial as it was made out to be. In fact a number of internal problems ranging from regional/clan divisions, socio-economic problems, rampant corruption and nepotism, had long been present in the Kyrgyz society, which had been a constant source of tension amongst the people and thus a breeding ground for discontent. The necessary spark to this simmering tension was provided by the 'fraudulent' parliamentary elections of 2005 when people's disenchantment with the government finally boiled over.

This chapter will begin with an analysis of the Tulip revolution from a theoretical point of view. A study of the various theories and positions on the revolt will be analyzed to give a more theoretical perspective to this study. The discussion will then move on to the main trigger event i.e. the parliamentary elections of 2005 when accusations of widespread electoral malpractices surfaced for the first time. The chapter will then track down the series of events will ultimately led to the resignation of Akaev as the President of the country and opening the way for a new leader. Also, an analysis of the factors, both immediate as well as long-term, will be done here. Here the study will be restricted to the internal factors that were responsible for the gradual disenchantment of the Kyrgyz population with the Akaev's regime who was earlier seen as a reformer by many scholars and observers alike. Here it needs to be pointed out that the lack of a detailed study of the external determinants does not imply that they had no role to play in the causing the revolt. Finally the revolt will be analyzed from the perspective of the north south divide.

## **WHAT IS TULIP REVOLUTION?**

Before going into the detailed analysis of the Tulip revolution, it is necessary to analyze the term "colour revolutions" first, which came into vogue in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Are the colour revolutions "revolutions" in the real sense of the term? How are they different from or similar to the classical revolutions that have taken place in the world time and again?

The term 'colour revolutions', termed by Tucker (2007:536) as a 'popular shorthand', is used to describe as a single phenomenon a number of non-violent protests that succeeded in overthrowing authoritarian regimes during the first decade of the twenty-first century (Beachain and Polese 2010:52). Fraudulent election results ran as a common theme in all these revolutions. In all the post Soviet countries, which witnessed the "colour revolution" the declaration of 'fraudulently' conducted election results acted as the trigger event, which was followed by widespread protests by the citizenry. In all these countries the incumbent leaders also had to tender their resignations in the wake of these mass scale protests. The non-violent nature of these protests was another feature, which set these movements apart.

The Georgian revolution or the 'Rose revolution' in 2003 was triggered by disputed parliamentary elections that led to widespread protests by the people. These protests were peaceful in nature and led to the removal of President Eduard Shevardnadze. This was followed by the 2004 'Orange revolution' in Ukraine, which was again the result of fraudulent presidential elections in the country. Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, who was contesting the elections, was accused of interference in the electoral process and this led to massive protests in the country, which finally led to the annulment of the results of the fraudulent elections. Kyrgyzstan soon followed suit when allegations of rigging by the Akaev administration in parliamentary elections of 2005 led to protests by the people. The protests led to Akaev's resignation as the president of the country and the event came to be known as the 'Tulip Revolution'. The International Crisis Group report in 2004 had claimed, in the face of upcoming parliamentary elections of 2005 in Kyrgyzstan, that the oppositions might see Georgia as a model as most of the CIS countries lacked a recent experience as independent states and thus there was a strong tendency to look at each other for political inspiration.

However, in certain respects the Kyrgyz revolution was different from the other colour revolutions and had its own unique features. While the Georgian and Ukrainian protests were conducted in a largely non-violent atmosphere, Kyrgyz revolution had a violent streak as there were reports of deaths of 6 protestors, widespread looting in the capital Bishkek and damage to property amounting to estimated \$100 million. Also, Radnitz (2006:133) says that while the engine of the protests in Georgia and Ukraine

were the urban dwellers, civil society members and student organizations, in Kyrgyzstan it was the countryfolk that led the movement. Radnitz adds that whereas the Georgian and Ukrainian mobilizations worked through a top-down structure as activists were recruited by the parties and NGOs, in Kyrgyzstan 'middle down' organizations were responsible for the protests as instead of the NGOs it was the local elites who gathered the supporters. Also, overthrow of Akaev didn't lead to annulment of the election results or conduct of fresh elections as had happened in the other two countries. In fact fraudulently elected Parliamentarians were allowed to continue under the leadership of new President Kurmanbek Bakiyev.

### ***Was Tulip revolution a revolution?***

The dictionary meaning of revolution defines the term as the forcible overthrow of a government or social order for a new system. However, Melnykovska (2008:3) says that after every wave of change in the political structures, understanding of revolutions, their causes, processes and consequences get revised and thus there is no one unambiguous definition of revolution. According to her, some common characteristics of a revolution can be deduced from the four generations of work on the theory of revolution<sup>3</sup> although each generation is progressively less radical from the previous one. These include change of regime without reverse possibility, change in economic and social structure, change of political institutions through anti-constitutional means, class or elite group driven, ideological legitimization of change, change occurs through mass mobilization and use or threat of use of violence (Melnykovska 2008:4).

If the "Tulip revolution" in Kyrgyzstan is analyzed from the context of the aforementioned characteristics of a classical revolution then certain points hold true and some don't. While definitely the 2005 revolution brought a political change in

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<sup>3</sup> The first generation or comparative school believes that a revolution creates a gulf between the previous era and the new era. The second generation is similar to the previous one and sees revolution as a rapid and violent domestic change in the politico-social structure. The third generation explains revolution from the structural viewpoint. The fourth generation, which evolved in last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century considers ideologies, ethnic and religious aspect, intra-elite conflicts as important.



Kyrgyzstan but there was no definite change in the economic or social structure of the society. In fact one set of regional elites replaced another set of regional elites.

*“Kyrgyzstan did not have a true revolution (meaning the transformation or overthrow of a whole sociopolitical order) or even a regime change. What the country had, by all appearances, was something decidedly more limited, namely, a transfer of power.”* (Radnitz 2006:133).

The tradition of strong presidency along with a weak parliament also continued in Kyrgyzstan after Akaev's ouster. Corruption and nepotism, which had been one of many grievances of the people before 2005 continued to rule the roost even in Bakiyev's government. Further, despite reports of killings and arson, the revolt was largely seen as non-violent in nature and thus no widespread use of anti constitutional methods to overthrow the incumbent leader was adopted or promoted by the opposition. State authorities also remained largely non-violent in their repression and there have been reports, which mention that Akaev specifically asked the security forces to refrain from retaliating in a violent manner. Also, the people were motivated to protest not because of any ideological leanings but because of specific grievances against the government. Juraev (2010:3) also agrees with this and says that ideology played no role in the Tulip Revolution. However, the level of mass mobilization in Kyrgyzstan was substantial to lend it a 'revolutionary' character. Also, the elites especially from the southern provinces played a very active role in guiding and leading the movement.

Thus, whether the “Tulip revolution” was a revolution in true sense of the term or was it a sub type of revolution remains a matter of debate. Melnykovska (2008:5) says that comparisons of colour revolutions with classical revolutions do not provide any clarity as there is no one definition for colour revolutions and they can be explained in different ways. She adds that strict categorization of revolutions cannot really take place as revolutions occur due to different causes and evolve in different ways and are carried out by different actors leading to different outcomes.

***Was “Tulip revolution” part of a `wave`?***

The timings of the “colour revolutions” in different countries were such that it gave rise to another perspective that saw “Tulip revolution” in Kyrgyzstan as an outcome of a ‘wave’. The successive revolutions starting from the Rose revolution in Georgia in 2003 followed by a series of similar revolutions in other post-soviet countries (Orange revolution in Ukraine in 2004 and Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005) within a short span of time were seen by many observers as a part of a ‘wave’ that engulfed the region. According to this view, each preceding movement influenced and directed the mode of action and outcome of the next movement.

Beissinger (2007:259) terms it as modular political phenomena, which means that action that is based in significant part on emulation of the prior successful examples of others. He argues that although some of these countries lacked the ‘structural conditions’ necessary for the revolutionary success but influence of some successful example can compensate for these structural disadvantages and lead to a successful revolution. Thus even if conditions are not ripe in a country for a revolution, the success of other countries can trigger a revolution in the former.

In the case of Kyrgyzstan as well, the role of successful “colour movements” in other countries in influencing the “Tulip revolution” cannot be ignored. Although each revolution had its own unique features but the modus operandi and the outcome was on similar lines in all the three revolutions. Beissinger (2007:262) comments that in March 2005 Kyrgyz opposition leaders organized their own Tulip Revolution in the wake of fraudulent elections, drawing inspiration from Georgia and Ukraine; instead of orange, they sported yellow and pink, seizing a number of towns in southern Kyrgyzstan. Thus each one of these revolutions inspired another emulative action in another country. Beissinger (2007: 263-266) further adds that there are five common characteristics of modular political phenomena. These include, firstly, a sense of connectedness between different cases due to common institutional characteristics, histories, cultural affiliation or modes of domination. Secondly, emulation of the prior success is the basic mechanism that works. Thirdly, cumulative weight of successful examples always reaches a tipping point after which movement formation among groups spreads rapidly. Fourthly, successful cases also try to spread action laterally. And, finally, some certain pre-existing structural conditions shape modular phenomena.

However, many scholars believe that it would be misleading to conceptualize these events as a wave (Lucan 2008). Lucan says that diffusion theory assumes that the opposition strategies developed in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia between 1996 and 1998 and in Serbia in 2000 'diffused' to the post communist countries, which led to the fall of ruling 'autocrats' there. He says that the proponents of the diffusion perspective believe that due to enormous exchange of ideas, skills, and people within the post-communist region, there has been a similarity in the various protest movements. Lucan argues against it and says that these countries chose elections and protests over armed rebellions not because these had been used in other nearby countries but may be, because these were the easiest, effective, and most internationally acceptable mechanisms for bringing down incumbents. He further argues that non-violence was the 'core element of oppositional strategy' in all the colour revolutions and if diffusion of strategies took place from other countries to Kyrgyzstan, then it should have prevented looting there, which was not the case. Lucan adds that non-violence could be ensured during the Tulip revolution not because the masses remained non-violent but because the military and police quickly dispersed in the face of mass protest.

### *A Revolution or Coup d'état?*

After the overthrow of his government in March 2005, Akaev accused the opposition members of carrying out a coup d'état against his government. There is a debate amongst the scholars as well who see the events leading up to the removal of Akaev regime as less than a revolution and more of a coup d'état. A book by Aleksander Kniazev titled "Coup d'état: March 24, 2005 in Kyrgyzstan" looked at the events leading to the ouster of Akaev in 2005 with suspicion and goes on to argue that the events in March of 2005 destroyed the most democratic country that ever existed in the Central Asian region. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) report (14 April 2005) which published its findings soon after the Tulip revolution also titled the report as "Coup in Kyrgyzstan: Developments and Implication" and thus interpreted the event as a coup against the Akaev regime. In fact a strong opinion exists amongst

the domestic as well as foreign observers who see the ‘Tulip revolution’ from the prism of a coup d’état.

Before analyzing this debate it is essential to understand what coup d’état signifies. Siani-Davids (2005:268) contends that coup d’état are simpler affairs than revolution. He adds that the element of mass mobilization is usually missing in coups and they often take place with minimal bloodshed, followed by a relatively quick return to what is perceived as normality, with only limited amount of change.

If we analyze the Tulip revolution from this perspective then certain elements of a coup d’état become apparent in it. Henningsson (2006:27) agrees with this and says that the Tulip revolution was in fact a coup d’état as it didn’t lead to any fundamental change in the dominant values of Kyrgyzstan. He adds that since there was only a shift in leadership with no subsequent change in the political or social institutions of the country, the March events fell short of a revolution. Further, the security forces and police also later sided with the opposition forces. Mullerson (2011:409) says that although coup d’e’tat would be a more appropriate term but public’s discontent with Akaev’s rule was genuine which thus lends a more revolutionary character to the events leading up to the so called Tulip Revolution.

However, it is essential to point out here mass mobilization witnessed during the revolution and the fact that the movement was led by opposition groups and not orchestrated by groups belonging to the state structures like military, lends credibility to the argument that the Tulip revolution was definitely more than a coup d’état, if not a revolution.

### ***2005 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS - THE TRIGGER EVENT***

The elections to the Kyrgyz Parliament in the month of February and March of 2005 proved to be a watershed in the history of Kyrgyzstan’s politics. The discontent in the population especially in the southern provinces had been present for a very long time due to the perceived economic and political neglect at the hands of the Akaev regime. The reported malpractices at the elections of 2005, which the southerners interpreted

as Akaev's another attempt to maintain his control over the Parliament, provided the opportune moment for the people in southern oblasts to express their grievances at a bigger stage.

Proportionate political representation for the southern provinces along with a balanced regional growth had been a long-standing demand of the southern politicians and oppositional groups. This had been a constant source of hostility between the two regions. On one earlier occasion also, in Aksy in 2002, the resentment felt by the southerners against Akaev had led to widespread protests. At that time the southern provinces had risen against the Akaev administration for the 'wrongful' confinement of a southern politician. That was the first time when the regional divisions had come to the fore in a violent manner in Kyrgyzstan. However, it was during the 'fraudulent' elections of 2005 when the discontent among the people of southern oblasts finally boiled over and led to Akaev's resignation.

Tucker (2007) argues the electoral frauds act as the perfect opportunity for the masses to galvanize as the individuals then perceive the costs involved for them as lesser when compared to the costs involved when individuals alone try to get their grievances against a unsympathetic regime redressed. He says that citizens continue to suffer under an authoritarian government rule and their calculus for perceived costs only changes when an electoral fraud is conducted.

*"In cases where citizens have strong grievances against the regime, attempts to address these grievances in the course of daily life are likely to entail high costs coupled with very low chances of success in any meaningful sense; consequently, most citizens choose not to challenge the regime. The likelihood of protests occurring following electoral fraud can greatly lower the perceived costs to any individual of participating in a challenge against the regime."* (Tucker 2007:536).

Tucker opines that in day-to-day circumstances, the *collective action problem* grips the people and although people would benefit from cooperation, the lack of individual incentives necessary to achieve this cooperation prevents the goal from being attained. A threshold is required to be achieved for the build up of a mass movement and till that is not achieved individuals continues to bear the atrocities of an authoritarian regime. Tucker says that when an electoral fraud is reported individuals join the protests more readily as first of all, the entire population bears the act of

abuse simultaneously and secondly, the fear of individual persecution gets lessened in a group protest.

*“A publicized major electoral fraud can alter both the perceived costs and benefits of participating in protest and makes the participation more likely after the fraud has been committed but before the results of the fraudulent election have been implemented.”* (Tucker 2007:543)

In Kyrgyzstan, as well, the reported electoral frauds in the 2005 Parliamentary gave the necessary impetus to the southern population to rise against an unsympathetic regime and demand the redress of their long held political and economic grievances. The accusations of electoral rigging proved to be just the right trigger then.

### ***Allegations of electoral malpractices***

The 2005 parliamentary elections although termed as the most competitive elections to be held in the country (OSCE/ODIHR, 2005) were marred by huge electoral malpractices, which were reported by many international observers.

*“The 27 February 2005 and 13 March parliamentary elections in the Kyrgyz Republic, while being more competitive than previous elections (genuine choice between for candidates in many constituencies), fell short of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections in a number of important areas.”* (OSCE/ODIHR 2005:1)

A number of allegations were leveled against the Akaev administration for using the official machinery for rigging the elections. This undermined the very legitimacy of an election, which was deemed to bring a change in the power structure in the country as Akaev was bound to leave the office due to constitutional constraints.

*“The competitive dynamic was undermined throughout the country, noticeably in the lead up to both rounds of voting, by widespread vote-buying, de-registration of candidates, interference with independent media, and a low level of confidence in electoral and judicial institutions on the part of candidates and voters.”* (OSCE/ODIHR, 2005:1).

ENEMO (European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations) also noted a number of disturbing factors like shutting down of radio signal of Radio Free Europe

(Azattyk), power cut to Kyrgyzstan's largest independent printing press and airing of information discrediting several candidates, in its report.

Apart from this, candidature of several prominent oppositional candidates was cancelled on minor technical grounds serious like campaigning three hours prior to the start of official campaign period (The OSCE/ODIHR 2005:9). The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) also disqualified many candidates on a narrow interpretation of residency requirements based on Article 56.1 of the Constitution and Article 69.1 of the Election Code. This was seen as an attempt by Akaev to undermine the opposition by barring popular oppositional candidates from participating. Already fear had been expressed in the oppositional circles that as the outgoing President, Akaev would try to install his own people in Parliament in order to hold on to power through his cronies.

*“One theory suggested that Akaev might use parliament to change the constitution to establish a new political system in which he, or a member of his family, could emerge as effective head of state as prime minister, with the presidency reduced to a ceremonial role. This made it important for Akaev to ensure that loyal supporters would win two-thirds of the seats in parliament.” (Lewis 2010:50)*

The OSCE/ODIHR also noted in its report that cases related to the bar on five former diplomats including Roza Otunbaeva from contesting in the elections appeared to be of undue restriction on the right to candidacy, rather than of encouraging inclusive participation.

### ***Electoral Reforms***

The 2005 elections were the first elections to be held after the 2003 constitutional amendments, which changed both the nature of the *Jogorku Kenesh* (Parliament) by making it unicameral and its composition as it restricted the number of deputies to 75 to be elected from single member constituencies for a five-year term. Prior to these amendments, the Parliament was bicameral with 105 members. Also, the earlier system under which 25 per cent of the seats were reserved for party list was scrapped. Instead, all 75 Deputies had to contest on the basis of 'first past the post' system.

*“Many people both inside and outside Kyrgyzstan were hopeful that the national legislative election on February 27, 2005 would strengthen political pluralism, easing the way for a peaceful handover of executive power in late 2005 when President Akayev was expected to step down.”* (Nichol 2005:1)

However, the outcome of the elections proved to be contradictory to the hopes expressed by many. Lewis (2010:51) opines that the Akaev government agreed for these electoral reforms, as it was believed that the first past the post system would make it difficult for the opposition to gain more than a few seats. Further, it was believed that the lack of party list would lead to further fragmentation of the opposition, which had been trying to form a united opposition alliance to counter Akaev.

The People’s Movement of Kyrgyzstan (PMK) was formed months before the 2005 parliamentary elections (in September 2004) with the merging of Ata-Jurt movement, the “For Fair Elections” bloc, Jany Bagyt, the National Movement of Kyrgyzstan and the National Congress of Kyrgyzstan. Ata-Jurt was a group created by Roza Otunbaeva and included many well-known opposition figures from the south of the country like Dooronbek Sadyrbaev, Adahan Madumarov and Omurbek Tekebaev. PMK under the leadership of Kurmanbek Bakiyev, aimed to present a common front against Akaev in the upcoming elections. Many important leaders joined PMK in the run-up to the Parliamentary elections of 2005. Parliamentary deputies Alevtina Pronenko and Alisher Abdimomunov and former Education Minister Ishengul Boljurova joined the PMK in October 2004.

Lewis further adds that Akaev’s failure to establish a reliable political party and also the general lack of party discipline in Parliament were another reasons for the doing away of the party list. Akaev’s daughter, Bermet Akaeva, had established a political party in 2003 “Alga Kyrgyzstan!” for the same purpose of creating a loyal base for Akaev in the upcoming Parliament but it proved to be a failure.

In addition to this, many observers also pointed out that new constitution which strengthened the decision making power of the local representative bodies could lead to further deepening of the regional divide in Kyrgyzstan (Khamidov 2003). Khamidov argued that oppositional leaders could seek to dominate the local councils



in the southern region and establish a new platform for launching more attacks on Akaev.

### ***The Parliamentary Elections and the Protests***

The allegations of an electoral fraud surfaced soon after the first round of elections were conducted in February 2005. Only 31 candidates out of 75 could secure a victory in the first round itself and most had to face another round in the run off which was to be held in March. Out of the 31 winning candidates only two opposition candidates, Muratbek Mukashev and Azimbek Beknazarov, got success in the first round of the elections. However, before the second round could commence a series of protests emerged in the southern provinces of Kyrgyzstan against the perceived electoral irregularities. Reports of electoral malpractices carried out by the official machinery led to instant galvanization of masses leading to widespread protests.

Lewis (2020:54) says that although in the early stage all pre-election protests took place in the north, the focus after the elections shifted to the traditionally more volatile south of the country. Marat (2006:11-12) says that in early March of 2005 Kyrgyzstan seemed to be divided into passive north including Bishkek and active south.

On March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2005 demonstrations were held in Kogart constituency of Jalal-Abad province in support of opposition candidate Jusupbek Jeenbekov. On 4 March, protestors blocked the Osh-Bishkek road in support of opposition candidate Dooronbek Sadyrbaev. Lewis (2010:54) says that Jalal-Abad became the center of opposition activity and much of it were organized by the Bakiev family. 4 March witnessed one of the biggest protests when almost 1000 supporters of Bakiev captured the regional administrative office in Jalal-Abad. The passivity on the part of the police, in the early period of the protests, can be gauged from the fact that the protestors occupied the building for the almost two weeks without being troubled by the police for regaining control.

The second round of voting, on 13<sup>th</sup> March, added further fuel to the fire as only six opposition candidates could manage to win the elections. Even Kurmanbek Bakiev lost the elections. Adahan Madumarov was another prominent oppositional figure from the south who lost the elections. Lewis says that reports of electoral rigging were even more the second time as the international observers had left after the first round of voting itself.

*“The political coalition “For Democracy and Civil Society reported a number of violations in Bishkek’s University and Uzgen districts, which were committed by competing candidates and Central Electoral Commission members. In particular, people were transported to polling stations in groups, making it nearly impossible for independent observers to inspect their documents.” (Marat 2006:9)*

Marat further adds that the results after the second round confirmed a majority for pro-presidential candidates in the upcoming single-chambered parliament. Fearing another capture by Akaev’s people at the presidential polls to be held in later half of 2005, the protestors increased the momentum of their protests and demanded the cancellation of election results as well as the resignation of Akaev. The month of March witnessed a growing number of protests in the country. The protesters on March 18 occupied the regional administration building in Osh.

*“One week after runoff elections for parliament, the government of Kyrgyzstan lost administrative control over all large cities in the southern part of the country to opposition protesters.” (Marat 2006:11)*

Lewis (2010:55) says that the opposition also developed the successful technique of building “parallel structures of power” in the southern provinces, which started with the appointment of Jusupbek Jeenbekov as the people’s governor in Jalal-Abad, followed by the appointment of a people’s governor in Osh after the capture of the regional office. Although security forces (Kyrgyz OMON Interior Ministry troops) forced the protesters out from the administrative building of both Osh and Jalal-Abad on March 20 they couldn’t retain the control of the building as the protesters numbering around 10,000 wrested the control from the police. The south fell under the control of the protesters after they seized control of the airports and roads.

Lewis (2010:55) says that two parallel political processes were visible in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005. While the south of the country has had huge public protests, no

significant unrest of the scale witnessed in the south occurred in the capital Bishkek. Marat (2006:11-12) says that the reason for the passivity of Bishkek was the concentration of the major businesses in the capital, which had informal ties with the government that prevented them from protesting. Thus, the southern oblasts of Osh and Jalal-Abad emerged as the nerve centers of the protest, while Bishkek remained dormant. Further, many of the state employees residing in Bishkek also refrained from the protests as they had received increased attention from the government in the run-up to the elections (Marat).

On March 24, a rally was organized in Bishkek, which, as Lewis says, brought together for the first time the protestors from Bishkek, and the battle hardened demonstrators from the south. Around 20,000 people gathered in Bishkek's central square and demanded President Akaev's resignation. The protestors marched to the White House and they captured it with little resistance from the police. Meanwhile, Feliks Kulov was released from the jail and he took control of the security of the country. Akaev left the country with his family before the storming of the White House.

Later on, Akaev held the collusion between the opposition and the leadership of his own police and security forces as partly responsible for his ouster (Hale, 2005:158). Hale (2005) says that institutions have a role in modifying the elite behavior and she holds the institution of patronal presidentialism in Kyrgyzstan as responsible for mass elite defection that was witnessed during the protest movements. He describes a patronal president as, one who is directly elected and has widespread formal powers as well as informal power based on patron-client relationships.

*“In practice, this means that a patronal president wields not only the powers formally invested in the office but also the ability to selectively direct vast sources of material wealth and power outside of formal institutional channels. Importantly, this authority can be used not only to accomplish policy goals but also to preserve the president's own power by rewarding political allies and punishing or co-opting enemies.”* (Hale 2005:138).

Hale says that in such a state of affairs the President as well as the elites get mutually dependent on each other as the President depends on the elites for vote and the elites depend on the President for access to resources. When the President remains firmly in

control of the state of affairs then a there is cohesion between the elites, as the latter fear that any divergence from the President would dry up the political opportunities available to them. However, elite calculations change when there is a possibility of presidential transfer of power. Hale says that lame duck syndrome' grips the elite which in other words mean there is an increased defection of the elite from the incumbent's team to the oppositional side when the elites believe that the incumbent may leave office. Hale (2005:157) says that the lame duck syndrome gripped the elites in Kyrgyzstan as well when the President Akaev announced that he wouldn't run for the third presidential term and many elites including police, mass media members and members of Supreme Court joined the opposition camp.

*"In the throes of this lame-duck syndrome, Akaev was unable to stem mass elite defection that began in the part of Kyrgyzstan where his own ties were weakest (the South) after international and other observers branded the parliamentary vote unfair."* (Hales 2005:157)

These series of event which started of with the mass protests in the face of fraudulently conducted elections and ended with the resignation of Akaev came to be known as the '**Tulip Revolution.**' It led to the installment of a government led by a southerner and addressed one long held grievance of southern provinces of greater political participation in country's affairs.

### ***REASONS FOR THE "TULIP REVOLUTION"***

The overthrow of President Aksar Akaev in 2005 by a peoples' movement gave rise to a flurry of studies to understand, theorize and categorize this movement. While on the one hand there is a body of scholarship that believes that International NGOs and US played a decisive role in the Tulip revolution through monetary and logistical support, there is another point of view, which considers the internal dynamics of the country as responsible for forming the bedrock of revolt in the country.

The former school of thought, although acknowledged the role that poverty, unemployment corruption, high levels of income inequality and regional disparities played in motivating the people to protest but argued that external factors in the form

of US strategic interest in this region were more important for understanding this revolt.

*“Without the intervention of these US-sponsored INGOs, the political landscapes in countries like Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan would not have been repainted in new colours”* (Chaulia 2006).

Many leaders, especially belonging to the post-Soviet countries also questioned the role of international election monitors like OSCE, IEOM in triggering the Tulip Revolution. Some called these election monitors as not only intrusive but also asserted that the premature declaration about the quality of elections by these groups led to destabilization of the post-election environment in Kyrgyzstan (Fawn 2006:1139).

However, the second school of thought believes that that this movement in Kyrgyzstan against the government could become a mass movement only because the citizens felt alienated and unrepresented in the economic and political structure of the country. Lewis (2010:45) while accepting that an enabling international environment was present during the ‘Tulip Revolution’ maintained that the main actors in the revolt were the local political leaders, motivated by their own local interests and not the agendas of international NGOs or Western embassies.

*“In reality, the events in Kyrgyzstan were deeply rooted in domestic politics and reflected in widespread discontent, not only in the political elite but in the wider society.”* Lewis (2010:45)

The scope of this study is limited to the study of the internal factors that have been held responsible for the mass mobilization witnessed during the revolution. The study will specifically analyze the movement from the perspective of the regional divide and the role it played in provoking people to protest against the perceived insensitivity of a regime led by Akaev.

### ***Role Of Leadership***

Akaev began his rule with the promise to liberalize the country. However by the mid 1990s authoritarian tendencies began to creep into the administration (Mullerson

2011). The opposition was sidelined, media was gagged and in order to hold on to power Akaev misused the official machinery for his own narrow gains. In addition to this, Akaev, in order to hold on to power, gave specific advantages to groups that could ensure his stay in the office. Many political and economic benefits were distributed in a manner, which favoured the northern region of the country over the southern region. This all had the role to play in instigating the southern provinces in revolting against the President in 2005.

*“Regarded as the most liberal and progressive among the Central Asian leaders, Akayev gradually lost popularity because of illegal manipulations of the electoral mechanism; allowing his family and friends to monopolise the most profitable business ventures; and by tinkering with the constitution, attempting to achieve limitless power for what looked like life-long rule.”* (Plater-Zyberg 2005:1)

Akaev entered into the President’s office as an outsider (Spector 2004, Collins, 2006) as neither he was a Party member nor he was a seasoned politician. Collins (2006:126) says that although Akaev was an outsider to Kyrgyzstan’s clan rivalries but he was insider by birth and marriage. In a rule spanning 15 long years, Akaev co-opted many of these clan and region based politics in his policies, which made him insider eventually.

In the initial years of his presidency, Akaev took many such measures that strengthened his image as a liberal. He pushed for dramatic economic reforms, freed the press and helped in the establishment of a healthy civil society.

*“Over the first two years of his presidency, Akaev managed to prevent ethnic conflict, minimize tensions with Russia and Uzbekistan, and embark on dramatic economic reforms He used bargaining and negotiating to forge compromises amenable to some extent to both the north and the south, and created stories for international audiences to attract foreign aid and balance neighboring interests.”* (Spector 2004:18)

However, autocratic tendencies began to creep in Akaev (Fletcher and Sergeyev 2002:252), especially after 1993, when his reform measures failed to deliver the desired results and the economy was in shambles. In order to push for reforms in a parliament that was “representative but at the same time chaotic” (ICG 2004:2), adopted many such measures that strengthened the executive considerably over the legislature. Lewis says that all through the 1990s Akaev tried to consolidate his control by recentralizing the powers in the hands of the President and this greatly undermined the mandate of the Parliament.

In 1994, he disbanded the Parliament prematurely and scheduled the Presidential elections a year earlier. Pryde (1995:116) says that complaints about intimidation and other electoral violations began weeks before the actual polling. Akaev comfortably won the elections with 70 per cent of votes in his favour. However, Akaev lost 20% of the electorate in the south that had previously voted for him. Instead he had gained popularity in the north where he and his wife were from, by staffing the administration with family and other network connections. (Spector 2004:20). Pryde (1995:115) says that the 1995 elections also brought a change in balance of power in the country as many local leaders from the south also managed to get themselves elected. Despite criticism of the electoral malpractices that came to light later, no wide scale protests happened in Kyrgyzstan. The authoritarian tendencies in Akaev started taking roots during this time and gradually Kyrgyzstan emerged as a semi-authoritarian state. Pryde (1995:117) says that several conspiracy theories started floating around during this time in Kyrgyzstan that portrayed Akaev as a skillful manipulator who had managed to sideline all of his potential challengers for the Presidency and was further promoting authoritarian rule in the country.

In the 2000 presidential elections, Akaev's utter disregard for the constitution came to the fore when he decided to run for the post of president for the third time despite the constitutional provision that barred candidates from becoming the President more than two times.

*"In perhaps the most blatant power grab, Akaev manipulated the constitutional court to allow him to stand for a third term."* (Spector 2004:21)

His reasoning was based on the ground that the Presidential elections of the year 2000 were the second in the history of free Kyrgyzstan since the first elections were held before independence and hence he should be allowed to run for the second time. The Constitutional Court also ruled in favour, which he achieved by installing a loyal judge as the head of the constitutional court.

He also tried undermining the oppositional forces prior to the elections. Oppositional candidates were deregistered on dubious grounds in the parliamentary elections. Felix Kulov who was fast gaining popularity as an alternate Presidential candidate was also arrested in March of 2000 for the abuse of power. Electoral malpractices continued on the day of the elections also. Considerable pressure was applied on the independent

groups who were committed to observing the election, and widespread falsification was reported on the election day (ICG 2004:3).

The allegations of electoral malpractices in the 2005 parliamentary elections proved to be the final nail in the coffin. There was already fear in the oppositional groups that Akaev would try to get his own loyal people (family and friends) elected to the Parliament to maintain his influence over the politics of the country as he couldn't get elected as the President for the third time owing to constitutional constraints. Two of his children, daughter Bermet Akaev and son Aidar Akaev were already contesting in the elections and Alga, Kyrgyzstan as the political party was the main tool in the hands of the government to win the Parliament and Bermet Akaev remained very involved with its activities (Kartawich 2005:7). The memory of the abject disregard by Akaev for the Constitution during the 2000 presidential elections was still fresh in the mind of the opposition leaders, so they were better organized this time around. The fears of the oppositional groups got worsened when nomination of many oppositional candidates were cancelled based on trivial technicalities. The disqualification of Roza Otunbaeva who was supposed to run against Bermet Akaeva raised many eyebrows. All these undemocratic practices finally led to a large-scale uproar against the President who was compelled to resign later on.

In addition to authoritarian character of Akaev's rule, nepotism and corruption were also rampant during Akaev's reign. Akaev, in order to maintain his hold over power, appointed people belonging to his own clan or regional groups in important political positions. Northerners, thus, got favoured over the southerners. This led to increasing discontent amongst the southern elites and masses, which finally boiled over in 2005.

*“The increasing concentration of power around Akaev, his family and close colleagues, has led to discontent among rival elites, who wished for a higher level of participation in both the political sphere and in business. The usurpation of power and corruption in all branches of government by the ruling elite led to a crisis of legitimacy – in the leadership, in the courts, and in the political system itself.”* (Kartawich 2005:6)

Plater-Zyberg (2005:1) says that Akaev lost power because first of all he failed to recognize that the political problems plaguing the country like corruption, division of north and south, economic stagnation, increasingly strong non-violent opposition,



inefficient administration. Secondly, he also defended the rigged elections and finally he also failed to learn any relevant lessons from 2002 Aksy protests.

### ***North-South Aspect of the “Tulip Revolution”***

The north-south divide was at full display during the Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan. The protests against Akaev (a northerner) and his administration (dominated by the northern clan members) started in the south of the country that had long perceived the former as insensitive towards their needs. Osh and Jalal-Abad oblasts were the first to witness the signs of protests when people gathered against the perceived electoral malpractices and deregistration of their leaders. Although the revolt later moved on to the city Bishkek but Southern provinces remained as the nerve centers of the movement. The flawed elections became a common rallying point for the population in the south of the country to protest against an administration largely run by members of the northern clans. The opposition in the south perceived the rigging during the polls as another step by the northerners to maintain their control over the resources of the country. In the face of wide scale protests, Akaev had to resign and his successor was Kurmanbek Bakiev, a southerner.

The north-south divide had always been relevant in the politics of Kyrgyzstan. The ICG (2004) report said that although the north-south divide was sometimes exaggerated and manipulated by politicians, but it certainly did exist in the perceptions of people. In the previous chapters it has already been analyzed that how the two regions viewed each other with skepticism and how economic development had been disparate between the two leading to the formation of a prosperous north and an impoverished south. Politically, the southerners also felt disenfranchised. Lewis (2010:46) says that since the administration was top-heavy with northerners, the southern leaders felt both under-represented as well as sidelined from resource flows. The leaders also fuelled this divide further by distributing economic resources in accordance with regional and clan considerations leading to lopsided development in the country. The disgruntlement in the southern opposition figures for underrepresentation in the power structures of the state was another source of conflict.

Temirkoulov (2005) holds the development of super-presidential system in Kyrgyzstan as responsible for the Tulip revolution. He says a presidential form of government - with strongly pronounced characteristics of authoritarianism and nepotism – can lead to destabilization and split in the society, especially during re-election times.

*“When the president stands for re-election for a second term or more, feelings of injustice appear among representatives of the non-presidential region; and there is a natural antipathy not only towards representatives of the elite but also among common citizens from the non-presidential region. In such a case, a non-constructive oppositional elite - based on the regional division - arises, and simple citizens have requirements of regional rotation. Such a system does not lead to stability, as an antagonism between two elites may well lead to chronic, forced changes of authority - as happened in March 24th 2005.”* (Temirkoulov 2005:11)

Scholars studying the “Tulip Revolution” often interpret the events leading up to the revolution differently. In the ethnic studies of conflict, two schools of thought have been very influential, the **Primordialist** and the **Instrumentalist**. In understanding the Tulip Revolution from a more theoretical perspective both the schools are equally relevant. The primordialist school of thought lays emphasis on the importance of primordial ties, in the form of ethnicity or clans, in the formation of identity of a person. The supporters of this school of thought believe that sociocultural divisions, which have their roots in the history of the country, continue to be a source of tension between groups belonging to different ethnicity or clan or tribes (Roberts 2010).

Collins (2003:177) argues that clan identity networks persist in modern state contexts even though many scholars dismiss clan and their hierarchies and loyalties as primordial. There is no denying that in the fact that in Kyrgyzstan, the regional clan affiliations form a very important aspect of a person’s identity. Loyalty towards one’s clan members is held supreme in the minds of the Kyrgyz. The sense of loyalty between the regional clan members is so strong in Kyrgyzstan that exclusion of a candidate from the elections amounted to an injustice to the entire family and clan which led to huge protests especially in the south of the country in 2005. Wide patron client networks are another important manifestation of these primordial loyalties. In Kyrgyzstan, it is a common practice for leaders to favour their regional clan members over others in distribution of resources in return for a loyal support in hours of need.

The 15-year uninterrupted rule of northerners in Kyrgyzstan ensured that northern clans got favoured over the southern clans in the claims over political and economic resources and appointments in government positions. This was one major grievance that the southern population had against Akaev. Thus, primordial ties have been an important aspect in the life of a Kyrgyz and distrust between different clan members has often been a source of conflict here. On the other hand, the instrumentalist school of thought believes that instead of the primordial ties, it is the competition between different groups over political and economic resources that leads to divergent interests. They dismiss the primordial identities as something that obscures the different interests of the groups based on competition over resources.

If the Tulip Revolution is analyzed from these two perspectives then both the arguments hold some substance. In Kyrgyzstan not only the regional clan identities were very strong but the economic and social disparity between them was also quite large. The political marginalization of southern clans was also a source of distress between the two regions. So, the social, economic and political differences between the two regions were reinforced the primordial identities and relations in Kyrgyzstan and this led to the Tulip Revolution.

## **SUMMARY**

The 2005 'Tulip Revolution' was a watershed event in the history of political Kyrgyzstan. The observers may interpret the series of events leading up to Akaev's resignation in many different ways, like calling it more of a coup d' etat than a revolution, but no expert can deny the importance of this 'revolution' in the political landscape of this country.

The southerners in Kyrgyzstan had long felt disenfranchised by a regime loaded with northern clan members, which was perceived as largely insensitive to former's demands and needs. In addition to political marginalization, poor socio-economic conditions of the southern oblasts in comparison to the northern oblasts became another bone of contention between the two. The makings of a mass movement were already present in the southern Kyrgyz society, which had earlier found a limited outlet during the 2002 Aksy protest. The failure of the government to readdress their

grievances even after 2002 only alienated the southern population further. The allegations of electoral fraud during the 2005 Parliamentary elections proved to be that trigger event that galvanized the masses in the south at a much larger scale against Akaev. The oppositional elites were also better organized this time proved to be another advantage. Finally, when the protesters starting from the southern provinces of Jalal-Abad and Osh reached Bishkek, Akaev had to resign as the President of the country. This event opened the gateway for a new government in Kyrgyzstan after 15 years of uninterrupted rule by Akaev. Observers hoped that the 'Tulip revolution' would also renew the efforts to strengthen democratic institutions in the country. Thus, 2005 Tulip Revolution both marked the end as well as the beginning of a new era in Kyrgyzstan.

The next chapter will conclude the findings of this study. The chapter will make an attempt at answering the research questions, which were mentioned in the beginning of this study and will also test the hypotheses with the help of available resources.

# **CHAPTER 5**

## **CONCLUSION**

Regionalization of politics is a reality in Kyrgyzstan. The regional influences on the political structure of the country has sometimes been subtle and many a times been glaring in nature. The regional considerations have not only influenced the voting pattern of the masses, as evidenced in many post independence polls, but the politicians have also manipulated the regional ties to both create a foothold as well as maintain a loyal support base. Vast networks of patron client relations have ensured skewed flow of resources in the country, which led to lopsided development, as one region invariably got favoured over the other. This hampered the development of independent institutions in the country. The continued economic and social disparity between the regions also fuelled the divide further. In this chapter, the conclusions drawn from the study will be shared in the specific context of the research questions and the hypotheses that were propounded in the beginning of the studies.

### ***RESEARCH QUESTIONS***

In context of the first research question that is if the tribal rivalries have undermined the democratic institutions in Kyrgyzstan, then the answer is in the affirmative. Many experts also believe that tribalism has made the realization of democracy in the country difficult. After independence Akaev took up the task of rebuilding the country by bringing rapid economic and political reforms in the country with the aim to establish a democratic polity supported by a market economy. In addition to this, realizing the negative potential of the regional clan divisions in undermining his efforts, he promised to build the institutions independent of these considerations. However the enthusiasm shown by Akaev in the beginning fizzed out in the later years when economic and political compulsions forced him to seek shelter under the same traditional ties that he had initially promised to remove. The traditional institutions proved to be too resilient in the face of his efforts and thus undermined the democratic institution building in the county.

These traditional institutions manifested themselves in the form of rivalries between the regions and the different tribes and clans in Kyrgyzstan. The regional clan identities and loyalties had been so strong in this country that wide and deep patron client networks became a mainstay of the politics and economics here. These networks became one of the primary reasons for the weakening of the democratic institutions as resource distribution was often guided by the regional clan considerations rather than the needs of any region. Thus, an elite with a degree of control over the allocation of resources favoured his regional and clan members over the others in order to maintain his position as the head.

The capture of the power by the northerners during the 15 years of Akaev rule ensured the flow of majority of resources to the northern provinces, which came at the expense of southern population as the latter many a times needed more resources than the former. In matters of appointment in government services this practice of favouring regional clan members over others was again followed which not only alienated the southern masses further but also maintained the system of clientelism in the country. This obviously weakened the development of democratic institutions in Kyrgyzstan as decision-making was often not according to the principles of democracy but according to narrow regional considerations.

Democratic institutions, which believe in open transfer of goods based on needs and demands differs from clientelistic institutions where the patron distributes goods according to his supporters' demands. Thus, clientelistic networks undermine the development of democratic institutions, as fair distribution of resources doesn't take place in the former case, as happened in the case of Kyrgyzstan. This eventually led to the deepening of the rivalry between the north and south as the southern clans often perceived the prosperity of the north coming at their cost. Twice during Akaev's rule the rivalry took the form mass protests, which threatened the very stability of the county. In such an atmosphere of instability democratic institutions are bound to fail.

Further, along with nurturing clientelism in the country, the regional clan considerations have figured prominently during the elections. Elections are the mainstay of any democracy as the citizens exercise their franchise to elect a government, which represents all. However, in Kyrgyzstan, the voting pattern has

been a clear signal for the existence of the regional divide in the minds of the people. Election results had time and again shown that people in Kyrgyzstan chose to elect their regional clan member over any other politician and political agenda seldom played the deciding role. In addition to this, the opposition parties also reflected the regional divisions of the country. This undermined the development of independent democratic institutions in Kyrgyzstan as leaders often got elected not on the basis of their political agendas and outlook but due to their regional clan affiliations, which they also milked at the time of elections.

The political leaders in Kyrgyzstan also played on this sentiment of the people to further their own interests. This brings us to the second research question that is in what way the political leaders have used the north south divide to further their political objectives. Akaev assumed the office of the President in the country with the promise to develop a democratic society with no role for the regional clan groups in them. In his early speeches Akaev placed much emphasis was placed on the development of a healthy civil society and thriving market economy. However, by 1995 the regional and clan considerations started to show in his rule and policies. Many scholars also believe that the growth of a civil society was undermined many a times by the political elite whenever they felt their positions getting challenged by civil society groups. During his rule, many observers pointed finger at the way appointments were made in the political and administrative circles. Nepotism and corruption became rampant in the regime. Important posts in the government that had a direct bearing on the security and economy of the country were awarded to people who were close to Akaev so that Akaev's hold on the country could be absolute. The clan and regional loyalties played a deciding role in these appointments.

In addition to this, the patron client networks had especially been nurtured by the elites to maintain a base of loyal supporters that could ensure a win in the elections and could also be mobilized easily against the opposition when required. The regional/clan identities became a basis for political mobilization and social support. During the 2005 elections which were termed as fraudulent by international observers the southern elites successfully mobilized the masses of the oblasts to protest against a government which was portrayed as unsympathetic to the cause of southern oblasts.

Further, although the southern elites complained of being marginalized by the northern clans but did nothing much to change this state of affairs when they assumed the control over the country under Bakiev's leadership, after Akaev's ouster in 2005. The period after 2005 witnessed the similar pattern of marginalization of the northerners by the southerners in appointments and resource allocation. Many observers had hoped that the new leadership would ensure a just distribution of power and resources in the country and satisfy the demands of the competing clans however this did not happen. This time there was a capture of the state power by the elites of southern clans, which made the northern clans feel excluded from the power structure of the country and thus a genuine democratic transition could not take place in the country. Bakiev like his predecessor was accused of usurping the power for his family, clan and regional members. Thus, the continued importance of kin-based relationships in the Kyrgyz polity and society led to the continuance of patronage-based politics in the country. Thus, the elites of the both the halves used the regional affiliations and loyalties for their own purpose, which has been to acquire a greater access to country's resources.

So both the regional clan rivalries as well as misuse of state structures by the Kyrgyz politicians have undermined the development of a stable and robust democracy in Kyrgyzstan as instead of meritocracy, regional considerations dominate the decision making process.

The first research question also mused if the strengthening of democratic institutions in Kyrgyzstan could lessen tribal rivalries and if yes then how could democracy be strengthened here. There is no denying the fact that democracy is the right antidote for the regional and tribal/ clan rivalries in Kyrgyzstan. Tribal and clan identities in Kyrgyzstan have a long history and can't be erased overnight. The only way forward will be to lessen the rivalries between the regional clan groups, which can only be ensured if both the groups have equal opportunities in matters of public appointments and access to resources. Further, the long-standing demand of the southern elites, all through Akaev's rule, had been greater political representation of their region in the country's political and administrative structure. Only a healthy democracy can accord equal representation and participation to all the groups in a country. Thus, establishment of impartial democratic institutions, promotion of civil society groups,



healthy press can go a long way in undermining the regional clan rivalries in the country. There also exists another school of thought that propounds that authoritarian regimes in fact served a useful function in Kyrgyzstan of preserving order and discouraging expression of radical nationalism in the country. However, the experiences of the later years, 2002 Aksy protests and the 2005 Tulip revolution, clearly underlined the need for less authoritarianism and widespread political participation for the peace and stability of the country as both these events were expression of a discontent by the marginalized sections of population.

The public administration needs to be improved in the country so that a just and equitable distribution of resources can take place. For that it is essential that meritocracy gets precedence over regional/clan considerations in matter of public appointments. Further, the elections have to be held in a transparent manner so that Parliament is not captured by elites of one region and it is able to provide a platform for expression of interests of all the regions of the country. Another positive step would be to give the legislature a wider control over the country's affairs and to curtail the powers of president so that decision making is based on consensus rather than an individual's whims and fancies. Another repercussion of a weak legislature is that it undermines the development of a strong political party system in the country as the political parties don't enjoy much say in such a weak parliamentary system. Thus, to promote healthy democracy in Kyrgyzstan there is a need to strengthen the legislature vis-à-vis the executive. It is also essential to make the office of President responsible to the legislature. Further, if all the oblasts feel included in the power structures of the country then regional clan rivalries can be weakened which will only strengthen the democratic structures of the country. Also, growth of a healthy civil society can also go a long way in strengthening the democratic institutions in Kyrgyzstan. Akaev on assuming the post of the President of the country had often spoken about the need for a robust civil society in the country. The growth of a vibrant civil society not only imparts essential political skills to its people but also provide its members with a wider platform for interest articulation. This would especially be useful in the case of Kyrgyzstan as a healthy civil society in the country would ensure both articulation and expression of interests of people belonging to different tribes, clans and regions in the country.

This brings us to the third research problem i.e. if the mainstreaming of all the citizens into the political process would reduce the impact of these north-south rivalries. One of the biggest grievances of the southern elites all through the Akaev's rule was political disenfranchisement due to capture of power by the northerners. The dominance of legislators representing northern constituencies coupled with the institution of super presidentialism led to marginalization of the southerners in the decision making process of the country. The people in the southern provinces held this as responsible for their continued economic and social backwardness as compared to the northern counterparts. This feeling was used by the southern legislators to mobilize the masses in 2005 when there was a widespread fear of another capture of the legislature by the northern leaders. The cancellation of candidature of several southern political figures only fuelled the fire further. Thus, giving a just representation to all the provinces is a must for reducing the north south rivalry as this will not only undermine the feeling of politically marginalization but will also ensure a common platform for grievance redressal for all the oblasts which would lead to an inclusive development in the country. Further, local administration should also be strengthened and the responsibility to run it should be given to the locals of the oblast so that the elites feel included in the decision-making and governance of the country. This will also go a long way in strengthening democracy in the country.

The fourth research question asked if balanced economic development would reduce regional rivalries in Kyrgyzstan. It is a natural corollary to the earlier question. Several international reports point out the highly skewed nature of statistics in Kyrgyzstan where one region benefitted more as compared to the other region, during Aakev's rule. Although both poverty and unemployment had been a problem in the entire country but the problem was more acute in the south. The prosperity of Chui and Bishkek especially fuelled the rivalry between the north and the south. The socioeconomic indicators also painted a better picture for the north than that of the south. Thus, a more balanced economic development in the country along with political mainstreaming is essential for reducing the grievances of the southern population. Many observers point out that in order to maintain his hold over power and maintain the support of his regional clan, Akaev ensured the maximum flow of resources and investments in the northern provinces, which came at the expense of the south.

Thus, it can be said that the rivalry between the two regions can only be reduced if both the regions get proportionate political representation and economic development is more inclusive.

## **Testing the Hypotheses**

In the beginning, two hypotheses had been propounded which were to be tested in the course of this study. With the help of the available sources, the first hypotheses that regional violence in Kyrgyzstan has been witnessed from time to time due to lack of inclusive political representation and regional-clan based interest articulation is found to be correct.

Several authors in their studies have pointed out that the lack of political representation of the southern elites and capture of the government by the northern clan members was the main bone of contention between the north and south. Twice during the 15 years reign of Akaev (1991-2005), clashes had erupted between the southern groups and the government. The first mass protest between the southern masses and the government loaded with northerners was in 2002 in Aksy when the southern elites mobilized the people to protest against the arrest of one of their southern legislator. Observers have pointed out that the cessation of some disputed territory to China by the government galvanized the southern elites as they feared that government could do the same with the disputed territory in the southern Kyrgyzstan. The subsequent arrest of their leader only added fuel to the fire. So, regional-clan based interest articulation played the primary role here.

Further, the evolution of super presidentialism led to the development of thriving patron client relations in Kyrgyzstan where the northern elites allocated political and economic resources to their regional clan members, which led to the capture of power by the northerners for almost 15 years. Due to this, the southerners increasingly felt politically marginalized by an administration largely run by northern clan members. This feeling of political disenfranchisement along with the fear of another capture of power in 2005 Parliamentary elections provided the perfect motivation for the

southern opposition groups to work together to remove Akaev. This resulted in the second regional clash in independent Kyrgyzstan's history when southern masses raised their heads in protest against Akaev in Osh and Jalal-Abad, which later spread to Bishkek and finally led to the downfall of Akaev. Thus, both the clashes in the history of independent Kyrgyzstan (till 2005) were a direct outcome of the regional conflicts that existed in the country due to lack of political inclusiveness.

Further, both these mass protests didn't assume an ethnic character and retained only a regional expression of discontent. There were no reports of any clash between the two ethnic groups (Kyrgyz and Uzbek) and both groups had the similar demand of removing Akaev as the President of the country. In fact during the 15 years of Akaev rule there was a perceptible interethnic calm in the country as there were no widespread clashes between the majority Kyrgyz and minority Uzbek groups, as had been feared by many observers after the 1990 Osh conflict. Both the Osh ethnic clashes as well as the 1999-2000, border crisis with Uzbekistan formed the basis for this fear. However, there was reasonable calm in inter-ethnic relations all through the presidency of Akaev. Observers cite many reasons responsible for this state of affairs.

Many observers believe that ethnic nepotism i.e. favouring one's own kin members over others in allocation of political and economic resources, is one of the major reasons behind ethnic conflicts in ethnically diverse country. Inter-ethnic peace during the 15 years of Akaev's rule could be explained on the basis of observation of many experts that the distribution of resources and personnel selection had largely been on the basis of regional clan considerations and was not anti-Uzbek per se. In addition to this, ethnicity in Kyrgyzstan had just been one aspect of the identity of the people here and several studies point out that there has been overlapping of interest of Kyrgyz and Uzbek population especially in the southern provinces of the country. The political and economic discrimination by a government led by northern clans had been a grievance of the entire southern population and not just of the Kyrgyz or the Uzbek populations. Further, the role of leadership in maintaining inter ethnic calm can also not be ignored here. Akaev after coming into power took it upon himself to bring and peace and stability in the southern provinces that had witnessed violent interethnic riots in 1990. Akaev being aware that another ethnic flare up would severely harm the Kyrgyz economy tried to bring harmony to the country by

supporting both the national aspirations of the Kyrgyz as well as promoting other nationalities to pursue their own cultural needs. In addition to this, the regional divisions in the country had become so entrenched in the minds of the people due to regional allocation of resources during Akaev's rule that it kind of overshadowed other societal divisions like the ones based on ethnicity. Many observers also believe that the regional division in the country led to stability in interethnic relations in the country. The cleavage between the North and the South of the country became so large during Akaev's presidency that it led to commonality of interest between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks populations settled in the south of the country as it was not only the Uzbeks who felt discriminated but the southern Kyrgyz also felt discriminated by the northerners in both the economic and the political field. This is the reason why there was solidarity between the southern Kyrgyz and Uzbeks against the northerners during both the 2002 Aksy protests as well as the 2005 "Tulip Revolution". Both the protests provided the perfect opportunity for the masses to express their regional/clan interests.

Coming to the second hypotheses that periods of economic decline and deep fall in social welfare provisions have coincided with political instability and sharpening regional divisions then the available data and studies do not support this proposition. Kyrgyzstan soon after independence adopted radical economic reforms to establish a market economy. The government took active measures to reform the economy by rapidly carrying out privatization, dismantling the collective farms, withdrawing the subsidies, reducing social welfare measures and freeing the market. This obviously had a negative impact on the economy as it witnessed a period of deep economic decline. Along with this, hyperinflation, climbing poverty and unemployment rates, falling wages made the lives of the people especially difficult. This economic turmoil lasted till 1996 when economy started showing signs of recovery although the poverty rates still remained high. Thus, the first decade in the history of independent Kyrgyzstan was a period of economic difficulties, which hurt the population on both sides of the regional divide. However, it needs to be mentioned here that this period of economic decline was not accompanied by political instability. In fact despite increasing poverty and unemployment, the country remained stable and there were no reports of any regional, ethnic or clan based fighting.

The economy in Kyrgyzstan showed real signs of resumption after 2000 when not only GDP of the country showed an increase but the poverty and unemployment rates also showed a decline. Although the southern Kyrgyzstan fared worse, in terms of socio economic indicators, than the north but that was the case prior to 2000 also. In addition to this, to tackle the menace of poverty, Akaev embarked on a massive poverty alleviation program with the help of World Bank and IMF in 2002. In 2004, another poverty alleviation program was launched in the county, which especially targeted the poor of the Osh province. The Osh Regional government with support from the UNDP launched country's first regional poverty reduction program aiming to reduce the provinces' poverty rate by more than half by 2010. Thus, efforts were being made to address the problem of rampant poverty in the south of the country. Overall the economy in Kyrgyzstan also became more stable compared to the previous decade. However, the period of economic stability couldn't ensure political stability as twice, after 2000, the country witnessed widespread protests against the administration that finally culminated in the Tulip Revolution of 2005. Thus, the last 5 years of Akaev's rule were marked by political instability and increased expression of discontent by the southern masses despite an overall improvement in the economy of the country and increase in spending on social welfare measures.

Thus, the second hypotheses, does not hold true in the light of available resources. In fact periods of political stability have coincided with periods of economic instability in Kyrgyzstan and vice-versa. There is a requirement for further research in this field to understand why economic stability could not ensure political stability in Kyrgyzstan.

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