

**SYSTEMIC TRANSITION AND IT'S IMPACT ON WOMEN:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN IN RUSSIA AND
POLAND SINCE 1990**

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It is certified that the dissertation entitled "**Systemic Transition And Its Impact On Women: A Comparative Study Of Women In Russia And Poland Since 1990**" submitted by Ms Nivedita Das Kundu in partial fulfillment for the award of the Degree of **Master Of Philosophy** of this University, is her original work and may be placed before the examinees for evaluation. This dissertation has not been submitted for award of any other degree of this University or of any other University.

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PREFACE

This dissertation seeks to study the systemic transition and its impact on women in Russia and Poland. The transition to capitalism bears upon itself the features of reform as well as revolution to some extent. Yet it is fundamentally different from both. The dramatic political changes of the recent years have redrawn the map of the Europe. Simultaneously it has also set in motion a process of profound economic and social transformation in the former socialist states. In my present research work I have chosen two former socialist countries that is Russia and Poland. These two countries were chosen specially because both were undergoing rapid changes on various fronts and both adopted shock therapy as means to undo the perceived shortcomings of the previous system. In Russia the Soviet model of socialism in which the state owned enterprises and collectivised agriculture were the dominant form of ownership and production have been rejected as unworkable and inefficient. In its place a market economy has been initiated. This market economy is now in a worse crisis than the soviet economy ever witnessed. In Poland this transition to democracy/ market economy caused many economic problems . There were severe flaws in the basic program. There were policy errors and greater politicisation of the economic scene. As a result for first few years the decline in the growth and production was more than expected. Inflation and unemployment were also higher than earlier suggested estimates. Of late however economy of both the countries appears to be improving. The basic thrust of this study is to depict the impact of this systemic change on women economically, socially, and politically. The strategies adopted by Russian and Polish women to cope up with the changes have also been discussed.

In the first chapter I have given an overview of the economic, political and social trends of transition in Russia as well as in Poland. In this chapter I have shown that transition from centrally planned economy to a market economy has been facing numerous problems. Along with transitional changes many other parallel processes were to be set in motion, like demonopolisation, restructuring of the economy and social structure etc. These were missing in both countries causing severe systemic crisis.

In the second chapter I have depicted the impact of systemic transition on the women of Russia. Here I have shown that due to the transitional changes how women of Russia are affected in the economic, social and political spheres. Besides, I have also shown various strategies adopted by the Russian women to cope up with the numerous transitional problems.

In the third chapter I have dealt with the impact of systemic transition on the women of Polish society and shown that due to the transitional changes how Polish women were affected in the spheres of economy, and politics. Here I have reflected the various strategies adopted by them to cope up with this transformation.

The fourth chapter is a comparative assessment between the women of Russia and Poland. Here I have compared and assessed the Russian and Polish women before and after the systemic transition. Many similarities and differences between them during the socialist period as well as after introduction of the market economy are also discussed.

The fifth chapter is in the form of conclusion. This chapter reflects many observations of the systemic transition and its impact on women in the two countries under study.

This study has served to bring out the status / conditions of women in the former socialist countries like Russia and Poland during the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy. It also reflects the courage and patience with which the women of these countries adopted different strategies to fight back and cope with the pressures of transition.

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CHAPTER -I

1. AN OVERVIEW OF ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL TRENDS OF TRANSITION.

1.1 In Russia

Russia is in throes of systemic crisis. The crisis that was caused due to the overall economic, political and social changes which was the result of the Russian transition to capitalism. The Soviet model of socialism, in which state owned enterprises and collectivised agriculture were the dominant forms of ownership and production, has been rejected as unworkable and inefficient. In its place a market economy has been initiated. This market economy is in a worse crisis than the Soviet economy ever witnessed. While there is an agreement on the gravity of crisis, there has been little agreement among analysts on the nature, causes, and remedies of this crisis. The transformation of the Russian economic system from a state controlled planned economy to a capitalist system, dominated by market forces was an essential agenda of the Russian reformers and their Western backers. It was believed that a new system of full-grown capitalism could emerge from the ashes of a completely destroyed state ownership system. The attempt was to weed out state owned enterprises, which numbered some 100,000 in 1989 in the entire Soviet Union, and transfer their ownership to a new class of individual

entrepreneurs. Similarly the collective farm system that had been the main stay of Russian agriculture during the Soviet era was to give way to privatised Capitalist agriculture. The majority of these state enterprises and collective farms were in functioning order when it was decided to dismantle them. There was no real crisis in their structure, function, organisation, or output, when it was declared that the entire system was to be transformed.

Attempts to lessen state control were initiated during President Gorbachev's regime under Perestroika. In 1988 the Law on State Enterprises granted greater autonomy to enterprises about production and financial decision. Production targets and orders given by the state were removed. Enterprise managers were given autonomy to set targets and look for orders. Bonuses and wages were linked to production. Enterprises could retain some amount of profits. New laws on co-operatives encouraged the development of small farms.

The attempt of these reforms to end the two problems of Soviet economy, stagnation, and shortages did not succeed. Bureaucratic intervention was cited as one of the drawbacks of the reform. Monetary financing of the budget and changes in the pricing system increased inflation. Regional assertiveness reinforced the process of autonomy and a break from central control. This contributed to the delegitimisation of the Gorbachev reforms and Soviet economy was criticised as unreformable. Market economy and liberalisation was posed as the best and the only alternative by the forces

led by Boris Yelstin and those who backed him in the disintegration of the USSR.¹ By the end of 1990's in the Russian economy there was a paralysis in the banking system.

This was aggravated after the devaluation of the currency on August 17, 1998. The GDP had declined by 5% in 1998 as compared with 1997. Industrial output declined further by 3% over declined what it was in 1997. It was calculated that an average growth rate of 3.3% overbear (i.e. the growth rate of USA) would take the Russian economy 17 years to reach its 1989 level. Thus Russia had a 40% decline since 1989. With a foreign debt already reaching \$123 billion. Analysts believed that if by 1999 Russia is unable to raise fresh money or delay payments, it would default on as much as \$200 billion in foreign debt. This would be the largest default by any government in history. Expenses on external debt services, which were \$0.7 billion in 1993, would reach \$6.85 billion in 1999.² With only \$12.3 billion in cash reserves in the treasury and with Russian companies' pocket empty, the economy was in tatters. Russia has defaulted by 250 billion rubles in short term internal debt. It has admitted that debt over 11 billion rubles in back wages, 25 billion in Defense contracts and 16 billion in welfare payments for 1998 could not be met.

After the August 17, 1998 ruble devaluation the ruble lost 40% against the German Mark, its strongest trading partner. With industry and agriculture in decline,

¹ A.M.Chenoy, Russian Transition to Capitalism, (Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1998), p. 1-2.

people in Moscow and elsewhere were eating imported food. The Russian GNP was dominated by the shadow (Black) economy & barter had largely replaced trade.² The central Bank had to suspend all foreign currency trade since the country was on the verge of and hyperinflation.³ Any resistance was dismissed as “communist.” This was the analysis by the Russian privatisers and dominant sections of the Western press. All resistance was designated as an attempt by communists and their sympathizers to restore the old regime .The Communist Party of Russia, in alliance with other groups like the Agrarian party of Russia, has not opposed the Russian transformation. They have opposed the fast pace of reforms, the lack of public debate on the method of reform, the lack of social policy, the withdrawal of social subsidies etc. They have proposed a mixed economy with a state sector that functions along with a private sector. Resistance to the privatisation program came from many quarters in the initial years especially until 1993.

The Duma with its Communist Party majority had strengthened its opposition over the last few years. The 1998 financial crisis gave fillip to the Duma when Yeltsin suddenly dismissed Prime Minister Chernomyrdin in May 1998 and blamed him for the financial crisis. The Duma twice rejected Sergei Kiriyenko who was Yeltsins new nominee for Prime Ministership. The Duma however had to accept him when Yeltsin threatened to dissolve the house. Kiriyenko’s failure to stop the crisis forced Yeltsin to dismiss him after five months in October 1998. Yelstein then tried to reinstate

² Moscow News, no. 23, June 18, 1998, p. 7.

³ Interfax News Agency, May 11, 1998.

Chernomyrdin. The Duma however effectively resisted this and threatened Yeltsin with impeachment proceedings. Yeltsin then was forced to compromise to bring in Yevgeny Primakov as the Prime Minister who had the approval of Duma.⁴ Again on May 12, 1999 Mr. Yeltsin dismissed the well respected Yevgeny Primakov. However the Duma failed in a long planned bid to impeach the President for treason and other grave crimes. On 19th May 1999, Yeltsin got his way completely as Russia's lower house of the Parliament voted overwhelmingly to confirm his choice for a new Prime Minister by a huge margin of 297-55. Duma deputies endorsed former interior minister Sergei Stepashin a man who stressed loyalty to the Kremlin as his main characteristic to head Russia's fourth government in just over a year.

With fresh Parliamentary election looming in December, the Communist Party and other opposition forces might actually find it preferable to have a Yeltsin loyalist in charge of Russia's economic disaster rather than Mr. Primakov who co-operated well with the Duma and included communists in his government. All these events proved that the Duma was no match to Yeltsin. When the President was in good health and top form he dominated the political stage.⁵ Meanwhile public protests grew. Miners who had not been paid their wages blocked railway lines. Trade unions staged rallies. Large demonstrations of working people have marked their protests. All these indicated that civil society was in distress. All these political events showed the decline in Yeltsin's power, which despite the huge constitutional power was in a weak state. Besides having

⁴ Op.cit. (Chenoy), p. 31-32.

⁵ The Hindustan Times, May 20, 1999, p. 14.

severe health problems Yeltsin continued to cling to office, acting erratically from his hospital bed. The very reason for which the earlier Soviet regime had been discredited, like the lack of accountability over centralisation of power, lack of transparency in the system, the impossibility of removing an unaccountable head of state dominated the current regime. The illusion that the systemic transition would ensure democracy had given way to a realisation that these reforms have instead led to Mafia control and authoritarianism. The

changes in the economic system have been matched by a new social stratification in Russian society. The income differentials between groups have widened liberalisation and shock therapy in Russia was initiated before the development of a class of domestic capitalist or industrialist. There was however a class of people in Russia, who managed to accumulate money under communism. They were primarily the currency speculator, black marketers, and the corrupt member of the state administration or nomenclature. The liberalisers, influenced by western neo liberal and monetarist theory, urged that they would form the core of the new domestic capitalist class. The nomenclature that ran the economic ministries and enterprises in the former USSR, were in an ideal position to profit from a sudden and chaotic dismantling of the centralised administrative system. They set up joint stock companies, took the bank loans, and used their connections to get credits from banks, and to corner the best deals. It was this combination of bureaucratic capital and Mafia that was at the core of the new Russian capitalist class.⁶

⁶ Op.cit. (Chenoy), p. 21-23.

With the increase of the political and economic power of bureaucratic capital and the Mafia there has been the simultaneous dramatic weakening of the political power of the industrial working class. This class has further suffered with the removal or slashing of the subsidies and falling real wages because of hyperinflation leading to the precipitous fall in living standards along with consistently rising unemployment. The balance of power in society has thus shifted and these new classes exercises favorable control over the government.⁷ The severe economic crisis demobilized large classes of people. This led to the rise of the commercial middleman who traded selling of finished products from state enterprises or smugglers. The sharp rise of speculators who controlled the economy was justified by the regime by stating that this would contribute to the accumulation of the capital. Shortages and monopolies were beneficial to mercantile & lumpen capitalist. This class was not only unlikely to become the new entrepreneurial class but was likely to act as agents of foreign capital or “ Compradore” capitalists like dominant elite’s in other third world countries which have undergone such International Monetary Fund (IMF) - bank prescribed economic reforms.⁸ The changes in income differentials in Russia have been very marked, since the privatisation drives started. The richest 10% received 28% of the income while the poorest 10% received 2% of the income. As much as 59% of the population was below the poverty line. This difference increased with every passing year. The income of middle level traders rose too much higher levels than that of the middle class.⁹ Those belonging to the intelligentsia;

⁷ Economic Trends in Eastern Europe, vol. 4, no. 1, 7th March 1995, p. 8.

⁸ M. Chossudovsky, The Globalisation of World Poverty: Impact of IMF and World Bank Reforms, (The Other India Press, Goa, 1997), p. 231.

⁹ Ministry Of Labour’s Commersant, 1993, no. 22.

specialists, scientist etc. received lowest wages. In 1992-93 average earnings was below \$ 10 a month, a university professor earned \$8, an office worker \$7, qualified nurse in an urban clinic earned \$6 a month.¹⁰ Thus in 1992 alone 90,000 persons left scientific activities for commercial activities. Intellectual work force build up over the decades was thus drained away. The lack of a social policy to compensate for the withdrawal of state support had led to the depression of the middle class and to the immiseration of the poor. Decline of the state's role in society weakened the middle class driving it to the periphery of the society. The belief that the middle class would be automatically developed with the market relations proved untrue in Russian society. In fact the Russian middle class had developed with the increased role of the state. The social upheavals caused by privatisation have thus been as great as they were during the collectivization decades. The crucial difference since these reforms far from being egalitarian were institutionalising Mafia and foreign capital. The inequalities created were gravely destructive for civil society and even for the integrity of Russia.¹¹

Thus it has been observed that transition from the centrally planned economy to the market economy was facing numerous problems in Russia. As along with these changes many other parallel processors were to be set in motion like demonopolisation, restructuring of the economy and a social structure etc. All these were missing here causing severe systemic crisis.

¹⁰ Ibid. (Chossudovsky), p. 227.

¹¹ Op.cit (Chenoy), p. 24

1.2 In Poland

After an initial euphoria the transition to capitalism in Poland was providing an unparalleled challenge to the market mechanism. The economic reforms of the transition had to their credit the end of queues to buy necessities; they were responsible for a sharp decline in social welfare. Total output and especially industrial output has fallen by an average of 30 - 40 %. An economic crash of this magnitude, including sharp decline in real wages and a collapse of the employment and social welfare system. No one expected the transition to be a picnic. Output and employment had fallen beyond all expectation.¹² In the past Polish economic performances during the 1970s and 1980s showed extremely wide variation. The annual rate of growth of GNP, both in total and in per capita terms showed Poland to be the fastest growing economy between 1970 and 1975, but it was the slowest growing economy between 1975 - 80 and 1980 - 85. Poland's hard currency debt in 1982 was the highest in Eastern Europe, both as a percentage of exports to the West (649%) and as a percentage of GNP (21.2 %). There seemed little hope that Poland would be able to meet all interest payments on its debt. Even if Poland's annual growth rate target of 3 - 4 % were met, Western bankers considered it unlikely that much headway could have been made towards debt elimination before the mid 1990s. Economic shocks imposed by the crash reform program introduced in January 1990

¹²H.A. Asden, "Politik und Gesellschaft," International Politics and Society, vol. 2, 1994, p. 1-2.

clearly attempted to maintain its lead within the block, the Sejm removed all price control, converted many state owned companies to private ownership, ended subsidies to unprofitable enterprises and allowed layoffs and bankruptcies. The plan was widely expected to produce extremely high short-term four-digit inflation and a six-figure unemployment. The use of wage control to dampen inflationary pressure was particularly sensitive for a government. This had criticized communists for never having truly represented workers interests, the high moral standing of the Trade Union. Solidarity and the ethnic and religious homogeneity of Poland made it politically more feasible to introduce harsh measures there than elsewhere. Poland's extensive program was motivated by the view that no structural reforms could have been effective in an unstable macroeconomics environment and therefore the reform process began with a major stabilisation program, which also included major structural component of trade reform.¹³

Poland's futile reliance on privatisation and market forces to restructure, resulted in loss of time, and missed market opportunities, particularly those associated with sustaining the growth of the public sector exports that boomed in the very early transition years.

The foreign capital that flowed into Poland in the early transition, particularly in the manufacturing sector tended to be tiny at the end of 1992. The major motive of the foreign investors was to exploit domestic markets. Big investors such as General Motors

¹³ K.Dawisha, Eastern Europe Gorbachev and Reform, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990), p.179

also instrumentally demanded protective tariffs or quotas against competitive imports as a pre-condition for investing (UNIDO 1993). Thus, where a subsidy - free environment was the goal of the transitional economy, market incentives were becoming the reality.¹⁴ Shock therapy was continued despite poor results, this model of shock therapy was illuminated by Leszek Balcerwicz, who was Poland's premier shock therapist, who was the hero of many intellectuals. Radical economic reform created safeguards to make the transition process irreversible. It rapidly introduced a number of economic and institutional changes that acted as policy constraint on any new government. Taking over, with whatever their basic ideology and value system might have been.¹⁵

Poland's economic turn around during the 1990s had been matched by the country's political transformation. In the decade following communism's collapse Poland had already seen four parliamentary elections (1989, 1991, 1993, 1997) and two presidential (1990 & 1994), a five part referendum in 1996 and a separate referendum in May 1997 to approve a new constitution. Governing parties had been voted out of office and replaced by the opposition ones, while a legendary anti-Communist incumbent President was defeated by the head of the former communist youth movement. In the 1990s rumors of the palace coups and charges that the Prime Minister had contacts with the Russian Intelligence agent were never substantiated, the political system had been characterized by a commitment to outcomes determined by the democratic process. All

¹⁴ Op.cit. (Asden), p. 3-5.

¹⁵ The World Bank Annual Report, "The Economic Scene: A Global Perception Eastern & Central Europe," p. 26-27.

other factors had been relegated to at best as a secondary role. An interim small constitution was enacted in 1992 and five years later; the Parliament and the public approved a new permanent one. There appeared to be no tests related to democratic consolidation left for Poland to meet both the 1995 presidential and 1997 parliamentary election about a choice between left of center and right of center candidates. A more transparent party system that more accurately reflected political difference within the electorate seemed to have been the main reason why Polish voters were more involved in the latter 1990's than the early 1990's & referendum on entry into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or into the European Union (EU) sparked greater interests. As elsewhere in electoral democracies, turnout at local elections in Poland was seldom above the 10 - 25 % range. Parliamentary elections have not given the same level of voter enthusiasm as presidential ones. In Poland the voting population has stabilized at about 60%. Three major issues shaped party programs at the time of the 1991 elections: i) The drastic program of economic reform (sometimes called the big bang approach, sometimes shock therapy) which entailed rapid privatization and price liberalization. ii) Role of the Catholic Church in society, in particular its commitment to religious instruction in schools and opposition to abortion. iii) The scope and nature of de-communization or the exposing of former communist and political exclusion.

The 1991 election results demonstrated no overwhelming support for any one political movement. The most important lesson of the 1991 elections was the need to revise the electoral law in order to create a stronger party system. The SLD's victory in

1993 came as no surprise, given the changed electoral law that disproportionately rewarded the top vote getting parties and the changed mood of the electorate, which had grown disillusioned with what Walesa had called “ the war at the top” within solidarity ranks.

The 1997 electoral victory by a conservative block was tampered with so there was a need to come to term with neo-liberal and secular elements. As in any democracy, Poland’s electorate political parties and leaders have shaped the country’s institution, process, and policies. Working together, these political actors advanced a new constitutional order in 1997 that would put the finishing touch on the transition from communism. Many important questions, especially those related to economic and social security remained to be resolved. However, how decision was to be taken was no longer in dispute. “Democracy is consolidated when it becomes self enforcing, that is when all the relevant political forces find it best to continue to submit their interests and values to the uncertain interplay of institution” wrote Adam Przeworski. Uncertainties would not disappear in Poland, and what had to be done about them might lead to greater disagreement. However, the process leading to political outcomes was neither uncertain nor disagreed upon.¹⁶ Changes were a result of an accelerated process of political evolution, where issues related to transition were relatively quickly replaced by issues involving business as usual. The leadership was the most susceptible to the most sudden

¹⁶ Richard F. Starr (ed.), Transition to Democracy in Poland, (Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1998), p. 47-89.

change. During the period of crisis, voters and parties responded to each other. The routinization of politics in Poland signified that the political initiative rested in the hands of the parties and the electorate. The growth of political consciousness and activism in Poland seems to have proceeded along familiar lines. As various social groups struggled for recognition and discovered the political weapons available in a democracy, they began to lobby for particular legislative action or an administrative decision. The old division of Country - city, intelligentsia - working class was replaced by a struggle for the presence in the public arena. This struggle brought into the political process new unknown players. The intelligentsia continued to involve into a professional class and its role as the representative for the society continued to decline.

Polish society, like Russian society was also undergoing a transition period. Recent political developments had been the most conspicuous. However, the changes had also occurred at a deeper level. The whole socio-economic formation of real socialism was in the process of disintegration and a new type of society was coming up. The new tendencies were also detectable in the social structure of Polish society and in parallel to the social perception of this structure. The collapse of the Soviet type system brought the restoration of democratic liberties derived under communism and the building of a state law, with the civil and political rights, as well as certain social rights that had not been necessary under full employment. For example unemployment benefits.¹⁷ At first, during this "phase of transition," hopes about the expected benefits

¹⁷ Mark Ziolkowski, "Social Structure Interest and Consciousness: The Crisis and Transformation of the System of Real Socialism in Poland," *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1990, p. 289- 304.

from a market economy were such that most people took for granted that social rights would be extended owing to the qualitative improvement of services. This rejection of the very notion increased inequalities. Events confirmed this fears: the dazzling rise of unemployment, paralleled by the production crisis, entailed an erosion or suppression of former social benefits. These benefits began to be taken seriously, as shown through the outcome of the elections in favor of the political formation linked to former regimes. The social question played a big part in the political discontent that brought ex - communist's back to power. After the first moment of euphoria and of confidence in the liberal economy, nostalgic feelings about the security and the egalitarian society of yesterday began to appear along with the tendency of embellishing the past, forgetting that this society was synonymous with shortages, repression and privileges of the "nomenclature". There was a tendency to forget as well that these benefits had been defined from the top without consulting these individuals who were treated as objects and not subjects. Many people today resentful in the face of the acknowledgment that extension of individual liberties, indispensable to free enterprises, means huge social inequalities, especially worsening of their own economic situation. Thus as Barbara Environ puts it, T.H. Marshall's earlier prioritizing of the "social rights of citizenship" had renewed relevance in the face of the growing social inequalities and poverty.¹⁸

¹⁸ Heineken Jacqueline, " Public / Private Gender - Social And Political Citizenship of Eastern Europe," *Theory and Society*, vol. 26, no. 4, August 1997, p. 584.

Political development in Poland, round table talks the election and the formation of the soldier-sonic led government first to the formulation and then since January 1990 to the implementation of a radically new economic policy. This policy changed the whole economic environment and created a new type of adaptive behavior. A new economic order and new type of society seemed to be making the general distinction towards the market economy. Poland has dismantled communism and broken away from the bondage of ideology, accepting the new economic rationality. The effect in the beginning was profound. The budget deficit was reduced; inflation slow and a trade surplus were achieved. The market was stabilized, and for the first time since world war II consumer power has been almost replaced the tyranny of perpetual shortages. The first phase of the government program was largely been successful. On the other hand there did not exists a viable social base of the economic transformation. Polish economy was regulated by two opposing mechanisms: the dominating old one - that of state command, protection and distribution - and the new one that of the market. The immediate short-term interests of the most numerous social groups like industrial workers, peasants & members of the intelligentsia were still clearly linked with the old mechanism. Market reform supported because of the theoretical interests but it has failed so far to produce the desired economic reaction on the part of private producers and both the management and the employees in the state sector. There was a common expectation that eventually the whole situation would somehow improve almost automatically and would come as a natural reward for the sacrifices. State administration and state interventionism remained enormous but people were accustomed to and still expected state presence, protection,

and control. They wanted to see great individual work and living conditions. The most common policy of the factory management facing financial restrictions were simply to reduce production by sending people, first on a forced paid holiday, then on unpaid temporary leave and finally on the government's strict monetary restrictions. The old habit of waiting for the central power to define the rules of the game was still in the changing process. There was almost no attempt to play an active role in the restructuring of production changing its profile, adapting it to the new market conditions. High interest's rates have also choked investment in the private sector, discouraging private entrepreneurs from expanding productions and creating new jobs. Farmers have complained that the high cost of machinery and fertilizer has made food production unprofitable and they asked for state protection and suspension of the market mechanism. There were some enclaves of people interested in functioning of an authentic market mechanism, but they still constituted a tiny minority. A certain paradox was noted here. The second economy had been an important factor contributing to the decline of the old system. The old patterns of functioning in the second economy, within the economic environment of the shortage economy of the state sector proved however, often to be clearly inadequate in the new situation. There was still very little room for the new system to grow. Private investments, small-scale planning and commercial contracts were as frequent as they had ever been. There was not enough capital for that but in addition not enough willpower, confidence, and positive experience. At the personal level withdrawal and passivity was still seemed to be dominated to coax people away

from the influence of the omnipresence and omnipotent state and to make them act in the new economic domain might well prove to be the most difficult task of all.

The main condition of the success of the transformation program seemed to be the creation of its real social base (i.e. large social groups having both short and long term interest in the development of the market economy) before social patience and symbolic support grew thin or disappears altogether.¹⁹ Thus these transitional changes should take a proper shape for the faster growth of the country and to bring out the country from the present confusing situation.

1.3 Conclusion

Transition is the collective concept of the process of systemic change. Transition to capitalism bears upon itself the features of reform as well as revolution to some extent, yet it is fundamentally different from both. The dramatic political change of recent years simultaneously set in motion a process of profound economic and social transformation in the former socialist states. This transition has brought systemic crisis both in Russia and Poland and this crisis had a deep affect overall society of these countries.

¹⁹ Op.cit. (Acta Sociologica), p. 301 - 302.

In Russia the transition to capitalism took place when the soviet model of socialism had been rejected as unworkable and inefficient where state owned enterprises and collectivised agriculture were the dominant forms of ownership and production. Market economy was introduced but this market economy brought crisis, which the Soviet economy never witnessed before, bringing Russia in a flux. The impact of the changes has raised many questions and problems for the women and on the society as a whole but women did not loose their patience and continued their fight and adopted different strategies to cope up with the situation.

In Poland the transition has brought turmoil in the government, deteriorated economic situation and power of the Catholic Church. It has been observed that this transition has done little to improve the conditions and solve the problems of the society. The status of women has fallen and many family problems have increased but in many ways the current situation in Poland was suitable for the creation of the women's movement. The country was undergoing major political economic changes, a large number of political parties interested groups and organisations have emerged and women also started involving themselves in discussions and debates started including more and more women in the women political parties and started mobilising more and more women to choose women candidates for their better future. Women started speaking out more loudly and more frequently on behalf of their sex.

Thus it has been observed that transition had a deep affect overall society of Russia and Poland. Women have been the most severely effected and the transition has brought down their status economically, politically and socially.

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CHAPTER 2

IMPACT OF WOMEN IN RUSSIA

2.1 Introduction

The Russian transition had a deep impact on society. The dramatic economic and political changes were felt by all sections of Russian people. Russia was going through a social disorder there was a lack of confidence in the future, and the gulf dividing the truths proclaimed on lofty platforms from real life. Transition to Democracy had led to people's alienation.¹ There was much confusion and uncertainty. Russia was developing a capitalism of a peculiar kind. It was neither European, North American nor Latin American. If one were to evaluate Russia's transition to market economy using the dynamics of investment and growth, then there was evidence that it was regressing rather than advancing towards capitalism. Evidence of such regression could be found in statistics, which indicated that in the 1970s, the economy of the former USSR performed better than Russian present economy. According to the Russian economists Igor Gundarov, "A possible conclusion one could draw is that, A market economy is less efficient than a socialist one. The second conclusion could be that the reforms have not created a market economy but something quite different one which we defined as being a

¹ David E. Powell, "Social Problems in Russia," Current History, vol. 92, October 1993, p. 325.



kind of a feudal system.”² The present Russian system contains features, which are not found in any other industrially developed country. Despite Yeltsin’s attempts to prove that things were getting better. There were many indications to show that the Russian economy was sliding towards a state of anarchy in which only criminal elements were the main beneficiaries of the reforms. The situation in Russia appeared paradoxical. Instead of a transition from socialism to capitalism the Russian economy appeared to be moving towards a feudal economic model. The regression seemed to be accelerated at a speed, which would make it extremely difficult to stop. The indication showed that it was returning to the state control rather than a free market economy.³ Economic disarray was one of the main reasons for the political instability. The market with its frightening uncertainty had confronted everyone with a need to save his or her own skin. One of the highlights of the past years in Russia was the devaluation of political beliefs and ideologies. In front of the entire nation, the representatives of power and their intellectual legitimisers, who for too many years proclaimed the unshakability of Marxist-Leninist theory, changed their political beliefs quickly according to season and fashion.

A fundamental change was taking place in social consciousness. There was a shift from social homogeneity to class differentiation, i.e. the society had once and for all bid farewell to the politics of equalisation and leveling of people with respect to their abilities and wages, and was making the transition to inequality based social groups. This process initiated first by the absence of restrictions on wages and second by the diversity

² Leo Cooper, *Russia and the World*, (Macmillan Press, U.K., 1999), p.39.

³ *Ibid.* (Cooper), p. 102-106.

of forms of property and entrepreneurial activity. The transition to a market economy in a post totalitarian society was accompanied by an expansion of the social structure of society. The social polarisation increased and the welfare state structure of the frame for society ceased to exist.⁴

2.2 Privatization

A market economy implied freedom of business activities. This was becoming extremely difficult for Russia because for 70 years it was totally devoid of private initiative. A solution to this problem was seen in the privatization of state owned assets. Privatization was considered as a means of improving the efficiency of production by introducing the profit motive. The subsidies provided by the government to state enterprises proved to be an economic burden resulting in a huge budget deficit. Privatization was meant to be the solution to the financial problem as well a step towards a free market through individual activity rather than a command system. In December 1991, the Russian government adopted a state program of privatization. The decision was prompted by the realisation that to liberalise prices without privatization could further complicate the difficult economic situation. The privatization program included a provision, which granted the workers the right to receive up to 35% of shares in privatized enterprises free of charge. The government also announced that it initiated to issue to each citizen privatization cheques, which would give him/her the right to a share of unsold state property.

⁴ Op.cit. (Powell), p. 325-326.

The program was formalised by decree in August 1992. Privatization vouchers made their appearance on the Russian commodity exchange from the first day of their distribution but most Russian citizens did not realize the value or even utility of the vouchers. Many Muscovites polled on the subject said they would sell the vouchers to the first buyers who would offer 10,000 rubles. Privatization faced number of difficulties despite the steps undertaken by the Russian government towards restructuring the economy. A real market economy was still in the making. Market forces were not yet operational in Russia. Former state monopolies were still in operation though many of them were running at a loss.⁵ All the rapidly growing new forms of economic activity (small business, joint venture, firms, as they were called etc.) were created almost exclusively for commercial middleman activity, or for the sale of finished products produced in state enterprises and institutions, as a mechanism for the redistribution of the profits received at these enterprises. Production remained in the hands of the state but the system of distribution became increasingly commercial. During the year 1990-91, high level officials began to take advantage of the measures to sell abroad resources, raw materials and many domestic consumer goods and means of production produced at state enterprises and to use their earnings to import goods for resale at free and high prices, thereby rapidly supplanting and impoverishing the state sector that was already characterized by shortages. Many of the representatives of the former nomenclature were thus compensated more than adequately for their lost privileges by these multimillion fortunes. The end of 1991 already formed a legal system of commercial exploitation of

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Op.cit. (Cooper), p. 107-109.

the state economy and the social watershed between representatives of socialist business and the most of the employed population came to the surface.⁶ At the same time statistics showed a decrease in the rate of growth of private farmers especially in 1992. Privatization of agriculture simultaneously with the privatization program for industry and commerce were also facing difficulties and problems due to the access to finance and markets.⁷

2.3 Social Stratification

By May 1993 the Russia's situation became graver. Creative intelligentsia, specialists, and highly skilled workers in science had the lowest wages. For e.g., the wage of professors who in other countries belong to intellectual elite and ranked above the middle class in the social stratification system, were on a par with the average old age pension in Russia in 1992. This social nonsense reflected a non-utilization of intellectual labor generated by the extensive form of its accumulation in the proceeding decades, and so in 1992 alone, over 90,000 persons left science and research for commercial purpose.⁸

This showed imbalance in the society and the lack of value that they attached to their human resources. The armed forces which for years had been depicted as the model of social solidarity and discipline, were revealed as an organisation where bullying was rampant and theft and robberies, sales of weapons, bribe taking, drug addiction and

⁶ A.N.Kochetov, " Sources of the New Social Structure," Sociological Research, May-June 1994, p. 86-95.

⁷ Ibid. (Cooper), p. 109

⁸ Op.cit. (Kochetov), p. 84-86.

drunkenness was flourishing. All these had elicited feelings of horror and fear among the people and had impact both on men and women of Russia. These things were literally unheard of when communist party ruled by terror. In 1992 the number of registered crime in Russia rose to 2,76 million and the crime rate to 1,857 per 100,000 people. The crime rate almost doubled between 1985 and 1992. Theft, buglery and other property offenses accounted for two - thirds of all crime in Russia.⁹

These were the pictures of social stratification that did not fit in with the transition to market relations. In the last years of Perestroika it was recognised that a social gap existed between the nomenclature class and the people. For the ruling elite, who lived on hidden prices this consumption basket (3312 rubles) was 3.3 times cheaper and consequently the real level of consumption increased by the same amount? Overall the level of consumption increased by the same that the bulk of incomes of the rich groups was used for personal consumption, to accumulate goods and real estate for resale. The sharp increase in the number of speculators in recent years was justified by invoking the necessity for the primitive accumulation of capital. They were seen as future capitalist or their precursors, but this was an obvious deception. Essentially the structure not only preserved but also even strengthened all the attributes of its totalitarian origins. First, power and the degree of participation in the system of distribution of material goods produced in the state sector continued to define existing inequality and were the source of social polarisation.¹⁰

⁹ Op.cit. (Powell), p. 330.

¹⁰ Op.cit. (Kochetov), p. 86-95.

2.4 Poverty

The number of people in Russia living below the poverty line has increased steadily with the privatization program. In 1994 - 96 one family of four was considered poor because their per capita income was below the subsistence wage level. According to the latest estimate over 42% of the population was poor.¹¹ According to the data from the "Program for deepening economic reforms" prepared for seventh congress of peoples deputies, the poverty level was 2,485 rubles per month per person in October - November 1992, the average was roughly 4,000 rubles. The data of sociological studies of the distribution of the population by level of consumption were published in 1991 after the April price rise and the observations showed that the most prevalent type of consumer had a per capita income of 364 rubles per month per person, a second type had 1190 rubles a third type 3312 rubles . Although at that time less than 1% of the population had a wage above 1000 rubles per month.

2.5 Elite/ Business Class

Middle level businessmen who had formed small firms with limited liability, had incomes that were ten times higher and those at the top of the business world who were directly linked to the ruling class or were even part of it had much greater income. Thus the gap between social classes increase to extraordinary levels.

¹¹ Op.cit. (Cooper), p. 104.

2.6 Employment

The fundamental and the visible changes in the structure of employment, which were usually set into motion by the emergence of a multi-structured economy, did not occur in these years either. The number of employed in the former USSR fell from 1990 to 1991 from 138.2 million to 135.7 million persons (by 2.5 million). A decrease in the number of employed in the state sector by 9.9 million was the result of a switch of some of those employed to leasing arrangements (9 million persons). The number of persons employed in joint ventures increased from 0.1 million to 0.2 million. There was an increase of 1.5 million occupied in the sphere statistically designated as private labor activity which in reality was petty speculative business. This occurred at the expense of a reduction in the number of employed in cooperative ventures and joint -stock companies. The reform course of 1992 introduced some quantitative changes in social structure; it reduced the number of persons employed in industry and in the intellectual spheres and considerably increased the number of intermediaries and traders in the commercial spheres owing to the opportunities created by an endless rise in prices.

It had become clear that the so-called liberalisation of prices in 1992 was an economic failure. Instead of the promised financial stabilisation, it transformed creeping inflation into hyperinflation and instead of filling the market with goods, it brought absolute reduction. Despite all the laws of the market economies, it was not a direct but an

inversely proportional relationship that formed between the rise in prices and the filling of the consumer market. According to statistical data, in the first quarter of 1992 the production of food products declined by 25%, while the commodity turnover in comparable prices was only 37% of the level in the corresponding period of 1991. Russia had never known such a high degree of disparity because there had never been such a high degree of non-utilisation of the most capable and skilled workers and discrimination against intellectual potential.¹²

Thus we have seen that in Russia if communism gave rise to many kinds of social problems the attempt to move towards democracy and a market economy had only made those problems worse and their efforts to transfer the system into a normal and civilised system had actually given rise to new sources of discontent, new forms of illegal behavior and ever greater troubles for the Russian men and women.¹³ Women were greatly effected by this transition. They were effected economically, politically, and socially. Russia's demography was also effected due to transitional problems. However Russian women also resisted and attempted to fight back these problems with lot of courage and hope.

2.7 Economic Impact on Russian Women

The transition to a market economy had a negative impact on Russian women. It became clear that democratisation, as it had been practiced in Russia for past few years

¹² Op.cit. (Kochetov), p. 84-95.

¹³ Op.cit. (Powell), p. 330.

were very much man's project. The position of women in the economy had profoundly deteriorated; surveys revealed increasing gender discrimination in salaries, recruitment, promotion and dismissal as well as growing professional segregation and feminization of poverty. Unemployment in Russia had a female profile. It was estimated that 74% of those officially recognized as unemployed was woman and they faced greater difficulties finding new jobs. If they did find jobs they were more likely to be offered or to accept employment at a lower skill and pay level. Most of the Russian that was unemployed was previously engaged in science, research, administration, and services. While 90% of the vacancies offered at the labor exchange were for workers. Thus the female unemployed in Russia were characterised by higher educational levels. Wages of Russian women remained far behind those of men. The gender gap in earning was registered in Russia and was still growing. As for equal pay for equal work legislation, Russia was far behind though there was a provision for this in the Russian labor code. The women's faction in the state Duma that called out for equal opportunities for men and women had started working for legislation providing anti-discriminatory hiring and firing practices. In Russia, women with higher education were the first victims of unemployment and were not valued. Traditionally through Soviet history certain occupations were highly feminized for example the teaching services and health sectors, these sectors and occupations were characterised by lower salaries. In Russia women traditionally predominated in the education and health sectors. In the so-called "budgetary sector" where wages were already low in comparison with industry wages had

further fallen behind. Women who had a raw deal traditionally thus suffered more in the changed system.

Russian women suffered from discrimination in wages, recruitment, and dismissal and were frequently shifted to part-time and low-paid jobs. Their main concern was to keep their jobs by any means even for a symbolic salary and without proper security. The main reason behind this was that women were being withdrawn from the labor forces and this had a dramatic financial impact on them. This would have deprived them from the support and benefits of working women including access to the day care centers provided by enterprises and the chance to improve their housing situation. The economic crisis in Russia had intensified women's risk of poverty, which like unemployment was likely to be increasingly feminised. Single women parent who relied on one wage to support a family felt the decline in real income with inflation particularly strongly. Single parent were predominantly women who were also at greater risk of losing jobs. Statistics showed that 10% of registered unemployed females were the only bread earners in the family and about half of them had young children. For women to move forward in a technology dominated society, re-training, and skills upgrading were of crucial importance. In Russia the educational level of women starting their career was usually equal or even higher than that of men. Soviet women were always proud of their access to higher education making up as much as 60% of specialists with high school diplomas. However during the transition period most Russian women were facing difficulty combining household and childcare responsibilities with career activities. In addition due

to limited resources for training and retraining, women faced harder time than men did in gaining access to training. Therefore at the beginning of the 1990's women made up only 37% of those who could have upgraded their qualification. Russian women with higher education were in the most disadvantageous position, which tended to be one of the most vulnerable social groups in Russia. Besides the immediate problems of the individual involved this also deprived society as a whole of the benefits of their education and experience.¹⁴

Thus the transition caused economic hardship, unfavorable living conditions, severe psychological stress and conflicts in the private lives of women making families and individuals more fragile.

2.8 Political Impact on Russian Women

Due to transition and economic reform women suffered more than men. They were laid off more rapidly from their jobs and women constituted almost 70% of the unemployed. At the same time many male politicians, democratic and nationalists advocated that women should return to the home. So the women of Russia needed to defend themselves and one method was to enter the political fray. As Yekaterina Lakhova, prominent leader of the women's movement said on television during 1993

¹⁴ Tatiana Zabelina and Yevgenia Issraelyan, "Russian and Canadian Women. Challenge of The Modern World," International Journal of Canadian Studies, vol. 9, 1994, p. 86-99.

campaign “Apart from us I don’t think anyone stands for women’s rights.”¹⁵ Since specific policies for women were absent from other party program’s it became necessary to form a separate women’s group called “ Women of Russia.”

More cynically, one could have argued that the women’s committee needed to find a new role for itself in the Russian federation. It had to adapt to new circumstances, redefine its being and transfer itself into something or else disappear either way or taking both together. The formation of the “Women of Russia” party was seen from the start as necessary rather than desirable. The women concerned viewed themselves as a “political” force that was pushed into “political” roles. Their aim was to boost female political presence and to defend with commitment women’s interest in a way in which male politicians appeared incapable of changing the position of women in Russia during the transition. However in 1994 and 1995 “Women Of Russia” were divided over the pace, the content and the extent of economic reform, ranging from hard-line communist of the past to those concerned with the promotion of business interests. It was primarily their sex that united them and their desire to see more women in the Duma but not economic policy. As their election materials of 1995 illustrated they lacked a coherent statement of economic policy. However they offered something to everyone. They offered jobs for the young, promised to increase pension for the elders, promised support for the armed forces. They looked forward for reform and were against civil war. They

¹⁵ Women of Russia’s Official Television Report of the 1993 Election, ORT’S News Archives, (Public Russian Television) www.ortv.ru.

also promised to bring prosperity to the countryside. The manifesto wanted to take care of everyone but the budget required to fulfill these promises were unclear.

Thus the differences between deputies in “Women of Russia” became stark by 1996. They were too small in number to form a faction but still by the end of 1996 “Lakhova” formed a new women’s movement called “All Russian socio- political movement of women of Russia” (Obshche Rossiiskoe Obshchestvenno Politicheskoe Dvizhenie Zhenshchin Rossii) splitting away from Fedulova. According to her, this was formed because “ Women of Russia” was too conservative with little foresight. They were unable to adapt and develop, so this initiative was taken immediately after the election of 1995 to call for change. It was observed that just three years after its formation in 1993 “Women of Russia” endured a serious political split like all large social and political movements worldwide. It fell victim to division rupture and regrouping. One of the reasons for this could have been because of their electoral failure in 1995. Therefore, “ Women of Russia” had no longer had a faction in the Duma. However “Women Of Russia” hoped for a comeback in the next election to the Duma since they ranked 5th in the party list results and enjoyed a reasonably solid base of female support. However before their movement split in 1996 they were unable to attract a large male vote. They were divided into two movements with confusingly similar names, they also should have taken some decision before the election and till December 1999 attempted some co-operation between themselves. However Lakhova and Gordeeva both were not in favour of forming an all-female party. As they already

experienced failure and understood that society was not prepared for that type of movement. They favoured women representatives and members in all parties as in other normal Western countries. So presently both the women's movements whether working together or separately, thought of devising strategies for successfully attracting more voters in the next election than they did in the previous election in 1995, particularly in some parts of the Federation. Moreover there was evidence that indicated that women in other parties were more prominent and this complicated the women's movement or movements in faring well. It had also been observed that women stood out more clearly from other parties since they had something distinct to offer. Therefore women candidates in these movements needed to have more striking personalities if they were to outshine those like Ella Pamfilova, Irena Khakamada and Galina Starovoitova in other parties. The success of these women's movements hung upon the carefully considered strategies and freshly devised ways of presenting female candidates in the media, so that they were known and appeared to be dynamic and sounded convincing with an appealing political program. Outside the Duma, Russia's two main women's movements continued to react to the changing circumstances and prepared for the 1999 elections to the federal assembly and for the presidential election in 2000. If the election eligibility becomes legally restricted only to the parties then the two women's movements would have to rethink their status as a movements and form a party.¹⁶ In 1996 itself, another movement called "Budushchee BezSPIDA" (A future without AIDS) had joined "Women Of Russia," widening its potential base of support. With members across regions, "A future

¹⁶ Sue Bridger (ed.), Women and Political Change, (Macmillan Press, U.K., 1999), p. 159-165.

without AIDS” might have provided some electoral benefits for the women’s movement. Thus the process of adaptation to political economic change which the soviet women’s committee began before the disintegration of the USSR in order to guarantee its own survival as an organisation and which the union of Women of Russia had continued since 1992. Women in the movement tried to remain firm since they wished to play a political role both inside and outside the Duma. Though after the division into two groups both movements were likely to receive much less support than they would have otherwise done if they were united. The female vote could be both divided and diluted. In 1997 Lakhova expressed her desire to stand as a presidential candidate though she knew a win could have been unlikely but still she said that one should atleast start contesting, otherwise a women would never be president of Russia .If Lakhova manages to upstage Fedulova successfully by competing rather than working together then a new movement could take the place from the prominence of the older ones.¹⁷

Thus it has been observed that women’s movement in Russia for all its faults fell victim to division, rupture and regrouping. These were the political impacts that Russian women have been facing during the transition. They have been virtually denied access into the new Russian political elite and a significant voice in policy but they did not loose their hope and continued their fight against all odds. The women have thus continued struggle to form strong women’s faction in the DMA and to come up as a strong political

¹⁷ Buckley (ed.), Post-Soviet Women, (Russia, 1996), p. 178-179

group to support the women of Russia and defend their rights, to help them in coping up with the difficult situation of the transition period.

2.9 Social Impact on Russian Women

The transition from the social welfare economy to a market economy has caused deep structural changes in Russian society. Along with the economic structural changes there have been a mass of rapid and unpredictable social changes. Undoubtedly these changes had a profound impact on women's lives. Considering the traditional family duties in Russian society and the high proportion of women in employment, it was clear that in the present situation and the structural changes particularly affected women's everyday life and their position in society. The majority of women were employed in the recent past and besides this they were routinely responsible for housekeeping, bringing up children, and creating an appropriate psychological climate at home. In the transitional period the idea that women's place was at home with her children and family had been stressed in the mass media too.¹⁸ Legislation concerning women's employment and the protective nature of social policy also placed women in a less favorable competitive position compared with men during this period. There were tendencies to change from "Protection" to "Prevention" which was preventing women from participating fully in the labor force.¹⁹ Along with structural changes and the radical economic reforms at the beginning of the 1990's women unemployment appeared as a new social phenomenon in Russia. According to one large survey the percentage of women among the unemployed

¹⁸ Z. A. Khotkina (ed.), Women and Social Policy, (RAS, Moscow, 1992), p. 23.

¹⁹ Y. Zabadykina, Zenshchiny V Sovremennoi Rossii, (Petersburg, 1993), p. 60.

in 1992 was 51%, which was slightly, more than their proportion in the employed population. However it had been observed that unemployment amongst women were increasing faster than that of men and creating a social imbalance.²⁰ All these changes because of global structural changes took place in the Russian society. At the beginning of the 1990s instability and lack of confidence grew among Russian women. All these trends were making women's work position more difficult especially as the official unemployment rate was rising. Due to the long period of unemployment returning to work was becoming more difficult and the probability of falling to a lower level of vocational status was increasing. In addition public debate and prevailing attitudes also contributed to transfer women to the labor reserve that was to look after the home, children, and the elderly. For all these tasks, legislation did not guarantee a pension and subsistence or other benefits. Since 1992 market forces and a lack of enforceable legal safeguards allowed discrimination to go unchallenged as the new labor market developed. Job advertisements after privatizations have routinely expressed a preference on the sex of the applicants. In a clear majority of cases this had preferred men for professional and managerial vacancies and women preferably under 30 unmarried and attractive for subordinate and decorative office jobs which meant they were given much lower status in the society.²¹

Thus it has been observed that one of the most visible results of the Russian transition to a market economy had been a massive drop in living standards and status

²⁰ Ibid. (Khotkina), p. 48.

²¹ Op.cit. (Bridger), p. 76.

that women experienced within and along with their families in the society. There was an absence of efforts to deal with the destructive interpersonal relationship and antisocial behavior, which require professional help. Social services had been ineffective in helping them. Nothing had been done to improve the actual lifestyle of women, which made them socially the most disadvantageous group of the country.

2.10 Demographic Impact

Economic hardship and fears dominated Women's thinking on the question of having children. Society was literally filled with the fear of possible unemployment, inflation, the long lines in stores, add to that the jumps in prices. Wages could buy very little and the threat of loosing the housing facility or the thought of never getting out of the communal apartment. All these created a social climate that reflected in the nature of women. The health coefficient of women started falling, so many of them did not want to take the risk of becoming a mother. The number of infertile women also increased sharply. Women of Russia simply refused to have babies, or for health reason found it extremely difficult to conceive. Health care for women and maternal care especially, became very poor in Russia. According to a comprehensive survey by the ministry of health and other government agencies only 25.8% of all pregnant women were healthy. This meant three quarters experienced some medical difficulty during pregnancy, which contributed to birth defects and infant mortality and morbidity as well as maternal mortality. Another major problem observed was that every ten women in Russia aged 15

- 49 underwent an abortion. There were almost 137 abortions for every 100 live births in the year 1991.²²

The demographic situation in the country was assessed as the worst during the transition period. A decrease in population size was noted in 40 of Russia's 79 regions. In many of them there was a natural decline of the population, which meant the number of deaths exceeded the number of births. The birthrate has dropped far below the level required for simple replacement of the population. In order to replace the parents generation with the generation of children, it was necessary that taking mortality into account, the total birthrate coefficient (the number of children born to one woman during her lifetime) was 2.15 - 2.17 on an average. In 1992, there were 1,393 children for every 1,000 thirty years old women. The lower birthrate situation aggravated by the significant decrease in the number of marriages. Where as in 1987, 1,443,000 were registered, in 1992 there were only 1,054,000. The trend towards a decrease in the number of marriages continues to intensify in 1993.

The decline in the birth rate was influenced by the general state of crisis in the social and economic sphere. With the cost of living climbing rapidly, in many cases the drastic increase in the expenditures needed to support even one child placed an unmanageable economic burden on the family. At the end of 1992, 42% of families with children under 18 were living on the brink of poverty or below the poverty line. For

²² David E. Powell, "Social Problems in Russia," Current History, vol. 92, October 1993, p. 326-327.

families with one child the figure was 34% with two or more 47% and with three or more 72%. In 1992 institutions in the Russian ministry of public health system officially registered 3.3 million abortions, twice the number of births. There were around 96 abortions in the country for every 1,000 women of childbearing age. In 1991, 100,000 abortions were performed on women under 20 who were undergoing their first pregnancies, the scenario that had the greatest negative consequences.

The increasing difficulties in creating normal conditions for family life were intensifying divorce trends. The divorce rate was rapidly growing. About half of all marriages were dissolved in 1993. Young families were the most vulnerable. Almost every third of married couples got divorced during the first year of marriage. The result of the survey conducted by the Moscow Youth Institute in 1992 showed that one of the main reasons for divorce in Russia was poverty. Compared to 1991, in 1992 the number of divorces increased by 4,000 or by 70% in a single year and came to almost 640,000 for all of Russia, as opposed to 580,000 in 1987.²³ Most young people was married without having even the minimum for subsistence and depended entirely on their parents. In many cases, divorce was the result of the housing problem. 43% of young families had a room in their parent's apartment, while 6.5% shared room with their parents, and 21% lived in hostels. Therefore, it was also observed that because of the unfavorable living conditions, many families simply abandoned the idea of having children. The birth rate

²³ The Current Digest, "Why Russia's Demographic Crisis is Deepening?" vol. 40, no. 41, 1993, p. 21.

in Russia was constantly falling. In fact the birth rate had declined by 26% from 1989 to 1992 and was below the mortality rate.²⁴

Despite the decline in the birth rate in Russia the proportion of babies born out of wedlock was increasing. In 1987 they accounted for 13% of all births. By 1992 the figure was 17%. Divorces and out of wedlock births became the chief factors behind the steady increase in the proportion of incomplete families in the Russian federation. Over four million children i.e. 12% of all children under 18 were living in such families.²⁵ The fall in the birth rate had made the aging of Russia's population virtually irreversible. By the beginning of 1994 the proportion of pension age people in the country's total population had reached 19.8% and in 35 regions it was between 20% and 26.6%. According to international criteria Russia's population had been considered old since the late 1960s. At present 10% of Russia's people or every 9th resident of the country is in the 65 and older age group. Not only the actual trends towards a change in the birth rate but also the consequences of this trends are important for Russia's demographic development. First, a natural decrease in the population had begun a decrease that totaled more than 970,000 people in 1992-1993. Second, depopulation was extending not only to the Central Europeans, Urals regions but also to Siberia, the Far East and in number of other republics within Russia. Third, depopulation processes were developing intensively among Russia's basic ethnic group. Fourth, in the next few decades the demographic factor would destabilise various branches of the social and economic sphere. Many

²⁴ Op.cit. (Zabelina & Issraelyan), p. 99.

²⁵ Op.cit. (The Current Digest, 1993), p. 21.

predictions were made based on this demographic decline. For example the requirements for children's pre school institutions and general education schools would change in different ways. Supply and demand on the market would fluctuate. The army would have trouble. For example in 2010 - 2011 the possible mobilisation contingent for all of Russia might not exceed 600,000 men.²⁶

Thus it has been observed that in Russia transition from communism to capitalism had numerous negative impact on women who forced them to take up such decisions which had an adverse effect on country's demographic situation along with other social and economic problems.

2.11 Strategies Adopted By the Russian Women to Face the Impact Of Transition

Women of Russia have adopted different strategies to overcome the hardship that came into their lives during the transition period. Economically they became very weak due to the fall in their income level and as the payment of wages was delayed and benefit levels for the newly unemployed remained far from adequate. Moneymaking and survival became a major preoccupation for women in Russia. Trading and subsistence farming of home based services and production backed up by a whole range of schemes for domestic economising, supplemented or replaced wages for the growing number of

²⁶ The Current Digest, "Demographic Disaster: Death / Birth Gap Widens", vol. 16, no. 28, 1994, p. 8-9.

women. Within weeks of price liberalisation in January 1992, women started offering for sale household items ranging from an unwanted teapot, a bottle of cognac, a hand knitted shawl etc. This type of trading continued to become popular. By the summer of 1993, the practice of trading anything and everything had turned the city into an open - air bazaar. Starting from selling of fruits and vegetables to puppies and kittens, books and pamphlets etc. started. As one unemployed women engineer had put it: "The only thing the whole country was living on was black market trading. Here you do not register anywhere, you buy here and sell there until they catch you and this is the only thing that allowed people to survive. Now that they were cracking down on this too we can't imagine how we are going to go on!" Thus trading became both an essential and a precarious means for women to keep body and soul together. While some women made acceptable money through buying and selling other budding entrepreneurs made money through hand work, crafts and home services which might never become a full time business but might offer an occasional supplement for making ends meet. By 1993 the employment service in Moscow started teaching unemployed women a range of courses in handwork and crafts skills. The union of women of Russia based some of these at the women's social support center set up. In the transitional period the most important thing was to survive and for that money was essential so it did not matter how it was earned, whether at home or at the workbench. Therefore, these centers were open to give realistic help to them. Women who were registered unemployed were being encouraged to train for skills for the informal sector work. Training as a hair - stylist also became quite popular as that was considered as a modest home based service, since the inflation was

growing and had started effecting living standards by 1994, going to a hairdresser became an unnecessary luxury for many families and home styling was becoming a mass occupation amongst women. Women were using hairdressing simply to economize within their own families and as a form of barter with neighbors and friends. During 1993 - 94 some women folks started painting "Matryoshki" (Traditional Russian nested dolls) which was considered a hobby before the market reforms but now it was considered a regular business. Some women even took up trade in clothing, cosmetics, and health products, some as a cleaner, child - minder, Dog-sitter etc. to add to their income. Women were involved in whatever viable means of survival was coming in front of them. Thus Russian women who were engineers and scientist were pushed into the streets, trading not by any desire to become entrepreneurs but purely by economic needs. They found themselves in a situation where they could have never imagined themselves before the transition period.²⁷ The transition from communism has also had numerous negative political impact on women but it had also open opportunities for women's organisations to unite and struggle together to form a new feminist politics. Russian women politically also continued their fight. They formed separate women's group called 'Women of Russia'. The main reason for forming a separate women's group was, because women were suffering more than men from economic reform and were laid off more readily from their jobs and constituted 70% of the unemployed. Women needed some strong group to favor them and to defend them and the women politicians rather than men could do this, and so women politicians came forward to defend women's

²⁷Personal Observation on Visit to Russia, 1993 & 1995.

rights. Forming women's group into a political movement was seen as necessary rather than desirable. Their main aim was to boost female political presence and to defend with commitment women's interest in a way of which male politicians appeared incapable.²⁸

Russian women in different spheres to cope up with the impact of the transition due to which they were facing numerous problems, which affected their everyday life severely, adopted all these strategies.

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CHAPTER 3

IMPACT OF WOMEN IN POLAND

3.1 Introduction

Poland became independent in 1989 and adapted a democratic polity and initiated a move towards democratisation. This movement had been led by the solidarity Trade Union with independent new euphoria for change. Poland under its Solidarity led coalition from 1989 was the first ex-communist state in East - Central Europe to adopt a radical economic reform program and shift from a centrally planned socialist system to a market oriented one. The transition to the market was planned by the so-called Balcerowicz plan. Polish Finance Minister Lezzek Balcerowicz advocated "shock treatment" and a rapid but painful transition to the market economy. The "Shock Therapy" approach was introduced in January 1990 to put an end to central planning. The abolition of state subsidies, the liberalisation of prices and privatisation of state enterprises was the keystone of the reform strategy. Poland's experiments with privatization were derailed by economic, political, social and administrative problems.¹ All these systemic changes have had an adverse impact on women. Their living standard fell drastically. Transition led to increased levels of stress on women. To fulfill the need

¹ Rondinelli, Dennis A and Yurkiewicz Jay," Privatisation and Economic Restructuring in Poland: An Assessment of Transition Policies," American Journal of Economics and Sociology, vol. 55, no. 2, April 1996, p. 145-59.

and demand of them and their families they were pushed to street trading or started doing multiple jobs. Ensuring their families survival had

a direct bearing on their own health. Women also experienced anxiety for their children's welfare due to the loss or inaccessibility of child-care and leisure facilities, summer camps and because of the effect of a restricted diet on children's health. All these unwanted burdens fell disproportionately on women. These consequences of the market reforms for so many families were so far removed from the picture of optimism, which greeted the downfall of communism, that the sheer depth of decline has continued to shock the public. At the individual and family level women were combating the impact of economic change through a whole range of survival strategies from running what were effectively small businesses to a patch work of economising and bartering through family and wider networks.²

3.2 Economy and Privatisation

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, Poland's new government faced the difficult task of restructuring an economy suffering from four decades of socialist central planning. Although its stabilization became the immediate objective, privatization of more than 8,400 state - owned enterprises was seen by many reformers as a key of the country's transition to a market economy while Poland's macro economic reforms were considered successful but they were not implemented without social and political obstacles. The transformation to the market economy was slowed down by

² S. Bridger (ed.), Women and Political change, (St. Martins Press, Great Britain, 1999), p. 3.

political ambivalence about the accompanying economic hardships. Thus public dissatisfaction resulted in frequent changes in government from 1989-1994. Since Poland was amongst the first of the post communist countries to embark on economic and political reforms, its experiences during the early 1990s illustrated the variety of factors that affected the implementation of privatization policies.³

The privatization process in Poland advanced relatively slowly through the July 1990's. Privatization bill opened the way for the sale of some 80% of the state's holding. Limited privatization by direct sale got underway with two trends of privatization one in 1990 and the other in 1993 but the third one was not approved until October 1994. In April 1993 the Sejm approved a mass privatization program under which 600 state farms were to be transferred to investment funds in preparation for floatation after 10 years. Shares in the funds were available for a nominal fee. Mass privatization began only after the passage of further legislation in summer 1995. In the privatization process there was a measure, which permitted the officials controlling state enterprises to "commercialise" them (i.e. to convert them to a share ownership structure) without plans for subsequent sale of the states shares. Thus creating a self-perpetuating bureaucracy with no interest in full privatization. This measure faced significant criticism. However restitution of property proceeded extremely slowly. Only the church secured relatively prompt restitution. Other applications proceeded laboriously. In Warsaw for example in October 1995 a decree had communalism all real estate but only a hand full of property

³ Op.cit. (Rondilli, Dennis and Yurkiewicz), p. 145-146.

certificates had been distributed by summer 1995. Thousands of applications for the restitution of city center property was unresolved. Restitution legislation proposed by President Lech Walesa who said that property should be returned or compensation offered was rejected in June 1995 but parliament again in summer 1995 decided that restitution should be in the form of re-privatization bonds and not in kinds. Though Poland officially came out of recession in 1992, the GDP growth of 2.4% was too little recovery.⁴

3.3 Political Changes in Poland

In December 1989, the Polish parliament abolished article 3 of the constitution, which granted communist party the leading role. Amendments to the constitution changed the country's name from "Polish Peoples Republic" which was adopted in 1952 to "Polish Republic." Before the World War II Poland was called as a Democratic Law-based state which implemented the principals of the so-called justice? This provided liberal and pluralist character of the Polish political system and granted the freedom of party formation where all parties enjoyed equality of rights under the law. However Prime Minister Mazowiecki pushed through a battery of reforms dismantling the Socialist economy and completing political democratisation. Along with the economic reforms the Polish leadership strengthened democracy. It scheduled local elections in the spring of 1990 rather than later in the year to give voters an opportunity to resist new laws reducing the state controlled and expanding private enterprises. In addition the Mazowiecki

⁴ East Roger and Pontin Jolyon, Revolution and Change in Central and Eastern Europe, (Pinter Publishers Ltd., London, 1997), p. 22-24.

government increased the autonomy of local governing bodies which had been subservient to the central administration in Warsaw under the communist. They were given the authority to raise their own taxes to supplement grants from the central government. Mazowiecki also sought for the removal of communist from the top leadership positions. However Polish communist party tried to salvage what it could of its role in politics. At the end of January 1990, at a congress in Warsaw the Party transformed itself into a new organisation called the socialist democratic party. Looking towards a possible future role in Polish politics, a party congress in early 1990 approved a moderate program calling for reform and a development of a market economy allowing the continuation of some state intervention in the national economy for equity and efficiency. The new organisations seemed to have modeled itself after the socialist parties of France, Spain, and Italy was trying to offer an alternative to solidarity. It did not have popular support. Nevertheless by adopting a moderate alternatives to the governments economic policies the former communists shrewdly positioned themselves for a possible resurgence of popular support. Poland had difficulties in developing a Western style democratic system. Factionalism in solidarity and the divisive presidential and parliamentary election in the early 1990s contributed to frequent cabinet changes, which undermined efforts to address pressing economic and social problems. This political instability also undermined the credibility of the new liberal order and help to encourage a popular yearning for the strength and security of the communist past. However with the passing years the country has developed truly liberal political environment in which the institution of government seems to have been functioning in

accordance with the principals of western- style parliamentary democracy. The new democratic institutions are still fragile and have yet to demonstrate their stay in power. This democratic political system tried to be responsive as well as efficient but continued to remain in stress.⁵

3.4 The Catholic Church in Poland

The role of Catholic Church in Poland's post communist order was a controversial one. Polish national identity historically has been closely related to Polish Catholicism. Citing this centrality to traditional Polish values the church had sought to restore the formal privileges it lost under the communist system.⁶

The Catholic Church continued to play a very active role in Polish politics even during the transitional period. The Church's leaders viewed themselves as central agents in the great political transformation, which took place in Poland. Poland's experience in reforms was important because this would play central role in determining the direction that transformation would take in future. The Polish Church, acted very aggressively to advance it is institutional and policy interests after the fall of communism and a backlash had apparently set in. However, public opinion poll suggested directly that the people had grown wary of the Church's influence. Seventy five percent of respondents in a poll said that the Church should not engage in politics and seventy three percent said that the

⁵ Minton F. Goldman, Revolution and Change in Central and Eastern Europe, (M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, 1997), p. 226-264.

⁶ East Roger and Jolyon Pontin, Revolution and Change in Central and Eastern Europe, (Printer Publisher, U.K 1997), p. 25.

Church should not endorse political candidates. In addition a sizable majority of the country consistently dissented from the church and passionately advanced opposition to abortion.⁷ With the fall of communism the Church's attention moved quickly to abortion, which was freely available in Poland earlier. In 1990 legislation restricted abortion and a strict law was passed by parliament in January 1993. Despite opinion polls that showed its unpopularity, abortion was permitted only in three cases. i) When the mother's life was endangered by continued pregnancy. ii) When pregnancy was the result of rape. iii) When test showed irreparable damage to the foetus.

Most politicians particularly those from post - solidarity parties regarded criticism of the Church as a political taboo.⁸ In Poland abortion was both an important moral issue on its own and a powerful indicator of a larger social conflicts. For the Polish episcopate, in particular, opposition served as a kind of shorthand for support of the Catholic heritage of the Polish nation. Those who endorsed legal abortion were dismissed as either secularist devoted to the assimilation of Poland into amorphous European whole or even worse communists nostalgic for the degradation and indignities of the Stalinist era.⁹ An attempt to formalise the Church-state relation began under the post - solidarity government of the early 90s. The success of ex-communist parties in the election of September 1993 and the decline in popularity of Christian democratic parties marked a watershed for the Church.

⁷ Byrnes, A. Timothy, "Catholic Church and Poland's Return to Europe." East European Quarterly, vol. 30, no. 4, January 1997, p. 433.

⁸ Ibid. (Roger and Pontin), p. 26.

⁹ Ibid. (Byrnes), p. 435-45.

The Church became involved in the 1995 presidential election campaign. In August 1995 the Polish episcopate urged the Catholics to reject candidates who had “participated in the exercise of power at the highest levels under the totalitarian rule”. President Kwasniewski campaigned in 1995 for a secular state, whereas Christian politician Walesa advocated strong links between Church and the State.¹⁰ Several individual bishops openly endorsed Lech Walesa in the days before election, masses for president Walesa and homeland were held in Warsaw’s churches on the eve of the election and Cardinal Glemp himself declared that election presented Poland with a choice between Christian values and Neopaganism. Kwasniewski’s subsequent victory in the face of the Church clearly expressed displeasure. It was a major political setback for the church. It indicated that Church’s diminished influence on the political life of the country, in terms of electoral politics. This placed the church clearly on the defensive in its dealing with the state. The Church continued to fight with the government over the terms of the proposed constitution to declare that church and state are autonomous and independent of each other in Poland and that the state’s relation with Catholic Church will be regulated in their specifics by a concordat with the Vatican. On specific policy questions such as abortion or religious education in public schools the Church attempted by the Governing majority to repeat or restrict the Church’s previous victories. Polish bishops wanted to preserve the catholic heritage of Poland so that they could serve its

¹⁰ Op.cit. (Roger and Pontin), p. 26-27.

redemptive role in the twenty- first century. They wanted a new Poland to sit at the center of a new Europe.¹¹

Thus Church played a major role in the Polish society. Polish women were very much influenced by the Catholic Church and obeyed their decisions.

3.5 Media

Under the press freedom introduced by the round table agreement of spring 1989, newspaper and journals boomed. The fate of the broadcast media was considerably more controversial. In January 1993 Walesa signed a law after 3 years of debate designed to end the state monopoly on broadcasting. The law also established a national radio and television broadcasting council (KRRT) with a brief to protect the public interest. Walesa had insisted on a clause stipulating that private broadcasters should respect the Christian system of values. In January 1994 Poland's first private television channel, "Polsat" began to broadcast. Although Polish television (TVP) and Polish radio were transformed into private companies, the treasuries remained the sole shareholder. There was a controversy over the broadcast media since 1993. Political leaders to control broadcasting officials concerned it with apparent attempt. Whilst President Walesa

¹¹ Op.cit. (Byrnes), p. 446-48.

repeatedly protested at the alleged bias of the television news. In 1994-95 he made a series of changes in the board running both TVP and the KRRT.¹²

3.6 Economic Impact on Polish Women

During the socialist era, women's view of their economic participation indicated a high degree of dissatisfaction, feeling of inadequacy and perception of discrimination. Women reported being overworked, overtired and too worried about their domestic responsibilities to take their employment seriously. They also found their jobs to be of low quality often boring and with few or no prospects for advancement.¹³ Under the communist system many regulations were such which allowed women to combine paid labour with the possibility of household care. Where as in the post- communist economic situation these gender specific regulations worked against women, making them less attractive to employers. In a situation of high unemployment, employers in the growing private sectors made specific demands from their employees. They preferred the employee to be young, male, and mobile. Thus women were in a worst situation in the labour market even though they were often more educated than the men with whom they competed for work.¹⁴

Polish women looked with great expectations to the transformation from the socialist planned economy to a capitalist market system. They hoped for more choices .

¹² Ibid. (Roger and Pontin), p. 26-27.

¹³ Lupri Eugen (ed.), Women and the Family in Poland, (Leiden, 1983), p. 276-295.

¹⁴ Siemienska, Renata, "Gendered Perceptions: Women in the Labour Market in Poland," Women's History Review, vol. 5, no. 4, 1996, p. 553-66.

and fulfillment better jobs and more opportunities. What they got however was something else altogether. Women became the first and the hardest hit victims of the economic transition.¹⁵

The situation that they were facing was a shock for the society, which expected something totally different from the results from the changes, which had taken place. Living standards continued to fall, there were growing number of people whose material conditions fell below the social minimum. Unemployment was increasing and services available to the average citizen were decreasing. The laws in force changed, taking away from people things they had considered as natural and evident. This situation was difficult for the whole society but women paid a greater price than men did. Their legal economic and social status often became the subject of intense political controversy in which the argument used were of a clearly ideological character and the church started openly pushing certain solutions.¹⁶ State-owned enterprises began to convert to private ownership. Women the lowest paid and the most expandable workers were the first to be let go.¹⁷

The attitude towards gender equality in the labour market was such that when there were production cutbacks, when jobs were scarce the question was who should be the first to be dismissed. This came first on women as men were considered as having

¹⁵ Ibid. (Eugen), p. 276-295.

¹⁶ Ibid. (Siemienska, Renata), p.276-295.

¹⁷ Bering Jensen Henrik, "Poles Apart in New Era," *Insight*, September, 1991, p.11-17.

more right to jobs than women. Moreover as private enterprises were increasing, women found it difficult to combine job performance expectations in private sectors with household duties. This prevented some women from competing for those jobs. In some private sector women employed were even required to sign a declaration stating that they had someone to take care of their children, to make them fully at the disposal of their employer. Another factor, which limited women's participation in the private sector, was the type of enterprise being created. These were often trade companies, door-to-door sales requirement or work those required computer skills where women usually had less experience. There were very few private enterprises which were concerned with healthcare, education or child care where women were dominant figures in the earlier period.¹⁸ Official government statistics reported that in 1994, 16% of the Polish workforce was actively seeking employment.¹⁹ In 1994 women constituted 52.7% of the unemployed. However a more dramatic difference in the employment status between the sexes was that the newly created jobs were clearly indicated towards the men. Job vacancies were 4:1 in favour of men. Moreover employment advertisement addressed specifically to women typically called for an attractive young women to apply for receptionist or other traditionally female jobs. While better-paid managerial positions were reserved for men. Generally women were out of work longer than men and faced more difficult time in finding employment. In 1994, 49.4% of unemployed women were

¹⁸ Op.cit (Siemenska, Renata), p.553-558.

¹⁹ Op.cit (Henrick), p.11-17.

unable to find employment for over 12 months compared with 38.6% of unemployed men.²⁰

In 1991 industrial production dropped by 40 % and real wages fell steadily. Although inflation was curtailed (it was estimated to be 20% for the year 1995 against 36% in 1994.) Salaries and wages continued to lag behind inflation. While food prices had stabled the cost of housing (rent and servicing) was sky rocketing. Under such circumstances many women found it very difficult to manage families and households. Even though food and other products became abundantly present in shops and makeshift markets. Married women and especially single parents had the harder task of making ends meet. Since a large number of women were unemployed, many families were led to struggle on one income. Under socialism several people often worked on task that could have been accomplished easily by one person, everyone who wanted or needed a job was employed. Though wages were low but none went hungry or homeless. After the transition to the market economy homelessness became a growing problem in Poland. Women begging for money and food were frequently seen on the streets and soup kitchens opened up to feed some of the hungry and destitute. At the same time scandals and corruption is flourished as fortunes were made on speculation and other schemes. Thus in 1991 opinion polls indicated that seven out of ten considered corruption a serious problem and many regarded themselves worse off in 1991 than under the previous regime. Many older retired women in order to survive started selling home made crafts in

²⁰ Gus, Small Statistical Yearbook, (Warsaw, 1995), p. 197.

the streets, while an alarming number of young women turned to prostitution. While in 1991 about 30% of working people were against privatization, in 1993 the number rose to 75%.²¹

Thus it has been observed that increasing privatization of education, health care, housing have become an added economic burden for women. In the past these services were provided universally and free of charge. Under such circumstances many women found it difficult to manage families and households expenditures.

3.7 Political Impact on Polish Women

Poland's emerging democracy was yet to open political spaces for women. Formal mechanism of power continued to favor the experience of the men. In Poland the dirty game of traditional politics was for men and the lives of women were molded by the conventional female roles of keeping families together, managing the household and caring for children. Throughout Polish history the public invisibility of women behind the scenes of support for the political struggle of more renowned male heroes or behavior similar to the selfless image of the "Matka Polka" or Polish mother was constantly emphasised. Poland's patriarchal political culture did not diminish during the democratic transition and its manifestation emerged in different patterns throughout the country. Polish women did not share political power under communism. They did not exercise it during the early euphoric years of transition even and remain marginalised even today.

²¹ Ibid. (Henrick), p.11-17.

Men have rarely regarded women in Poland as actors with sufficient individuality to influence political process. A new democratic political state also did not make any difference. Neither a totalitarian or democratic state structure had supported the right of women. The former totalitarian state's exclusive control of all spheres of public life permitted no political space for women. Policies formulated to satisfy formally the socialist pledge to women's maternity leave, child care, medical care, employment were not used to liberate women but were developed for instrumental reasons significant to the state. In actuality, the system liberated women not so they could choose their work and interest but they could more easily contribute to the common good as dictated by the totalitarian political system. Under communism women did not occupy any position of power. Communism promoted its own particular notion of equality. In both politics and industry the more powerful organisation or party the lower the representation or employment of women. This absence of women in high political and managerial positions restricted severely access of women in the levels of power in which decisions were made. Denial of entrance to higher levels of power also prevented the acquiring of the political skills and resources necessary for political participation.

Democratisation in Poland and its resulting social structure were reviving some of the procommunist inequalities as well as increasing the divisions between rich and poor and attempted to restore the traditional roles of women. Introduction of a market economy and private property relation and privatization of state industry created a social structure in which the redistribution of power, class and gender relation created a

different system of winners and losers and also constructed insurmountable barriers to political participation. Democracies celebration of individual freedoms did not liberate women rather it illuminated number of barriers for women to participate in the political process. These barriers were the re-emergence of i) Nationalist rhetoric (with the strong support of the catholic church) which encouraged women to stay at home and assume the role as wives and mothers ii) The legacy of collective group interests which favored the interest of men. iii) The continuation of patriarchal political structures which disallowed the voices of women.²²

However under the socialist system in Poland, women achieved political representation in terms of numbers. By the mid 1980s, women constituted 23% of the members of the parliament, 30% of officials at the provincials level and 26% of local level representatives. Women did not exert much power. They held low level positions and were virtually absent from central committees and councils, where most of the important decisions were made. Moreover women politicians had no associations, committees and networks of their own which could represent their interest and concerns. While several state - initiated and state - controlled women's organisations were in existence during the socialist era, these were not concerned with sex equality and the

²² Graham, Ann and Regulska, Joanna, "Expanding Political Space for Women in Poland: An Analysis of Three Communities," Communist and Post Communist Studies, vol. 30, no. 1, March 1997, p.65-82.

empowerment of women.²³ As a result the political process lacked gender specific agendas and only working women's issues were addressed sporadically.²⁴

The complex legacy of communism and the instability of democratic transition constricted the opening of political space for women. Research indicated that new opening of political space for women had come up but they were mainly non-governmental organisations. They were created to represent the need of women in Poland. Another route women found to participate in politics was through the local government.²⁵ In May 1990, during the elections to local governments women gained 10.2% of the seats on the local councils.²⁶

The 1991 parliamentary election brought even worse results for women. Only 44 out of the total 560 elected (in both houses) or 8% were women. While women gained 13% representation, 73 out of 560 in the 1993 election, only one woman was appointed to the new ruling cabinet. Despite the proliferation of political parties none of the parties currently represented in parliament (13 in all) which were led by women. Even after the introduction of capitalism in Poland there were very few women in the government and its agencies as it was in the past. Their presence was simply to symbolise women's

²³ Renata Siemienska, "Women and Social Movements in Poland," Women and Politics, vol. 6, no. 4, 1986, p. 5-35.

²⁴ Op.cit (Regulska), p. 185.

²⁵ Ibid. (Communist and Post Communist Studies), p. 5-35.

²⁶ Brenda S.Bishop, "From Women's Right to Feminist Politics: The Developing Struggle for Women's Liberation in Poland", Monthly Review, November 1990, p. 15.

importance in the political representation to appeal to female voters and to reconcile conflicting interests. Occasionally a female politician was elevated to a position of power. However her prominence used to be short lived and she used to be dismissed before having a chance to leave a mark of distinction. For instance, Izebella Cywinska, who was minister of culture and arts, was removed from power in 1991 after only a few months in office. Hanna Suchocka's short lived appointment to head the democratic union (UD) party and the post of prime minister was an example of soliciting women's support during the time when the government's popularity was decreasing. Another victim of Polish male dominated politics was Anna Popowicz. She was a government appointee, in charge of an office for women, youth and family issues under the council of ministers, who was fired a few months after taking office because of her disagreements with the government over the family planning policies. More recently in 1995, Barbara Lobbed an outspoken parliamentary deputy on behalf of women's rights who was serving a second term in the Sejm and was a chair of the women's parliamentary group was ousted from her party (the democratic union) for being critical of the party's pro-church position. Lobuda had opposed to the anti- abortion legislation, had consistently and vehemently opposed to the anti-abortion legislation, and had consistently and openly presented a feminist perspective on issues. She was also the prime mover behind the attempt to hold the public referendum on the anti-abortion bill.²⁷

²⁷ Juliusz Urbanowicz, "Government Abortion Tussle: It's Getting Ugly", Voice News, 18th December 1992, p. 3.

In the October 1991 election on a coalition of women's groups, "Women's alliance against life difficulties" ran several candidates and succeeded in getting one female deputy elected to the Sejm. The women's parliamentary group established in 1991 had 46 Sejm deputies and 6 senators out of 73 female parliamentarians.

Despite a feminist agenda that included access to abortion and legalise sterilisation, affordable day-care and increased incentives for women's involvement in politics, the group had limited influence largely because it comprised only 9% of all MP's. With a few exceptions women had been left out of the critical power struggle. The new democracy had also restricted its female political representation and substantive participation. More over the new ruling forces in Poland have circumscribed women's political involvement by slowly withdrawing the social welfare provisions and reproductive rights that women had gained under the socialist constitution. By attempting to restore women to their traditional role of mothers and home - makers they aimed effectively to curtail women's participation in public life.²⁸

3.8 Social Impact on Polish Women

The Transition to market economy and democracy required a change in the entire social order. Society under socialism was shaped in the shadow of the omnipotent state. The transition to a market economy and democracy required not only a modification of

²⁸ Jill. M. Bystydzienski, "The Effect of the Economic and Political Transition of Women and Families in Poland," Women and Political change, (Macmillan Press Limited, London, 1999), p. 96.

the character and orientation of the existing islands of social activity but they also required different organizational principals for the entire social order.²⁹

During the transition period women were the most vulnerable groups affected by the deterioration of social services. Welfare and social services in Poland have declined gradually. More and more women were forced out of the work, they fell back on unemployment, and welfare benefits which provided poverty level income.

Unemployment benefits constituted 36% of the average monthly salary. Since women's income was generally lower than those of men were and their years in the labour force were typically fewer, women's unemployment benefits were on the average lower than the overall average. Numerous elderly, the majority of whom were women were forced into early retirement. Retirement income was low and relatively fixed and as the cost of living rose, the elderly found it harder to survive.

Under the current system some private, highly priced childcare centers have emerged replacing many of the government sponsored ones which were closed down for want of funding. Under the socialist system, Poland had one of the world's longest maternity leave provisions. Women could stay out of the paid labour force for upped 6 years. They were paid fully during the first six months and could receive partial benefits

²⁹ Kolarska Bobinska Lena, "Civil Society and Social Anatomy in Poland," Acta Sociologica, vol. 33, no. 4, 1990, p. 277.

for another six. This right to protected long-term maternity leave was one of the very first benefits to be curtailed when the systemic transition from socialism to capitalism took place. After the transitional changes took place women had only six months reduced pay and upto three years unpaid leave with a job guarantee. Benefit levels were determined on a sliding scale dependent on husband's income. Single mothers were eligible for government's low benefits for the entire three years.

The increase in privatization of education and healthcare became an added economic burden. Whereas in the past these services were provided universally and free of charge. After the transition, private schools charged fees inaccessible to most of the population and private health clinics created two separate standards for the rich and for the poor. As the economy deteriorated so did public services. Hospitals and clinic personnel including nurses, 1994 had cut nursing assistance and doctors by 30,000 and many healthcare staff were told to take early retirement. In 1993 numerous long lasting strikes were organised by teachers and health-care personnel's and the majority of them were women.³⁰

Thus it has been observed that women's situation in Poland after introduction of market economy started deteriorating economically, politically and socially as well. They were victimised more than men were. They had to face many difficulties created by the systemic transition but they continued their fight and adopted various strategies to

³⁰ Op.cit. (Bridger), p. 60-63.

face numerous economic problems of the transitional economy and to keep up their positions politically & socially. They continued their fight with lot of courage and hope for the better future for them.

3.9 Strategies Adopted By the Polish Women to Face the Impact of Transition

The departure from the concept of a state responsibility for satisfying the needs of its citizens created a new situation for women and their families. Transitional changes were accompanied by the reduction of many benefits. The number of nurseries and kindergartens has decreased because neither business nor local authorities had the financial means for supporting them. This limited women's chances for adapting themselves to the expectations of potential employers, as it was traditionally considered that they were the ones responsible for taking care of children. Due to the high price of private services more and more women did more work within the household? Due to the constant fall in the living standards more and more families had no choice whether the wife/mother might stay at home and take care of the household, even if she really wished to do just that. Working for money simply became a necessity. Due to the changes, which have appeared outside the family, she was executed to cope largely than in the past. At the same time she was confronted with an acute double problem, one finding work (which was difficult for people over 35, as many companies did not want to hire

older people) and another was enabling the family to function properly. So training programs were established to help the unemployed women and adapt to the changing demands of employers, as new companies with new methods of work organisation, new production profile or services looked for people who were capable of performing new tasks.

Several foundations also offered various types of training programs for helping women to get a job. To cope up with the situation women reorganised the household duties. They increased the cooperation between the household members to enable them to perform the functions previously performed by the specialist institutions such as nurseries and kindergartens. Studies have shown that women has already made their families adapt to their changing conditions. A comparison of data from 1988 and 1992 regarding the division of household duties demonstrated that changes have already been made. Tasks traditionally perceived as being women's job - cooking, washing the dishes, cleaning, doing homework with children were more frequently done by both husbands and wife.³¹

These changes were adopted to cope up with the drop in the incomes of women as well as unemployment of women in many families. A comparison of data for 1984, 1988 and 1992 showed that due to the decreased availability of specialised services as well as

³¹ "The Social and Living Conditions of Young Marriages in 1992," GUS, (Warsaw), p. 28-32.

due to the high cost women started performing many tasks at home, which were earlier done by specialized companies for example laundries etc. Very few women started taking maternity or post maternity leaves for bringing up their children as many women involved their relatives and kins to take care of their children. Thus de-institutionalization of many family tasks developed and at the same time also increased inter-generation resource flow, which became necessary for the young women and at the same time was possible due to the time available with the grand parents of their children due to their early or some times even forced retirement.³² Finally it has been observed that to cope up with the hardships of the situation women became more organised, they became more aware and conscious about their issues.³³

To democratise a previously monolithic political structure and to free up a closed and stagnating economic system, the transitional changes were not improving the status and situation of women rather women became victims of these transformations. Ironically in some ways women were better off under the communist regime. The solution to Polish women's problem were thought and mobilised by women's organisations. The initial groundwork was already laid as numerous women's groups have emerged in Poland since 1989.

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³²Siemienska Renata, "Gender Perception: Women in the Labour Market in Poland," *Women's History Review*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1994, p. 563-64.

³³ *Op.cit.* (Bridger), p. 64.

CHAPTER 4

COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT

A comparison of the status of women in the two former socialist societies like Russia and Poland is relevant because of the shared experience of transitional systems and because of the variations in the specific situation. Women's circumstances in these two former socialist societies were quite similar. They had many similarities but at the same time responses had some variations. Women had reached approximately the same status level in these two former communist countries. Women's status in both these countries in education, occupation, and income were almost the same. In both Poland and Russia substantial gaps existed between men and women in education, occupation, and income. However the gaps between the sexes on these indicators were slightly greater in Poland than in Russia.

4.1 The Socialist Period

4.1.1 Education

Women in Poland constituted 50.8% of students in higher education whereas in Russia women in higher education constituted 56%. In both the nations women tended to gravitate to and make up the majority of those enrolled in medicine, education, arts and the humanities. While Polish women were about one-third student in technical, legal and

administrative fields,¹ Russian women constituted over 40% of students in these areas. Though women in both these countries had higher educational levels, their unemployment rate was much higher than men were.

4.1.2 Economic Status

A high percentage of women from both the countries held jobs in public health, social welfare, education, government administration, credit and insurance, trade, public catering and sales etc. In sectors considered traditionally male, particularly those requiring physical strength such as construction, agriculture, transport, and industry, women were typically under-represented. However a percentage of women appeared in these male occupations in Russia were higher than in Poland. In proportion there were more women engineers and economists. More women worked as industrial, agriculture, communication, transport workers in Russia than in Poland.

Although women in both societies were equally over-represented in the 'feminised' occupations, Russian women had attained somewhat greater representation in the traditionally male sectors of the economy. Part time employment for women was almost non-existent in Russia and so during socialism over 90% of women between the ages of 18 and 60 either worked full-time or went for higher studies.²

¹ Harold D. Nelson, (ed.), "Poland: A country Study", Foreign Area Studies, (Government Printing Office, Washington D.C, 1983), p.153.

² Dallin Alexander, "Conclusion," Women in Russia, (Stanford University Press, 1977); p. 385.

In Poland during the period of the centrally planned economy over 5% of working age women were officially employed part-time and 30% of married women were reported to be unemployed housewives. Factors that might have influenced the reluctance of Polish women to participate in full time work was due to the availability of part-time work. Women were thus less involved in the official economy in Poland than in Russia. Many Polish housewives worked in cottage industries that allowed them more flexibility for household and child-care responsibilities and simultaneously provided an extra family income.³ Many workers co-operatives in Poland made it possible for women to work in manufacturing small articles such as toys, dolls, folk arts, crafts and clothing to be done at home and on a part-time basis.⁴ These type of facilities were not available to Russian women during the communist regime and if these options of working part-time or cottage industry work at home would have been available to the Russian women too then many Russian women also might have dropped out of full-time jobs, but since the option of part-time work was not available during the socialist period they were more committed to work outside full-time.

³ Bystydzinenski Jill M., "Women and Socialism: A Comparative Study of Women in Poland and Russia," The Signs, vol. 14, no. 3, 1989, p. 676.

⁴ Robert Oakeshott, "The Case for Workers Co-operatives," (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978), p. 218.

4.1.3 Social Situation

In the social context for women there was an important difference between the two societies. Russian women consistently thought that working outside the home were very important to them. Polish women however did not place much importance on work outside the home. Employed women in both the countries typically took on two jobs - one outside the home and one within it. Women and men in Poland and in Russia generally accepted the notion that household duties and childcare were women's work. Russian women were expected to achieve success in both areas, as successful mothers and homemakers and as socially and politically active professional women, accepting that their child care and household activities were the natural responsibilities of being women. They also accepted the view that it was normal and natural to work outside the home. For Russian women both the occupational role and the family role appeared to be of relatively equal importance. For Polish women however being a mother and a homemaker was more important than holding a paid job. Though both Polish and Russian women indicated that they were primarily motivated to work for extra income, but still majority of Russian women also indicated that they wanted to work because of their desire to contribute to the society, to be part of a working group and also as they did not want to waste their educational qualifications.⁵

⁵ Reinharz Shulamit, "Experimental Analysis: A Contribution to Feminist Research," Theories of Women's Studies, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1982), p. 162.

In social context the role played by Russian and Polish women showed an important difference between the two societies. In social context Russian women were much more advanced than Polish women were. Polish women were more traditional in nature. Statistics showed that the rate of divorce in Russia were more than doubles than in Poland. However in Poland because of their traditional nature relatively small proportion of Polish marriages ended in divorce, though there were very high number of separations. Thus the statistics suggested that the Polish were less likely than the Russians to take up the final steps of dissolving the marriage although judging by the large number of separations they also suffered serious marital problems were. Thus it has been observed that Russian women had more control over their lives than Polish women did. Russian women were less traditional in nature. They were more likely to leave an unsatisfactory marriage and were more likely to be economically independent as most of them were employed and used to carry the burden of both household and work. It has been observed that in some respect the situation of women in Poland appeared more circumscribed and limited than that of women in Russia. Polish women were less active occupationally, expressed less interest, and desired to be involved outside the home and the family. They were more likely to stay in troubled marriages and were less likely to find birth control and abortion acceptable.⁶ whereas Russian women expressed confidence in the importance of their contribution to the wider society, which was missing in the social expressions, and views of Polish women.

⁶ Wandanepokorna, "Ordinary Day in the Life of a Poll," Kultura, July/August 1983, p. 97-102.

4.1.4 Demography

In Poland (around 72%) most Polish women believed that women should seek abortion if she desired for it and so it should be officially available and performed by trained medical personnel. On the other hand many (around 38%) women due to their religious belief could not go for abortion. More women than men (34% and 22% respectively) were opposed to abortion in Poland on religious grounds. In personal accounts many women who had abortions felt a strong sense of guilt about their decision. Where as in Russia the vast majority of women population (around 87%) found abortion acceptable. Though Russian government always discouraged abortions in order to curtail the dropping birthrate but still none in authority had advocated on making abortion illegal.

4.1.5 Political Status / Role

During socialism in Poland women achieved political representation in terms of numbers. In the mid- 1980s women constituted 23% of MP's. 30% of officials at the provincial level and 26% of local level representatives but like Russia in Poland also women did not exert much power in politics during socialism and were absent from central committees and councils. When important decisions were taken in politics they remained marginalised. Women's role in politics thus fulfilled a necessary 'Quota'.

They were visible in some positions but remained outside the most important decision making bodies.

4.1.6 Women and Church

Roman Catholicism held a special place in the Polish society for many centuries and had long been an element of the national culture. Women's adherence to religious traditions was stronger than that of men's. The social and political influence of the Church was one of the major factors that shaped differences between Poland and Russia. The Russian Orthodox Church was far from having the influence in the Russian society, which the Catholic Church exerted in Poland. In Poland a force, which had been especially influential in maintaining the traditional role of women, was the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church had explicit and unequivocal position on birth control, divorce and family structures and most of the Polish women supported Church's view.⁷ The Church continued to control women during socialist period in Poland.

4.2 The Transition

4.2.1 Education

After the transition from socialism to capitalism, the educational level among women in both these former socialist societies remained same as before but both in Russia as well as in Poland women with higher education were the first victims of unemployment and

⁷ Holland Barbara (ed.), Soviet sisterhood, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1985), p. 13.

were not valued. With the gradual withdrawal of subsidies from education, it is likely that women will be the first to be effected.

4.2.2 Economic Status

Both in Poland and Russia after the transition to capitalism wages were considerably below the average in the sectors where women constituted majority of workers. Income disparities persisted even when men and women held same positions, had equal educational and skill levels. Even if they had the same levels of responsibility and was at the same age. The data suggested that the discrepancy between men and women's wages were somewhat greater in Poland than in Russia. After the systemic transition in Russia as well as in Poland women started working more part-time to keep themselves employed rather than becoming unemployed, as being an employed one could avail certain facilities like child-care and other employment benefits. After the introduction of market economy, the majority of Polish workers viewed working for meeting the essential material need of the family. This was the only motivation for employment and relatively few indicated that they worked because they had qualifications or enjoyed their work or for the broader social contacts. However after the systemic transition the main purpose of working for the Russian women also became similar to that of Polish women. They also started engaging in various kind of jobs to meet up their basic family needs and to keep themselves employed in any type of jobs, forgetting their former qualification and profession.

Polish women too after the systemic transition started carrying the burdens of their families. Both the compatriots engaged themselves in various occupations whether low paid or physically demanding. In addition, Russian women due to the lack of availability of the full-time occupation started involving themselves in part-time, cottage industry labor, which allowed them some flexibility to manage the family responsibilities. Only thing they thought about was how to earn more and more money to meet up the regular expenses. Whether they wished or not, they had to involve themselves in some or other occupation and were required to go out of home for making their families economically sound. Women thus bore the double burden of household work and work outside the home.

Though it became necessary for the Polish women to consider working as an essential factor after the market economy, still majority of Polish women considered motherhood and household care more important than their careers, but these thoughts were forced to change because of the difficulties caused by the transitional changes. Russian women also had to cope up with the changes of the transitional economy and engaged themselves in various occupation not only from the point of contributing to the society but mainly for enabling to manage their household expenses and to run the family properly. After the systemic transition many Russian and Polish women were forced to choose part-time work or early retirement as no other alternatives were left for them. Thus women of both these countries after the transition from centrally planned economy

to market economy had to face much tougher life than before to maintain both family and job.⁸

4.2.3 Social Status

The transition from centrally planned economy to market economy had caused deep structural changes in Russian and Polish society. Along with the economic structural changes there have been a mass of rapid and unpredictable social changes. All these changes had a profound impact on women's everyday life and their position in the society.

In the transitional period the idea that women's place was at home with her children and her family had been stressed both in Russia and in Poland. Along with the structural changes and the radical economic reforms at the beginning of the 1990s women's unemployment appeared as a new social phenomenon mainly in Russia. According to one large survey the percentage of women among the unemployed in 1992 in Russia was 51%, which was slightly, more than their proportion in the employed population. However unemployment amongst women were increasing faster than men creating a social imbalance.

⁸ Op.cit: (Signs), p. 680.

Welfare and social services in Poland and Russia have deteriorated after the transition. Social services had been ineffective in helping them. After the systemic transition due to non-availability of many social service facilities and lack of employment many Russian and Polish women had to shift themselves to the part-time work and started taking care of their child and other services of their own.

Both in Russia and Poland after the transition abortion became more desired option for the women of both these societies due to the hard life caused by lack of proper jobs, housing facilities and other child-care and maternity facilities. It became difficult for the women of both these countries to meet up the expenses of maternity and childcare services at the same time maintain big families. Thus their social status thus dropped drastically along with the deteriorating economic conditions.

4.2.4 Political position

Due to the transition and economic reforms politically women suffered more than men in both the countries did. In Russia it has been observed that male politicians actively campaigned for women's return to their home and were less concerned about women's active political participation and other women's issues. Similarly in Poland also after the introduction of democracy space for women in Politics decreased. In Poland like in Russia society favoured men in the traditional politics and the women were moulded to take up the traditional family role. The women of Russia for defending their

status started taking more interest in Politics during the transitional period than before and formed separate women parties. Their main aim was to bring more and more women in Duma so that they could protect women's interest.⁹ Presently in Russia there are two major women's group, one led by Lakhova and another by Gordeeva. Though they have been virtually denied access into the new Russian political elite and a significant voice in policy making, they continued their struggle to form strong women's faction in the Duma and make strong women's political base.¹⁰

Similarly in Poland also patriarchal political culture continued even during the democratic transition. In Russia after the introduction of democracy, women of Russia needed to form a separate party and organisations to represent women's interest and concerns, but in Poland such networks and parties were not formed to represent and give political support to the women issues. Only a few NGOs came up to support women's need in Poland.¹¹ Both in Russia and Poland women's presence in political parties were mainly to appeal to female voters to reconcile conflicting interest. Occasionally female politicians were elevated to a position of power but their prominence used to be short-lived and used to be dismissed before having a chance to show their competence.

Thus it has been observed that both in Poland and Russia even during the transition to capitalism women were not encouraged to participate actively in Politics,

⁹ Op.cit. (Bridgersue), p. 159-165.

¹⁰ Op.cit. (Buckley), p.178-179.

¹¹ Op.cit. (Renata Siemienska), p. 35.

rather they were more encouraged to take up the traditional home-making role than competing with the male politicians, who were in politics since ages and considered their place in Politics was more appropriate than women. However women also did not give up, as they knew their issues could be brought up and fought in better way by them than men. So they knew their presence in politics was essential for improving their status and position in the society, they continued their struggle to bring female politicians in forefront.

4.2.5 Church's role after transition

In Poland the Church played a major role even after transition. It created a major obstacle for women to participate in active politics as most of the parties had pro-Church attitudes, which opposed many women's issues.¹² Where as in Russia, such religious obstacles were not present even during the period of transition about women's political participation.

However, Poland and Russia both underwent economic and political upheavals during this century but there are certain differences between them. Like Church in Poland supported and reinforced traditional views of women. It restricted abortion and strict laws

¹² Op.cit. (Juliusz Urbanowicz), p. 5.

were passed by legislation in January 1990 making abortion illegal unless essential. Even though opinion poll showed its unpopularity. Polish women are also more religious minded than Russian women are and so they obey the Church's views, even if they don't support them totally.

4.2.6 Demographic impact after transition

Economic hardship and fears dominated Women's thinking on the question of having children both in Russia and Poland. Society was filled with the fear of possible unemployment, inflation, and price rise. All these created a social climate that reflected in the nature of women. Healthcare for women and maternal care specially became very poor both in Russia and Poland. According to a comprehensive survey by the ministry of health and other government agencies showed only 25.8% of all the pregnant women in Russia were healthy. This meant that three quarters of women experienced some medical difficulty during pregnancy, which contributed to birth defects and infant mortality.

The demographic situation in both the countries assessed as the worst during the transition period. There were natural decline of the population. The birth rate dropped far below the level required for simple replacement of population. Poland's birth rate was higher in comparison with Russia's was due to Church's expanded role in Poland's

cultural and political life. As the need arose after the introduction of the market economy their views about abortion and birth control became almost similar.

4.2.7 Strategies adopted by the Russian and Polish women to face the impact of transition

Women of Russia and Poland have adopted different strategies to overcome the hardship that was coming into their lives during the transition period. Transitional changes were accompanied by the reduction of many social benefits. Economically they became very weak due to the fall in their income level and due to the increase in the unemployment level. Moneymaking became a major preoccupation for women in Russia.

Trading and subsistence farming of home based services and production backed up by a whole range of schemes for domestic economising, supplemented or replaced wages for the growing number of women. Women of both these countries started offering for sale household items ranging from an unwanted teapot, a bottle of cognac; a hand knitted shawl, started from selling of fruits and vegetables to puppies and kittens, books and pamphlets etc. By the summer of 1993, the practice of trading anything and everything became popular. Thus trading became both an essential and a precarious means for women to keep body and soul together in these two former socialist countries.

In Poland due to the reduction in the government run services and high price of private services, more and more work was done within the household by women. Due to the constant fall in the living standards all women started doing something or the other as earning more and more money simply became a necessity due to the changes which have appeared outside the family. She was expected to fulfill more tasks than in the past.

In Russia many women started learning handwork and crafts and skills to earn their living as their prior qualification could not provide them enough money or jobs. Many registered, as unemployed women were encouraged to train for skills for the informal sector work. Training as a hair-dresser also became quite popular as that was looked as a modest home based service. Women became hairdressers to economise within their own families and as a form of barter with neighbour and friends. During 1993-94 some Russian women groups started painting “ Matryoski” (Traditional Russian nested dolls) these were considered as a hobby before the market reforms but during the market economy it was considered a regular business. Some Russian women even took up trading, clothing, cosmetics, and health care products. Some became a cleaner, child - minder, dog sitter etc to add to their income. Many Russian women who were engineers and scientists were pushed into the streets, trading not by any desire to become entrepreneurs but purely due to the economic needs. Thus women were seen involved in whatever viable means of survival was coming in front of them.

In Poland to cope up with the situation women reorganised the household duties. They increased the cooperation between the household members to enable them to perform the functions previously performed by the specialist institutions such as nurseries and kindergartens. Studies have shown that women has already made their families adapt to their changing conditions. A comparison of data from 1988 and 1992 regarding the division of household duties demonstrated that changes have already been made. Tasks traditionally perceived as being a women's job - cooking, washing the dishes, cleaning, doing homework with children were more frequently done by both husbands and wife.¹³ These changes were adopted to cope up with the drop in the incomes of women as well as unemployment of women in many families. A comparison of data for 1984, 1988 and 1992 showed that due to the decreased availability of specialised services as well as due to the high cost, women started performing many tasks at home. Which were earlier done by specialised companies for example laundries etc. Very few women started taking maternity or post maternity leaves for bringing up their children as many women involved their relatives and kins to take care of their children. Thus de-institutionalisation of many family tasks developed and at the same time also increased inter-generation resource flow which became necessary for the young women and at the same time was possible due to the time available with the grand mothers of their children due to their early or some times even forced retirement.¹⁴

¹³ GUS, "The Social and Living Conditions of Young Marriages in 1992," (Warsaw), p. 28-32.

¹⁴ Siemienska Renata, "Gender Perception : Women in the Labour Market in Poland", Women's History Review, vol. 5, no. 4, 1994, p. 563 -64.

The transition from communism in Russia had numerous negative political impact on women but it had also open opportunities for women's organisation to unite and struggle together to form a new feminist politics. In Poland also to fight back the women's issues politically numerous women's groups have emerged since 1989.

Finally it has been observed that to cope up with the hardships of the transition women of Poland and Russia both became more organised. They became more aware and conscious about their issues. They adopted various strategies in different spheres to cope up with the impact of transition due to which they were facing numerous problems, which effected their everyday lives.

Thus a comparison between women in Poland and Russia indicated a marked difference in the views and attitude of women and their participation in the wider society. However it has also been observed that after the systemic transition the status and need of the women of both these countries became quite similar. Whether they wished or not they had to adopt certain lifestyles which became essential for them to maintain their families during this period, though it has also been observed that even after the introduction of democracy in both these nations, women's place was more with the family and in the home.

Comparison of women in Poland and Russia showed that women in these two countries viewed their role in their societies quite differently during the socialist period but after the introduction of democracy due to the drastic changes in the whole society, which caused massive fall in their status and position they changed their views about their role in the society. Their views became quite similar to each other. As in both these countries women's conditions deteriorated economically, socially and politically to the similar level and their problems were also alike.¹⁵

In both these countries the transition had caused economic hardship unfavourable living condition and severe psychological stress on them and caused conflicts in their private life making their families and individuals more fragile.

Transition from centrally planned economy to the market economy did almost nothing to improve the life style of women rather their status deteriorated making them socially politically and economically the most disadvantageous group of the country. However they are continuing their fight with lots of courage and hope for a better future for themselves.

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¹⁵ Op.cit. (Signs), p. 684.

CHAPTER - 5

CONCLUSION

The transition to a market economy has never proved to be an easy task. Both in Russia and Poland, transformation from centrally planned economy to market economy has caused severe economic problems.

In Russia, the transition to a market economy has brought worse crisis than the Soviet economy ever witnessed. It led to the collapse of the entire economic system and disruption of the social and political order. It has ruined Russian economy and brought disaster upon the people. It is still finding difficulty to pave the way to capitalism. The social sector in Russia has been systematically hacked away. No social policy is in its place. The withdrawal of subsidies has pushed large section of people into poverty, which was earlier unknown to them. The middle class has been pushed to the periphery of the society and the academic and intellectual labor has disintegrated or migrated. New classes and the Mafia have emerged with the withering away of a legal system.

In Poland, transition to democracy had received mixed responses. Democratic government on the one hand received an overwhelming majority of support from those who preferred democracy and supported systemic transition and thought that these

changes were better than former communist dictatorship as most of them did not have the desire to return to the old repressive political order. At the same time many people were inclined to judge systemic transition on its economic achievement and blamed the transition from socialism to capitalism for a deterioration of living conditions. In the process of transition the political system of Poland was trying to be responsive as well as efficient but they continued to remain under stress, as there were faults in the basic program. There were policy errors and greater politicisation of the economic scene. And this hampered the growth of the country towards capitalist market economy.

Transition from the centrally planned economy to the market economy required many other parallel processes to be set in motion like demonopolisation, restructuring of the economy, social structure etc. All these were missing in both these countries making the systemic transition in Russia and Poland into a severe systemic crisis.

In Russia the systemic transition has also deteriorated the position of women greatly. Gender discrimination increased in the salaries, recruitment, the promotion, and dismissal. It also increased unemployment rate in women and those who were employed were mostly engaged in low-skilled, lowly paid jobs. The educational level of women in Russia was always higher than men but it had been observed that the women with higher education were the first victims of unemployment. However they continued their struggle and tried to keep up their jobs by any means whether part-time or low-paid, to at least get the support and benefit of being employed. Russian women were facing

difficulty in combining household and childcare responsibilities. They were facing severe economic hardship and were under continuous psychological stress. They were becoming increasingly fragile with every passing day.

Along with the economic structural changes Russian women had to face unpredictable social changes also. These social changes had deep impact on their lives. During socialism, policy towards women was 'protective' but these policies changed into 'prevention'. This prevented them in exercising numerous social benefits, which were earlier meant for them or for their children. In this way instability and lack of confidence grew among women and their living standards and status in society declined drastically. As social services became ineffective, they became socially the most disadvantageous group of the country.

Politically also Russian women were pushed to return to their home by the male politicians and women's issues were not politically supported. To boost up female political presence, to defend women's interest and issues with commitment and to change the position of women which deteriorated during the transitional period, women entered into the political fray and formed separate women's parties. They made reasonably solid base for themselves as well as had a good female support. Russian women politicians even then were denied access into the new Russian political elite and a significant voice in policy making. They however remained firm as they knew that they were required to

play a political role both inside and outside the Duma; mainly for supporting the women's rights and also to help women in coping up with the difficult situation of this period.

Similar to Russia, in Poland also transition to capitalism brought sharp decline in the society. Employment and wages fell beyond expectations. The reliance on privatization and market economy for restructuring the society resulted in mere loss of time. Foreign subsidies, which flowed in during the early period of transition, were not used appropriately and were insufficient. The shock therapy model continued despite poor results. In Poland political transformation was also very chaotic. Within a decade of the collapse of communism, they had four parliamentary elections and two presidential ones. Polish political movements showed more interest in making their entry into NATO and EU than improving their internal political structure. Thus the uncertainties in internal politics continued.

The growth of political consciousness and activism continue in these systems. The socio-economic formation disintegrated and a new social structure came up. Social inequalities and poverty grew. The new regime did very little to improve the conditions and solve the problem of the society rather the situation deteriorated and made people's life more miserable and thus the social disorder and confusion continued.

This emerging democracy did not provide much space for Polish women. They continued to favor men politically and economically. Democratisation in Poland

attempted to restore the traditional roles of women. The continuation of a patriarchal political structure always stood as an obstacle for women in politics. During socialism Polish women achieved political representation in terms of numbers but did not exert much power before as well as after the communist regime. They held low level positions in politics and were virtually absent from the central committees and councils where most important decisions were made. Their presence in politics was simply to symbolize women's importance in the political representation and to appeal to female voters and reconcile conflicting interests. If female politicians reached upto noticeable positions, then they were often dismissed before having a chance to leave a mark of distinction. However women continued their fight and succeeded in bringing quite a number of women in active politics.

Since these transitional societies followed neither the pure model of capitalism or socialism, there were very few signs of their advance towards capitalism. These systemic changes had a greater impact on women as it raised numerous economic, social and political problems for them. Certain changes which women started facing were typical of the transitional period. Many things were literary unheard of when communist party ruled by terror. To cope up with the hardship of the new situation women of both these former socialist states became more organised, they became more aware and conscious about their issues. While comparing and assessing the women of Russia and Poland after the systemic transition, it has been observed that the women's status in both these countries in education; occupation, income, and social status were almost similar to each

other. The discrimination between men and women in above-mentioned spheres were slightly greater in Poland than in Russia. In Russia women that appeared in the traditionally male occupations were higher than in Poland but after the transition their situation came down to almost similar level as the rate of unemployment increased, promotion into higher ranks were almost stopped, income disparities between men and women grew up and part-time employment in both these countries increased.

In the social context Russian and Polish women showed a noticeable difference. Polish women were more traditional in nature. They placed more importance for household and childcare activities whereas Russian women were keener in taking up home making and professions together. For Russian women both the occupational and family role was of equal importance. They were proud to be part of a working group. However it has also been observed that the systemic transition has brought women of both the societies on a similar platform, as in both these countries women started considering money making as their major occupation and adopted various strategies to earn more mad more money to meet up their family expenses.

Russian women were less traditional than Polish women were. The rate of divorce in Russia was more than double than in Poland. In Poland though divorce rate was less, as Poles were less likely to take up the final steps but very high number of separations were there. About abortion also more Russian women found abortion acceptable, whereas Polish women because of their traditional nature and strong religious

belief could not go for it very easily, in spite of their support for abortion. However it has been observed that during the transitional period abortion and birth control measures became quite common in both these countries.

In Poland the role of Catholic Church was quite strong. It had a great influence on Polish women in maintaining their traditional nature. Most of the Polish women supported the views of the Catholic Church whereas Russian Orthodox Church did not have any such influence on the Russian women. Russian women were comparatively less religious minded.

It has been observed that women of Russia and Poland had more differences during the socialist period as their role and status in the society then was quite different from what it became after the introduction of the market economy. Their views and roles became quite similar to each other and their status and problems were quite same except few differences during the transitional period.

Thus it has been observed that the dramatic political changes of the recent past that took place in Russia and Poland had simultaneously set in motion a process of profound economic and social transformation in these former socialist states. Russia and Poland were in the throes of systemic crisis that was symptomatic of an overall economic, political and social crisis. This crisis had a deep impact on the women of these two

former socialist societies. It did little to improve the status of women; rather these changes elevated the problems of women and their families.

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