

**RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN RUSSIA: ISSUES AND  
CHALLENGES, 1991-2010**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University*

*in partial fulfilment of the requirements*

*for the award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**SEEMA M.P**



CENTRE FOR RUSSIAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

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2011



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## DECLARATION

25<sup>th</sup> July 2011

I declare that the dissertation entitled “**Religious Minorities in Russia: Issues and Challenges, 1991-2010**” submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

  
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## CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for the evaluation.



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*To my beloved  
Mom...*

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## *Acknowledgment*

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I am greatly obliged to DR.Archana Upadhyay, my guide who taught me throughout the successful completion of this work. I am grateful to her for untiring support and inspiration, as well as for her willingness to help me whenever I approach her.

I extend my gratitude also to the librarian, members of the staff, and research colleagues at the centre for Russia and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, library staff of the JNU, Institute of Defense and Strategic Analysis, and Teen Murthy for their assistance and cooperation

I am thankful to my professors from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala, DR.K.M Seethi , and DR. A.M Thomas, DR.Mathew Kurian who inspired me for the successful completion of this work. I owe a lot to these great minds for their support during the time of preparing the dissertation.

I am much beholden to all my friends starting from Mangalam, Ganesh, Unni Krishnan, Anargha, Khekali, Meera Anupam, my sister Sreedevi. Mr. Jomesh Joseph of course deserves special thanks, for his willingness to help me and being available whenever I need his help.

My Special thanks to my family for the lively care and support which kept me going. Thanks are due also to my grandpa for his limitless love and patience. I wish to thank my Father because without Him this paper would never have been possible, or complete.

Finally, but not by any means the least, gratitude from my heart is due to the strong pillar of inspiration that is my dear Mom, for keeping up such high hopes of me and for always being there to share all my experiences, and for motivating me to work harder and harder. Also I thank all others who directly or indirectly helped me to complete my research.

Thank you.

SELMA M.P  
Scree

## ABBREVIATIONS

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ARMC	All-Russia Monarchist Center
CCMNC	the Coordinating Council of the Muslims of the North Caucasus
CMR	Council of Muslims of Russia
CMSA	Central Muslim Spiritual Administration
CPSU	The Communist party of the soviet union
FEOR	Federation of Jewish Communities in Russia
FSB	Russian Federal Security Service
ICCPR	International Covenants of Civil and Political Rights
KBR	Kabardino-Balkaria
KChR	Karachaevo-Cherkessia
KGB	Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti(Committee for State Security)
MCSU	Moscow Christian Social Union
MSA	Muslim Spiritual Administration
MSD	Muslim Spiritual Directorates
MVD	the Ministry of Internal Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NORM	National Organization of Russia's Muslims
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in europe
RCDM	Russian Christian Democratic Movement
REK	Rossiiskii Evreiskii Kongress( Russian Jewish Congress )
RFSFR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNHRC	The United Nations Human Rights Council
URC	Union of Christian Rebirth
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

# *Chapter I*

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## *Introduction*

## Chapter I

### Introduction

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In the Primitive ages, Eastern Slavs<sup>1</sup> worshipped crude images representing natural powers. Christianity<sup>2</sup> was introduced to the people of the territory during 9th century AD. Ancient Slavic tribes, who were the natives of Russia, had been worshipping a pagan<sup>3</sup> pantheon that included deities of wind, war, wealth, and cattle. They practiced polygamy<sup>4</sup> and conducted raiding parties to get the brides. When Varangians<sup>5</sup> conquered the Kievan Rus<sup>6</sup> in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, they acquired a second pagan pantheon. Though Grand Duchess Olga<sup>7</sup> became a Christian at the middle of tenth century, but the establishment of Christianity as an official faith happened during the rule of Vladimir I<sup>8</sup>. Large scale conversion of Russians to Christianity happened in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Vladimir began his rule with a pagan revival in Kiev and the building of a pantheon to the East Slavonic gods. He considered it as a backward factor for Russia. Later on, he turned his attention on other religions of the World. In 988, Vladimir converted to Christianity in the Byzantine<sup>9</sup> city of Cherson in the Crimea. Russia found a place among other nations by adopting Christian faith from Byzantium. Later on in Kiev, the pagan idols were destroyed, Bishops were appointed, and churches and monasteries were built in the places where pagan were idols venerated. Vladimir turned to Byzantium rather than to Rome because there were some determining factors like

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<sup>1</sup> They are Slavic peoples who speak Slavic language and they were the main population in medieval state of Kievan Rus.

<sup>2</sup> A Christian is a person who follows monotheistic religion based on life and teaching of Jesus Nazareth.

<sup>3</sup> It came from Latin word *paganus*, which means country dweller, and this term is used to refer polytheistic religious tradition. A characteristic of paganism is the absence of proselytism and the presence of living mythology, which explains religious practice.

<sup>4</sup> The state or habit of having more than one mate is called polygamy.

<sup>5</sup> Varangians were the people from Baltic States and later they settled in Kiev Rus.

<sup>6</sup> Kievan Rus disintegrated under the pressure of Mongol invasion and became a medieval polity in Eastern Europe.

<sup>7</sup> Princess Olga is the first women have been recorded in history as having openly become a Christian. She was the wife of Prince Ihor(913-945) , a Norseman who was one of the first great princess of the Kievan- Rus Empire. And she was the grandmother of Prince Vladimir who ordained the national baptism in 988.

<sup>8</sup> Vladimir Sviatoslavich the Great was a Varangian grand prince of Kiev and he ruled from 980-1015.

<sup>9</sup> Byzantine Empire was existed in Middle Ages and it also known as Roman Empire. Constantinople was the capital of the Empire and most of them were Christians and predominantly Greek speaking people.



geographical proximity of Constantinople and traditional relationship with Kiev. In fact, conversion of Russia into Christianity is not an event, but a process. The majority problem, which the ruler faced, was from the lower classes in rural areas. The majority of the population was not ready to leave their pagan idols, customs, symbols, and reliance on shamans<sup>10</sup> after 988 AD (Obolensky: 1976).

Actually, the introduction of Christianity made an impact on their family and social life. For e.g. Christian marriage made slow progress against pagan nuptial festivals and the practice of polygamy. The concept of being virgin before marriage had not been a pagan concern, but this concept grew slowly in that society. In order to promote these practices, the Kievan Church played a significant role. The courts in that time also worked hard to eradicate witches, magicians, and pagan priests and tried to impose the popularity of Christianity. Laws began to codify the ideals of the church and state. Gradually, orthodoxy touched every aspect of Russian life (B.Husband:2000)

New concepts came with the Christianity like the concept of morality and justice, new religious arts and architecture, and a system of clerical education. The way in which Church entered into Russia was also different. In Western Europe, the establishment of church occurred due to the decline of political authority, but in Kiev, it was in contrast, because the church was introduced or established by the authority itself. Many aspects of Russian life were influenced by the Orthodox Church<sup>11</sup>, like its language, humanities, government, arts, and literature. The Church started its mission work several decades before the baptism of Vladimir. It was after his baptism the only church formed its organization and spread its teaching throughout Russia. There were good relations between the Church and State in Kievan Russia. The Church was supported by the authority for the campaign against paganism. The Church had an influence on the language also. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, missionaries translated the Church services and religious books to Slavic

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<sup>10</sup> However, the pagan faith were followed by native herdsmen (cattle and deer breeders), and the native hunters and fishers, of the region and had been deeply absorbed for centuries in their soul and body, and could not be replaced at once by the new, foreign religion. Being baptized, they continued to follow their traditional beliefs, sometimes ignoring the rules and customs of Orthodoxy. In *Laws and Customs of the Yakuts of the Steppes* (1823), it was stated that shamanstvo[shamanizing] is being practiced at least secretly by many Yakuts. The practice exerted considerable influence even from the second half of the nineteenth century and into the beginning of the twentieth century

<sup>11</sup> The Orthodox Church is the dominant Christian denomination and it also referred to as the Eastern Orthodox Church.

language, and created a literary language which was based on the Macedonian dialect<sup>12</sup>. They used this language for their missionary works among the Slavs. It was the first literary language of Russia. Traditionally, the people worshipped pagan gods. At some stage In short, in Russia, the people were believed in paganism. At some stage, 988 onwards, mainly after the mass baptism of people to Christianity the Tsar<sup>13</sup> considered it as a primitive sort of region tried to adopt Christianity from other nations as he considered it as the way to promote his society. However, as ruler wanted everyone to convert to Christianity, many people from the lower strata of the society opposed it. But many of them converted to Christianity and Christian missionaries also got support from the authority. Many other religions like Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism were introduced to Russia people. The difficulties which they faced during that time will be elaborated later. (Ellison: 1964).

### **Religious policies in the Soviet Union**

Due to Imperial expansion, a large number of Muslims<sup>14</sup>, Jews<sup>15</sup>, Catholics<sup>16</sup>, Protestants<sup>17</sup> and pagans came into Russia and the proliferation of new religious sects happened (Livanov:1997).

Russian monarchy faced this situation by introducing different degrees and forms of religious toleration. However the tolerance had its limitation. The Russian Empire showed its unwillingness to accept any kind of challenge to orthodox Christianity and it never entertained the growth of other Christian sections. The non-Orthodox Russians were separated from the orthodox population. They were allowed to settle in other parts of the Russian empire, but the authority did not permit them to integrate into the main society. There was a different approach even in the implementation of laws. The Russian Government Laws were performed in these local areas according to the interest of local officials. As a result, practice of religious policy became different from region to region. The same Law which formulated to protect the rights of different religious communities was imposed with tougher restriction on the non-orthodox. There

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<sup>12</sup> Macedonian is a south Slavic language spoken as the first language in the region of Macedonia.

<sup>13</sup> Prince Vladimir, came into power in 980 and remained till 1015, it was in his ruling period a mass baptism happened in Kiev Russia

<sup>14</sup> Muslim is the Arabic term which means 'one who submits to God'. Muslims are the adherents of Islam, a monotheistic religion based on the Quran.

<sup>15</sup> The Jew is the ethno-religious groups originating in the Israelites or Hebrews of Ancient near east.

<sup>16</sup> Catholics are a number of people, who follows the Roman Catholic Faith.

<sup>17</sup> They are one of the divisions of Christianity.

was also a significant regional variation in the law itself. The central Tsarist government formulated and applied diverse religious laws in different part of the Russian empire<sup>18</sup>. There was no uniform Law to every individual or region in the Empire. During that period religious organization was intricately attached with national identity and nationality. There was a direct link between practices of the Church and the political activities of the State. But it did not exclude the other religious minorities. The religious minority laws were misinterpreted (Breyfogle: 2001).

According to time and situation Soviet religious policies vary. Atheism was the official doctrine of Soviet Union<sup>19</sup>. They recognized religion directly with nationality. According to Marxist - Leninist<sup>20</sup> approach religion was considered the “opium of the masses”. Religion or belief was considered the by- product of economic exploitation and social oppression. The official religious policies of Soviet Union were based on Marxist belief system, atheism<sup>21</sup> and suppression of religions. The 1918 Constitution of the RFSFR<sup>22</sup> also stipulated that “the church is separated from the state and the school from the church”. Further it branded the concept of the freedom of religion as an anti-religious propaganda. Through the Soviet Constitution guaranteed worship and the functioning of churches, Mosques and Buddhist temples (Agrwal: 1969). The Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) opposed the practices of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, which they regarded as illogic, unscientific and irrational. Antagonistic and insensitive measures were taken by the Soviet state mainly against fundamental religious institutions. The state was disinclined to pay salary to the clergy. The CPSU<sup>23</sup> and the Soviet State gave the wrong notion to the world, that they respected the progressive character of religion, but actually they were not so (Muzzaffar: 2002). In cause of time, absolute hostility and insulting attitudes of the early years became a practice. State interference in religious activities was high and it utilised the bureaucracy to suppress religious activities (Corley: 1996). In spite of its declared hostility towards religion in general, the Soviet regime exhibited preferential treatment towards organized

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<sup>18</sup> The Russian Empire was a state existed from 1721 until 1917. It was one of the largest empires in world history.

<sup>19</sup> The Soviet Union was a constitutionally a socialist state that existed in Eurasia between 1922 and 1991.

<sup>20</sup> According to Marx, religion is the opium of the masses, a tool of ruling class, helps to provide false consciousness.

<sup>21</sup> Atheism is the reaction of belief in the existence of deities.

<sup>22</sup> The Russian Soviet Federative socialistic Republic commonly referred to as Soviet Russia was the largest, most populous and economically developed republic in the former Soviet Union.

<sup>23</sup> The Communist Party of the Soviet Union was one of the largest communist organizations in the world. It was the only legal, ruling political party in the Soviet Union.

religions. According to Lenin, religion was a private matter in relation with the state, but not with Marxism and Communist Party (Lenin: 1891).

Anti religious propaganda campaigns, harsh prison sentences, rigid governmental censorship were carried out throughout the Soviet Union. Many Religious institutions were seized and destroyed and turned into museums of atheism. Bolsheviks<sup>24</sup> tried their best to suppress the orthodoxy, but was not easy to do so (Sinha: 1971). In the words of Walters (1993) the Bolsheviks had “a genuine hostility towards religion”. The Bolsheviks were against the Orthodox Church. National and religious identities were increasingly perceived as a direct threat to the development of socialism. Anti-religious propaganda of Bolsheviks led to the foundation of “anti-religious commission” in 1922, which later became the League of Militant Atheist<sup>25</sup>. It was operated under the guidance of the Central Committee’s Agitation and Propaganda Department. Religious policies of various state agencies were coordinated by the Ministry for Cult Matters, which was founded in 1924(Coppieters: 1990).

During Stalin<sup>26</sup>’s regime in 1929, Soviet religious policy had begun to undergo dramatic and repressive changes. Anti-religious policy not only focused the orthodox religion, but also dynamically mistreated all other religious groups. An anti-Muslim campaign was initiated, anti-religious propaganda increased, and anti-religious education introduced during this time. Apart from this, school monasteries were closed entirely, church building were destroyed or converted in large number (Johnson: 2005).

The Soviet government passed a Law “on religious association<sup>27</sup>” in 1929, which prohibited the teaching of religious ideas and banned religious associations in life. Under this Law the church and religious organization had to register legally in order to worship. The law extended the governments control into every aspects of religious life, effectively eliminating the Constitutional guarantee of the separation of church and state. It was the 13<sup>th</sup> article of the

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<sup>24</sup> The Bolshevik were a faction of the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, which split apart from the Menshevik faction at the second party in 1903.

<sup>25</sup> It a mass voluntary organization of working people in the U.S.S.R that existed form 1925 to 1947, it was manifestation of anti-religious movement.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Stalin was a Soviet leader and general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1922 to 1953.

<sup>27</sup> The 1929 Legislation formed the main legal basis for governing of religious activities in the U.S.S.R. It effectively curtailed the church’s public presence and mostly limited religious activities to services conducted within religious building only.

Constitution which contained the provision of the exclusion of religious propaganda. Under Article 58 of the Soviet Criminal Code believers suffered most severe persecution. The economic and the political goals of the government also tried to demolish all forms of religious faith. Gradually, a full scale attack on religion was initiated. Icon corners in workplaces and homes were replaced with atheist corners and exams on atheism were given in both secondary schools and universities. Museums of atheism were erected in every major city and town across the Soviet Union (Boudeaux: 1985).

Though, the anti –religious propaganda was eased during the world war second, the revival was relatively short. Nonetheless, the Soviet Union’s approach to religion slightly changed after the World War, as the government realised that if it continued to the attacks, it would not be in a position to call upon the citizens to defend the country from invaders. The war slightly eased the anti-religious attitude of the Soviet Union, though repressive laws were in force. They were rarely enforced, and many religious institutions like churches, mosques, and seminaries were reopened. Religious literatures were also published. In September 1943, the league of militant atheist was dissolved. However, Stalin re-launched the campaign against religion in 1949, and orthodox believers suffered persecution until his death in 1953(Boudeaux: 1985).At this time, the government established two organizations for dealing with religious affairs; eventually the two bodies would merge to form the council for religious affairs (Ibid). Nikita Khrushchev initiated an intense official campaign against religion. He wanted to enforce the 1929 Law, and amended it in 1962 for bringing all religious activities under the tight supervision of the state. The authority again closed many religious institutions, monasteries, churches etc. Imprisonment of missionaries, forced exile, and deregistration of religious organization happened during this time. “As a leader of the Soviet Union Khrushchev spoke of “constructive communism” as the party’s main task and the eradication of religion was part of communist ideology”(Taubman:2003). Khrushchev’s anti religious propaganda ranged from insulting church leaders to criticizing all religious ideas as un-progressive. His new programme was to educate masses about the evils of religion through the Communist Ideology. A group of intellectuals were formed in order to spread scientific and political knowledge. The mass media played an important role by publishing countless articles regarding the attacks committed by zealous believers, which included murder, rape, and fund embezzlement. The reports claimed that it happened in the name

of religion (Ibid). Leonid Brezhnev<sup>28</sup> came to power in the Soviet Union in October 12, 1964. Brezhnev approach to religion was different from his predecessors as he not only took it in a pragmatic way but also in a militant and responsible way. Brezhnev moved anti-religious works to the Academy of Sciences to preserve them. Arrest of faithful declined in his period. He stops treating religious as an enemy of the Soviet State, and rather introduced the concept of eliminating religion through improved atheist education and propaganda.(Strong:1971)

During Gorbachev's<sup>29</sup> time, religious groups were allowed to participate in religious rites, such as baptism. Gorbachev's religious policy was the continuing easiness of importation, production and censorship of religious books by the authorities (Ramet: 1993).

The Soviet government began to adopt tolerate attitude towards religious groups. Unpublished literatures of religious organization began to emerge, and many political prisoners were released, including those, who were imprisoned for religious and nationalist activities. Gradually religious extremism began to arise and extremist nationalism led to a new wave of anti-Semitism and it became a challenge to the state. The government announced a new Law on Freedom of conscience and religious association in 1990<sup>30</sup>. It includes the new legal standing of religious organizations with the Soviet Society. The new Law legalized the religious institutions, and granted the believers the right to worship. It also introduced a set of standard procedure to stop the legal officials from making their own decisions. A was the reversal of the expulsion of religious education. The Soviet Academy of Sciences offered a theology course in 1990 and it was looked upon as a greater development in religious education (Anderson: 1994).

Religion got social and political acceptance. Restrictions on publishing spiritual literature in state publishing houses and lack of accessibility of journals were removed. After the collapse of Soviet Union, religious practices got the official stamp of approval. Initially, Soviet policy towards Islam was one of acceptance. It allowed the practice of public rituals, sharia courts, and Muslim schools, and allowed the mullahs to retain their rights. From 1920's policies were changed and Muslim rebels, *Basmachi* came under control. State moved against Islam, and closed schools sharia courts and mosques. Direct campaign of persecution was launched. The

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<sup>28</sup> Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev was the general secretary of CPSU from 1964 to 1982.

<sup>29</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev served the general secretary of CPSU from 1985 to 1991.

<sup>30</sup> In 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1990, Soviet Parliament adopted legislation granting full freedom of conscience by replacing the 1929 Stalinist Law of religion.

state was opposed to Islamic tradition like use of veil by women, polygamy, *and kalym*. It obstructed rituals and fast in the name of labour discipline. Prohibition of pilgrim to Mecca and separation of Muslim nationalities occurred during the period of Soviet policies towards Jews was that they were treated both as a religion and nationality. Bolshevik's tried to end the discrimination against the Jews. They were provided advanced education and profession. They created Birobidzhan, a new Jewish autonomous region. However Jewish religious practices were suppressed and community councils, outlawed Hebrew language and training of rabbis were resurfaced. Anti Semitism and violence appeared again while persecution and discrimination had occurred. Many Jews joined a dissident movement. In the Buddhist case, interiors of temples were seriously damaged; statues and manuscripts destroyed, and soldiers used paper with ancient Tibetan text to roll their cigarettes. Militant Godless' tried to prevent the celebration of Buddhist holidays, interfered with religious procession and closed Datsans. Prosperous monasteries and churches, many of which were architectural masterpieces were closed (Baradat: 1989, Muzaffar: 2002).

In short, the religious policies of the soviet period were different from the Tsarist regime. Tsarist regime policies were related to the protection of orthodox Christians. In many aspects, religion enjoyed an official status and the authority had maintained good relations with the religion. The religion was a part and parcel of Russian during that period. During the same period other religions came into Russian territory, authority wanted everybody to convert to Christianity. They introduced religious policies to keep off this non-orthodox group. It was in the form of isolation, which means the government granted territories to these groups intending to isolate and prevent them further assimilations with the mainstream Christian population. There was no uniform religious policy during that time and it varied from place to place. The interesting aspect was that they never introduced anti-religious propaganda rather; considered religion as a progressive factor in sociological aspect. Everything changed in Soviet period, because they introduced anti religious propaganda. Atheism was treated as an official strategy to abolish the religion. The soviet policies were centred on one Marxist approach, .i.e. Religion is opium of the masses. They separated the Orthodox Church from state. Most of the monuments, churches, synagogues, and Buddhist temples were destroyed at that time. In a way, the religious practices were suppressed in Soviet era, and the policies were uniform, though the policies varied from ruler to ruler and atheism was underlying factor. In short tsarist regime tried to establish

Christianity and introduced policies against other religions to safeguard its legacy. But during the Soviet period, religion was separated from the state and government implemented anti-religious policies and every religion suffered in equal level.

### **Religious minority groups in Russia**

Religious minority groups can be defined as a secondary group whose members considerably have less power or authority over their lives than members of a majority group. The concept of minority is very complex and defining it is difficult. Religious minority groups can be categorized in different patterns. Some groups get assimilated into the existing society fully or partially, in another cases they differ as result of internal and external extinction, (Thomas C.Berg: 2004). According to Bastian(2007) the minority is a small of group when compared to the rest of the population, while the phrase religious refers to different religious distinctiveness compared to those of the majority. Religious minorities could be defined as a group lower in number and claim for identity on the basis of religious belief. The rights of religious minorities are recognized by Article 18 of the international Pact on civil and political rights and these rights were included in the European Convention on Human Rights under Article 9 (Rohmer : 2007).In international Law religious minorities are the ones who can preserve their traditions, language, culture and their religion within a state.

Appropriately a community becomes minority when a thoughtful process of identity characterization is in process. Religious minority does not structure a homogenous approach. For example they include religious cultures, Diasporas and socially challenged religious groups. In fact religious minorities are very complex to examine empirically (Richard Étienne: 2009).Religious identity typically means doing a set of practices, which are quite visible and particular too. The type of religious practices could be grating or offensive to the majority and the response generally in a harsh or weird manner. Many religious practices separate or insulate the believer from the majority, such as getting educational facilities from a religious faith based institutions or non -participating in food and some other activities. Not only beliefs, but law is also a reason that affects the religious minorities. It is clearly significant to overthrow laws that distinguish against persons basically on their private beliefs or memberships. As most of the religious minorities' definitions are related only to human rights there is no proper recognized definition. Religious minorities can also be distinguished on the basis of language, ethnicity,



religion, and even geography. In international law, minority is a group of population with a characteristic culture and sense of identity and occupied a sense of less political status. Religious minority is an ethnic group whose religious responsibility results in different patterns of behaviour among others and it cause a discriminatory treatment by the majority (Ibid).

There are four religions which are considered as traditional in Russia on the basis of the Law on freedom of conscience and religious association in 1997. They are Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. Among this except Orthodox Christianity, all of them are considered as religious minorities in Russia in various aspects. As we know that these are considered traditional religions, they have a strong legacy in Russian Federation. Even then, have the benefit as a minority group. In the case of Muslims, they are numerically. There are also phenomena like Islamic radicalism and ethno-political conflict. These factors played an imperative role in the Russian society and the state. So Muslims in Russia are in the minority status. As regards the Jew's they have confronted harsh violence in political arena in national and local levels. Numerous incidents of anti-Semitism also took place. Due to that they went to some other countries. In the case of Buddhism also the religion was considered as among traditional ones. The population was less. They faced problems in registration of new organizations and obtaining visas. In Russia these three traditional minority groups are religious minorities. Religious minority definition is appropriate to these groups in one-way or the other. The problems they face are sometimes homogenous or heterogeneous, but they fit into the category of Religious minority list.

### **Religious groups in Russia: Brief history of origin and present status**

Many religious groups existed in the former Soviet Union. The present study would primarily focus on the following religious groupings.

- Russian Orthodox Church
- Jews
- Islamic groups
- Buddhists

## **Russian Orthodox Church**

During the early period paganism was the religious belief that existed in Russia. Even Christian missionaries from other countries tried to convert this people, but they failed. However Christianity introduced to Russian area during the rule of Vladimir in 988. In 988, Vladimir was converted to Christianity in the Byzantine city of Cherson in the Crimea. Russia found a place among 'civilized' nations by adopting Christian faith from Byzantium. During the period of Tsarist regime, Russian Orthodox Church was considered as state church, and organized government department. The Church and the state were inseparable elements. Many of the people were converted into Christianity and the approach of authority was that conversion should be held not in the form of violence but in the form of love. Christian missionaries got a support from the Russian Empire, because unlike other countries, the authority itself propagated the religious belief. It was because of the assumption that this religion could change the societal condition of Russia and even the Tsar himself considered paganism as a backward form of religion. Church enjoyed a good position in administration also. Many aspects of Russian life were influenced by the Orthodox Church, for e.g. its language, humanities, government, arts, and literature. The church started its mission work in Russia several decades before the baptism of Vladimir. But it was only after his baptism; he started church organization and spread the teaching throughout Russia. There were good relations between the church and state in Kievan Russia. Church was supported by the authority for the campaign against paganism. Church had an influence in language also. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century missionaries translated the church services and religious books to Slavic language, and they formulated a literary language which was based on the Macedonian dialect. They used this language for their missionary works among the Slavs. It was the first literary language of Russia (Ellison: 1964).

Everything got changed after the revolution in 1917, as Soviet government came to power. Religion had no future in the communist state. The religious doctrines were treated by the government as false, anti-scientific and dissident. Religious organizations were treated as vending machines of false teaching and believers were treated as deviants from official communist norms (Corley: 1996).

Christianity faced repression in the Soviet Union. The state was devoted to the abolition of religion and to this effect they demolished churches and executed religious leaders. They

included anti-religious education in the schools and utilized media to propagate the atheistic ideas and in general they promoted scientific atheism. Many orthodox Christians were also subjected to psychological punishment and torture, sent to prisons and exiled (Wallace: 2009).

The State government had taken all charitable and social works, because of the destruction and closing of churches. Church's private property was seized and used for public purposes. In places government permitted to church, but it was legally viewed as state property. Some Christians were sent to mental hospitals and trial prison. They used anti-religious propaganda and created atheist journals to attack religion. The State also supported other sects to weaken the Orthodox Church. The government faced difficulties in implementing the anti-religious education, due to the shortage of atheist teachers. At the same time a massive elimination of Christian intellectuals was happened has most of them died in camps or prisons.

## **JEWS**

Before understanding the nature of the Jewish community in Russia, it's better to analyze the historical events that formed the structure of Russian Jewish identity. To Russians, Judaism has various dimensions, because the Jews struggled to define their identity in terms of religious, cultural, ethnic or even national feeling. On the basis of this conception, they faced a critical problem in Russia. Judaism is both a religion and nationality. In many aspects, Jews did not practice it as faith, but they were very much influenced by the heritage of their culture. Jews came to the Russian Empire, during the time of Catherine the Great. They faced problems because of the Russian prejudice, against them like 'Christ killers' etc. The Jews restricted their area of living within the Jewish Pale. They remained as merchants urban communities, as they were not allowed to own farm (Baradat: 1989).

In 1880's discrimination against Jews happened in Russian. Prior to the 18th century, they had less number of issues to face, and the number of Jews was also less. During the reign of Catherine, she established "pale" for the Jews, i.e. legal approval place for the Jews to reside, within southern Russia. While the area of the Pale was extended, Jews were subjected to discriminatory taxation in 1794. In 19<sup>th</sup> century imperial government pursued a policy of assimilation of the Jews which was firmly closed to its traditional racial and religious exclusiveness. Jews enjoyed impartial treatment in Schools and army. After some point of time,

everything got changed. Jewish schools came under the control of Russian authorities and it was considered as a preliminary measure towards the discrimination of Jews. The Kahals, the Jewish autonomous communities were dissolved in 1884 and six years later, traditional dress of Jews was prohibited. The policies of assimilation were persistently resisted by the orthodox Jews (Florinsky: 1969).

In the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century the approach between Jewish communities and imperial government were reversed. During the regime of Alexander II the conditions became better, and the performance of Jews, shunning traditional taboos, made rapid progress. Permission was granted to Jewish merchants to stay outside the pale, Number of Jewish students in Russian schools also increased. The involvement of a Jewish woman Jessie Helfman, in the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, changed the atmosphere in a dramatic way. This incident followed a number of discriminatory measures. “Jews were forbidden to settle in rural areas even within the pale (1882), they were excluded de facto from the legal profession (1889); and they were disfranchised by the Zemstvo and city government acts of 1890 and 1892. In 1891 some 20,000 Jewish artisans were expelled from Moscow (Florinsky: 1969). They introduced special quotas for Jewish students in secondary and higher schools. These discriminatory policies were responsible for the mass migration of Russian Jews to U.S.A and promoted the Zionist movement. During that period the rise of Jews was considered as threat to the Russian Empire. Experiences of Jews about their problems in Tsarist authorities were written by themselves. Tsarist officials failed to pursue a coherent set of policies with regard to their Jewish subjects, and they often expressed their frustration even in trying to overcome “the quite Jewish Obstinacy (Baron: 1987).

Later, the Soviet system aggressively demolished Tsarist models and many discriminatory policies were introduced. Their position as a minority put them in trouble. Among all other soviet ethnic groups, Russian Jews character was most urbanized and russianised too. Russian Jews characters were referred as stubborn and compact mass. Most of them remained by their own image of themselves, “a people apart” not only in religion but in language, dress, culture, and economic activity (Lindemann: 1991).

Anti-Semitism had existed in varied appearances in Russia. In a reasonably peaceful, prosperous time it existed in hidden form, while in periods of chaos and social crises it took on an actively

dangerous nature. Previously, through the tsarist period Jews mainly lived in the Pale of settlement. However, Soviet regime's aim was to put Jews into the soviet life and to separate the communities. Later on, it led to the annihilation of Jewish religious life and its customs, and it led a massive movement by the Jewish communities. Soviet regime imposed general restrictions on all religious organizations, and they campaigned against the practices of Jews like the Rosh ha-Shanah<sup>31</sup> and the Yom Kippur<sup>32</sup>. Prayer meetings organized in private houses in order to escape from the police. Jews also witnessed discrimination in some sections of intellectual life. Anti- Semitic cartoons were begun to appear and they were accompanied with propaganda against Judaism. Many synagogues were burned in the banner of anti-Semitism. The government established "emigration taxes" and persecuted "refuseniks<sup>33</sup>" and it coasted embarrassment to the Soviet Union in the international level. Wide-ranging of discrimination against Jews had taken place in many areas like, academic institutions; universities and jobs (Bezbozhnik: 1929).

Though Judaism was considered as a traditional religion of Russia, they faced problems like anti-Semitism and also were treated as a religious minority. They confronted lots of oppression everywhere, and these incidents led the Jewish population to emigrate from Russia to other countries. They kept their religious identity as a cultural identity, but they faced different kind of suppression not only in Tsarist period but also in Soviet regime.

## **Islam**

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when. Russia first came into contact with Asia, the people of the region were considered as barbarians, not highly civilized Muslims. For the Muslims, the natives that means the 'Rus' were very wild and primitive. During 942-4, the 'Rus' was completely destroyed the areas, like Transcaucasia, Berdea, Azerbaijan, and the inhabitants were slaughtered. In the tenth century, Islam conquered the whole of Turkestan south of Syr Darya and the king of Bulgar and they penetrated Eastern Transcaucasia and Dagestan. Russians were mostly practicing pagan culture, but after this incident they adopted the religion of the Prophet. Even the nomadic Turks,

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<sup>31</sup> Rosh shanah is the Jewish New Year and it is celebrated in the first of the high holidays celebrated ten years before Yom Kippur.

<sup>32</sup> Yom Kippur is also known as the Day of Atonement and it is one of the holiest days for the Jewish.

<sup>33</sup> Refusenik was an unofficial term for individuals, which means those who are denied permission to emigrate abroad by the authorities of the former Soviet Union.

who belong to Caspian steppes and Khazars, adopted Islam as their official religion (Bennigsen: 1983).

The expansion of the Russian Empire in the Muslim area happened during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Tsar personally imposed the spirit of religious tolerance in these newly conquered Muslims lands. His approach was that conversion has to be conducted with love and not by force. The choice of conversion or expulsion from majority to the native Muslims were offered by the Empires. The Muslims were not treated as equals and their rights were denied. Later on Missionary activities were launched; they built monasteries and tried to convert a large group of Turkic natives. They became Christian orthodox, but used their own Tatar language. The policy applied by the Russian government was very harsh. This created a series of violence uprising led by Tatar and it passed a hatred towards Russia to all Muslim people. The last invasion of Central Asia by the Muslims began in the first years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the entire west Mongolian tribe, the torgut, left Jungaria, from the north and south part of Central Asia settled in the area of southern Volga. They called it as ‘kalmuks<sup>34</sup>’; they remained as a militant alien body in a Muslim Turkic environment (Ibid).

Soviet policies led a significant disturbance to Muslim religious life. In Soviet Union, out of all other religions, Islam was considered as the most conservative and even reactionary religion. Islamic rites and customs, like fasting during Ramadan<sup>35</sup>, were considered as unhealthy. Even Islamic art, literature, moral thoughts were considered as an opponent to communist principles. So the presumption was that Islam belongs to the past, and doesn't have any role in a socialist society (Yaccov Ro'I:2000).

During anti- religious propaganda, a large number of books and pamphlets were published in all languages, and distributed in Muslim Republic of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Soviet Muslims however faced difficulty to hold on certain Islamic practices like, fasting during the month of Ramadan. Muslims inhabited in Central Asia, near borders of China, Siberia, and Western borders of the Soviet Union. Soviet Muslims were different from each other, on the

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<sup>34</sup> Kalmyk is the name given to Oriats or western Mongolic people whose descendants migrated from the Dzhungaria in the seventeenth century.

<sup>35</sup> Ramadan is in the ninth month of Islamic calendar ,it is the month of fasting in which Muslims are refrain from eating and drinking and intended to teach Muslims about humanity, patience etc.

basis of culture and language. Hence the communication between different Muslim groups had been difficult (Ibid).

In order to achieve a new soviet society, the anti-religious propaganda of Soviet Union included attacks on the traditional patriarchal framework of the Muslim family. The government's effort to change the family structure met with some success, because it abolished the custom of polygamy, and early marriage of Muslim girls, though most of the customs didn't disappear. They were weakened. Due to consistent efforts, the authorities' effort brought Muslims to a stage of accepting monogamy as the system of family life. At the time of World War II, some Mosques were re-opened and Islamic theological training was recommended (Ibid).

Russia's treatment of Islam and Muslims has been mostly characterized by suppression, especially under the communist rule. Muslims considered their religion as a part of nationalism.

## **Buddhism**

In Russia, there are three traditional Tibetan Buddhist regions, they are Buryatia<sup>36</sup> in Siberia near Lake Baikal, Tuva also in Siberia north of western Mongolia, and Kalmykia to the northwest of the Caspian Sea. The Tuvinians are Turkic, and the Buryats<sup>37</sup> and Kalmyk's are Mongols. Kalmyks are the only Buddhists in the European part of Russia. In the seventeenth century Oriats came to Kalmykia from the Xingiang region of China. Kalmykia is also significant for the relative harmony between Russians and Kalmyks. In Tuva, and to some extent Buryatia, deep-felt hatred between the local populations and Russians was always solid, and in Kalmykia, it's either absent or very shallow. There were many types of ethnic people in this area, and sometimes clashes happened. But the native people hold that most probable conflict happened with new people those who came after the collapse. In many cases Kalmyks and Russian came together against Caucasians. Intermarriage between Russians and Kalmyks was very common.

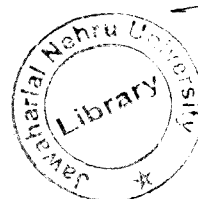
Traditionally, Buddhism was extensively practiced in Mongolia and Tibet under the denomination of Gelupa<sup>38</sup>. In spite of the repressive national and religious policies of Tsarist

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<sup>36</sup> Republic of Buryat is a federal subject of Russia.

<sup>37</sup> Buryats are the largest minority groups in Russia, who lived in Siberian region and most of them are the prop ganders of Buddhism. Their systems are mainly belongs to Mongolian traditions.

<sup>38</sup> Gelupa is a school of Tibetan Buddhism, and it was founded by Je Tsongkhapa, who got inspiration from older kadampa tradition.



Russia, the Kalmyks, Buryats and Tuvians performed their Buddhist beliefs quite freely in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. All three groups belong to Mongolian form of Buddhism. (Andreyev: 2009).

Buddhism acquired the legal status as the local religion of the ethnic minority groups in 1905. The spread of Buddhism in Russia went through many phases. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Buryats, Kalmyks, and Tuvians, came to Russia and their culture, social, and state organization became an integral part of Russia. The European part of Russia which had contacts with Buddhism it encouraged the cultural interaction between Christianity and Buddhism. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, basic canonic and post-canonic texts were translated to Russian from other languages. These texts covered Buddhist doctrine, philosophy, and Tantras. So today, everything related to Buddhist tradition is available for Russians in their own language. In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century Buddhism tried to integrate with the Russian metropolis and built *datsan* in the city and it was the joint effort of Buddhologist and Buddhist devotees (Ibid).

Buddhism was completely wiped out during the Soviet period. A Large number of Buddhist priest were sent to the labour camps in Gulag and all monasteries in Buriya and Kalmyk were closed. There was no clear data about the Buddhist priest who were persecuted then. The senior monks were identified as counter-revolutionaries, kolkhoz wreckers, pan-Mongolists or Japanese agents. According to the KGB<sup>39</sup> records, in the period between January 1, 1937, and November 1, 1938, 1864 Buddhist clergymen were arrested in Buryatia alone, of whom 969 were convicted(Andreyev:2009).

Moscow re-established the Kalmyk Autonomous Region in 1957 and allowed the exiled people to return to their homeland. Revival of Buddhism happened after the collapse of Soviet Union. Many temples were reconstructed and also on the original sites. The Buryat *datsans* formed a religious organization called “The traditional Buddhist Sanga of Russia” under the control of Buryat Buddhist church and the Bandida Khamba-Lama. In Kalmykia one *khurul* (temple) in Elista and 15 more Buddhist communities formed the Union of Kalmyk Buddhists, headed by

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<sup>39</sup> It was the national security agency of the Soviet Union from 1954 to 1991. It was created in 1954 and it was the committee for state security.



Venerable Telo Rinpoche, the Shajin Lama (or Grand Lama) of the Kalmyk People. This monk was accepted by the Dalai Lama as a personification of the popular Indian yogin Tilopa, the founder of the Kagyu School (Nauka i Religiya: 1960).

In Tuva, khure, Tuvdan Choikhorling, was built in its capital Kyzyl, and ten Buddhist groups, or "societies", were officially registered, and all of them were under the administration of the Kamba-Lama of Tuva, as well as one Dharma centre. In many Russian cities Buddhist groups of different denominations were emerged. One of the important aspects of this Buddhist revival was that the new Russian Buddhists were socially active and they are well integrated into the modern urban culture. The explanation of Buddhism in Russia is very different. On one hand they considered it as religion and on the other it represented more of a philosophy. The evolution of political and social organization was common, but the ethnic, background and history of the Buryats, Tuvinians, and Kalmyks were distinct.

There was a boom in religious communities as they attracted a large number of followers and propagated the religious faith. On the whole, the Buddhist resurgence resulted in the reestablishment, and enrichment of its social and cultural forms within the context of the Russian society and its involvement into the global network of lay Buddhist communities. The Buddhism's institutionalization in Russia is a complex process that can be analyzed through its two distinguishing features. The first feature is that traditionally, Buddhist territories considered religion as a potential state ideology. The countries like Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva have witnessed the reinforcement of monastic culture, religious education, and the construction of new temples. The second feature lies in the fact that the Buddhism that has settled in the Russian capitals Moscow and Saint Petersburg is very different from the Buddhism that practiced in Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva. Buddhism in the capital is being propagated by Nepalese, Indian, Sri Lankan, and Taiwanese monks (Alexander: 1996).

Briefly Buddhism also is considered as the traditional religion of Russia. They are enjoying the religious minority status only. They are numerically very less. During the Soviet period, like any other religion they also suffered a lot. Religious revival happened after the collapse. However, they faced problems in registration of religious organization, and in getting visas etc.

This chapter included the points like the emergence of religions, their existence, arrival of Christianity, role of Christianity in Russian society, attitude of Soviet Union to religion, Religious policies, religious minorities of Russia, their history, and meaning of religious minorities etc.

# *Chapter II*

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*The Majority - Minority  
Discourse in Post -Soviet Russia*

### The Majority - Minority Discourse in Post -Soviet Russia

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#### Overview

Most of the countries are culturally diverse. This diversity itself gives rise to a series of significant and possibly varied questions. Minorities<sup>40</sup> and Majorities<sup>41</sup> have dispute over many issues. They are language rights, regional autonomy, political representation, educational curriculum, land claims, immigration and naturalization policies and even national symbols, such as national anthems or public holidays. The greatest challenge of democracies is to find morally justifiable and politically feasible answers to these issues. Since Cold War<sup>42</sup> ethno-cultural conflicts have become the sources of political life and till now there is no decline (Gurr: 1993). To achieve the ideal of a homogenous polity, governments throughout history have pursued a variety of policies regarding cultural minorities. Some minorities were physically eliminated, either by mass expulsion or by genocide. Other minorities were coercively assimilated, forced to adopt the language, religion and customs of the majority. In some other cases, minorities were denied political rights and were treated as resident as resident aliens, subjected to physical segregation and economic discrimination. Various efforts have been made historically to protect cultural minorities, and to regulate the potential conflicts between majority and minority cultures.

#### Description of Minority Rights:

The emergence of Ethnicity<sup>43</sup> and Minority rights on the political theory mainstream agenda can be traced back to Rawl's writing on pluralism (Modood: 2004) Van Amersfoort (2008) has attempted to derive a typology of "majority- minority" relations by combining the orientations of dispersed and concentrated subordinate groups with three dimensions of dominant group aspirations. Louis Wirth (1954) presented four ideal types of minorities in terms of their aims.

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<sup>40</sup> They are relatively smaller in number group of people, differing from others in race, religion, language, or political persuasion.

<sup>41</sup> They have greater in number and denoting superiority.

<sup>42</sup> It is state of political hostility existing between the Soviet Bloc countries and western powers after the Second World War.

<sup>43</sup> Ethnicity relates to a group of people having a common national or cultural tradition.

They are pluralist<sup>44</sup>, secessionist<sup>45</sup> and militant<sup>46</sup>. He argued that no minority is unanimous and that each one may have its cross currents or internal factions. He nevertheless suggested that any specific minority will, in all likelihood, have one of these four aims as a “characteristic orientation and directing social movement”. The minority with pluralistic aims seeks toleration for its differences on the part of the dominant group. The one with assimilation<sup>47</sup> as an objective “craves the fullest opportunity for participation in the life of larger society. Secessionists wish to achieve political as well as cultural independence from the dominant group” while the militant minority, as Wirth defines it in a very special sense, has set domination over others as its goals. According to Claude “assimilation demands that minorities agree to abandon the ethnic, cultural and linguistic characteristics which distinguish them from natural majorities with whom they live, and become merged into nationally uniform communities with majorities. Today, however, after decades of relative neglect, the question of minority rights has moved to the forefront of political theory. There are several reasons for this. The first stage was the pre-1989<sup>48</sup> debate. Those few theorists who discussed the issue in the 1970s and 1980s assumed that the debate over minority rights was essentially equivalent to the debate between “liberals<sup>49</sup>” and “communitarians<sup>50</sup>”.

Confronted with an unexplored topic, it was natural that political theorist would look for analogies with other more familiar topics, and the liberal-communitarian debate seemed the most relevant. The liberal-communitarian debate is an old and venerable one within political philosophy, going back several centuries, albeit in different forms. In the first stage of the debate, the assumption was that one’s position on minority rights was dependent on, and derivative of, one’s position on the liberal-communitarian debate. If one is a liberal who cherishes individual autonomy, then one will oppose minority rights as an unnecessary and dangerous departure from the proper emphasis on the individual. Communitarians, by contrast, view minority rights as an appropriate way of protecting communities from the eroding effects of individual autonomy, and

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<sup>44</sup> It is a condition or system in which two or more states or groups, principles coexist.

<sup>45</sup> It is the policy of those who maintains the right of secession.

<sup>46</sup> It means who is aggressive in nature.

<sup>47</sup> This is the process by which minority group’s gradual adaptation of the customs and attitudes of prevailing culture.

<sup>48</sup> This first stage minority rights are considered as communitarians .At this stage in the debate pre-1989, it was assumed that to defend minority right, they had to be communitarians.

<sup>49</sup> Liberals is a person who favors the political philosophy of the progress and reforms.

<sup>50</sup> They are cooperative group who practice the principle of communism.

of affirming the value of community. The Ethno-cultural minorities in particular are worthy of such protection, partly they are at risk. They also have a communal way not yet succumbed to liberal individualism, and so have maintained a coherent collective way of life. This debate over the relative priority and reducibility of individuals and groups dominated the early literature on minority rights. Defenders of minority rights agreed that they were inconsistent with liberalism's commitment to moral individualism and individual autonomy, but argued that this just pointed out the inherent flaws of liberalism. In short, defending minority rights involved enduring the communitarian critique of liberalism, and viewing minority rights as defending cohesive and communally minded minority groups against the encroachment of liberal individualism (Kymlicka:2007).

In the second stage minority rights were discussed within a liberal framework. It is increasingly recognized that this is an unhelpful way to conceptualize most minority rights claims in Western democracies. Assumptions about the "striking parallel between the communitarian attack of philosophical liberalism and notion of minority rights" have been increasingly questioned. Indeed, far from opposing liberal principles, public opinion polls show that there are often no statistical differences between national minorities and majorities in their adherence to liberal principles (Ibid).

Minority questions are among the most contested issues in political life because they speak to an inherent tension in human affairs between competing desires for freedom and belonging. Significantly for the study of minorities, there is a fundamental paradox implicit within this characterization of the human condition. The concept of minority, as applied to religious, racial, linguistic or ethnic groups, is relatively a recent origin. It dates from the 1919 Paris Conference when the term 'minority' was included in the peace treaties with the successor states of the Habsburg Empire, Ottoman Empire and Prussian Kingdom (Laponce 1960:3). Since this time, 'minority' has come to refer mainly to a particular kind of community which differs from the predominant group in the State (U.N 1945:85).

As Asbjorn Eide points out, identity is essentially cultural, and it requires not only tolerance but a positive attitude of cultural pluralism by the State and larger society. Required is not only acceptance but also respect for the distinctive characteristics and continuation of minorities in the life of the national society as a whole. Protection of the identity means not only that the State

shall abstain from policies which have the purpose or effect of assimilating the minorities into the dominant culture, but also it shall protect them against activities by third parties which have assimilating effect. Crucial in these regards are the language policies and educational policies of the State. Cultures are not static, but minorities should be in an interaction with the persons belonging to the minority themselves, with the minority and the State and with the minority and the wider national society. The measures required to achieve this purpose are minority rights. Minority protection, therefore, is important and this protection is based on four requirements: protection of their existence, non-exclusion, non-discrimination and non- assimilation (Narang: 2002).

The contemporary 'problem of minorities' thus emerges as a lack of consent or entitlement to their self-determination. In some way minority status is restricted to citizens of a State and so excludes refugees, resident aliens or migrant workers to underscore the significance of membership in a political community and the presumption in favour of full incorporation within it. The treatment properly accorded to refugees, aliens or migrants has, in each case, its own distinct normative basis and so it is argued that these should be treated as separate categories. Minorities are in a position to claim special treatment in the form of minority rights precisely because they are not fully integrated into or do not exercise control over their own political community self determined. Corollary of non assimilation is to protect and promote conditions for the group identity of minorities. Many recent international instruments use the term identity, which expresses a clear trend towards the protection and promotion of cultural diversity both internationally and internally to States (Minority Right Group 1991:7).

### **Problems of Minorities**

Minorities are political outsiders whose very existence challenges the prevailing principles of legitimacy. Consequently the identity of those persons who constitute a minority changes from one political and historical context to another. But the 'problem of minorities' may occur in any period. It is not limited to domestic society but extends to international society. This problem can be addressed in one of two ways either by enforcing conformity or by recognizing diversity. Minority rights are an attempt to do the latter (Barron: 1967).

One way of resolving the ‘problem of minorities is to enforce conformity with whatever ideal legitimates a political community. Such enforcements can take several different forms, which may be grouped into four broad categories: discrimination<sup>51</sup>, assimilation, persecution<sup>52</sup>, or separation. These categories are not exclusive and may, in fact, be mutually reinforcing. Minorities are a direct consequence of our human propensity to seek out those who share our values and interests. This explains why minorities are frequently resistant to policies intended to deny or erode their distinctiveness, and it makes the proponents of minority rights believe that minorities who are recognized and supported by the political community will be less likely to challenge its authority or threaten its territorial integrity (Ibid).

### **Threat to minorities**

There are many issues which really turn out to be a threat to the minority groups. In a globalised world, economic model had come in a wide perspective in order to integrate into the national and international markets. It causes destruction of identity and also poses another threat, which is assimilation. Another major issue is discrimination. Most of the times, minority continues to live in intolerable conditions due to discrimination. General instability is often a great threat to minorities. Boundaries appear to be unstable sometime because of the ethnic and religious tensions. Terrorism creates insecurity in the world and it is often rooted in ethnic or religious grievances. In particular, countries and regions government had taken this opportunity to persecute minorities (Baldwin: 2003).

### **Historical perspective of Majority - Minority Discourse**

In International Minority Protection System, there are many documents which have specific history and causes. After the creation of nation states, the problem of minority protection began to appear. There was some complexity regarding the concept or definition of minority. The League of Nations had made the first attempts to protect racial, religious, and linguistic minorities. After the Second World War focus was placed on protection of individual rights and principle of non discrimination. The setting up of the U.N Sub Commission on the Prevention of

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<sup>51</sup> Treatment or consolidation on the basis of class or category rather than individual merit or in sociological term it it’s the unfair treatment based on prejudice.

<sup>52</sup> It is the practice of persecuting on the basis of race, religion, gender, or beliefs that differ from those of the persecutor.



Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, and drafting of Article 27<sup>53</sup> of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights happened during this period. U.N adopted Covenant in 1966. In December, 1992 Non Treaty Text of Human Rights was created, that is the U.N Declaration on the Rights of Person Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (Kovacevic).

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of the 1966, which reads in its Article 27, “in those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons and such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, to use their own language” (Pentassuglia: 2001). It is in this background that the U.N Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities contributes to the political and social stability of States. The implementation of the Declaration can play a significant role in the prevention of violent conflict involving different communities within the States. The declaration expresses minimum standards relevant to all national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and applicable in all situations. It is important to recognize that the implementation of the Declaration is a continuing process requiring sustained attention and resources by all parties concerned (Ibid).

This declaration is considered an important point of reference, though, it is legally non binding. Following Article 27 of the International Covenant of 1966, this declaration stipulates rights for persons belonging to minorities, thereby opting for an individual rights approach rather than a group rights approach. It should also be noted that Article 8 of this declaration clearly limits the scope of the right to self determination within the framework of the declaration. The distinction between the rights of minorities and the principle of self-determination goes unmentioned (www.oas.org).

Recognition and sincere implementation of minority rights is a very significant mechanism. This of course does not mean conflict with rights of individuals or with the principle of non-discrimination. In fact, minority rights are primarily a manifestation of human rights. As far as

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<sup>53</sup> Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is: In those states in which Ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right in community with the other members of the group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

conflicts between various categories of rights are concerned, it may be mentioned that in any society there can be conflicts of rights or rather disputes as to the boundary between one right and another; for instance freedom of expression and right to privacy or freedom of assembly and freedom of movement. There may even be potential conflicts within a given particular right: a given religion may deny the right inherent in the notion of freedom of religion, to change one's religion or have no religion. Measures to redress the legacy of racial or gender discrimination may appear to involve such discrimination. The point as such is not of conflict between rights or discrimination against citizens but is that of providing confidence among minorities about protection of their identity (Ibid).

Not only U.N, the countries all over the world also were concerned about the protection of minority Rights. In Europe, the government introduced many laws on minority protection, and initiated protection of indigenous people, and cultural groups. The OSCE<sup>54</sup> published the Recommendation on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations in 2008. Due to the conflicts; many people become isolated requiring protection. International Organisation like the U.N, OSCE, and the European Council are protecting the indigenous people, their culture, language etc. In any case if any nations violate it, these organisations provide support to minorities to ensure their rights.

The first part of this research deals with the existing approach or attitudes regarding the minorities in general and religious minorities in particular. The second part concentrates on insecurities minorities face in a multi-ethnic society and the trends towards religious revival in Russia. Attempts have also been made to discuss the dominant issues also that outline the relationship between State and Religion in a multi religious Post Soviet Russia.

### **Understanding the concept of 'Minorities'**

Minorities are a small number of people who are different from a dominant group. They have their own language, religion, race, and political persuasion. The Oxford dictionary defines 'minority' as a smaller number of part representing less than half of the whole; a relatively small group of people, differing from others in race, religion, language or political persuasion.

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<sup>54</sup> Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe is the world's largest security oriented intergovernmental organizations. It established in 1973 as CSCE and then renamed its name OSCE in 1995.

*UNHRC*<sup>55</sup> in 1946 defined minority as the non-dominant group in a population which possess a wish to preserve stable ethnic, religious, and linguistic traditions or characteristics markedly different from those of the rest of population. Consequently, minority groups are facing problems like racism, religious discrimination, language, legal development and identity preservation. Hence the concept of *Minority* is applicable to religious, linguistic, racial or ethnic groups. Majority groups are numerically strong, and, have the benefit of favourable laws, religious preferences, and strong political as well as spiritual influence over the inhabitants of the nation state. In a society the majority community get every facility which is ensured by the government. They usually create problem to minority people, and question their culture, language, religion etc. Sometimes, these people fight with the minorities in the name of nationalism (U.N:1945:85, Jackson: 2005).

In an elaborate sense, minority is a term which doesn't have a legal definition. No one defines the exact meaning of minority. Everyone accept the fact that minorities exist in all countries. The world is a mixture of distinct peoples and there are 5,000 diverse communities. The term minority was used in religious literature in 1533. Later on; Sir T. Brown used it to indicate the term as "smallness". First time in political sense the word minority was used by Edmund Burk in 1790 (Ermawra: 1983). It is proven as a very difficult task for the organs of international agencies to prepare a universally accepted definition of minority. The concept of minority has become a controversial theme to international jurists and states, because of the vagueness of the term, and hence it created some confusion and ambiguity.

Rodley (1995) for e.g. does not want to "revisit the vexatious problem of the definition of a minority" because it is impossible "to identify the persons that would be the group rights holders". Al fredsson and Zayas (1993) argues that a lack of definition does not necessarily prevent the adoption of meaningful measures for the protection and promotion of the right of minorities. According to Hannum (1991), even without a definition, the term minority can be understood using common sense.

Briefly, majority is a group which has high influence in all levels of the society and it is the minority groups which always suffer. They can be differentiated on the basis of religion,

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<sup>55</sup> The United Nations Human Rights Commission was a functional commission within the framework of the United Nation from 1946.

language, and race. They are suffering from discrimination, legal implications; governmental policies etc. It is not an excuse that there is no universally accepted definition of minorities. The authorities have to protect the rights and safeguard the interest of minorities.

### **Religious minorities**

Religion depicts mainly the socio- cultural characteristics of a person. People perceive religion differently. Religion can be defined in this way that the belief of human being is that some higher unseen power is controlling his/her entire destiny. Religion is not only reflecting the mental and moral attitude of an individual or a community but also the personnel and general acceptance of this religious belief as a paradigm for spiritual and practical life (OED: 1989).

In spite of the idea that whether the people are in the status of minority or majority, religion remains an integral part of the lives of millions of men and women in every region of the world. European Court of Human Rights has observed, 'religion is one of the most vital elements that set out to make up the identity of believers and their conception of life' (Evans 1997:283). Religion has a precise political significance, because it applied a powerful influence over the values, identities and human conduct of those who believe in it.

The concept of minority could be applied to all types of groups who are religiously, linguistically, or ethnically varied from majority. Religious minorities wish to preserve their religious traditions or characteristics noticeably different from the rest of the population. The myths and symbols had originated from older religious organisation and practices. Nowadays these practices strengthen the ethnic and religious minorities, because these customs are considered as a part of their identity (Smith1986). Hence religion continues to play an important part in contemporary life. Religious minorities' main demand is that they should be protected from discrimination and has to be treated equally (Shaw : 30).

### **Religious composition of Russian Federation**

The country has an area of 6,592,769 square miles and a population of 142 million<sup>56</sup>. In Russia, only a small number of citizens are actively participating in any religion. More than half of the population, i.e. approximately 100 million citizens are Russia Orthodox Christians, The second

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<sup>56</sup> Post Rosstat.perepis, 2010-ru.

major community is Muslims and they are the largest religious minorities constituting around 14 to 23 million of the total population. A large number of Muslims lives in the North Caucasus, Volga-Ural region, Moscow, St Petersburg and parts of Siberia. There are one million Buddhists in Russia. Most of them are settled in traditional Buddhist regions like Buryatiya, Tuva, and Kalmykiya. There are estimated 250,000 Jews and majority of them lives in Moscow and St.Petersburg cities in Russia (Report on International Religious Freedom 2008).

Data from the Russian Ministry of Justice reveals that, there were 21,664 registered religious organizations in Russia. The main organizations are Russian Orthodox Church, Islam, and Pentecostal Church followed by less number of Baptist, Jews, Buddhist, Roman Catholics, Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witnesses groups and others .In many cases, religious groups were unable to register or re-register and therefore they operate without official registration. In a 2000 opinion poll, 64% of respondents stated that they considered themselves members of a religious faith but only 19% of them regularly visited places of worship. Despite this, many believe that some form of adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church is a crucial component of being Russian. Many local authorities and federal government continued to restrict the right of a few religious minorities (U.S Department of State Report: 2003).

### **Russian Orthodox Church and its status in Post Soviet Russia**

Russian Orthodox Church<sup>57</sup> is the nationwide institution which the Russian have continuously trusted. The Church's activities in the Post Soviet Period had a great political and social significance. The Patriarchate's campaign to implement legislation regarding the limitation of the activities of foreign missionaries is an expressive influence of orthodox in the matters of political governance. The 1997 Law<sup>58</sup> also reduced the right of other foreign religious bodies and created a legal obligation to other religions to give more importance to Russian Orthodox Church. The Russian Orthodox Church was mentioned in the preamble of that Law. Church's domestic political significance is high and it was reported by a leading news paper (Komozin: 2001).

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<sup>57</sup> The Russian Orthodox Church is founded in 988 by Vladimir. It is also known as the Orthodox Christian Church of Russia.

<sup>58</sup> The Law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Association was Passed in 1997.It affirms freedom of religion, assumes Russia as secular state, recognition of ROC.

The sense of extreme nationalism mixed with strong religious traits in characterizes the increasing influence of the *ROC*. It is considered as an integral part of Russian identity. This research especially considers the situation of minority religions in a country dominated by one powerful denomination, Russia Orthodoxy. In Russia, and in some other post communist countries there is rehabilitation of religion now after decades of an anti-religious life. This process of accommodating a new global post religious modernity that presumes religious pluralism within a secularised setting (Greer: 2001).

Numerous religious groups had appeared in Russia when religious freedom was proclaimed. Minorities faced problem because of the deeply internalised bias of Russian society. There were three issues. The *first* is the official conservatism of the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy, which is concerned with keeping its traditional dominance. The *second* is massive religious illiteracy and a simplified set of identity criteria, leading to a sort of xenophobic syndrome against any heterodoxy or simply against uncommon things. Along with the *third* is the new Russian state's use of the dominant religion as legitimization instrument. The last point contains some ambiguity. The new regime, balancing between liberal reforms and imperial traditions of the Russian state, supports religious freedom on the one hand, and manipulates the "official" orthodox symbols. There is a permanent split between "liberal" and those who are lobbying for more uniformity and control and for exclusive rights for the dominant Church. This split is replicated in society at large where conservatives have a clear majority, in contrast to the elite level (Moberg: 2001). After the disintegration of Soviet Union, *ROC*, tried hard to restore its pre-revolutionary position as the state Church.

In short the *ROC* co-operates more closely with the government than any other religious groups. The *ROC* has entered into a number of formal and informal agreements with various government ministries. It gave them greater access to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the police and military than any other religious groups. *ROC* activities with the government include support for the psychological rehabilitation of service men returning from conflict zones, the holding of religious service for those serving in conflict zones and co-operation with the ministry of internal affairs to combat extremism. It has a special arrangement with the government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counselling. These include agreements with the ministries of education, defence, health, internal affairs, and

emergency situations and other bodies such as the federal tax services, federal border service, and main department of Cossack forces. It portrays that *ROC* is enjoying preferential treatment. In November 2007, the Moscow city Duma<sup>59</sup> removed “religious proselytizing in public” from its list of administrative offences in the new Moscow city code (Report on International Religious Freedom in Russia: 2008). The relationship of *ROC* with the Russian state includes admissibility of religious instruction in public schools; the introduction of chaplaincy in the armed forces; the restitution of property; and the limitation of competition by other faiths. The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations in 1997 was a success to the *ROC* (Gorenburg: 2011). The leadership of Russian is very happy to promote the Church role as a national identity. *ROC* sought to redefine its identity and sometimes it had to adopt the new socio-political environment besides facing consumerism and proselytism of other Church sects. Though it is the most important church denomination in Russian society and enjoys cordial relations with the State, it is not recognised as a state church. The decision to build cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow was acknowledgment of *ROC* as a national symbol. The most important development had been the adoption of Russian Orthodox Church’s social doctrine. This reflects the official position of the state and secular society. The doctrine states that state won’t interfere in spiritual activities of the *ROC*, except some legal obligations. The amount of money to build or restoring church had been given by the state, even though it was against the Law (Smith: 2002).

So the status of *ROC* in Post Soviet Russia is very high. The Russian State declared it as secular state, but *ROC* is visibly getting its benefits from the State. *ROC* tried to influence the state’s religious policies and it caused a trouble to its rivals, who non-orthodox. Many agreements are being collaborated with the State. Sometimes the *ROC* tries to assault other faiths in the name of nationalism. In short, *ROC* in Post Soviet Russia is not a state church, but also enjoys many privileges as compared to other traditional religions in Russia.

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<sup>59</sup> A Duma is the representative assemblies in modern Russia. It corresponds to the lower house of the Parliament.

## State and religion in Post Soviet Russia

The State Atheism<sup>60</sup> was banned in 1991, and Russia entered a phase in which the political, secular and religious became reconnected in new ways. The State played the central role in facilitating the return of the *ROC* into public life. Although the Constitution of the Russian Federation proclaims separation between the Church and the State, in reality the *ROC* has a special role. The 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Association extended a special treatment to Orthodoxy as one of the traditional religions. President Vladimir Putin<sup>61</sup> strongly promoted the church following his election in 2000. The *ROC* receives substantial symbolic and material support from the State. The President and the Church officials often appeared side by side in the media and many Church buildings have been declared part of national heritage. Russia has always been characterized by religious diversity and the fall of the Soviet regime enhanced the visibility of not orthodox but also non –orthodox Christian and non Christian denominations. However, orthodoxy remains the dominant faith of ethnic Russians and a large majority name Russian orthodoxy as their religion (Lunkin:2006).

For most people, Orthodoxy is constitutive of their Russian identity. '*Being orthodox*' does not necessarily imply religious practice and is not always considered a matter of religious belief. Despite its dominant position, the *ROC* clergy is left threatened by a variety of religious groups from both East and West (Sabkova: 2010). Orthodox Christianity is becoming a sort of main religion of Russia. Notwithstanding the secular constitution, the leaders of the state attend churches; orthodox hierarchs voice their expert opinions on a range of political, economic and cultural issues on government TV. Relations between state and religious organization are governed by the Federal Act on Freedom of Consciousness and Religious Associations. According to Article 4, the Russian Federation is a secular state. No religion may be established in the state as a compulsory religion. Religious associations are separate from the state and are equal before the law. The relationship between the State and religion particularly the *ROC* is becoming stronger. President Putin himself has established openly close relations with the *ROC* and its leaders (Gillis: 2003).

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<sup>60</sup> The State atheism has been defined as the official promotion of atheism by the government. In this context, state suppress religious freedom and practice.

<sup>61</sup> Vladimir Vladimiro Vich Putin served as the second President of the Russian Federation. He became acting President in 1999 and he won the presidential election in 2000 ND 2004 too.



Besides analysing the relationship between Russian Orthodox Church and the state, it is necessary to look into the state's attitudes towards minorities. Many members in Russian Duma<sup>62</sup> issued anti-Semitic statements. But the impact of these statements are appears to be limited. In Russia post-Jewish institutions are fragile and dominated by foreign groups. Local Jewish organizational group lacks the skills, experience, and confidence to address the issues of their community like defamation, bigotry etc. Indigenous Jews are inactive in Jewish life itself (Gidwitz: 2003).

The relationship between the State and Muslims are enormously complicated and disruptive. There are several factors which obstruct the relationship between the Muslim and the State. Islam is the largest minority religion in Russia, and Muslims criticize the government about their favouritism to Orthodox Church. Muslims are concerned about the issues like celebration of their religious holidays, building mosques, and meeting their educational needs. The problem behind poor the relationship between the State and Islam is the lack of a joined Islamic representative body, which enjoys authority from the worshippers and also confidence from the state. The Central Spiritual Authority of Muslims is the most influential organization. Extremism is one of the major issues between Islam and the State in Russia. One stereotype thinking about Islam in Russia is that the religion is militant in character, aggressive in nature, associated with separatism, terrorism, drug trafficking etc (Sotnichenko: 2009).

There were periods of peaceful relations, competition and even confrontation between Islam and *ROC*. They exist more than seven hundred years. The negative understanding against Islam is one of the causes of sour relationship between *ROC* and Muslim. The stereotype image was fully adopted by the Orthodox believers and authorities too. In Russia the other religious people can worship or profess their faith freely, but not enjoy equal rights (Alexy: 2004).

In Russia Orthodox and Muslim intolerance is very prevalent. There is a strong opposition among orthodox Christians to grant religious liberties to Muslims. Correspondingly in some Muslim areas there is strong intolerance of the Orthodox. Due to the indirect influence of *ROC* on the State, they get benefits and popular support for religious freedom. The communal tensions between Christian- Muslim tensions are of Russia's religious intolerance. Sometimes it varies

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<sup>62</sup> A Duma is the representative assembly in modern Russia, and correspond the lower house of the parliament.

from region to region. Tolerance is much better in Tatarstan<sup>63</sup>, and Bashkortostan<sup>64</sup>, the two regions where large Orthodox and Muslim populations have long co-existed peacefully. Religious practices are, to a small extent linked to intolerance, mostly among Muslims. Religious intolerance is more closely related to people's ideological beliefs about religious than to religious beliefs as such. The orthodox are Russia's dominant majority and it would be impractical for its Muslims or other minorities to question the majority rights to practice its faith. Russia is known for ethno cultural and religious diversity. Regional differences prove crucial for understanding the state and origins of tolerance among orthodox Christians and Muslims in Russia (Karpov: 2007).

Relations between state and Islam are extremely complicated and controversial. There are several factors which obstruct the relations between the State and Muslims. Referring to the Act of Freedom of Consciousness, Muslims criticize the government for its relations with the Orthodox Church. Muslim demand equality which is guaranteed by the law, but it is hard to achieve owing to the disproportion between Orthodox and Muslim populations of Russia. Russia has a very low rate of participation in organized religion, but religion, and particularly Russian Orthodoxy, is highly valued in social and political sphere. The Russian Orthodox Church is a widely respected and trusted organization with the potential to benefit from a strong civil society, and yet it has arguably acted to prevent the growth of religious civil society in general (Bacon: 2005).

Nowadays Russian Orthodoxy stands as a symbol for Russian nationalism. There is an anti-Semitic nationalist wing in the Orthodox Church. Throughout the Soviet period an appeal to religion has been used by the political leaders of Russia to fill a spiritual and moral vacuum. Russia witnessed a proliferation of immoral values like crime, corruption, pornography, prostitution and drug etc. Former President Putin had declared that "nothing but religion can make human values known to people" (EkhoMoskvy 2002). Russia's role in Post Soviet space about religion arises two contradictions in terms. The first is that the relationship between the State and the *ROC* and the second is regarding the stand on religious policies. It is because

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<sup>63</sup> The Republic of Tatarstan is a federal subject of Russia located in the Volga Federal District and its capital is Kazan.

<sup>64</sup> The Republic of Bashkortostan is a federal subject of Russia. It is located between the Volga River and the Ural mountains. its capital is Ufa.

Russia is a Secular State, though the State is happy to identify itself with Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. The relationship is mutually beneficial, and neither the Church nor the State wishes to see a more formal linkage. The religious policy of cause difficulties to other religions and indirectly State assures favours to *ROC*. In Regional level, most of the difficulties faced by the non-orthodox sect happened just because of the complaint of Orthodox Church against them. The State National Policy regarding the visit of other sects' religious leaders' very good examples about the indirect influence of *ROC* (Poroskov 2003).

Briefly, there are four religions which got the status of traditional religion in Russia. The State is a secular state and every religion has got the right to worship. The State did not introduce any anti-religious propaganda like the Soviet Regime.

On the basis of Report on International Religious Freedom in 2008, there are four categories of restrictions on religious freedom in Russia.

1. *The Registration of Religious Organisation*
2. *Access to places of worship*
3. *Visas for foreign religious personnel*
4. *Government harassment of religious organisation or individual*

Russian courts are using the Law of Extreme to ban some Muslim religious groups. It has been continuously used by the courts to rule religious extremist literature. In 2007, the Russia government banned as extremist the Russian translation of fourteen parts *Risale-i-Nur*<sup>65</sup>. In 2008, *FSB*<sup>66</sup> blamed *MSDs*<sup>67</sup> as extremist under the cover of Islam. In 2009, the Russian government funded military chaplains; but the favour was not shown to other religions. In November 2010, President Medvedev<sup>68</sup> signed a new legislation establishing a process for the return of property to religious communities that was seized during the Soviet Period, including land, building and movable property, and held by the State or local authorities. According to the Institute of Religion and Law, the Russian Orthodox Church got priority, but in the case of minorities. Only a few properties were returned. The size of such properties varied from region to region.

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<sup>65</sup> It means message of the light.

<sup>66</sup> Russian Federal Security Service

<sup>67</sup> Muslim Spiritual Directorates

<sup>68</sup> Dmitry Anatolyevich Medvedev is the third and current President of Russian Federation.

President Medvedev has supported the Russian official policies that favour *ROC*, but many Russian government officials and sectors of the society strongly oppose these policies as the violation of the constitutional guarantees of secularism. Religious minorities have suffered from official discrimination in 2010, such as more frequent refusal of registration requests and denial of permission to build houses of worship. In the local level there is continuance of violent hate crimes against religious communities. Besides that some chauvinist groups have stepped up their campaign, including death threats against individuals, groups, and government officials that defend the right of religious minorities. Even, Russian police have offered assistance to these defenders and their efforts are ineffective and inconsistent too (USCIRF Annual Report 2011).

Nowadays many States in the world are facing minority issues one way or other. Not even a single state is an exception to this. The major issue is the criteria of being a minority is different one region to another. International Organisation plays a significant role to safeguard the interests of these groups. Generally, there are many issues state confronts, and sometimes it relates to any of these groups. Religious minorities have insecurity issues, as the government has an eye on their every affair. Except constitutional guarantees, legal restrictions are there in the society to control the activities of these groups. They are facing mistreatment from the governmental officials during the time of registration. The majority's chauvinism sometimes it leads to violence. These ultra nationalist blame these religious minorities and always claim that they are the reason for extremism, terrorism, separation etc. It is because religion occupies a major role in these minority groups. The majority religion considers them as a threat, and pressurizes the State. In Russia's case, the majority religion is getting a preferential treatment from the State. Due to the pressure from the majority the government is implementing Laws which is in favour of the majority. The majority religion has influence and historical legacy and it is valued indirectly by the State. The major contradiction in this issue is the religious minorities is that the religious minorities in the country in this context are not new proliferating religious sects. They are accepted by the authority as traditional religion of Russia. These people had a strong historical legacy, tradition and already an integrated part of the society. Then also they have been discriminated. This highlights that every privileges is in the papers. In a multi religious society Russia, minorities are not only based on religions, a few of them are from ethnic background, and others are of cultural or national minority origin. In course of time everybody comes under the category of religious minorities. In short minorities are facing threats like loss

of identity, and discrimination. Every time these people are confronting insecurity issues. The government is keen to protect the interest of the majority, as a sign of nationalism. This leads to legislation of Laws which is unbearable to minorities.

# *Chapter III*

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## *Minority Rights in the Constitution of 1993*

### Minority Rights in the Constitution of 1993

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#### Constitution of Russia and its Religious provisions

The present Constitution of Russia was adopted on December 1993. The Constitution becomes the supreme Law of the land. It mentions about the right to mention of religion and conscience in Article 13<sup>69</sup> and forbids the formation of any group that incites religious enmity. The Russian Constitution guarantees the freedom of religion, equality of all religions before the law, and the separation of the Church and State. Some efforts were taken by the Government to restrict the activities of certain religious groups. Towards this purpose, a bill was introduced in Russian Supreme Soviet in July 1993 to prohibit the proselytizing activities of non- traditional religions. President Yeltsin vetoed the proposal because it violated the Russian Federation's International Treaty obligations and the 1978 Russian Constitution<sup>70</sup> (Lawrence: 1997). The Constitution of the Russian Federation in 1993, reproduce the liberalizing characteristic of Post- Communism in Russia. Religious freedom significantly improved, after the establishment of an Independent Russian Federation. The Constitution directly addresses the religious freedom in two provisions; the first is the discussion of religious freedom. In Article 14 of the Russian Constitution declares "The Russian Federation is a Secular State. No religion is considered as a state religion. The Constitution of Russia officially declares it as a Secular Country with separation of Church and State, and freedom of religious activity and principles including freedom to proselytize (Barry: 2005).

The second one is regarding the religious associations' separation from the State and equality before Law (Russian Constitution article 14). Another reference to religious freedom is in chapter two which specifies the individual rights Article two states that "To each is guaranteed freedom of conscience freedom of profession of faith, including the right to profess individually or in conjunction with others any religion or to profess none, to freely choose, have and spread

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<sup>69</sup> According to Article 13, supra note 5: The establishment and activities of public associations, whose aims and actions are directed at forcible alteration of the fundamental of Constitutional governance and violation of the integrity of the Russian Federation and undermining of the security of the state, the forming of armed units, the incitement of social, racial, national and religious strife shall be prohibited.

<sup>70</sup> It was fourth constitution of the Russian SFSR and it replaced the Old Russian Constitution of 1937.

religious and others beliefs and to act in concert with them .Religious freedom is indirectly impacted in other two areas of the Russian Constitution. One is from Article 29(2) and another from 55(3); the Article 29(2) “prohibits any sort of propaganda or agitation” and inciting social, racial, national or religious hatred and strife is impermissible. The propaganda of social, racial, national, religious or language superiority is forbidden. It bans any sort of superiority of one group over another, including proclaimed superiority on religious grounds. The Article 55(3); commands that human rights may be restricted by Federal Law in those instances where such action is necessary to protect the fundamentals of the Constitutional order, public morals, health, the rights and the legal interest of other persons to guarantee the defence of the country and the security of the State (Article 55:3). In short, these Constitutional provisions are directly or indirectly dealing with the religion and lays down provisions to protect the rights of citizens. Some legal experts have pointed out the loopholes in the Russian Constitution regarding the protection of individual religious liberty (Gvosdev: 2001).

In a marked transition from the Soviet era, the Russian Government discarded its official spreading of atheism and includes international norms with regard to religious freedom and other human rights and also the Russian Constitution. In Russia, more than 70 percent of people identify themselves as Orthodox Christians, while other religious minorities like Muslims, and Jews, continue to suffer the intolerance and societal discrimination. They are not repressed by the government on the matters regarding the practice of their religion, powerful Federal officials, creates trouble for them. Though incidents of anti Semitic hate crimes and racism occur, law enforcement bodies have not prosecuted the culprits effectively. Religious minorities are continuously prevented by the federal registration service and some local officials from registering locally or from acquiring property.

The Constitution, in short fails to protect the minority from an imperious majority. The Majority is controls the organs of Russian Federation and tries to utilize power to diminish the rights of minority (Lien: 1994). Chapter 2 enshrines the right to religious freedoms “Each person is guaranteed freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, and says including the right to profess any religion individually or together with others or not to profess, any and freely to choose, hold and disseminate religious and other convictions and to act in accordance with



them”. Religion is closely tied to morality, and hence individual rights can be abridged to protect the morality of other individuals. Any restrictions on religious freedom can be justified by a legislative finding that there exists a threat to Russian morality in activity. The Russian legislature can then place restrictions on religious freedom within the Russian Constitutional structure (Constitution of Russia Federation 1993).

In short, the Russian state is secular, as it separates the religious association from the State, and provides equality to all citizens before Law. Individual religious freedom is also incorporated in the Constitution. However, legal experts have found some loopholes in the Constitutional provisions regarding the religious rights of the people. In general, it guarantees religious freedom to its people, but the implementation of Laws has been a threat to the practice of religious faith. It could be proven as true because of the following legal restrictions and amendments of the Russian Constitution in the following parts. Before explaining the “Law on Freedom of Conscience and Associations” 1997, it is necessary to include or elaborate the historical events that led to the implementation of this Law in Post Soviet Russia.

### **The 1990 Law on Freedom of Religion**

The 1990 Law of Freedom of Religion was adopted by the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation. The 1990 Law of Russian Federation<sup>71</sup> treated religious freedom as an inalienable right of the citizens and infinite to any person, who resides in Russia, irrespective of their citizenship. This Law contains strong provisions, for e.g. abolition of the compulsory registration of religious organization (Shterin: 2004). The main principles of these Laws were further reinforced by the 1993 Russian Constitution. Analysis of the 1990 Law has shown that it mainly follows the stipulation of the UDHR<sup>72</sup>, and European Conventions on Human rights<sup>73</sup> (Davis:1997). In some aspects, Russian Constitutional provisions and the principles of the Law 1990 Law were very similar to the American model of Church –State relationship with regard to the principles of non establishment, strict separation between church and state, and equality of

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<sup>71</sup> In October 25, 1990, Soviet Parliament adopts legislation granting full freedom of conscience, replacing 1929 Stalinist Law on religion. The 1990 Law on freedom of Religion was adopted by the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation.

<sup>72</sup> On December 10, 1948 General Assembly of the U.N adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

<sup>73</sup> A European Convention Human right is an International Treaty to protect Human Rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe and entered into force on September 1953.

all religions before the Law. However, the legal provision of the Law seems to have come into conflict with rapidly changing Russian social, cultural and political reality. Various amendments to the 1990 Law were constantly discussed by various committees and commissions till 1992. Meanwhile, in the period 1994 to 1997 the country witnessed a flood of the Laws and regulations passed by provincial authorities. These local Laws seemed to have predicted the radical changes that occurred in 1997, and most were completely opposed to the formal legal situations that existed in Russia from 1990 to 1997(Ibid).

The New Law 1997<sup>74</sup> signifies a fundamental removal from the very spirit and concept of the 1990 Law. The Law on Freedom of Religion in 1990 constitutionally protected the freedom of practices and state tolerance of religion. Actually it exposed the disturbing realities of political processes and imposed restrictions on religious freedom. Under this Law, religious associations could exist in Russia without registration, and they could perform their religious activities. However, they could choose to register because of the tax exemption. Later on a new Law was enforced in the name of “Law on freedom of conscience and associations” in 1997.

### **The 1997 “Law on freedom of conscience and associations”**

Within a few years of Independence, extreme limitations on religious freedom emerged in Post Soviet Russia, stopping the activities of foreign missionaries and other groups those who are new to the country. In particular, the Russian Orthodox Church criticized the influx of new religious group and their practices. The representatives of the ROC indirectly tried to influence the legal changes it wanted to restrict the activities of certain religious groups. On September 27, 1997, Russian president Boris Yeltsin signed a Law, which had harsh restrictions on religions. This Law found overpowering support from all elements in Russian political circles. Demonstrating the support, the state Duma<sup>75</sup>, Russia’s lower house, voted 358 to 6 in favour of the bill. Russia’s upper house, the Soviet of the Federation, voted unanimously, 137-0 in favour. Under such widespread popular support, Yeltsin had no real political choice but to sign the legislation. The

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<sup>74</sup>Russia's September 1997 law on religion replaced the October 1990 Law on Freedom of Conscience, widely highly praised for its cautious safeguards of religious liberty. The new legislation calls for a two-tier approach to state recognition of religious bodies.

<sup>75</sup> Duma is the various representatives of assemblies in modern Russia. It is a form of Russian governmental institution.

passage of this Law demonstrates the difficulty of establishing protection for the rights of minorities in Russia (Hoffman: 1957).

The 1997, Law on Freedom of Conscience and Associations consist of four chapters, specified as follows: *Chapter one: General provisions; Chapter two: Religious associations; Chapter three: Rights and conditions for the activity of religious organization; Chapter four: The supervision and monitoring of the implementation of the Law on freedom of conscience and on religious associations.*

The Law establishes three broad categories of religious communities. They are Religious groups, local religious organizations, and centralized religious organizations. Different legal status and privileges were attached to each of them (The 1997 “Law on Freedom of Conscience and Associations”, Russian Federation). The 1997 Law regulates all religious association but treats these associations differently depending on their type. A religious organization enjoys certain legal privileges that did not extended to religious groups. The organizations which have existed in Russia for not less than fifteen years, and a part of centralized religious organization can enjoy the privilege. The Law includes many prohibitions against government interventions and specific protections that allow free exercise of conscience and religion under the 1997. It is noteworthy that Islam has experienced relatively more problems registering with the government (Ibid)

The 1997 Law had basic requirements for freedom of religion. The Preamble of this Law contains preferential treatment to the Eastern Orthodoxy. The Law permits those religious associations that have existed in Russia for more than fifteen years to register as organization and thereby enjoy the full rights as a legal entity. Others those who have less experience in Russia could operate as groups, but their rights were seriously restricted. In addition the new Law limited the rights of foreigners to proselytize. This Law contained highly troublesome registration requirements that obstructed the ability of smaller and newer religious groups to increase registration and function effectively. Some of these problems were resolved through the Russian courts. On the basis of this Law, a number of Catholic priests had been expelled from Russia. This Law imposed the deadly registration requirements that efficiently created a disturbance among the religious communities, which means the new and smaller religious groups enjoy fewer rights and privileges than the traditionally established religious groups.

The 1997 Law's provision resulted in the collapse of a number of minority religious groups such as Jehovah Witness, Protestants, Eastern Cults, and Hare Krishna groups. The Law's vagueness, its contradictory language, and also the registration processes created trouble for the minority groups. According to the new Constitution, religious associations were to be separated from the State and were to be equal before law. The 1997 Law indirectly disfavours the smaller religions, it does not provide a provision for state religion, but the preamble Law identified four religions as traditional religions, i.e. Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. This was a contradictory to the constitutional provisions, because the Constitution states that all religions are equal, so the identification of traditional religion effectively penalizes the religion who is comparatively new to Russia. This Law on religion includes the processes of registration as complex, lengthy, and costly (Christopher: 2002).

The 1997 Registration Law did not maintain to establish a state religion, but it recognized the special role of Orthodoxy in the history of Russia, its origin and development of its spirituality and culture. Some argue that the legislation "in essence made the ROC the de-facto state religion". The Law also professes to respect Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and other religions which comprise an integral part of the historical heritage of the peoples of Russia (Ibid).

However, it is noteworthy that there was a vast disparity in legal treatment between groups and organizations, thus contradicting the Law's provision that all religions are treated equally. The Groups which are not registered don't have legal status. In the meantime, groups have been denied the privileges that had been granted to major religious organizations, for e.g. they may not own property, publish literature, open bank accounts, issue invitations to as foreign guests such as missionaries or obtain tax benefits. In effect, the only right granted is to hold worship services in the premises that must be provided by the members themselves. The registration requirements are very confusing and demands. Legal fees and investment of time (Simkin: 2002).

The 1997 Law was adopted in order to protect the Russian populace from foreign influence. Many innocent religious organizations faced the possibility of losing the right to worship because of the Law's restrictions. Another reason for the emergence of the Law was the need to determine registration and liquidation procedures for religious organizations. The Russian Federation Constitutional Court's interpretation of the 1997 Law was that it had restrictive

provisions and many scholars view it as a violation of the Constitutional guarantee which explains the freedom of conscience and equality of religious associations before the Law (Constitution of Russian Federation: 1993, Article 14.2). In fact, the Law's blanket application to all minority religions provoked an International uproar (Ibid).

The Preamble to the 1997 Law assigns a special role to the Russian Orthodox Church, recognizing its traditional influence on Russian culture and history. It also makes particular mention of well-known religions in Russia, such as Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism. Therefore, the Law appears to distinguish between traditional and non-traditional religions. It was interpreted as a violation of Russia's Constitutional principles of equality of religion before the Law. The Law divides all religious associations into two categories: religious groups and religious organizations (Article 7 and 8). Religious organization could be local and centralized, depending on the sphere of their activities. Religious groups have limited rights because they are non-registered entities, while a religious group has the right to perform religious services and teach its members, it cannot proselytize, distribute religious literature or perform other activities. A registration of a centralized religious organization could be carried out either at the local or at the Federal level depending on the location of local religious organizations. If the local religious organizations located in different subject of the Russian Federation; they must apply for registration as a centralized religious body at the Federal level. However, according to the Law of 1997, a centralized religious organization must conform to a specific structure, it has to include at least three local religious organizations, each of which of them have at least ten Russian citizens residing in the same locality (Thomas:2003).

Briefly, The Law of 1997 triggered lots of controversy in the Post Soviet Russia. It imposed restrictions on religious groups. The clauses of this Law were very complicated and it was indirectly avoiding the influx of religious organizations from outside. It recognized the traditional religions of Russia, and highlighted the role of Russian Orthodox Church, thereby raising question about the secular nature of Russian Constitution. This gave a secondary status to other religious belief especially Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. The Law stipulated as an interference of the state in the matters of religious organization. There have been avenues for interaction with regional and local authorities. Regional administration and many municipal administrations had appointed officials to talk with religious organizations. Religious minorities

regularly encounter problems in regional levels. The Slavic Centre for Law and Justice had given training to regional and municipal officials to implement the 1997 Law properly. The office of the Federal Human Rights Ombudsman contains a department for religious freedom issues. They estimated that 75% of these complaints represent genuine violations of religious freedom and rights guaranteed under Law (2008 Report on International Religious Freedom in Russia).

## **The Federal Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity: 2002**

Disintegration of the Soviet Union has created political, social, and ethnic tensions. The increased influence of nationalism, and racism also led to the formation of this Law. The increasing ranks of nationalist, Fascist, and other intolerant groups attribute Russia's present economic and social ills. These ethnic and national minorities became a primary motivation behind anti extremist legislation (Khamrayev: 2002).

The Preamble of the Extremism Law declares the law's purpose to be the "protection of the rights and freedoms of persons and citizens, the principles of the constitutional system, and the integrity and security of the Russian Federation."<sup>76</sup> To achieve these objectives this Law formulates an official definition for extremism. The definition of extremism includes in Article 1 of the Law<sup>77</sup>. In this Law many provisions deal with the prohibition of religious organization,

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<sup>76</sup> Extremism Law *supra* note,4 preamble

<sup>77</sup> 1.According to this Article, Activity of social and religious associations, or other organizations, whether through the mass media or by physical persons premeditated organization, preparation and execution of actions directed at:

- Forceful change of the fundamental constitutional structure and destruction of the integrity of the Russian Federation;
- Undermining the security of the Russian Federation;
- Seizure or appropriation of commanding authority;
- Creation of illegal armed forces;
- Carrying out terrorist activity;
- Incitement of social, racial, nationalistic or religious animosity;
- Debasement of national dignity;
- Creation of massive disorder, hooligan activities, and acts of vandalism motivated by hatred or hostility toward a social group;
- Propaganda of exclusivity, advocating either superiority or inferiority of citizens on the basis of religions social, racial, national, religious or linguistic affiliation;

2.Propaganda and public demonstration of Nazi paraphernalia or symbolism, or paraphernalia or symbolism similar enough to be confused with Nazi paraphernalia or symbolism;

3.Public summons to , or commission of, the above-indicated activities;

4. Financing or encouraging the above-indicated actions, including providing the means for accomplishment of such activities through financial means, real estate, educational, polygraphic or material or technical resources,

and leaders. The Law allows government officials to suspend the religious organizations, and political parties without Court order. The critics points out that the Law had a politically biased application. Under the new amendments, any of the crime can be classified as extremism if it has been reported on political nuance by the State.

Efforts to combat extremism was understandable, because in Russia the amount of violence was increasing and most of them were based on racist, nationalist, and religious motivation. In 2008, the Russian authorities created a special department known as “centre Eh” for the enforcement of this extremism Law. Alekseeva (2010) points out that the departments has interpreted the Law and its definition of ‘extremism’ vary widely, and has monitored every public organizations, human and civil rights groups, and religious minorities. Religious minorities in Russia were frequently targeted. For example, if any Muslim who is going frequently to a Mosque, which is not in “white list”,<sup>78</sup> could be accused as extremist and he will be sent to 8 to 15 years in prison.

The Law restricts the freedom of speech and civic participation in Russia. Russia has been facing threats from groups which advocate and spread violence in the name of religion. The Government approach was very problematic because it was enforcing they were using the vague provision of anti-extremism Law to religious adherents in the name of Russia’s security. Human Rights activist were concerned about these issues and their opinion was that Russian government’s approach on addressing the security threats could increase the radicalism and instability among the religious communities (Ibid).

The Law passed in 2002 and amended in 2007, it widened the definition of extremism. It was to be defined as a provocation to racial, religious, social or political hatred. This Law was widely used against the political opposition, media, and religious organizations. The Law has also been applied to limit religious literature which promotes the superiority of one religion over another. Religious communities face difficulties from other Laws as well. Minority religious groups in Russia were experiencing registration delays, and refusal to build or rent the buildings to worship. Members of religious communities have been harassed and detained. Russian

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telephone, fax or other means of communication, informational services, or other types of material or technical resources.

Extremism Law, supra note 4, art. 1

<sup>78</sup> List of State approved Mosques

government officials were continuously describing the religious communities as alien to Russian society and culture, and they continued the climate of intolerance (Leonard: 2011).

The religious minorities in Post Soviet Russia were continuously facing restrictions in the name of terrorism. The Law indirectly grants the officials the right to assault these groups in the name of security threats. In a way it was against freedom of speech or expression, and also their right to worship. The Law has very rigid and vague provisions too. Russia utilizes this Law to abolish or eliminate the extremist activities.

Another Law which restricts the religious organizations activities was, "On the Introduction of Amendments into Several Laws of the Russian Federation" and it was enacted in 2006. This NGO Law restricts to form an organization in the federation, and it develops the powers of the state over every organizations. It directly applies to religious organizations. The Law grants authorities the right to attend religious organization activities, perform a yearly review of the organization. The general organizational obligation in the NGO law applies straightforwardly to the religious organization. Along with these requirements, religious organizations have been required to report on funds received from foreign individuals or organization. Restrictions on NGO makes easier for the government to hide its human rights violations. It was because of its unclear provisions; it caused lots of criticism from the civil society of Russia and International Community (U.S. Department of State International Religious Freedom Report: 2008). Every religious organization members said that these provisions were unacceptable. Human rights violation has been happening in Russia frequently. This Law prohibited the organizations to enter Russia. In short the Russian Government is taking measures and implementing Laws in order to suppress the religious faith especially outside religious interventions.

The Russian Constitutional structure allows for the passage of a religious Law as restrictive to the practice of faith. The Russian Religious Law does not appear to offend Russian constitutional principle but it regulates the actions of religious associations and works on the institutional level. The Russian Religious Law guarantees the rights in the Constitution. The text of the Religious Law begins by reaffirming the right to profess one's own religion freely. The religious groups those who want to attain the status of religious organization must have ten or more citizens from the Russian Federation and also residents of Russia for more than fifteen years. Under this condition only religious groups can enjoy the legal entity, if they want the status of an



organization. However, there are considerable hurdles to these processes. The language of the Law does not deny the rights to religious groups because they can maintain religious buildings, equipment and objects specially designated for worship services and the organization will also have the right to deliver the religious services.

Religious organizations have the provisions to produce, acquire export and import, and distribute religious literature. Religious organizations create enterprises to produce liturgical literature for religious services. They also create charitable organizations, institutions for professional religious education, own buildings, property, and religious schools. The Law does not violate the right of individuals; rather it meant to protect the morality of the Russian people. This Law can be defended as a necessary protective measure for the morality of the Russians.

**Regional level:** Many regions formulate and enact the Religious Law themselves, which were more limiting than the Federal Law. The first region, which implemented the Law was Tula<sup>79</sup>, and it was in 1994. This Law was rapidly used as a model by other regions, and in a brief period they introduced Laws, and it violated the Federal Law and Constitutional guarantees (Homer: 1999). The disagreement between the Federal Law and an increasing number of regional Laws had been solved with the passage of the new religion Law in 1997 at the federal level. This Law contains two types of classification; distinguish into religious organization and religious groups. The religious organizations have a broad range of privileges, but the religious groups are permitted to worship, they also face restrictions on their property rights, educational activities, publishing religious literature etc. According to Homer, such actions create problems not only for religious freedom but also for Federalism and the Rule of Law.

Meanwhile the country witnessed the passage of the Laws and regulations by provincial authorities. Since 1994, about 30 regions in Russia have adopted their own local Laws or regulations (Lawrence: 1996). In spite of some differences, they all have a great arrangement in familiar, sometimes even repeating the same words to express the same ideas. On the conceptual level, all the Laws draw two types of distinction: between traditional and non-traditional religions and between foreign and Russian religions, The Law limits the activity of religious

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<sup>79</sup> Tula is an industrial city and the administrative center of Tula Oblast, Russia.

organizations which are “canonically or in any other way under the jurisdiction of foreign religious organizations”. In Tula and Kaliningrad<sup>80</sup>, the local Dumas have passed resolutions identically entitled “on religious organizations operating as structural divisions of foreign religious organizations beyond the jurisdiction of the Russian federation. Sverdlovsk law and Yaroslavl draft contain the notion of traditional and non- traditional religions (Yaroslavl draft: Article 7). They set up special bodies with powers to regulate and control the activities of religious organizations. These organs were appointed to investigate and assess the beliefs and practices of religious organization and give recommendations or decision about their registration. Contrary to the Federal Legislation, the local Laws imply prohibitions on the activities of those not registered. The local authorities created extremely complicated procedures and almost invariably, payments for the certificate of registration were also introduced which were typically something like ten times the minimum monthly wage (Keston news service: 1996).

Arbitrary prohibitions of certain religious practices include: creating obstacles to general education, “harming mental or moral health” promoting disobedience to state authorities, or “encouraging citizens to refuse to carry out their civic or family obligations (Ibid). Restrictions on missionary activities are limited. Hence, the restrictions are imposed by local laws include absolute prohibition of religious practices. In the regional level, it must be understood that there were less number of public meetings. As the minority religion cannot have their own meeting places, these kind of restriction became a powerful mechanism of control over religious organizations.

Some Laws require the submission of document and it simply goes against the gaining of a registration certificate for the foreign religious organization. In some cases the Law or drafts requires that the missionaries should have invitations from the local authorities and or an invitation from s religious organization in the country of origin. In some cases the Laws or drafts require that the missionaries should get an invitation from the religious organization, which are registered locally, otherwise the religious organization cannot get the legitimacy ,even if they are registered nationally (Uzell: 1996). Some kinds of religious activities of religious organizations had to be licensed by the local authorities. This may include activities like

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<sup>80</sup> Kaliningrad is a seaport and administrative center of Kaliningrad Oblast, the Russian exclave between Poland and Lithuania on the Baltic Sea, and is geographically separated from the rest of Russia.

preaching, concerts, lectures etc. All local Laws seem to contain obvious violations of the Russian constitution and 1990 Law. However, there have been no concerted attempts on the part of the federal government to challenge these Laws. According to the Constitutional Law, local laws can be evaluated by the Constitutional Court, which has unquestionable jurisdiction.

In short, the Russian Constitution guaranteed the Freedom of Religion and it considered itself as Secular State. The Laws which the state implemented after that really cause trouble to religious minorities in Russia in one way or the other. The issue of religion is one of the most represented components of the Russian Constitution. The Freedom of Religion and belief is one of the fundamental features of Human Rights. The Law on Religious Activity was proposed and soon to be enacted into Law. Under the provision of this Law “ordinary believers will face lines of sharing their faith with strangers. Clearly, it means that Russian Government is attempting to wipe out of all religion except Russian Orthodox Church. The leaders of religious organization have the right to profess, and in other cases the persons those who got special preference from the leadership have such rights. Rests of the people have been prohibited from propagandizing faith, and ideas (Larussophobia: 2009).The proposal came into existence in 2009 along with the amendments of 1997 Law. This Proposal includes anti-Constitutional religious Literature restrictions, free distribution of religious literature and it indirectly violates Russian Constitution of freedom of religious faith. This widens the restrictions on the activity of unregistered religious groups. Some religious groups have highly criticized these proposals. They considered it as the violation of the Constitution, Religion Law, and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This proposal was against Article 28 of the Constitution (Corley: 2011).

The Constitution is the supreme Law of the Land and guarantees and protects the rights of citizens. In Russia, Constitution provides the freedom of faith and association. It declares itself as a secular state. In practical sense, many Laws introduced by the Russian state regarding the freedoms of religion are imposing restriction on religious minorities. The 1997 Law restrict the registration of religious groups from outside. It identified four religions as traditional. Then also a controversy remains in this Law, because it recognizes the traditional and historical legacy of Russian Orthodoxy. Indirectly the state is favouring and giving preferential treatment ROC more than any other traditional religious minorities. Law limits the increase of the other religious group’s entry to Russia after the disintegration. The 2002 Laws also became controversial

regarding its definition of extremism. Many religious groups have suffered under the provision of this Law. The government used this Law to tackle the violence that happened in Russia. The Russian State has proposed the drafts against the distribution religious literatures; and under these drafts religious organizations have to submit the details of their properties to the authorities. Under these Laws the Authorities have the right to persecute, punish persons, or organizations without a court order. The adherents can only go to religious institutions which have already been recognized by the authority, or submit to punishment by accusing anti-religious activities of the government. Many religious institutions in Russia have been banned in the name of extremist activities. In short, the authorities are protecting the Russian Orthodox Church, because they relate it as a part of Russian nationalism. They have the assumption that other religious organization is alien to Russian culture and traditions. The religious groups are protected under the shades of the Constitution, but actually their activities are monitored in the name of the Laws of the states. These Laws were partial and only restricting the religious minorities in Russia. Previously in Russia, the policies of the state were based on atheism and they were clear about the propagandas and had an equal treatment to all religious groups. It varied from time to time, but the basic propaganda didn't change. In the case of Post Soviet Russia, it declared the state as secular but preferential treatment has been given to Russian Orthodox Church. Laws are favourable to majority community it is because of that the religious minorities suffers. They are facing discrimination, insecurity, suppression, and majority chauvinism, in the name of their religious faith. Religious belief is considered as one of the fundamental feature of Human right from earlier times. In Russia many human rights violence were reported only in the name of religious faith or practices. Actually the religions are not protected by the Laws, because most of the Laws are very vague and imposing restriction on religious minorities. So their rights are not protected under the provisions of the Constitution.

# *Chapter IV*

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*Religious Minorities and  
Political participation in Post-  
Soviet Russia*

### Religious Minorities and Political participation in Post-Soviet Russia

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#### Minority Representation

Representation is a key aspect of minority political participation. Usually, minority groups not only seek control over their own affairs but also representation at the national level. Such representation has important policy implications and symbolic benefits for the minority communities. Political systems vary greatly in regard to the level of national representation granted to minorities in terms of additional opportunities for such representation. However, internal democracy within the minority communities is one of the important concerns raised by the international community in relation to minority governance issues. Minority representatives are key intermediaries between their communities and the political system at large. The ability of minority community to articulate and communicate their concerns are significantly affected by the quality of their representatives which in turn is contingent on the inclusiveness, competitiveness, and fairness of the process by which those representatives are selected. The lack of democracy in minority governance comprises the ability of minority communities to achieve their collective goals and undermines the legitimacy of efforts to establish specialized forms of minority representation. In this context, it is noteworthy that large regions of Russia have minorities and thus have a potential for secessionism. The participation of minorities in public life is essential to ensure their concerns and also enable them to play a participatory role in the development of the society at large. Participation in social and economic life enables them to effectively address their needs that too, through their own active contribution. Effectual political participation is needed in the allocation of both opportunities and benefits. Political participation involves incentives for the parties involved, especially minority representatives (Barry: 2005).

Effective participation in political, cultural, economic and social life can be considered as an important aspect of minority right and hence clearly is the focus of debate on minority rights. Discriminatory standards and practices in public affairs can be eliminated with minority's

effective participation. Effective participation of minorities in all areas of public life is essential for the development of a truly democratic, cohesive, inclusive society. Participation of minorities in the decision-making processes has a special impact on their overall well being. It is a fundamental precondition for the full and equal enjoyment of the human rights. Moreover, measures taken to ensure the effective participation of minorities contribute to the easing of tensions between communities. Hence, creating conditions for the effective participation of minorities is clearly integral to the principles of good governance. International standards on minorities and their effective political participation focus on the rights of minorities to have admittance to all forms of political decision-making at all existing levels without discrimination (Rauws: 2009). The present chapter analyzes the representation of minority groups in the institutions and structures of governance of the Russian Federation. It also dwells upon the resurgence of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as an important non-state actor in the politics of Russia.

### **Achieving Minority Representation**

In democracies, proportional representation is commonly used to ensure some form of representation of minority groups in the political process. Quotas are also useful provisions for minority representation.

In the Russian situation, via amendment 93, of Article 14 of the Russian Constitution the Law of Religion, states: “the special role of Orthodoxy in the history of Russia and in the establishment and development of its spirituality and culture.” The predominant position of *ROC* is thus clearly established. The Orthodox Church maintains close ties with the Prime Minister and continues to influence governmental actions, particularly those that affect other religious practices in Russia. Needless to say, the Orthodox Church has a vested interest in keeping the other religions and their potential influence at bay. Given the large following of the Orthodox Church, the government also has a vested interest in this relationship. It is noteworthy that while other religious minorities face bureaucratic restrictions such as compulsory registration, the Russian Orthodox Church is exempted from the requirement to register with the State (Hailes: 2009).

Russian Orthodox Church in Russia operates as an interest group. Interest group in this regard means “any group which articulates demands that the political authorities in the political system

or sub system should make an authoritative allocation of resources to them” (Richardson: 1993). It differs from a political party or social movements and provides its members with a combination of selective reasons and shared goals. The ROC is the largest single religious institution in Russia. It is the most influential force within the religious population of Russia and is known to have reservations about democracy, free market, economics, and a pluralist society (Steeves: 1994). In order to retain its monopoly over education, the ROC has lobbied with political parties. It imposes morals on society through legislative gains and also retains preferential tax status. It encourages its members to enroll, and at the same time seeks to provide its members with collective good. It is noteworthy that the *ROC* and the radical right actors in the Russian political system co-operate with each other and are also ideologically close. The association clearly benefits both sides. (Dnipropetrovsk: 2010).

One substantive element of the Russian political space has been the emergence of movements brought together by the ecological and spiritual revival<sup>81</sup>. The spiritual and ecological movements are more often than not linked with religious and national parties. It may be noted that religious parties have acquired dignity in Russia, mainly due to the religious association of their members. This is equally characteristic of movements that developed in the Russian political space on the basis of Islam and Christianity. However, the destiny of religious parties is usually problematical due to the fact that the spiritual leaders tend to stress their distance from politics and see their participation in politics only through explicitly influencing the society with their religious and priestly service (Sivertsev:1995).

Religious parties, in a parliamentary system have a diverse parliamentary role compared to nonreligious parties. They also have a different reserve cadre of deputies, as compared to others. In this context, it is noteworthy that within the structure of the Communist Party, there *are* several parties having democratic and social-democratic orientation. However, within the Communist party, it is impossible to imagine the emergence of a Christian or Islamic party as a full-fledged structure within the party. The complexity of the communists joining religious based parties is beyond resolution. It involves dealing with serious ideological and psychological difficulties. The cultural barrier of religious parties is highly visible, especially in Islamic parties.

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<sup>81</sup> These movements aim at the individual person, the person’s inner world, and the transformation of his or her consciousness. These Movements are espousing personal improvement and self realization.



The knowledge or ignorance of the Arabic or of the sacred writings is a significant factor in selecting the elite of the religious party. This formal barrier prevents a possible influx of former communists wishing to return to power through the structure of the victorious parties (Ibid).

## **Political Parties and Minority Representation**

Political Parties are indispensable for democracy. In a democratic state, minority representation in the political process is fundamental. International Law recognizes the right to vote without regard to race, colour, sex, language, religion, or other status as fundamental and universal. It is common for democratic governments to allocate some kind of proportional representation in their electoral system in order to ensure the representation of minority groups within the political process. The effectiveness of this system depends from state to state depending on the degree of diversity within the population. In other words, electoral systems and their ability to incorporate minorities in the political process vary greatly from country to country.

In the context of Russia, the state carefully examines the characteristics of all minority groups in order to apply for participation in the political process. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights recognizes: the right and opportunity without distinction of any kind such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or soviet origin, property, birth or other status. It further entitles the citizens to:

- Take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- To vote and be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot; and
- To have access on general terms of equality to public services in one's country (ICCPR: Article 25)

Many International Treaties and Covenants and ICCPR<sup>82</sup> force states to guarantee rights to persons belonging to national or ethnic minorities to participate in public life. The best option is to guarantee this right is to have constitutional safeguards, which however ought to be supported by other forms of legislation as well (Ibid).

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<sup>82</sup> International Covenants of Civil and Political Rights adopted on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1966.

## **Law on Political Parties**

The Federal Law 95: “on political parties” was adopted in July 11, 2001. This federal Law regulates the public relations of the Russian citizens and their right to get politically organized. Special features such as creation, activity, reorganization and liquidation of political parties in the Russian Federation is also provided in the Law (Article: 1). Article 2 includes the right of the citizens of the Russian Federation to form political parties. However, the fact that political parties and religious associations in Russia still have not acquired large experience of democratic existence poses serious challenges in the implementation of this Law. Article 9 points to the Federal Law on Political Parties that forbids the creation of political parties on the basis of professional, racial, national, or religious identity. In other words, the charter should not include among its goals the protection of professional identifications. Such identifications must not be reflected in the name of the party either. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the Ministry of Justice rejected the application for the registration of the “Russian Christian Democratic Party”, because the word “Christian” reflected a religious affiliation and hence it would be absurd and unconstitutional to do so. Consequently religious groups are left to defending their own interests ([www.2.stetson.edu](http://www.2.stetson.edu)).

Against this background, the following sections seek to understand the role of religious minority groups and organizations in the political system of the Russian Federation. The political and legal constraints within which they have to operate and the challenges they face in a set up where the ROC has clearly emerged, due to open state patronage, as the most important non-state actor inside Russia.

## **Russian Jewish Organizations**

Russian Jewish Congress Organization was created in January 1996. It declared itself to be a Jewish social and non political organization working on the territory of the Russian Federation and it registered itself as welfare fund. Within the first few years of its existence, it came to play a leading role in the Jewish community (Zaharescu: 2010). Anti-Semitism has been a major issue faced by the Jewish Community and for the Jewish Congress Organization the management this problem by influencing the government directly or indirectly has been a major preoccupation. Post-Soviet anti-Semitism mainly found expression in the media and some other forums. Anti-

Jewish insults on the street, in public transportation, schools, and workplaces are common a phenomenon. Attacks on Jewish property principally synagogues and Jewish cemeteries have increased. Anti-Jewish slogans and swastikas are painted on buildings and gravestones, and several synagogues have been firebombed. Attacks on individuals associated with the organized Jewish community also have been multiplying.

Although, there are demands and pressure on the Russian government to take action against such acts of bigotry, including prosecution of perpetrators, the political atmosphere within Russia is not conducive to explicit public statements censuring anti-Semitism. Post Soviet politicians have been tolerant to extremist organizations and very often, they have even encouraged the development of these organizations as part of civil society groups. The Jewish organizations in these circumstances operate more as a pressure group to influence the government and to draw attention to the grievances of the Jewish community. The medium of influence, clearly is not political or way by direct participation, but by soft pressure. The Jewish control an excessively large share of the Russian economy and the Russian media and that possibly explains the resentment towards them.

Russian Jewish Congress have been issuing statements about anti Semitic attacks on Jews and Jewish property, particularly against the backdrop of growing number of politicians issuing anti-Semitic statements to gain political support and the public unresponsiveness regarding the attacks on Jews and also the Russian authority's inability is to prosecute those guilty of such crimes. It was further noted that Russian inability or unwillingness to protect its Jewish citizens compelled the REK<sup>83</sup> to establish its own Security Foundation, an action that, paradoxically, forgives the Russian government of its own responsibility to protect its citizens (Gidwitz: 1999).

Federation of Jewish Communities in Russia (FEOR) is another Jewish organization that came into existence to raise voice against the anti –Semitic incidents in Russia. Anti-Semitism is effectively being positioned as an instrument employed by political radicals for attacking the fundamental institutions of democratic authority in Russia. However, the federal government in general and most regional authorities are aware of the social and political hazards of the

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<sup>83</sup> It is called as Russian Jewish Congress created in 1996. The main goal is to unify all Jewish Organizations in Russia. The abbreviation of this Organization in Russian is (Rossiiskii Evreiskii Kongress; REK)

everyday anti-Semitism as demonstrated by the joint efforts made by the federal legislators and presidential administration for promulgating the Law “On controlling the extremist activities”<sup>84</sup>.

The authorities, clearly concerned with acts of rampant anti-Semitism and xenophobia, created a relevant department in the Ministry of Interior for controlling such crimes. Consequently, this gives the Jewish organizations additional options for a wider and closer cooperation’s with the authorities in preventing and fighting anti-Semitism. The Jewish groups, to some extent have been successful in pressurizing the authorities into initiating criminal proceedings for acts that lead to the incitement of ethnic strife and anti-Semitism. FEOR also conducted a round table conference meeting in 2002 on “Anti-Semitism of the younger generation. In this conference, recent incidents of vandalism and terrorist acts with anti-Semitic placards were discussed. The meeting was attended by the members of the youth human rights movement from Germany.

The Jewish communities in Russia would actively get involved in the gathering of information in regard to the state of ethnic relations in Russia. Community members and activists would analyze the leaflets, pamphlets, notices and placards distributed in the neighbourhoods and would also monitor the publications in the local and regional media to keep a check on publications that exhibited extremist tendencies, incited ethnic aggression, vandalism and violence in the society. In this regard it is noteworthy that responding to the appeal of the Jewish community, the authorities took initiatives to stop the distribution of the openly anti-Semitic publication and also initiated proceedings against the paper editors and writers for inciting ethnic hatred. FEOR has been calling upon all ethnic and religious communities and associations in Russia to do everything in their power to establish attitudes of tolerance towards all ethnic minorities and faiths in public life and social relations. The Jewish organizations in Russia are also against the mandatory teaching of the “Fundamentals”<sup>85</sup> of Orthodox Culture at schools (Federation of Jewish Communities: 2003).

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<sup>84</sup> The Federal Law on Combating Extremist Activity was adopted in July 2002; it defines the extremist activity and provides for specific punishment guidelines applicable to all non-governmental groups and mass media outlets.

<sup>85</sup> The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture (FOC), is differs markedly from Western European approaches to religious education. Fundamental Orthodox Culture combines an introduction into Russian culture and patriotism with moral education and the imparting of knowledge about Orthodox Christianity.

In short the Jewish organizations have been exercising influence on government policies though not by direct participation in the governmental process. Their participation is mainly in the form of drawing attention to issues that affects the community such as anti-Semitism, and vandalism. This they have been doing through the media and also by filing complaints with the government agencies. The organizations have also sought help from outside Russia, because the nature of the problems which the Jews face are common everywhere. Given the fact, that in Russia as a religious minority, Jews have been suppressed in many cases, Jewish organizations have a clear cut agenda of protecting the interests of the Jewish community.

### **Islamic parties in Russia**

Traditionally, Muslims have voted with the Communist Party in order to win political protection for them. They have also supported other political parties and have also tried to organize a party for themselves. At times, Muslim parties have supported the left and at times the right in pursuit of their own goals. They have also developed an outline of centrism. However, much as other religious groups, the Islamic groups are also limited in their expression in elections because of the passage of a Law excluding the use of religious terminology and names in Parties. Out of all other parties registered for the elections, only the True Patriots of Russia, headed by Magomed and Zaur Radzhabov came close to the identity of Islam. At first they tried to use the term "Islamic" in their party's name, arguing that it did not violate the election law because Islam is a culture as well as a religion. However by September 2002 had to abandon the name (Centre for Strategic and International Studies: 2002).

The first Islamic party in Russia was Islamic Party of Renewal of Russia, led by Akhmed-Kadi Aktaev. The party wanted to create a Muslim section in the State Duma. The party split in 1994, and in the absence of support moved away from the political scene. The first officially registered Muslim movements were formed in 1995 and it was called Nur. The first secretary of this party, Akhmed Khaltoev, came from Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. The goal of this party was to strive to create a 'civilized image of the Muslims' and to promote internationalism. The party secured seats during Boris Yeltsin's tenure in the Consultative Council in 1996. The party however faced several obstacles, mainly due to the split among different factions of Muslims and the divisive activities of various clerics. It is noteworthy that the party was recognized by the

Central Election Commission as one of the twenty civic organizations and got permission to take part in elections along with other fully fledged parties.

The disunity among the Islamic groups was not the only reason for its poor performance and inefficiency to participate in the political processes. The role of federal and regional governments in the “manipulation of electoral laws and their arbitrary application ... including denial of registration requests and disqualification from elections, often on the basis of flimsy excuses”, played no small a role. However, the fact remains that despite the disunity and fragmentation among the Muslims, they have some common values which will ensure their presence both inside and outside of the political process (Relioscope: 2003)

The primary goal of the Islamic party has been to spread Islamic ideas, correct the false image that the community acquired after the 9/ 11 attacks, and study the Russian Muslim’s approach towards the Duma. Russian Muslims proudly claim that they have the distinction of being the first right group to organize themselves to defend their economic, political and religious rights as a community. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Kamel Kalandrov, the director of the Russian Centre for Human Right gave shape to a socio-political organisation to serve the Muslim population in Russia. The objective of the new body was to strive to transform the image of the Muslim community, to act as a middle man between the authorities and immigrants, to strengthen ties with law enforcement bodies and to provide legal and financial assistance to the deprived Muslim families. Despite these bold initiatives, there has been limited political participation of Muslims in Russia. Muslim leaders have also been targeted in assassination attacks.

It is noteworthy, that the media in Russia has often characterized Muslims as Islamic terrorists. Muslim activists have often complained that Russia is not entirely a secular state, because of the government’s dynamic support to the majority religion. There are reports to suggest that Muslim recruits, serving in the army were subjected to abuses and insults based on the religion. The authorities have permitted Orthodox chapels and priests in army bases, but at the same time Islamic services are not allowed and Muslim soldiers are not provided with substitute meals to pork-based meals (Islamic Human Rights Commission: 2004).

## **Case study: Islamic movements and parties in Dagestan**

In general, the Muslim political parties mainly concentrate on specific areas having high Muslim population. One such area is Dagestan where the organizational abilities of Muslim religious parties particularly stand out.

In Dagestan, Islam is not only a religion but also a mode of daily life. It is a factor organizing the village commune and also a structure of real authority. In the Soviet period, many Islamic mosques were demolished. There were a few places where people learnt Arabic and religious education was totally nonexistent. So the great stability of Islamic culture is a determinative factor in the evolution of the political situation in Dagestan. In Dagestan, there is a stable and traditional system of transmitting holy knowledge from old generation to younger ones. Later on as a consequence of the constant tradition of Islamic identity, political structures evolved in this region and it led to a large number of conflicts. Dagestan is a heterogeneous region, both ethnically and linguistically. Islam has long provided a cultural denominator. Islam is also a source of firm personal identity. A living and constantly reproduced tradition of Muslim education, thus creates a special context for the establishment of political movements. Consequently, Dagestan turned into an ardent Islamic zone which provided fertile ground for the evolution of new movements. Many new parties came into existence; the Islamic Democratic Party of Dagestan; the Islamic Renaissance Party; the Department of Dagestan Muslims, which also promotes traditional Islam; the Shamil Popular Front of Dagestan; and the nomenklatura party bodies. A noticeable fact in the region is that the young followers of Islam are excessively concerned about the problems of the middle-aged with their perpetual clash between the atheistic communist Party and traditional Islam. The local Islamic leaders however are not concerned about the clashes or current conflicts. Their plan and ambitions have a long term character. They view Dagestan as a section of the Islamic world and this is an important aspect of their strength. Economic problems of the region have also been high on the agenda. One such issue has been the economic conversion of military plants. The large redundant workforce, the closing down of several factories resulted in the emergence of lumpen<sup>86</sup> parties and movements. The local Islamic leaders thus filled the vacuum and were obliged to perform the functions of both religious and

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<sup>86</sup> This related to a dispossessed and uprooted individuals those who cut off from the economic and social class with which they might normally be identified.

secular authority. The attitude of religious leaders in the region have been to maintain stability and are disinclined to let the Russian authorities into their local problems, believing that they are best able to settle their own accounts (Sivertsev:1995).

It is noteworthy Muslims in Russia are divided by geography, history, ethnicity and divergent confessional movements and legal schools. Muslims communities can be found across the Russian federation but the largest concentration of ethnic Muslims are found in the North Caucasus's Muslim republics, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Adygeya, Kabardino-Balkaria,(KBR), Karachaevo-Cherkessia(KChR) and in the Volga and Urals republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. There are also large Muslim populations in Moscow and St.Petersburg where they organized their own socio-political organization, the National Organization of Russia's Muslims (NORM) (Ignatenko: 2003). Muslims in Russia are not strongly self-organized, but they are well organized by the Islamic clergy and the Russian state. The Muslim communities register with the government and are incorporated into a regional Muslim Spiritual Administration (MSA).All of them are included under the three main Muslim organizations: the Council of Muslims of Russia (CMR), the Central Muslim Spiritual Administration (CMSA), and the Coordinating Council of the Muslims of the North Caucasus (CCMNC). The various Muslim spiritual; councils obtain state funding for mufti's salaries, university and *madrassa* development, and the building of mosques. Independent Muslim communities and mosques are treated in Russia as illegal and the authorities usually incorporate all these into official administration. The authority's perception is that these groups have produced jihadist terrorist organizations, leaders, and cadres. With regard to political ideology, Muslims in Russia are divided among democrats, conservatives, Eurasianist and Islamic reactionaries. However, since under the Russian law political parties based on any communal identification are prohibited from electoral participation, it is hard to get a detailed representation of Muslims' division on Russia's political spectrum.

Putin-era amendments to Russia's laws "On Extremism" and "On Combating Terrorism" give the Federal Security Service (FSB), the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), Justice Ministry, and General Prosecutor's Office a lot of power which often resulted in policies and practices leading to significant violations of Muslims' civil, political, and human rights. These practices were more prevalent in the North Caucasus, especially in Chechnya where authorities have even



carried out extra-judicial reprisal against the families of suspected and actual terrorist (American Foreign Policy Council Report for Russia: 2010). In the national level there no strong Muslim organizations. It is mainly because of the disunity among the parties itself. Many organizations are blacklisted by the authorities in the name of extremist activities. Religious literatures are also banned and adherents can visit only the Mosques which are included in the White List, otherwise they will be apprehended by the authorities in the name of terrorism. Muslim leaders are known to be strongly against several government policies and they are also not satisfied with those legislative activities that accord special status to the Russian Orthodox Church. Hence the Muslim Religious Organizations feel compelled to engage in activities and goals that would protect the interest of the community.

### **Russian Orthodox Church and it privileged status**

Contemporary Russia is a country of rapid change. These changes, which touch all aspects of state and societal life, also naturally reflect in the church's relations with the state and society. During the Soviet era, the church neither played a role in the society nor in politics. The era witnessed complete separation of church and state with scant importance to religious institutions and religion itself. But after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, everything changed and Russia underwent complete transformation in every sense. The revival of the ROC as a major player in Russian society was one such change. It has also come to assume an important place in political affairs of the state. The weakening of the old political structures and the rise of sharp struggle of ideas between political groups within Russia, post disintegration of the Soviet Union, forced many political forces to look for alliances with the Orthodox Church. Consequently, the relationship between the Church and political structures of the State has become an established fact. The Christian organizations are playing a significant role in the political life of the country and have emerged as an influential political force, though their political orientation varies greatly. The RCDM<sup>87</sup> and the MCSU<sup>88</sup> are self-described centrist parties, close to the state and

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<sup>87</sup> It is a Christian organization originated in 1990, under Aleksander Chuev, the full form of RCDM is Russian Christian Democratic Movement.

<sup>88</sup> Moscow Christian Social Union, organization created in 1992 and headed by Dmitrii Khanov.

the conservative sections of the Russian society. The ARMC<sup>89</sup> and URC<sup>90</sup> are the supporters of the nationally oriented conservative forces and their ideology is clearly tied with the tradition of Orthodox Christianity. Through the electoral process, several priests and church activists have been elected as deputies of local organs of legislative power. Many representatives of Christian democratic associations also became deputies at different levels. The Orthodox Church has been an advocate of what it describes as 'genuine patriotism'. They argue that Christian ideology urges upon believers to love their earthly home and neighbours and hence Christian patriotism cannot have anything common with nationalism- that is, hatred for other people, and feelings of national superiority, blaming people of a different nationality for one's own misfortunes and calling for violence. So, the crux of the argument is that the destinies of the Church and state are different though they are called upon for mutual assistance - without pressure on one another, without replacing one another, without red tape and without attempts to limit the freedom of the Church, the state, society, or the individual. It is noteworthy that the ROC has organized roundtable, discussions<sup>91</sup> to analyze the problems of relations of the Christianity to the national questions (Chaplin: 1995)

It is significant, that President Yeltsin acknowledged the importance of the ROC as an element of Russia's sense of national hood. In January 1998 he stated: "For more than thousand years, the Russian Orthodox Church has fulfilled its sacred mission, affirming spiritual and moral values on Russian soil . . . The Church is an inalienable part of the history of our country and our people. Its selflessness activities have deservedly earned the state's gratitude and respect" (Witte: 1997).

Former President Vladimir Putin, a declared believer and a baptized member of the ROC also clearly sees the Orthodoxy in this light. In August 2001 when visiting the Solovki monastery, he spoke to journalists in the following words:

“. . . since time immemorial, our country has been called 'holy Russia' and these words have carried a great spiritual meaning, as they emphasized the special role assumed by Russia voluntarily, as the keeper of Christianity . . . without Christianity Russia would have hardly

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<sup>89</sup> In 1992, at a congress of thirty- four monarchist organizations, All-Russia Monarchist Center was created.

<sup>90</sup> It is called a Union of Christian Rebirth, and it the supporter of nationally oriented conservative force.

<sup>91</sup> In Moscow, a round table entitled "Christian Associations in Contemporary Russia" was held in 1992. In 1993, the Danilova Monastery organized a seminar on Christianity, Patriotism, National Problems" in order to verify the relationship.

become an accomplished state. It is therefore extremely important, useful, and timely to get back to this source”.

President Dmitry Medvedev is also known to go to the Church frequently, kiss precious icons of the Virgin Mary and seek political and moral counsel from the Russian Orthodox clergy. On June 29 2008 President Medvedev spoke at a Russian Orthodox Church celebration of the yearly anniversary of the Baptism of Russia saying: “The continual work of the Russian Orthodox Church will affect the revival of Christianity in our nation. Thanks to the Orthodox faith Russian culture through the years has acquired Biblical values on which the system of moral ideals for our nation is built.” He further said: “When we celebrated the millennial anniversary of the Baptism of Russia twenty years ago it was the beginning of churches being rebuilt and the restoration of the integrity of the Orthodox Church” (<http://xlerma.wordpress.com/2010>)

The ROC’s post-Soviet relationship with the state has highlighted several key concerns: the admissibility of religious instruction in public schools through the framework of “Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” courses; the introduction of chaplaincy in the armed forces; the restitution of property; and the limitation of competition by other faiths on Russian soil (Ibid). It is noteworthy, that the Medvedev government has decided to grant federal approval for the teaching of “Orthodox values” in public schools. Both Prime Minister Putin and President Medvedev have moved towards authorizing full restitution of pre-Revolutionary ecclesiastical property and the Duma has also been considering further legislative restrictions on foreign proselytism (Gorenburg:2011).

In reality, the Orthodox Church in post-Communist Russia is as much a pillar of the state as like the army, the police and the courts. The Church is also a valuable instrument for projecting Russian interests abroad, as the Orthodox Churches of Georgia, Ukraine and Belarus are all parts of the Russian Patriarchate. President Medvedev was involved in giving Orthodox theological schools the same status as secular Universities. He signed a decree establishing as federal holiday, the “Day of the Baptism of Rus” when Kiev Prince Vladimir converted his people to Christianity in the 10th century. There are now two officially recognised Orthodox holidays in Russia and there is none representing any other religion. Following the sanction of a controversial law to re-establish the religious organisations property and assets seized by the state in Soviet times, the Orthodox Church become the biggest real estate owner in the country.

Critics say this is the price the Kremlin is ready to pay the Church for its political support and ideological cover. President Medvedev has also supported the Church in its long-standing demand to have “Orthodox culture” classes in schools. In some regions, the classes are optional but at least in five provinces they are mandatory. This has invited protests from parents belonging to other religious groups. The Defence Ministry announced that on the instructions of the President, it will establish a military chaplain corp and will train chaplains at one of its military schools. The current position of the Church is often compared with pre-1917 revolution time, when Orthodoxy was the official religion of the Russian State. The one big difference though is that in imperial Russia, the Church was obedient to the State with the Tsar being the formal head of both, whereas today the Church is the most powerful non-state actor (Radyuhin:2011)

The Council of Russian Orthodox Bishops went as far as to authorise priests to participate in elections to local and federal legislatures, even if only in exceptional cases, to oppose forces that attempt to use the vote to fight the Orthodox Church (Radyuhin:2011). On the other hand in Russia, religious minority’s participation in politics is relatively through the religious organizations. They don’t involve in elections directly, but influence the election process indirectly. They generally act as interest groups or nongovernmental organizations. In this way they highlight the problems faced by the community and seek to influence the Russian Political process in their favour. In a Democratic State, minority representation is an unavoidable part and these groups do participate in the process and try to make an impact however limited it may be. It is marked that the Russian Orthodox Church, as an organization abides a remarkable resemblance to a typical contemporary political organization in Russia. It has problems with groups and also has personal rivalries (Lloyd: 1995). As an organization church is burdened with both internal disagreements over church issues and also with political issues.

In contrast, minority religious group organizations in the Russian Federation are non profit voluntary organizations whose members have a common cause for which they seek to influence public policy, without seeking political control. Their primary activities are influencing the members of legislative bodies through contribution to political parties; working to elect sympathetic politicians and conducting covert or open propaganda campaigns that would secure the interests of their community.

# *Chapter V*

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## *Conclusion*

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Existing world is a mixture of distinct peoples and this diversity raises serious and diverse questions. It divides the people as minority and majority and more often than not, these groups conflict over such issues as language, rights, provincial independence, political representation, educational programmes, land claims, immigration policies, and even national symbols, such as the choice of national anthem or public holidays. Discovering justifiable and politically workable answers to this problem is the biggest challenge that any multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious country faces. Even though, the issue of effective participation of minorities in public life has become one of the crucial aspects of current international discussion, the quest for evolving an advantageous and effective way for organizing majority and minority relations continues. Freedom of religion and beliefs clearly is one of the fundamental human rights and religion continues to play an important part in Contemporary life.

There is no specific definition of a minority. The category itself presents complexities, thereby making it extremely challenging to identify people who are in a minority status. The fact that the criteria for being a minority differs from region to region, only adds to the prevailing complexity. Even though, minorities are identified on the basis of religion, language, race etc., the role of international organizations is significant in safeguarding the interest of minority groups. Among all the minority groups, religious minorities are the most vulnerable. Religious minorities have deep seated insecurity issues as their activities are subject to deep scrutiny by the state agencies. Even though constitutional guarantees may be in place there are numerous legal restrictions that controls and curbs their activities and poses serious challenges to their dignified existence. In regard to religious registration, it may be noted that though the rules vary significantly from country to country, more often than not, for religious minorities, a very complicated registration procedure is in place. Religious procedures are applied in a discriminatory manner resulting in suspicion and misgivings. The majority community's chauvinism has to be adjusted to, by the minority and this very often results in violent confrontation. These ultra nationalists blame the religious minorities and often accuse them for being the reason for extremism, terrorism and

separatism. It is because of the unavoidable role played by religion in the life of minorities the majority religious population regard them as a threat and often yield pressure on the government to rein in the minorities, through the instrumentalities of the State. It is noteworthy, that the identity of those persons, who constitute a “Minority”, varies or changes from one political and historical context to another. Sometimes the issues of minorities are limited to domestic society and at other times, it extends to the international society.

In present day Russia, there is more religiosity than in the previous period, especially in comparison with the Soviet times. However, it is very hard to provide an accurate religious profile of Russia, due to the definitional problems and difficulties involved in the choice of criteria to evaluate the confessional relationship, including the level of religious observance and cultural identification of religious groups. The cultural criterion is particularly relevant in the Russian context. Religious Minorities in Russia, such as the Jews and Muslims have a stronger cultural identity than a religious one. In fact religion is incorporated into the cultural identity of these groups.

The Basic conceptual frame work for this study is the transformation of the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional society. To understand the religious life of a changing society, an analysis of the status of minority religions is an imperative. Particularly in the context of Russia, religious minorities deserve special attention as it forms a new social and sociological pattern. Religious minorities in Russia maintain a structure which has different aspects including their size, internal organization and even international relationships. There are four religions which are considered as traditional religions in Russia on the basis of the *Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Association in 1997*. These religions are: Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. Of these, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism are minority religions. Religious minority definition is appropriate to these groups in one-way or the other, and the problems which they face as a minority group are at times similar and at other times specific to the community. Nonetheless, these groups perfectly fit into the category of being religious minorities.

In Russia's , the privileged position of the majority religion – The Russian Orthodox Church – is more than evident and is often witnessed in the form of preferential treatment that the ROC gets from the State. The majority religion has a strong traditional influence on the Russian

society, a fact openly acknowledged by the highest functionaries of the Russian State. In a situation such as this, minorities in general and religious minorities in particular have been facing serious threats such as loss of identity and discrimination in the hands of the state agencies. Majority chauvinism often passes off as nationalism, thereby resulting in a deep sense of insecurity among minorities and raises serious questions on the willingness of the Russian State to protect the rights and dignity of its citizens belonging to minority religious groups.

The 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation proclaims Russia to be a secular country with provisions within the constitution that guarantees freedom such as, freedom of religious activity and conscience, freedom to proselytize and the separation of Church and State. However, the 1997 Law on Religions provides a special status to the Russian Orthodox Church, by recognizing its traditional legacy. It is noteworthy, that this Law weakens the constitutional provisions on the secular character of the country by legalizing discrimination against the non-traditional religions. This Law defines religious freedom in a very narrow sense, in much variance with the International Guidelines for the protection of minorities.

- Developments in the political and social landscape of Russia in the past two decades reveal that there is widespread of religious intolerance between Russia's Orthodox Christians and other religious minority groups in the country. This strong hostility towards each other is mainly based on religious diversity and gets embedded in socio-economic issues. The religious minorities in Russia are often seen as victims of oppression by the governmental policies that are heavily loaded against them. Despite the constitutional provisions, religious freedom in the Russian Federation is of a limited nature. As democracy is yet to consolidate in Russia, the nation's development towards democratic reform, based on rule of law and protection of human rights including religious freedom also remains uncertain and unconsolidated. Moreover, in a situation where the country is facing serious threats to its unity and integrity from undemocratic and divisive forces, state policies, especially its security policies have evolved in a manner that comes in direct conflict with the interests of minority groups including religious minorities. Consequently, it has resulted in a scenario where state agencies try to control and monitor the development of religion and religious groups in Russia. Paradoxically, the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church, is viewed as positive manifestation of nationalism. Invariably, this



gives a privileged position to the Russian Orthodox Church and its followers in every sphere of Russian life.

Although in regard to the practice of religious freedom, Russia today is much freer than any other time in Russian history including in the pre-Soviet and Soviet period, yet there are issues in regard to minority rights that are of serious concern. It is noteworthy, that throughout the Soviet era, religious belief and practice were strictly repressed by the state authorities on the ground that religious beliefs and believers posed serious obstacles to the state in the obtainment of the Marxist Leninist ideology. Consequently, freedom of religion and human rights in the Soviet state were strictly curtailed. However, despite much improvement in the situation in the sphere of Universal Human Rights and the Freedom of Religion and Belief in Post Soviet Russia, there still exist federal laws that impose severe restrictions on the minorities not only in regard to their religious freedoms but also political participation. Laws in Russia, that govern the Freedom of Association and Religion contains language that effectively prevents many religious groups from registering as organisations and openly practicing and propagating their chosen faith. At the same time, the majority group has a legally guaranteed privileged position in the country that enables it to participate in every facet of Russian life including political.

Although, Russia has declared itself as a secular state, in practice many laws have been introduced by the Russian State that restricts the religious freedom of minorities. The 2002 Law on Extremism became controversial because its definition of extremism was heavily loaded against the religious minorities. The government used this Law as an anti-terror tool to tackle incidents of violence in Russia. It is noteworthy, that the Russian State has been considering drafts against the distribution of religious literatures. Religious organizations are also expected to submit details of their properties to the authorities. Based on such legislation, the authorities have the right to punish individuals as well as organizations without court order. The adherents of minority religious faiths have permission to go to only those religious institutions that have been recognized by the authorities or else they can be punished for indulging in anti-religious activities. Many religious institutions in Russia have been banned in the name of extremist activities. In short the authorities are protecting the Russian Orthodox Church, because they regard it as a part of Russian nationalism. Other religious groups and organizations are considered to be alien to Russian culture and traditions. Though these religious groups are

protected in the shades of the Constitution, but in actual reality, every activity of these groups is monitored by legally empowered state agencies. These Laws clearly aim at restricting the activities of the religious minorities in Russia.

Religious minorities thus are facing discrimination, insecurity, suppression, majority chauvinism and other kind of discrimination that very often goes unaddressed by the State. Since the political participation of religious minorities is marginal in the Russian political system, given the legal restrictions imposed on them, they have not been able to make any kind of impact in governance. At best, they have been able to organize themselves as organizations and groups trying to indirectly influence government policies in the hope of ensuring security and dignity to the members of their community.

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