

CONCEPT AND PRACTICE OF AUTONOMY IN SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY



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INDIA
2002**



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Date: 21.07.2002

CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled “**Concept and Practice of Autonomy in Soviet Central Asia**” submitted by **Mukesh Kumar Mishra**, in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University, is to the best of our knowledge, his own work ^{and} has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

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***DEDICATED TO MY
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Acknowledgement

I am highly indebted to my "Gurudev" Professor K Varikoo for his valuable advice and guidance at all stages in preparation of this work. But for his unfailing patience, critical observations and continuous encouragement, the study could not have been finalized. I am thankful to Prof. Dawna Norbu, Prof. G N Jha, Prof. M Kaul of School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. I am specially thankful to my friend Vidhan Pathak whose companionship all the while has been a source of intellectual stimulation. I am equally thankful to my friend Aparajita. No words would be sufficient to express the care and concern she has bestowed on me.


I am grateful to many staff members and librarians of JNU, JDSA, and Shastri Bhavan. I am specially thankful to Dr. Krishna Gopal, Dalveerji, Sudarshanji, Sangramji and Mallickji.

I am also thankful to my numerous friends from JNU. I am specially indebted to G N Dubey, Satishji, Sanjaylalji, Rajesh Sinha, K G Tyagi and Gangesh, Sudhir, Ajitabh and Tarun.

I must express my thanks to my family members, Pramod Bhaiya and Bhabhiji. I am also thankful to Vijay Bhaiya. Their constant faith in me, encouragement and cooperation has been a great source of inspiration to me.

Mr. Ambros Minj has also provided his prompt professional help at very short notices. I am very thankful to them.

Though my work was helped by many, I owe total responsibility for all the shortcomings.



MUKESH KUMAR MISHRA

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P R E F A C E

Former Soviet Central Asia comprised of five republics – Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tadzhikistan and Kyrgyzstan named after their respective ‘titular nationality’. The demographic profile of these Republics had an important bearing on the nationality question in Soviet Central Asia. The crystallization of ethnic identities among the Central Asian peoples as manifested in their varied linguistic heritage, disparate social and cultural origins and residence in well defined territories was an important determinant of the nationality question in Central Asia. Thus, the distinct peculiarities of the peoples of Central Asia regarding history, culture, religion and language had an important bearing on the nationality question in Central Asia. The dominant ethnic groups besides being provided with their territorial locii were also invested with a political and administrative apparatus which served to strengthen their ethno-national identity. The creation of autonomous republics for each of the five dominant ethnic groups and investing them with government apparatus soon after the consolidation of establishment of Soviet authority in Central Asia served to consolidate the historical processes that accentuated ethnic-identity formation. Thus, these Republics were built on the foundations of distinct ethno-cultural history.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which emerged from the rubbles of the “Bolshevik Revolution” of 1917, remained till its demise in 1991 one of the world’s most powerful nation state, based on wide cultural, regional and linguistic diversities, survived as a ‘so called’ socialist federal state, adopting the Marxist-Leninist principles of ‘self-determination’ and ‘autonomy’. Soviet nationalities policy was based on the objective laws of economic development to break down ethnic boundaries and achieve the objective of international integration. The Central Asian peoples achieved considerable economic and cultural progress during the Soviet period. Soviet nationalities policy adopted a flexible approach in State construction and solving nationalities question in Soviet Central Asia. It granted national autonomy to Central Asian Republics to develop their national identity and statehood. Soviet policy in Central Asia consolidated the ethno-political identity of the Central Asian Republics, providing each titular nationality with a fixed territorial locus.

The politics in the ex-Soviet Union, in the wake of the inauguration of a liberal regime by Gorbachev, was largely governed on nationalist lines with a host of organisations and fronts airing nationalist demands and grievances there was ethnic/cultural revival and the widespread occurrence of ethnic conflicts in Soviet Central Asia in the post-1985 period. In the face of rapidly deteriorating ethnic relations, Gorbachev suggested bringing

far reaching reforms in the federal setup of the Soviet Union. However, it became clear with the demands for greater autonomy and sovereignty that only a reconsideration at the very bases of Soviet Statehood would satisfy the aspirations of various republics and nationalities. Gorbachev after being elected as President called for the conclusion of a “New Union Treaty”. Certain characteristics of the treaty virtually amounted to the dissolution of the Soviet State paradoxically under the plea of saving the State. A series of declarations of Republican independence thereafter signed the death warrant of the first Communist state in the world.

In the light of the above mentioned facts, this study has attempted to make an objective analysis of the concept of ‘autonomy’ and its practice in Soviet Central Asia. This dissertation, in its first chapter, *Soviet Nationalities Policy : Theoretical perspective*, seeks to analyse the Soviet nationality policy formulated by Lenin and as it evolved under his successors, Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev. The influence of Marx and Engel’s writings on the national question has also been evaluated. Finally, the impact of the policies of Gorbachev i.e. *Perestroiska* and *glasnost* on the emergence of ethno-nationalism has been studied.

The second chapter entitled, *Formation of Soviet Central Asian Republics*, discusses the national state delimitation in the Central Asia and the process of formation of Soviet Central Asian Republics.

The third Chapter, '*Extent and Pattern of Autonomy in Soviet Central Asian Republics*' explains the pattern and practice of 'Autonomy' and 'Federalism' in Soviet Central Asian Republics. It tries to highlight the problems and prospects of 'Autonomy' and 'Federalism' in the former Soviet Central Asian Republics.

The fourth or final Chapter makes an effort to comparatively analyse the grounds and implications of 'Autonomy and Federalism' in Soviet Central Asia and reaches at a critical and logical conclusion.

CHAPTER I

SOVIET NATIONALITIES POLICY: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Soviet Union represented a complex mixture of various ethnic groups dating back to antiquity, with a large number of races and ethnic groups diverse in language, religion, culture and customs. The first All Russian Census taken in 1897 estimated that nearly 104 distinct nationalities inhabited the territory of the Tsarist Empire.¹ The people of Soviet Union were inter-related through old ethnic ties, which accounted for a number of common features in their culture, economy and way of life. Their common historical development and joint struggle against foreign invaders strengthened these bonds of unity. Yet the ethno-cultural and religious diversity gave rise to incipient nationalist movements and the emergence of the national question as an outstanding issue in the former Soviet Union.

In spite of the growing importance of the national question, few political parties gave serious consideration to it. However, the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDRP) endeavored to break away completely from the influence of Great Russian nationalism. Its growing awareness about the national question was indicated by the manifesto it issued in its founding Congress in 1898, and at its Second Congress in 1903. The RSDRP adopted a resolution calling for the right of nations to

self-determination.² The controversy on the right of nations to self-determination in the Social Democratic circles did not end there. The Polish Social Democrat, Rosa Luxemburg, charged that the recognition accorded by RSDRP to the right of nations to self-determination was tantamount to supporting the bourgeois nationalism of the oppressed nation.

In the writings of Marx and Engel the treatment of the question of national liberation and self-determination was peripheral. Their views on various issues pertaining to national question are to be mainly found in relation to its bearing on the concept and practice of proletarian revolution. The writings of Marx and Engel on the Irish problem marked an important stage in evolution of their thought on the national question. However, they never thought that colonial conditions in various countries of Asia and Africa would give rise to powerful anti-imperialist struggle. Marx and Engel regarded colonialism primarily as an economic issue. Neither Marx nor Engel offered a precise definition of the concepts Nation and Nationalism. Nationalism was virtually neglected or its significance underplayed in Marxist theory and was described as a part of an illusory communal interest. However, at the level of political activism, both Marx and Engel acknowledge nationalism as "real force." The duo, in the

¹ Avrahm Yarmolinsky, *The Jews and other Minor Nationalities Under the Soviets*, London, Cassell, 1928, p.141

² R. Vaidyanath, *The Formation of the Soviet Central Asian Republics*, New Delhi People's Publishing House, 1967, p.251

opinion of Walker Connor, were influenced more substantively by national concept than they were probably aware. Walker Connor while referring to the theoretical and practical strains of Marxism states, “this most famous credo of nationalism was drafted by history’s most famous internationalist.”³ Thus with the rise of nationalism as an important socio-political phenomenon, the Marxists were forced to operate on two relatively different planes, discussing nationalism in theory and yet acknowledging it as a real force in practice.

Marx viewed nation as a historical phenomenon of the capitalist social system. According to Marx, the bourgeoisie, the dominant class within the capitalist system fosters nationalism in three ways:

- a) Conflicting economic interests between the imperial countries give rise to national hostility.
- b) Exploitation of the colonial country by the imperial country engenders national consciousness in the former.
- c) The bourgeoisie employs the tool of nationalism to maintain its domination over the working class.⁴

Evolution of Soviet Nationalities Policy: Under Lenin and Stalin

Lenin’s Soviet nationality policy is essentially rooted in Marxist thought. Lenin recognized the revolutionary significance of the national

³ Eric Hobsbawm, “Some Reflections on the Break up of Britain”, *New Left Review*, September – October, 1977, p.23

⁴ Michael Lowy, *On Changing the World*, New Jersey, New York: 1992, pp. 55-56

question in the colonial countries and he worked to harness its revolutionary potential to further the cause of the proletarian revolution in Russia. Lenin encountered theoretical opposition from Rosa Luxemburg and Left-Bolsheviks on this issue.

The chief tenets of Leninist formulations on the national question evolved in the process of a long drawn polemical debate in the first place between Lenin and Austro-Marxists and later between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg and finally between Lenin and the Left-Bolsheviks.⁵ In his theoretical diatribe against his socialist colleagues, Lenin was helped by Stalin whose writing *Marxism and National Question* together with Leninist writings on the issue provided the framework for the formulation of the 'Soviet Nationality Policy'. It would be appropriate, therefore, to briefly outline 'nationality debate' between Lenin and other Socialists.

Austro-Hungarian empire, like Russia was a multinational state and the problems of the relationship between the numerous nationalities – Austrian, Hungarian, Poles, Czechs, Ruthenians and other small ethnic groups was one of extraordinary importance. The Austrian Social Democrats discussed the nationality problems and advocated ways to solve it. To eliminate the national animosities which threatened the overall solidarity of the proletariat, Otto Bauer came up with a solution to the

⁵ V.I. Lenin and J.V. Stalin on National and Colonial question, from *Selection* Calcutta, 1970. pp. 9-10.

national question in the Austro- Hungarian empire. Bauer put forward two important propositions:

- a) The empire be transformed into a federal state with the nationalities administering its own territory as far as cultural matters are concerned.
- b) Secondly seeing that certain nationalities were spread out over large areas of the empire not inhabiting a fixed territory which could be transformed into an administrative unit, he proposed that such nationalities as well as territorial ones would be represented in legislative and administrative organs and that members of every nationality would be given representation and protection by his national delegation.⁶

In an article entitled 'On Cultural National Autonomy', Lenin denounced the Austrian Socialist formulations on the national question.⁷ He based his criticism on the following suppositions, which were latter applied to the Russian situation.

- a) Lenin rejected the constitutional means of solving the national question. He was conscious of the fact that the nationalist

⁶ Op. cit., R. Vaidyanath, p. 252.

⁷ Lenin a letter to Maxim Gorky; as cited in R. Vaidyanath, p. 253.

fermentations among the non-Russians nationalities constituted a very potent revolution, which the socialists should try to harness.

- b) The doctrine of national cultural autonomy was abhorrent to Lenin because it implied the federalist and decentralized reorganization of the Socialist Party. This doctrine had repercussions within the Russian Social Democratic Party.⁸

Both Lenin and Stalin denounced the ‘cultural national autonomy’ concept of the Austro-Marxists. Before commencing his attack on the Austrian Social-Democrats, Stalin elaborated the Marxist concept of nation. According to him a nation comprised of four fundamental elements (i) Community of territory, (ii) Community of language, (iii) Community of economic life and (iv) Community of psychological make up. Stalin defined nation as a “historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and Psychological make up, manifested in a community of culture.”⁹ He then proceeded to criticize Otto Bauer for his historical definition of the nation. A nation for Bauer is the “aggregate of people bound into a community of character by a community of state”¹⁰. Stalin accused Bauer of creating a mystical concept of the nation and of ignoring the objective character of nationhood and changing historical and economic conditions which produced it. Stalin was of the opinion that the

8 Ibid., pp. 259-260.

9 Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question” in *Selection*, pp. 80-81.

10 Lenin, “The Irish Rebellion of 1916” in *Selection*, p.52

nation was not a permanent unit but simply a symptom of a certain phase of historical evolution, namely the phase of rising Capitalism. Stalin's work, *Marxism and the national question*, established Stalin's reputation as a Marxist theoretician of note on the national question. He expressed concern at the growing tide of nationalism all over Russia. To protect the workers from the general 'epidemic', Stalin called upon the Social Democrats to unfurl their banner of internationalism and to stress the unity and indivisibility of the class struggle.¹¹ Both Lenin and Stalin did not approve the national cultural autonomy concept of the Austro-Marxist, as it would make the workers look to their national bourgeoisie for guidance rather than to their proletarian class brothers.

The other theoretical opponent of Lenin on the national question was Rosa Luxemburg who was seconded by extreme left wing within the Bolshevik group, Bukharin, Pyatakov and Radek. Rosa Luxemburg in her famous book, *The Accumulation of Capital*, stated that the right to self-determination of nations implies in reality to the support for bourgeois nationalism. She expressed the undesirability of the Communists engaging themselves in bourgeois democratic affairs such as the national problem also for the reasons that the right of self-determination of nations is an abstract and not a physical right and that the independence of small nation

¹¹ Op. cit., R Vaidyanath, p.254

is utopian from the economic point of view. She was of the opinion that the Socialists should prepare for an immediate proletarian revolution.¹²

While refuting the theoretical assumptions of the Austrian Marxists, Rosa Luxemburg and the Left- Bolsheviks, Lenin formulated his own theory on the national question. The sharpening of national conflicts in Eastern Europe especially in Balkans and in Russia too convinced Lenin that the national question could not be evaded. On the undesirability of the Socialists engaging themselves in bourgeois democratic affairs such as the national question, Lenin admitted that "Marxism is irreconcilable with nationalism even if it is the fairest, purest, most refined and civilized nationalism. Marxism advocates internationalism in place of nationalism of any kind."¹³ However, he accused Rosa Luxemburg of being blind to historical realities. Both he and Stalin pointed out that nation was historical category belonging to the epoch of rising capitalism. The development of capitalism was everywhere accompanied by the growth of national movements seeking to establish national states. These national movements were being spearheaded by bourgeoisie.¹⁴

Lenin believed that the cause of the proletarian revolution could only be furthered by resolving the national question. Departing from Marx's formulation, Lenin called for active collaboration between the

¹² Op. cit., Michael Lowy, pp.59-60

¹³ R. Vaidyanath, *The Formation of the Soviet Central Asia Republics*, New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1967, p.255

¹⁴ Ibid., R. Vaidyanath, p.251

progressive nationalism of Eastern Europe and that of the colonies with the working class movement to jointly fight imperialism by voicing the demand of the latter of political self-determination. Lenin, recognizing the revolutionary potential of the national movements, which he supported for being directed against oppression. The emphasis of Lenin on resolving the national question on a priority basis is evident from his outburst against Karl Radek, one of the members of the extreme Bolshevik group.¹⁵

Lenin and his associates were preoccupied with advocating the right of nation to self-determination. However, the basic Marxist hostility to nationalism did not prevent Lenin from recognizing the historical legitimacy of national movements. He asked the critics of the nationalities policy of the RSDRP to ponder over the national question in Russia, as it had existed at the beginning of the twentieth century. He drew attention to the fact that except for the Great Russian nationality, other nationalities were languishing under the oppressive Tsarist regime, which denied them their legitimate national claims. Reasserting the Marxist dictum that no nation could be free if it oppressed other nations, Lenin declared that the only way of showing disapproval of Tsarist policy of national oppression was by recognizing the right of oppressed nations to complete political self-determination.¹⁶

15 Lenin on "the Right of Nations of Self-determination in *Selection*, pp.13-16

16 *Op.cit.*, R Vaidyanath, pp.256-257

In Lenin's opinion, such an advocacy of the right of nations to self-determination becomes obligatory. He thought it was impossible to break away from the occurred history of Tzarism in the national sphere without ensuring complete equality of all nations and making the recognition of the right of self-determination the cornerstone of the nationalities policy of the future socialist government of Russia. Lenin made it clear that the demand for self-determination did not contradict his basic centralist views. He wrote, "We demand the freedom of self-determination, i.e. independence, i.e. the freedom of secession for the oppressed nations, not because we dream of economic disintegration or because we cherish the idea of small states, but on the contrary, because we are in favour of large states and the closer unity and even the fusion of nations but on a truly democratic, truly international basis which is inconceivable without the freedom of secession".¹⁷

Most of the Bolsheviki, including Stalin, Pyatakov, Bukharin and others, treated the right of self-determination as a doctrine valid only for capitalist conditions and considered that it had no place under Socialism. However, countering the thesis of Stalin, Pyatakov and others that the right of self-determination of nations had no meaning under socialism, Lenin stated that the right was as valid under capitalism as during the initial stages of socialism. He categorically asserted, "the necessity of proclaiming and granting of freedom to all oppressed nations will be as

¹⁷ Lenin, *Sochineni* (2nd edition, Moscow, 1935) KVIII, p.328

urgent in the socialist revolution as it was urgent for the victory of the bourgeois democratic revolution¹⁸. Lenin in his reply to the critics defended the right of nations to self-determination both under imperialism as well as under the initial stage of socialism. Lenin developed a working formula for the application of the right to self-determination by the future socialist government of Russia. Lenin strongly condemned the view that Social Democrats should cease their advocacy of the right of self-determination. Lenin rejected Rosa Luxemburg's thesis that the objective conditions were ripe for an immediate proletarian revolution and that the socialists should not engage in bourgeois matters of national question. He argued, that it had become essential to formulate the right of self-determination and other democratic rights and advocate them in order to draw a wider stratum of population both within the East European states and in the colonies into the revolutionary struggle.¹⁹

However, this did not mean that Lenin thought that socialism would perpetuate nationalism for all time. On the contrary, he firmly believed that socialism would not only abolish the present division of mankind into small national states but would ultimately merge them. However, Lenin and comrades though dedicated to the right of self-determination of nations were more committed to the socialist revolution and the unity of the working class movement. He was hostile to any suggestion or measure

¹⁸ Op. cit., R. Vaidyanath, pp.261

¹⁹ Ibid., p.39

which would bring about division in the working class and which ultimately would harm the cause of socialist revolution. Adopting the relativist approach of Marx and Engel towards the national movement, Lenin often argued that the revolutionary potential of the national movements should be harnessed to fight imperialism and consequently promote the cause of socialism. Thus, the right of self-determination of nations did not prevent the Bolsheviks from proclaiming the primacy of the claims of socialism over national state to achieve a socialist order. Leninist formulation on the nationality question was informed by several abiding concerns. First, sharp distinction was made between the nationalism of the oppressed (the non-Russians of Russia), which were to be treated with empathy as an expression of true grievances and the wholly objectionable nationalism of the oppressors (the Tsarist government dominated by the Russians), which was to be fought tooth and nail. Secondly, non-Russians in the empire had the right to set up their own nation states, by exercising the right to self-determination. This clearly reflected Lenin's awareness of the revolutionary potential of ethnically defined liberation struggles and his wish to use them, which he did with considerable effect in the October Revolution of 1917. Thirdly, however, the supreme task was to spread the socialist revolution and ethnic demands were secondary to this and to be subsumed under it.

Thus one of the first acts of the Bolsheviks after they seized power in Petrograd in October 1917 was to release a document entitled, Rights of the Peoples of Russia.²⁰

The rights comprised the following guarantees:

- (i) The equality and sovereignty of the people of Russia.
- (ii) The rights of the people of Russia to free self-determination even to the point of separation and formation of independent states.
- (iii) The abolition of all kinds of national and national-religious privileges and limitations.
- (iv) The free development of national minorities and ethnic groups inhabiting Russia.

These four principles later were to form the basis of the Soviet nationality policy.

Even before Stalin assumed the reins of the government, his point of view on the nationality question had begun showing deviation from the Leninist formulation. In the Seventh Congress of the Party held in April 1917, the drafting commission under the influence of Stalin and Piatakov virtually rejected the Leninist interpretation of the right of self-determination. Under the conditions of socialism, Stalin and his followers argued that the solution of splitting of great state formations into small national states lost its meaning and gave the slogan of "away with the frontiers." Stalin and Piatakov's stance angered Lenin who remarked, "We

²⁰ Ibid., pp.263-264

have been arguing so much about this question ever since 1903 that it is difficult to say much about it now. Go where you please. He who does not accept this point of view is an annexionist, a chauvinist.”²¹ Lenin denounced the resolution as being an expression of chauvinism. Defending the right of nations to self-determination once again, Lenin declared that there was nothing if Finland, Poland and the Ukraine broke away from Russia and branded those who opposed their right to such a separation as chauvinists. As a result of this personal intervention of Lenin, this draft was rejected and the Congress by a substantial majority adopted a resolution on the national question which declared that all nations composing Russia must have full right to separate and to form independent states. Denial of such a right, and failure to take measures that guarantee its practical realization, are tantamount to supporting the policy of seizures and annexations. For nations not desiring to separate from Russia, i.e. not desiring to exercise their right to self-determination, the Congress recommended, regional autonomy, abolition of control from above, abolition of compulsory state language, drawing of boundary lines of the self-governing and autonomous regions on the basis of consideration by the local population itself of economic and ethnic conditions, of the national composition of the population etc.

Stalin repudiating the right to secession stated, “The demand for the secession of the border regions from Russia as the form that should be

²¹ Lenin, *Sochineniia* (2nd edition, Moscow, 1935) pp. 276-277.

given to the relations between the center and the border regions must be rejected²². Stalin and his supporter, the Red Army commander Ordzhikidze outrightly annexed Georgia in 1921. Local Bolsheviks were also curbed and their quest for autonomy dismissed as “National Communism.” Lenin on his death bed wrote, “I have been very remiss for not having intervened energetically and decisively enough in the notorious question of autonomisation”²³, thereby reasserting his belief in the need for positive discrimination towards the nationalism of the oppressed. Stalin’s ascendance witnessed the absolute confrontation of power through the virtual domination of party organization, the army and the political police which made any right to self-determination only a formality.²⁴ Police systematically destroyed any support for and any expression of local autonomy regardless of its roots. The early years of Stalin’s regime saw purges of “bourgeois nationalists” who were eliminated or removed from party positions for voicing nationalist demands. The forcible deportation of whole nationalities – Crimean Tatars, Meshkhetians, Germans, Chechens, etc, from their homelands on charges of treason was reflective of the dictatorial power of Stalin and his insensitiveness to ethnic feelings. Stalin declared at the Tenth Party Congress in 1921, “the essence of the national question in the Soviet Union is to liquidate the economic, political and

²² Stalin in *Selection* no.18 p.115

²³ Theodor Shanin, “Ethnicity in the Soviet Union”, *Analytical perceptions and political strategies in comparative studies in Society and History*, Vol.31, 1989 p.418

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.115

cultural backwardness of the nationalities. We inherited this backwardness, from the past. We do this in order to give the backward peoples the opportunity to catch up with central Russia both in governmental, cultural and economic respects”.²⁵

Stalin was playing the role of what Lenin would have described, the Great Russian chauvinist. A rewriting of history began where Russian Princes and Tzars were glorified. Stalin’s pronouncement during the victory celebrations in 1945, described the Russians as “the leading people of the Soviet Union”. However, he did not tamper with the federal format of the constitution and gave adequate impetus to the development and preservation of cultural and linguistic expression of the ethnic groups. Successors of Stalin except for certain modifications continued to follow a policy with regard to the nationalities as formulated by Lenin and Stalin. This was the form into which the Soviet nationalities policy crystallized after its evolution from the platform of the RSDRP.

Acceptance of The Federal Scheme

Before 1917 both Lenin and Stalin were staunch opponents of federalism and favored the establishment of a highly centralized unitary state structure in Russia. Marx had severely rebuked Proudhon for advocating federalism as a solution to national problem. Lenin and Stalin too criticized the Austro-Marxists for proposing federalism as a solution to

²⁵ Dan N Jacobs and Theresa M Hill, “*Soviet Ethnic Policy in the 1980*” in Jacoph, L Noges (ed), *Theoretical consistency and political reality*, New York, 1983, pp.162-163

the nationality problem in the Habsburg empire.²⁶ Lenin had written that Marxist are “opposed to federation and decentralization” and that “while and in so far as, different nations constitute a single state, Marxists will never under any circumstances advocate either the federal principle or decentralization.” However, towards the beginning of 1918 when they were confronted with the task of building the new multi-national Soviet state structure, their former hostility to federalism underwent a radical change. They recognized that the adoption of a federal constitution was “a step forward” in the objective of merging the workers of different nationalities and in unifying their economic resources for building socialism. In the declaration of the “Rights of the Toiling and Exploited Peoples” adopted by the Third All Russian Congress of Soviets on 25 January, 1918, it was stated that “the Soviet Russian Republic is established on the basis of a free union of free nations as a federation of Soviet national republics.”²⁷

In April 1918, a constitutional commission was established to prepare a draft of a new document to describe the relations between the regions and the centre. The commission recommended the creation of federal units based on national-territorial principle. The principle gave formal status and political recognition to the leading nationalities and recognized their claim to homeland. The new territorial-nationalities were

²⁶ Lenin views on federation, Centralization and Autonomy, in *Selection*, pp.9-10

also invested with administrative apparatus to look after the affairs of the federal units. The national-territorial principle thus gave a sense of self determination, a promise of autonomy and a feeling of natural representation to the national minorities.

For implementing its nationalities policy the Soviet government created a special organ, the Peoples Commissariat for Nationality Affairs (Narkomnats) with Stalin as the first chairman for overseeing the implementation of the Soviet nationality policy. Towards the end of 1918 the organs of the Narkomnats were also established within various autonomous territories.²⁸

Thus, soon after the establishment of the Soviet state, Bolsheviks were equipped with both a policy framework and an administrative machinery for carrying out the momentous task of building a supra-national state and implementation of the Leninist formulations on the nationality question. In place of the policy of the national state pursued by the Tsarist regime in the multi-national Russian empire, the Soviet government put into practice a policy which aimed at building a number of republics which in proportion to the size of their territory, population and economic resources, were given an appropriate degree of internal autonomy. The expression “national in form but socialist in content”

²⁷ Isabelle Kriendler, “*The Soviet Deported Nationalities; A Summary*”, *Soviet Studies*, Vol. Xxxv iii, (July, 1986), pp.387-388.

²⁸ *Ibid*, pp.9-10

describes the reconciliation effected by the Bolsheviks in their nationalities policy between the rival claims of nationalism and socialism.

Soviet Nationality Policy Under Khrushchev and Brezhnev

Khrushchev's nationality policy was in many ways, a departure from Stalin's. He sought to undo the harsh measures perpetrated by Stalin. In 1956, Khrushchev condemned his predecessor's crimes and acknowledged that "under Stalin there had been 'monstrous' and gross violations of the basic Leninist principles of the nationalities policy of the Soviet state. The entire nations had been deported on spurious ground. Khrushchev sought to undo the harsh measures perpetrated by Stalin. Charges of treason against many of these nationalities were withdrawn and they were rehabilitated.²⁹ The harsh face of Stalin's regime was watered down by putting an end to the mass terror tactics and the "thaw" brought much greater freedom of expression and the rehabilitation of national cultures. However a strict watch on the manifestations of nationalist tendencies was kept and any such appearances were brutally curbed.

Khrushchev came to realize that in order to gain control of the ministerial apparatus, decentralization of the decision making process was imperative. He sought to devolve power by shifting away from the branch principle of organization and invested the decision making authority to the local bodies. A reflection of the growing confidence of the central authority

²⁹ Op. Cit., Isabelle Kriendler, pp.387-388

in the local nationalities was seen in the indigenisation of the party and government machineries unlike the Stalinist regime. The central authority was now willing to allow decisions to be made by the local elites.³⁰ However, Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation process was reversed after 1958 in order to promote the assimilationist policy.

In theoretical pronouncements, Khrushchev expressed optimistic exuberance when in the Twenty Second Party Congress in 1961, he remarked, "The party has solved one of the most complex problem which has plagued mankind for ages and remains acute in the world of capitalism to this day, the problem of relations between nations." Khrushchev spoke of *Sliianie* (Fusion) of nations.³¹ This gave currency to a debate that since the national question was now solved, the rationale for the existence of the federal republics had evaporated. P. G. Semenov initiated this debate among scholars who suggested that the federal division had outlived its usefulness and might be dispensed with in the near future. In fact the idea of "defederalization" had gained such wide currency that Twenty Second Party Congress, in October 1961 proposed, "the borders between the Union Republics are increasingly losing their former significance since life is organized on a single socialist foundation and they are all united into one family by common vital interest and are advancing together towards a

³⁰ Op. Cit., Dan N Jacobs and Theresa M Hill, pp.162-163

³¹ Gregory Gleason, *Federalism and Nationalism, the USSR*, Boulder, 1990, p.34

single goal, Communism.” However, surprisingly nothing came out of the party proclamation.

Brezhnev who did not announce a formal nationality policy until 1972, contradicted the theoretical formulation of Khrushchev. On the occasion of the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of USSR, He propagated the formula which became the hallmark of the Brezhnev period. He adopted a dialectical solution to the national question. Brezhnev adopted a compromise formula that gave due importance to national distinctiveness. He pronounced that the Soviet nationality policy, in sharp contrast to Khrushchev, advocated the *rastvet* (development) of the nations and *sblizhenie* (rapprochement) of nations. Proclaiming himself to be against the forcible increase in the pace of *sblizhenie* process, Brezhnev maintained that the best national traditions, values and tendencies would be promoted in the Soviet multinational state. Brezhnev policies led to a revival of national cultures. The atheistic propaganda in the Central Asian region lost much of its punch and drive.³²

Brezhnev’s handling of the federal republics had an important bearing on the nationality relations. He continued the policy of recruitment of natives in the higher levels of party organization . The national elites were given considerable leverage in administering their own republics so long as republic’s economic performance was satisfactory and nationalism was kept in check. However, Brezhnev’s patronage led to nepotistic style

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of functioning at the republican level, which was more glaringly evident in Central Asia.

Gorbachev and the Nationality Question

Soon after assuming the leadership, Gorbachev boldly began to unfold his ideas of overhauling the Soviet system. He began by arguing that socialism essentially meant a humane and democratic society and that the Soviet Union must create such a political system which could function under unrestricted democratic control and guidance of the Soviet people as a whole. To achieve this objective he pleaded for frank debates and discussions and for participation of the people in the affairs of the country. He called for an end to censorship and free flow of information. These ideas soon crystallized into what came to be known as *glasnost*. Close on the heels of *glasnost*, Gorbachev embarked on a comprehensive restructuring of the Soviet society. *Perestroika* as the new programme was christened, which meant, at the political level, introduction of democratic norm and conduct in the functioning of the government. However, the major thrust of *perestroika* was to introduce basic changes in the planning, management and functioning of the Soviet command economy which had been for the last few decades marked by stagnation, low productivity, shortages, inferior quality consumer goods, rampant official corruption and a flourishing black market. *Perestroika* and *glasnost* though not linked in

³² Michael Rywkin, "Islam and the New Soviet Man", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.6 (1987), pp.28-29

any way to the objective of bringing about changes in the 'nationality relations' virtually transformed the "nationality question" in the USSR and brought it to the fore of the national agenda.³³

In the pre-Gorbachevian period the all powerful central authority used its overwhelming political and coercive clout to impose its authority and decisions on the republics. However, with the inauguration of the era of *glasnost* and *Perestroika* things began to change and the sphere of nationality relations did not remain untouched by these far-reaching changes. Promotion of *glasnost* and pluralism and loosening of the coercive control mechanisms oversaw devolution of certain kind of "political resources" to the periphery resulting in widespread ethnic activism.

Gorbachev sponsored *glasnost* fostered a climate of open discussion and debate on virtually all issues including the nationality question. The new practice of deliberating on and inviting criticisms of the past and present served to accentuate ethnic consciousness and national differences. For instance an open review of Stalin's policy during the second world war which was referred as the finest example of the Soviet unity, now served to intensify ethnic antagonism towards the central authority. During the second world war, Stalin's mass deportation of certain nationalities (Meshkhetians, Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, Chechens etc) and the

³³ P. Goldman (ed.) *From Union to Commonwealth; Nationalism and separatism in the Soviet Republics*, 1992, pp.45-49

dissolution of the homeland of many of these ethnic groups and the Stalin-Hitler pact costing the Baltic republics their independence came in for scathing criticism, especially from the concerned ethnic groups. Secondly, critical examination of the state policies, particularly with reference to the language, culture, religion and history of the various ethnic groups gave rise to a widespread perception that these policies were discriminatory promoting Russification and threatening the ethno-national identity of the groups concerned. Thirdly, the discussions also pertained to the inequalities inherent in the federal structure. The new writings emphasised upon the necessity of restructuring the politico-economic framework of the Soviet state and of establishing a genuine federal arrangement. The Soviet press was organized along ethno-linguistic and ethno-territorial lines rather than functional ones. With the result, the press tended to provide a "national perspective" of the policies of the government, and the happenings and events. In this way the republican press provided stimulus to national activism.³⁴ The local intelligentsia played a leading role in the debate and discussion on nationality issues. Spurred by a sense of ethnic discrimination and the need to promote their language and culture, they found the climate of *glasnost* opportune to organize themselves into clubs or people's fronts to articulate the aspirations and demands of their ethnic groups. They began mobilizing public opinion and even launched agitations on the need to promote greater democratization in the republics,

³⁴ Paul Goble, "Ethnic Politics in the USSR", *Problems of Communism*, July-August, 1989, p.3

to foster the growth of national language and culture and finally to protect environment and advance the economic interests of the republic. In course of time these fronts including the *Birlik and Erk*, especially the former emerged as the champions of the ethnic cause in Central Asia.

Various organs of the police state were systematically dismantled or considerably eroded. The loosening of the coercive control apparatus “contributed to an explosion in public activism throughout the Soviet Union.”³⁵ In the pre-*glasnost* period, demonstrations and public protests were few because there was every likelihood of the participants being persecuted or punished. However, since Gorbachev assumed the realms of power, both the number of demonstrations and the participants increased dramatically. The central authority as well as the republican leadership showed willingness to negotiate with these groups. However, more importantly most of these demonstrations were ethno-nationalist in nature.

Gorbachev changed the matrix of Soviet politics. There was a sea change in the Soviet politics with the arrival of Gorbachev. Public opinion now emerged as an important factor in Soviet politics. In a desperate bid to legitimate its rule and authority, both in the eyes of the central authority and the population over which it ruled, the local authority sought rapprochement with the dominant nationality of the republic heeding public views and voicing their concerns. Gorbachev, in an attempt to overcome the stagnation in the Soviet economy especially, in the context of

Central Asia has cut subsidies and reduced amounts of turnover tax redistribution. Massive irrigation projects were abandoned and the republics were made to rely on their own resource mobilization. The economic measures alienated the republics further and consequently infused an economic content to Uzbek ethno-nationalism.

Glasnost and *perestroika* had another important bearing on the nationalities question. The twin policies resulted in a gradual but steady erosion of the “traditional normative framework” of the USSR and also gave increasing impetus to the ideologies of democracy and distributive justice with the perception and projection of the ruling communist regime as being autocratic, discriminatory and oppressive. There was a sea change with the introduction of *Glasnost and Perestroika*, in the position and power of the CPSU. Gorbachev, perceiving reluctant support from the party apparatus and bureaucracy to his reform endeavors sought to mobilize public opinion in an attempt to garner support for his reform programmes. The CPSU General Secretary sought to mobilize public opinion in favor of restructuring. In his enthusiastic fervor, he went overboard displaying considerable lack of political astuteness and skill and supported all forms of popular activism. This encouraged more and more groups to take up issues concerning people at large and most of these issues were ethno-nationally inspired. Hundreds of informal organizations mushroomed up overnight in the Baltic Republics, Central Asian Republics

³⁵ Ibid., p.3

and the Trans-Caucasian Republics demanding protection and promotion of their language and culture and raised vital issues of economic and political relationship between the Republics and Moscow. The CPSU and the government came under severe flak from these informal groups. Moreover, Gorbachev denounced various aspects of Soviet history. He thus called into question the legitimatising principle of the Soviet state and thereby undermined the ideological hegemony of the Marxist-Leninist theory. The gaps between socialist theory and practice were revealed. With the quick delegitimisation of the communist party and ideology, nationalist causes occupied the political space which were created by Gorbachev's policies.

Gorbachev showed little interest in either tackling specific situations or formulating a nationality policy designed to solve the ethnic question. His non-performance in this sphere of Soviet life is noteworthy. The statements of Gorbachev in the initial years of his reign on the nationality question seem to assume that there was nothing more to Soviet national relations than "boundless harmony," "friendship and brotherhood." He never tired of repeating the platitudes of his predecessors that the nationality question had been "solved". On May 8, 1985, in a speech on the Fortieth anniversary of the victory in World War Second, Gorbachev

echoing Brezhnev remarked, "The blossoming of nations and nationalities is organically connected to their all round drawing together."³⁶

The first inklings of reform in the nationality policy was seen at the nineteenth party conference in the summer of 1988. Gorbachev outlined his first tentative ideas to restructure the Soviet nationality policy which were chiefly related to the working of the Soviet federation. In the face of rapidly deteriorating ethnic relations with major inter-ethnic conflicts erupting in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Uzbekistan, Gorbachev suggested bringing far-reaching reforms in the federal setup of the Soviet Union in the first serious discussion on the nationality question. However, it became clear by the early 1990s with the demands for greater sovereignty acquiring intensity that only a reconsideration of the very basis of Soviet statehood would satisfy the aspirations of the various republics and nationalities. Gorbachev after being elected as President called for the conclusion of a "New Union Treaty". The draft advocated the formation of a "Sovereign federal democratic republic" based upon the voluntary union of republics with equal rights each of which would have the option of choosing its own form of government. The union treaty was to serve as the basis of a new constitution and the framework of a new government was also outlined.³⁷

³⁶ Op. cit., Alexander J Motyl, pp.156-157

³⁷ Stephen White, *Gorbachev and after*, New York, 1992, pp.173-174

The characteristics of the new union treaty were in many respects of far-reaching consequences. The republics were allowed to choose their own forms of property rights and government, which constituted a major attack on the existing state structure.

Gorbachev negating the massive mandate of the acceptance of the New Union Treaty abjectly surrendered to certain other amendments in the treaty, which virtually amounted to the dissolution of the Soviet state paradoxically under the plea of saving the state. Even this diluted treaty was rejected by five of the fourteen republics of the ex-Soviet Union. A series of declaration of republican independence thereafter signed the death-warrant of the first communist state in the world.

CHAPTER II

FORMATION OF SOVIET CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

The October Socialist Revolution of 1917 ushered a new era in the life of Central Asian peoples. It opened up for the peoples of Central Asia, the path to independent national development. The Soviet nationalities policy in Central Asia proclaimed legal and constitutional equality of all the peoples in the region. It abolished all special national privileges and created a voluntary federal union of free and equal nations. In April, 1918, a constitutional commission was established which recommended the creation of federal units based on national-territorial principles. These principles gave formal status and political recognition to the leading nationalities and recognised their claim to homelands. The national territorial principle thus gave a sense of self-rule, a promise of autonomy and a feeling of natural representation to the national minorities.

The Soviet government's accomplishment of fixing the national state boundaries in 1924 helped the peoples of Central Asia in their national consolidation efforts. The principle underlying national delimitation of Central Asia stemmed directly from the Bolshevik nationalities policy. The idea of national delimitation did not come up suddenly in 1924. It had been present long before then and was implemented in 1924. In 1913 the central committee of the Russian Socialist Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) called for the demarcation of

the boundaries of the regional autonomous and self-governing units by the local populations themselves in conformity with their economic and ethnic distinctions and national composition etc. This was reaffirmed full by the Seventh Conference of the party held in April 1917. The principles of national delimitation had already been applied with the establishment of national republics for Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Georgians, Armenians, Bashkirs, Azerbaijanians, Tatars, Chuvashes, Kalmuks and Yakuts.

Various Central Asian nationalities were intermingled under three different states – Turkestan, Bukhara and Khiva. The Fifth Territorial Congress of Soviets held in April 1918 declared the autonomy of Turkestan. In October 1918 the Sixth Congress of Soviets confirmed the constitution of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

The question of national state delimitation in Central Asia was first raised by Lenin in July 1920 in his remarks on the draft submitted by the Turkestan Commission concerning the Turkestan Republic. The Turkestan Commission had decided in favour of carrying out the administrative regrouping of Turkestan in conformity with the ethnographical and economic conditions of the region. Yet it opposed the suggestion to divide immediately the territory of the Turkestan Republic into a number of national republics. The centre while agreeing to the postponement of national delimitation instructed the Turkestan Commission to continue the preparatory work relating to this question.

The policies pursued by the Soviet governments of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khwarezm prepared the ground for the national delimitation by creating national divisions, establishment of national autonomous oblasts, development of languages, literature and press of indigenous nationalities. The measures taken by the governments of the three Central Asian Republics in this direction stimulated the desire of various other peoples for their separate national statehood.

The People's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs which was established in 1918 had under it separate divisions of Uzbeks, Tadjiks, Turkmens, Kirghizs, Tatars, Armenians, Ukrainians and native Jews. On March 31, 1921 a separate Kazakh national division was created within the Turkestan central executive committee to look after the well-being of the Kazakh areas. After the abolition of the commissariat for nationality affairs in Turkestan, national divisions under it were transferred to the central executive committee and they enjoyed a status similar to the Kazakh national division.

They acquainted the central executive committee of Turkestan with the needs of the nationalities concerned. In order to prepare the self-determination of the peoples of Turkestan, the all-Russia central executive committee proposed to the Turkestan central executive committee in August 1920 the elaboration of a plan on the redivision of the administrative districts of Turkestan in conformity with their national

composition. In August 1921 the name of the Trans – Caspian oblast was changed into the Turkmen Oblast as the majority of the people there were Turkmens. In April 1922 the Kirghiz oblast was organised by amalgamating the Kirghiz majority areas of the Semirechye, Syr-Daria and Ferghana oblasts. In the central executive committee of Bukhara and Khwarezm republics, Turkmen and Kirghiz national divisions were created. In the Bukhara republic, a Turkmen oblast was carved out with Chardjui as its centre. In 1922 a special commission to administer Eastern Bukhara where the Tadjiks were in the majority was created. In October 1923, in the Khwarezm republic a Turkmen and a Kirghiz Karakalpak oblast were organised. The Uzbek majority areas were separate to form Novo-Urgench oblast and Khiva raion.¹

In fact, the question of national delimitation of Central Asia came to the fore in 1920 with the formation of the Kirghiz (Kazakh) ASSR. In October 1920 the northern part of the Trans-Caspian oblast of Turkestan ASSR was transferred to the Kirghiz ASSR in conformity with the wishes of the Kazakh people. Thus it became clear that the demand for national delimitation was emanating from the peoples of Central Asia themselves. The local party and other social organisations were the first to demand it and the Centre only conceded this popular demand by carrying out national delimitation in 1924. On April 28, 1924 the Central Asian Bureau created

¹ Devendra Kaushik, *Central Asia in Modern Times*, Progress Publishers, Moscow pp.105-106

the territorial commission and other sub-commissions for Uzbeks, Turkmens, Kazakhs, Kirghizs and Tajiks. They were entrusted with the task of practically carrying out the delimitation by defining the territory of the republics and oblasts to be formed.

On May 10, 1924 the recommendation of national commissions was scrutinised by the National Delimitation Commission.

It favoured the establishment of full-fledged Uzbek and Turkmen national republics and the Tajik and Kirghiz autonomous oblasts. The territorial commission concluded its work at the beginning of September 1924. All the nationalities were equally represented on it. On September 16, 1924 an extraordinary session of the central executive committee of Turkestan gave its legal affirmation to the delimitation proposal and conferred upon the Uzbeks, Turkmens, Kazakhs, Tajiks and Kirghizs the right to opt out of the composition of the republic and establish their own national state formations.

On September 20 and 29, 1924 the Fifth All-Bukhara and All-Khwarezm Kurullais respectively conferred similar rights on various peoples inhabiting the republics. On October 14, 1924 the all-Russia central executive committee confirmed the resolution passed by the Turkestan central executive committee on September 16, 1924 and separated Turkestan ASSR from the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist

Republic (RSFSR).² The formation of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic which voluntarily entered the RSFSR, was the first major step towards the creation of Soviet national statehood for peoples of Central Asia.

However, the national delimitation in Central Asia was impossible immediately after the October Revolution due to the slow formation process of the peoples of Central Asia into nations and difficulties in mutual relations among various nationalities inherited from the past feudal and colonial regime. In 1917, the creation of national republics for the peoples of Central Asia was out of question, as they were divided between three states units, viz, Turkestan, Bukhara and Khiva and the revolution in Khiva and Bukhara could not take place until 1920 and a national delimitation in Central Asia without Bukhara and Khiva was unthinkable. Moreover, there was also the task of defending and securing the revolution from internal as well as external enemies. Other necessary precondition for national delimitation was sufficient achievements in the sphere of economic and cultural development and in the formation of socialist nations.

National state delimitation was carried out in Central Asia in 1924 as a result of which national Soviet Socialist Republics were formed. The national territorial delimitation plan envisaged the creation in Central Asia of separate national republics for each of the main nationalities of the

² Ibid., pp.209-210

region in place of the then exiting multinational Turkestan, Bukhara and Khwarezm. The formation of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was the first step towards the founding of national states by the peoples of Central Asia.³ Two of them the Uzbek SSR and the Turkmenistan SSR were formed as Union Republics within USSR. Others like the present day Tajikistan came into existence as an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Uzbek SSR, Kirghiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within RSFSR and Karakalpakia as an Autonomous oblast within Kirghiz ASSR. These national Soviet socialist republics and autonomous oblasts provided the main peoples of Central Asia their own national states for the first time in history. Subsequently, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were elevated to full Soviet socialist republics. Thus was completed the national delimitation of Central Asia and the Central Asian peoples acquired heir national statehood.

In addition to creating a legal framework, the constitution of 1924 established various levels of national territorial autonomy. National territorial units were created even for those nationalities which lacked state structure as well as for those too small to show much interest in having them. In Central Asia, existing state units were dissolved and new ones based on ethnic principles were constructed, cutting across historically established borders. All the existing borders were redrawn, splitting

³ R.G Gidadhubli, *Socio Economic Transformation of Soviet Central Asia*, Patriot Publishers, New Delhi, p.272.

Turkistan into several national republics. It was officially carried out for the purpose of creating modern-national units in place of old feudal formations. The distinct peculiarities of the peoples of Central Asia regarding history, culture, religion and language and the demographic profile of these republics had an important bearing on the nationality question in the Soviet Central Asia. Further, the Bolsheviks added the territorial dimension to the nationality question. Thus, these Republics were built on the foundation of distinct ethno-cultural history. The dominant ethnic groups besides being provided with fixed territory were also invested with a political-administrative apparatus which served to strengthen their ethno-national identity. With the old ethnographic anomalies removed, a better solution of the national problem in Central Asia was found by the 1924 delimitation. It created a stable basis for a speedy removal of economic and cultural backwardness of the Central Asian nationalities by bringing people closer to administration. By removing grounds for national frictions it enabled the people of Central Asia to be drawn into the historic task of building socialism. Thus during this period the Central Asian peoples acquired their national statehood. At the time of the implementation of the national delimitation project, the Central Asian region possessed an area of 1,745,00 square kilometres and an estimated population of 8,131,064 persons. In accordance with the decree of the Politbureau of the Central committee of the Russian

Communist Party of 12 June 1924, in the course of implementing the delimitation scheme 685,900 square kilometres of territory having a population of 1,468,724 persons was ceded to the Kazakh ASSR. As a result, the Central Asian region lost more than one-fourth of its territory and 18.1 percent of its population. The area transferred to the Kazakh ASSR comprised parts of the Syr- Daria, Semirechie and Samarkand oblast of the former Turkestan ASSR. The remaining areas of Central Asia were divided among the Uzbek and Turkmen SSRs, the Tadjik ASSR, and the Kirgiz and Kara – Kalpak Autonomous oblasts.

THE UZBEK SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC

The Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic occupied a territory of 167,500 square kilometres with a population of 4,447,555 persons. The areas which previously constituted parts of the Republics of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm, and which were inhabited predominantly by the Uzbek population, were merged within the Uzbek Republic. Forty-one volosts of the Dzhizak, Katta-Kurgan and Khodzhent uezds of the Samarkand oblast), twenty four volosts and Mirzachul uezds of the Syr-Daria oblast, seventy volosts of the Andizhan, Kokand Namangan and Fergana uezds and seven village communities (Shakhimardan, Vuadil, etc. of the Fergana oblast, the Zerafshan area (consisting of the Bukhara, Kermin and Nur-ata Vilayats), the Kashka-Daria region (consisting of Bek-Budi, Guzar, Shakhrisabz vilayats), a part of the Surkhan-Daria region (including the

whole of the Baisun vilaiet and two tumans of the Shirabad vilayat) and the western border areas of the Eastern Bukharan oblast (The Sary-Assi and Lurchi tumans of the Sary-Assi vilayat) and the south-eastern part of the territory of the Khorezm Republic which was subsequently organized into the Curlen, Novo-Urgench and Khiva uezds.

a) **AGRICULTURE** - The frontiers of the Uzbek SSR bordered in the north with the Kazakh ASSR, in the east with the Kirgiz Autonomous oblast and the Tadjik ASSR, in the south with Afghanistan and in the west with the Turkmen SSR. The territory which was included within the Uzbek Republic represented one of the most fertile, economically advanced and densely populated areas of the Central Asian region. Not only did the bulk of the irrigated areas of the Central Asian region come into the possession of the Uzbek SSR (it acquired nearly 80 percent of the lands which were irrigated in the previous years), but presence on its territory of the Amu-Daria, the Syr-Daria and the Zerafshan rivers ensured wide opportunities for further extension of the facilities of irrigation and the development of hydro-electric power. Besides, the Uzbek SSR also possessed the Hungry Steppe irrigation canal System, the second biggest irrigation system in Central Asia, which provided water to as much as 60,000 desiatins of land. Of the total of 3,097,743 desiatins of cultivated land of the Central Asian region, 1,393,444 desiatins, i.e. nearly half of the entire sown area of Central Asia came to be the share of the Uzbek Republic. Within the

Uzbek SSR nearly one-sixth of this land, located in the fertile Fergana valley, Samarkand, Tashkent, Bukhara and Khorezm regions, was under the cotton crop and it represented 85.2 per cent of the entire cotton growing areas of the Central Asian region.⁴ More significant was the fact that out of the gross income of 454, 738,000 rubles which accrued to the Central Asian region from its agricultural sector, as much as 316,915,000 rubles (i.e. 69.7 per cent) was allocated to the share of the Uzbek SSR. In livestock also the Uzbek SSR was well placed. Nineteen percent of the total livestock of Central Asia (2,589,063 head of cattle) fell to the share of the Uzbek SSR. Besides cotton, the Uzbek Republic also produced considerable quantities of rice and cereals. In 1923-24 the Uzbek areas accounted for 73,584,000 foods of cereals.

b) **INDUSTRY** – In the allocation of the properties of the former Republics of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm among the new state formations, the Uzbek SSR received more. It secured 45.8 million rubles worth of properties (i.e. 60.5 percent) out of a total of 75.8 million rubles worth of properties of the former Central Asian republics. In the industrial sector also the Uzbek SSR was most favourably placed. It secured 110 out of the 132 cotton-processing industries which existed in Central Asia.⁵ Besides,

⁴ In 1923-24 out of the 14.2 million foods of raw cotton grown in the Central Asian region, the territories accounted merged within the Uzbek SSR for as much as ten million foods. See *Istoriia Uzbekskoi SSR*, Tashkent, 1957, Vaidyanath, pp.205-206.

⁵ R Vaidyanath, *The Formation of the Soviet Central Asia Republics*, New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1967, p.207

most of the fuel industries, wine manufacturing enterprises, silk-reeling factories, flour-mills and soap-making plants came under the control of the Uzbek SSR. No less significant was the fact that the Uzbek Republic secured 49.8 percent of the railway network of the Central Asian region.

c) **EDUCATION** – In the sphere of educational facilities again, the Uzbek SSR was better placed than other Republics of the Central Asian region. To its share came 981 primary and middle schools with an estimated student population of 75,000 persons, 23 technicians, 8 professional – industrial schools, 8 industrial schools, etc.⁶ More important was the location of the Central Asiatic State University and the communist University of Tashkent. In 1925 the Central Asiatic State University had a student population of 3,331, Uzbek SSR was also better equipped than other Republics in respect of libraries, clubs, hospitals, ambulances, etc.

d) **CITIES** – According to the 1926 census, the Republic's urban population was placed at 1,062,288, which represented 23.8 per cent of its total population. Almost all the major cities of Central Asia such as Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Kokand, Margelan, Andizhan and Namangan came under the Uzbek SSR. The Uzbeks constituted as much as 74.7 per cent of its total population. Soon after its formation the Revolutionary Committee of the Uzbek SSR issued a proclamation in

⁶ Ibid., p.207

which it assured the non-Uzbek population of the Republic that their interests would be fully safeguarded. The Revolutionary Committee created a special commission on National Minorities and charged it with the task of working out schemes for effectively safeguarding the interests of the national minorities inhabiting the territory of the Uzbek SSR. Besides these two major national units, a large number of national administrative divisions such as national volosts, and sel'sovets (village soviets) were also established. There came into existence twelve national volosts and as many as 306 national sel'sovets. Of these national Sel'sovets, 107 were possessed by the Tadjiks, 51 by Kazakhs, 31 by kuruma, 24 by Russians, 3 by Uigurs, 10 by Kipchaks, 18 by Kara - kalpaks, 13 by Turkmens, 12 by Arabs and 4 by Persians.

e) **ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION** - The former Republics of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm, in ceding parts of their territories to the new state formations, also had bequeathed to them the administrative and legal systems which existed on those territories. Soon after their establishment, the Revolutionary Committees of the new republics and autonomous oblasts were confronted with the task of creating a uniform pattern of administration and unified norms and legislation. The Uzbek SSR, for instance inherited no less than three distinct types of administrative divisions. In the areas which came to it from the former Turkestan Republic, the administrative units conformed to a four-tier

pattern; oblasts, uezds, volosts and Sel'sovets. The territory of the former Republic of Bukhara was divided administratively into vilayats, tumans, kents and amindoms. The territory ceded by the former Khorezm Republic to the Uzbek SSR had its own distinct type of administrative divisions; oblasts, Uezds, Shuros and aksakaldoms. On 29 January 1925 the Revolutionary Committee of the Uzbek SSR decided in favour of adopting the pattern of administrative divisions which existed in the former Turkestan Republic. Subsequently, the entire territory of the Uzbek SSR was divided into 7 oblasts, 23 Uezds, 239 volosts and 1,152 Sel'sovets. The newly organized oblasts were Tashkent, Fergana, Samarkand, Zerafshan, Kashka-Daria, Surkhan Daria and Khorezm⁷. Soon after the administrative reorganization, a decision was taken to make the city of Samarkand the capital of the Uzbek Republic. On 3 April 1925 the government of the Uzbek SSR shifted from Tashkent to Samarkand.

The delimitation of Central Asia also led to fundamental changes in the communist party organizations of the region. Following the abolition of the communist parties of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm, there came into existence the communist parties of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and the oblast party organization of Tadjikistan, Kirgizia and Kara-Kalpakia. At the time of its formation, the Uzbek communist party had a total membership of 16,371 persons of which 6,883 (42.2 per cent) were Uzbek, 6,666 (40.7 per cent) were Russians and 946 (6.8 per cent) were Tadjiks.

⁷ Tursunov, *Otchet Orabot Pravitel'sta Kirgizskoi ASSR*; 1927, p.174

A provisional organizational Bureau managed the affairs of the Uzbek Communist Party until February 1925, when the first congress of the communist Party of Uzbek SSR was held. The party congress proclaimed the Uzbek Communist party an integral part of the All Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), and elected its permanent organs. The newly elected central Committee of the Uzbek communist party replaced the provisional organizational bureau.

Soon afterwards, the First Constituent Congress of Soviets of the Uzbek SSR assembled in Bukhara on 13 February 1925. The congress was attended by 588 delegates among whom were 404 Uzbeks, 66 Tajiks, 65 Russians, 5 Kirgiz and 48 from other national minorities of the Uzbek SSR.⁸ The congress adopted a Declaration on the Formation of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic and then addressed itself to the task of establishing the permanent legislative and executive organs of the Republic. A conference of the Central Executive Committee of the Uzbek SSR held between 12 to 15 April 1925 once again discussed the question of integration of Uzbekistan into the USSR. The conference favoured the sending of a delegation of Uzbek SSR to participate in the Third All-Union Congress of Soviets. In accordance with this decision of the Central Executive Committee, a sixty member delegation from the Uzbek SSR was sent to Moscow towards the beginning of May 1925. After a formal request was made by the Uzbek delegation, the Third congress of

Soviet of the USSR took a decision on 13 May 1925 to admit the Uzbek Republic into the Soviet Union.

A resolution passed by the Congress on this question described, the entrance of the said republic into the USSR as a new demonstration of the fact that the “USSR is really a voluntary union of equal peoples and a reliable bulwark of the formally oppressed peoples.”⁹

THE TURKMEN SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC

The Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, which was formed on the basis of the recommendations of the Territorial Commission, acquired an area of 443, 500 square Kilometres and a population of 855,114 persons. It was constituted from the Turkmen majority areas of the former republics of Turkestan, Bukhar and Khorezm. These areas were the Turkmen Oblast (the Trans-Caspian Oblast) of the former Turkestan ASSR, consisting of Poltoratsk, Tedzhen, Krashovodsk and Merv Uezds, the Kerki and Chardzhui Vilayets and the Kelifa tuman of the former Bukharan SSR and Dargan-Ata, Ilialy, Kumu-Urgench, Porsu, Tashauz and the Takhta-Bazar areas of the former Khorezm SSR.¹⁰

Situated in the western most part of the Central Asian region, the new Turkmen SSR bordered in the south on Persia and Afghanistan, in the

⁸ Ibid., p.211

⁹ The Turkmen Republic was also admitted as a constituent member of the USSR along with the Uzbek Republic, Vaidyanath, pp.211-212.

¹⁰ Mustapha Chokayev, “Turkestan and the Soviet Regime” *Journal of Royal Central Asian Society*, London, XVIII, 1931, p.414

east on the Uzbek SSR and the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast, in the north on the Kazakh ASSR and in the west on the eastern shore of the Caspian sea. The territory which came into the possession of the Turkmen SSR differed in many ways from the territory included within the Uzbek Republic. Turkmen Territory was less fertile, economically more backward and more sparsely populated. More than 80 percent of its territory was covered with the sands of the Karakum and other deserts, and the remaining parts also were not so well supplied with water resources. Only the southern portion of the Republic and a narrow strip of land situated on the left bank of the river Amu-Daria had adequate water resources. The presence of rivers such as the Murgab, the Tedzhen and the Atrek, and the small rivulets which flowed down from the Kopet-Dag mountains, rendered the southern part of the Turkmen SSR an important region from the stand-point of agriculture. Besides, this region also possessed the largest irrigation canal system of the Central Asia. The Bairam-Aliirrigation canal system as it was called, provided water to 285,000 desiatins of land, and in the pre-war years it had irrigated as much as 326,000 desiatins.

The area under cultivation within the Turkmen SSR did not exceed 223,332 desiatins. About 12.5 percent of the total livestock of Central Asia, a share amounting to 1,701,100 head of cattle, was allocated to the Turkmen SSR. Its value was estimated to be about 20 million rubles. An

average of about 2.5 desiatins of land and 12.7 head of cattle was owned by each individual peasant holding within the Turkmen SSR. In the economy of the Turkmen SSR both agriculture and stock-raising played an equally important role. About 52 percent of its income was derived from agriculture and 48 percent from stock raising. Of the total sown area of the Turkmen SSR, 47,590 desiatins (21.3 percent) was under cotton, 19,903 desiatins (8.91 percent) under lucerne, 145,625 desiatins (65.21 percent) under cereals, 22 desiatins (0.05 percent) under tobacco, and 10,192 desiatins (4.56 percent) consisted of orchards and Veneyards. Turkmenistan's chief articles of export consisted of dry fruits, cotton, carpets, Karakul wool, oil, etc. The Republic possessed great potentialities for the development of water transport, and it had acquired 1,364 versts of railway network.

a) **POPULATION**-Turkmen SSR was largely homogenous. The Turkmen constituted 70.2 percent of the total population of the Republic. Among the other national groups, which inhabited the Turkmen SSR, there were 104,900 (11.7 percent) Uzbeks, 6,000 (0.7 percent) Kazakhs, 1,000 (0.01 percent) Kirgiz, 74,000 (8.2 percent) Russians and 82,900 (9.1 percent) persons belonging to other minor national group.

b) **ADMINISTRATION**- The Turkmen republic, like the Uzbek SSR, inherited diverse types of administrative divisions and legal norms. At the time of its formation there were within the Turkmen Republic two Oblasts,

three Vilayats, 4 Uezds, 10 tumans, 7 shuros, 36 Kents, 272 Aksakaldoms, 20 volosts and 267 aulsoverts. By a decree of the revolutionary committee of the Turkmen SSR of 24 January 1925, all the old administrative units of the Republic were abolished and new administrative divisions were established. The whole territory of the Turkmen SSR was divided into 5 districts, 26 areas (raions), 7 volosts, 272 aksakaldoms and 307 aulsoverts. The reorganization of the judicial apparatus of the Republic was also undertaken and towards the end of 1924 the High Court of the Turkmen SSR was established. First congress of the communist party of Turkmenistan and the first constituent congress of Soviets, simultaneously began their session on 14 February 1925. The Turkmen party congress elected a new central committee to replace the Provisional Organizational Bureau as the guiding organ of the communist party of Turkmenstan, and decreed that the newly established Turkmen Communist Party should function as an integral part of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). On 20 February, 1925 the Congress of Soviets of the Turkmen SSR adopted a 'Declaration on the formation of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic'. One of the rights of the national minorities recognized in this declaration was the right to employ the mother tongues of the minority groups in local organs of the administration, educational and cultural institutions and law courts. The first congress of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan as well as the first constituent congress

of Soviets adopted resolutions, which indicated the desire of the Turkmen people for the voluntary entrance of the Turkmen SSR as an equal member into the USSR. On 13 May 1925 the Third Congress of Soviet of the USSR resolved to admit both the Turkmen and the Uzbek SSRs into the Soviet Union.

THE TADJIK AUTONOMOUS SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC

The newly formed Tadjik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic occupied an area of 145,000 square kilometres and possessed a population of 827,000 persons. The areas which were inhabited predominantly by Tadjiks were incorporated within the Tadjik ASSR. The entire Pamir region of the former Fergana Oblast, the upper Zerafshan area situated between the river Mafcha and the Iskander-Kul lake, and the northern slopes of the Turkestan range situated between the river Ak-Su and Gul'draut, and the Eastern Bukharan region of the former Republic of Bukhara consisting of the Vilayats of Gram, Hissar, Kulyab, Kurgantube, Dushanbe and a part of the Sary-Assi Vilayat (the Regar and the Karatag areas).¹¹

AREAS – The southern and eastern frontiers of the Tadjik ASSR coincide with the international frontiers of the USSR with Afghanistan and China respectively. In the south-east, the territory of the Tadjik Republic is separated from India by a four-hundred kilometres wide strip of territory, the so-called Afghan corridor. To the north of the Tadjik ASSR lay the territory of the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast and to its west, the territory of

the Uzbek SSR. Consisting mostly of either hilly region or high mountain ranges, the territory of the Tadjik ASSR represented one of the most backward and neglected parts of the Central Asian region. More than 95 per cent of its population was dependent on agriculture, and in the parts of its territory primitive barter economy prevailed. The bulk of the population of the Tadjik Republic was concentrated in its western part.

This region, which was watered by the rivers Kizil-Su, Vaksh, Aksu and Kafirnigan, represented the most fertile part of the Tadjik ASSR. When the economic resources of the former Republic of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm were distributed among the new state formations of Central Asia, the Tadjik ASSR was allocated seven million rubles worth of state properties, 962,504 head of cattle and 1,428,000 rubles from the funds of the Central Asiatic Agriculture Credit Bank. Its share included 642,643 desiatins of cultivated land of the Central Asian region which yielded a gross income of 20,406,000 rubles. Nearly 97.75 per cent of this area (628,165 desiatins) grew cereals. About 6,049 desiatins of land grew lucerne and another 8,399 desiatins were occupied by orchards.

POPULATION – The Tadjiks constituted the bulk of the population of the Republic. Out of the Republic's total population of 827,2000 persons, the Tadjiks constituted as much as 74.6 per cent (617,100 persons). The remaining part of its population consisted of 175,000 (21.2 per cent) Uzbeks, 4,100 (0.5 per cent) Turkmens, 11,400 (1.4 per cent) Kirgiz 1,600

¹¹ Ibid., pp.217-218

(0.2 per cent) Kazakhs, 5,600 (0.7 per cent) Russian and 11,900 (1.4 per cent) persons belonging to other national groups.

ADMINISTRATION – In reorganizing the administrative units of the Tadjik ASSR the Revolutionary Committee of the Republic decided to adopt the Vilayat system of administrative divisions which had previously existed in the Republic of Bukhara. The entire territory of the Republic was divided into eight Vilayats. The newly established vilayats were Garm, Gorno-Badakhshan, Dushanbe, Kulyab, Kurgantube, Pendzhikent, Sary-Assi and Ura-tube.¹²

In a proclamation address to ‘All Toilers of Tadjikistan’, the Provisional Revolutionary Committee on 7 December 1924 officially proclaimed the formation of the Tadjik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. On 12 March 1925, people all over Tadjikistan celebrated the formation of their national Republic. On 1st December 1926 the constituent Congress of Soviet of Tadjikistan adopted with great ceremony a declaration on the formation of the Tadjik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. All the legislative functions of the Republic were entrusted to the newly created Central Executive Committee of the Tadjik ASSR.

THE KIRGIZ AUTONOMOUS OBLAST

The Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast was formed by merging those parts of the former Turkestan ASSR which were inhabited predominantly by the

Kirgiz population. This territory consisted of the Karakol and Naryn Uezds and a part of the Pishpek uezd of the former Semirechie oblast, fourteen Kirgiz-majority volosts of the Aulie-Ata Uezd of the former Syr-Daria Oblast; thirty-eight volosts of the Andizhan, Namangan, Fergana, Kokand and Osh Uezds of the former Fergana Oblast.¹³

POPULATION – Situated in the north-eastern corner of Central Asia, the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast occupied an area of 190,700 square kilometres and possessed a population of 993,000 persons. The territory of Kirgizia is surrounded on almost all the four sides by the mountains ranges which act as its natural frontiers with the adjoining states. In the south-east its frontier with China passes along the Kok-shaal-Tan range and the Tien-shan ranges. In the south, the Zaalai and Turketan ranges constitute Kirgizia's natural frontier with the Tadjik Republic. Again the mountain ranges located in the north and northeastern part of the Kirgizia separate its territory from the territory of the Kazakh Republic. In the west, for about 300 kilometres its frontier with Uzbekistan runs along the plains adjoining the Alatau mountains and through the Chu river valley. In the south-west where the territories of Kirgizia and Tadjikistan meet in the Fergana Valley, the frontier between these two state formations has been demarcated along the foot-hills and plains. The territory of Kirgizia abounds not only in mountains but also in valleys, rivers and lakes. Its

¹² Biulleten 'tsentral' nogo Statisticheskogo upravleniia Uzbekistana (Tashkent, 1925) p.5-6

¹³ Op. cit., R. Vaidyanath, p.221

biggest rivers are the Naryn, Chu and Kara-Daria. In the eastern part of the territory of Kirgizia is situated the Issyk-Kul lake, the second biggest in the Soviet Union and one of the largest lakes in the world. The territory of Kirgizia also has considerable forest wealth and mineral resources, chief among them coal, lead, Zine, tin, quicksilver, antimony, marble, gold, salt and oil deposits.

AGRICULTURE- At the time of its formation, the total cultivated area of Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast amounted to 246, 516 desiatins. According to the data available an income of 30,525,000 rubles accrued to the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast from agriculture in 1923-24. In 1924, within Kirgizia 13,268 desiatins (5.38 per cent) of land was under the cotton crop, 212,526 desiatins (86.21 per cent) under cereals, 19,120 desiatins (7.76 per cent) under lucerne, 191 desiatins (0.08 per cent) under tobacco and 1,416 desiatins under orchards and vineyards. About 35.9 per cent of the income of the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast was derived from agriculture.

POPULATION – In its population composition, the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast was less homogenous than some of the other new state formations of Central Asia. The Kirgiz constituted 66.6 per cent (661,200 persons) of Kirgizia's total population of 993,000 persons. Among its non-Kirgiz population there were 103,800 (11.1 per cent) Uzbeks, 1,800 (0.2 per cent) Kazakhs, 116,400 (11.7 per cent) Russian and 103,800 (10.4 per cent) persons belonging to other national groups. The Uzbek-inhabited areas of

the Kirgiz ASSR were organized into one national volost and nineteen national sel'sovets. Besides these, there came into existence two Tatar national Sel'sovets, one Dungan national sel'sovet, and 21 national sel'sovets of mixed European population. Kirgizia's average density of population was only 5.07 persons per square kilometre. It ranged from 40.2 persons per square kilometre in the Pishpek region to only 1.92 persons per square kilometre in the Naryn area.¹⁴

ADMINISTRATION-Administratively the entire territory the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast was divided into four districts', Karakol Naryn, Pishpek, Dzhalal-Abad and Osh. Pishpek City, which at the time had a population of only 13,000 persons, became the capital of the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast. The constituent Congress of the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast met in Pishpek between 27-30 March 1925. In place of the provisional Revolutionary Committee, which until then was in charge of the administration of Kirgizia, the congress constituted an elected executive committee. A resolution adopted by this congress demanded that Kirgizia should be given a higher constitutional position than a mere autonomous oblast and to realize this it instructed the newly constituted executive committee to open negotiation with the All-Russian Central executive committee. In a plenary session of the executive committee of the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast held on 31 March 1925, a presidium was

¹⁴ Otchet O rabot pravitel'stva kirgizskoi ASSR. Mart 1927 – April 1929 (cited hereafter as

constituted. On 5 April 1925 by a decree of the presidium of the executive committee of the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast, the organs of state administration were established. These consisted of the departments of land, finance, labour, health, education, justice, nationalities, social security, internal trade and planning. On 6 December 1925 the executive committee of the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast formally requested the VTsIK of the RSFSR to confer on Kirgizia the status of an Autonomous Republic. Thereafter the all-Russian central executive committee, resolved to confer upon Kirgizia the status of an Autonomous Republic, and soon issued a decree on this question. This decree was confirmed by the Thirteenth Congress of Soviets of the RSFSR on 15 April 1927.¹⁵ After the reorganization of Kirgizia into an Autonomous Republic, a central executive committee consisting of 150 members was established by the first constituent congress of the Kirgiz ASSR in March 1927. In a plenary session of the central executive committee of the Kirgiz ASSR held on 12 March 1927, a Presidium was constituted. The executive organs of the Republic' – the council of People's commissions, consisting of 39 members, was also constituted.

ORPKASSR)

¹⁵ Ibid., pp.224-225

THE KARA-KALPAK AUTONOMOUS OBLAST

The newly established Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast occupied an area of 112,000 square kilometres and possessed a population of 363,470 persons. The Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast was constituted by amalgamating the Khodzheili and Kungrad regions of the former Khorezm Republic with the Chimbai and Surakhan Uezds of the former Amu-Daria Oblast.¹⁶ Most of the territory of the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast located near the Aral sea is covered by the sands of the Kizyl-Kum desert. The territories situated on the right bank of the Amu-Daria and on the right portion of its delta are relatively more fertile. At the time of its formation the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast possessed 34,803 desiatins of cultivable land and 380,745 head of cattle. Among the various crops grown on its territory, cotton occupied 1,622 desiatins (4.66 per cent), cereal 28,304 desiatins (81.33 per cent), lucerne 4,774 desiatins (13.72 per cent) and orchards 88 desiatins (0.25 per cent). According to the data available for 1923-24, a sum of 9,085,000 rubles accrued to Kara-Kalpakia from agriculture.

Unlike the other state formations of Central Asia which were largely homogenous in their national composition, Kara-Kalpakia was and continues to remain heterogeneous in its national composition. According

to the 1926 census, its territory was inhabited by 38.1 per cent Kara-Kalpaks, 28.5 per cent Kazakhs, 27.6 per cent Uzbeks, 1.6 per cent Russians and 3.2 per cent Turkmen. Though at the time of the establishment of the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast, the Kara-Kalpaks constituted a relative majority of its population, in subsequent years, largely as a result of assimilation by the culturally more advanced Uzbeks, the size of the Kara-Kalpak population began to fall sharply. According to the 1939 census the Kara-Kalpaks constituted a little less than 27 per cent of the population of Kara-Kalpakia.¹⁷

ADMINISTRATION - Administratively the entire territory of the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast was divided into districts and twenty-five volosts. From the territory which came into its possession from the former Khorezm Republic, the Khodzheili and Kungrad districts were constituted. The Khodzheili district was divided into six volosts and the Kungrad district into four volosts. That part of the territory of the former Amu-Daria oblast which was merged with the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast was divided into the Turtkul and Chimbai districts. The Turtkul district was divided into seven volosts and the Chimbai district into nine volosts. Chimbai town became the capital of the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast.

¹⁶ Op. Cit., R Vaidyanath, p.226

¹⁷ Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Quelquejay, *The Evolution of the Muslim Nationalities of the USSR and their Linguistic problems* (London, 1961) pp.32-33 (translated by Geoffrey Wheeler)

The first constituent congress of Soviets of the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous oblast met in Turtkul between 15-19 February 1925. The congress adopted a formal 'Declaration on the Formation of the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast' and created an Oblast Executive Committee to take charge of the administration of the territories of Kara-Kalpakia. The Fifth All-Kazakh Congress of Soviets which met in Kyzyl-Orda between 15-19 April 1925, in accordance with the wishes of the Kara-Kalpaks, decreed the inclusion of Kara-Kalpakia as an autonomous part of the Kazakh ASSR. _

The political map of the Central Asian region underwent a radical change as a result of the implementation of the national delimitation scheme. In place of the former Republics of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm, which under different names had existed on the political map of Central Asia since the days of the Russian conquest of the region, now came into existence as many as five separate state formations. Of the three remaining political formations, Tadjikistan was given the status of an Autonomous Republic within the Uzbek SSR and Kirgizia and Kara-Kalpakia were organized as Autonomous Oblasts, the former within the RSFSR and the latest within the Kazakh ASSR. The fact that the Republics in which Tadjikistan, Kirgizia and Kara-Kalpakia were included were members of the Soviet Union, also made these three state formations of Central Asia members of the USSR though in an indirect way.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NATIONAL DELIMITATION

The main significance of the national delimitation of Central Asia lay in the fact that it enabled the unification within the framework of nationally homogenous Republics of the different segments of the Uzbek, Turkmen, Tadjik, Kirgiz, Kara-Kalpak and Kazakh populations which previously were scattered over the territories of the Republics of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm. Formerly 66.5 per cent of the total Uzbek population of Central Asia lived within the Turkestan ASSR, 22.2 per cent within the Republic of Bukhara and 11.3 per cent within the Khorezm Republic. Now within the newly established Uzbek Republic as much as 82.6 per cent of the entire Uzbek population of Central Asia was unified. If formerly 43.4 per cent of the Turkmen population of Central Asia lived within the Turkestan Republic, 27.0 percent within Bukhara and 29.8 per cent within Khorezm, now within the newly established Turkmen SSR as much as 94.2 per cent of the entire Turkmen population of Central Asia was brought together. The reform proved equally beneficial to the Tadjiks, Kirgiz, Kara-Kalpaks and the Kazakhs. Within the Tadjik ASSR 75.2 per cent of the entire Tadjik population of the Central Asian region was united, 86.7 per cent of the entire Kirgiz population of the Central Asian region was brought within the frame-work of the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast and 79.3 per cent of the entire Kara-Kalpaks of Central Asia now lived within the Kara-Kalpaks Autonomous Oblast. Though none of them approximated

to the ideal of a uni-national state. Within each one of them its dominant nationality constituted a compact majority of its total population.¹⁸ Thus, within the Uzbek SSR the Uzbeks constituted 74.7 per cent of the total population, and the Turkmens constituted 70.2 per cent of the population of the Turkmen SSR. Within the Tadjik ASSR the Tadjiks constituted as much as 74.7 per cent of the total population. The Kirgiz constituted 66.4 per cent of the total population of Kirgizia.

It had considerable significance for the economic, cultural and national consolidation of the major nationalities of the region. In the economic sphere, the delimitation of Central Asia resulted in the territorial bifurcation of the area practising a nomadic cattle-breeding economy from the areas of sedentary agricultural economy. The Turkmen and the Kara-Kalpak regions, in whose economy both agriculture and stock-raising played an equally important part, also differed from both the typically cattle breeding areas of Kazakhstan and Kirgizia and the typically agricultural regions of Uzbekistan and Tadjikistan.

In the educational and cultural sphere the establishment of nationality based homogenous state formations enhanced prospects for systematically combating illiteracy and raising the cultural level of the people. Before 1924, whatever educational and cultural institution there were in Central Asia, existed as a rule in the more advance Uzbek regions,

¹⁸ This statement requires qualification in relation to the Kara-Kalpaks who constituted only a relative majority of the total population of the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast.

and the peripheral non-Uzbek areas were utterly neglected. Equally significant was the stimulus, the languages of the nationalities of Central Asia received following the establishment of the new state formations. Their large scale use in administration, in cultural and educational institutions, and in the publication of newspapers, books, and periodicals, provided ample scope for the development of these languages, and for the growth of national literatures. Equally significant was the fact that following the establishment of nationally homogenous state formations, the Uzbeks, Tadjiks, Turkmens and Kirgiz acquired the objective prerequisites not only for preserving their national identity but also for consolidating their nations by way of assimilating their kindred ethnic groups, tribes and clans. The weaker national groups were freed from this threat of national extinction following the changed political, economic and social conditions which came to prevail in Central Asia after 1924.¹⁹

Another important outcome of the delimitation of Central Asia was that it rendered possible the rapid socialist transformation of the region. In the former Republics of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm, the Bolsheviks found that the presence of inter-tribal frictions and antagonism, and the pre-occupation of the people with national rather than with socialist slogans had greatly hindered their objectives of promoting class stratification and building socialism. The delimitation of Central Asia also

¹⁹ Op. Cit., R. Vaidyanath, pp. 230-231.

marked the beginning of the process of drawing the peoples of the region away from the political and cultural influences of the adjoining countries of the Middle East and particularly from Turkey.

ELEVATION OF TADJIKISTAN, KARA-KALPAKIA AND KIRGIZIA TO HIGHER FORM OF STATEHOOD

Barring the reorganization of the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast into an Autonomous Republic in 1926, the political set up which emerged in Central Asia as a consequence of national delimitation did not undergo any major changes until 1929. But it began to undergo significant changes following the introduction of a number of reforms. In 1929 the Tadjik ASSR was separated from the Uzbek SSR and raised to the status of a Union Republic and was included directly within the USSR. In 1932 the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast was detached from the Kazakh ASSR, elevated to the status of an Autonomous Republic and was included within the RSFSR. In 1936 following the adoption of a new constitution of the USSR, the Kirgiz ASSR was separated from the RSFSR, raised to the status of a Union Republic and was included directly within the USSR. The economic and political causes which led to these changes are worth examining.

In the territory included within the Tadjik Republic, the cotton crop in 1914 had occupied about 35,000 hectares. By 1928-29 Tadjikistan had

161,000 hectares under the cotton crop. This rise was particularly impressive in view of the fact in 1925-26 the areas cotton had shrunk to 9,000 hectares. The establishment of the Termez-Dushanbe railway line helped in linking the territory of Tadjikistan with other parts of the Soviet Union with modern means of communication. In the educational sphere also Tadjikistan made considerable progress. In 1927-28 there were 154 schools and 3 pedagogical schools on the territory of the Tadjik ASSR. In 1929 the number of schools increased to more than three hundred. Its 1925-26 was budget placed the total revenue of the Republic at 511,000 rubles and its expenditure at 5,139,000 rubles. About 90 per cent of the overall deficit for the year 1925,26 was covered by subsidies provided by the government of the USSR. In 1929 the total revenue of Tadjikistan had risen to 3,844,000 rubles and its expenditure to 14,340,000 rubles. In that year Tadjikistan received a subsidy of 10,420,000 rubles from the centre. By 1929 the communists of Tadjikistan had begun to express their misgivings on the constitutional arrangements made in 1925 by virtue of which the Tadjik ASSR became an autonomous part of Uzbek SSR. On 12 June 1929, the presidium of the central executive committee of the USSR, in response to the demand put forward by the communists of Tadjikistan, adopted a decree on the secession of the Tadjik ASSR from the Uzbek Republic and on the reorganization of Tadjikistan into a union republic.²⁰ All issues connected with the secession of the Tadjik ASSR from the

²⁰ Ibid., pp.237-238

Uzbek Republic and its elevation to the status of a Union Republic were discussed in a plenary session of the central executive committee of the Tadjik ASSR on 10 September 1929, and later by the Third Extra-Ordinary Congress of Soviets of Tadjikistan on 15 October 1929. On 16 October the extraordinary congress adopted a declaration on the formations of the Tadjik-Soviet Socialist Republic. This declaration also sanctioned the inclusion of the Tadjik SSR within the Soviet Union. On 6 November 1929 an extraordinary session of the central executive committee of the Uzbek SSR gave its consent to the separation of the Tadjik ASSR from the Uzbek SSR. On 5 December 1929 the central executive committee of the USSR gave its approval to the inclusion of the Tadjik Soviet Socialist Republic as the seventh member of the Soviet Union. This decision was formally confirmed in March 1931 by the Sixth Congress of Soviets of the USSR.

In 1932 certain changes were introduced in the political set up of the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast. A decree of the all-Russian central executive committee promulgated in March 1932 elevated the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast to the status of an Autonomous Republic. In 1932 Kara-Kalpakia had not any outstanding economic achievements to its credit, on the basis of which it could have put forth a claim for the advancement of its political status. On the contrary, there is reason to believe that the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast had failed to realize its

targets of economic development. The Central Asiatic Bureau chided both the government and the communist party of the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast for continuing to employ the Russian language in their work. In 1936, following the constitutional reforms introduced in the USSR, the Kara-Kalpak ASSR was separated from the RSFSR and included within the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. The fact that during these years the Uzbek population of the Kara-Kalpak ASSR registered a sharp rise might have been a decisive factor which led to the inclusion of Kara-Kalpakia within the Uzbek republic.²¹

In 1936 when the Kirgiz ASSR was elevated to the status of a Union Republic, conditions within Kirgiz ASSR in the economic, social and cultural spheres had undergone significant changes. Within a decade of the establishment of the separate Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast, the Kirgiz emerged as an authentic socialist nation. The economic and cultural developments which rendered the consolidation of the Kirgiz nation possible within such a short span of time are worth examining. During the period of the first and second five year plans, the nature of the economy of Kirgizia underwent a radical change. If at the time of its formation the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast had an essentially nomadic cattle-breeding economy, at the end of the second plan period a sizable portion of its income began to be realized from agriculture and industry. In the agriculture sector, individual peasant holdings had become largely things

²¹ Ibid., p.240

of the past. About 127,524 small peasant holdings were merged into 1,762 large collective forms. In 1933 the collective farms yielded a gross income of about 68.4 million rubles, out of which about 46 million rubles were realized from agriculture alone. By 1933 about 45.00 nomads and semi-nomads were settled on land. During the first year plan the basis of industrialization was laid subsequently, a number of coal-mining textile leather, food-processing, oil-drilling and light metal industries began to be established. By 1933, there were about 1,500 small industrial enterprises, two thermal power and one hydro-electric stations in the Kirgiz ASSR. During the first plan period the capital investment in industrialization amounted to about 65 million rubles. Equally significant was the establishment of the railways. A beginning was made in this sphere by the construction of the Dzhahalal-Abad-Kok Langak, Karasuosh, Frunzekang and Kang-Tokmau railway line. By 1936, the Kirgiz republic possessed more than 3,000 automobiles. Within ten years after its establishment nearly 50 per cent of the population of the Kirgiz republic became literate. By 1934 nearly 82 per cent of children of school-going age were provided with educational facilities, and between 1924-34 the number of schools increased from 463 to 1,580.

Education in most of these institutions was imparted through the medium of the Kirgiz language. With the rise in the number of literates, clubs, theatres, 'Red Chaikanas', newspapers, journals and books also

started growing. The publication of the first Kirgiz newspaper, Erkin too was begun as early as 1924. Another newspaper, Leninchil Zhash and the journal, Communist began their publication in 1926. Between 1921-29 two Russian language newspapers, Krasnoeutro and Batratskaia Pravda were published.

The USSR was no longer the backward agrarian country it had been in 1924 when its first constitution was adopted. The new constitutional project published on 12 June 1936 drew attention to these facts and to the numerous problems which were brought into existence by the rapidly expanding economy of the USSR. The process of building the national state formations in the Central Asian region which was begun in the early twenties of the present century was thus brought to completion in 1936. At the end of this period the inequality of political status which prevailed among the state formations of the Uzbeks, Turkmen, Tadjiks and Kirgiz had disappeared.²²

²² See Article 13 of the Soviet Constitution in *Istoriia Sovetskoi Konstitutsii 1917 – 1956* (Moscow, 1957); p.711.

CHAPTER – III

EXTENT AND PATTERN OF AUTONOMY IN SOVIET CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

The Soviet nationalities policy in Central Asia proclaimed legal and constitutional equality of all the peoples of the region. In the Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People endorsed by the Third All Russian Congress of the Soviets in 1918, it was stated that “The Soviet Russian Republic is established on the principle of a free union of free nations, as a Federation of Soviet National Republics”. It abolished all special national privileges and created a voluntary federal union of free and equal nations. The formation of the united multinational state was dictated by the objective course of its development. Without a close federal union the Soviet Republics would have been unable to defend their existence in the face of World imperialism. Forms of national statehood such as Union, Autonomous Republics and Autonomous Regions took shape in the early 1920s to be followed later by National or Autonomous Areas. Relying on the right to national self-determination many nations and nationalities had created either their own national status or national state formations.¹

Practically, territorial national autonomies on the territory of Russia began to shape in the period following the third Congress of Soviets. National state development in that period was clearly characterized by the

¹ Noun Farberor, “Leninist Principles of National – State Organisation of the USSR” *Problems of the contemporary world* (70), 1978, p.159

fact that autonomies were forming simultaneously with the socialist federation of a definite kind, namely, a federation based on autonomous formation. The third All Russia Congress of Soviets promulgated the establishment of a federation when the autonomous formations just started shaping in accordance with the people's 'Sovereign will'. Historically, the earliest form of Soviet Socialist Federation, the RSFSR, was based on autonomy. The Soviet Republics rallied around the Russian Federation. The RSFSR in fact became the center of the movement of the peoples for unity, the prototype of the USSR, which was in accordance with Lenin's plan, formed in December 1922 as an "association of equals, an association that demands common agreement". The practice itself of Soviet national state development thus resulted in a substantial extension of the forms of Soviet national statehood. The autonomous formation, covert forms of national self-determination were the bedrock of the Soviet Federation.

Soviet national statehood was established along the lines of regions distinct in the national composition of the population settled on a given territory. Government and administrative organs in various national regions possessed certain peculiarities in structure. Special legislation was passed defining the particular political and legal status of the respective autonomous state formations and reflecting their national and often specific features. The Soviet National Republics and the autonomous national state formations possessed their special institutions for

representation in the organs of the integral federal state.² However, development of Soviet nations and nationalities as social ethnic communities made it necessary in some cases for one form of national statehood to be replaced by another, matching the changed conditions. In the course of Soviet national state development many autonomous regions were reorganized into Autonomous Republics. A number of Union Republics become members of the Soviet Union after the reorganization of the respective Autonomous Republics.³ The development and improvement of the forms of socialist national-territorial autonomy, the theoretical foundations of which were laid by Lenin's conception of broad regional autonomy, should be considered in close connection with the theory and practice of Soviet federation. The character of the specific forms of autonomy largely determined the politico-legal nature of a federation based on autonomy. The system of federal relations could not but escort the determining influence on the development of the very forms of socialist autonomy.

As a federal state the USSR was founded on the principle of democratic centralism. But centralization operated hand in hand with federalism with the broad independence of the Republics, which enhanced the core value of federal state and facilitated the development of each

² E.V. Tadevosian, "The Constitutional Basis of Soviet National Statehood", *Soviet Anthropology and Archeology*, 1987-88, pp.3-4.

Republic. The mutual relations among the Republics were built on federal principle, so that the interests of the multinational state were combined with those of each of the constituent Republics.

In the changing international context, the leaders of Soviet Union tried to provide an alternative framework to 1936 Constitution, which they had inherited from the past regime, to provide the growth of genuine autonomy and federalism in Soviet Republics. All these changes were clearly evident in the Constitution of 1977. The modern forms of Soviet autonomy, recorded in the 1977 constitution of the USSR and the constitutions of Union and Autonomous Republics, had absorbed the best of what was achieved in theory and practice over the past period, and simultaneously reflected the fundamental features which ensued from the conditions prevailing at the new stage of social and political development.

Autonomy and Federalism in the Constitutional Framework of 1977

The 1977 constitution emphasized primarily on the creation of a federal structure to provide a strong central government. While guaranteeing each constituent Republic the fullest local and cultural autonomy and equal participation in the central government, the 1977 constitution provided every possibility for the USSR's further development as a united multinational state. It preserved the structure of federal arrangements of Union – Republic relationships and division of state

³ Victor Shevtsov; "The State and Nations in the USSR", in *Self-determination of Nations: Autonomy and Federation*, Progress Publishers (Moscow), pp.71-72

power. In the course of the historical development of the Soviet multinational state, the following basic forms of Soviet national statehood evolved, which were secured in the constitution of the USSR; (1) the Union Republic; (2) the Autonomous Republic; (3) the Autonomous Oblast; and (4) the Autonomous District.⁴

Union Republic

A Union Republic, as stated in the constitution of the USSR, was a sovereign Soviet socialist state that united with other Soviet Republics in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic. A Union Republic exercised independent state power on its territory. A Union Republic had its own constitution, which conformed to the constitution of the USSR taking into account the specific features of the Republic (art. 76). The territory of a Union Republic would not be altered without its consent. A Union Republic independently determined its administrative-territorial structure (art. 79). A Union Republic had the right to enter into relations with foreign states, conclude treaties with them and exchange diplomatic and consular representatives and take part in the activities of international organizations (art. 80). The Union Republics through their supreme organs of state authority, had the right of legislative initiative in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (art. 113).

A new constitutional right was given to Union Republics as the right of participation in decision making by all union organs in matters that came within the jurisdiction of the USSR. Article 77 of the constitution of the

⁴ OP. cit., n.2, p.4

USSR stated, "A Union Republic takes part in decision – making in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the Government of the USSR, and other organs of the union of Soviet Union Socialist Republic in matters that come within the jurisdiction of the USSR". " This right of Union Republics was guaranteed both by the very structure and by the operation of all – union organs of state authority and administration." Thus, the bicameral structure of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, which consisted of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities, both sharing equal rights, made sure that the economic plans, the budget and other laws passed reflected the general interests of all peoples of the country and the specific interests of the Union Republics. The already established practice of forwarding all the more important bills to the Union Republics for review, guaranteed their broad participation in the drafting of all – union legislation. In accordance with art. 114, the Union Republics had gained the right of submission to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of proposals for countrywide discussion of bills and other very important matters of state.

It was laid down in the constitution of the USSR that a Union Republic ensured integrated economic and social development on its territory. On matters that came within its jurisdiction, a Union Republic coordinated and controlled the activity of enterprises, institutions and

organizations subordinate to the union (art. 77). Union Republic ministries of the USSR directed the branches of administration entrusted to them, as a rule, through the respective ministries and other organs of Union Republics, and directly administered individual enterprises and associations, as well as other organizations and institutions of their branches which were of Union subordination. The extensive, genuine rights enjoyed by the Union Republics within the Soviet federation were further exemplified by the fact that the Union Republican budgets constituted 42% of the state Budget of the USSR. Every Union Republic retained the right of free secession from the USSR (Art. 72). The jurisdiction of the USSR and its organs, on the one hand, and the jurisdiction of the Union Republics and their organs on the other hand were defined in the constitution of the USSR (articles 73, 76, 121, 131, 137, 142, etc.). The sovereign rights of the Union Republics, as stated in art, 81 of the constitution of the USSR, were safeguarded by the USSR. The 1977 constitution of the USSR not only maintained and ensured the sovereign rights of the Union Republics, but even expanded them and reinforced their guarantees.⁵

Autonomous Republic

An Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was a national Soviet socialist state that was a constituent part of a Union Republic. The politico

⁵ Ibid., pp. 72-73

– legal status of the Autonomous Republic was comprehensively described in the constitution. Article 82 of the constitution of the USSR stated that in spheres not within the jurisdiction of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Union Republic, an Autonomous Republic would deal independently with matters within its jurisdiction. An Autonomous Republic had its own constitution conforming to the constitution of the USSR and the Union Republic with the specific features of the Autonomous Republic being taken into account. The constitution of the USSR listed the Autonomous Republics forming part of respective Union Republics. The 1977 constitution of the USSR, as in the 1936 Constitution earlier, ruled that endorsement of the formation of new Autonomous Republics within Union Republics came within the jurisdiction of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. There was a new article in the constitution defining the territorial supremacy of the Autonomous Republic, viz.: “the territory of an Autonomous Republic might not be altered without its consent” (Article 84). Similar articles were to be found earlier in the constitutions of Autonomous Republics.⁶

The constitution of an Autonomous Republic adopted by its Supreme Soviet did not need to be approved by a session of the Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic, as was the case earlier. This provision was a major constitutional guarantee of the autonomy of an Autonomous Republic. Under Article 83 of the constitution of the USSR, an

⁶ Ibid., p.73

Autonomous Republic took part in decision making through the highest bodies of state authority and administration of the USSR and of the Union Republic respectively, in matters that come within the jurisdiction of the USSR and the Union Republic. Each Autonomous Republic was represented in the Soviet of nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR by eleven deputies, and in the Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic, in proportion to the size of its own population. Autonomous Republics were also represented in the Presidium of the Supreme Soviets of the respective Union Republics (Article 114 of the constitution of the RSFSR, Article 111 of the constitution of the Uzbeke SSR, Article 113 of the constitution of the Azerbaijan SSR, and so on).

According to the new constitution of the USSR, an Autonomous Republic ensured comprehensive economic and social development on its territory, facilitated exercise of the powers of the USSR and the Union Republic on its territory, and implemented decisions of the highest bodies of state authority and administration of the USSR and the Union Republic. In matters within its jurisdiction, an Autonomous Republic co-ordinated and controlled the activity of enterprises, institutions, and organizations subordinate to the USSR or the Union Republic. All this broadened considerably the legal basis underlying the work conducted by organs of on ASSR and increased their responsibilities for the implementation of the comprehensive and harmonious development. Constitutions of Union

Republics secured for Autonomous Republics the right to initiate legislation through their highest bodies of state authority. The territory of an Autonomous Republic could not be altered without its consent (art – 84). The Supreme Soviet of an ASSR had exclusive jurisdiction over the adoption of the constitution of the ASSR and its amendment, endorsement of state plans for economic and social development, and the Autonomous Republic's state budget. (art. 143)

The constitution of the USSR ensured further expansion of the Autonomous Republican rights. Thus, according to art. 83 of the fundamental law of the USSR, an ASSR took part in decision making in matters that came within the jurisdiction of the USSR and the Union Republics, through the Supreme organs of state authority and administration of the USSR and of the Union Republic respectively. A number of representatives of the Autonomous Republic were members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic in the capacity of deputy chairman.⁷

Autonomous Oblast

An Autonomous Oblast was a Soviet socialist national state formation that was part of a Union Republic or a *krai* [territory]. In contrast to the ASSRs, Autonomous Oblasts were not states and enjoyed administrative-political but not state-political autonomy, with a correspondingly narrower range of rights. An Autonomous Oblast, like an

Autonomous District, differed essentially from an ordinary administrative oblast or raion, for it embodied the sovereign will of a nation or nationality and expressed its self-determination. In accordance with the constitution of the USSR, the Supreme Soviets of those Union Republics that included Autonomous Oblasts would adopt, upon the recommendation of the Soviets of People's Deputies of the Autonomous Oblasts, a special law on Autonomous Oblasts (art. 86). All this rendered the Autonomous Oblast as well as the Autonomous Districts, a form of national statehood and provided for somewhat broader jurisdiction to be exercised by an Autonomous Oblast (or autonomous district) in comparison with an administrative oblast (or district). Thus all Autonomous Oblasts enjoyed their separate representation in the Soviet of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Autonomous Oblasts were also represented in the organs of the Union Republics and *krais* of which they were a part. The acts promulgated by state organs of an Autonomous Oblast possessed special legal force and could not be rescinded by the corresponding higher organs of a *krai*. An Autonomous Oblast itself determined the administrative- territorial division of its territory, subject to subsequent confirmation by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic. The organs of state authority and administration of an Autonomous Oblast were guaranteed the right to treat with the organs of state authority and administration of the Union Republic either through the

⁷ Op Cit., n.2. p.9

territorial (*krai*) organs or directly (art. 83 of the 1978 constitution of the RSFSR).⁸

3

Autonomous District

An Autonomous District was a Soviet socialist national – state formation that was a constituent part of a *krai* or oblast, and represented a form of national statehood for the small nationalities. Most of the National (autonomous) Districts were formed in the 1930s on the basis of a resolution passed by the Presidium of the All Union Central Executive Committee on December 10, 1930, “On the organization of National Associations in Areas of settlement by the small peoples of the North.” In 1937 there were already nine national districts in the country while they were increased to ten later on. A number of the Autonomous Districts exceeded in population from many of the Autonomous Oblasts, and even some Autonomous Republics, while in area the Autonomous Districts were, as a rule larger than Autonomous Oblasts and ASSRS.

In accordance with the new constitution of the USSR, National Districts were renamed Autonomous Districts. This underscored the growing role of the national territorial districts within the national–state system of the USSR and an enhancement of the scope of their authority towards closer approximation of other forms of Soviet autonomy. The new constitution of the USSR stipulated the promulgation not of a Regulation

⁸ Ibid., p.73

on National Districts, but a law on Autonomous Districts, to be adopted by the Supreme Soviet of a Union Republic (art 88). The 1977 constitution of the USSR had a special chapter (chapter II) on the autonomous region and autonomous area. Just as the old 1936 Constitution, the new constitution enumerated the autonomous regions incorporated in each Union Republic, which provided additional legal guarantees of their existence. Endorsement of the formation of autonomous regions came within the jurisdiction of the USSR.

The legal status of each autonomous region was defined, in accordance with the constitution of the USSR, by a law drafted by its Soviet of Peoples Deputies and approved by the Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic. The autonomous form of Soviet national statehood had an important place within the national state structure of the USSR. In contrast to the 1936 constitution of the USSR, the new constitution of the USSR devoted these national-state formations considerably more attention. It provided for the drafting and adoption by the Union Republican Supreme Soviet of a special law on Autonomous Oblasts and a law on Autonomous Districts, which were intended to define in detail the political legal status of each of these national-state formations. Constitutions of Union Republics established a set of powers attesting to the actual independence of national state formations. All this reflected the growing role and

importance of Soviet autonomy and facilitated the further enhancement of the work of its organs.⁹

Extent and Pattern of Soviet Autonomy and Federalism

The constitution of the USSR contained a definition of the USSR, as “an integral, federal, multinational state formed on the principle of socialist federalism as a result of the free self-determination of nations and the voluntary association of equal Soviet Socialist Republics. The 1977 constitution retained the structure of federal arrangement of Union-Republic relationships and division of state powers. It preserved and reinforced the Leninist principles of complete equality, free self-determination of nation, and socialist federalism and thus restoring the principle of autonomy and federalism to optimum extent. The actual equality of the nations and nationalities of the USSR was ensured in all spheres of life with the building of natural socialism.

The important feature of the 1977 constitution was extended to the participation of people's rights. All power in the Soviet Union belonged to the people, who exercised it through the Soviets of People's Deputies. The constitution gave the local organs the power and broader competence, especially in the area of control over the observance of the law by enterprises, establishments and organizations situated on their territory and subordinated to higher bodies.

⁹ Article 70, 1977 constitution.

The constitution of 1977 also established a solid legal basis for the formation and activity of all social organizations, that took part in running the state and public affairs and making decisions on political, economic, and social and cultural problems in accordance with the tasks written into their rules. They also enjoyed the right to initiate legislation. The right to initiate legislation under the constitution was vested in various bodies. It could be initiated by the Supreme Soviet and also by the Republics and the Soviet of Nationalities, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the Council of Ministers of the USSR, the Union Republics, the Deputies and Commissions of the Supreme Soviet, the Supreme Court of the USSR, and the Prosecutor General.¹⁰

This demonstrated a more direct participation of the people in the legislation – making process, which was the most important component of federalism and autonomy. The participatory rights of the people also included the right to submit proposal to state bodies to improve their policies or functioning, the right to criticize their performance (Article 46), the right to lodge complaints against state officials and others, and also the right to seek “legal compensation” from courts for “damages” caused by unlawful action by state organizations (Article 58). Additionally, the structure of participatory rights had been strengthened in chapters 13, 14 and 19 of the 1977 constitution which sought for enhancement of the

¹⁰ B. Topornin, “New Constitution of the USSR,” *General Features of the New Constitution of the USSR*, Progress Publishers, Moscow. 1980, PP. 16-17.

functional role of People's Deputies of the local Soviets, as also of other local bodies of state authority. The responsibilities of People's Deputies lied in local decision making to ensure "all round economic and socio-cultural development of their area (Article 147)".¹¹ These thus constituted the additional dynamic linkages with the envisaged goals of participatory self-government, greater functional autonomy of the local institutions.

The 1977 constitution took the very step that had been opposed twenty years earlier. A separate law, which might be changed without constitutional amendment, thus making it unnecessary to obtain consent of two-thirds of the deputies. The standing of the Union Republics as administrative units was enhanced soon after Khrushchev's ouster. The split occurred between Federal and Republic governments. As a result the government planned and the Republics operated the industries. The 1977 constitution of the USSR clearly stated that the Soviets and their apparatus should handle the entire volume of territorial administration with their jurisdiction. While preserving the basic federal framework, the 1977 constitution tried to eliminate "excessive" regulatory elements. For example it had left it to the Union Republics to determine the composition and range of power of their Supreme Soviet as well as their Presidiums (Articles. 137 – 139). Likewise the scope of Article 73, which dealt with

¹¹ Bonn Toporia, *"The New Constitution of the USSR"*, Progress Publications. Moscow, 1980. P. 56.

the power of the highest bodies of the state apparatus of the Union Republics, had been expanded with a view to facilitate their active and greater participation in decision making at the Republic level and at the national level. This, thus, endorsed the functional ethos embodied in the 1977 constitution, which seemed to favour institutional decentralization. The Soviet system denied to its Republics the right to tax and to dispose of revenues, except, in accordance with terms established by the federal authority. This indicated that the Federal Supreme Soviet annually adopted a budget for the entire federation. The Supreme Soviet of the Republic, within the general limits established, established the final budget of each Union Republic in detail. Budget procedures might contribute to a sense of participation in governing and dignity but it was a limitation on a Republic's power to plan its own future.

Preservation of the dignity of the Republics was another matter. A new provision of the 1977 constitution, namely the provision requiring that the two chambers of the Supreme Soviet be equal in number of deputies. The new formula required that both chambers had an equal number of deputies, so that the ratio would be changed with each census to prevent increase in the number of deputies. Dignity was also enhanced by the constitutional guarantee to Union Republics of the right to secede. The right to secession enhanced the dignity of the Union Republics and

implement formally the declaration in Article 76 of the 1977 constitution that Union Republics were "Sovereign".¹²

The principle of federalism and autonomy found its most viable expression by the demarcation of the jurisdiction of the Union and of the constituent Republics in it. By vesting each level of Soviets with a definite volume of jurisdiction, the constitution gave the organs of authority the possibility to independently resolve the problems within their terms of references and excluded the supplanting of some organs by others. The 1977 constitution of the USSR also reaffirmed the independence of judiciary by principles such as the election of judges (Art. 152), the independence of courts and procurator's offices (Art. 155, 168.) and collegiality and publicity in the hearing of civil and criminal cases (Art. 154, 157) and listed the guarantees of the transgression of the person (Art. 54-57) . It recorded the obligation of the state and all its bodies to act on the basis of socialist legality and ensure law and order.¹³

In the 1977 constitution of the U.S.S.R. there was a clear cut continuity of the ideas of the 1918 constitution of the RSFSR, the 1924 and 1936 constitution, which established the principles for demarcating jurisdiction between the organs of the USSR and of the Union Republics. However, for the first time in the history of Soviet constitutional

¹² Donald. R. Kelley, "*Soviet Politics from Brezhnev to Gorbachev*" Praeger, New York, 1987, P.41.

¹³ Georgy Shakhnazarov, "Tendencies in the Development of Socialism's Political System" *Problems of Contemporary World*,(70), 1978, P. 120.

legislation, the fundamental law devoted special chapters to the legal status of Autonomous Republics, Autonomous Region and Autonomous Areas. This diversity of the forms of Soviet autonomy was foreseen by Lenin when he wrote the possibility of forming autonomous areas along side the large national territorial units. Thus, the forms of national statehood that had taken shape in the USSR and stood according to the test of time, proved their viability in combination with Soviet form of federalism and autonomy.

Though it has been put forward by some critics that the concept of 'autonomy' did not find its proper expression in the Soviet-Russian polity, still it cannot be denied that autonomy on the ground of culture, language, ethnicity, as well as to a comfortable extent in the case of regions restored to an optimum level of satisfaction. Soviet autonomy brought about a true rebirth of people, large and small and their all – embracing and much accelerated progress. The outstanding achievements realized by Soviet nations and nationalities on the foundations of Soviet autonomy area striking confirmation the vast potential these forms of national state structure represented.

Autonomy and Federalism under Gorbachev:

In the pre-Gorbachevian period, the powerful central authority used its political and coercive clout to impose its authority and decisions on the Republics. However, with the inauguration of the era of *glasnost* and

perestroika things began to change and the sphere of nationality relations did not remain untouched by these far reaching changes. The new practice of deliberating on and inviting criticisms pertained to the inequalities inherent in the federal structure. There was emphasis on the necessity of restructuring the politico – economic framework of the Soviet state and of establishing a genuine federal arrangement. Gorbachev changed the matrix of Soviet politics. Loosening of the coercive control mechanisms contributed to an explosion in public activism throughout the Soviet Union. The republican press also provided stimulus to the national activism. Further more, the local intelligentsia organized themselves into clubs or people’s fronts to articulate the aspirations and demands of their ethnic groups. They began mobilizing public opinion and these fronts emerged as the champions of the ethnic and regional aspirations. Public opinion emerged as an important factor in Soviet politics. Gorbachev, in an attempt to overcome the stagnation in the Soviet economy especially in the context of Central Asia, cut subsidies, amounts of turnover tax redistribution was reduced, massive projects were kept in abeyance and the Republics were made to rely on their own resources mobilization.

Glasnost and *perestroika* resulted in gradual but steady erosion of the “traditional normative framework” of the USSR and also gave increasing impetus to the ideologies of democracy and distributive justice. Gorbachev denounced various aspects of Soviet history and called into

question the legitimatising principle of the Soviet state and thereby undermined the ideological hegemony of the Marxist- Leninist theory. Thus the gaps between revealed with the quick delegitimation of the Communist Party and ideology. Nationalist causes occupied the political space which had been created by Gorbachev's policies.

In the face of rapidly deteriorating ethnic relations, Gorbachev suggested bringing far-reaching reforms in the federal set up of the Soviet Union. However, it become clear with the demands for greater autonomy and sovereignty that only reconsideration of the very basis of Soviet statehood would satisfy the aspirations of the various republics and nationalities. Gorbachev after being elected as President called for the conclusion of a "New Treaty". Certain characteristics of the treaty virtually amounted to the dissolution of the Soviet state paradoxically under the plea of saving the state. A series of declarations of republican independence there after signed the death warrant of the first communist state in the World.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Soviet leaders, especially Lenin in order to harness the revolutionary potential of the oppressed nationalities in overthrowing the Czarist regime and to prevent the eventuality of domination by Russians (being the major ethnic group) over other nationalities and also taking into cognizance the national aspirations of the subjugated nationalities came up with a unique federal formulation known as the Soviet nationality policy. Both Lenin and Stalin, approved the federal solution to nationality problem, when confronted with the task of reorganizing the administrative apparatus of the first Communist state in the world in 1917-18. Lenin referred to a federal setup as the “surest step to the most solid unification of the different nationalities of Russia into a single democratic centralized Soviet state”.

Soviet nationalities policy in Central Asia proclaimed legal and constitutional equality of all the peoples of the region. It abolished all special national privileges and created a voluntary federal union of free and equal nations. The distinct peculiarities of the peoples of Central Asia regarding history, culture, religion and language had an important bearing on the nationality question in Central Asia. Further, the Bolsheviki added the territorial dimension to the nationality question. The dominant ethnic groups besides being provided with fixed territory were also invested with a politico – administrative apparatus which served to strengthen their

ethno- national identity. Thus, these Republics were built on the foundations of distinct ethno-cultural history. The constitution commission which was established in April, 1918 recommended the creation of federal units based on national territorial principle. This principle gave formal status and political recognition to the leading nationalities and recognized their claim to homeland. The national territorial principle thus gave a sense of self-determination, a promise of autonomy and a feeling of natural representation to the national minorities.

The Soviet nationalities policy in Central Asia had two broad trends, which with their divergent appearance, worked in a complementary manner. The first was the implementation of a policy of centralization which subordinated the regional interests to the interests of the Union. The other was the promotion and encouragement of national and linguistic peculiarities of the peoples of Central Asia within the overall socialist setup. These two trends although appeared to work at cross purposes, in fact helped to realize a common objective, that is the consolidation of the Soviet regime in Central Asia. The centralization of power in local party and governmental organs did help in the promotion of non-regional and all-union loyalties among the peoples of Central Asia. It also established multiple ties between the Centre and the Central Asian Republics.

The process of building national state formations in the Central Asian region which began in early twenties was brought to completion in

1936. At the end of this period the inequality of political status which prevailed among the state formations of the Uzbeks, Turkmens, Tadjiks and Kirgiz disappeared. National state delimitation was carried out in Central Asia in 1924 as a result of which national Soviet Socialist Republics were formed. Two of them, the Uzbek SSR and the Turkmenistan SSR were formed as Union Republics within USSR. Others, like the present day Tajikistan came into existence as an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Uzbek SSR, Kirghiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within RSFSR and Kara – Kalpakia as an Autonomous Oblast within Kirghiz ASSR. These national Soviet Socialist Republics and Autonomous Oblasts provided the main peoples of Central Asia with their own national state forms for the first time in history. Subsequently, Tadjikistan and Kyrgyzstan were elevated to full Soviet Socialist Republics. Thus, all the Central Asian peoples acquired their national statehood.

The establishment of the national republics of Central Asia enabled the Uzbeks, Turkmens, Tadjiks, Kirgiz, Kazakhs and Kara Kalpaks to consolidate their nationhood.² The economic policies which were subsequently pursued in relation to Central Asia, conferred upon these local nationalities a substantial degree of economic prosperity. Soviet nationalities policy adapted a flexible approach in state construction and resolving nationalities question in Soviet Central Asia. It granted national

autonomy to Central Asian Republics to develop their national identity and statehood. It laid greater emphasis on rendering all assistance to the Central Asian region to overcome its economic backwardness and to catch up with the economically more advanced parts of the Soviet Union. The implementation of Soviet nationalities policy resulted in the transformation of one of the most backward regions of Tsarist Russia into an economically and culturally developed region. Thus, the Central Asian peoples achieved considerable economic and cultural progress during the Soviet period.

The concept of autonomy and federalism occupied prominent place in the Soviet constitution. In the 1977 constitution of the USSR there was a clear cut continuity of the ideas of the 1918 constitution of the RSFSR, the 1924 and 1936 constitutions of the USSR which established the principles of demarcating jurisdiction between the organs of the USSR and of the Union Republics. The 1977 constitution retained the structure of federal arrangement of Union-Republic relationships and division of state powers. It wholeheartedly preserved and reinforced the Leninist principles of complete equality, free self-determination of nation, and socialist federalism and thus restoring the principles of autonomy and federalism to optimum extent. As a federal State the USSR was founded on the principle of democratic centralism. But centralization operated hand in hand with federalism with the broad autonomy of the Republics, which enhanced the core value of federal state and facilitated the development of each

Republic. Mutual relations among the Republics were built on federal principle so that the interests of the multinational state were combined with those of each of the constituent Republics.

Soviet nationalities policy was based on the objective laws of economic development to breakdown ethnic boundaries and achieve the objective of international integration. However, the Soviet nationality policy in many ways was responsible for the emergence of ethnicity in the USSR as it served to consolidate the identities of the major ethnic groups of Central Asia. The federal units of the Union were based on ethno-linguistic identity. Soviet policy in Central Asia consolidated the ethno-political identity of Central Asian Republics, providing each titular nationality with a fixed territorial locus. Five nationally homogenous Republics were created around a 'core' ethnic group which was the largest or the dominant nationality in the area. The five Republics were named after their respective 'titular nationality'. The delimitation of territorial boundaries and creation of Republics for each of the five major ethnic groups offered both a sense of "separateness" and "inclusion" that reinforced local identity. The dominant ethnic groups besides being provided with fixed territory were also invested with a politico-administrative apparatus which served to further strengthen their ethno-national identity. Ethno-nationalism was one of the prime cause for the collapse of the Soviet Union, a phenomenon that socialism proclaimed to

have solved. Communist stalwarts from Lenin to Khrushchev had proclaimed that Marxism-Leninism had solved the national question in the multinational Soviet State. It was claimed that the establishment of the Bolshevik rule, which abolished national oppression, had invested the titular nationalities with administrative territorial states and undertaken measures for the development of their language, culture and economic well being. However, the ethnic implosion during the Gorbachev years besides exploding the myth of stability and invincibility of the first socialist state in the world also falsified another myth that the nationality question had been solved in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's regime decisively transformed the very nature of the national question in the former USSR. Gorbachev's participatory style of functioning, inauguration of a regime dedicated to openness, loosening of the coercive control apparatus, advocacy of restructuring particularly in the realm of economic performance and finally his impatience and criticism of the bureaucratic apparatus and the party organization precipitated the rise of ethno-nationalism.

With the inauguration of the era of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, in the Gorbachevian period, things began to change and the sphere of nationality relations was particularly affected by these far-reaching changes. The new practice of deliberating on and inviting criticisms pertained to the inequalities inherent in the federal structure. Thus there was emphasis on the necessity of restructuring the politico-economic frame work of the

Soviet state and of establishing a genuine federal arrangement. Gorbachev changed the matrix of Soviet politics. Loosening of the coercive control mechanisms contributed to an explosion in public activism throughout the Soviet Union. The republican press also provided stimulus to national activism. Furthermore, the local intelligentsia organized themselves into clubs or peoples' fronts to articulate the aspirations and demands of their ethnic groups. They began mobilizing public opinion and these fronts emerged as the champions of the ethnic cause. Public opinion emerged as an important factor in Soviet politics. *Glasnost* and *perestroika* resulted in a gradual and steady erosion at the "traditional nominative framework" of the USSR and also gave increasing impetus to the ideologies of democracy and distributive justice. In the face of rapidly deteriorating ethnic relations, Gorbachev suggested bringing far-reaching reforms in the federal setup of the Soviet Union. However, it became clear with the demands for greater autonomy and sovereignty that only a reconsideration at the very basis of Soviet statehood would satisfy the aspirations of the various republics and nationalities. Gorbachev after being elected as President called for the conclusion of a "New Union Treaty". Certain characteristics of the treaty virtually amounted to the dissolution of the Soviet state paradoxically under the plea of saving the state.

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