

Islam, Secularism and Women in the secular Republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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2012



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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "*Islam, Secularism and Women in the secular Republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan*" submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Anuradha Chenoy for making this dissertation a reality. It has been a wonderful and enriching experience to work under her supervision. Her enthusiasm and interest in this subject has been very encouraging for me to work on this topic in the first place. I would like to thank her for sincerely helping me from finalizing the topics, to providing me with references and every little detail. Her vision and clarity regarding the subject has made my understanding of the subject better and has been very helpful in the writing of this dissertation. Working under her supervision has been a valuable and priceless experience in every aspect of my life. I hope this dissertation is close enough to meet her levels of expectations from any such academic works.

I would like to thank my Aama, Baba and my brother for standing by my side and encouraging me to pursue my education to this level and encouraging me to even go further. The love and support I receive from them gives me great strength and comfort and I shall remain ever grateful for all that they have done for me.

I would like to thank my friends Gayatri and Menon for instilling confidence in me and for being there for me during my numerous moments of severe panic attacks. Thank you, my LSR buddies, Krattika, Puja, Shivani and Swati for everything. Words fall few when it comes to thank you guys because you guys have been there like family, always believing in me and being there for me. There are a list of many more friends, Obja, Anuradha, Anuja, Syndhya, Sabah, Lenin whom I will always be grateful to for being there for me and making life in J.N.U really nice and beautiful. Lastly, I would like to thank Rajk for standing by my side and being there at all times. Thanks to this support at the end of this dissertation I have emerged as a more confident and better person, to a certain extent understanding where my heart lies and what I seek to do in life.

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Introduction

Statement of the Problem and the Objectives of study

The disintegration of the Soviet Union resulted in the creation of five independent republics in the Central Asian region. Independence was accompanied by a radical transformation of the socio-economic and political structures of the Soviet system. These changes posed various problems threatening the socio-economic and political stability of the region and to its people. The emergence of radical Islamic groups, especially in the Republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan was one of the most serious problems. The Constitution of these republics defined them as sovereign, secular republics. Islam plays a very important role in the lives of the people in these republics. However, the emergence of these groups put forward a new challenge of defining Islam in these republics. There were large scale speculations regarding the variant of Islam that would be adopted by these republics, the fear being that radical Islam would replace the ideology of the Soviet Union.

These speculations were however largely unfounded and based on the generalisation of Islam as being monolithic in nature. The Islamic practices observed by different Muslim countries remains varied and are shaped up by the socio-political and economic context in which these practices emerge. Islam in the Central Asian republics too has a long history and has developed within the framework of changing socio-political and economic contexts. These factors have played a very crucial role in the manner in which Islam is today observed and practiced by the people in these republics. In the aftermath of independence, the contours of Islam are once again being redefined to suit the interests of those in power. In continuation with their Soviet past, these republics have opted for secularism as a policy option. However, those in power have also continuously shown their allegiance to their faith by observing Islamic practices in the public spaces. This has resulted in the state following very ambiguous policies towards religion and secularism, whereby there is a Soviet style monitoring of religious activities while at the same time propagating the restoration of Islam as a part of their tradition.

This restoration of a traditional past forms the basis of the nation building process which has different implications for men and women. The approaches to studying the nation and the idea of national security is however mostly state centric and the impact

of the different processes of nation building on different groups making up the nation is not addressed as part of the discourse on international relations. The impact of these processes on women as a group especially remains largely ignored and outside the domain of International studies. The politics of state/nation and religion impact women in different ways than they do men. This dissertation seeks to analyse these differences and its consequences.

Women in these republics have had to face the double brunt of independence and the resurgence of Islam at different levels. The former has resulted in radical transformation from the state controlled economy to market oriented reforms resulting in large scale unemployment, increasing levels of poverty and cut down on social expenditure. These changes have been felt by the women both at home and work. Gender equality formed an integral part of the Soviet ideology which is now being replaced by a different ideology that seeks to glorify the traditional national heritage which is inherently patriarchal and places men at the helm of affairs.

The women in these republics have been therefore adversely affected by these changes which have resulted in lowered socio-economic and political status of women. The state uses secular politics to control the influence of radical Islamic groups on the one hand while on the other hand Islam is deployed by the state to ensure adherence to the official national ideology. The bid to contain religious practice by making it conform to an emergent 'official' national ideology, which is patriarchal in form and content, makes the boundaries between so-called secular and Islamic moralities, and expectations blurred and indistinct (Kandiyoti, 2008). Secularism still provides women with a better alternative which is apparent when the condition of women in these republics is compared to their counterparts in Islamic republics. However, secularism does not ensure the end of patriarchy which has been apparent in the attitude of the state which has been reinstating conservative gender ideologies.

The changing status of women in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is the focus of this dissertation. These changes have been largely attributed to Islam, this dissertation seeks to reject these contentions and establish the crucial inter-linkage between the state, religion and the condition of women in these republics. Identity formation remains an integral part of the nation building processes in the post-

independence era in these republics. It is the manner in which Islam has been deployed by the states in these processes that has had a significant impact on women's lives in these republics. Secularism has been adopted as a conscious policy choice in continuation with their Soviet legacies. However feeble attempts at modernization by introducing economic reforms while at the same time strengthening elements of traditionalism in the private/public spaces have had negative impacts on the lives of women. Therefore, despite formal guarantees of equality women are today being deprived of the privileges that had ensured them a level of formal equality under the Soviet regime. Secular politics is being used by the state as an effective policy to control the threat of radical Islam yet at the same time it seeks to deploy Islam to restore traditionalism as a national heritage. This dissertation focuses on the narratives of Islam and the state and in its impact on the lives of women in the secular republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Outline of the Chapters:

Chapter One: Islam in the Secular Republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

This chapter traces the historical development of Islam in the region within the framework of changing socio-economic and political context. The first chapter provides the theoretical framework for understanding Islam and secular politics. This chapter explores how Islam was influenced by the differing state policies under the tsarist regime, the Soviet system and by the state in the post-independence context. The focus of this chapter is on the development of Islam as a moderate force in these regions as a result of the state policies of these systems. It is also the argument of this chapter that despite being an alternative secularism today is being challenged at every step especially by the radical groups that have resurged in the post-independence era. The ambiguous stand of the state in the post-Soviet era towards religion and secularism has once again brought the relation between religion and state to the fore. This chapter seeks to explore the issue of Islam's compatibility with secularism, with the broader argument that secularism needs to be redefined and models of secularism has to developed to suit local circumstances. The argument of this chapter is that the post-independence state in its modern nation building process needs to redefine its

secular, economic and political policies to ensure that the radical groups are not successful in mobilizing the people by using Islam as a force.

Second Chapter:

Islam and Women in the Secular Republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

This chapter follows the arguments of the first chapter and seeks to explore the relation between Islam and women's lives in these republics. The focus of this chapter is to trace how women and gender relations were influenced by the manner in which Islam was developing in these regions. In tracing the historical evolution of women's position in these societies, Leila Ahmed's argument has been up that at the time of formation of an Islamic identity; certain local traditions were picked up and incorporated by those interpreting the norms and values of Islam to be given an Islamic character to these norms and traditions. A social structure was built up that defined specific gender roles and was ordained by the Sharia as the way of life. The manner in which these practices underwent radical changes under the Soviet regime has been analysed to explain the impact of these changes on the lives and condition of women. This chapter seeks to establish that women were not passive recipients of faith but actively participated in upholding the value system of Islam in these regions. However, the manner in which these values were now practiced was different. The socio-religious policy of the state had significant impact on the lives of women under the Soviet system which had paradoxical consequences. The focus of study in this chapter is the impact of these changes in the lives of women.

The lives of women in these republics were tied up to their Islamic identity during the pre-Soviet era which was altered and underwent transformations under the Soviet regime. The attacks on the traditional practices like bride payment, observance of the veil, polygamy were radical measures taken by the state to end the seclusion of women and ensure gender equality. These policies resulted in the creation of a Sovietised public space while traditional solidarity was maintained within the private spaces. Islam never went out of the lives of the people and women had an important role to play as guardians of tradition within their private spaces. This chapter seeks to ask the questions:

1) How did Islam influence upon the lives and conditions of women in these regions?

2) Did women's economic empowerment ensure gender equality in the true sense; did these policies alter existing gender relations?

The answer to these questions forms the part of this chapter and the third chapter. This chapter concludes that the lives of the women underwent radical transformations during the Soviet period, changes which were both challenged and accommodated to suit their new lifestyle under the Soviet regime. The women in the post-independence scenario seek to have a life in continuation with this Soviet past where they seek to maintain their ties with Islam while at the same time have the right to equality which has been curtailed to a large extent under the changed circumstances.

Third Chapter:

Women, Islam and the State in the Secular Republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

The post-Soviet states in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has been witness to increasingly conservative gender ideologies. The condition of women in these republics has deteriorated socially, economically and politically. These changes have been attributed to the presence of and strengthening of Islam in these republics. This chapter seeks to reject this contention that Islam has been the sole factor for the changed status of women in these republics. The focus of this study is to trace the crucial inter-linkage between Islam, secular politics and its impact on the lives and condition of women in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Women in these republics have had to face the double brunt of economic crisis, social transition with independence and the resurgence of Islam in the public spaces. What has these developments meant for women and gender relations in these republics? What has been the impact of secular politics for women in these republics? What does the resurgence of Islam as a factor for defining gender relations signal for women in these republics? How did Sovietisation of the public spaces impact women's lives? Can the changes in women's condition be attributed just to the presence of Islam in these regions? This chapter seeks to find the answers to these questions that is very crucial to understand how women's lives have been impacted upon by these developments.

This dissertation is an attempt to look at the impact of secularism paralleled with progressive policies on the status of women in these republics. In the wake of

Independence, progressive policies have taken a back seat resulting in the deterioration of women's lives while secularism has been taken up as a policy choice to deal with the threat of radical Islam. The hypothesis of this dissertation is that secular politics paralleled with progressive socio-economic and other policies is a necessary condition to ensure that women's rights are guaranteed in the society. The three chapters works within this framework and seeks to prove this hypothesis by analysing women's life in relation to Islam as it developed under the state policies of the different regimes therefore tracing the inter-linkages between Islam, the State and its impact on women in the secular republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Chapter One

Islam in the Secular Republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1990's there was wide spread speculation about the future of the Central Asian republics. Independence opened up several challenges and problems. The threat posed by radical Islam being extremely significant amongst all other issues. Debates on the future of these nascent republics in the international arena revolved around what course they would take up in the wake of independence gripped by fears of economic, social and political instability. It was an almost established belief that these republics in the wake of such large scale uncertainties would definitely follow the trajectory of the West Asian regions and set into place Islamic republics, thereby inextricably linking up the Islamic identity to the national identity. However, these states in continuation with their Soviet legacies challenged every established notions and beliefs and established themselves as secular republics.

Islam, especially in the aftermath of the September 11 attack, has generated widespread interest with the result that a certain stereotype has been established regarding Islam and Islamic practices/values and beliefs. The Western world's obsession with Islam has contributed significantly to producing the 'established knowledge' about Islam, the most general understanding being the inextricable link between Islam and terrorism. This question has fuelled fresh round of "culture talk": the predilection to define cultures according to their presumed "essential" characteristics, especially as regards politics (Mamdani, 2002:766). Following this line of argument, it has become extremely important to deconstruct these established notions regarding Islam and therefore understand that Islam is not a monolithic structure having universal values but is a global civilization where values and beliefs are shaped up in the context in which it is practiced. As observed by Mamdani, it is therefore important to place cultural debates in historical and political contexts rather than dismissing them like culture talk does (Mamdani, 2002:767). Central Asia is a case in such a framework.

Islamic revival is a reality in the republics of Central Asia, but the nature, scope and intensity of these developments have been widely analysed in the framework of generalised beliefs and understandings regarding Islam. As stated before, most

literature on Islamic revival in the Central Asian Republics falls under the mainstream Realist school of thought with the state and national interest being the area of concern. Islamic revival in Central Asia is therefore seen in terms of how it impacts internal and external security, defined in terms of posing a threat to “national interest”. Likewise, the questions and debates then revolve around how to tackle this threat. Islam is therefore taken as a monolithic entity with certain essential features with the understanding that the practice of which will result in similar situations and therefore the solution to dealing with these situations would also have to be the same. This kind of an approach to understanding Islamic revival in the republics of Central Asia will have its own limitations and completely delegitimize the role of history and political/social/economic conditions in shaping up values and beliefs of any culture.

It is in this context that it becomes important to place Islamic revival in the Central Asian republics within the framework of its own historical developments in the region, from the point of its arrival to the developments it underwent under different regime types to understand the scope and intensity and implications of Islamic revival in the region. This dissertation focuses on the two republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the major areas witness to the revival of radical Islam by fundamentalist groups, in the Central Asian region in the post-Independence scenario. As has been rightly observed by Khalid, before analysing the role of Islam in contemporary Uzbekistan, it is important to comprehend what Islam means to the people of Uzbekistan. In analysing questions like how is religion and authority reproduced today, and what is the relationship to the broader field of political power? What contests over the place of Islam in society are under way now? the popular understandings of Islam has been intertwined with and subordinate to powerful discourses of nation and progress. As a result, Islam today is widely understood in Uzbekistan in ways that are profoundly secular (Khalid, 2003:573). An understanding of Islam in these republics has to therefore be taken up within this framework.

Understanding Islamic revival in the republics of Central Asia therefore requires the analysis of the social milieu in which Islam was introduced and practised. It is important to therefore understand how Islamic practices have been constantly shaped and reshaped by the parallel socio/economic and political developments that have taken place in the region. The role of the state towards Islam in Central Asia has moved from complete non-interference under the Tsarist regime to massive state

interference under the Soviet and the post-Soviet state. State policies have had a significant impact on how Islamic practices have developed in the republics of Central Asia. These developments are apparent in the extent to which Islamic practices influenced the daily lives of the masses during the Soviet and the post-Soviet era. This comparative perspective gives an insight into how Islam is not archaic and monolithic but constantly changing and adapting itself to different situations and circumstances. This also makes it possible to trace the crucial connection between the role of the state policies and Islamic revival in the region.

Islam was introduced into the Central Asian region through two means: one through invasion and the other through trade. Conversion to Islam as observed by Haghayeghi was carried out in two phases. The first phase, which mostly took the forms of conquest and subjugation, lasted for a relatively short period of time beginning in the mid seventeenth century and effectively ending early in the eighth century, subsequent to the death of Qutayba ibn Muslim, who was in reality responsible for the successful Arab infiltration into Central Asia. The second phase of conversion was made possible by Muslim merchants and later, by missionaries who exposed the local population to Islam along the trade routes, in particular the famous Silk Route. (Haghayeghi, 1997: xix). The introduction of Islam into these regions was a very gradual process where the population were divided by their other identities. Islam as a force unifying the people developed at a very later stage.

The introduction of Islam into the region was largely affected by geographical factors as well whereby beyond the oasis towns and valleys, the spread of Islam on the Central Asian steppe was slow and sporadic. Islam did not come to the Kazakh steppe until the seventeenth century, and even then the predominant Sufism incorporated ancient shamanistic traditions of nomadic culture, such as the veneration of animals and nature (Rashid, 2002:28). Successful inroads were therefore possible more in the sedentary regions in comparison to the tribal regions of the Steppes. Haghayeghi (1997:xix) observes that Islam made its lasting impact on the sedentary population of Central Asia as a way of life and not so much as a religious ideology by the beginning of the thirteenth century. Islamization of the tribal population however was a much slower and weaker process in comparison to the settled population of the region.

Sufism makes up an important variant of Islam in the Central Asian region. Introduction of Islam into the tribal regions of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan was made possible largely through the Sufi sects of the Naqshbandiya, Qadiriyya, Yasawiyya and Kubrawiyya order. The fact that there exists diversity in terms of existing religious doctrine coupled with the geographical differences gives Islam an entirely different meaning in the Central Asian context. Majority of the Muslim population in the region belong to the Sunni sect of the Hanafi school of liberal thought which lays more emphasis on beliefs in the Islamic faith than adherence to practices. In practice Islam in Central Asia has been conventionally deferential to political authorities, and has shown little sympathy for radical Islamist movements (Gunn: 2003:396). Islamic practices in Central Asia is completely different and therefore cannot be taken as homogenous, especially in the post-independence scenario, the discourse on Islamic practices remains extremely diverse and fragmented. Islamic practices were also strongly influenced by the state policies especially under the Soviet regime. It is with this legacy that the people relate themselves to in the post-independence context.

It is therefore important to understand the crucial inter-linkage between the state and religion to understand how the former plays a crucial role in defining the influence of the latter in the lives of the people. This point of reference is significant to understand the nature, scope, intensity and influence of the Islamic revival in the post-Soviet space. In order to understand how Islam operates in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan it is important to trace how present day Islamic practices are either a legacy of the past or a divergence from the past. Islamic revival are therefore inextricably tied to and constantly influenced by the existing regime types and the attitude of these regimes towards these practices. Islam as stated before therefore has to be understood in the local social/political milieu to understand what course it would chalk out for itself in terms of it being practiced by those adhering to these beliefs. State policies therefore play a crucial role in shaping up the overall Islamic orientation in the region. This chapter traces the development of Islam in the region as a response to the policies adopted by the different regime types from the Tsarist era to the Soviet regime and finally to the post-independence context.

For the Russian colonisers, Central Asia as a region appealed more in terms of the vast mineral and other resources it provided especially cotton production. The tsarist

regime's conquest of the Muslim dominated province was mostly to expand their empire and once the conquest was completed, the Russians adopted towards the Muslim population a policy that was inconsistent and contradictory both as regards the various peoples and the times at which it was applied. It was also confused, for it was rarely the result of a premeditated plan conceived and applied by the central authorities, but more often the consequence of local initiative which was only later confirmed and legalised by St. Petersburg (Benningsen and Quelquejay :1967:11). Many economic and political reforms were introduced by the Tsarist regime for administrative purposes and to establish their control. However, the Tsarist regime did little to change or reform existing social structures. The Russians adopted a colonial policy towards the Muslim population; they did not try to russify it or to introduce "European" civilisation. The Muslims were not regarded as citizens of the empire; they were not subject to military service and they preserved their own juridical status in conformance with Muslim law (Ibid). The Colonisers were more interested in the vast mineral resources the region had to offer and did little to introduce reforms in the existing social structures.

The Russian colonisers were as mentioned above more interested in advancing their empire and less in bringing about a cultural revolution. Russian administrative policy was different for Turkistan and the Kazakh steppes. The existing political structure of the regions was broken down and new economic and political structures were put into place to suit the needs of the tsarist empire. Turkistan, with Tashkent being the new military and administrative headquarters, was placed under the Governor General ship of General Konstantin Von Kaufman, one of the best Russian administrators. Much like other European colonial strategies of the nineteenth century, the tsarist political aim was first to undermine the power of the traditional political authority at the highest level, though not to dismantle it altogether, and second to extend its own political and administrative authority, already in place elsewhere in the empire, into that region (Haghayeghi 1997:3). The colonial policy did produce significant changes economically and politically, without much transformation of the social structures, in the region successfully completing the colonisation of the region by the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Russian colonisation of the region resulted in the latter becoming completely subordinated to the Russian empire as supplier of raw material and other resources.

Russian social policy was aimed at the formation of pro-Russian elites in Central Asia and the preservation of status quo of the local population (Roudik, 2007:87). The colonial policy adopted was to leave the social structures untouched and to gradually enlighten the masses towards Russian culture and way of life. It was believed that the people would gradually move away from the archaic Islamic values to Russian values and customs. It was also a careful move on the part of the tsarist regime to prevent any kind of upheaval based on a common Islamic identity. The masses were in no way united at that point under a common Islamic identity, the fact being that they remained more affiliated to their tribal and clan identities. However, an earlier attempt by the Tsarist regime to forcefully convert Muslims, burning down mosques and deport Muslims to far off lands had resulted in a wave of anti-Russian sentiments among the masses and popular unrest had been fuelled by the clergy and the traditional Muslim elites. This time therefore the policy was more of appeasement and non-interference to prevent the masses from identifying themselves and uniting to fight the colonial masters under the banner of Islam.

The cultural transformation they sought to bring about was to be done through the gradual introduction of Russian education in the region. The aim was twofold: one was to expose the population to Russian culture, and the other was to train the indigenous population for service in various low-level bureaucratic positions to aid in the administration of the region. (Haghyeghi: 1997:8). These schools imparted training in Russian language, handicrafts and other aspects without interfering in traditional educational systems of the regions. It was a brilliant set up to gradually infiltrate the existing system and to implant Russian values and customs. Turkistan never experienced the politics of religious conversion. The Russian Orthodox Church did not conduct missionary activities in the region, but rather served the Slavic settlers inside the Russian outposts; likewise Russian tsars did not attempt to interfere in the religious affairs of the Muslims (Roudik, 2007:87). The Russian colonisers were more interested in maintaining their interests.

The Russian colonisers attempt to introduce Russian culture and values in the region through educational systems were met with resistance in places where Islam had made significant inroads. Encounters with the Russian way of life however paved way for the Jadid movement, led by the Muslim Intelligentsia who wished to modernise the teachings of Islam. These reforms came from within the Islamic community itself

which was also met with stiff resistance by the traditional elites which received strong support from the tsarist regime as part of their colonial, administrative policy. The tsarist regime, to legitimise their rule in the region sought to keep the traditional elites by their side. The Russian regime did not merely tolerate the clerical elite but helped it to fight heresy and uphold the Shariah law (Ibid). The Tsarist regime played safe by keeping the traditional elites content by following the policy of non-intervention. As concluded by Haghayeghi (1997:10), whether out of fear or negligence, the czarist cultural strategy did not include the wholesale destruction of the Islamic tradition. Instead, it aimed at projecting a positive image of the Russian culture, assuming that over time the “inferior” and archaic Islam would wither away. As a result of this policy, the traditional religious elites had a very strong hold. The lives of the people were governed by the Shariat and customary law (Adat). The existing traditions were gradually incorporated with the doctrines of Islam and were now being practiced and upheld as their cultural identity. Islam as such had begun to evolve as a very strong force in the lives of the people in the region by the end of the tsarist rule.

Things changed completely with the coming of the Bolsheviks to power following the October Revolution of 1917. The first Socialist Revolution had been successfully completed and the tsarist regime was put to an end completely transforming the socio-economic and political landscape of Russia. The first Soviet Constitution was framed based on the Marxist-Leninist principles. Separation of the state from religious affairs, namely the church and also every other religious institution was constitutionally established. Taking from the Marxist philosophy of religion being the opium of the masses, debates opened up on how the Soviet policy was to be framed to deal with the religious affiliations of the masses, which was a very delicate and sensitive issue. Lenin’s practical and brilliant interpretation of the Marxist philosophy in adapting it to the local circumstances in the nascent Socialist state was visible in every aspect which was likewise regarding the Soviet religious policy as well.

The Soviet Union when it came into existence established the right to national independence and self-determination of nationalities. This decree is significant in the sense that it paved way for the nationalist consciousness among the different nationalities making up the Soviet Union. The religious policy has to be analysed parallel to this development in the Soviet Union and every other socio-economic and political changes that was taking place in the region. It is only then that a clear

understanding of how Islam was developing in the region emerges and also establishes the link between the role of state policies and religious identity.

Prior to the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, during the period of the provisional government being put into place, many Muslim organisations had come into existence. The Muslim political groups were divided into two factions: The first constituted the liberal faction and standing for the modernisation of Islam, was made up of Jadids. The second, representing the conservative section and very powerful, was composed mainly of those religious minded Muslims who, formerly faithful to the tsarist monarchy, had since February become separatist. These two wings ended by amalgamating, and the Jadid element managed to take over the direction of the national movement throughout Russian Turkestan (Benningesen and Quelquejay: 1967). The First Muslim Congress was convened by the Jadids in Tashkent whereby the primary issue was the future of Central Asia and the demand for end of Russian Colonisation in the region. The Second Muslim Congress was held in Tashkent in September, 1917. Local leaders wanted to create an autonomous Republic of Turkestan, which would be federated with Russia but organized according to its own standards and Shariah law (Roudik: 2007:95).

Conscious of the national question, the Bolsheviks when they came to power put into place the decree recognising the right to self-determination and national independence. Along with this, on November, 1917, shortly after the Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, a special appeal was addressed “to all Muslim workers of Russia and the East”, which solemnly promised them that their beliefs and customs would be respected, and invited them to order their national life in their own fashion ‘freely and without hindrance’ (Benningesen and Quelquejay: 1967:82).

Efforts were made by the Bolsheviks in every possible way to win the support of the Muslim community and for this purpose the Central Commissariat for Muslim affairs was established to Bolshevisize the Muslim community. However, despite these efforts at assimilating the Muslims, at the local level, the Russians were in the forefront championing the cause of the Revolution. This was not acceptable to the Muslim community which had deep rooted suspicion of the Russians having a long history of oppression they had to face under the tsarist regime. Likewise, the Tashkent Soviet, mostly made up of Russians did behave in an atrocious manner, refusing to take in

members of the Muslim community in the administrative set up and ordering arrests of leaders and members of the erstwhile provincial government, most of them belonging to the Muslim community.

With the onset of the civil war, and the implementation of the policy of War Communism, the Soviet state was entrusted with full power which reflected in the functioning of the local Soviets as well. The earlier liberal position on national independence and self-determination was therefore reversed and in any instance of demand for autonomy, the state came down with full force on these demands. The disillusion of the Muslim community became apparent during the Civil War era with most of these organisations rising up in revolt against the Bolsheviks, the most significant of them all being the Basmachi Revolt. This revolt began in 1918 and mostly concentrated in the region of Turkestan, was the most severe form of expression of anger and discontent with the treatment of the Muslim community by the local Soviets.

With the victory of the Red Army in the civil war, their policy towards the Muslims was once again reversed. The earlier atrocious behaviour of the local Soviets were severely condemned and all efforts were now channelized to assimilate the Muslim masses into the fold of the Soviet regime. The Central Muslim Commissariat, headed by Stalin was made the primary instrument for this process of assimilation. This institution was highly successful in incorporating a large number of Muslims into the Communist party. The setting up in place of Turkestan Commission to restore the faith of the Muslim community and to undo the mistakes of the earlier local Soviets went a long way in winning many new sympathisers of the new regime. By the end of the civil war, the Muslim Communist Party was merged with the Bolshevik Party and the leaders of the former gave up all their earlier demands of creating a state within the Communist framework. It can be said that though large scale assimilation of the Muslims had been successful it was not they had become ready Communists and given up their faith and beliefs, it was largely an act of political survival.

The end of the Civil war period was followed by the implementation of policies at every level and in every aspect to then carry forward the Revolution to fulfil the larger goal of establishing a Communist society, the final and successful stage of revolution. Eliminating every vestige of religion and religious affiliation was an important part of

creating a Communist society. Lenin had been very cautious in the policy to be adopted in dealing with religious issues because of the sentiments of the masses attached to such beliefs and customs. Many debates had been initiated regarding the policy to be adopted regarding religion in the nascent Socialist state, at the end of which Lenin's strategy finally prevailed. Lenin thus pursued a two-pronged religious strategy that not only called for a comprehensive program for atheistic education, but also a plan for a systematic attack on the religious establishment (Haghayeghi: 1997:14).

This policy was put into place following the end of the civil war with the Soviet state launching a full scale attack on the institutions and establishments propagating the Islamic value system. The Islamic courts were held in high esteem in the society and jurisdiction was guided by the laws of Sharia. Legislation was passed to reduce the authority of these Islamic courts and set up Soviet legal systems. The Decree "On Sharia and Adat Courts" made these Islamic courts redundant and insignificant and prohibited the establishment of any new Islamic courts. Likewise, the secularisation of schools and educational institutions were put into place with full vigour. The Soviet Constitution established the separation of church from the state and the schools which went a long way in establishing secular institutions guided by scientific values and free of any religious affiliations.

Likewise the financial and political autonomy of the clergy was also severely restricted and limited where the property of the Waqfs were confiscated, practices like Kalym and polygamy were made illegal and every such incidents was now to be monitored and adjudicated by the Soviet Institutions and not the clergy. Large scale anti propaganda against religious teachings and beliefs were carried out by the Communist Party cadres and sympathisers. Literature on scientific teachings and value system was propagated as against religious teachings to educate and introduce the common people to ideas of scientific enlightenment vis-a-vis religious despotism. Lenin's intelligence and practicality prevailed in the formulation of the various religious strategies of the Soviet state. The Soviet state did however take a firm stand on clamping down on the influence of Islam among the masses which was more vigorously pursued by Lenin's successor Stalin.

The Stalinist era was witness to large scale repressive measures more severe and firm in dealing with any religious activity. The Soviet state gained absolute control in tightening its hold over religious activities and launched full scale measures to achieve the goals of Socialism which meant firm resistance to any kind of religious activities that hindered this process. Stalin's religious policy towards Islam concentrated on fully reducing the influence of Islam and bringing it under the strict supervision and control of the state. The state therefore in the early years of the Stalinist rule launched direct attack on the prayer houses, the mosques and the religious institutions. These institutions were forcefully shut down and the numbers were drastically reduced. The assault on Islam was made in concert by school teachers, party and komsomol agents and above all, by the Union of Godless Zealots founded in 1925(Benningsen and Quelquejay: 1967:150). This body became the primary vehicle for carrying out the anti-religious propaganda of the state with steady rise in membership from three thousand in 1928 to sixty seven thousand in 1931.

The offensive against Islam was sanctioned through legislative measures and decrees putting into place new reforms and legislative statutes to condemn these activities and discredit Islamic practices. The 1929 amendment to the Constitution made it an illegal activity to propagate religious ideas and beliefs which was earlier a constitutionally guaranteed right. Likewise the Law on Religious Associations established strict guidelines to be observed while conducting any kind of religious activities. The most significant development of the Stalinist era was the development of a very powerful and strong state. The state now had full power to control every activity which was reflected in the religious policy pursued by the state as well. This legislation gave full authority to the state to monitor and supervise any form of religious activities. The law established that only monitored religious activities could now take place and that too under the supervision of the state and any religious associations functioning without the notice of the state would be severely penalised. Further, Islamic practices like the pilgrimage to Mecca, payment of Zakat and keeping of the Ramadhan fast was also prohibited by the state.

These measures were paralleled with the frontal attack on the clergy and blatant attacks on the Quran through state sponsored journals and other forms of print media which highlighted the evils of religion. The state was firm in dealing with any official being sympathetic towards religious activities whereby any such act was dealt with

severe form of punishments. This resulted in a large number of persecutions and purging of top party officials whom Stalin believed were being lenient towards the religious establishments. The state as such took a very harsh stand on curbing every religious activity in their march towards Socialism. The Bolshevik leaders considered themselves committed by their doctrine to a ceaseless fight against all religions as such, these being 'false ideologies in the service of the exploiting class'. For them Islam was like any other religion: a "superstructural" phenomenon of capitalist or pre-capitalist society; it was simply a survival from the dead past, deflecting the masses from constructive task and even, it maybe, cloaking the manoeuvres of the enemy within or without (Ibid: 139). The purpose of the Soviet state was to remove any affiliations based on faith and tradition and to create a Sovietised secular space.

Despite this hard line approach in dealing with religion, the Soviet state was constantly facing challenges at the international and the national levels. The state's religious policies therefore kept altercating with the changing circumstances. The outbreak of the Second World War forced the Stalinist state to therefore alter the hard stand being taken towards Islam to incorporate the Muslim region in their fight against the German invaders. The war period therefore was witness to a liberalisation of the state's policies towards Islam mostly to appease the Muslim masses. The policies however did not ensure complete freedom to the religious establishments but limited autonomy under the control of the state. The state established four Spiritual Board of Directorates: the Spiritual Boards or Directorates of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan in Tashkent, of European Russia and Siberia in Ufa; of the Northern Caucasus in Buinaksk in Dagestan and of Transcaucasia in Baku. At the end of July 1943 the official body of the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) was set up... They were to ensure the homogeneity of the Muslim clergy from the point of view of both Islamic conformity and loyalty to the regime. This entailed supervision by the spiritual directorates of the clergy's strictly clerical activity and encouragement of 'patriotic' initiatives (Ro'i:2000:104). Religious activities were therefore monitored and scrutinised by the state and its institutions.

The state sought to establish institutions to keep under check the activities of the religious clergy and establishments through these institutions. A sort of hierarchy was therefore maintained with the clergy and prayer houses being monitored strictly by

these Spiritual Directorates which was supervised by the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults which was directly under the control of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union. Earlier legislative measures were revoked to some extent to grant religious freedom and toleration at some level to inculcate feeling of patriotism within the Muslim community and to prevent them from defecting towards the German invaders.

The liberal stand towards Islam was maintained after the war for foreign policy reasons. The Second World War now placed the Soviet Union in an elevated position at the International level. The Soviet Union was now seen as an arch competitor by the Western bloc who presented the USSR and Socialism as the next enemy to be fought and defeated. The international scenario was therefore such that the world was now divided into two blocs one led by the Soviet Union and the other by the Western world. It was important for both to therefore create allies in the bi-polar world to secure their interests. The Soviet Union saw their allies in the countries having faced erstwhile colonial oppressions and waging nationalist movements against their colonial masters. The Soviet policy was to support these causes to further bring about a world revolution and therefore to support these countries in their fight against Imperialism. For this purpose, the Soviets at the domestic level continued with their liberal policy towards the Muslims to gain sympathy in the Muslim countries of the East in their fight against Imperialist forces.

At the domestic level therefore, a number of earlier legislations were reversed. The prohibition on pilgrimage to Mecca was uplifted and resumed, likewise the prohibitions on zakat, observance of the Ramadhan fast were also lifted and allowed to be practiced but like mentioned above under the strict guidance and supervision of the spiritual board of directorates. The League of Godless Militants¹ was also abolished and anti-religious propaganda through print media was also brought to an end. The policy was that of limited government sponsored practice of Islam to assimilate the Muslim masses within and outside the Soviet Union.

¹ The League, designed to pursue the Soviet antireligious propaganda had become the dominant body in charge of coordinating all antireligious propaganda in the country (Haghayeghi, 1995:22).

The post Stalin era was more or less witness to a limited liberal state sponsored practice of Islam. Khrushchev's policy was similar to that of Stalin which took on a harsh turn during his later years with the Soviet state's renewed efforts to promote socialist reconstruction. This led to the anti-religious campaign of 1958-64 associated with the First Secretary's name, during the course of which religious activity was seriously repressed (Ro'i:2000:10). Khrushchev's policy was more of verbal attack and the drive to strengthen atheistic work among the masses. The Decree "On the Strict Observance of the Laws on Religious Cults" was placed in March 1961. This decree necessitated the strict observance of and implementation of existing laws to directly attack the clergy as well as other attributes of religion and the penalties for religious offences were to be made severe (Haghayeghi: 1997:32).

The anti-religious campaign led to a large number of mosques being deregistered and the number of Muslim clergy arrested and deregistered also went up. Many acts of vandalism against mosques and prayer houses were committed and those mosques seeking registration were being denied the same without any premises. Most often the pretext given for the forceful closures of mosques was that it violated the law of the land. These policies were once again reversed from 1965-85, in which the regime sought to find a modus operandi that would enable it to co-exist with religion, making it clear, however, that religion was being tolerated as a necessary evil and not encouraged (Ro'i :2000:10). At the same time there was a belief of a state sponsored or "official Islam" whose limits were acceptable. The state was constantly seeking to ensure the existence of a secular space while at the same time prevent the population from getting completely disillusioned with the state and resorting to these practices.

Khrushchev's successor, Brezhnev did not bring many changes to the state policy regarding Islam, focusing like his successor on the law enforcement aspect. More emphasis was given to enhancing the role of the party organisations and ideological institutions to promote atheistic education and prevent spread of religious views. The 1977 Brezhnev Constitution made minor changes to the article on religion guaranteeing the freedom of conscience and speaking of atheistic rather than anti-religious propaganda (Haghayeghi:1997). With the success of the Iranian Revolution and the geographical proximity of Iran to the USSR, the state tightened its control over the state sponsored religious establishments and also gave a huge pretext to strengthen control over the Muslim region in the name of state security. While the

authorities seem to have been generally ineffective in their efforts to curb the practice of religion and the extent of religiosity, they did exert considerable pressure on and control over the religious establishment. This had the effect, among others, of widening the gap between institutionalised religion and the mass of believers, who thus became less conducive to control both by their own religious leaders, whom they saw as compromised, and by the powers-that-be (Ro'i :2000:53). The political regime manipulated religious leaders and ideologies to strengthen their own control.

Gorbachev's policy of Perestroika, Glasnost and Democratisation was introduced to bring down a top down reform in the political structures of the Soviet system in every aspect. These policies granted the freedom to the masses which had earlier been denied to them under the rigid control of the Soviet system. The earlier policy of rigid control and strict attitude of the state towards the religious activities was now reversed to loosening of state control and allowing democratic freedom. This freedom of criticism granted to the masses under Glasnost and Perestroika resulted in open condemnation of the Soviet regime and severe criticism of the anti-religious propaganda that had been pursued by the Soviet state for so long. The state likewise, reversed its earlier religious policy. The change in the Soviet religious policy was first witnessed when the state formally celebrated the millennium of Christianity and Gorbachev constantly hyped on the freedom of conscience to appease the masses adhering to any religious freedom (Haghighyehi: 1997:66). These measures opened up the earlier closed spaces.

The religious freedom granted to Christianity and other religions in the region was not at par with the freedom granted to Islam. This resulted in widespread discontent and dissatisfaction among the Muslim masses. The first series of religious protests in Central Asia occurred in December 1988 when spontaneous demonstrations by Uzbek students broke out in Tashkent. Although the focus of the demonstration was the restoration of the Uzbek language and culture, according to Critchlow some participants waved green banners-a symbol of the Islamic faith- and read Koranic verses during the demonstration. Two months later, a second public protest was carried out by Muslims in Tashkent to demand the resignation of the head Mufti of the Religious Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, Shamsuddin Babakhanov ibn Zeyudin (Haghighyehi: 1997:66). In this newly gained space of more autonomy and religious freedom, the long suppressed dissent was now becoming visible.

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The demand for the resignation of the Mufti symbolised the long suppressed resentment of the Muslim masses against the Soviet regime which had so far denied them their autonomy. This resentment was reflected in the vacant position of the state representatives in the position of the Muftis being filled upon by those favoured by the Muslim community within their sphere of influence. The other aspect was the reopening of mosques and religious establishments that had been forcefully shut down and denied any form of autonomy so far. Glasnost and Perestroika paved way for large scale changes in the socio-economic and political spaces which gradually resulted in the disintegration of the Soviet Union. These changes could be seen in every aspect in the form of popular unrest and uprisings and revolts against the Soviet regime.

By October 1991, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan had declared full independence. Independence opened up many problems, the threat of unrest and resurgence of radical Islam being one important aspect. Despite the strict control maintained by the state to regulate religious activities and bring them under the supervision of the state, the Soviet regime was unsuccessful in establishing control over Islamic practices in everyday life. Despite active state monitoring of religious activities, facts state that the religious activities outside the purview of the state was more efficient in spreading religious values and beliefs, governing everyday life according to the principles of the Sharia. The family came to comprise the chief guarantee that Islam would continue to subsist, for they were so deeply rooted in society and the events they denoted so commonplace, regular and inevitable that their eradication was well-nigh out of the question (Ro'i, 2000:510). The institution of family as such played a very crucial role in passing down religious sentiments and affiliations which largely remained outside of state control therefore largely undermining and nullifying the Soviet state's attempts at eradicating every vestige of religious affiliations of the masses.

Uzbekistan and Tajikistan formed the main centres of revolt and Islamic revival in Central Asia following Independence. These revolts mostly radical in nature fuelled intense speculation and debates in the Western world especially about the future of the erstwhile Soviet republics. It was widely assumed that Radical Islam would sweep over these newly independent republics gripped by socio-economic and political unrest and establish themselves as Islamic republics. Though various reasons have

been cited for this Islamic revival in the republics of Central Asia, the manner in which this Islamic revival has been interpreted varies. The intensity and scope of these movements however, has to be seen within the parameters of the region itself and keeping it outside of the general assumption regarding Islam and any movement associated with Islam.

As has been discussed in the beginning of the chapter, the nature, scope and impact of these movements has to be seen and understood in the local context in which it operates. Unlike Western presumptions, Islamic revival in the region largely focuses on economic, political gains and due respect for the religion which has been denied for centuries under the different political regime. In the absence of adequate political, social and economic developments, these forces will just gain further momentum and strengthen its sphere of influence. The fact that these republics have opted for secular politics has gone a long way in weakening the influence of these forces among the masses. The state policies therefore, as has been the major focus of this chapter, play a crucial role in shaping up the manner in which religion can develop and operate as a mobilising force.

The tightening of state control during the Soviet era instead of controlling Islam acted in an opposite way, giving birth to Islamic activities being carried out secretly and illegally. The revolution the Soviet state initiated was a top down Revolution and not a revolution from below. The Soviet's religious policy therefore could not successfully detach the masses from adhering to these beliefs. The contribution made by the Soviets was however, the introduction of secular legislations and other such measures in the various institutions like the judiciary, the schools and religious establishments. These measures paralleled with progressive measures like free education, employment opportunities, better working conditions etc. went a long way in preventing a complete disillusionment of the masses with the state. The Soviet's anti-religious policy was almost the same for adherents of every faith which is why the Muslims of the region did not feel targeted as a particular religious community over others. The issue was more of being treated in an inferior manner vis-a vis the Russians as a community. This deep rooted suspicion was a legacy of the Colonial administrative policy of the Tsarist regime.

The Islamic revival, fuelled by the radical groups in the region therefore largely aimed at restoring the practice of their faith and religious customs unhindered by active state intervention. Islam as has been stated before has a very strong influence in the region but the Islamic practices today have been largely shaped up by how Islam developed in the region and most importantly also because of the diversity in terms of the various doctrines of the faith. The Islamic revival fuelled by the radical groups in the region has not completely encroached into the society and the scope and intensity of their influence largely depends on their organisational and mobilisation capacities as stated by Haghayeghi(1997) which at the moment remains restricted to certain regions within the different republics.

Out of the few organisations associated with the radical movements, the Islamic Revival Party(IRP) of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is the most prominent, which has opted for bringing about change by allying with the democratic process and through democratic structures. The other more radical organisation, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) which operates secretly and carries out its activities in an underground manner after having met with serious resistance and repressive measures by the state. These forces too have very limited support and are specifically concentrated in different pockets in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. These organisations have limited or no reach at all in the other three republics of Central Asia.

The support base of these organisations is mostly composed of the rural population and even if present in the urban areas, the unemployed youth and elderly men and women form the active support base. In the Uzbek republic, the IRP has its support base mostly in the Fergana Valley region. The IRP has as its objectives to ensure spiritual awakening of the masses with their everyday lives being guided by the principles of Islam and to co-operate with the democratic parties and state organisations in all fields to achieve social-economic and political equality. The IRP, though initially did demand the formation of an Islamic state has given up that demand but has maintained the need to practice their faith without any intervention by the state. The IRP has like other organisations constantly picked on the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of the region to challenge the legitimacy of the government but has not made significant inroads where increasing its sphere of influence is concerned.

The Islamic movement of Uzbekistan and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, having more radical and extremist tendencies have been able to make some inroads into the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. These organisations operate through illegal channels and are more actively engaged in cross border terrorist activities, drug trafficking and smuggling in the region. The repressive measures taken by the state against religious practices and groups operating outside the influence of the state, deteriorating socio-economic conditions have been cited as the primary reasons for the birth of these extremist organisations.

The Uzbek Constitution of 1992 delineates Uzbekistan as a secular state. Article 31 guarantees freedom of religion and protects the right to manifest a religion, while article 61 establishes the separation of religion and state. However, the Uzbek regime's policy towards Islam contradicts the spirit of the constitution (Karagiannis: 2006:263). Professing secular politics on the other hand while constantly politicising Islam to achieve political ends by the Karimov regime has further intensified the extremist agenda of these organisations. Post 1999 extremist attack on Karimov led to the regime initiating state sponsored massive crackdown. The repressive measures of the government have largely focused on completely eradicating the presence of radical groups posing threats to the regime. This ambivalent attitude of the state in constantly sponsoring Islam in ways like Karimov's special state sponsored holy pilgrimages and reciting the verses of the Quran in taking his oath while on the other hand intensifying state sponsored repression on any religious group on the basis of suspicion has further worsened the situation (Ibid).

The state crackdown on religious groups was conducted on the pretext of eradicating every vestige of fundamental and radical movements. However, this continued repression strengthened the hands of the state which extended its repressive measures to other spheres as well. The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations passed by the Uzbek Parliament on May 1998 banned the use of unregistered mosques and required all Muslim clergy to be registered. By then there were some 42000 mosques in Uzbekistan of which 2,430 were located in the Fergana Valley. Out of these, only 1,566 were ever registered by the government (Rashid :2002:146). The state under this legislation carried out forceful closure of mosques and put under state control every unregistered, unchecked activity in the pretext of checking the rise of extremist factions. The state crackdown targeted the families of

the militants as well. For instance, Namangani (chief militant of the IMU)'s mother was summoned to a public meeting at a school auditorium in Namangan, where her neighbours denounced her, and relatives of soldiers killed fighting the IMU blackened her face with paint and condemned her for bringing Juma into the world (Ibid). These acts of the state reflect the ambivalent attitude of the state towards religion and secularism.

Therefore, despite having a secular regime in place, the state's activity has severely curtailed freedom of conscience and the right to practice religion freely outside of the state's control. Although Uzbekistan's constitution ensures freedom of religion, authorities fiercely suppress any religious group that functions outside state control. In particular, authorities have intimidated, beaten, and imprisoned on false charges Muslims who are affiliated with independent organizations and clerics. Up to 60 pious Muslims in Shakhrihan district, Andijan region, were detained in June 2009 on suspicion of illegal religious activity. In August, 11 pious Muslim men were put on trial on religious extremism charges in Karshi. In November, at least 12 pious Muslim women were detained in Karshi, one of whom is a leader in a local mosque; the charges against them are not known. Authorities continue to arrest members of minority religions for their peaceful religious activity (Human Rights Watch,2010). The state security apparatuses have become increasingly powerful for the purpose of maintaining stability within the Republic. The judiciary remains highly inefficient and lacks independence whereby inquiries against state atrocities remain unchallenged and unquestioned. The executive organs and the Parliament too remain under the state supervision and inefficient in dealing with the atrocities committed by the state.

Tajikistan immediately in the wake of Independence had to face the brunt of the civil war launched in 1991 by the group of radical Islamists. The Islamic revival in Tajikistan was significant whereby many Tajiks saw Islamic revival as a means to cement a national identity and ensure Tajikistan's development as a unified state (Rashid:2002:96). The Civil war worsened the socio-economic and political conditions in the newly independent Republic which soon took an international dimension. The coming of the Taliban to power in neighbouring Afghanistan further intensified the situation with the International community acting swiftly and intervening through the U.N to initiate peace talks with the militants waging the war.

The peace talks finally came to an end with a coalition government being put into place on an equal power sharing by the religious and secular parties of Tajikistan.

In the existing situation of socio-economic deterioration, large scale unemployment became a stark reality. The economy was in a state of decline and no sufficient measures could be effectively implemented by the state to facilitate economic development in the absence of sufficient funds. The rise of Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan facilitated the use of Tajikistan as a passageway for the import of opium and cross border terrorism. The Tajik passageway was also being used as a base by the militants of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir and the IMU to carry out their underground extremist activities. The IRP of Tajikistan which had been in the forefront of the Civil War had largely modified its agenda and factionalism, splits in the IRP led to the party losing its influence gradually amongst their earlier mass base. It now functioned more as an opposition party and remodelled their demands to bring about reforms through democratic institutions and structures.

Overall, the whole tendency towards Islamisation gradually was losing hold in the region whereby the IRP had earlier been active during the Civil War years. There were very few active madrassahs or overt attempts at Islamic education in the valleys, and local mullahs had gone back to their mosques and farms. Compared to Pakistan and Afghanistan where madrassahs are turning out thousands of committed Islamicists, Tajikistan has gone back to being fairly secular (Rashid: 2002:112). The fact remains that Islam is central to the lives of the masses but in the wake of acute poverty, hunger and deprivation basic survival remains the primary concern. The state on the other hand has treated Islam as a matter of security concern and dealt with it likewise, more so in the wake of the developments in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Like in the republic of Uzbekistan, strict state control over religious activities has been maintained through enforcements of laws tightening state control and effective monitoring of these activities. A report published in March 2010 by the Bureau on Human Rights and Rule of Law, a Tajik nongovernmental organization, revealed a judicial system with little advance notification of hearings, patchy explanations of process and rights, erratic access to interpreters, and efforts by judges to exclude observers. The politicization of the Tajik justice system was underscored by the treatment of Nematillo Botakozuev, a Kyrgyz human rights activist who had sought

asylum in Tajikistan. Botakozuev disappeared in late February 2010; his relatives only learned one month later that he was in the custody of the Tajik police for allegedly lacking identification. He was held without access to communications or a lawyer. When a source known to Human Rights Watch finally saw him in mid-March, Botakozuev appeared to have been tortured. In May Tajikistan extradited Botakozuev to Kyrgyzstan, where he was held for two weeks, released, and warned by state security to refrain from human rights work.(World Report 2011:Tajikistan :Human Rights Watch).

Religious activity remains under strict surveillance of the state and religious freedom is a distant reality. Underscoring the importance of state control over religious activity, the new law removed oversight of religious groups from the Ministry of Culture and placed it with the Committee for Religious Affairs, which reports directly to the president. The state has relied on investigations, arrests, and convictions to squelch certain kinds of Muslim religious activity (Ibid). Religious freedom therefore has been placed under the active supervision of the state to check internal as well as external political threats. Gross human rights violations therefore, accompanied by miserable socio-economic conditions remain a reality in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Both the Uzbek and Tajik republics have established themselves as secular republics, constitutionally stating the strict separation of religion from the state. However the states in both these republics remains active in terms of monitoring religious activities and in the process have established strong states. The absence of a strong judicial system and ineffective executive organs has further placed absolute power in the hands of the state constantly violating the basic rights of the masses. The radical Islamic forces have relatively less influence among the masses who have succumbed to relegating Islamic practices within the private sphere of the family. There has been a revival of Islamic practices in the public and the private spaces post-independence under the pretext of reconstruction of national identity by the state. The state has however sought to delineate itself from these radical groups and to demarcate between the ideology of these groups as being imported and the acceptable practice of Islam as defined by the state. At present, the support extended to overt manifestation of militant Islam is very rare and is mostly concentrated to specific regions whereby the

socio-economic background of these regions have been rural and poverty stricken. The state in these republics still hold legitimacy among the masses but the state will have to ensure the presence of a secular space to prevent Islam from being used as a mobilisation force by these groups in the long run.

The establishment of secular societies alone does not fulfil the end purpose of achieving equality and religious harmony. In the absence of well framed progressive measures to tackle issues of poverty, unemployment, educational facilities, the effect of these policies would be nullified. Further, there is a serious need to redefine secularism, especially in countries facing transition. The concept of secularism has largely been a western one which implies strict separation of the state from the church, which has been imported and planted by transitional societies into their local context. This direct import of ideas often results in a systemic collapse and therefore the failure of establishing secular society results in the condemnation of the idea itself. This often leads to the Western world denouncing these societies as lacking inherent cultural values to establish secular societies because of their religious affiliations. Most importantly, the Muslim world, it has been stated lack the “civilisation” values to establish genuinely democratic and secular societies. The Western world believes that individuals in the Muslim world are guided in their political activity by virtue of being a Muslim which is backward and lack values that can be termed as modern and secular.

It is true that in some societies, more so on the verge of transition are in search of their national identity. In such societies divided by religious and other affiliations, religion does become a primary marker of identity. Therefore it is important for these societies to develop indigenous theory of secularism to suit the local circumstances. The dominant mainstream understanding of secularism comes from the idealised concept of strict separation of the church and state as is practiced in the West. The other variety is that of Laicism, practiced in countries like France and Turkey which has many dimensions, including the exclusion of religion from the spheres of power and authority in modern societies, the privatisation of religion, and a decline in church membership and potential disappearance of individual religious belief (Hurd:2008:29).

It is also important to understand that the Western societies, which today disregard the Muslim world for being inherently backward and inability to realise values of modernity, were not inherently secular and democratic as they believe. Hashemi(2009:11) observes “It was only after a gradual process of democratic bargaining and negotiation over the normative relationship between religion and politics has taken place-often after heated, acrimonious, and contentious debate- and today a broad consensus exists on religion’s role in the polis and the limits of its reach”. These concepts were themselves a result of lived experience in the Western world themselves.

It is therefore a necessity to dwell upon different alternative models of secularism that can be applicable to societies marked by deep rooted religious affiliations. In the case of the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan models of secularism has to be formulated that allows for religious diversity and pluralism. These republics have a more favourable tilt towards the secular state in Turkey which follows the French model of strict separation of state and the church but allows for one sided intervention i.e of the state to monitor religious activities. This conception which arose in response to the excessive domination of the Church, encourages an active disrespect for religion, and is concerned solely with preventing the religious order from dominating the secular (Bhargava:2011). Secularism as a concept has been picked up from what it means in the West today and being applied to different contexts. It is important that new models of secularism, compatible with the religious beliefs/faith of the masses be formulated and applied in societies facing transition.

Tajikistan and Uzbekistan face many problems like all transitional societies thereby seriously hampering the process of democratisation and secularisation. However, these challenges have to be addressed seriously and monitored effectively to prevent the strengthening of Islamic forces constantly using these issues to delegitimize the government. Secularism has been picked up by these republics as a policy measure to deal with the threat posed by radical Islam. However, the success of these policies will be fruitful only if coupled with progressive policies in other aspects. Islam today remains a dominant faith practiced by the people and the rituals are observed in their everyday lives. However, the Islamic practices varies and is not homogenous or monolithic where people still remain divided by ethnic and other identities. Islam as

mobilisation force is yet to develop in these republics which is why opting for secularism remains the best policy option. However, the model of secularism has to be so developed that it suits the local context and emerges as a model which allows for religious diversity, tolerance and acceptance with respect.

Islamic practices even within the region vary today and are of a very different version in these republics. The experience of the people under Islam has been completely different as compared to other areas where Islam has a prominent role to play in the lives of the masses. Islam is more of a moderate version in these republics. However, with the granting of more religious freedom after independence, there has been a resurgence of Islamic practice at different levels. The rise of fundamentalist groups propagating radical Islamic practices has been one important development. These groups have not yet gained much prominence and are mostly restricted to the rural areas with high levels of unemployment and poverty. The people have accepted Islam as a way of life and observe certain practices of Islam in their daily lives. The people of these regions also have had a long history of the Soviet past and secularisation under the Soviet regime. The result of this was that the people had a completely different experience with Islam in comparison to the other parts of the Muslim world.

The Soviet policy of secularisation went a long way in transforming the lives of the people of Central Asia. It is not to be stated that religion went away from the lives of the masses but it was just pushed to the private spaces of the family and the community. Islamic practices, despite strict state surveillance were kept alive within these spaces. The Soviet state did however manage to create a Sovietised secular space and paralleled this development with progressive policies like providing the masses with educational, employment and other opportunities. This went a long way in changing the lives of the people of Central Asia, especially the women of these republics.

In the wake of independence, the new states were grappling with the issue of state building processes. The state building process once again brought the issue of the state's approach to Islam to the fore. These republics have constitutionally defined themselves as secular republics in continuation with their Soviet legacy. The state policy towards Islam and building up a secular society remains largely ambivalent. On the one hand there has been an active monitoring of religious activities by the

state, while on the other hand the political leaders have continuously shown their affiliation towards Islam in the public spaces. The state has sought to demarcate between “officially” acceptable Islamic practices and the imported ideology of these radical groups. The people have not shown much sympathy to the radical groups as of yet, but Islam remains an important aspect of their lives within the confines of their private spaces. These groups as such have not been very successful in mobilising the people using Islam as a tool. However, the state will have to ensure the presence of a secular space along with introducing progressive policies which includes socio-economic, political and religious aspects to improve the condition of the masses to prevent the use of Islam as a force to mobilise the masses.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Islam and Islamic practices in the two republics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan when understood in its historical and political context can be best understood as being liberal and tolerant. The state in continuity with its Soviet past has opted for secular politics as a policy measure to deal with the threat of radical groups using Islam as a mobilisation force. The presumptions that Islam would take on a radical turn and sweep over the whole region have been strongly challenged by the republics. This development can be understood only when Islam is not viewed as a monolithic culture but studied and analysed within its historical and local context. The general understanding regarding Islam and Islamic practices has to therefore be deconstructed and new ways of looking at and understanding these practices have to be developed. Islam and Islamic practices in the two republics have to be therefore explained in terms of how it has been shaped up by existing local economic, social and political conditions. This explains the difference in Islam as practiced in these regions and rest of the Muslim world.

Likewise, regarding the Islamic revival, varied interpretations have been put forth and many times parallels have been drawn with other parts of the Muslim world to assume that secular politics in these countries, because of their adherence to Islamic practices, have failed. However, the mainstream understanding fails to draw a link between religion and state policies. The latter has a very strong role to play in shaping up religious practices. Secularism remains the most effective measure to deal with religious forces from taking on a radical turn. However, secularism when directly

taken up as it is understood in the West and placed in the different context often results in failed practices. In the transitional societies often faced with problems of socio-economic uncertainty and political instability, religion often acts as a strong mobilisation force and the primary marker of identity. Secularism in such contexts is the most effective policy measure, however, instead of being imported from the west into these contexts it has to have a lived experience. The western practice of secularism has been placed as the only model available; however different alternatives have to be brought into place. A model of secularism has to be developed that supports the local practices and customs and allows for religious diversity and tolerance.

Secular politics also has to be paralleled with progressive state policies in every aspect. It is only when the state takes effective measures to deal with socio-economic, religious and political issues that the radical groups using religion as force cannot use these grievances to unite the masses and delegitimize the state. The state policies therefore have a very crucial role to play in weakening or strengthening these forces. In the absence of effective state policies, these forces grow in strength using these issues and offering lucrative incentives to delegitimize the state government. Likewise, the state policies towards religion have to be effectively formulated and dealt with. Unlike the mainstream approach of dealing with these forces as just a security issue and strongly intervening using its security apparatuses to curb these forces, the meaning of security has to be constructed as well. The state has to formulate policies to deal with the socio-political and religious issues. These policies have to take into account the emotional affiliation of the masses and formulate policies that do not violate their basic human rights. Like for instance, the state using legislative measures to curb religious practices and freedom of the people will just enhance the grievances of the masses. In the absence of well framed, secular policies the radical forces will just capitalise on these grievances and use it effectively to serve their purpose of delegitimizing the state.

In the present scenario where these republics are still dealing with the problems opened up by independence, state policies have a very strong role to play in the course that Islam as a force will chalk out for itself. Deteriorating socio-economic conditions will just strengthen the influence of the radical forces. The state therefore has to

effectively deal with these various problems and also with the religious affiliations of the masses. The continued state intervention using various pretexts to curb religious freedom will just worsen the situation. Secularism as a religious policy will have to be given new meaning and made strong and effective paralleled with better and progressive policies addressing the various grievances of the masses.

This chapter has sought to look into the development of Islam and Islamic practices in the Central Asian region. The attempt of this chapter has been to focus on the relation between the changing socio-political context under different regime types and its impact on the development of Islamic practices in the region. The secularisation of the society under the Soviet regime especially had a profound impact on how Islam developed in the region. It is with this long past under the Soviet regime that the people of the Central Asian republics trace their affiliation to. This is evident in the manner in which Islam is being practiced in the post-Soviet space. The people still adhere to the faith and Islam today has come to occupy a very prominent position in the lives of the masses. It is visible in the revival of traditional practices in the forms of marriages, births, deaths and other such ceremonial functions. There has been a revival of the idea of tradition and customs and this forms the basis of national identity formation in the post-Soviet space.

The state in the post-Soviet era has effectively deployed Islam to suit its interests and glorify the ideology of the nation. The use of Islam to trace a national heritage has had different consequences for men and women, which will be analysed in the other chapters of this dissertation. The states in both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan remain largely ambiguous towards both religion and secularism. On the one hand there has been a continuation of the Soviet style state monitoring of religion, while on the other there has been an attempt to guarantee more religious freedom than under the Soviet state. The states seek to maintain a secular identity and control the threat posed by the radical groups while at the same time there has been attempts by the political leaders to show their affiliation to the faith in the public spaces. Despite this ambivalent attitude of the state Islam remains largely liberal and tolerant and is yet to emerge as a force to challenge the secular ethos of these republics.

This chapter looks at how Islam and Islamic practices developed in these regions under different regimes. It also seeks to explore how the process of secularisation

impacted these practices under the Soviet regime and in the post-Soviet scenario. In tracing the crucial linkage between the state policies and Islamic practices, this chapter concludes that Islam developed as a strong force in the lives of the masses but remains moderate and tolerant in comparison to the rest of the Muslim world. The secular state still holds legitimacy among the masses and the radical forces have made limited inroads. However, the state in these republics has shown an ambivalent attitude to both secularism and religion in the post-Soviet scenario. Islam at present remains a largely private affair but the continuous reinstatement of the same in the erstwhile secular spaces can result in secularism being compromised upon by the state. The state as such to prevent Islam from being used as a tool for mobilisation will have to ensure the strengthening of the secular spaces by formulating and implementing progressive policies in every aspect.

Chapter Two

Islam and Women in the Secular Republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

This chapter in continuation with the first looks at Islam as it emerged and developed in the Central Asian region over the years under changing socio-political and economic systems. This chapter is an attempt to further narrow the broad framework and look at the development of Islam and women's condition in the region. This chapter therefore seeks to establish a framework for understanding gender relations not as a separate component but in sync with the larger issues of socio-political and economic changes that took place in the region.

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the debates regarding the region focused mostly on the power vacuum that had been left open by this historic event. The resurgence of radical Islamist groups asserting themselves in the region led to wide spread speculation regarding the future of these nascent republics. The arguments on power vacuum itself can be questioned as a fear that did not materialise because the structures of power built during the Soviet period easily took over the new political space. The debates, following Independence remained largely state centric concerned with national security issues and speculations about the role of Islam in shaping up the socio-economic and political landscape of these nascent republics. Limited attempts have been made to break down these debates to focus on the different dimensions of this debate. One important aspect remains the crucial link between these developments and gender relations in the region. Most of the mainstream debates in International Relations often overlook this aspect as having limited or no significance in world politics. However, it is important to move away from this traditional approach to understanding world politics and to explain events from the vantage point of the different groups that make up the state which is the focus of world policy debates. It is within this framework that this chapter seeks to explore the development of Islam in the region and how this development has largely shaped up women's lives in the region. This chapter and the third one in continuation, seek to establish the link between the role of state policies, Islam and women's condition in the region.

Islam has played a very significant role in the Central Asian region and has developed within the framework of a constantly changing socio-political landscape of the region.

Changes in the latter has significantly impacted and shaped up the manner in which Islam has survived in the region. There is not much substance to the mainstream dominant discourse on Islam which sees it as a homogenous identity. Islamic values and practices have largely been shaped up by the different socio-political, economic and cultural background in which these practices have emerged and survived. Islam in the Central Asian region has been of a more moderate version as has been observed in the first chapter. The geopolitics of the region and the changing socio-political landscape has played a crucial role in shaping up the manner in which Islam has developed in the region from the time of its arrival to the present era.

The first chapter explored the manner in which these values and practices emerged and has survived in the region under differing political- social systems. It also draws upon the conclusion that Islam in the Central Asian region has had a completely different value system in comparison to the rest of the Muslim world. This, as has been explained above is due to the fact that the context in which these practices have developed has had a significant impact on shaping up the value system of Islam. This challenges the mainstream, generalized understanding of Islam as being homogenous. This chapter is an attempt to move ahead with this idea and to narrow it down to analysing the relation between women and Islam in the Central Asian region with focus on Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The discourse on women and Islam has also to a large extent been understood within the generalized framework of taking women as a homogenous group facing oppression at every level within the value system of Islam. The lives and condition of women have been analysed and understood as an outcome of the practices of Islam in regions where Islam has a significant role to play in the society. There is definitely a crucial link between Islamic practices and women's lives; however women's conditions in the region cannot be simply traced just to Islam and Islamic practices. Various other factors have contributed to the role women have to play in society and how their lives have been shaped as a result of these societal and cultural constructs. It is important to take into account therefore the diversity of factors that have shaped up women's lives within any socio-political and economic systems.

The nascent republics of Central Asia rejected speculations that radical Islam would fill in the ideological vacuum created by the disintegration of the erstwhile Soviet

system. These republics rejected all speculations and constitutionally established themselves as secular republics. Further, these countries differ from the rest of the Muslim world in their historical evolution, social composition, political and economic structures etc. These aspects are very crucial in determining the manner in which Islamic practices have been shaped up in the region as a whole. These differences then would have had completely different impact on women than how Islam would have impacted women in the rest of the Muslim world. Firstly, these differences are significant in understanding how women as a group have been impacted by Islam in Central Asia. Secondly, women as group in itself cannot be taken as a homogenous group. The diversity within women themselves remains stark in terms of class, region, race, ethnicity etc. These diversities play a very crucial role in defining women's lives and conditions within any region. It is therefore very important to take into account all these factors to explain the condition of women in any society.

Islam and Islamic practices in Central Asia, because it forms the value system of most of the societies in the region, definitely have a significant role to play in defining women's lives in the region. However, these practices have not been static and have constantly evolved and changed with changes in the larger socio-political, economic systems. It is important to therefore analyse the condition of women in the region within this framework rather than just attributing it to Islam and Islamic practices. This chapter therefore seeks to widen the discourse on the study of Islam and women by taking into account the societies in which these practices are rooted and how gender relations have been shaped up and articulated at every level in these societies.

Leila Ahmed in her work, "Women and Gender in Islam" has brilliantly examined the discourse on women and Islam by tracing the historical roots of Islam and how it has developed from the ancient period to the present day. This framework becomes relevant in understanding the manner in which Islamic practices have for long shaped up women's lives in the Central Asian region. Exploring the discourse on women and Islamic practices within the framework of the socio-political context in which it emerged gives us a better understanding of how women have been impacted by the value system of Islam. In the recent years, debates on the value system of Islam has gained wide spread attention. Islam has been established by the Western world as having a value system that is inherently backward, violent and oppressive and more so when it comes to their treatment of women.

Women and Islam has been paid special attention to prove the inherently oppressive nature of the latter. This idea has been, fairly so, challenged by those propagating the value system of Islam as being fair and respectable to women. As observed by Ahmed (1992), what is or is not unique, specific or intrinsic to Islam with respect to ideas about women and gender has already, then, become a complicated question. This idea has been further elaborated by Ahmed to explain that some practices already existed in the regions when Islam came to these places which was then taken up and incorporated with Islamic beliefs and practices. These traditional practices therefore played a crucial role in defining the early practices of Islam. Her suggestion is that this factor should be taken into account when defining and understanding what has been clearly established as intrinsically Islamic. It is therefore important to understand that there is no unilateral approach to defining what constitutes or defines true Islam.

As has been observed by Lucas(1991:7), Islam is a religion which constantly expands-probably the only one nowadays;-It thus incorporates ways of life and customs from different cultures; Muslim laws as they exist in the real world today result from the combination of interpretations of the Koran entwined with local traditions. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that there is no one, homogenous interpretation of what makes up true Islamic practices and beliefs. Lucas further elaborates that it is important to realize that, although they are not "Islamic", traditions are enforced upon women in the name of Islam: belonging to a specific Muslim community is equated with accepting all the religio-cultural aspects which make for this society. Traditions and practices therefore have to be deconstructed within the societal, historical and political context in which these practices emerged to understand how gender relations have been established by these value systems.

Deconstruction of what makes up tradition therefore helps us analyse how these traditions were established in the first place. This helps us to understand the gender relations as it emerged within particular social contexts with its own historical specificities. Women and gender relations in the Central Asian region therefore can be best understood within the framework of Islam by taking into account the social change that constantly paralleled the evolution and development of Islamic practices in the region. This approach will help us to understand and explore how the value system of Islam differently impacted women in the region in comparison to the rest of the Muslim world.

As has been mentioned before, women have been affected by Islamic practices in the region but to what extent and how is what this chapter seeks to explore. Religious practices in the region constantly evolved under differing socio-political systems. It existed under the limited surveillance of the Tsarist regime to the strict vigilance by the state under the Soviet system to a somewhat similar system of the Soviet era in the post-Independence era. This link between the gradual development of the larger political systems and the religious practices is very important to understand how the value system of Islam has been established in the region. Further, it is this crucial link that has to be drawn to understand how gender relations has been established and set up in the region of Central Asia.

Women and gender relations in Central Asia have been influenced to a large extent by this process of gradual evolution and social change the region has been witness to under differing social political systems. Islam has developed within this framework; here it is an attempt to analyse the impact of these changes on women and gender relations in the region. As observed by Tokhtakhodjaeva(1995:19), "Today Islam strongly influences the culture, the way of life and the outlook of the people of Central Asia, this is why the women's issue in central Asia cannot be seen in isolation of the thirteen century long domination of Islam on the one hand, and the 70-year expansion of Communism on the other." Women's issue in the region has to be explored within the framework of the socio-political changes that the Central Asian region witnessed.

As observed by Ahmed (1992) in her work on the development of gender relations in the context of the West Asian region, it can be stated that women's subordination appeared to have become institutionalized with the rise of urban societies and with the rise of the archaic state in particular. A similar pattern can be drawn to explore the condition of women in the Central Asian region as well. Like Tokhtakhodjaeva(1995:18) states, "In all the major religions, at the early stages of development the preachers of the new belief sought support from the socially deprived sections of society ,and women were among the first converts because the new teachings addressed them as individuals, speaking of their worth and right to choose. Later, the right to interpret religion became the privilege of the state and its institutions, which assigned women a secondary and subordinate role in the society and in the family." This is a point in itself which proves that Islamic practices like any

other religious systems were gradual outcomes of social change. These practices as it evolved with the institution of family and other social structures built up value systems that gradually elevated the position of men over women. However, this dimension of evolution of socio-cultural structures is largely overlooked and is firmly established that it is Islam which is intrinsically oppressive when it comes to the issue of women's rights and condition.

Societies gradually evolved from having women playing a much more active role in public life to gradual segregation and seclusion from social life. Central Asia too had a history of women being active participants in the public sphere till the gradual evolution of complex social orders. These changes were followed by evolution of norms and traditions which were then further codified to institutionalize these changes and establish a value system to govern and organize social life. Women and men were impacted differently at different levels by these established norms and customs. Women and men alike were now governed and organized by these new dictates of traditions. However, women faced greater segregation and seclusion and following this process of social change, women were now to become the bearers of this social change. Laws governing these new social structures changed and evolved becoming harsher and restrictive towards women. Women enjoying greater freedom in the earlier stages of development of societies were now restricted and granted limited autonomy. Institutions like marriage and family were then to become the pillars of upholding these value systems. These complexities defined the position of women in evolving social structures which went a long way in establishing the inferior position of women in the complex social structures that gradually came into existence.

Central Asia as has been mentioned before has been witness to different set of socio-political, cultural systems under different stages of development. The history of Central Asia as has been observed by Tokhtakhodjaeva(1995:20) also has examples of women who had greater roles to play in the public life. "There were periods where the strength of secular rule allowed women to also have an influence on political life." However, with the gradual process of social change things began to change. "Later, the stricter observance of the law of purdah, the segregation of the sexes and the seclusion of women, became the established norm for women of lesser origin as well as for ladies of the elite. This happened due to the collapse of secular society and the exclusion of women from better education opportunities." Strengthening of social

order and complex social structures laid down norms and traditions which gradually moved towards subordination of women and allocating them an inferior social status in the public and private sphere.

Prior to the region being colonised, the people in the Central Asian region remained divided along kinship, tribal and other identities. As observed by Nantes (2005:34), “An understanding of the social organisation of the Central Asian population is crucial in identifying the problems for any concerned resistance to Russian conquest and later Soviet domination of the region.” The Russian colonisers were simply interested in Central Asia for the vast material resources that it had to offer. The colonisers therefore were not necessarily interested in bringing about a socio-cultural revolution in the region. “Resistance to colonial dependence in Central Asia took two forms: one demanding the restitution of the ‘old order’, the other raising the slogan of enlightenment and social progress. The first emerged as a rural movement protesting against the dispossession of lands by the colonial Russian settlers. Under the slogan of *ghazva*, this movement was led by the clergy and aristocracy who had lost their lands. The other movement known as Jadidism emerged at the turn of the century among the lower and middle urban bourgeoisie.”(Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995:29). The Russian colonisers did not make many attempts to challenge the existing social systems but any attempt whatsoever were met with stiff resistance.

The Russian colonisers gradually tried to make inroads to introduce the common masses to the Russian culture through the medium of education. This was based on the premise that gradual inroads into the educational system would help establish Russian culture and the people would gradually move away from the archaic value system of Islam. Education in the region included study of Islamic values and teachings establishing these practices as the way of life. The intrusion into the educational system as such was met with severe resistance where Islam had made significant inroads. The Jadid movement led by the Muslim Intelligentsia aimed at modernising the teachings of Islam. This movement aimed to reform Islamic practices and to modernise the prevailing value system. This movement supported to a certain degree that women should be imparted equal opportunities in the field of gaining knowledge and availing of educational facilities. However, this movement met with severe resistance from the orthodox sections of the society which were supported by the Russian rulers. As summed up by Massell(1974:17) “ It was one of the great

paradoxes of the Russian presence that it served to expose local traditional communities and ethnic groups to new secular institutions and ideological orientations over which the occupying power had virtually no control.”

The limited efforts of the Jadidists could not much challenge the value system that had now been put into place in the Central Asian region. With the region becoming colonised these value systems became more strongly established which then became closely identified as being the basic principles of Islam. This was so because Islam became to be closely identified as the way of life by the masses uniting against an outside enemy i.e. the Russian colonisers. The Tsarist policy led to some form of identity formation slowly making its way into the region and Islam had begun to establish itself as the way of life of the people especially in the settled communities.

Islam had begun to play an important role in shaping up the lives of the people of the region slowly which gradually established itself as a force with the onset of Russian colonisation of the region. As has been observed by Nantes (2005:35), “The Islamic conversion of the population began in the seventh century among the settled populations of principally Uzbek ethnic origin, and by the sixteenth century encompassed the Kazakh and the Kyrgyz nomadic communities. Thus, from that point onward not only traditional (adat) law but also religious (Shariat) laws governed the lives of the Central Asian people.” The Islamic laws of Shariat and Adat were to be observed in the daily lives of the masses which significantly impacted the status of women in the society. As summed up by Tokhtakhodjaeva(1995:32), “ While religious laws have always had a particularly strong impact on the family, the written laws of Islam have been overridden by unwritten prohibitions and taboos which question women’s value.” These norms and traditions were often interpreted in ways which subordinated women and placed them in an inferior status in the society. For instance, arranged marriages which made the payment of dower (bride price) a necessity as a source of financial security for the bride, segregation of women as the weaker sex who needed to be protected by the men were now practiced as ordained by the Shariat. These traditions were now being established in the society as observance of the “true” spirit of Islam. “The denial of women’s rights was both the consequence and the cause of conservative, narrow religious attitudes, which were reflected in the superficial observation of the rituals of Islam, rendering impotent its spiritual aspect and thereby condemning society to backwardness and poverty”(Ibid). The adherence

to these traditions now was established as their culture and way of life and women were to be the guardians of this culture.

Based on customary practices, therefore institutions like the family and marriages now were to be governed by these dictates of the Shariat. Arranged marriages were the norm and parents sought partners for their children where the respective bride or the bride grooms did not have any choices. The payment of Kalym(bride price) became the common practice, “The payment of Kalym was considered an act of faith as well as one of commitment.”(Nantes, 2005:37). Seclusion and segregation of the sexes likewise became the norm where women were now to observe seclusion by wearing the veil. The women in Central Asia observed seclusion by covering themselves in a kind of cloak called the paranja that covered them from head to toe. These practices clearly began to establish a social structure that demarcated the social roles to be played by men and women and boundaries to be established. Women were made to be exclusively contained within the domain of the household, the private sphere and maintain limited presence in the public sphere. The higher the class status, the more the women were made to become the bearers of these customary practices as has been observed by both Nantes(2005) and Tokhtakhodjaeva(1995).

Women’s lives were significantly impacted by these social changes that were taking place in the region. From being active participants in the social life, they were now being isolated and segregated as groups that needed to be “protected” by either the fathers, brothers or their husbands. Women’s contribution at every level either in the household or even as active participants alongside the men in the economic activities in the fields was now being rendered insignificant to the man’s labour. Women for long in the lower strata of the societies have worked as the labour force alongside men but customary practices now began to relate to women’s role primarily as wives and mothers. These practices definitely had negative implications for women in comparison to men. Women’s lives in Central Asia prior to the Bolshevik Revolution as has been aptly summed up by Chenoy (1996:516), “is associated with the practice of bride price(kalym),child marriage, female isolation at the back of the home(ichkari),isolation through the veil(paranja),polygamy, violence and complete domination over the lives of the women.” This paints up the picture of the lives of women in the region prior to the Soviet times.

The Soviet system was the first of its kind based on principles of Socialism with the larger goal of attaining a Communist society. The founding basis of this Socialist state was the concept of equality. The Bolsheviks when they came to power in Russia envisioned the creation of a Socialist state which ensured the equality and freedom of every individual. This vision was to be realised in the context of a nation which was economically weak, politically unstable and socially built up on feudal values and principles. The Bolsheviks, under the leadership of Lenin valued the goal of achieving Socialism and believed these features of the Soviet Union as a whole would be the fertile grounds for planting the seeds of revolution. The larger goal as mentioned above was to create a socialist state free from oppression and any kind of discrimination.

The Marxist principles were continuously picked up and adapted by Lenin to suit the existing social situation in the Soviet Union. The approach to religion was the same as well, whereby Lenin decided to approach religion using , “a two-pronged religious strategy that not only called for a comprehensive program for atheistic education, but also a plan for a systematic attack on the religious establishment” (Haghayeghi:1997:14). The Bolsheviks believed that to challenge any existing system it was crucial to target the section most affected by the system. Regarding religion, the Bolsheviks saw women as a group being the most affected by this system. The limitation of the Soviet approach was the, “lack of recognition of the woman’s participation in religious life as a believer and/or practitioner” (Tolmacheve, 1994:184). The Soviet policy on religion was limited because it did not take into account women’s agency in upholding the value systems of the religious life.

Islam as has been mentioned before had a significant role to play in Central Asia whereby the masses saw it as way of life. The Soviet system’s attempt to challenge religion therefore was met with stiff resistance by the people. The Soviet religious policy in Central Asia had both positive and negative connotations and cannot be therefore singled out and stated as either being simply negative or positive. The Soviet religious policy in condemning religious establishments sought to liberate masses, especially women from the feudal practices that placed them in an inferior position in the society. However, the Soviets failed to realise that the people valued these practices and beliefs as an integral part of their lives as their identity and therefore such direct state led assault on their value systems would not necessarily ensure the

break away from feudal practices. It is also true that women were the most to gain from the Soviet system as a whole and it was this legacy with which the women of Central Asia closely relate themselves to in the present day as has been observed by Chenoy(1996).

The Soviet policy merged the women's issue with the religious issue in the Central Asian region. They looked upon women as agents of change, the oppressed group that needed to be mobilised to bring about revolutionary changes in the region. The Bolsheviks approach therefore was to gradually eliminate religious practices to improve the status of women in the society. This approach held religion as an integral part of a larger social structure that defined and put into place the social and cultural roles of both men and women in the society. The gender relations were defined by these norms and traditions that were now part of the larger social structure, where Islamic laws, which were held in high esteem, gave these traditions the moral sanction and approval. The Soviet religious policies in the region sought to eliminate all form of religious symbols and practices with the larger aim of creating a society free from the vestiges of feudal practices. These efforts had both negative and positive effects, the former resulting in the masses making religion a more closed, personal affair and keeping it alive in their everyday lives and the latter resulting in the establishment of secular institutions.

The Central Committee of the All Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) and its Women's section (Zhenotdel) carried out the different legislations targeted at improving the condition of women in the region. Legal measures were taken at every level to ensure the betterment of women's lives in the region. The basis of this approach was to attack the authority of the traditional religious elites and the legal sanctity of the Sharia and Adat. Legislative measures were taken to replace the Shariat by civil law which would now dictate the religious and cultural practices among the masses. Various measures were taken to enforce the secular laws on marriage, divorces and the family. In 1919, a Registry of Births, Marriage and Deaths was inaugurated in Turkestan which was responsible for enforcing Soviet law with respect to marriage, divorce and the legal rights of children.(Nantes-2005:39). The Soviet laws governing family life and social practices could not immediately override the influence of the older traditional laws which held sway for a long time.

The attack on social norms and customs however went a long way in improving the status of women in the society. “The Soviets intervened aggressively in the realm of ‘custom’ by criminalising and prosecuting a category of misdemeanours based on local traditions (bytovye prestuplniia or byt-literally ‘way of life crimes’).By the 1920s the shar’ia court system in force among sedentary populations and the customary law(adat) practised in nomadic areas was superseded by secular family law. Polygyny, under age and forced marriage were outlawed as was the payment of qalin(bridal price.”(Kandiyoti, 2008:604). These efforts of the Soviet system went a long way in establishing a secular society from which women had a lot to gain in the long run. The Soviet state’s efforts to create a secular society though was not a smooth an easy process where men and women alike resisted these radical changes being forced upon them by the state.

These new legislative measures were met with stiff resistance by the religious establishments and the masses themselves. However, these measures were put into place and various methods were used to popularise and enforce these progressive legislations that aimed to grant better living conditions and socio-economic status for women. The new legislation protecting women’s rights was broadly publicised at meetings and rallies, often called on holidays and Sundays. However, the implementation of these laws did not take place of itself; the resistance of the class enemies, who leaned for support on the still influential mullahs, was by no means overcome at once, particularly where the solution of the women’s question was concerned. (Aminova, 1977). Soviet laws governing marriage and divorce completely challenged the basic principles of the Islamic law in the region. The former made it possible for women to have the basic right to marry someone of their choice or to walk out of an unfair marriage which was unacceptable under the Shariat. These radical changes were obviously met with stiff resistance for it challenged the order of a system that had formed the basis for these value systems to survive.

Central Asian women had for long been a part of this system and upheld these practices as the natural order. These new challenges provided them with new opportunities to come out of the lives of seclusion they had been witness to for so long. The women who resisted these forces and chose to support these new measures were seen as outsiders and many were brutally attacked and assaulted by their husbands or male relatives. As has been observed by Keller(1998:23), “For Uzbek

women, the act of bringing Uzbek men to Soviet courts additionally opened them to accusations of disloyalty to Islam, to the family or both.” Like it has been mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, these value systems had been put into place and incorporated at a specific stage of social change in the region as the value system of Islam. Therefore these challenges were met with resistance because the masses saw it as an attack on Islam, the attack on their personal lives.

The launching of the Khudjum, the assault on the veil, in Uzbekistan on 8th of March, 1927 was seen as the most outright onslaught on Islam. The Khudjum, moreover, represented a full-frontal assault on one of the more intimidating symbols of the population’s adherence to Islam and traditional culture, and one that set the Muslim women apart from their Soviet peers. As long as the use of veil persisted it would be a constant reminder that the revolution and the imposition of Soviet legislation and values had failed in Central Asia. (Nantes, 2005:44). The Khudjum years were witness to many women and men participating in the burning of the paranja, the symbol of oppression of women. It was a bloody revolution where many men and women alike taking these steps was either assaulted or brutally killed. No reliable statistical reports summarising the overall scope of the violence exist. The Soviet secret police (OGPU) produced a report on the rise of ‘terror in the village’ between 1926 and 1928, which stated that the number of political murders had almost doubled during that time. (Keller, 1998:25). The Communist party met this resistance by increasing the judicial authority of the courts to punish the perpetrators of violence. The party members and cadres were asked to monitor violence against women at every level and ensure their safety. Parallel to these measures, women’s participation to elected bodies and in the political sphere was encouraged. These measures did go a long way in ensuring the break away from the seclusion of women to private spaces but women still remained trapped in the traditional structures that prevented them from exploring these new opportunities that were being opened up to them.

The larger Soviet goal was the complete removal of elements of Islamic practices from the region. The onslaught on the veil followed by the educational reforms that resulted in the replacement of Arabic scripts by the Latin scripts was all a part of this larger goal. It was believed that the former ensured the persistence of religious values and sentiments and the latter a complete secularisation of the educational institutes. The Soviet policy sought to resolve the women’s question within this framework.

These reforms no doubt went a long way in achieving the desired goals but in a limited manner. These changes brought women out of their seclusion which was the major achievement of these measures undertaken by the Soviet state. However, it did not necessarily alter the gender relations that formed the basis of the social system at large.

The Socialist state ensured effective mechanisms to liberate women by granting them with educational opportunities and better living conditions. The state also encouraged women's participation in the political and economic structures. The levels of economic employment and political participation were the highest during the Soviet period. Before the Revolution practically no women were employed in the economy; today, about 47% of Central Asia's workers and employees are female. Before the revolution, only about 2% of all women (aged 9-49 years old) in Central Asia were literate; in 1970 the figure was around 99%, and women accounted for about one third of all students in higher and secondary specialist educational establishments (Lubin, 1981:183). These achievements of the Socialist state cannot be overlooked but this also did not mean that the women's question was completely resolved in the region.

Women in Islam for long have been seen as the helpless victims oppressed by the values and practices of Islam. A similar approach was reflected by the Soviet policy in dealing with the women's issue in the Central Asian region. The issue of women's liberation was tied to the elimination of religious practices. Despite massive onslaught on these practices and any other symbolisms related to religious beliefs, the values of Islam were practiced and upheld in the private sphere of the family. The women's issue was not completely resolved because this was not understood as a part of a social construction of the larger social system, religion and religious ideas were just a part of this larger social construction. The Soviet policy in doing away with the traditional practices and feudalism of the tsarist era put into place a different form of feudal practices which did not largely challenge the existing gender relations.

Massell in his work has argued that Moslem women came to constitute, in Soviet political imagination, a structural weak point in the traditional order: a potentially deviant and hence subversive stratum susceptible to militant appeal- in effect, a surrogate proletariat where no proletariat in the real Marxist sense exist (1974:xxii). The gradual introduction of the Central Asian women as the working

class in various spheres of the economy proved beneficial for the Soviet state as a whole. However, they did not emerge as the potential revolutionary group that sought to undermine traditional structures and belief systems of Islam in the region. The fact that the Soviet state did not recognise the women's issue in broader terms was witness in the state's promotion and glorification of women's roles as mothers and wives. The bestowment of numerous titles and rewards for performing these social functions like Heroine Mother and Motherhood Glory awards reflect the patriarchal attitude towards women. These awards and titles were in sync with the demographic policies carried by the states which placed central importance to the role of women as mothers and their obligation to fulfil duties of motherhood as a social duty. The state upheld the value systems that relegate women an inferior status in the society. Women under the new system were doubly burdened with fulfilling their traditional roles and in the working spaces as the working class.

The Soviet state sought to destroy traditional solidarity among the people bound by religious sentiments by challenging practices derogatory to women and sanctified by religious laws. However, these practices were part of a social order that had been incorporated as a value system of Islam at a particular stage of evolution and social change. The ordering of society along patriarchal lines led to these practices being established as the norms and traditions to be enforced and upheld. Religious laws therefore gave the customary sanctity to these norms and customs. Traditions kept changing forms but it kept being practised in the name of reflecting the true spirit of Islam. The practice of payment of Kalym for instance was sanctified under the Islamic law which stressed on the value of women in terms of money, as ensuring financial stability to women and also as means to discourage divorce. This practice was banned under the Soviet law which retained in a different form whereby the Kalym was now given in the form of gifts like livestock or other material goods in place of cash. The whole practice of giving Kalym had now become largely a traditional, customary practice which obviously took meaning from the religious scriptures but the practice changed forms from how it had originally been defined by the Islamic law when it had been put to place. These social practices and beliefs kept changing forms and were retained by the people in their daily lives.

Islam played a very important role in the lives of the masses despite strict supervision and other forms of control established by the Soviet system to monitor religious

activities in the region. The religious and social lives of the people had gradually evolved to become interrelated and continuously influence each other to a large extent in the region. The Soviet policy categorised the existing practices in the region as results of the religious systems and sought to deal with these issues through the onslaught on religious structures and elements of religious practices. The frontal attack on these practices were seen by the people as an attack on their traditions and customs, guided by the principles of Islam, which they sought to preserve within the realm of their families and private spaces.

Women had a great role to play in upholding these value systems and practices within the private spaces of their houses and neighbourhood. The religious life of Muslim women in Central Asia has not yet received the attention among academic commentators that it deserves (Fathi, 2006:303). Likewise, Kandiyoti and Azimova(2004:333) observe most accounts tend to downplay the role of women in the transmission of Islamic knowledge through the mediation of another important female figure-the otin. These scholars have traced the role played by the otins, the female clerics in Central Asia performing the same functions as the male mullahs. The otin is a religious practitioner with significant education in Islamic religious texts and the classics of Central Asian literature. Not only does she officiate at women's gatherings marking important life events (including births, marriages and deaths) and at religious feasts, but she is also a teacher, specialising in the provision of religious instructions to young girls (Ibid). The otines in Central Asia were revered as the guardians and custodians of tradition and customs and were responsible for the education of a girl child from birth to adulthood.

The otines played a very crucial role in preserving the religious practices associated with Islam alive in the region. The large scale onslaught on religion could not prevent these women from playing their role as the custodians of faith and passing them down to the next generation. These otines were held in high respect by the society and were believed to have descended from religious family backgrounds. They were responsible for imparting religious education to the girl child and also for directing religious ceremonies and rituals. During the period of strict state surveillance of religious practices by the state, these otines imparted the knowledge of the Koran and Islam to the girls within their Mahalla. The Mahalla which forms an integral part of

the administrative unit in Central Asia became the unit for preserving the values of Islam by these otines.

The Mahallas were for managing basic community lives of the masses. It was within these Mahallas that the otines managed to preserve their religious beliefs and practices. They were forced to lead a clandestine existence and they had only very meagre means at their disposal: the rare religious texts they were able to save were not enough to allow them to acquire an extensive and formal knowledge of Islam. It was for this reason that the form of Islam they preserved was one of popular and oral traditions, based on a tradition of rites and prayers that they had learnt by heart and which they would recite without understanding their meaning (Fathi, 2007:34). The otines were outside of the state monitored official Islam and carried out their practices in a very secretive and clandestine manner. Many of them were members of the Communist party and educated in the Soviet schools but they never incorporated the socialist principles and kept their struggle to preserve their religious identity and tradition alive.

The Otines as spiritual guardians kept these practices alive as an integral part of their traditions and customs. These women clerics even though they operated in a clandestine manner preserved the traditions and customs of what they believed constituted the basic principles of Islam. The importance of these women clerics in keeping the religious values alive can be traced to the post independent scenario where they have once again emerged as an important group in a context of more religious autonomy and as observed by Fathi(2006:303) the religious networks created by these women have contributed to a revival in Islamic practices among the female population of Central Asia. The role played by these women clerics has not received much attention but they had a very important role to play in upholding the value system of Islam and transferring it to the next generation. In the post-Soviet era their traditional roles are once again being revived where these women clerics are invited to perform rituals like births/deaths and marriages along with the male clerics. Fathi further elaborates on the emergence of “new” types of Otines who never had any religious background nor did they practice Islam in the past. The issue of the “true” vanguards of religion and traditions remain a site of contestation for the traditional otin-eyes and the new ones. They also diverge on the issue of interpretation of Islam wherein the “new” group of otin-eyes seek to not only want to reform the

behaviour of Muslim women, but also to purify Islam from what they see as non-Islamic accretions such as the veneration of holy tombs or the 'return' of the soul of dead during a religious ceremony (Fathi, 2007:310). In the present scenario both groups have come to hold important positions in the society and it is only in due course of time the prominence of any group will be decided. At present it is important to analyse the role of these groups in promoting Islamic values and the manner in which they are being promoted by the state as well. In the wake of Independence and greater religious autonomy, the state has actively promoted the entry of these women into official religious institutions to impart religious education. Islam, in the post-independent scenario has a definite role to play in defining social relations but as of yet the discourse on Islam in Central Asia remains fragmented.

Islam in the post-Soviet scenario has come to establish itself more firmly as an important part of the lives of the people in Central Asia as a whole. However, it does not reflect a break away from the past but more a continuity with the past. Islam never went away from the lives of the masses. The Islamic practices were kept alive through various means within the private realm of the family or the community (mahalla). As has been mentioned earlier in the chapter, there have been significant debates in what constituted Islam. Central Asia followed a similar trajectory throughout the development of the value system of Islam as well. Like the history of every social change, the interpretation of those in power prevailed here as well whereby certain norms and traditions were established and the Islamic laws were interpreted to give sanctity to these traditions that were now defined as being Islamic.

The Soviet policies aimed to monitor and eliminate practices that were derogatory to women and were imposed upon women in the name of religion. The Soviet policies of monitoring practices like arranged marriages, payment of bride price, making child marriages illegal were formally put into place to emancipate women. These policies went a long way in liberating women from their earlier lives of seclusion and segregation; however women did not give up their belief in Islam as a way of life. As observed by Lubin(1981:194) attitudes and perceptions are always slower to change than broader, more standardized relations in society at large. Hence, while much has been transformed in the position of women in Central Asia- women are no longer veiled, they walk on the streets alone, they do spend lot of time outside in the home, etc. - they were and still are the most tradition-bound elements of Central Asian

societies. The Soviet period opened up new opportunities for the women in the region but because the gender relations remained unaltered, women's traditional roles as mothers and wives as guardians of faith remained the same.

It was within this sphere of the family and the community that women upheld the traditional values and norms, which they believed reflected the values of Islam. Besides the relevance of women's role as guardians of traditions the other aspect has been summed up by Tolmacheva(1994:189) on the other hand, besides the lingering influences of tradition, the destruction of Islam in the Soviet Union not only resulted in pushing Islam into a "back corner" of interpersonal relationships and individual spirituality. It also, by removing the worst abuses of women, made the religion of Islam into a mostly comforting, socially accommodating and culturally appealing alternative to what, as was being recognised in the U.S.S.R in the 1980s, was generally perceived by the indigenous populace as not merely secular, remote and irrelevant but as "Russian" and "Christian" culture. The otines for instance in passing on their teachings to the next generation placed emphasis on what distinguished them as Uzbeks and therefore made them different from the Russians.

The women in the Central Asian region took advantage of the newly created opportunities and were actively engaged in the economic and political activities, many women in comparison to the pre-Soviet times received both formal and informal education. However, these changes did not necessarily alter their value systems. Despite these new legislations being put into place, very few women legally initiated the process of divorces and traditional practices were still observed in terms of marriages, births and deaths etc. As observed by Lubin(1981:194), "Other customs concerning women which in fact have been outlawed by the Soviet government, have not altogether disappeared; they have simply changed face. While wearing the veil is now illegal, many Central Asian women in outlying areas still cover themselves with shawls from head to toe before leaving home to go out on the street. While Kalym, or bride price, has been outlawed, the traditional exchange of 'gifts' before marriage is not altogether dissimilar." These practices became a part of their customs and traditions, the preservation of which had become important for the people.

As per the statistics put forward by Ro'i (2001), in 1970 over 40% of girls were married by the age of 18-19 years in Tajikistan and one third in Uzbekistan. By the

mid-1980s, 95% of marriages entailed Kalym. Likewise, the number of women observing the paranja was growing in both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan whereby in 1951 mass of the Uzbek and Tajik women still wore the Paranja. In places the Paranja were replaced by headscarves or shawls. These figures reflect the prevalence of the traditions and customs strongly among the women folk despite the presence of state laws to ban such customs and practices. The explanation for such attitudes among women can be best explained in terms of how they viewed themselves in the existing gender hierarchies as guardians of custom and the other aspect being, the unwillingness to be branded as an outsider within their own family and community.

The Khudjum campaign resulted in a lot of women unveiling and taking up the red scarf signalling a new era of liberation. However, if thousands of women were out on the streets abandoning the veil a lot more were subject to brutal assaults and torture in the hands of their male relatives. This fear of being treated as an outsider within the family and the community made it difficult for women to give up their values and beliefs. As observed by Tokhtakhodjaeva(1995:17), “Courtesy of the traditional cultural setting and upbringing, the majority of the people continued to accept women’s subordinate status as something natural while men failed to free themselves of the absolute superiority over women.” This reflects the existing gender relations of the society in the region at the time of disintegration. It is also true that women were the most to gain from this kind of enforced secularisation of the society under the Soviet regime. The emergence of women from the confines of their homes into the public spaces was the most significant achievement of the Soviet experiment.

The Constitution of the republic of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan guarantees equality of rights but in reality women’s status in both the republics within the space of the family and the society paints an altogether different picture. The re-emergence of traditional practices and customs in the public sphere demonstrates that the principles of family and community remained strong throughout the Soviet period (Nantes, 2005:142). The women in the nascent republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan which has witnessed the most of the radical manifestations of Islam were the most affected by these developments. Resurgence of the Islamic practices in the societies advocating relatively more freedom than in the Soviet era has led to the developments of new discourses in terms of the family, society and gender relations.

The state in continuation with the Soviet legacy established a secular regime which reflects the Soviet policy of allowing for moderate and monitored practice of religion. Though the state upholds itself as being secular there has been an active promotion of Islam in both the republics whereby mosques have been opened up, madrassas that had been shut down have been reopened and the state leaders have undertaken religious pilgrimages to holy shrines. On the other hand, the institutions of the state have been strengthened to monitor and control any religious activity that seeks to challenge the authority of the state. This has been witnessed in the active use of force by the state in picking up of individuals on the grounds of suspicion, complete subversion of the judiciary to the executive bodies etc.

The post-independence scenario has seen a revival of tradition and culture which reflects the desire of these republics to create their unique national identity as Uzbeks and Tajiks respectively. The nation building projects seeks to incorporate their Uzbek/Tajik traditions and customs within the framework of Islam. It is within this framework of national identity formation that gender relations are being shaped up. However, their adherence to secular ideals have led these states to demarcate between what constitutes “acceptable Islamic practices” as practiced and “foreign” expressions of Islam represented by the radical groups. The bid to contain religious practice by making it conform to an emergent ‘official’ national ideology, which is itself patriarchal in form and content, makes the boundaries between so-called secular and Islamic moralities and expectations blurred and indistinct. Islam undoubtedly presents a more coherent, if internally contested framework for the regulation of gender.(Kandiyoti, 2007:611). This bid to search for a national ideology in sync with the customs and traditions also led to a reassessment of existing gender relations in the society as an integral part of this process.

The resurgence of traditional values and customs in the public sphere has been tied up to the whole idea of building up a national identity. These values and practices are now being fostered by the state to promote the goals of Nationalism. The state is itself enmeshed in promoting values that seek to redefine traditions and customs that has once again brought the discourse on women and Islam to the forefront. Most of the works on post-Soviet Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have attributed the subversion of women’s lives to the “re-Islamisation” of the society. Kandiyoti(2007) has argued that this approach yields limited insights into the post-Soviet developments in these

Republics. These developments have to be understood within the framework of new ideologies operating in the region where gender has a crucial role to play in shaping up the discourse on nation and national identity.

The discourse on nation building has been built up on the idea of a lost cultural identity under the Soviet system and the restoration of which became the primary goal of the state in these republics. In this quest for building up a national identity, there has been a turn towards seeking an Islamic heritage in the fields of culture and tradition. This has led to the emphasis on the whole idea of women's "natural" roles as mothers and wives within the domestic sphere. The cultural loss has been to a large extent placed on women venturing out in the streets performing unnatural duties. The state in both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has promoted values that subverted the Soviet laws and reopened the customary practices of Adat taking precedence over civil laws. This has resulted in the strengthening of traditional norms and practices in the public and the private spaces. The Soviet state sought to empower women through progressive legislation which was the hallmark of the Soviet era. These legislations ensured the formal equality of women at every level. The re-strengthening of traditions over formal legislations once again sought to formally strengthen gender hierarchies in the society in the post-Soviet era.

Women in these post-Soviet societies have been completely stripped of their rights and entitlements, which is not just an outcome of the re-Islamisation of the society. These new regimes are guided by a differing set of ideology of promoting the neo-liberal agenda in the region which equally promotes patriarchal values. Those advocating these reforms are once again in the helm of affairs having the authority to create discourses and interpret existing realities. These republics are once again witnessing social change and once again traditions are being established to form the value system of the social order. This change once again necessitates the redefining of gender relations which is being carried out by the state. Women's role is therefore once again being defined as that of mothers and wives to be secluded within the public domain protected by their male relatives. These practices were visible in the state promoting women's roles as dutiful daughters and mothers providing community services through the Mahallas, the importance of which has increased in post-Soviet Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The Women's question is once again being taken up in the post-Soviet scenario where the call has been towards re-establishing women's roles as mothers and daughters. These roles were now being promoted as reflecting Uzbek/Tajik values and customs reflecting the true spirit of Islam. Islam has a very important role to play in the lives of the people in the region of Central Asia. In the post-Soviet scenario, the revival of Islamic practices have been witnessed both at the level of the state and by radical groups asserting themselves as being the true proponents of Islam. These groups have constantly reasserted the need to redefine traditions and customs, insisting on the need to build up an Islamic state based on the interpretation of the Shariat. On the other hands these republics have established themselves as secular republics but promoting ambiguous policies towards Islam and secularism which seeks to foster Islamic practices and at the same time curtail Islamic practices that seem to threaten the regime.

Regarding the role of women both the state and these groups seem to have a clear understanding whereby they agree that women's place is within the private spaces. These patriarchal values are being incorporated and reflected in the various practices of the state. The governments in their attempts to appear secular have taken moderate stands by demarcating their practices as being different from those of the radical groups. For instance on the issue of the ban on veiling, the government of Uzbekistan responded by attempting to police boundaries between acceptable national dress- the colourful head scarf leaving the face bare- and 'transnational veiling' (or what it is considered as 'Arab' or foreign dress) signifying an expression of extremism or 'Wahhabism' (a loosely utilised but politically charged expression in common use in the region) (Kandiyoti, 2007:611). The state therefore has been continuously engaged in building up a value system which they seek to represent as a reflection of genuine Uzbek/Tajik identity respectively which is within the framework of Islam.

Women upheld the value system of Islam throughout the Soviet period within the realms of the family and the society. Despite the end of their lives of seclusion, women in the Soviet Union did not give up their beliefs and faith in Islam. Women in the post-Soviet era stand at the crossroads and have largely maintained their distance from the radical groups and their propaganda of building up an Islamic society based on the Sharia. The women in these societies have accepted Islam as part of their private lives within the family and the community. Women in these Republics do not

challenge their roles as mothers and daughters; however they do not see themselves working in the public spaces as a contradiction to their affiliation towards Islam. Maybe this can be seen as the greatest contribution of the Soviet legacy of enforced secularism. The constant argument of this chapter has been that certain values were incorporated and accepted at a particular stage of social evolution as being the true values of Islam and women played an active role in upholding and acting as guardians of these values. In the post-independence scenario, once again the value system of Islam is being redefined and the question of women's role in the system is once again being redefined as well. To sum it up, "The greater public role of Islam also means that women themselves can participate in the circulation of competing interpretations of religious belief and practice and make new, proactive choices about their lifestyles and faith"(Kandiyoti,2007:611).

Conclusion:

Women in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have been active participants in upholding the value system of Islam. This has largely been a result of the emphasis on women's traditional roles as guardians of faith. The identity of women in these republics is closely tied up to the identity of being an Uzbek/Tajik Muslim. The development of gender identities as such has been within this framework in the post-independence scenario. The economic and social status of women on the other hand remains closely tied to the state policies being implemented in these republics. These policies likewise are crucially linked up to the existing gender ideologies. The changing socio-economic status of women has been visible under the Soviet regime and in the post-independence context. These changes were largely consequences of the gender ideologies that were an intrinsic part of the social changes that were being brought about in these republics.

This chapter has explored the issue of women and Islam in the secular republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Islam has developed in a different manner in these republics as a result of which the Islamic observances people adhere to is of a more moderate version than in the rest of the Muslim world. The implications of these practices have therefore been different for women in these republics than in the other parts of the world where Islam is a significant part of people's lives. Women in the Central Asian republics trace their present identity to their past under the Soviet

regime which granted them a level of formal equality which had earlier been denied to them. The Soviet policies created a paradoxical situation for women whereby they were emancipated through education, employment and presence in the public spaces. However, they were also doubly burdened with work and performing their household duties as part of their traditional duty. The Soviet policies though it did seek to ensure equality of the sexes, did not transform the existing gender hierarchies and gender roles were not radically altered. For instance, women were rewarded with benefits and entitlements like “Heroine Mother” for producing children and performing their other social duties as mothers. The Soviet policies of modernisation in eliminating one form of feudalism put into place another forms of feudal practices which though it did serve to ensure equality for women also strengthened traditional gender roles.

The greatest achievement of the Soviet policies was the end of women’s seclusion from the public spaces. For the first time women were guaranteed legal rights and benefits that allowed them to avail of educational, employment and other facilities. These changes worked to ensure women a better economic and social status. However, women did perform their traditional roles as sanctioned by the dictates of Islam and these values were carried forward by the *otines*, the women clerics. These clerics played a very important role in upholding and guarding the values of Islam. Even otherwise, women performed their roles as guardians of faith within the spaces of the family and the community. The contribution of the Soviet policies was that women no longer saw a contradiction in being Islamic and performing their daily rituals while at the same time having the legal rights and benefits as men in terms of availing education, employment, political representation etc.

The women in these republics have had different experiences under Islam and they differ from their counterparts in the other countries. These experiences was a result of their long past under the Soviet system. Women in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are adherence of the Islamic faith but they do not support the radical version of Islam that has been propagated by the proponents of the radical Islamic groups in the post-Soviet space. The establishment of secular regimes has provided women the space in which they can debate and engage in the forms of practices that would define their lives. However, the state policies are very crucial in bringing about social changes.

In the wake of Independence, the state building process remains a topmost priority and the various aspects of these processes impact women differently than men. The extent to which women are represented in the public spaces is to a large extent interlinked to these processes. The reconstruction of national ideology glorifying tradition places women in an inferior position. The state ideology is inherently patriarchal in nature and unlike the Soviet state's ideology; gender equality is not a part of this ideology. There has been a glorification of traditional gender roles and women are once again being segregated at every level resulting in a lowered socio-economic and political status for women. These changes are a consequence of the inherently patriarchal attitude of the official state ideology. However, the other alternative for change is being offered by the fundamentalist groups which have limited legitimacy among the masses at present.

In continuation with their Soviet past it is unlikely that women will support the extremist version of Islam these groups advocate. However, along with the economic, social and political policies, the states have to work to ensure the continuous presence of a secular space. Islam is yet to develop as a radical force in these republics. Social change that results in the deterioration of people's lives would provide these groups with the support base to use Islam as a tool for mobilisation against the political authority. The state therefore has to work to ensure effective socio-economic, political and secular policies to keep Islam from being deployed as an effective tool for mobilisation. Secularism provides women with the spaces which are denied to them in nay theocratic republics. However, secularism has to be paralleled with progressive state policies that seek to ensure women's rights as well. The presence of secular political regimes does not ensure the end of patriarchy which can be seen in the context of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The gender relations are being reorganised along lines of traditions and customs which seeks to put into place a gender hierarchy which negatively impacts the condition of women in these republics. The lives of women in these republics are therefore not just a result of religious practices and resurgence of Islam. Women's lives in these republics remain largely affected by the discourse on Islam on one hand and the state policies on the other in these republics in the post-Soviet era.

Chapter 3:

Islam, State and Women in the Secular Republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

The post-independence scenario in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan along with the other three republics has been such that nation-building and national identity formation remains the priority. The challenges put forth by independence have been broadly addressed within this framework of national identity formation. The approach therefore has largely been state centric with national security taking priority over every other issue. With the collapse of the Soviet order an entire system disintegrated paving way for new structures replacing the earlier ones. The emergence of radical Islamic groups led to wide spread speculations that the ideological vacuum would be replaced by one of Islamic fundamentalism. These republics, however, in continuation with their Soviet past established themselves as secular republics.

The discourse on nation building in these nascent republics has closely been tied-up to the discourse on Islam as well. The emphasis has been on building up a Tajik or an Uzbek identity glorifying the traditions and customs of a distant past completely destroyed by the Soviet system. Islam has a very important role to play in the lives of the people and the idea has been to frame a national identity rooted in the values of Islam. However, having established themselves as secular republics, those in power has also made an attempt to define the role of Islam in these political projects. The state has made attempts to demarcate itself from the fundamental agenda of the radical Islamic groups that came to the forefront following disintegration of the Soviet system. These groups have a very radical agenda and their agenda has been one of constructing a national identity as well, with the emphasis on reorganising the state and the society according to the principles of the Sharia. The state has firmly established their difference from these groups and has placed them as threats to national security.

These developments have impacted different groups differently and it is therefore important to break these debates on national interest to take into account the implications of these developments for the different groups that make up the nation. Women remain one such very important group which has been mostly neglected by mainstream approaches to understanding national security. This chapter seeks to

explore the interlink age between women, Islam and the state in these two republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The previous chapters have focused on the development of Islam in the Central Asian region within the framework of the larger political projects of the states. These chapters have made an attempt to interconnect the role of the state and the development of Islam in the region. Tracing the historical development of Islam in the societal context in which it emerged and evolved has been an attempt to reject the hypotheses that Islam is monolithic. In continuation with the second chapter, this chapter seeks to establish the interconnectedness between the role of the state, Islam and women's condition's in the region. The lives of the women in the Central Asian republics have been a result of various factors which have often been traced to simply the religious factor. The fact that Islam plays an important role in the lives of the people has been taken up to be the major deciding factor for the gender relations in the society.

Islam has a very important role to play in the lives of the people and more so in the post-independence scenario. However, as has been mentioned before, these regions are in a stage of uncertainty where Islam in itself is being constantly interpreted to suit the interest of different factions differently. Women have been largely impacted by these developments and stand at the crossroads where they will have to define the Islamic practices that will suit their interests. In the present state of affairs, the manner in which traditional roles are being prioritised in the name of Islam women will be the least to benefit from it. The state in undertaking the political project of defining national identity vis-à-vis traditions that emphasises on establishing gender relations that restrict women to the private spheres has a very important role to play in defining women's rights in the region. The whole debate on national identity formation seeks to glorify the Uzbek or Tajik identity where women's duty as mothers and wives are once again being glorified. The politics of religion, nation and the state impact women's lives in these republics. While the women's problems largely remain out of the state centric approaches, their roles have become the focus of the different groups in the region. The constitution of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan defines them as secular republics which has had positive connotations for women. However, secular politics in the absence of progressive policies would be rendered insignificant to improve women's lives in the region. The position of women in these republics cannot be

attributed to the resurgence of Islamic practices alone but to the role of the state policies as well.

The argument of this chapter is that women's position in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan cannot be attributed to solely to the resurgence of Islamic practices. Women's lives are very crucially connected to the political projects the state seeks to undertake and the ideology which guides these projects. The state institutionalises patriarchal values that seek to establish an order that supports gender hierarchy. The social duties and roles defined by this hierarchy necessitate women to perform duties within the private spaces of the family and the household. The state in the post-independence scenario seeks to establish these roles and duties in the name of tradition. These traditions and norms are then legally and morally sanctified by the legal scriptures and Islamic doctrines. Traditions and customs are therefore given a religious and legal sanctity and established as the way of life. The post-independence trajectories of how Islam is deployed to define traditions and customs are relevant to understanding women's conditions in these republics.

This chapter works within the framework of Kandiyoti's arguments that, "an adequate analyses of the position of women in Muslim societies must be grounded in a detailed examination of the political projects of contemporary states and their historical transformations" (1991:2). This framework helps in understanding that women's lives are to a great extent shaped by the state itself. The manner in which Islam evolves and is practised is conditioned by the state. In the Central Asian region, Islam was for the first time invoked as the identity of the people to challenge the Russian colonisation under the Tsarist regime. Later, under the Soviet system once again Islam was identified as the way of life in the wake of Sovietisation of these regions. Islamic practices were largely conditioned by the socio-cultural and political system that came into existence under these differing regimes. Local beliefs and traditions were incorporated and merged with the Islamic practices establishing an order, a value system as a way of life. These norms and traditions impacted women differently than men with these norms being more harsh and severe towards women. The role of the state in upholding these systems or challenging these systems then further defined women's conditions in the society at large.

The women in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have been witness to a regime type that laid strong emphasis on gender equality in the public sphere. This does not mean that women were liberated and gender relations were completely altered under the Soviet rule, however, women enjoyed greater autonomy and their presence in the public spaces was the greatest achievement of the Soviet system. The post-independence scenario has led to the resurgence of traditional values being highlighted to define the national identity, which has resulted in emphasis being laid on women's roles within the private spaces. The traditional values and customs are being given legal and moral sanctity which glorifies women's roles as mothers and daughters. The state building process has taken up the task of defining what makes up true Islam and within this framework seeks to define women's role in the society.

The discourse on Islam has been divided with the radical groups proposing stricter enforcement of the Sharia and the state's version which has been largely ambiguous. On the one hand, the state has established itself as secular states while on the other hand it has continuously re-affirmed its faith to Islamic practices as well. This ambiguity largely results from the attempt of the state to enforce secular values. The state, in order to enforce secular ethics has become highly authoritarian in nature. In continuation with its Soviet legacy these republics have established strong states and have their version of an official Islam with the religious activities of the people being constantly monitored by the state institutions. Islam and Islamic practices is therefore being defined by the state even in the post-independence scenario.

The Soviet state sought to destroy all forms of religious practices ordained by the Sharia and imposed upon women in the name of religion. The ideology of the Soviet state necessitated that all forms of feudal practices be destroyed to achieve the goals of Socialism. They sought to achieve equality of individuals for which they believed that women's emancipation was very crucial. The Soviets sought to emancipate women by attacking all practices that were derogatory to women. It was in this context that the onslaught on traditional practices like polygamy, payment of Kalym(bridal price), observance of purdah(Paranja in the Central Asian region), child marriages were banned to emancipate women from these practices. The onslaught on these practices resulted in both men and men viewing this as an attack on their traditions and culture. However, it did serve the larger purpose of freeing women

from seclusion and segregation which was the greatest achievement of the Soviet regime.

The state in the post-independence context has prioritised the nation building process and glorification of a traditional heritage forms the basis of this project. This has resulted in the re-emergence of Islamic tradition and practice in the public/private spaces in Central Asia. These practices had under the Soviet regime been largely restricted to the private spaces of the family with legal structures forbidding such practices in the public realm. As observed by Nantes (2005:137), “In the post-independence period a reaffirmation of the national identity, effectively denied throughout the Soviet period, brought the relationship between culture and religion to the fore.” The state building process is guided by its own ideology where notions of culture enmeshed in religious values are strategically being deployed to serve their interests. The status of women in these republics was impacted by these developments and the extent to which Islam was deployed by the state as an integral part of these processes.

It is important to note that Islam as it developed in these republics were completely different from that in the other parts of the Muslim world. The Islamic practices also varied in comparison to these regions. Islamic practices in the Central Asian Republics varied ranging from support for liberal strands of Sufism to Wahabiism. In the aftermath of independence, these republics were grappling with their state building processes. The states in undertaking their political projects of creating modern nation states have largely set up secular institutions. Independence opened up spaces for religious practices and granted more autonomy in terms of adherence to one’s faith, however, the state sought to maintain its hold on these practices and prevent it from taking a radical turn. The relation between the state and religion keep evolving and it is the extent to which the latter is deployed that will define women’s role and status in these republics.

In the wake of independence the state resorted to break away from the erstwhile Soviet structures and ushered in market reforms which brought about rapid changes economically, politically and socially. The resurgence of Islamic practices in the public spaces was taking place parallel to these developments as well. It is here that the link between the state and religion has to be drawn because the latter is

respectively affected by the former. Any changes in the larger socio-economic, political framework would have implications for the manner in which Islam was evolving in the region. In the wake of these structural changes, these republics were economically impoverished and sweeping changes resulted in large scale poverty and unemployment and if they do not succeed in generating ideologies capable of coping with the widespread social change that Capitalism will bring in its wake, they might rely on Islam (Chenoy, 1996:518). The radical groups, for instance constantly relied on their populist ideologies to draw support for their movement and challenge the state structures. These groups are mostly concentrated in the economically impoverished regions and have drawn support from the rural masses using Islam to mobilise people against the structures of power.

The people in these regions have largely been supportive of the secular state structures and these radical groups do not have much popular support except in areas where they are concentrated. The state in undertaking their political project of rapid socio-economic and other changes have deployed Islamic values and traditions at different levels to serve their interests. The governments in both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have branded these radical groups as a threat to national security. They seek to maintain a firm hand in controlling these threats while at the same time eagerly display their allegiance to the faith. The opening up of madrassas and mosques that were earlier banned under the Soviet regimes for instance or performing the Hajj and taking the pledge on the Qu'ran were reflections of the government's aim to deploy Islam as a reflection of their culture and identity.

Women's problems and changing status remain largely unresolved in these republics. These economic reforms have severe implications for women in these nascent republics and are largely responsible for the changing status of women in these Republics. CAW² are likely to be hemmed in between the issue of identity and changing status. The changing status will come from the on-going reforms, whereas the issue of identity will be complicated by the interweaving of traditional roles and customs, the experience of the Soviet past, ethnically and geographically defined frameworks, and their own political movements (Chenoy, 1996:518). Women in these

² CAW: Central Asian Women.

republics remain trapped between these developments which will have implications for them as a group.

The emphasis on traditional roles and customs was incorporated with the building of the national identity as part of their tradition which had been eroded by the Soviet regime. The idea of a glorious national past, prior to the Soviet times was now being glorified and widely circulated by the state. Although Tajikistan remains a secular state there has been a resurgence of Islamic practices and observance of Islamic practices have brought the question of the condition of women to the forefront. The economic reforms resulted in radical transformations and the impact of these changes was felt by women differently in comparison to men. On the other hand the debate on identity formation had its own implications for women who were once again being pushed back to the private spaces in the name of performing their traditional roles.

These republics in their struggle to build modern nation states work within the framework of new ideologies and the various aspects of the state building processes have had its own impact on the lives and condition of women in the region. Tokhtakhodjaeva(1999:34) has put forward the argument that, "Uzbek society is not homogenous and that two trends can now be discerned in its development: the modern and the traditional." Likewise Kandiyoti(2006) has argued that modern day debates in the post-Soviet Central Asian republics is to a large extent a result of the Soviet policies of modernisation which had paradoxical consequences. The state policies of modernisation from above did not necessarily alter the traditional pattern functioning parallel to the modern elements of societies. The consequence of this was the resurgence of this contradiction in the post-independence context. The state building process has reflected elements of both the modern and the traditional aspects. The state's attempts at introducing economic reforms to ensure a modern way of life reflect the former aspect of state building process. At the same time adherence to traditional beliefs and practices have been gaining prominences in the public/private spaces as well strengthening the feudal and traditional elements in the society.

In the wake of independence, the revival of national identity became the cornerstone of the political projects undertaken by the state. The traditional aspects were strongly incorporated into this ideology whereby women's images were being reproduced as that of good wives and daughters. The public performance of traditional female roles-

such as those enacted in the yearly televised 'Best daughter-in-law' competitions in Uzbekistan-serve both as an icon and celebration of national identity (Kandiyoti,2006:617). Once again traditional gender roles were being resorted to and women were being subjected to these norms of fulfilling their traditional duties. There has been a wide circulation of and resort to conservative gender roles in the society in the name of the revival of national identity. Women remain trapped between these emerging discourses where they are facing the double brunt of the problems posed open by independence and reinstatement of the traditional and religious norms in the public spaces.

The state in order to maintain its secular ethos has tried to draw boundaries between the fundamental versions of Islam put ahead by the radical groups and the state's version of Islam. These leaders have shown their allegiance to the faith as a national heritage and have been vocal in the observance of Islamic practices in the public spaces. On the question of the veil, the Uzbek government, "responded by attempting to police the boundaries between national dress- the colourful headscarf leaving the face bare- and 'transnational' veiling(or what is considered as 'Arab' or foreign dress) signifying an expression of extremism or 'Wahhabism'(a loosely utilised but politically charged expression in common use in the region)"(Kandiyoti,2006:611). The Tajik government responded likewise by introducing a partial ban on the Hijab in 2007 on similar grounds that it was a foreign import of radical ideas and a complete ban of the headscarves in schools and educational institutions.

Islam as argued by Kandiyoti remains an internally contested but coherent discourse to regulate gender relations in these Republics. The state seeks to co-opt modern and traditional elements of society to address the women's issue. Women in these republics remain trapped between these discourses. The resurgence of traditionalism in the space of the family and the society cannot be ignored and women take up to their traditional roles for they are trapped between the dictates of the state and the family. For instance, the banning of Hijab in educational institutions in Tajikistan requires women to abandon the hijab or the headscarves while in the space of the family women are forced to wear them. Once again the issue was of being treated as an outsider within the family and the community that women chose to remain within these structures. A similarity can be drawn with the Soviet state's campaigns to create a secular space. The difference in the post-Soviet context was the absence of legal

guarantees to protect the rights of the women if they took the step to venture away from these norms and practices.

The state has in co-opting elements of traditionalism reinstated the patriarchal discourse which was being appropriated as a national culture. As observed by Kennedy- Pipe (2004:103), “This notion of what it takes to build the state- based on the virtue of a dominant male- has dramatic repercussions for society. And, in some parts of the region, this trend has been compounded by the public revitalisation of Islam”. Therefore unlike the claims of the threat being posed by the radical groups, it is the reinstatement of traditional aspects in the public spaces that has been detrimental to the condition of women in the republics as has been observed by Nantes(2005). The reinstatement of traditional roles has resulted in women being pushed back to the private spaces. The state supported the traditional role of women as wives and daughters. It was being actively propagated that women’s presence in the public spaces were ‘unnatural’ and an erosion of traditional values and culture. Women were now in the name of tradition being asked to take up their traditional roles within the confines of the houses and the family.

The greatest achievement of the Soviet regime had been the entry of women into the public spaces which had earlier been denied to them. In the post-Soviet era, the states worked within new ideologies that sought to reinstate a gender hierarchy that confined women to the private spaces. In the changed socio-political and economic scenario women have faced the brunt of these changes the most. They were now being deprived of the rights and benefits which had been guaranteed to them under the Soviet system. Under these circumstances women were being forced to accept their traditional roles and remain confined within the private spaces.

In the changed circumstances, there has been a complete erosion of the social security nets that had been guaranteed under the Soviet system. There has been an increased level of unemployment and poverty in these republics. Women have felt these changes first both at work and in the home. The community organisations like the Mahalla have gained prominence as a system of administration where women are actively involved in providing community services in the absence of the state’s support for the family and the community. These activities have further established women’s roles as wives and mothers working selflessly as caregivers for the family. It

is within these circles that women's traditional roles are observed and further gain prominence. The family and community values are fostered and strengthened within these structures. Women earlier were doubly burdened by work and family and now in the absence of state incentives for women's engagement in the public spaces women are resorting towards these structures and practices.

The strengthening of the Mahalla has reinforced women's traditional roles as guardians of traditional values. It was within these spaces that women actively participated even under the Soviet regime to keep these values alive. However, with the changed economic circumstances and the state's withdrawal of social support systems, there has been an active reliance on community services provided by these structures. Women have acted as guardians of faith and performed various rituals and practices under the auspices of the elderly within these mahallas. "In Uzbekistan, for example, the government officially supported the mahalla system and utilized it to administer specific welfare projects. It was the women's committee and female elders which were most involved in community care activities, visiting families, compiling lists of those most in need and those who qualified for the receipt of government benefits and humanitarian aid"(Nantes,2005:144). In the wake of rising poverty and unemployment women were taking up these services as unpaid labourers. Women were actively engaged in providing these services and upholding their traditional roles being reinforced by the state.

The elements of social conservatism being propagated by the state have resulted in extremely negative espousal of gender relations in these republics. The Soviet regime had introduced laws to abolish traditional practices like the ban on child marriages, legal right to divorce, payment of Kalym(bride price) etc. The traditional practices despite being legally banned were maintained in secrecy within the confines of the family and the community. In the post-independence context these practices have resurged once again. There is an attempt to glorify the pre-Soviet past where statutory laws are being replaced by traditional norms. There has been wide spread debates on polygamy to be legalised to better the economic status of women. For instance, the moves within the Kyrgyz republic to legalise polygamy was defeated, however it remains in the public domain and on the political agenda in all three republics (Nantes, 2005:151). In the absence of the state security, traditional practices banned by the Soviet state once gained prominence. Practices like the payment of Kalym,

dower, polygamy were gaining prominence and being justified on the grounds of ensuring some amount of financial benefits.

The practice of bride abduction which had been banned under the Soviet Union has once again become prominent and more so in the republics of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Most of these bride abductions are forced upon the women who are unwillingly kidnapped but they are forced to uphold the marriage because of the notion that returning back home from such marriages would bring shame to the family. The laws that banned these practices as crimes against women under the Soviet system have been dropped from the legal scriptures that regarded these activities as crimes even when women organisations have reported these marriages as a form of culture based violence against women (Werner, 2009).

There has been a considerable lack of ensuring the safety and protection of women's rights in these republics. The social status of women has deteriorated in the absence of social safety guaranteed to women which is fostered by the precedence of the traditional norms and customary law over the statutory law. If practices like bride price payment if not in cash but in other forms like giving gifts in the forms of livestock, bride kidnapping, forced marriages have emerged in the scene the other derogatory development has been the rise in the level of domestic violence against women.

In the post-independence context, institutions like marriage and family have become the site of resurgence of traditional values and practices. Women's rights within these spaces remain out of the purview of the state and there is not much legal protection for the violation of women's rights within the confines of these spaces. This has become evident in the light of the growing incidents of violence being committed against women within the family. Domestic violence against women remains grave issues in both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and the governments have failed to take effective measures against such heinous crimes. The state policies on the contrary seek to keep families together and foster community assistance to those families experiencing conflict as a result of which women suffer doubly at the hands of the husband and the state(Human Rights Watch Report " Sacrificing Women to Save the Family",2001).

The domestic law formally guarantees the equal rights of men and women before the law and the family law guarantees women's equal rights within the marriage and access to divorce on an equal basis with men. However, these guarantees remain only formal and the state has not taken concrete measures to protect these rights. Even in the marked increase of domestic violence as reported by the various NGOs and Women's organisations in the republic, there is no criminal statute against domestic violence. The patriarchal attitude of the state is reflected in the fact that there is very little or no data compiled on the number of cases reported. The Report presented by Human Rights Watch states that domestic violence is a markedly under reported crime and out of the respondents interviewed 60% of the women stated that domestic violence was a "normal situation". In the same Report it was observed that the government officials denied the existence of domestic violence in Uzbekistan or if they did agree then it was justified on the grounds that men would have had reasons for beating their wives or daughters. Women in the absence of any form of security have no way out but to silently bear with these heinous crimes within the confines of the family.

A similar trajectory unfolded in the republic of Tajikistan as well which was witness to a violent civil war in the wake of Independence. The civil war resulted in the death of more than 60,000 people. An estimated 26000 women were widowed, 55000 children orphaned and 600,000 people displaced. During the war violence against all the citizens intensified and women were witness to various gender based violence like rape, torture, verbal abuse, forced marriages etc. (Haarr, 2007:246). The war resulted in the loss of many lives and a huge increase in the number of women becoming widows which has revitalised the tradition of Tajik men taking up a second wife, a tradition that had been banned under the Soviet regime. These practices were being given legal and moral sanctity as a part of their national heritage and culture.

The highly patriarchal values of the Tajik society is reflected in the gender relations where women are viewed as male property and men resort to the use of violence as a means to ensure obedience from women. Marriages and families as social institutions are highly respected and women are obliged to accept their roles as mothers and wives fulfilling their traditional duties within the confines of these private spaces. Domestic violence within these spaces has rapidly increased in the wake of Independence with little or no legal guarantees to safeguard women's rights. As reported by Falkingham(

2000:xii), “Violence against women and girl children continues to be a problem within Tajikistan. A recent survey found that two thirds of Tajik women are regularly exposed to some form of violence (including physical, psychological, and economic violence) within the home”. It has been found by both Haar and Falkingham in their reports that nearly two thirds of the women in Tajikistan suffered domestic violence either at the hands of their family members or relatives that included both men and women and later in their husbands houses. In the study conducted by Haar (2007:263), it was found that 36.1% of women experienced physical violence and 42.5% experienced sexual violence by their husbands.

These findings in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are results conducted outside the aegis of the state. The state refuses to acknowledge the presence of domestic violence in these republics. Like in Uzbekistan, the government has no statistics on the reported number of cases pertaining to domestic violence. “The government in Tajikistan”, as observed by Haar (2007:250), “remains unwilling to incorporate the term domestic violence into its Family and Criminal Codes”. This attitude reflects the highly gender insensitive and patriarchal approach of the state. Women under such circumstances have no legal guarantees to protect their rights which had been the hallmark of the Soviet system. In the absence of any legal guarantees women fear reporting such cases and silently bear with this treatment. However, despite the states claim that domestic violence does not take place in these Republics, these findings assert the gross violation of women’s rights and reflect the patriarchal attitude of the states.

Women other than silently resorting to such treatments have as observed by Nantes (2005) opted for self-immolation as a way out. Between 1986 and 1987 over 270 cases of self-immolation were reported in Uzbekistan. In the wake of increasing conservatism towards divorce women have been forced by the pressure of the community and the state to keep marital issues within the confines of the family. Such attitudes have resulted in women seeking a way out in committing suicidal attempts in the form of self-immolation. The practice of self-immolation among women in Central Asia is prevalent only In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where Islamic influences and traditional religious and cultural practices have exerted considerable pressure with respect to the nature of gender relations in these societies(Ibid:156). Conservative

attitudes regarding the condition of women in these republics have resulted in the construction of gender relations that negatively impact upon women's lives.

The state has in undertaking its political project of national identity formation constantly deployed Islam in the public spaces. This reinstatement of religious and traditional values as a part of a national heritage has proved to be detrimental for women in these republics. The issue of identity is enmeshed in the traditional ideals and goals which places women in an inferior position. The state reflects the traditional aspirations and seeks to maintain the gender hierarchy which is reflected in the appraisal of traditional values and goals. Likewise, the limited approach in terms of ensuring the constitutionally guaranteed right to equality and women's rights reflects the patriarchal attitude of the state.

The changing status of women can be attributed to the changes in the economic, social and political structures. Women and men were impacted differently by the transition from the socialist to the market economy. With the transition to market economy and structural adjustment programmes, these republics suffered huge financial losses. These republics even though financially constrained inherited high human development indicators, reflecting the legacy of economic and social development achieved during the Soviet period. Tajikistan, for instance despite a low level of real GDP, the Human Development Index (HDI) for Tajikistan was 0.629, which is comparable to the 0.649 averaged by countries classified by the United Nation Development Programme as "medium" income countries. The economic transition followed by civil war had severe implications for the people of Tajikistan the brunt of which was borne most severely by women and children. The HDI slumped from 0.629 in 1991 to 0.540 in 1998 with the result that Tajikistan is now ranked 108th out of 174 countries. The decline in the Gender Development Index between 1995 and 1998 also indicates that the relative position of women in Tajikistan has deteriorated (Falkingham, 2000:4).

The transition to market economy has resulted in a drastic cut-down on expenditure in the social structures in comparison to the U.S.S.R. The state spent substantial amount in the health and education sector which was 50-55 of government expenditure while the fiscal pressure in the CAS(Central Asian States) has not only meant cut backs in this amount but the governments are thinking of user charges and health

insurance(Chenoy,1996:518). These changes in the social sectors have had negative implications for women. The total state expenditure in the field of education fell from 19.2% in 1991 to 13.5% in 1998 and from 9.8% to 6.7% in the health sector (Falkingham, 2000). These changes have had profound impact on the lives of women.

The gendered impact of transition has resulted in women losing out on educational opportunities which had profound impact on their lives at every level. There has been a huge drop out in the number of girl from schools, colleges and universities in Tajikistan in the wake of Independence. The gender gap in terms of higher education for instance widened from 58 girls per100 in 1990 to just 34 in 1998(Human Development Report,1998).The reinstatement of traditional values and norms that is highly patriarchal and conservative has resulted in these wide spread gender disparities. Despite the existence of formal laws guaranteeing equal rights for men and women these laws have been superseded by the strengthening of traditional norms and practices that negatively impact upon women's lives.

Gender disparity has been a visible outcome of these changes which has negatively impacted women's lives and conditions in the region. Following the civil war which resulted in the creation of many female headed households women have had to face the brunt of the transition at home and in the work space. In the wake of transition, unemployment has risen sharply and with the cut down on spending in state enterprises, women have been laid off from their jobs. This resulted in a drastic rise in unemployment among women wherein the 1996 figure shows that the number of women officially unemployed grew from 17,471 to 26,726 by the end of the year. Only a small number of women received unemployment allowances which are well below the minimum income (Human Development Report, 1997).

Low levels of education, high levels of unemployment among women resulted in low social status for women. Women have lost the earlier benefits and entitlements guaranteed under the Soviet system. These changes have been a result of not just re-Islamisation of society but the official restoration of male privilege as an item of national culture (Kandiyoti, 2008). The gendered nature of transition has been obvious in the republic of Uzbekistan as well. Under the Soviet system families were given financial support by the state for the education of their children which was removed after independence because of the financial pressures felt by these states. In

the wake of large scale unemployment, the priority for families was in the least to maintain a basic family income. Such circumstances resulted in an increase in the dropout rates and more so of the girl child from educational institutions.

As per the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report, Central Asia, the total expenditure on education decreased from 11.6%(as% of GDP) in 1992 to 8% in 1996. Enrolment in education (age 6-23) decreased from 59% in 1993 to 50% in 1997. Female university graduates decreased from 78% in 1993 to 61% in 1997(females as % of males). Likewise in terms of expenditure in the health sector, it fell from 4.8% of the GDP in 1992 to 3.1%. The fiscal pressure on the states as an outcome of transition resulted in such cutbacks which was not as severe in the republic of Uzbekistan as in the other republics. The gender disparities remain stark in the republic as well despite having laws and conventions to protect the rights of the women and to ensure gender equality in all fields. The republic even ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1996 however formal adherence to these Conventions does little to ensure the actual implementation of these laws.

There has been a marked withdrawal of women's representation in the political spaces in the post-independence scenario. Under the Soviet system quotas were put into place to guarantee female representation in the political spaces. Although comprising 51% of the population, women represent less than 18% of all administrators and managers and fewer than 10% of deputies in the Parliament (Human Development Report, 1999). A number of reasons can be cited for the low level of women's participation in the public spaces however these reasons firmly remain rooted in the values of patriarchy. Patriarchal discourse has been institutionalised by the state which is reflected in the changing socio-economic and political status of women in these republics. Arguments like that of merit have been brought forward where women it was believed were given unnecessary advantage over men but in the changed circumstances women will have to compete with men to achieve these privileges (Nantes,2005). These arguments are all rooted in the assumption that women have to resort to their traditional roles within the private spaces and not in the public spaces which have been a forte of the men.

The social status of women is largely determined by their representation in the socio-economic and political life of the society. The post-independence social indicators of development have been relatively low for women in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. These figures speak for themselves when it comes to the gender based disparities prevalent in these republics. Much of the legislation on the statute books has not been implemented while other laws have been interpreted through a cultural bias that keeps women politically and economically marginalised. Despite proclamations and legislation aimed at improving women's equality, political, social, and economical biases against women have prevailed and strong inequalities in all spheres of life remain vivid (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995:11). Women's gains and benefits under the Soviet system were largely being denied to them in the changed socio-political and economic context resulting in a low social, economic and political status of women in these republics.

The transition has resulted in huge social changes and women have faced the brunt of these changes. The gender disparities in terms of educational, employment opportunities, political representation have resulted in women having a low status in the society. Women are denied educational opportunities at the basic level which then results in them having low skills in comparison to men. This has led to large scale feminisation of poverty and unemployment especially in the rural sectors. In the wake of large scale unemployment and poverty, families are largely concerned with basic survival which has resulted in women joining the work force in large numbers as labourers in the informal sector of the economy. Women working in these sectors are greatly exploited and poorly paid which is at times even below the minimum wages. On the other hand, lack of professional skills has resulted in women being employed at lower paying jobs than men at every level. The gendered division of labour has resulted in job segregations where women are employed in professions like education and health. The state policies in providing women with minimum social security benefits have placed women in inferior position vis-à-vis men with the result that women have been forced to withdraw from the public spaces and remain confined within the private spaces of the family.

The state building projects in the republic of Uzbekistan has focused on various aspects like social development, economic reconstruction and ensuring political stability. These aspects have had different impact on both men and women. Following

independence, these republics have taken up the huge political task of building up modern nation states. These projects have significantly impacted women who have had to face the double brunt of independence and the resurgence of Islamic practices in the public spaces. This chapter has worked within Kandiyoti's (1991:10) argument, "the extent to which women are represented in the political discourse, the degree of formal emancipation they achieve and their participation in the economic life are closely linked to the state building processes." The thread of argument of this chapter has been that there is an interlinkage between Islam, Women and the State and it is important to trace this inter-linkage to explain the condition of women in these republics.

Islam in the republics of Central Asia has developed within the larger framework of changing socio-economic and political contexts. The manner in which Islam developed in these regions is different than the rest of the Muslim world. The differences in these countries in terms of their historical evolution, social composition and economic and political structures have had a significant bearing on the manner in which Islamic practices have taken shape. Islam is far from monolithic but differs from region to region. Islam in Central Asia has a very important role to play in the lives of the people, however there is no one strand of Islam that the people adhere to in these republics. Islam in comparison to the other parts of the Muslim world is of a moderate kind and people have resorted to the practice of Islamic traditions more as a way of life.

Islamic practices in the region have been defined to a large extent by the state policies under differing regimes. Islam came very late in the region and was first consolidated as a common source of identity in the wake of the Russian colonisation of the region. The people resisted the russification of society by building up a value system guided by the laws of the Sharia and adhering to these practices as a part of their identity. The incorporation of local traditions and norms now came to be defined as Islamic practices and the people were to adhere to these norms to show allegiance to the faith. The issue of identity therefore was now based on drawing a link between tradition and religion. The gender relations were constructed within this framework where the social roles of men and women were clearly defined. This resulted in women being secluded to the private spaces within the confines of the family fulfilling their traditional roles as mothers and wives and guardians of faith and culture. The social

and religious institutions were so constructed that it worked to inculcate these value systems in the people.

The Russian colonisers did little to change these systems or practices. The Central Asian region largely served their colonial interests. The attempt to introduce Russian culture was made through reforms in the educational institutions which were met with stiff resistance. This resulted in the Jadid movement which sought to reform the Islamic practices and modernise these practices. The secular intelligentsia sought to challenge the backward nature of the existing practices by first questioning the existing educational systems which later incorporated the issues of women as well. The movement though significant was not very successful in achieving the desired results because of the stiff resistance put forward by the conservative section of the society resisting such changes.

Women's experience in the pre-Soviet times was one of seclusion, observance of the parandja(veil), forced marriages, under age marriages, payment of bride price etc. These practices placed women in an inferior position. The lives of the masses were dictated by the laws of the Sharia and Adat(Customary law) which entailed men and women to observe these practices as adherence to Islam. The masses observed these practices as a way of life, as part of their identity. The Soviets, when they came to power viewed these practices as archaic and backward. The larger goal of the Soviets was to bring about a Socialist society that was based on equality of individuals. The goals of Socialism would have been incomplete without achieving gender equality. The Soviet campaign to ensure women's emancipation in the Central Asian region was largely linked up with their religious policy. The Soviets believed that eradication of all forms of religious practices would ensure the emancipation of women.

The Soviet religious policies had paradoxical consequences with these practices completely removed from the public spaces but now pushed back to the confines of the family and the community. The secularisation of educational and social institutions served the purpose of placing religion outside these spaces and education was now imparted to inculcate values of rationality and reason. The state policies ensured women the spaces that had been earlier denied to them. Women were now given the rights to pursue education and employment opportunities outside of the confines of the houses. For the first time legal guarantees and measures were provided

to women to improve their social and economic status in the society. However, these guarantees did not necessarily alter the existing gender relations in the society. The onslaught on traditional practices in the public spaces had the negative effect of these being more strictly observed in the private spaces. Women under the new system were also doubly burdened with fulfilling their traditional duties at home and working outside of their houses.

The Soviet policies had paradoxical consequences for women wherein the persistence of traditional culture and social attitudes kept women from achieving full equality with men under Soviet rule. Relationships in the home failed to change along with women's entry into the workplace, so that women remained responsible for child care and traditional household duties as well. The upper reaches of power remained closed to women. Nevertheless, they did improve their position in society (Cooper and Traugott, 2003:63) Women in the Soviet system achieved some degree of formal equality which had been denied to them for so long. The greatest achievement of the Soviet system was the emergence of the women from the secluded confines of their homes into the public spaces.

Kandiyoti(2008:601) has argued that "the gendered consequences of the Soviet paradox was that the very socialist paternalism that supported and legitimised women's presence in the public sphere(through education, work and political representation), with a command economy and nationalities policy that stalled the processes of social transformation commonly associated with modernity." The result of the Soviet policies was that women achieved formal emancipation but the gender relations largely remained unaltered. The strict observance of rituals and traditional practices in the private spaces of the family and community in fact reinforced women's traditional roles. As observed by Tokhtakhodjaeva(1999:36), "the Soviet model produced a kind of split personality among educated women, who appeared modern on the one hand, but who still found reference in their families, and local communities on the other." This contradiction resurged in the post-Soviet scenario and the manner in which the state either departed from or upheld its Soviet legacies would impact gender relations in these republics. Islam once again formed the framework for constructing gender relations but the manner and extent to which the state deployed Islam in its state building projects would impact women's lives and conditions.

Constitutionally, these states have established themselves as secular republics. Independence opened up several problems and challenges; the threat posed by radical Islamic groups was one among the many problems. Secular politics was as such a conscious political choice to deal with the problem of radical Islam gaining momentum especially in the rural areas of the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. However, the state has been fairly ambiguous in terms of its religious policy. There is an attempt to demarcate between “official” Islam and radical Islam. In the wake of perceived national threat from the latter, the state has gained prominence and has become highly authoritarian in nature. The international organisations like Human Rights Watch and UNDP in their annual reports have reported the gross violations of human rights in these republics. The governments have initiated crackdowns and arrests of individuals on charges of suspicion of being affiliated to these radical groups. People today stand at the crossroads, with increased threat from these radical groups constantly using Islam to mobilise the masses against the political authority and the state initiating crackdowns upon any form of opposition to the state policies of observance of Islam.

Since independence, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have failed to make any significant progress economically, socially or politically. These factors have been constantly used by these radical groups to gain more support and to challenge the authority of the state. At present, these groups operate clandestinely and are mostly concentrated in the rural areas. The state has constantly invoked national security and national identity and encouraged Islamic observance of rituals as means of promoting national identity in the public spaces. However, these practices are monitored by the state which constantly seeks to demarcate between the ideologies propagated by the radical groups. As observed by Cooper and Traugott(2003:63), “this renewed interest in religion led to the revival of certain customs associated with Islam that have adversely affected women’s status.” The glorification of a national ideology that places men at the helm of affairs has led to the reinstatement of patriarchal values in the public spaces.

As argued by Kandiyoti(2008:611), “The bid to contain religious practice by making it conform to an emergent ‘official’ national ideology’, which is itself patriarchal in form and content, makes the boundaries between so-called secular and Islamic moralities and expectations blurred and indistinct.”It is important here to analyse how

these republics in their attempt to build up modern nation states are dealing with the women's issues. The official endorsement of secular politics has not necessarily entailed equal gender relations because these republics have resorted to traditionalism to construct the national identity which is in itself extremely patriarchal. Secularism forms an integral part of the political projects undertaken by transitional societies to build up modern nation states. However, the notions defining secularism remains largely restricted to the Western ideals of secularism.

As stated by Lucas(2011:8), "In today's Europe, two conceptions of Secularism coexist under one same word in the English language, and this is a source of great confusion: on the one hand the French ideal of laicite i.e. the total separation of Church and state and total disengagement of the state vis-à-vis religions which declare itself incompetent in these matters; and on the other hand the Anglo-Saxon definition of Secularism, i.e. equal toleration for all religions by the state, and recognition of representations of religions within the state."The direct import of these ideals to the transitional social systems often results in a contradiction of the secular ethics and principles with the condemnation of secularism in itself. In the aftermath of independence, these republics in a bid to build up their national identity largely remain divided by religious and other affiliations. In this context religion often serves as a primary marker of identity as has been stated by Hurd (2008). It is therefore important that these societies develop indigenous theories of secularism to suit the local circumstances.

The issue of Islam's compatibility with modernity has been central to the Western approach towards Islamic societies and secularism is integral to the project of modernity. In an era where secularism is in itself being questioned; there is an urgency to define secularism by moving away from the Western interpretation of secularism. As observed by (Bhargava, 2011), "It is time we shifted the focus away from doctrines underpinning some western secular states towards the normative practices of a wide variety of states, including the best practices of non-western states such as India. Once we do so, we will begin to see secularism differently, as a critical ethical and moral perspective not against religion but against religious homogenization and institutionalized (inter- and intra-religious) domination. Of all available alternatives, secularism remains the best bet to help us deal with ever deepening religious diversity and the problems endemic to it." The approach therefore

should not be one of dismissing secularism but redefining the ethos to suit different circumstances.

The concept of 'principle distance' as put forward by Bhargava(2011) would be apt in defining the goals of secularism. This concept is based on the premise that the state does not maintain strict exclusion from religion but interference in religious affairs if it promotes the larger goal of equality of all individuals. In the larger struggle for equality, secularism today has become a women's issue where in the struggle's for women's rights secularism is seen as an alternative. Secular spaces provide women with the spaces in which the struggle for women's rights can be carried forward, however "secularism is a necessary but not sufficient condition to women's rights" (Lucas, 2011:9). These societies are grounded in patriarchal values which have been institutionalised by the states. Secular societies therefore do not necessarily guarantee gender equality but it provides the existence of laws which seek to promote equality not guided by the dictates of religion.

Women have the most to gain from secularism which was apparent in the Soviet period and even in the post-Soviet Central Asia. The Constitutional guarantee of formal rights and equality ensure the space for debating and promoting women's rights unlike in theocracies. The condition of women has significantly deteriorated in the wake of independence but it is "not in the realm of revived tradition that explanations must be sought but rather an understanding of the factors shaping post-Soviet gender regimes" (Kandiyoti, 2008:613). The official restoration of a national culture that is inherently patriarchal in nature has proved to be detrimental for women in the region. The withdrawal of state from providing economic benefits has likewise resulted in lowering the socio-economic status of women in these republics. Kandiyoti's argument that it is not in Islam but the state's approach to using Islam in their political projects that the answers are to be found(Kandiyoti,2008). The inter-linkage between Islam and state policies is therefore crucial to understand women's conditions in these republics.

In the absence of the state benefits International donor groups and NGOs are today playing a very important role in taking up the women's issues. A nascent women's movement has emerged in these republics actively seeking the promotion of gender equality. However these movements remain grounded in the neo-liberal, capitalist

ideology and seek to promote gender equality within this framework. NGOs funded by the U.S and Europe are actively engaged in promoting women's rights and have been given the relative freedom to carry out their programmes and projects. The funds and packages for promoting women's rights have been effectively channelized by these republics within the background of existing conservative ideologies. "Certainly, the Uzbek government is no staunch defender of women's rights. It permits women's rights activists to work relatively unimpeded because they provide the regime with a useful fig leaf when confronting foreign critics and because it does not vie such activism as a direct threat to its authority. But whatever the reasons behind it, the regime's relative tolerance for such work provides the chance to expand support for activities aimed at empowering Uzbek women and building their organisational strength"(Cooper and Traugott,2003:66).

The state building process in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has incorporated women's issues within the various aspects like economic, social and political reconstruction. Women's development does not form a separate component of the state building process. It is in this context that the impact of these changes on women has to be considered to understand the changing status of women in these societies. It is important to deconstruct the impact of these changes on women's lives especially that of the construction of national identity which is inherently patriarchal and seeks to officially endorse, male privileges as a national heritage. Women have had to face severe consequences as a result of the socio-economic and political transformations that have taken place in the region. The paradox of the Soviet policies which resulted in ensuring the women's emancipation and yet at the same time stalling changes associated with modernisation, as observed by Kandiyoti(2008), resurfaced in the post- independence scenario. The consequences of the Soviet modernisation policies were that despite the creation of a Sovietised secular space elements of traditionalism still prevailed. In the post-independence scenario, elements of both modernity and traditionalism were incorporated into the state building processes. The former reflected in the radical economic transformations that were introduced in these republics in the direction of market oriented reforms. The strengthening of traditional norms and customs on the other hand reflected the traditionalist orientation of these states seeking to restore these values as their national heritage. Both these aspects of

the state building processes have had profound impact on the condition of women in these republics.

Islam has been the framework for redefining gender relations, which has had an impact on the lives of women in these republics. However, as has been the thread of argument of this chapter, Islam in sync with other factors has shaped up the lives of the women in these republics. The differing conditions of women in different parts of the Muslim world are precisely because of the extent to which Islam has been deployed as a part of the state building projects. These republics have been conservative in terms of reforming the family and women's lives in their endeavour to build modern nation states. However, women have fared better than their counterparts in the rest of the Muslim world because of the manner in which Islam has been deployed by the state. Despite limitations, these republics have provided its citizens with a secular space in continuation with their Soviet legacies which provide women the space in which they can participate in the competing interpretations of religious belief and practice and make proactive choices about their lifestyles and faith as argued by Kandiyoti(2008:611). As has been the argument of this chapter, secularism alone does not guarantee the end of patriarchy. Women's lives and conditions remain entwined with the politics of religion and the state and it is here that the answers to explaining women's conditions in these republics have to be sought.

Conclusion:

The post-Soviet trajectory of development in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has seen both a continuation and breakdown of the Soviet structures. In the economic realm, there has been a swift transformation to market oriented reforms and capitalist structures replaced the socialist modes of production. These reforms resulted in radical socio-political transformations as well. In continuation with its Soviet legacy the state has emerged as very strong actor. Nation building was the primary focus of the state in the post-independence scenario and the various aspects of state building project have been taken up within this framework. The discourse on these projects has mostly been state centric and the implications on different groups that make up the state have not been accounted for separately. Women as a group form an integral part of this debate which has been largely rendered insignificant by the state centric approaches to analyse the state building project.

The women's question has been incorporated as parts of the various aspects of the state building process and has not been taken into account as a separate issue. The political projects of the states in these republics have had profound impact on the lives of women. This chapter has been an attempt to trace the inter-linkages between the secular state, role of Islam and women in these republics. Kandiyoti's argument that women's representation in the political processes, their formal emancipation is very closely linked to the state building processes in Islamic societies has been the framework for this chapter. Her argument that women's conditions in these societies have to be viewed within the framework of the historical transformations of these states and how Islamic practices in itself remains defined by the states has been picked up to explain the inter-linkage between Islam, women and the state.

There have been marked changes in the socio-economic and political status of women in these republics. This chapter seeks to establish that these changes cannot be necessarily attributed to the resurgence of Islamic practices in the region. Islam has become the framework within which gender relations are being regulated, but Islam in itself remains a contested issue in these republics. These states have established themselves as secular republics and despite the endorsement of religious practices by the political leaders there is an attempt to demarcate between moderate and radical Islam as propagated by the radical Islamic groups.

Islam has always played a very important role in the lives of the people in Central Asia, however there has been limited support for the radical groups which remain concentrated in the rural areas. These groups have used Islam as a tool to mobilise support against the political authority and have used weak governance as an effective means for garnering support. In the absence of state support to welfare measures, increasing levels of unemployment and poverty, the welfare measures provided by these groups have appealed to the rural section among which these groups have their support base. The state on the other hand has used its legitimate authority to crack down on these groups in the name of threat to national security. The attempt on the part of the state has been to promote an official national ideology promoting a reinstatement of traditional values as a national heritage that had been destroyed by the Soviet regime.

The ideological vacuum of the Soviet state has been replaced by the new ideology of national identity formation which seeks to reinstate male privileges as a national heritage. The traditional elements have been reinstated in the public arena which once again seeks to restore a gender hierarchy that places women in an inferior position. The deteriorating condition of women therefore cannot be attributed just to Islam but has to be found in the post- Soviet factors shaping up the gender discourses (Kandiyoti, 2008). The state while it seeks to introduce aspects of modern nation states it has also kept elements of traditionalism alive which is reflected in the strengthening of the family and community. The latter seeks to maintain the traditional gender roles that require women to be confined within the private spaces of the family and the community performing their traditional gender roles.

The renewed interest in tradition has resulted in the observance of religious practices that adversely affect women in these republics. The state has been ambivalent in its religious policy. On the one hand it seeks to endorse its faith to Islam while on the other hand it seeks to actively monitor any form of practice that is outside the purview of the state. In an attempt to uphold its secular credentials there has been attempt to enforce these secular principles as well for instance the ban on veiling. Observance of veiling often resulted in punitive measures being taken by the state like exclusion from access to educational opportunities or being arrested on the grounds of suspicion of being associated to the radical groups. On the other hand reinforcement of traditional values in the private spaces has resulted in many women being forced to don the veil or to certain extent women doing this out of their own will in adherence to their traditional beliefs.

The strengthening of traditional values and norms require women to observe these practices on one hand while on the other hand endorsement of the official ideology requires them to obey the state wherein women face double oppression i.e. in the hands of the state and their families. In the absence of a state ideology that seeks to ensure equality of the individuals irrespective of their gender women face these discrepancies at the hand of the state. However, the other alternative being offered by the fundamentalist groups hardly appeal to the women of these republics, who given their long history of relative freedom under the Soviet rule, are particularly likely to oppose the oppression at the hands of religious fundamentalists(Cooper and Traugott, 2003). The avenues for change and improvement of women's status at present largely

come from International agencies and NGOs working with the ideologies of market reforms and neo-liberal agendas. These groups work in the backdrop of conservative gender ideologies which seek to revive the institution of family and community under the banner of revival of tradition as argued by Kandiyoti (2008). It is not Islam per se but the extent to which Islam has been deployed by the state to serve its ideological goals in the post-Soviet scenario that has impacted women's lives in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The secular space provided to women in these republics nevertheless places them in a better position than their counterparts in the rest of the Muslim world. Secularism today has largely become a women's issue and women's rights activists actively seek to defend and promote secularism as an alternative. However, secularism is not necessarily an alternative to patriarchy which has to be challenged. Women's struggle is not restricted to religious problems but other socio-economic problems as well which stems from the patriarchal values of society which has been institutionalised by the state. It is largely a reflection of this patriarchal attitude of the state in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan that has resulted in women being adversely affected.

Conclusion

This dissertation has been an attempt to highlight the crucial inter-linkages between Islam, secularism and its impact on the lives and condition of women in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Most literature on the Central Asian region has focused on the state building processes after Independence. However, the impact of these processes on the various groups making up the nation has mostly been ignored by the mainstream theories of International Relations. Women make up one of the most important groups. The women's issue has been encompassed within the various aspects of state-building processes but has not yet figured as a separate component. This dissertation seeks to look into this aspect of how the political projects undertaken by modern nation state in the post-independence scenario has impacted the lives and condition of women in the two republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Secularism is an integral component of modernisation and this project of building up secular states has varied implications for the lives of women. This dissertation is an attempt to trace the development of Islam and secularism and its impact on the lives of women in these republics. Islam gradually evolved in these republics as a way of life and became a part of the identity of the lives of the people in these republics. Observance of certain traditional practices soon became identified with Islamic practices and became a part of the value system of these societies. These practices resulted in women being secluded within the family and the community. The observance of the veil (known as Paranja in Central Asia), practice of polygamy, arranged marriages became the norm which were derogatory to women in these societies and they had a very low social and economic status. This was the condition of women in the Central Asian region prior to the Soviet rule.

Women's emancipation was an integral part of the Socialist ideology which was the basis of the Soviet state. Secularisation of the society was the foremost task facing the Soviet state which was carried out in full vigour ranging from the complete secularisation of educational institutions to a massive onslaught on the religious symbols and observance of traditional, religious practices that were derogatory to women. The Soviet state along with this policy of onslaught introduced progressive policies at the economic, social and political level to ensure equality of all individuals. The introduction of progressive legislation ensured the security and legal guarantee of

the rights of men and women. These efforts resulted in raising the standards of women because they were now guaranteed the rights to education, employment and representation in the political processes. The achievements of these policies were that women were being given the opportunity to come out of their seclusion and enter the public spaces.

On the other hand, these policies also resulted in the strengthening of the traditional norms and practices within the confinements of the family and the community. These policies though it resulted in the creation of a secular Sovietised space pushed these practices to the public spaces and strengthened these forces. The Soviet policies therefore had paradoxical consequences. Deniz Kandiyoti in her work has aptly summarized the gendered consequence of this paradox which has resurged in the post-Soviet space. The paradox of the modernisation policies of the Soviet policies was that while it ensured the emancipation of women through education, employment and political participation these very processes stalled the other aspects of modernisation and went on to strengthen traditionalism in the private spaces of the family and the community(Kandiyoti,2008)

The survival of traditional elements therefore stalled the alterations of the existing gender relations in the society. Women's roles as mothers were in fact recognised as a social duty and women were entitled to various rewards and benefits for performing these social duties. Women and men participated in upholding these values in the society at every level especially in the family. The women in fact played a very important role in performing their traditional roles as the guardians of faith. This has been highlighted in the second chapter extensively. The Soviet state therefore resulted in the creation of women highly modernised in terms of the qualifications she possessed yet at the same time having high esteem for traditional values and beliefs.

The women in the Central Asian republics however relate their present identity to their long past under the Soviet rule. Their experience with Islam has been different in comparison to the experience of women in the other parts of the Muslim world. Questions were posed in January-April, 2012 to a few students, women and men alike of the republics of Central Asia for the purpose of this dissertation. A questionnaire was prepared and put forward to these students; their views have been extremely helpful for the purpose of this study. For instance on the experience of women and

Islam in these republics they had similar opinions that women in Central Asia were far more better off than women in other parts of the world.

Some of the excerpts from the questionnaire as presented below to help summarise the findings of this study:

Question: How is Islam and Islamic practice in these republics different from the rest of the Muslim world?

Answers: "Islam is not fundamentalist in our country. Islam is a religion of equality and all the people are like brothers and sisters. It is an American interpretation of Islam being fundamentalist. It hurts us; we do not like this interpretation." Aminova (name changed on request), Tajikistan, student in M.A. (International Relations, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University)

"It is totally different. Islam is not homogenous. It depends on the political systems, structures and cultures. Kazakhstan is a secular state and the policies of the state are of tolerance to all religions." Amrenova Ulbolsyn, Kazakhstan, student in M.A. (International Relations, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University.)

"Islamic practices are very different. Not everybody is terrorists; it is countries like U.S.A and Russia which do not want Islam to be the foremost religion which is why they brand us as terrorists. Islam has nothing to do with terrorism, the radical forces do not know anything about Islam because they do not know or read about Islam. Our Constitution reflects the opinion of the people therefore our state is secular." Nodirbek Salimbekov, Uzbekistan (School of Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru University).

Question: How did Secularism impact women's lives?

Answers: "During the Soviet times, religious views were banned, books were burnt and hidden. My grandfather was killed for religious reasons. But people still carried out practices in the private spaces. Marriages were conducted at dawn secretly under the Islamic law. It was difficult. But women became free and they got education, could go to Moscow freely. My grandmother is educated where she got training in the special school for women. Grandmother did not veil. These changes were important.

The practice of veiling is not like in Iran. It varies according to the regions and the system of giving dower was cut by the Soviet state.” Aminova(Ibid)

“The political structure being secular resulted in women’s positive development. There was no discrimination.” Amrenova Ulbolsyn(ibid)

“Paranja was lifted 1924 onwards. Women giving up veil were not acceptable to men initially but by Independence women became equal in this sense. After Independence once again Hijab is gaining grounds because of the fear of radical groups but the police crackdown in 90s and women wearing Hijab were introspected. Today, those wearing the hijab depend on their choice.” Nodirbek Salimbekov,(ibid)

Question: Has there been a reassertion of their Islamic identity in the post-independent contest? How has it impacted women?

Answers: “The state still remains secular. Yes there has been the reassertion of identity especially by the radical groups. But people do not favour these groups. At the state level there has been no reassertion as such, for instance government bans the wearing of veil in the schools and government offices. But women’s presence in the public space is going down. During Soviet times women were everywhere, now not so much.” Aminova(ibid)

“There has been a reassertion of traditional identity. Government and people want to realise and reassert their cultural identity. Modernity versus tradition debate is going on. There is no problem in women’s roles as future mothers. Women can manage work and home. But the traditional norms are both negative and positive. Women will have to face it socially and economically. There is less work opportunities for women.” Amrenova Ulbolsyn(ibid)

“The difference can be seen mostly in terms of dress patterns but it is not a very big difference. People writing about Central Asia talk of these countries becoming Islamic but it is not true. There has been no reassertion of an Islamic identity. I Like wearing the kurta for Namaz(prayer) at the mosque. Even women wear the Hijab in mosques but not outside. People in our country are modern and they have choice to practice their beliefs.” Nodirbek Salimbekov(ibid)

Question: Do people support the radical groups or the secular state in these republics?

Answers: “There is not much support for radical groups. We don’t like people saying Islam is fundamentalist. Women should be liberated especially from the veil system as asserted by the fundamentalist.” Aminova(Ibid)

“These groups are growing active but not in Kazakhstan. Despite much propaganda people are very passive.” Amrenova Ulbolsyn(Ibid)

“Radical ideas were spread in the name of Islam in the early years of Independence. But the level of support I am unsure. It depends on the individual. We have to be modern. The days of hyping on values and customs are over. You need to be equal to be progressive.” Nodirbek Salimbekov(Ibid)

A number of other questions were posed to these students regarding the status of women in the Soviet times and in the present era. They all responded equally by saying that women’s lives had changed but it was important to ensure the equal treatment of women to become modern and progressive. However, they were also equally firm that those women’s roles as mothers were not much of an issue and that the choice to work and stay at home should be guaranteed. The observations from this experience were that there is a prevailing discourse regarding gender roles and identities in these republics in the post-independence era. Kandiyoti(2008) has aptly summarised this as a legacy of the Soviet past.

The paradoxical consequences of the policies of modernisation have once again resurfaced in the post-independence era. The state in continuity with its Soviet past has opted for secularism putting to rest all speculations regarding the trajectory of development these states would follow in the aftermath of Independence. Unlike assumptions that the ideological vacuum would be filled in by that of radical Islam, the Constitution of these republics declared them as Sovereign, Secular Republics. Women have had much to gain from their experience under the Soviet rule and were formally emancipated through educational, employment and other opportunities that raised their social, economic and political status in the society.

Following independence, the various aspects of state building processes had serious implications for the lives and condition of women in these republics. The changes have been extensively documented in the second and third chapter. The changed status of women has been attributed to the resurgence of Islamic practices in the

region. However, the attempt of this dissertation has been to reject this contention. This work seeks to establish the crucial relation between the secular state, Islam and women in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The argument of this dissertation is that the changed status of women in these republics has been a consequence of the various aspects of the state building process.

There has been an increasingly conservative gender ideology emanating from the state in the post-independence context whereby the state officially seeks to restore male privileges as a national heritage. This attitude of the state has reinstated patriarchal values in the public and the private spaces resulting in the deterioration of women's status in the society. While Islam still forms the framework to regulate gender relations in the society, the discourse on Islam remains fragmented. The state in a bid to contain the rise of radical groups uses secularism as a conscious policy tool and seeks to maintain its secular identity. While on the other hand there has been an open assertion to the Islamic faith and observance of Islamic practices in the public spaces by the political leaders. This renewed interest in religion has led to the rise of conservative practices that stresses on women's traditional roles as mothers and wives. The Soviet ideology has been replaced by the state's ideology to reassert cultural identity as a national heritage which deploys Islam extensively to glorify traditional gender roles. Women therefore remain trapped within these discourses. Their identity remains enmeshed within this search for a national identity which seeks to glorify women as mothers and daughters. Their socio-economic and political status on the other hand has been significantly impacted by the sweeping changes brought about by the market economic reforms. Women have been the most affected by these changes and have had to face the double brunt of Independence and the resurgence of Islamic practices in these republics.

The long history of the Soviet rule has however resulted in the practice of a moderate strand of Islam in these republics. Despite the use of Islam by the radical groups to challenge the political authority, they have not gained much support from the people. The secular state still appeals to the people of these republics and more so the women who have had much to gain from the secular state under the Soviet rule. Secularism still provides a better alternative for women than in theocracies; however there is a very important need to redefine secularism and develop models that can suit existing local circumstances. The women's experience with Islam in a secular framework has

as such been completely different than in the other societies. This has been a very important reason why the radical groups have not been able to garner much support except in the rural areas where they remain concentrated at present.

The conclusion of this dissertation is that secularism is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to fulfil the rights of women as has been observed by Lucas(2011). Secularism has to be paralleled with progressive policies to ensure women's rights in the society. The deterioration of women's lives in these republics is therefore not just a result of re-Islamisation of the society but because of various factors at work including economic policies and strategies of nation building. Women in these republics are in fact much better off than women in the other parts of the Muslim world. The narratives on Islam and secularism and its impact on women's lives have been extensively covered by the three chapters. The conclusion of this work is that Islam has been a part of the social change that has encompassed the region in the wake of Independence which has had a huge impact on the lives and conditions of women in these republics. It is as Kandiyoti(1991) has stated that women's lives in the Muslim societies have to be explored within the framework of the political projects of the states in its historical transformations. It is the deployment of Islam in the post-Independence trajectory of modern nation states in relation to different nationalisms, state ideologies and opposing social movements that is of central relevance to understanding the condition of women. The ways in which women are represented in political discourse, the degree of formal emancipation they are able to achieve, the modalities of their participation in economic life and the nature of social movements through which they are able to articulate their gender interests are intimately linked to the state building processes and are responsive to their transformations. It is within this framework that secularism as an integral part of the state building process has been taken up to explore the use of secularism as a state policy to control Islam. The focus of this study has been to trace the crucial linkage between these developments and its impact on the lives and condition of women in the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

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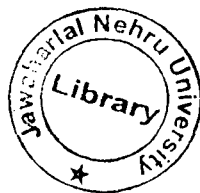
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