

**ETHNIC CONFLICT IN TRANSCAUCASIA:  
A CASE STUDY OF CHECHEN CRISIS,  
1991-95.**

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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY.**

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the Dissertation work "ETHNIC CONFLICT IN TRANSCAUCASIA: A CASE STUDY OF CHECHEN CRISIS, 1991-95" is a research work done by Kumari Snehlata submitted for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY in Soviet and East European Studies of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi during 1994-96 under my supervision. This is her original work and has not previously formed the basis for award of any degree to her.

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**FOR,  
MA & BABA**



**DEDICATED TO,  
SHELLY**

**(Who is no more)**

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# CHAPTER - I

## INTRODUCTION

Transcaucasia consists of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and the Southern Russian autonomous republic of Chechen-Ingush. It is situated to the South West of Russia and to the west of Kazakhstan. The region is surrounded by Caspian Sea, Iran, Russia, Black Sea and Turkey. Considering its geographical location in erstwhile Soviet Union, it can be said that the region was isolated from the mainstream as, it was separated by the Black and Caspian seas from the rest of the country. Due to its geo-political location, it was closer to Middle Eastern Islamic countries than to the Soviet Union. Due to unique location, the nature of its problems faced by this region are also unique. This region has always been a hotbed of ethnic strifes throughout its history at different points of time. The entire region had to face demographic and cultural transformations on several occasions. The clash between Christianity and Islam has always been one of the special characteristics of the ethnic conflicts in this region.

Ethnicism is a much debated concept in the modern World today. There are various opinions on the subject due to which its study has become very complex, however, most of the social scientists have accepted that ethnicity is referred to as shared culture, such as language, religion, territory, customs and institutions.<sup>1</sup> Paul Brass has named

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1. Abercrombie (N); Hill(s) and Turner (B.S.): Dictionary of Sociology, London. Penguin, 1988.

it as objective attribute. He has also suggested two other definitions of ethnicity, i.e. with reference to subjective feelings and in relation to behaviour. In the present study the first definition, i.e., objective attribute would be point of departure.<sup>2</sup>

In order to acquire a political and social shape, an ethnic group passes through, several stages. In the first stage an ethnic group identifies people with similar language, customs, religion and other practices and forms a community of such people, which fulfills their desires of group solidarity and thus becomes the basis for successful political demands. This stage is followed by emergence of sense of pride in the ethnic group. Here a section of the group becomes its leader and they want to establish dominance of symbols (language, deity, customs) on certain territory and thus emerges the "state" as an organised group of political people having similar goals.

In modern times, most of the nation states are multi-ethnic because international factors compelled them to enter in alliance with other groups and form multiethnic state.

But, the unique characteristics of Soviet Union was that probably, it inhabited maximum number of nationalities. Therefore, it was obvious that nationality question in the Soviet Union was much more complex than it was projected. The nationality problem was not only at the Union level, but also within the republics it was equally complex one.

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2. Brass (Paul R.) : Ethnicity and Nationalism (theory and Comparison) New Delhi, Sage Publication, 1991.



The All Union Census counted 128 nationalities existing on the territory of Russia. Some authors would put this number to 160. The Tatars are one of the most numerous communities in Russia. They account for about 5.5 million in Russia, while in earstwhile Soviet Union they were 6.6 million. There are more than a million Bashkirs, Chuvash Mordvians, Latvians and Estonians living in Russia alone. There are more than half a million Chechens (apart from Chechnya), Udmurts, Mari and Jews living in different parts of Russia. There are about 4 lakh Yakuts and Kabardians. Some of the Communities are no more than 500 or even lesser.

<sup>3</sup> According to 1979 census, in the whole USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republic) Armenians were 1.6%, of the population. Azeris were 2.1% and Georgians were 1.4% of the total population. At the same time, Armenians constituted 90% of the total population in Armenia, whereas, Azeris 78% in Azerbaijan and Georgians 69% in Georgia.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, most of the republics are inhabited by a number of communities. But in most of the cases one or the other community dominates the social cultural and political life of the republic. Usually, the language, religion and culture of the dominant community is recognised by the state, due to which the minority cultures felt threatened, despite the fact that the Soviet policy which was adopted after the Bolshevik

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3. Drobizheva, Leokadia, "To each his own nationalism" (Seminar, May 1992 (393)).

4. Lane, D, : Soviet Society Under Perestroika, Unwin Hyman (London, 1990) p-166.

revolution of 1917, intended to do away with all the ethnic and national differences. In this context, the Soviet policy for eliminating all ethnic and national differences had three major components : <sup>5</sup>

- i. Policy of cultural development (Kraztsvet or blossoming) - involved recognition of national and ethnic consciousness, but policy was structured in a political context of communist party hegemony and socialist in values. According to Stalin 'National in form, Socialist in Content',
- ii. drawing together of different nationalities in a socialist community (Sblizhenie) and
- iii. merging of different ethnic groups, i.e., replacement of previous national and ethnic consciousness (Sliyanie).

However, in practice, the merging and drawing together of the various groups could not materialize in the way intended by Soviet Leaders and national consciousness became an endemic and incredible feature of Soviet Society.

The people of Caucasus region belong to two major races, they are - Indo Europeans and Turanians. <sup>6</sup> Each of the two is represented by a number of groups. The Indo-European group consists of two groups (1) Tats and Talysh

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5. Lane, D, : Soviet Society Under Perestroika, Unwin Hyman (London, 1990), p-164.

6. Bammate, Haider : "The Caucasus and Russian revolution" (Central Asian Survey; Vol. 10, No. 4, 1991).

(2) The actual Caucasian people, who are further divided into three groups:<sup>7</sup>

a. The Katvel group, inhabiting Southern Caucasus and consists of Kartvelians, Imeretians, Mingrelians, Guris, Ajars, Laz, Svanetians, Tushins, Pshavs and Khevsurs (all living in Georgia).

b. Circassians - inhabiting Black sea Coast and northern Caucasus and consists of Abkhaz, Circassians and Kabardians.

c. The Eastern group - which is divided into Chechens and Dagestanis. The Chechens and Ingush speak same language and are part of the first group. The second group consists of Tabasaran, Darghin, Lak and others.

The Armenians form an another cohesive group, living in Transcaucasia. The Azerbaijanis, Kumyks, Avars, Balkans, Nogai and Karachai all belong to the Turanian race.

Besides these two major races, this region is also inhabited by Russians, Germans, Greeks, Jews and others.

The people of the Caucasus have nothing in common with the Russians, neither language, culture, nor religion, because the majority of these people is muslim.

After the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, this region became a part of Soviet Union, despite its sustained effort to maintain its shortlived independence.

The political system, which was established in the Soviet Union was based on the principle of control not theo-

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7. Bammate Haider, "The Caucasus and the Russian Revolution," Central Asian Survey, Vol. 10, No.4, 1991.

retically but actually in practice. Under Stalin, the leader himself was at the centre of all powers. The Communist Part of Soviet Union (CPSU) was used to discipline and appease all the sections of Society and also to provide managerial and administrative services to the system. The NOMENKLATURA<sup>8</sup> was governed by the powerful ministerial empires, coordinated by GOSPLAN.<sup>9</sup> The Soviets of worker's deputies, Komsomol and Trade Unions had minimal role to play.

The prime motive behind the establishment of such a political system was economic growth. In 1931, Stalin said that his country was 50-100 years behind the advance countries. He wanted to do away with this lag within ten years. The economic policy of early Soviet State was thus very attractive to smaller nationalities. Secondly, the Soviet constitutions, which were adopted in 1936 and 1977 repeatedly provided that although Soviet Union is a Union of States, these nationalities will have right to secede from the Union at any future point of time. But unfortunately, these two attractions proved farce. As by 1980, most of the non-Russian nationalities had this feeling that they are not given their dues of economic development. Actually by this time, the economy had started reflecting its poor condition. Secondly, although the constitutions provided for the provi-

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8. The term is of Russian language & it stands for list of names:.. Robertson (D); Dictionary of Politics, London, Penguin (1985).

9. State Planning Committee of USSR.

sions related to secesion from the union. (Article 17, 1936 constitution),<sup>10</sup> in actual practice they are not allowed for the same. The reason was that although the Soviet Union was a federation theoretically, but in actual practice due to the control of political power at the Union and state levels by the CPSU, no one could have thought of seceding from the Union. And all Soviet claim of solving all existing nationality problem proved false later on.

State sponsored Sovietologists were of the opinion that nationalist problem is a remnant of a primitive social order, but another group of western thinkers are of the opinion that ethnicity is the basis of legitimate collective self expression and therefore, will remain a subversive challenge to the multiethnic Soviet empire. Probably western thinkers were more correct. Because although the political institutions were extending to the entire Soviet Union, as soon as the time came people took side of their own nationalities and dissociated themselves from the Soviet institutions. This also strengthen the hypothesis that nationalism is always present, but can only express itself once an adequate situation arises.<sup>11</sup>

In early 20th century the Bolshevik political culture was anti nationalistic. In theory it was internationalist and wanted the unity of the working class round the glob.

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10. A.G. Noorani, "Yeltsin's war-Matter of International concern", The Statesman, Calcutta, 12 January 1995.

11. Deutsch, Karl W. Nationalism and Social Communication : An enquiry into the foundation of Nationality. Cambridge: MIT Press; 1969.

But Lenin was a great organiser. He was very well acquainted with the emotional feelings of people related to their own religion, territory language etc. Therefore, not only he tolerated but even was convinced with the idea that repression would only fuel nationalist and separatist tendencies. It will also weaken the international communist movement. He was confident that once economic base was constituted, the nationalist feelings would automatically weaken. Therefore, during his times the majority language and culture was supported and promoted by the State. And so, the minority groups of any particular region felt left out and discriminated, which in course of time fueled their nationalistic aspiration.

Lenin was succeeded by Stalin, who reversed his entire nationalistic approach. He stopped the promotion of regional cultures and languages by the State. In its place, he started the policy of assimilation. Under which the Russian language and culture was imposed on the non-Russian regions and in a way Russian people occupied a dominant position in the Tsarist empire as well as in the Soviet Union. The Russian language, in addition to historical and numerical dominance, has dominated Soviet State as well. It remained the Lingua-franca of Soviet Union. Even for minor successes in one's life, one was needed to be proficient in Russian Language. Therefore, the consolidation of nationalities which started during Lenin's period, survived and emerged with a new strength. Most of the national republics became more national demographically and culturally. National

elites grew powerful, often defying attempts by the Central Soviet authorities to control affairs in their republics. In Transcaucasia - the Russification through educational policy and assimilation was resisted by, slowly developing national communities. This all culminated into an anti-Soviet feeling among people, who were waiting for an adequate situation to encash it. The coup by hardliners provided this opportunity to national communities to declare their independence from the Soviet Union.

Some Sovietologists argue that the CPSU actually provided unity to the Union. But actually this was not the case, because the nature of the CPSU was not truly national. During different phases of the leadership the party was dominated by leaders coming from certain regions. Due to the domination of these institutions by Russians, Motyl called the Soviet State - the Russian national State.<sup>12</sup>

The Transcaucasia, in recent years has been among the most explosive regions in erstwhile USSR. Ethnic clashes in different republics in this region have resulted into loss of hundreds of lives and the appearance of thousands of refugees. The recent example of this tendency is the Chechen crisis, which has become more acute these days.

Chechenya is a part of the Caucasus region and lies in the North Caucasus along Terek river in the Southern part of Russia. The Landmass of Chechenya falls into three geo-

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12. Brass, Paul R. : Ethnicity and Nationalism : (theory and comparison), N. Delhi, Sage Publication, 1991.

graphical regions : the main Caucasus range in the South, the river valleys of Terek and Sunzha from west to east and the plains of Nogay Steppe in the North. Broadly, three groups inhabit this area. They are the Chechen-Ingush, who comprise 60% of the population, the Russians form 35% and the other Caucasian nationalities form 5% of the total population of Chechenya.<sup>13</sup> This ethnic composition has created a religious divide between the Russians, who are Slavs and the Chechen-Ingush, who are Sunni-Muslims. Sufi tradition is very popular among them.

Throughout its history, the Chechen population never wanted to be dominated by the Russians. But, somehow during entire Soviet period ethnic resentment could not come to forefront, but it kept on brewing in the minds of people. During Soviet era, it was claimed that all existing nationality problems had been solved and that there remained no cause of any ethnic conflict. However, the introduction of Perestroika and Glasnost by Gorbachev opened a flood gate of ethnic revolts in many former Soviet republics. Transcaucasia became the most dangerous spot of all the bloody conflicts in former Soviet Union.

The first major ethnic clash emerged between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, when in February 1988, the Soviet of Nagorno - Karabakh autonomous oblast appealed to the Supreme Soviets of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union to endorse the Oblast's transfer to Armenia, which was

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13. Dash, P.L. : "Russia's war of Attrition in Chechenya" (Economic & Political Weekly February 18-25, 1995).



later on ruled out in July 1988. This resulted into a bloody conflict between the two nationalities and it seems that this conflict has become permanent in nature.

«In Georgia also, South Ossetia is struggling to secede from Georgia and want to join the Russian Federation, while Abkhazia wants to negotiate a federal agreement with Georgia»

«These ongoing clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Georgia and Abkhazia and a triangular conflict involving Russians, Georgians and Ossetians are the examples of increasing assertions of ethnic identities and secessionist movements in Transcaucasia. Chechenya is the new addition in this list, where ethnic conflict has emerged soon after the collapse of Soviet Union.»

## **CHAPTER - II**

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ETHNIC PROBLEMS IN TRANSCAUCASIA

To understand nationalism and ethnic conflicts in Transcaucasia in a better way, this problem should be seen in historical perspective.

Historically, this area has always been a centre of conflict among different rulers due to its strategic geopolitical location, as this area lies between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, in which not only flow major rivers of Eastern Europe, but they also link, Caucasia to the Mediterranean and Europe on one side and to Persia, India and the entire Asian continent on the other.<sup>1</sup>

Culturally, the Transcaucasian region is divided into a number of ethno-linguistics, religious and national groups, a legacy of a long colonial rule. The most basic division is between Christianity (Armenians, Georgians, Russians, Ossetians etc.) and Islam (Azerbaijanis, Chechens, Abkhazis etc.).

Ethnically, this region is divided among many national groupings like Armenians, Georgians, Azerbaijanis, Chechens, Ossetians, Abkhazis, Russians and many other small nationalities.

Looking back to the history we will find that the whole Caucasus region has always been a turbulent area, an arena of conflict throughout its history at different points of

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1. BammateHaider, "The Caucasus and the Russian Revolution" Central Asian Survey Vol. 10, No. 4, 1991.

time. As early as 4th and 5th century, it witnessed struggle between neighbouring States for sphere of influence and annexed by Romans and Sassanid rulers, then from 7th to 10th century, it was conquered by Arabs. By 13th century, again it fell prey to Mongol and Tatar invasion, which was followed by the Turkish, Persian and Russian invasions.

Besides, Transcaucasian history is also famous for the heroic struggle of the local population against the foreign invaders. These people did not put up easily and struggled stubbornly to fulfill their nationalistic aspirations. One of the basic features of these struggles was that the most of them had a religious colouring, whether it was the Babek rebellion <sup>2</sup> (816-37) which lasted for 20 years or was Muri-dism <sup>3</sup> led by Mohammad Shamil in 19th century.

The early history of Transcaucasia shows that Transcaucasia and central Asia were the first to adopt the feudal system. Marx defined feudalism as social relations under which the exploited working people were owners of the means of production i.e. their own farms, but not of the

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2. It was a peasant war led by Babek in 816 against the Arab rurals. This Babek rebellian, which flared up in a number of Transcaucasian provinces has a religious colouring and its slogans were the anti-feudal watch wards of Hurramite sect. Simirnov. H (Ed) A Short History of USSR, Part -I Moscow, Progress Publication, 1965, p. 26.

3. Mavidism was also a religious movement, led by the Imams and sheiks in 19th century against the Russian rule. Followers of these religious leaders were called "Murids". History of Russia, Vol. I, Moscow Foreign language Publication, 1965, p. 351.

goods, they produced. The fruits of their labour were appropriated by feudal lords and making the petty producers dependent upon the aristocracy.<sup>4</sup>

In Transcaucasia, the feudal system developed between the 3rd and 6th century. The economy of this region was based on agriculture, viniculture and animal husbandry. During this time, all the lands was seized by the aristocracy, which gave birth to two classes - Feudal lords and dependent peasants.

All the foreign invaders took support of these feudal lords in local Transcaucasian politics. The local population became the victim of the suppression inflicted upon them by the foreign invaders as well as the local lords. Many peasant uprisings and independence movements took place, but the population could not get freedom from the clutches of either feudal oppression or from the foreign rulers. The first and the most important struggles of the Transcaucasian people was the revolt of 405-51 and later on the revolt of 481-84 against the Sassanid rulers of Persia, who not only taxed the local people heavily, but also pursued a policy of Persianising and assimilating the local people. These revolts, however, failed to free Transcaucasia from Sassanid rule, but these freedom loving people didn't put an end to their struggle. Again the period

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4. Simirnov H. (Ed) A Short History of USSR Part-I Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1965, p. 24.

between 9th and the 11th century witnessed an acute class struggle in the movement of Tondrakites.<sup>5</sup>

The beginning of 13th century brought ruins and devastation to the people of Transcaucasia, as this was the beginning of the period of Mongol conquests which embraced the whole of Asia and many European countries. The Mangols established a state in the west of the Urals, with its capital at Sarai on the Volga, which came to be known as the "Golden Hoard".<sup>6</sup> The territory, ruled by the Khans of Golden Hoard remained united for more than 200 years. The Mongol rule was a dark period in the history of Central Asia, Transcaucasia and Russia. The whole Mongol empire declined economically, politically and culturally. Ibn al-Asir, an Arab historian and contemporary of the Mongol conquests, wrote: "There has not been a more terrible catastrophe for mankind, since the creation of the world and there will never again like it to the end of time and the Day of judgement".<sup>7</sup>

After the fall of Timurid empire, the united Georgia was reestablished, but by the end of the 15th century, it fell to pieces and three independent Georgian kingdoms came

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5. Tondrakite came from the name of the Armenian village of Tondrak. The doctrine of the Tondrakite was anti-feudal and they proclaimed the equality of all people on the basis of true christianity. Simirnov H. (Ed) A Short History of USSR, Part -I Moscow, Progress Publication, 1965, p. 27.
  6. Ellison Herbert J., History of Russia, New York, Toronto, London, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964, p. 46.
  7. Simirnov. H (Ed) A Short history of USSR - Part -I, Moscow, Progress Publication, 1965, p. 54.

to exist - Kart'hil (with its capital at Tblisi), Kakhetia and Imeretia. There were also five principalities, which were independent of these kingdoms.<sup>8</sup> The same process of political fragmentation was going on in Armenia and Azerbaijan, which paved a path for Turkey and Persia to conquer Transcaucasia. The expansionist policies of both the powers, threatened the people of this region. The struggle between these two powers to establish their hegemony over this region, was exceedingly fierce and brought ruin to the people of this region. Turkish and Persian rule in Transcaucasia resulted in greater political fragmentation. Exploitation by the feudal lords and the expansionist ambition of the two empires, weakened this region economically and culturally. The treaty of 1555 put an end to the struggle of both the powers for some time. According to this treaty Armenia and Georgia (including the kingdom of Imeretia and the Georgian principalities of Guria and Megrelia) went to Turkey and the eastern parts of Armenia and Georgia and the whole Azerbaijan went to Persia.<sup>9</sup> But this treaty could not last long and soon they started fighting, which again ended in the treaty of 1639, according to which Azerbaijan and Eastern Armenia went to Iran and western Armenia went to Turkey.

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8. Galoian (G.A.) - Russia u Narodu Zakavkaza, Moscow Mucul, 1976, p. 31.

9. Ibid p. 32.

A process of Iranianisation and Turkization was carried  
on by both the rulers in their respective Transcaucasian territories) The harsh economical, political, social and national oppression gave rise to a massive freedom movement in Transcaucasia. In 1625, a great uprising against Iranian expansion erupted under the leadership of Georgi Saakadze in Georgia, but it failed and Georgi Saakadze was forced to leave Georgia. By the end of the 17th century Russia became the main aid to their liberation movement. Georgia had very old contacts with Russia, which was broken during the Mongol period. The Georgian kings tried to revive this contact. Teimuraz became the king of Kart'hil, he was well aware of Russia's importance for Transcaucasia and through out his life he remained loyal to Russia. He believed that union with Russia would free his country from the Persian Yoke and in 1649, he sent an ambassador to Moscow asking for military aid. His example was followed by king Alexander of Imeretia. However, Russia couldn't send the help as she herself had been weakened by the wars against Poland and Sweden. Nevertheless, Russian interest in this region never ended. Besides Armenians, who were being harassed by the Turkish and Persian also sought support of Russia. In 1667, a company of Armenian merchants obtained privileges, which enabled them to trade in silk in Moscow and in 1667 and 1672 negotiations were made with Russia for a joint action



against Turkey and Persia.<sup>10</sup> (It was an ironical phenomena in the history of Transcaucasian people that they always sought help from Russia to get rid of Turkish and Persian rulers, but they could not realize that by doing this, they were inviting Russia to dominate them) Though the history of Russian intervention in this region goes back to 11th century, when a Russian Prince named Mstislav attacked on Transcaucasia and killed a local Caucasian Prince Rededy by deception. The Rededy affair started a bitter conflict between Caucasia and Russia and proved to be a permanent disbelief between the two. (The process of Russian expansion in this region was started with a design to capture the whole of Asia through Transcaucasia) The main aim to control this area had a strategic point of view, as Georgia connects Russia with the upper Transcaucasian region and the west. Due to its oceanic geopolitical situation, Transcaucasia was a very important region for any expansionist design. Russian Tsar Peter the Great was very much influenced by European military and naval technologies, so it was quite obvious that he was interested in capturing the important sea coast areas. He wanted to conquest the east i.e. Constantinople and the Indies. He voiced the precise aim of Russia's policies in the following words." We must come as close as possible to Constantinople and the Indies, for he who rules over these regions will be the true ruler of the

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10. Simirnov (ed.) A Short history of USSR Part - I, Moscow, Progress Publication, 1965, p. 126.

world.<sup>11</sup> These words of Peter the Great clearly shows the importance of Caucasus region as Constantinople and the Indies, both are linked with the Black sea and the Caspian sea. Besides by that time, it had become quite necessary for Russia to end the Iranian domination in Transcacasias and to prevent its seizure by the Ottoman empire, if it wanted to gain a foothold on the western coast of the caspian sea. Hence, Peter the Great initiated the process of expansion by waging a series of wars with Turkey and Persia. A campaign of 1722-23 against Persia had secured him the control of the Southern and South Western coasts of the caspian sea, together with the cities of Baku and Derbent.<sup>12</sup> Tsar Peter the Great concluded another treaty with Turkey in 1724 at Constantinople, which confirmed the conditionalities of 1723 treaty, according to which a significant part of the Transcaucasian territories won by Iran were retained by Russia.<sup>13</sup> These treaties laid the foundation of Russian hegemony on this region. Later on, the expansionist policy, started by Peter the Great, was successfully carried out by the other Russian rulers.

(The later half of 18th century witnessed a great increase in economic, political and cultural relation between Transcaucasia and Russia, as the continued struggle against

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11. Bammate Haider, "The Caucasus and the Russian Revolution", Central Asian Survey, Vol-10, No. 4, 1991.
  12. Ellison Herbert J, History of Russia, New York, Toronto, London, Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1964, p. 94.
  13. Galoian (G.A.) - Rossia u Narodu Zakavkaza, Moscow, Mucul, 1976 p. 76.

Turkish and Persian aggression inclined the Transcaucasian rulers to look more and more towards Russia) Even in 1762, two Georgian kingdoms of Kakhetia and Kart'hil were united and Georgia participated in the Russo-Turkish war on Russian side. In 1783, king Irakli II (Heraclius) of Georgia signed a friendship treaty of Georgievsk with Russia, under which Eastern Georgia was placed under Russian protection, although at that time Russia did not incorporated Georgia, but the actual incorporation of Georgia into Russia took place in 1801 under Tsar Paul.<sup>14</sup>

Due to Georgia's incorporation into Russia, Russia's relation with Persia deteriorated and soon afterwards the Shah of Persia launched a war against Russia, which lasted for years (1805-1813) and ended with the treaty of Gulistan signed on 12th October 1813 by Nicholos Ritschef and Mirza Abu Hussain Khan.<sup>15</sup> It was a peace treaty, according to which sovereignty of Russia over Karabakh and Georgia, districts of Shekie Shiriwan, Kobek Derbend, Bakoobeh and many other territories of Azerbaijan was established. But this truce could not last long and again in 1826, Persia waged a war against Russia. Under the leadership of General Paskevich, Russian troops were sent to Caucasus against the Persians, which defeated Persians at Elisavetpol and cap-

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14. George H. Hanna (Translated) Outline history of the USSR Moscow, Foreign language Publishing house, 1960, p. 112.

15. Boulger D. Charlse, England and Russia in Central Asia London, 1879, Vol. 2, Appendix - A, B and C pp. 375-409.

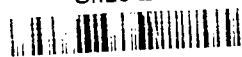
tured the cities of Erevan and Tabriz. When the Persian capital Tehran was threatened, the Persian resistance was broken and the Shah asked for an another peace treaty. By the treaty of Turkmenchai signed on 22nd February, 1828, the Nakhichevan Khanate, the Ordubad Okrug, Erevan, Eastern Armenia and many other territories came under the Russian rule.<sup>16</sup> Besides, this treaty established Russia's naval rights in the caspian Sea region, and Russia was now in a strong position to deal with Turkey. After eighteen months of war, the Russian forces had captured Adrianpole and in early August 1829, moved very near to Constantinople. To prevent the Russian acquisition of Constantinople, strong pressures were put on the Sultan of Turkey by France and Britain to conclude a peace treaty with Russia. A peace treaty was signed on September 14, 1829 between Russia and Turkey. According to the Adrianpole peace treaty, Russia annexed the mouth of the Danube and the Black sea coast of the Caucasus region. All these treaties, gradually put an end to Persian and Turkish claims on Transcaucasia.

(The incorporation of Transcaucasia in Russia was objectively progressive for the people of Transcaucasia, despite the fact that the upper strata of the local feudal landlords retained their privileges. Despite the arbitrary rule of the Russian military bureaucracy and the Tsarist colonial policies, merger with Russia, brought the administrative and territorial fragmentation, internal fights etc. to an end in

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16. Ibid

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this region. The centralization of power contributed to the economic development of Transcaucasia and it followed the road to capitalist development along with Russia.) The local population came in contact with Russians which facilitated the cultural progress and brought revolutionary ideas to them, which resulted into anti-feudal movements in this region. Even Engels recognised the progressive role of Russia in the development of Transcaucasia, as in a letter to Marx on 23 May 1851, he wrote, "... It is quite clear to me that in relation to the East, Russia actually plays a progressive role."<sup>17</sup>

(Nevertheless, Transcaucasia continued to remain a backward agrarian country under the colonial oppression of Tsar.) The Tsarist government barred Transcaucasians from participating in administrative and judicial bodies and in some way hindered the development of the national culture. The decree of 1846 and later the statutes of 1847 and 1851 had the purpose of strengthening the social support of Tsarism in Transcaucasia through the ascendancy of the local landlords. The local feudal lords (Agalars, maliks and Beks) were given equal rights along with the Russian landlords. (This tsarist policy of national oppression gave rise to social and political movements in Transcaucasia.) Tsarist policies were hampering the interests and aspirations of the local population. Throughout the 18th century a lot of

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17. Galoian (G.A.) Rossia u Narodu Zakavkaza, Moscow, Mucul, 1976 p. 6.

bloody conflicts took place between Transcaucasia and Russia, which later on became a permanent feature. The Caucasians fought bravely against their new colonisers. The first war of independence, which was started by Sheikh Mansur of Chechnya in 1783, continued for more than a century. In 1785, Sheikh Mansur's warriors encircled a Russian bridge on the bank of the river Sunzha. It was the worst defeat for Queen Catherine's army in that period. Mansur's movement spread to Chechnya, Northern Dagestan and to Kubal. But this movement was failed in Kabarda. In 1771, Sheikh Mansur was captured by the Russians and died in Schlusselfurg prison in 1783.<sup>18</sup>

As it is known, these conservative religious people of Upper Chechnya and Dagestan were organised and led by Sufi brotherhood. Sheikh Mansur's resistance was the first Sufi resistance against the Russians. These people were followers of Naqushbandiya<sup>19</sup> Sufi brotherhood. After the 1791 defeat Naqushbandiya disappeared for almost 30 years from North Caucasus.

The anti Russian activities again revived in 1820s in the province of Shirvan. This time Sheikh Mohammad Efendi

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18. Bennigsen A. and Broxup Marie The Islamic threat to the Soviet State, London & Canberra. Croom helm, 1983 p. 65.

19. There are two Sufi brotherhoods - Naqushbandiya and Qadiri. Naqushbandi is an ancient order formulated in Bukhara in 14th century and came to North Caucasus at the end of the 18th century. Qadiri was founded in Bagadad in 12th century and was introduced in Caucasus in 1850 by Kunta Haji Kishiev. (Bennigsen A. & Broxup M. The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State, Croom helm, London & Canberra, 1983, p. 75).

of Yaraglar in Southern Dagestan was the second Naqushbandi murshid (master or Sheikh, Imam, pir) to preach the jihad (holy war) against the Russians. Gazi Mohammad and Imam Shamil were his murids (follower). The Decembrist movement of 1825 in Russia gave momentum to the independence movement of Transcaucasia. Gazi Mohammad and Imam Shamil became the leaders of the anti-colonial movement in 19th century in Transcaucasia. This anti-Russian movement was called "Muridism". The Imams and Sheikhs of this movement gathered a large number of murids or followers and fought to the Russians for about 40 years.

As the leader of the pro-Turkish aristocracy and the Muslim priesthood, Imam Shamil declared this holy war (Muridism) against all infidels including Russians. He even established a theocratic state (Imamat), introduced a despotic regime based on the dominance of the local feudal aristocracy. But Shamil's orientation towards Persia and Turkey could not bring freedom to the Caucasians. In 1859, Shamil was surrounded in the mountains and gave himself up. The conquest of the Caucasus by Russians, however was not completed until 1864, when the last mountain villages near Sochi were captured during the regime of Alexander II.<sup>20</sup> It was the longest and fiercest resistance put up by any Muslim population to Russian conquest.

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20. Vyatkin, M.P. & Levin S.M. (Ed) Short history of USSR, Moscow, Progress Publishing House, 1965, p. 203.

After the conquest of Caucasia in 1864, a great migration took place. A large number of Transcaucasian population was forced to migrate to Turkey and other regions. According to the Tsarist policies many decrees were passed regarding Transcaucasia. One of the decree gave the ancestral rights on Transcaucasian land to Russians and Cossacks, so that if in future Transcaucasians wanted to come back, they would loose their rights over the land.

After the occupation of Dagestan and Chechnya by Russians, the Naqushbandiya again went underground. It's leaders were either killed or caught and deported to Siberia. Some of them who remained, formed their guerrilla groups in the mountains and continued their war. The 1864 submission of mountaineers before the Tsarist regime stopped any other resistance against the Russians. But the emergence of social democratic movement in Russia gave a new direction to the liberation movement in Transcaucasia. Now their struggle was against the Tsarist autocracy, as well as the bourgeoisie, local landlords and others. In their war of freedom, they were not alone, but the whole exploited and suppressed people of entire Russian empire joined their hands irrespective of their ethnic and national identities. By the end of 1890s, the whole Caucasus was joined through railroads, which brought them even closer to each other. (The development of capitalism during the 1870s and 1890s gave rise to a working class in Transcaucasia and soon in whole Transcaucasia a wave of Marxist ideas and thoughts started and immediately after the formation of Russian



Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) in 1898, many organisations sprang up in different parts of the Caucasus region, which were later on united in 1903 at the Caucasian Union of RSDLP.) The idea of the Russian liberation movement influenced progressive public opinion in Transcaucasia and many Transcaucasian revolutionaries like I.G. Chavchavadze, A.R. Tseretel, Zurabian, A.S. Khakhoian and many others took part in it. Baku oil fields soon became one of their major centres of activities.—

After the revolution of March 1917, when the provisional government of Prince Lvov took the reigns of power in Petrograd, a special committee for Transcaucasia nominated by the Provisional Government established itself at Tiflis, but it lasted until the fall of Karsky's government. When the Bolsheviks came to power after the October revolution in 1917, in Transcaucasian region local revolutionary committees, sympathetic to rightwing socialists (Mensheviks) were incharge of the situation.<sup>21</sup> (After the Bolshevik revolution these local revolutionary committees (Georgian Social Democrat Mensheviks, Armenian Dashnaksutians and Mussarat Party) refused to recognise the authority of the Government of the Soviets and agreed to appoint a federal autonomous Government for Transcaucasia in Tiflis. This Federative Republic of Transcaucasia, with the autonomous states of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, was almost completely separated from Russia and the declaration of the independence of Transcau-

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21. Librach Jan, The rise of the Soviet Empire, London & Dunmow, Pall Mall Press, 1965 p. 141

casia was made on April 22nd, 1918. But their independence was short lived. The red army entered Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and soon the Transcaucasian Federation became a part of Soviet empire. On December 5, 1936 the constituent states of Transcaucasian Federation became separate constituent republics of Soviet Union).

The Soviet power consolidated in Chechen-Ingush in three stages. First stage was the victory of red army in March 1920 over the white guards. After this Gorskaya Autonomous republic was set up in November 1920. In the second stage, Chechen Autonomous region was created, which followed by the establishment of Ingush autonomous region in July 1924. In 1934, Soviets created a combined Chechen Ingush Oblast with Grozny as its capital. In the final stage, this Oblast was transformed into Chechen-Ingush Autonomous republic in December 1936.

#### **THE REVOLT OF 1920-21**

But the consolidation of Soviet power in Chechen Ingush region was somewhat difficult. The downfall of monarchy in February 1917, was seen as a unique occasion to restore the theocratic Imamate of Shamil. With this the idea of holy war erupted, it was led by two prestigious personalities - the Imam Najmuddin of Gotsinki, who was an elected supreme mufti of Dagestan and the Sheikh Uzun Haji. They were inspired by an irreconcilable hatred for Russians and a passionate

striving for complete independence.<sup>22</sup> For 3 years, from 1917 to 1920, they fought not only against the Bolsheviks, but also against the whites of Denikin, Bicherakov and the Terek Cossacks. In 1919, Uzun Haji even created a theocratic state, an Emirate in Chechnya and placed it officially under the Sovereignty of the Turkish Caliph. The Naqushbandi Sheikhs, who directed the revolt were the Imam Najmuddin Gotsinski, the Sheikh Sirajeddin Haji, Seyid Amin of Ansalta, Derwish Mohammad Haji of Andi and others. During 1920-21, the revolt covered all Chechnya and Northern Dagestan and the Soviets were forced to engage the entire 11th Red army corps to crush the resistance of the Ghazies. Najmuddin of Gotsinski fought till 1925, when he was finally captured and executed. This uprising was one of the most dangerous challenges to the Bolsheviks, since their advent to power in 1917. After the defeat of the rebellions, the religious elements in North Caucasus were submitted to a long and bloody persecution. Many mosques were closed, which later on proved to be a wrong strategy on the part of the government, as the closure of the mosques only contributed to the growth of the clandestine Sufi brotherhood and their messages spread over the whole Chechen-Ingush. Clearly, the Sufi brand of Islam began to pose a more dangerous threat to the Soviets than the official domesticated Islam. So in 1978, the Soviet authorities acted to reverse their policies

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22. Wimbush, S. Enders (Ed), Soviet Nationalities in Strategic Perspective; London, Routledge, 1989 p. 50.

and two mosques were opened in Chechen-Ingush ASSR in that year and in 1980 five more mosques were opened.

After 1920-21 revolt again the Qadiri and Naqushbandi started fighting against the Soviets and a major revolt broke out in 1928, which was followed by similar revolts in 1934 and again in 1940-42. The last uprising was started in the winter of 1940 and was led by nationalists, former members of Communist Party. But this revolt was crushed down by air raids and after the world war -II, the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous republic was dissolved by Stalin, who accused them for collaborating with the Germans. The whole Chechen population had to face another migration.

All these struggles show, that the Chechens never wanted to be a part of Soviet empire and for them Soviet power was simply another variant of Russian encroachment, only worse because the new Russians were not only infidels (Kafirs), but also irreligious (bi-din), thus deserving more contempt than their tsarist predecessors. <sup>23</sup>

[ After the Bolshevik revolution, the Bolshevik leadership had a great task to face that was to unite all the nationalities into a federal and multinational State. At that time nationalism for most of the nationalities in the Tsarist empire, was a phenomenon still largely centered in the ethnic intelligentsia and among the students. Among Azerbaijanis, the identification was linked with people with

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23. Bennigsen, A. & Broxup, Marie; The Islamic threat to Soviet State, Croom Helm; London & Canberra, 1983 p. 67.

whom one shared social and religious communality, rather than a sense of nationality. Among Georgians and Azerbaijanis secular nationalism had been relatively weak before 1918, but the years of independence, the ascendancy of a more nationalist discourse among their intelligentsia and involuntary Sovietization, all gradually paved a path for heightening the secular nationalist sentiments.<sup>24</sup> Though, the Russian social democracy was very much concerned with the issue of national minorities in the late 19th century and even the London Congress of the second international declared the people's right to self-determination a fundamental right. (The RSDLP inserted this declaration into their 1903 programme and the Bolsheviks interpreted the right of self-determination as the right to secede and form an independent State) As far as nation's rights were concerned, Lenin's concept contained two basic points: (a) right of nation's self determination and (b) Separation.<sup>25</sup> Though the elements of the Soviet nationality theory were conceived as early as 1903, the system of federalism was adopted later, after the revolution. It was in a historically specific circumstance that a decision was taken to unite all people in a federal multinational state. And that time, the right to secede was interpreted from a class

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24. Ronald Suny, "The revenge of the past: Socialism and Ethnic Conflict in Transcaucasia". *New left Review* (184) November-December 1990.

25. Gonsalves and others (Ed), *The Second revolution, Democratisation in the USSR*, New Delhi, Patriot Publishers, 1989, p. 87.

viewpoint, that is, the secession was considered legitimate only if exercised by the working class of the nationality in question. As E.H. Carr explained that the Bolsheviks were forced to insert this qualification because of the separatists movement in the minority regions in the wake of the October revolution, which were sponsored by the feudal elits.<sup>26</sup> Although, the territory of USSR went on expanding till the end of the Second World War; the main outline of the Soviet State System was drawn before 1929, when it was proclaimed as a multinational State. It was the period, when distrusts towards the Soviets had not yet disappeared and centrifugal forces were still operating. Under these circumstances, decision was taken to unite all the people in a federal multinational State, the first ever to be based on ethnicity as political unit. Though Lenin, Stalin and Armenian Bolshevik Stepan Shoumyan were against this federal State and were in favour of a unitary state structure. Lenin's notion of national self-determination and historical compulsion of the establishment of federal administrative system worked to consolidate, rather than erode ethnic and national cohesion.

Although Bolshevik political culture had always been anti-nationalist, nevertheless Leninist tradition actually tolerated and even encouraged the national consciousness, as they were convinced that repression would only fuel nation-

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26. Carr, E.H. The Bolshevik revolution Vol. I, London, New Delhi, Penguin 1966 pp. 260-64.

alist and separatist tendencies. They were to believe that the improvement in the economic condition would eventually lead to the erosion of nationalism and national distinctions.<sup>27</sup> Even both the 1936 and the 1977 Soviet constitutions (articled 13 and article 70) reaffirmed the USSR as an integrated multinational federal state. In 1920s a policy of 'nativization' (Korenizatsiia) encouraged by Lenin and supported by Stalin, was started. This policy promoted the employment of native cadres in the ethnic republics, established alphabets for people, who had no script, opened schools for those, who had none under tsarism and set up hundreds of national Soviets living outside their national region. Gradually, Russian officials were replaced by national leaders and thus 1920s witnessed the growth of national communism in many republics. The capitals of Georgia and Azerbaijan became the seats of power of native communists and national operas, national academy of science, national film studios were built up there. Migration strengthened the titular nationalities in each republic, consolidating the identity of ethnicity with territory. In the pre-revolutionary period Transcaucasia had been a region of high mobility with tribes and people moving constantly from one area to another. This resulted into a highly mixed up population in this region. In mountainous Karabakh, an autonomous region in Azerbaijan, over three quarters of the population were Armenian. In Abkhazia, an autonomous region

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27. Suny Ronald, 'Nationalist and Ethnic unrest in the Soviet Union', World Policy Journal 6(3), Summer 1989.

in Georgia, the Abkhaz minority was threatened by the growing Georgian plurality. While many Azerbaijani villages were in Armenia and Georgia, many Armenian and Georgian villages could be found in Azerbaijan. The territorialization of ethnicity and the increased power of the titular nationalities left the minorities with few guarantees.

After Lenin, when Stalin consolidated his autocratic power by mid 1930s, the Soviet programme of economic development and social modernization started. As Stalin felt that his country was lagging ten to twelve years behind the developed nations, he wanted to bridge this gap within few years. During this period, ethnic interests were paid less attention and the major emphasis was given to economic efficiency and productivity. Under his dictatorship, the State's treatment of non-Russians reached an absolute nadir, as the old elites and national communist leaders, national artists and writers were imprisoned or executed and several small nationalities were deported from their motherland. All important elements of ethnic culture such as religion, patriarchy, village tradition etc. were undermined by the forced modernization, industrialisation and collectivization of agriculture, carried out by the Soviet State.

The industrialisation of Transcaucasia resulted in social and geographical mobility that further broke up the traditional patterns of authority and cultural practices. Education was nationalised but also secularised. By the end of 1930s, Russian language study was made compulsory in all schools. Though Stalinism had stifled the nationalist



expression and eroded the ethnic traditions, the consolidation of nationalities in the non-Russian regions and republics continued. These nationalities not only survived Stalinism, but emerged with new strengths. The republics became more national in character not only demographically, but politically and also culturally. The Soviet form of modernization produced coherent, consolidated, conscious nationalities, firmly established in their own national territories.

With the end of Stalin's era, the loosening of central control under Khrushchev and the easing of the extraordinary restriction on ethnic expression the national political elits in each republic began to exercise greater power and a limited independence from Moscow. Once Stalinist terror was reduced and in absence of effective control, the Transcaucasian republics, were essentially ruled by "national-mafias", who are centered within the Communist parties and State apparatus, a result of NOMENKLATURA Culture.<sup>28</sup> The ethnic consolidation of the titular nationalities and the empowerment of their national intelligentsia and leadership, increased pressure on the minorities within the republics to assimilate or migrate. Even the titular nationalities did not feel endangered from the Russians or the Central Soviet authorities, but by the neighbouring national groups. For Armenians, the most acute concern was the loss of Nagorno-

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28. Suny, Ronald, "The revenge of the Past : Socialism and Ethnic Conflict in Transcaucasia," New left Review (184) November-December 1990.

Karabakh, that had been a part of Azerbaijan. For Azerbaijanis danger was from the Armenian side and Georgians were threatened by Abkhazian sessionists.

Throughout the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era, the State didn't face any cohesion of ethnic consciousness, the real dimensions of ethnic and national question were felt only when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985.

(Gorbachev's reform programme through Perestroika, Glasnost, Demokratiia and Pluralism had a significant impact on the various national groups making of the USSR. Demokratiia had encouraged people to participate, Glasnost had allowed them to articulate their feelings and pluralism had legitimised the rights of to form groups on the basis of consciousness of self interest.

(Gorbachev's Demokratiia and Glasnost opened a flood gate for all types of ethnic clashes in Former USSR. Soon almost entire Caucasus region got involved in ethnic clashes between different nationalities).

The first major ethnic clash and a mass nationalist movement took place between Armenians and Azerbaijanis Over Nagorno-Karabakh. It was not primarily an anti-Russian struggle, but between the Karabakh Armenian and Azerbaijanis.

Nagorno-Karabakh was granted the status of an autonomous region within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1923, despite the dominance of Armenian population and same was the case of Nakhichevan, with a large Armenian minority. This region was physically separated from the

rest of Azerbaijan by Armenian territory, but was declared an Autonomous Republic within Azerbaijan. During the Soviet era, the Armenian population in Nakhichevan had fallen from nearly half to less than ten percent. The Karabakh Armenians feared a similar fate, as by 1979 the proportion of Armenians in Karabakh had fallen from about 85 per cent to 75 per cent.<sup>29</sup> They claimed that their region was being kept backward by the Azerbaijani government, which forced the Armenians leave/emigrate. Though Armenians, both in Karabakh and Armenia had started their agitation in the 1960s, for the incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, but the Central Soviet government declined their demand and affirmed that Karabakh would remain part of Azerbaijan. In February 1988, again the Nagorno-Karabakh oblast Soviet appealed to the Supreme Soviets of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union to endorse the oblast's transfer to Armenia. Karabakh Armenians also began a series of demonstration in favour of incorporation into Armenia. At first President Gorbachev prevaricated and then in July 1988, ruled that Nagorno - Karabakh should remain a part of Azerbaijan. This declaration enhanced the bloodshed in the oblast. In 1990-91, Soviet army troops reportedly cooperated with Azerbaijan OMON (Security troops) detachments in the systematic departure of Armenians from Karabakh.<sup>30</sup>

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29. Ibid.

30. Elizabeth, Fuller, "Mediators For Transcaucasia's Conflicts", World Today 49(5) May, 1993.

In September 1991, following Azerbaijan's declaration of State independence, Nagorno-Karabakh proclaimed the region independent from of Azrbaijan. This further complicated the relations between both the nationalities. Though Armenia abjured all territorial claims on Nagorno-Karabakh, under the ceasefire agreement later that month, it continued to insist that the Oblast's Armenian population has the right to autonomy. Whereas, Azerbaijan refused to acknowledge the right of representatives of the Nagorno-Karabakh Parliament to participate in negotiations on resolving the conflict and blamed Armenia for the present crisis. Despite many talks and negotiations initiated by Russia, Kazakhstan and many cooperative zones, there is not a single solution of this ethnic conflict, which has gradually become permanent in nature.

The ongoing clashes between Georgia and Abkhazia and a triangular conflict involving Russians, Georgians and Ossetians are the two other examples of ethnic clashes in Transcaucasia.

#### **ABKHAZIAN CASE**

In Abkhazia, the Abkhazs constitute only 17.8 per cent of the half million population and Georgians are around 45.7 per cent of the total population. For decades, Georgians are living in this autonomous republic. Both the nationalities living here, believe that each ethnic group is being victimised and discriminated against the other. In 1978 and again in 1988-89, the Abkhaz put pressure on the centre, for the secession of their autonomous republic from Georgia, but

all their efforts went in vain. During 1921-30, Abkhazia had enjoyed the status of a full Union republic. In August 1990, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet again made another attempt to upgrade their status. But the Georgian Parliament annulled their demand immediately, which led the Abkhaz 'Declaring Sovereignty' four months later. This effort was also rejected by the then Georgian President Gamsakhurdia and this move was termed as separatist.

When Edward Shevardnadze came to power in Georgia in March 1992. In June, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet submitted to the Georgian council for debate a draft treaty, which provided for Federative or confederative relations between Abkhazia and Georgia. When Abkhaz parliament did not get any response. They, in mid-July, voted to restore the Abkhaz constitution of 1925, under which Abkhaz was a Sovereign State.

This separatist move was denounced by the Georgian State Council. But situation took a new turn, when in mid-August, Shevardnadze dispatched the National guard to Abkhazia to secure the release of government ministers, reportedly kidnapped by Gamsakhurdia supporters. The troop was sent under the leadership of Foreign Minister, Tengiz Kitovani, who marched into the Abkhaz capital, Sukhumi and opened fire on the parliament building,<sup>31</sup> which resulted into a civil war situation. Ethnic clashes started and bloodshed became the routine event. Efforts were made by Russia to pacify both

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31. Ibid.

the sides, but it yielded no results. And still Abkhaz is a battlefield with no permanent solution in sight.

#### **SOUTH OSSETIA**

Georgia is also facing another ethnic conflict, as South Ossetia has engaged in a legislative battle with Georgia in an effort to unite with the North Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Region within the Russian Federation since 1989. When in late 1990, Gamsakhurdia abolished the region's autonomous status, which sparked off fierce fighting between Ossetians and Georgians. The deployment of a strong tripartite Russian, Georgian and Ossetian peace keeping forces ceased the direct confrontation, but the future of South Ossetia is still uncertain.

## **CHAPTER - III**

**ETHNIC CRISIS IN CHECHNYA ON THE  
EVE OF SOVIET COLLAPSE (1991)**

As the history of Transcaucasia shows that Chechnya was annexed by Tsarist Russia in the later half of 19th century; after a long and sustained resistance by the local population, led by Imam Mohammad Shamil. In the true tradition of Sufism, he underlined the egalitarian basis of Chechen society and was responsible for the reforms and rethinking that pervaded much of the Islamic world at that time. His defeat in 1859, after a 25 years long war was followed by the deportation of the local population and looting and burning of the Chechen villages by Tsarist Russia, very much to the imperialistic fashion of those days. Here it is quite necessary to know the identity of these Chechens; as Russian and Soviet history is full of the accounts of these people and even these days in late 20th century, once again they are drawing the attention of the whole world towards themselves.

{The Chechens are indigenous people of the Caucasus region, speak a language unique to the region and closely related only to the neighbouring Ingush.}<sup>1</sup> Throughout the Soviet period, their script was cyrillic, but recently they have adopted Latin alphabets) They are Sunni Muslims with Sufi practices, which is the mystical egalitarian form of Islam. They are tribal people and belong to the Nakhcho tribe of the mountain villages of Chechen; from which they

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1. Dragadze, Tamara, "Report on Chechnya". Strategic Analysis; 17(12) March 1995.



came to be known as Chechens, whereas Galgay tribe from the village Angush was subsequently known as Ingush. By the end of the 18th century, both these tribes were known as Vay-nakhs.<sup>2</sup>

Chechnya expands to around 16,000 sq. km and has a little oil reserve of around 5 million tonnes which is a big asset for a small place like Chechnya.<sup>3</sup> Besides, there are some industries in Chechnya, which have monopolies in their own sectors, like Orgtekhrika association, which supplies electrical and photographic equipments to Russia.<sup>4</sup> About 75% of Chechnya's industrial output goes to Russia. Though compared to Russia's immense richness, land and oil fields of Siberia, the tax revenues from local agriculture and industry are largely insignificant for the Russian budget. Nevertheless, one cannot forget the key position of Grozny in the economy of South Russia, as the western part of the North Caucasus region (which includes Rastov district and Krasnolar and Stavropol provinces) are Russia's main agricultural centres, producing large surpluses of grain, which are sent to Transcaucasus republics, the Urals and Siberia. The agricultural economy of this region is supported by the agriculture based factories in Rostov-on-Don and by petrol

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2. FBIS Report 1992:26 quoted in P.L. Dash's "Russia's war of Attrition in Chechnya", Economic and Political Weekly, February 18-25, 1995.
  3. Dragadze Tamara " Report on Chechnya", Strategic Analysis, 17(12), March 1995.
  4. Russia's Radio (Mosco) 29 November 1991, quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, BBC, 3 December, 1991.

and diesel oil refineries in Grozny. The strategic line between Baku and Rostov passes through Grozny, connecting the North Caucasus to Transcaucasia. The railway line from Grozny and Astrakhan, which continues to Chelyobinsk links North Caucasus to the Urals and Siberia. The main oil pipeline Baku-Makhanchkala - Tuapse and the local pipelines, which transport oil from the South-eastern regions of Astrakhan also passes through Grozny.<sup>5</sup>

(Besides, geographically Chechnya is entirely landlocked within the Russian Federation and has only one external frontier that is Georgia and thus it becomes the only way to connect Russia to the other Transcaucasian republics. Throughout the Tsarist period, Chechens had shown a long tradition of opposition to the colonial powers along with the other Transcaucasian regions. Chechens led the independence movement in Transcaucasia). [After the great October revolution these free spirited Chechens did not even want to join the Union, even though Lenin's sympathy towards the minority groups and his idea of right of self-determination. Lenin argued that the right of self-determination would remove the slightest national friction or the slightest national mistrust developing ultimately into a "fusion of nation" and it would create a large Socialist State.<sup>6</sup>

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5. Zhores A Medvedev, "The war for Caspian oil via Chechnya" *Philosophy & Socialaction* 21(2) 1995.

6. Robert Conquest, (ed), *Soviet Nationalities policy in Practice*, London, Bodley Head, 1967.

As already mentioned in the second chapter of this study that the consolidation of Soviet power on Chechnya passed through several stages, despite the persistent resistance of the local population. It was in 1936, that Chechens and Ingush received the status of an Autonomous Republic (ASSR) within the Russian Federation. And as the Stalin constitution of the USSR of 1936 recognised the Union republic's right to secede from the USSR (Article 17), it also provided for Autonomous republic or an autonomous region within an Union republic. Article 22 of this constitution listed members of the Russian Federation and Chechen-Ingush was recognised as an Autonomous Republic within the Russian Federation.<sup>7</sup> Though being an Autonomous Republic, at that time, Chechnya opposed the forced collectivization and Latinisation. During the World War-II, the Chechens were declared a nation ready to fight unto death for the cause of socialism. But on June 26, 1946, an announcement was made that the Chechen-Ingush ASSR had been abolished and they were accused of collaborating with the Germans. But infact, they had been deported to Central Asia and Siberia two years earlier from where they returned only in 1957, when a wave of destalinisation was going on in USSR. At the 20th Party Congress in 1956, in his secret speech, Khrushchev even confirmed the date of deportation as April

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7. A.G. Norani, "Yeltsin's war - Matter of International concern" The Statesman, Calcutta, - 12 January 1995.

1944.<sup>8</sup> He passed a decree on January 9, 1957, which recommended the restoration of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. On returning to their homeland, they found that all the fertile land had been occupied by Russian settlers. Besides attempts were also made to keep their religious fervour within bounds by creating four spiritual directorates and a few mosques. During the deportation time all the mosques (around 2,675 in 1930) were closed. The lack of sufficient registered clerics only contributed to the growth of the Clandestine Sufi brotherhood and helped spread their virulent message to the Chechen and Ingush and as a result they became more religious than ever. This Sufi brand of Islam began to pose a more dangerous threat to the Soviets. Though efforts were made to reverse the Soviet policy by opening few mosques in Chechen-Ingush ASSR, but one cannot deny the fact that the ordeal of the deported North Caucasians led to xenophobia. The Chechens became the most violent anti-Russians of all the Soviet nationalities and between 1959 and 1979, the number of Russians in the Republic declined spectacularly from 49 per cent in 1959 to 34.5 per cent in 1970 and in 1976 they constituted only 29 per cent of the total population i.e. from 367,000 individuals in 1970 to 336,000 in 1979.<sup>9</sup> Because of the xenophobia, Russian and other Christians started leaving this area, which was rapidly becoming

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8. Tara Kartha, "The Conflict in Chechnya", Strategic Analysis, 17(12); March 1995.

9. Bennigsen, A & Broxup, M. - The Islamic threat to the Soviet State, London, Croom helm, 1983, p. 34.

more native and Muslim. An ethno-religious gap was apparently visible in this region.

Although throughout the Soviet era, they couldn't put forward their demands. By the end of the Stalin era, the Central power started loosening its control over the republics and the Autonomous regions. The result of which was the emergence of national political elite in each republic with greater power than before. When Mikhail Gorbachev came to the power in 1985 and he introduced his ideas of Perestroika, Glasnost and Demokratiia. As a result, communist ideology and the functioning of the leadership were attacked. The common people started giving voice to their age old grievances and freedom of the press brought forward the public dissent.

In February 1988, a construction Engineer, Ruslan Ezbulatov of Gudermes Bio chemical Plant in Chechnya, published a paper mentioning that health hazards were being produced by the plant. This information sparked revolt in the republic and a ban on the production of health hazard was demanded. Until this time Vladimir Foteyev, Communist Party chief and his deputy Pavel Gromov were controlling Chechen affairs. But in April 1989, Doku Zavgayev was elected as the deputy, who subsequently became party's first secretary in June 1989. And in November 1990, Zavgayev organised the Chechen National Congress (CNC). It was the same time, when demands for Chechen Sovereignty were raised. By this time, in Chechnya many political parties such as the Chechen popular front, Islamic Party of Rebirth and Islamic

Path Party were active, who were eager to fulfil their nationalist aspirations and demanding for Chechen independence.

In December 1990m, Major General Dzhokhar Dudayev was elected Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Chechen National Congress. The radical and nationalists views of Dudayev made him a rival of Zavgayev, who being the Communist Party Chief in Chechnya was carrying out the centrist policies.

Dudayev was born in Summer 1944, in a Chechon family, who also became the victim of Stalin's deportation. They returned to Grozny only in 1957. During a splendid career in Armed forces, he also joined the Communist Party in 1968. He married an ethnic Russian woman.<sup>10</sup> Not long before being elected as the Chairman of the Executive Committee of Chechen National Congress, he had taken premature retirement from airforce, when his division was redeployed to the North Caucasus, to involve himself in the local politics of Chechnya. Soon he recognised the public mood and Chechens began to see him as the only person, who could have fulfilled their long standing demand for independence. But only, Dudayev is not to be blamed for the present crisis in Chechnya, but also Mr. Boris Yeltsin, the then Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Russian Federation (RSFSR). In the beginning of 1991, he told to the autonomous republics to

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10. Pravada, (Moscow) 21 October 1991.

"take as much Sovereignty as you can swallow down".<sup>11</sup> Not only this, he also supported Dudayev, when he led the opposition to the old Communist leader of Chechnya, Mr. Doku Zavgayev. When Boris Yeltsin visited to Chechen Ingushetia on 24th March 1991 to address a rally, in the town of Nazran with a demand for the restoration of Ingush autonomy within RSFSR, he offered help in restoring Ingush autonomy.<sup>12</sup>

At that time confrontation between Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin was at its zenith. As under the impact of Perestroika and Glasnost, nationality problem became so acute that Gorbachev had to conduct a nation wide referendum on the future of USSR. But the problem had intensified so much that six out of fifteen republics i.e. Georgia, Moldavia, Armenia and three Baltic States conducted separate referendums in which a majority of people of these republics voted for secession. Yeltsin was against Gorbachev over the referendum issue and he went on the Television to say that the federation envisaged in Gorbachev's Union treaty would preserve the system that would ruin the country. He even demanded Gorbachev's resignation and kept telling to west that he alone could dismantle the Union and bring about a real transition to the market economy.<sup>13</sup>

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11. A.N.D. Haksar, "Islamic threat to Russia", The Pioneer (New Delhi) December 20, 1994.

12. TASS (Moscow) March 24, 1991, quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, March 26, 1991.

13. S.P.K. Gupta, "Then the USSR ceased to exist", The Patriot September 1, 1992.

The Chechen's aspiration of independence was only fuelled by Yeltsin's stand on this issue. No firm action was taken by the authorities, when in November 1990, the delegates of All National Forum announced the creation of an independent Chechen Republic Nokhchicheye. The Supreme Soviet of Chechen-Ingushetia took the will of the Congress into consideration to some extent, but did not divide the two republics and confirmed constitutionally the new name for the former autonomous republic. Though this move was not successful. However, the Executive Committee of Chechen National Congress did not give up their intention and at its proposal; delegates of the Congress, who gathered again on 8th June 1991, accepted a statement to name the Chechen republic Nokhchicheye.<sup>14</sup> Whereas, a Congress of people's deputies of Ingushetia, held on 20th June, 1991 and adopted a declaration proclaiming an Ingush republic within RSFSR.<sup>15</sup>

While all USSR was in a turmoil and was on the path of dismantling due to various reasons, Yanayev led August Coup to dethrone Gorbachev, only hastened the process. During this chaos of the August Coup attempt, Dudayev was believed to be identified as a "Yeltsin's man", as he moved against the conservative leadership. But, the failed coup subsequently developed into a power struggle between Grozny and Moscow. In Grozny large numbers of demonstrators came out on the streets, demanding the resignation of the local

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14. Moscow home service, 9 June 1991, quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 15 June, 1991.

15. TASS news quoted in SWB, BBC 19 July, 1991.



Supreme Soviet for having sided with the putch-mongers.<sup>16</sup> The Executive Committee of the All National Congress to a large extent was responsible for these demonstrations, it headed the demands of the people and on September 1, 1991 dissolved the Chechen - Ingush Supreme Soviet, which supported the Yanayev led 'Junta' and the Congress decided to form an interim republican committee which was to draft laws for changes in legislative power and to stage election for President. The Chechen Supreme Soviet however did not listen to the demand, as a result the Executive Committee's armed formation, the National Guards, seized the buildings of Supreme Soviet, Television centre and the Radio.

Russian leaders were, however seemed to be happy with the turn of the events and even expressed their satisfaction with the fall of the Supreme Soviet and their desire to see a swift return of law and order. Mr. Yeltsin<sup>17</sup> and Ruslan Khasbulatov described the events as a victory of democratic forces over the party bureaucracy. He even blamed Zavgayev for supporting the August Coup.<sup>18</sup> In response, Zavgayev blamed Khasbulatov for whipping up nationalist passion in the republic.

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16. TASS (Moscow) 2-9-1991, quoted in Flemming Splidsboel Hansen, "The 1991 Chechen revolution, Response to Moscow", Central Asian Survey 13(3) 1994.

17. Izvestiia (Moscow) 6.9.1991.

18. Russian T.V. (Moscow) Reporting quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, BBC 9.9.1991.

The power tussle between Dudayev led Chechen National Congress and the Chechen Supreme Soviet grew more when Zavgayev refused to resign from his post. Then the RSFSR Supreme Soviet sent a delegation to Grozny to solve the problem by bringing about the resignation of Doku Zavgayev. Pravada on September 13, 1991 informed about an anonymous opinion poll conducted by the newspaper Golos Checheno-Ingushetii (voice of Chechen-Ingushetia), according to which, forty four percent people were supporting the Executive Committee, while twenty nine per cent were in favour of Chechen Supreme Soviet.<sup>19</sup> This opinion poll said to be shown the public opinion about the political developments of that time.

After three days talks with the RSFSR delegation, the Chechen Supreme Soviet met in an extraordinary session and dissolved itself on September 15. All the legislative powers were transferred to a Provisional Council, headed by Khuseyen Bakhdmado, which was set up to organise new elections for the Supreme Soviet.<sup>20</sup> But on the same day, Dudayev said that for the issue of State Sovereignty, it were the citizens, who through referendum would decide whether republic formed a part of RSFSR or the renewed Union. Taking full advantage of the opportunity, soon the Executive Committee decided that the elections would be held not for a new Supreme Soviet of the Chechen - Ingush republic, but for

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19. Pravada (Moscow) 13.9.91.

20. TASS (Moscow) 13.9.91, quoted in SWB, BBC, 17.9.91.

the President and Supreme Soviet of the Chechen republic on October 27 rather than on November 17, as the date was earlier decided by the Provisional Supreme Council. It was also decided that only the Chechen citizens would be allowed to vote in the election. On this a telegram was sent by Mr. Khasbulatov saying, "Decisions that were worked out honestly with regard to the elections to the republic's Supreme Soviet are being violated, because the elections are being forced along and the results of the election wouldn't be regarded as legal".<sup>21</sup>

This telegram was seen as an interference by Russia in the affairs of Sovereign Chechen Ingushetia in the Congress of Chechen people and it resolved to proceed with Presidential election and Dzhokhar Dudayev had been nominated for Presidential post of the republic by the gatherings of residents in several settlements. But being opposed by the Provisional Council, the Executive Committee of Chechen National Congress, decided to implement its own will in force.

Following the rumors that a number of members of Provisional Supreme Council had tried to replace Bakhmadov, the head of the temporary legislative body, with the support of local KGB, the executive council announced the dismissal of Provisional Supreme Council on October 5, 1991 and blocked the buildings of the republican KGB, Radio and TV centres. A spokesman for the executive committee announced

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21. Central TV Russia (Moscow) 29.9.91, quoted in SWB BBC, 5.10.91.

that the KGB would not operate in Chechnya, until new power structure was created.<sup>22</sup>

The Chechen development made the Russian leadership unrest and soon a delegation headed by Vice President A Rutskoy was sent to Chechnya on a peace keeping mission. During the talks, Dudayev was reportedly reminded by Rutskoy about the laws forbidding the storming of buildings and asked him to stop "politicizing" the people. But the executive committee did not pay any attention to the decisions of the delegation and a further divide was apparently seen between the Chechen leadership and Russian leadership. It was creating an atmosphere of uncertainty among the other nationalities living in Chechnya. More or less, this was the same case in all over the USSR. Minorities were feeling unsecured and threatened in each republic of the Soviet Union.

Returning back from his trip to Chechnya, the Vice President Rutskoy said that the only way out of the conflict was through fundamental democratic measures and under no circumstances troops would be deployed to Chechnya.<sup>23</sup> Following the reports of Rutskoy, the presidium of the RSFSR on October 8, 1991 resolved that -

1. Until the election of a new Supreme Soviet of the Chechen-Ingush Republic, the only legitimate body of author-

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22. TASS (Moscow) 5.10.91 quoted in SWB, BBC, 7.10.91.

23. All Union Radio, Mayak 7.10.91 quoted in SWB BBC 9.10.91.

ity in the republic would be the provisional Supreme Council, which will adopt all the necessary measures to stabilize the situation in the Chechen Ingush republic.

2. Illegal armed outfits should handover weapons to internal affairs body on October 10, 1991.<sup>24</sup>

Regarding the RSFSR Supreme Soviet's decision as interference in the internal affairs of a Sovereign republic, the executive committee again brought out its supporters on the streets. Dudayev assessed the decision of RSFSR Supreme Soviet virtually a declaration of war on Chechen Ingushetia and called for a general mobilisation of all the Chechen men between fifteen to fifty five and by putting the national guard on alert.<sup>25</sup>

This dangerous turn of the event was apparently noted by the Soviet media and Ruskoy's remarks were seen as a virtual threat to deploy troops in Chechnya and media attacked on the members of Russian Parliament for not seriously taking the urgent problems, behind which the lives and destinies of the people rested.<sup>26</sup> Even Dudayev remarked that the anti-democratic actions of the Ex. power mongers compelled them to take the situation in their hands. In reaction to Dudayev's statement Mr. Boris Yeltsin said that the cause of the conflict had been found unconstitutional and the actions of the executive committee illegal, and

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24. TASS (Moscow) 8.10.91 quoted SWB, BBC 10.10.91.

25. TASS, Russia's Radio (Moscow) 10.10.91 quoted in SWB, BBC 12.10.91.

26. Izvestiia (Moscow) 10.10.91.

demanded their unconditional submission to the law. Illegal arms outlifts should be disbanded within three days and elections must be held on November 17, as earlier decided by the Provisional Council. Even Khusain Akhmadov, the deputy Chairman of the executive committee described the appeal and the previous actions of RSFSR as the "Last belch of the Russian empire" and "evidence of a desire to throttle democratic forces in the Chechen republic".<sup>27</sup>

The demonstrators outside the government headquarters wanted to uphold the people's right to national self determination by all the means available. Under these circumstances, Chechens went for the poll on September, 1991 and Dudayev was declared the first President of the Chechen republic. Soon after becoming the President he told that Chechnya was prepared to build its relation with Russia on the principles of equality and mutual advancement on both the sides. The first decree of Dudayev had been issued which said, "Guided by the declaration of the republic's State Sovereignty and the will of the people manifested in a direct and general election, the State Sovereignty of the Chechen Republic is declared on November 1, 1991."<sup>28</sup> The State flag, the code of arms and the anthem of the Chechen Republic were approved through other decrees. The Chechen

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27. TASS (Moscow) 10.10.91, quoted in SWB, BBC 21.10.91.

28. All Union Radio, Mayak (Moscow) 4.11.91 quoted in SWB, BBC 6.11.91.

and Russian languages were declared the official languages of the Republic.

Moscow declared the results of the election illegal and on November 8, 1991, Russian President declared a State of emergency over the whole territory of Chechen Ingusetia from November 9, 1991 till December 9, 1991. This step was soon taken into notice by the media, which feared an inevitable arms confrontation between the two conflicting sides. The situation in Grozny became extremely tense and alarming and crime situation was gradually becoming more complex. Even situation became so explosive that possibility of inter-ethnic clashes emerged. Minorities were so threatened by the developments in the republic, they started migrating to Russia. It was hard for the Russians to accept the fact that they, who were the masters of the land, property, industries and oil of the republic had lost their status and they believed that they would be the main targets of Chechen's hatred. Though in an interview, Dudayev told "we aim to spare our people the fear of ethnic and religious discord and creat a democratic state with equal rights for everybody irrespective of nationality, belief or political conviction".<sup>29</sup> Despite new government's claims, the russians and the other minorities could not come out of their fear. Besides, in response to the economic and financial blockade imposed upon them, the Chechen governmentl started looking towards to the Muslim world for help. Muslim fundamentalism

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29. Pravada (Moscow) 21.10.91.

was encouraged by the leadership, which was looked upon as a threat to Christian identity. On December 20, 1991, Dudayev declared 'Friday' as a holiday following the tradition of other Islamic States and Sunday as a working day, which was a complete negation of the Christian Russian hegemony. Another presidential decree enabled the Chechens to freely purchase and possess arms, as it was regarded an ancient Chechen tradition.

Besides, due to economic sanctions and state of emergency imposed by Russia, followed by a call for the introduction of MVD (internal troops) and KGB troops into the emergency zone, the anti-Russian feeling among the Chechens enhanced. Though officially not a single derogatory statement had been released by the Chechen leadership about the minority groups, one can't deny the fact that the common Chechens were not bound with government's policies. In an interview, a Russian woman said that the Russians encountered insults and threats everyday on buses, in trains, in shops and everywhere.<sup>30</sup>

The decrees and counter decrees to exercise their powers by both the Presidents, were playing a havoc with the lives of the people. The State of emergency, which was introduced by the Russian President had been lifted by the decree of Chechen President. Instead martial law had been introduced and general mobilisation had also been resumed.<sup>31</sup>

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30. TASS (Moscow) Reporting, quoted in SWB, BBC, 19.12.91.

31. TASS (Moscow) 9.11.91, quoted in SWB, BBC 11.11.91



A military tactical group of internal troops and Russian MVD men, who came to Grozny, had been blocked inside the republican MVD building by the supporters of Dudayev, who demanded the immediate withdrawal of the RSFSR representatives and MVD Personnel from the Republics territory as well as the resignation of the minister of internal affairs.

Dudayev appealed to all muslim people to turn Moscow into a disaster Zone for the sake of their common freedom from "Kafr" (blasphemy). He also signed an appeal to all people of the Caucasus. It said that the freedom guaranteed by the "Most High" could not depend upon Russia for ever. It was necessary to turn every metre of land, every village and town into a fortress and to break off all kinds of relations with Russia.<sup>32</sup> Chechens were asked to fully prepared for any situation and weapons were distributed among them.

The enmity between the Russians and the Chechens increased to such a point that Dudayev even planned to give a call to Chechens living in different parts of Russia to commit acts of terrorism, including the explosion of nuclear power stations.<sup>33</sup> He was sure that Chechens would definitely follow his instruction. On the other hand, it was claimed that whatever measures had been taken they were exclusively aimed at preventing bloodshed, unlawfulness and anarchy in Chechnya. According to Ruts koy there were over 8,000 people

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32. Russian's Radio (Moscow) 9.11.91, quoted in SWB, BBC 11.11.91.

33. Ibid.

in Chechen - Ingushetia; who were armed with modern automatic rifles, most of which were brought from abroad, through various channels.<sup>34</sup> But, the economic sanctions imposed on Chechnya was becoming more chaotic. The former economic structures were not working. There were no delivery of goods, which resulted into a scarcity of food grains and other commodities. In such a situation Dudayev claimed that all food and humanitarian assistance, Chechnya was getting was from Turkey.

The deteriorating political and economic conditions in Chechnya undoubtedly stirred up inter ethnic hatred and crime situation became worse. Everyday instance of murder and killing was reported. Even on the evening of November 11 pro-rector of the university had been killed by four unknown persons and the rector had been kidnapped. Stealing cars and property had become a routine event. These conditions, prevailing in the republic, compelled the Russian speaking population to leave the Chechen territory. Despite Dudayev's claim that "Nowhere are Russians, more reliably protected than in our republic",<sup>35</sup> could not bring any change in this trend. In an interview to "Sovetskaya Rossiia" Dudayev told that Chechens and Russians were drawing closer, on the republic's territory, which was connected with their common destinies. Russians were enlisting in the republican

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34. Russia's Radio (Moscow) 13.11.91 quoted in SWB, 15.11.91.

35. TASS (Moscow) 16.11.91, quoted in SWB, BBC 18.11.91.

guard and a women's battallion had been created at the initiative of women - including Russians and on the relations with Cossacks, he said that they had much in common, even in traditions and clothings. They had common goals and there was no enmity between both the nationalities.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, the fear psychosis did not leave the other nationalities living on the Chechen territory. Despite the official position of the republic's leadership that neither Russians nor Americans, Jews and others were threatened in the republic, many of them wanted to leave. As they felt that they were the target of the crimes occurring in all over the republic. They had to go through and bear with the hatred of Chechens and were vulnarable to their attacks. Even Dudayev had to say that he could only stop the exodus of Russians by forbidding them to sell their houses. But the departure of Russian speaking population continued, as they thought that their interests were not safe in an Islamic State like Chechnya. In Russia the situation got worsened, as about 600,000 refugees from other republics came there, which increased hunger and unemployment in Russia.

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36. Ibid.

## **CHAPTER - IV**

**ETHNIC CRISIS IN CHECHNYA IN  
POST SOVIET ERA ( 1992-93)**

(The year 1991 became one of the most important years in the world history, as it saw the fall of Great Soviet Union). The Union republics grabbed the first chance they got and declared themselves independent from the Union, thus fulfilling their years long ambition. It was not only a desire to fulfil the political ambitions on the part of the local leadership, but also an urge to enjoy the natural resources of their land, what so ever it had, and to become the masters of their own destinies.

The same reason may be implied with the case of the autonomous republics, for example Chechen - Ingush ASSR, which also wanted to follow the path of their big brothers and to take advantage of the democratic tradition and values, initiated by Gorbachev and popularised by Boris Yeltsin. Despite the fact that the current turmoil in Chechnya was triggered off by the political upheavals during the coup period. We cannot even ignore the malaise and frustration of the Chechen and Ingush people, who were the victims of deportation during world war - II, subsequent sufferers of the problems of their resettlement, rehabilitation and economic stagnation since then. Besides, the difficult economic situation in USSR also fueled the idea of regionalism in many other republics of USSR. Chechen - Ingush autonomous republic also suffered a lopsided industrial development, based entirely upon the fuel industry, particularly oil production and refining. Due to oil, Chech-

nya was one of the main industrial region even in the tsar-<sup>✓</sup>ist period (1890s). In Soviet era, due to local crude production, Grozny developed into one of the largest petroleum refining centre in USSR. Before 1950s mostly refined petroleum products were railed to consuming areas, but with the development of interregional pipeline system in 1950s and 1960s, crude oil were sent to refineries located in the consuming areas. North Caucasus was one of the regions, which has a chronic surplus of refined products, whereas refining capacity was limited and production remained at low levels. Thus, the refining industry of the North Caucasus started showing a slow decline.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, despite the early start of industrialisation, this republic was not fully industrialised and modernised, which contributed to the low standard of living. Chechno-Ingushetia accounted only 0.3% of the USSR's total industrial output in 1985, and the level of living was only 50-60 per cent of the USSR average in the 1970's.<sup>2</sup> Besides, the petroleum production and refining, which formed the backbone of the local economic base, were not particularly labour-intensive and led to a job deficit for the fast growing population. Not only this, oil and gas processing and chemical production gave an unhealthy physical environment. The Russians were outnumbered in the republic, they were

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1. A.R. Bond & Mathew J. Sagers, "Chechno - Ingushetia: Background to current unrest"; Soviet Geography, Vol-132, December, 1991.

2. Ibid.

enjoying the key positions in the local industries, which gave rise to the inter ethnic tensions, as native population was trying to take measures to reestablish the political expressions of their national identities. And when the opportunity came, they declared themselves free.

After declaring independence in 1991, the beginning of 1992, saw the efforts of the Chechen president Dudayev. to give his republic the status of a Sovereign State, keeping with his words "Unless we build our own structure of some kind without either Russian or Union interference, our republic has no future".<sup>3</sup> He started to earn recognition for his new state from other nations. He came forward with an initiative to form a special military formation like OMON, which would ready to go with a peace keeping mission to any hot spot in Caucasus. Besides, in 1992, Dudayev also proposed the creation of a Union of Caucasian States, which included Rostov, Volgograd regions, Stavropol and Krasnodar territories. Originally intended only for the mountain people, Dudayev visualised the inclusion of the rebellions Tatarstan, Barskhortostan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. On 6th March 1992, he made an appeal to these oil extracting republics, in which he accused the Russian leadership of having "Crudely violated the right of people to share the wealth by unilaterally declaring itself the legal successor

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3. Rajiv Sen, "Freedom move by Chechno-Ingushetia" The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 21 November 1991.

of the USSR".<sup>4</sup> And he appealed these republics to unite to defend their interests. Infact, this plan was sketched out to allure the oil hungry nations and to convince the leaders of the international community of the plan's feasibility and the benefits, which these nations might get from such an independent Union. This move may be regarded as an attempt to break loose from the strong hold of Russia.

Besides, Dudayev also started playing the Muslim card ✓ to gain support from the Islamic countries. In April, a delegation of Islamic figures from Azerbaijan, headed by the Transcaucasian Muslim leader Pashazade, visited the Chechen republic. In their meeting the outlines of new geopolitical bloc in Caucasia took shape. The Muslim leader Pashazade talked about the offences of combined forces of the Christian world, which in his opinion has threatened the Islamic world. Dudayev blamed Russia as a chief conduit for any Islamic aggression. Both the leaders agreed upon uniting all the Muslims of Transcaucasia, which would be a force capable of resisting the ideology, which was being imposed upon them by Christian world.<sup>5</sup>

But whatever stand was taken by Dudayev, he also knew ✓ the importance of Russia and well understood that without Russian recognition his State could not survive. So he showed his interest in cooperating with Russia over common

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4. Radio Moscow, 6 March 1992, quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 9 March 1992.

5. Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Moscow) 21 April'92 quoted in Summary of World Brodcast, 28 April 1992.



economic space, common information space and issues of joint defence. On 16th April he urged that a common military space be preserved, calling on the command of CIS armed officials and individual officials in Russian leadership and asked "not to destroy it, not to pull it down".<sup>6</sup> By saying this Dudayev clearly showed his intention to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

#### **SITUATION IN CHECHNYA:**

On the 4th January 1992, a law on defence and security adopted by the Chechen parliament had come into force. According to this law, the defence forces include the National Guard, the border and custom services and the special purpose troops, exactly in the fashion of a Sovereign State. Chechnya also set up its own airforce. Besides, the setting up of local detachments of the guards started in a number of Chechen settlements, which were subordinated to various public organisations or local bodies of self government. The forces were also provided with the home manufactured automatic weapons which received the name 'Borz' (wolf).<sup>7</sup> By making these arrangements, Dudayev was strengthening his military power.

✓ But, Chechnya was facing many problems regarding political, economic and ethnic conditions prevailing in the republic. The beginning of 1992 saw the deterioration of

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6. FBIS - SOV-91-277, April 21, 1992; Channel I T.V. Moscow 16 April '92 quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 22 April, 1992.

7. TASS (Moscow) 4 January 1992, quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 9 January '92.

Chechnya's relation with its neighbouring republic of Ingushetia. On January 8, 1992, Chechnya restored its borders with Ingushetia, that existed until 1934, when they were given status of an autonomous region. A declaration was adopted by the Chechen parliament, which said that any attempt to renegotiate the borders would be considered as violation of law. And within three days the Chechen parliament released the declaration, defining the republics western borders with Ingushetia. A large area, densely populated by Ingush and Cossacks, was said to be taken over by Chechnya and president rule would be introduced in this area.<sup>8</sup> Chechen parliament even informed the Russian Supreme Soviet about this effect. This Chechen move, as speculated earlier triggered off revolt in Sunzhenkey rayon, which was mostly Ingush populated. Dudayev's answers to this move was that he intended to proclaim the Vaynakh republic by reuniting both the republics and by recovering the Ingush land from Ossetians, which was ceded to the neighbouring North Ossetian ASSR by territorial changes during the deportation period. But this land was not returned to them after the restoration of Chechen-Ingush republic and Ingushetia was also demanding for the same. Akhmed Adizov, the Chairman of the Council of elders (supportive to Dudayev), supported the Chechen parliament's decision and said that Chechnya did not want to give back its land to Russia, if Ingush wanted to

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8. Mayak Radio (Moscow) 11 January'1992, quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 13 January 92.

set up an autonomy within Russian federation.<sup>9</sup> Russian media termed this event as a possible military conflict between both the nationalities.

On 2nd March, another decree was passed by Dudayev, according to which, on Chechen territory, foreign courts and arbitration judiciary of only those countries would be honoured, which had recognised the Chechen independence.<sup>10</sup> This presidential decree worsened the Law and order situation in Chechnya, as it became the asylum for all types of criminals, who felt themselves sound and safe on Chechen territory, since till then not a single state had recognised Chechnya's independence. And this led to a situation, where every ethnic minority felt themselves in danger in Chechnya.

✓In the mean time, Chechen - Russian relation got worsened. As financial and economic blockade imposed by Russia made the situation worse in Chechnya. Because of the blockade, citizens were not getting salaries, pensions and other benefits. Dudayev even sent a telegram to Yeltsin demanding the repayment of debts mounting Rouble One bn. Chechen President threatened to cease supplies of industrial output including oil and chemical products.

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9. TASS 12 January 1992 (There was a congress of people's deputies at all levels in Nazran on 20th June 1991, which adopted a declaration proclaiming an Ingush republic within RSFSR - BBC, SWB 19 June, 1991).

10. Mayak Radio (Moscow) 2 March'92, Quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 4 March'1992.

Whereas Moscow had its own way to spread anarchy and disstability in Chechnya to weaken it. A local politician named Umar Avturkhanov was chosen by Moscow for this work. Soon, a strong anti-Dudayev force was built up in Grozny and there were even rumblings of dissent within Dudayev ranks. Moscow's effort was helped by the growing disenchantment with Dudayev's policies and fuelled by the perrennial shortage of necessary things. Moscow through issued weapons to opponents and asked them not to acknowledge Dudayev and his parliament, making the situation more complex for him.

This was the time, when Dudayev declared his intention not to sign the Russian Federation treaty, which was due to be signed on 31st March 1992. On 6th April 1992, the Russian congress of people's deputies was going to discuss the draft legislation concerning the establishment of Chechen and Ingush republic within the Russian Federation. Dudayev called this move as a "step towards irreparable confrontation" and said "this means war, we shall never surrender our land".<sup>11</sup> Dudayev's statement led to a coup attempt by the opposing forces on 31st March 1992. Grozny T.V. and Radio buildings were seized by using weapons and two Dudayev supporters died in the encounter. Tanjug, a Belgrade based news agency on the same day reported that opponents wanted Chechnya to remain a part of the Russian Federation and coup

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11. ITAR-TASS (Moscow) 25 March'92 quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 26 March'92.

attempt was indirectly connected with the signing of the Federation Treaty.<sup>12</sup>

A state of emergency was declared in Chechnya and the Chairman of the Chechen Parliament accused Russian military behind the coup and a telegram was sent to Russian President B. Yeltsin and Ruslan Khasbulatov demanding to stop interfering in the affairs of Chechnya and other Caucasian republics. The political situation in Chechnya had become so unstable that despite the leadership's effort to normalize the situation to firm its position, Russians were forced to leave the republic. They were afraid of the bloodshed and happening in other Union republics from where Russians were being evicted. In such a political and economic situation in Chechnya they were unsafe. Though on official level, Dudayev had provided equal rights and equal opportunities for all, had declared two official language - Russian and Chechen and double citizenship. He abolished the passport and residence permit system. Dudayev denied any hardships inflicted upon Russians, but there were many instances, where flats belonging to Russians had been seized by the Chechens. Besides Dudayev knew very well that only anti-Russian propaganda could let him enjoy the power. But, it increased the fear psychosis among the Russians so much that by 11 June '92, 18000 Russian speaking families left the

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12. ITAR-TASS Moscow 31.3.92 Quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 1.4.92.

Chechen territory.<sup>13</sup> Though some measures had been taken by the government to halt this process. An ethnic council was formed under the President. Freedom of religion was guaranteed. However, it failed to reverse the trend of mass exodus.

On the other hand, the attitude of Russian leadership was also responsible for the growing anti-Russian feeling among the local population. The Russian Defence minister Pavel Grachev claimed that in any event of Russian's human rights violation, an adequate action from Russia was essential.<sup>14</sup> Surely this statement could not act as a soothing balm for the Russians living in other territories, but could flared the anti-Russian feelings among the local population, and Russians had to bear the onslaught first. In Chechnya Russians were looked upon as enemies and Chechens were looked upon as mafias by Russians. There was a feeling of mistrust on both the sides.

Around the same time, clan rivalry within Chechen Parliament on rise. The differences between the President and Parliament came into open when General Dudayev accused the Minister of Internal affairs for directly supporting the opposition and dismissed him from his post. The main political opposition group like the Daimkhok (Father land), the Marsho (Freedom) which consisted of former communists and Pro

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13. Radio I (Moscow) 11 June'92 quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 16 June'92.

14. Russia's Radio (Moscow) 20 June'92 quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 22 June'92.

Russians, YSO (justice) and Khasbulatov's clan, all were armed, whereas President himself was supported by the National Guards. The situation started worsening day by day.

While back home, Dudayev was threatened by the opposition, he wanted to gain political and economic support from the Caucasus region that is why from 4 to 5 September 'The Caucasian Home' round table conference was held in Grozny on the initiative of Dudayev. It's communique, published on 8th September, contained a call to the nation states, public and religious organisations and associations, political parties and movements of the Caucasians to render out assistance for the creation of a Caucasian Home, within which every nation would be ensured security and a chance for free development. The round table urged all the conflicting sides to stop hostilities. This move of Dudayev was not only to divert the Chechens attention from the political and economic problems of the republic, but was also an indication that he wanted peace. In response to this, Moscow canceled all the flights to and from Grozny. The order was given by the Russian Air Transport department and reason was given that the Russian crew were not safe at Grozny airport due to the tense situation. Meanwhile Russian interior troops were redeployed in the Northern Caucasus and Dudayev issued orders for strengthening Chechnya's defense capabilities.

Though, in this period efforts were made for negotiations between Russia and Chechnya. A delegation led by Chechen foreign Minister Shamsuddin Yusef met with Russian

Vice President Alexander Rutskoy on 22 September'92 and a letter was sent by Dudayev to Yeltsin expressing support for the atmosphere of mutual understanding and he even invited Mr. Rutskoy to visit the State.<sup>15</sup> In the meeting, both the sides reached on an agreement on measures to reduce tension and it was decided that issues relating to recognition of independence and State Sovereignty as well as economic relation of Russia and Chechnya, the social issues, pricing and custom policies, collective security etc. would be discussed in another meeting to be held in mid October. Even the Russian speaking population of Chechnya wanted a compromise between Russia and Chechnya. A letter, from the Grozny's plant for producing and selling oil products, was sent to Boris Yeltsin, Khasbulatov and Chechen leaders in connection with the plight of Russian speaking population in Chechnya. In this letter, Russians requested Russia to repay the debt owned by the Russian Government, due to which they were not getting any salaries and pension. They wrote that as far as Chechens were concerned, they had their relatives in villages and their families could survive there, but the economic and air transport blockade has caused more difficulty for Russians.<sup>16</sup> Even the Russian Cossacks demanded inclusion of representatives of Russian

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15. ITAR-TASS (Moscow) 22 September'92, quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 25 September'92.

16. Rossiyskaya Gazeta (Moscow) 23 September'92, quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 1 October'92.



speaking Chechen population in Russian delegation holding talks to Chechen leadership.

But in the month of November, Dudayev again declared a state of emergency in Chechnya after the introduction of Russian troops in Ingushetia. This incident once again destroyed an opportunity for compromise. Dudayev ordered a single system of mobilization and warned Russia that Chechnya would go on war if Russia did not withdraw its troops by the morning of 11th November.<sup>17</sup> When Russia did not pay attention to the deadline, the Chechen troops moved close to the border and set up a special defence zone. Martial law was imposed on the border. When the situation became quite grave, Russia and Chechnya agreed to reach on an agreement for withdrawing troops. On 16th Nov. in the city of Nazran the agreement was signed. And the danger of possible war was averted.

After this event, efforts were again made to hold talks and Chechen opposition even appealed to Moscow to build its relation with Chechnya on the basis of the will of its people rather than the political views of General Dudayev.

The year 1993, witnessed the widening gap between the Chechen parliament and the President. The first Premier of Chechnya, Yaragi Mamodayev, once a Dudayev ally, expressed his intention to delegate the economic and foreign relation powers to Russia and his willingness to sign the Federation treaty. But Dudayev was firm on his earlier stand though he

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17. ITAR-TASS (Moscow) 10 November '92, quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 17 November '92.

was ready for a talk to find mutually acceptable political and economic agreement. And gradually Chechen Parliament and the President splited on the question of Chechnya's future relation with Russia. The confrontation became so bitter that, the leaders of all opposition movements and parties, prominent Scientists, writer, artists, representatives of national minorities and religious groups rallied on the initiative of the opposition faction of the Chechen Parliament and formed a council of national reconciliation. The main aim of this council was, as propagated, to pull Chechnya out of its political and economic crisis by peaceful manner.

By March '93, the parliament was estranged from the executive, refusing to agree to a referendum on a new constitution, which would have given the President increased powers. According to Yusup Soslanbekov, Dudayev had reduced the people and economy of Chechnya to a complete degradation and Soslanbekov wanted to conduct a referendum mainly on two questions:

1. Wheather the time was right for an early elections to the higher bodies of authority and
2. Whether a president was infact necessary in Chechnya.<sup>18</sup>

Soslanbekov called for 100,000 signatures in support of this referendum. In retaliation, Dudayev vetoed the parliament's decision, which was seen as a breach of constitution

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18. Russia's Radio (Moscow) 8.3.93, quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 10.3.93.

by the opposition. Finally on 17th April Dudayev took another drastic step and issued decree on the dissolution of the government and parliament and introduced president's rule in the republic. Curfew was imposed in Grozny. Dudayev declared that the elections for a new parliament to be held in either September or October 1993 and a new draft constitution would be drafted and put for a referendum. Dudayev passed another decree on the formation of a new cabinet and appointed Zelmikhan Yandarbiyev, leader of Vainakh Democratic Party as Vice-President.<sup>19</sup> He appealed to the constitutional court to solve the constitutional crisis, which in its turn recommended the formation of a cabinet of ministers of national trust with direct participation of the members of parliament.

On the other hand, the Chairman of the Chechen Parliament declared the decree illegal and in May'93 Parliament released Dudayev from the post of premier and Yaragi Mamodayev was appointed the new premier. Dudayev accused Russia for all these developments in the republic. He even accused the Russian deputies, elected from the former Chechen Ingush for the organised terrorist activities in Chechnya. Russians were alleged to have trained Kabardins, Ingush and Chechens near Volgograd and even helped the opposition in the conflict, which was later on proved and admitted by the

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19. Russia's Radio (Moscow) 17.4.93, quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 19.4.93.

Defence Minister Pavel Grachev.<sup>20</sup> Opposition started rallying in Grozny and occupied the interior ministry and city council buildings, then Army detachments under the command of Dudayev opened fired and in that clash at least 50 persons were killed. Mamodayev was called State criminal, when he hold talks with Moscow on 2 June'1993. The situation in Chechnya became extremely tense, when in June three of the eighteen rayons (Nadterenchny, Urus Martanouskeiy and Gudermesskeiy) declared their intention of breaking away from Chechnya.<sup>21</sup> The Cossacks of the Terek, Stavropol and North Ossettiia, after getting support from Yeltsin, turned into a party of influence in support of the Russians. But the unstable condition draived waves of refugees into Russia Around 34,000 Russian refugees reported to had left Chechnya and Ingushetia and came to Russia. Though Chechen government provided for a beneficial condition for Russian Officers, who wished to serve in Chechen army. But all efforts went in vain and the number of refugees gradually increased. A nationalist hysteria had begun in the republic. Hatred was being formented not only on all Russian things, but also of the Russians. In Chechnya Russians have been proclaimed "imperialspia".

When the Russian government found no other alternative to break the Chechens moral and their courage, it ordered for the closure of the borders of Chechnya and completely

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20. Tara Karatha, "The conflict in Chechnya", Strategic Analysis, 17(12) March'95.

21. Interfax News agency 10.6.93.

sealed it. Chechnya, in turn retaliated by cutting off all the rail links and boycotting the State Duma elections of December 1993.

The year 1992 and 1993 saw Dudayev attempting to make economic and political ties with the other nations in order to get recognition of its sovereignty and statehood. Chechen leadership also showed a willingness to negotiate with Russia due to the hardships, it was facing because of the economic and financial blockade imposed upon them by Russia. But they did not want to cast their hard earned independence for it. Hence, not a single decision could be taken on the solution of the problem, as both the sides were accusing each other for involving in terrorist activities in each other's territories. The year 1993, also witnessed the high handedness of Dudayev, when he dissolved the parliament, blowing away all his claims for establishing a democratic state. These were the years when Chechnya became a mafia's den and easy flowing of arms and ammunition in this region made Chechnya a stock exchange, which was determining the level of prices of weapons throughout the Caucasus region. The advantage of the unstable political situation was taken by oil mafias. It was also speculated that it was only for the oil the war like situation in Chechnya arose. Even there were reports that Mamodayev in alliance with the Minister for oil shipments, had effectively been siphoning off oil revenues of Chechnya. According to "Kosmoslskaya Pravda" of March 20, 1993, the Chechen oil was being sold

approximately 30 per cent lower than the world prices.<sup>22</sup> The crime situation in Chechnya got out of the control and in the wake of the blockade, systematic robbery of the trains, passing through Chechen territory had started. It was reported that 740 freight trains carrying butter, sugar, meat and other food products to Azerbaijan were robbed in this area between June and December 1993, an average of about four per day.<sup>23</sup> Throughout this period, Chechen troops were involved in fighting, but Chechen leadership made it quite clear that outside interference in their internal feuds by a third party - that is Russia - would not be tolerated.

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22. Kasmosl'skaya Pravda (Moscow) March 20, 1993 quoted in Tara Karatha's, "The Conflict in Chechnya", Strategic Analysis 17(12), March 1995.

23. Sevodnya, December 7, 1993.

# CHAPTER - V

**RUSSIAN INTERVENTION AND THE  
CURRENT CHECHEN CRISIS (1994-95)**

In 1993, the Russian Federation strengthened its position as the leading power in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The Russian hegemony over many of the Republics of former Soviet Union was established. Russia also made a constant effort to establish and to support those governments who were favourable to its interest. Russia was protecting the outer boundaries of the former Soviet Union. Russian leadership not only became the leader of CIS, but also provided support to Russian minorities in the non Russian republics. In brief, we can say that Russian Federation became the unchallenged successor of the Soviet Union.

Boris Yeltsin's idea of military intervention to stop ethnic conflicts in the near-neighbouring countries<sup>1</sup> and the participation of Russian forces in the conflict zones, resulted in to the change in the political leadership in Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Timely Russian intervention in these regions helped to establish the regimes which were less nationalistic and more favourable to Russian interests, than the ousted governments. Russia is an economic power in this region and is supplier of raw material, natural gas and petroleum to all the republics. With its intense military, economic and political power, Russia persuaded Azerbaijan and Georgia to join CIS in late 1993.

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1. New York Times (NewYork) March 1, 1993.



But, back home Russia was not as successful, as it was in its foreign policy in dealing with other near-neighbour countries. Chechnya remained a bone in Moscow's throat. This small republic showed an unprecedented resistance to any move taken by Russia to diminish Chechnya's sovereign status. The Chechen government did everything possible to defy Russia's instructions and to maintain its statehood. In 1992 and 1993, Chechen President, General Dudayev even tried to get international recognition for his State. In December 1993, Chechnya did not take part in the elections, conducted by Russia for the new Russian Parliament. This can be regarded as the major failure of the Russia's home policies.

The year 1994, was a year of great upheavel. It saw the empty and hollow promises of Russia to maintain democratic tradition and also witnessed a major human rights violation. Boris Yeltsin, who acclaimed himself a great democratic leader, blew away all the norms of democracy. The Russian intervention in Chechnya in December 1994, showed the real face of the democracy in Russia.

The year 1994 started with the decision taken by the Russian Central Electoral Commission to conduct the parliamentary election in Chechnya. The Russian Central Electoral Commission announced on 6 January'1994 that elections to the new Russian Parliament would be held in Chechnya on 13th March'94. According to the Russian constitution Chechnya was and would remain a ful-fledged subject of Russia and hence should be worthily represented in the Federal Assem-

bly. The Russian Federation Central Electoral Commission's decree said, : "The election of the deputies of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation Federal assembly for 20, two seat electoral district and of the deputy of the State дума of the Russian Federation Federal Assembly in the 32 single seat electoral district formed by the Central electoral commission as the territory of Chechen republic are scheduled for 13th March".<sup>2</sup>

The Chechen leadership regarded the electoral Commission's decree as an "ultimatum",<sup>3</sup> which would lead to a greater confrontation between Russia and Chechnya. Grozny authorities even accused Russia of adopting policing role and methods of threat and intimidation in Chechnya. To prove Chechen Sovereignty and to emphasis its independence, Dudayev took another step. In January 1994 through a presidential decree he changed republic's name to "Chechen-republic Ichkeria". It was claimed that the second name had been introduced in order to preserve the historical name of the territory, where the Chechen people lived. All the official and non-official institutions had been instructed to cease using the term "Chechnya" in practice.<sup>4</sup> This move was an indication to Russia that the republic would not join

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2. Rossiiskaya Gazeta (Moscow) January 10, 1994, quoted in Summary of World Broadcast January 17, 1994.

3. Mayak Radio (Moscow) January 6, 1994, quoted in SWB, January 10, 1994.

4. Izvestiya (Moscow) January 19, 1994, quoted in SWB, January 25, 1994.

the Russian Federation and it wouldn't give up its hard earned sovereignty at any cost.

By this time, the confrontation between the Chechen government and the opposition had accelerated. The head of the main opposition, Yaragy Mamodayev, called upon Dudayev to tell him that his rule had no prospects and asked him to step down in public interest. He had to say that the two years of Dudayev's rule had led the republic to a deadlock. He claimed that the Chechen people wanted to build a free state, but did not want to shut itself off by borders and isolate from the rest of the world. The opposition, was agitated for the earlier confrontation took a violent shape between Dudayev supporters and the opposition. By mid 1994, gunbattles were going on in the streets of Grozny between the forces for and against Dudayev.

Meanwhile, Former Parliament speaker, Ruslan Khasbulatov, himself a prominent Chechen and supposed to be Yeltsin's foe, came back to Chechnya to bring all opposition factions under one roof and to put up an united fight against the rebel leader, Dudayev. Money duly began to flow to the man, chosen by Moscow, in Chechnya to oppose Dudayev. Arms and ammunition were supplied to Umar Avturkhanov, the leader of the opposition forces in Naderecheny rayon, to destabilize the situation in Chechnya. Dudayev, meanwhile, exploited the Russian help rendered to the opposition, in his advantage by mobilising more and more Chechens in his

support to defend "the independence of the motherland".<sup>5</sup> He accused Khasbulatov and Umar Avturkhanov for the critical state of the republic. A civil war situation arose in Chechnya. Both the forces were fighting with each other. Russian troops were reportedly operating from the Naderecheny rayon. Helicopters, gunships with Russian markings attacked on the pro-Dudayev position. Since the Russian troops were on "peace keeping" mission in nearby Georgia and in Ingushetia, their activities in Chechnya were quite noticeable. In missile attacks, many people were killed. But Russia ruled out armed involvement in this crisis. The head of the Russian presidential staff, Mr. Sergey Filatov said, "we have only one position no Russian troops must be there".<sup>6</sup> He further added that armed intervention in Chechnya would lead to an outburst in Caucasus. Perhaps, only this fear was preventing Russia from directly and openly involve itself in Chechen affair at that time. But Russia knew its way in meddling with the Chechen affair. It gave full support to the opposition Chechen Interim Council, headed by Umar Avturkhanov in the Chechen civil war.

Opposition leader Ruslan Khasbulatov presented an ultimatum to Dudayev in following words, "The most reasonable decision for your family and relatives and for your nearest associates would be to pass authority to the provi-

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5. Arun Mohanty, "Anatomy of an intervention", The National Herald, 19.1.95.

6. Interfax News Agency 30.9.94 quoted in SWB, BBC 3.10.94.

sional bodies of people's power. By 16:30 Moscow time on 30 September, Dudayev must surrender to the opposition, otherwise we will continue the attack on Grozny".<sup>7</sup> But Chechen President did not pay attention on this ultimatum and kept on mobilising Chechens to defend republic's independence. He made an emotional appeal to the people and asked his fellow country men to come to the defence of the "sacred right and proud and free life given by God".<sup>8</sup> Dudayev knew it very well that in that unequal struggle, he could only win by his own forces. Dudayev's appeal did wonders to the sentiments of the Chechens and on 1.10.94 about three to four thousand, Dudayev supporters hold a rally in Grozny and called upon him to take the severe and decisive steps against the criminal groupings of the opposition.

On the other hand, the opposition leader, Ruslan Khasbulatov also gave a call to the Chechens to unite in the struggle against Dudayev. He said, "The hour is near of liberation from Dudayev's disgraceful three years of rule, when human honour, conscience and dignity were humiliated and the word Chechen became a profanity around the world".<sup>9</sup> He said that Chechnya had become a den of rascals, thieves and murderers.

The mobilisation call, given by both the sides further deteriorated the republic's situation and both the sides

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7. Ibid.

8. ITAR-TASS (Moscow 30.9.94, quoted in SWB, BBC 3.10.94.

9. Intefrfax Nesw agency (Moscow) 30.9.94, quoted in SWB, BBC, 3.10.94.

were counting on the use of more force to resolve the conflict. The interim council accused Dudayev of plundering the republic's wealth and betraying the interests of the people and demanded his resignation, whereas Dudayev accused the opposition for playing according to the will of Russia on the cost of the independence of the republic.

But, Russian defence ministry was constantly denying any type of Russian involvement in the Chechen conflict. Nevertheless, the truth came to open, when on October 21, 1994, the Russian deputy Premier Sergey Shakray said that Moscow backed those forces, which were in favour of maintaining the republic within the Federation and of resolving the crisis by peaceful manner,<sup>10</sup> but the Russian Defence Ministry did not accept this stand. But it was quite clear that in Russian view that force was none other than the interim council headed by Umar Avturkhanov. Though it was true that interim council was in favour of Russia, by no means it was trying to resolve the conflict. Whatsoever stand was taken by Russia, did not in any way helped the Chechen civilians, who were being killed in arm clashes. With Russian help, the opposition made several attacks on Grozny, but all ended in a fiasco. They could not dampen the morals of Dudayev and his supporters. It enraged the opposition and they claimed that Grozny would be seized by the end of November. In November opposition attacked Grozny, which ended in an utter fiasco and about 58 soldiers and

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10. BBC editorial report, quoted in SWB, 24.10.94.

officers were captured by Dudayev's men. These army person- als were ethnic Russians. Still, the Russian Defence Minis- ter Pavel Grachev denied Russian army's intervention in the assault. The Russian captives were paraded before the TV cameras and were seen saying that they were recruited from Russian army by country's counter intelligence agency - Federal counter intelligence (FCS) for fat sums.<sup>11</sup> The Russian Parliamentarian Yelena Pamfilova confirmed the presence of Russian armed force personals among the Prison- ers of war (POWs). As the Russian authorities were still denying their involvement, the Chechen Parliament speaker, Akhyadi Idigov, said that the fate of the POWs depended on Russian leadership. In case of Russian denial, POWs would be regarded as mercenary formations and according to war time laws, they would qualify for capital punishment.<sup>12</sup> (Dudayev had already declared Martial Law in Chechnya on 12.10.94 and in another decree, he had given the Chechen courts the status of field court martials for war time period). This statement by the Chechen speaker made the prominent Duma members to rush to Grozny to hold talks with Dudayev, in order to rescue the lives of the captured Rus- sian POWs. Later Dudayev freed all the captives in an act of generosity in December.

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11. Arun Mohanty, Anatomy of an Intervention, " The National Herald, 19.1.95.

12. Radio Russia (Moscow) 29.11.94, quoted in SWB, BBC, 30.11.94.

But the defeat of opposition in the hands of Dudayev was too hard to swallow down by the Russian leadership. This defeat was a severe blow to the respectability of the Russian leadership. Ruslan Khasbulatov, also went back to Moscow, leaving his so called peace keeping mission. And it was the time, when Russia decided to directly intervene in Chechnya. Mr. Yeltsin warned the Chechens that Russians troops would intervene and a state of emergency would be declared unless Chechen forces disarmed themselves by the morning of 30th November'94. He passed a decree and said, "Blood is being split on the Caucasian soil, which is an inalienable part of our homeland and I, as the President of Russia, bear full responsibility for its faith, for the lives and for the health of all its citizens".<sup>13</sup> His statement was regarded as another act of violence, intimidation and blackmail by the Chechen President. Chechens believed that the threat of imposition of an emergency on the Chechen territory by Russian Federation contradicted the norms of international law and represented a blatant desire to continue war and to interfere in the internal affairs of State. But Chechens were ready for any test and any war to save their independence. Chechnya's military commander, Aslan Maskhadov said, "We have already waited 300 years for our independence and we are prepared to wait further. Today we are ready to fight".<sup>14</sup>

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13. A report by Richard Beeston from Moscow, The Times London, 30 November 94.

14. The Pioneer (New Delhi) 1.12.94.



Dudayev was ready for peace talks, therefore on 6th December 1994, peace talks started between Dudayev and Pavel Grachev. But Russian President issued an ultimatum on December 9, 1994 to all warring Chechen groups to lay down their arms by December 15, 1994 and spelled out his intention to fulfil his constitutional duty by putting an end to the bloodshed in Chechnya and to maintain the integrity of the Russian Federation. He threatened Dudayev for dire consequence in its failure. As the deadline came closer, Russian troops marched into Chechen territory and all the peace talks collapsed. The Russian troops entered into Chechnya on December 11, 1994 in pursuance of Boris Yeltsin's decree, authorising the government to use all available means to disarm illegal armed groups and restore constitutional order. Russian troops attacked on Chechnya without waiting the deadline. But they had to face a fierce resistance from Ingushetia, as the Ingush President Mr. Ruslan Aushev had already promised to Chechen President that his republic would try to prevent the passage of Russian troops through his territory.<sup>15</sup> Russian troops backed by artillery and helicopter gunships launched a major attack on Grozny and completely sealed it off. Intense bombing was continued in the city by war planes, causing hundreds of casualties. Chechens put up a fierce resistance and clashes between Russian Internal troops and Dudayev's supporters had continued in a number of districts of Grozny. Russian

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15. The Hindu (Madras) 12.12.94.

forces gained control in most of Grozny by January'1995, in which they destroyed much of the city. They launched a series of offensives aimed at driving out the Chechen rebel forces. These offensives were officially described as the "disarming of illegal criminal groups and the protection of the rights of the civilian population".<sup>16</sup>

But, Russian troop's victory over Grozny was not that easy, as it was claimed by the Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, who earlier said that operations in Chechnya would not last more than 24 hours. By saying this, how he could have possibly forgot that Chechens were fierce fighters, if they could continue their war of independence for more than a century in the past, they would not end their opposition so easily in the present circumstances. Even the Great Russian poet Lermantov, who served as a tsarist officer in the troubled Caucasus, more than 150 years ago, said about the Chechens "Their God is freedom, their law is war". The truth of this statement was quite visible in the Chechen war of 1994-95. Although Russian forces had reached the Central districts of Grozny by December 31, 1994, but they were defeated and driven back to the outskirts of the city by Russian defenders. But a renewed Russian assault by combined air and ground forces, began on January 3, 1995, which brought the Russian forces back to Grozny's centre. By January 8, the Chechen Presidential palace had become the

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16. Kessing's Archieves - News Digest For January 1995, No. 1, Vol. 41.

centre of Chechen resistance to Russian forces. A further Russian assault began on January 15, 1995 which succeeded in dislodging the resistance at the presidential palace. Mr. Yeltsin claimed that Chechen conflict was over and now Interior Ministry alone was to impose order in Chechnya.

Despite Yeltsin's optimism, Russian forces had to face a long-drawn war to impose Russian rule in Chechnya. Grozny's southern suburbs and many towns in low-lying areas were in the hands of rebels. But Chechen rebel units had to withdraw from the Chechen capital Grozny on February 8, 1995 as Russian forces consolidated their position in the city. Dudayev had to leave Grozny and to move his headquarters. Despite the fall of Grozny, fighting continued to the south and east of the capital. Fighting was interrupted, after an agreement to cease fire, reached during the talks on February 13 between Kukalov, the commander of Russian forces in Chechnya and the Chechen Chief of Staff Aslan Mashkadov at Sleptsovskaya in the neighbouring Russian Republic of Ingushetia. But fighting again resumed on February 19 and the talks failed.

Since Grozny's fall, Chechen fighters had moved into the mountains of Chechnya and neighbouring Ingushetia, where they continue to wage a guerrilla war against Russian forces. Chechen leader Dzhokar Dudayev, although not getting any outside help, had vowed to continue to resist "Russian occupation" until the bitter end.<sup>17</sup>

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17. Michael McFaul, "Eurasia letter: Russian politics after Chechnya", *Foreign Policy* (99), Summer, 1995.

## CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR:

Though by April '95, the Russian troops occupied all the major strongholds of the Chechen rebels, but both the sides have to pay heavy price for it. The Chechen war claimed thousands of human lives. But the official figures given by both the sides were quite different. On February 12 '1995, the Chechen chief of staff Mashkadov claimed that at least 13,000 Russian soldiers and only 500 Chechen fighters had been killed. The Russian human rights Commissioner Sergei Kovalyev claimed on February 18 that some 10,000 Russian troops had lost their lives.

In contrast, Grachev described the Russian losses insignificant and Boris Yeltsin gave the figures as 1,146 Russian troops killed and 374 missing. A report on February 7, by a group of experts and observers, which was investigating human rights abuse in Chechnya, put the number of civilians dead in Grozny at 25,000. State Duma deputy, Yuliy Rybakov, accused interior Ministry troops of looting and of killing Chechen civilians "as the first sign of protest".<sup>18</sup> In the Russian air raids and bombing Chechen as well as Russians were killed. The Chechen victory costs thousands of human lives. Besides there were some instances, where atrocities on women and children had been done by Russian soldiers. In an interview, an Estonian woman said, "Russian soldiers came to the house and they

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18. Keesing's Archives News Digest For February 1995, Vol 41, No. 2.

took my 22 year-old daughter. They raped her until 4.45 this morning. They took the baby (who is five months old) and threw him up in the air".<sup>19</sup> There might be many unreported incidents of such kinds, mocking all the human values and democracy.

The mind blowing air raids and bombing by the Russian troops, made the Chechen citizens more furious. Due to the war, there was no food supply. Even in such difficult circumstances, people were not loosing heart. A women named Akhayeva said, "We will never give up, any of us. All our boys say, there is no way out now. We will just keep fighting. That Yeltsin, he is such a bastard. And we all voted for him. That is what democracy has brought to Chechnya".<sup>20</sup> Besides, the war had created a major refugee problem in all neighbouring countries. The Russian migration service in the neighbouring republics had registered 12,577 refugees. In the mid December 1994 refugee figures from Grozny provided by press centres of Chechnya and Ingushetia's parliaments were more than 15,000. Over 5,000 people had fled to Ingushetia. 6,000 to 8,000 Chechens went to Dagestan and about 2,500 Chechens and Russians to Stavropolski Kray.<sup>21</sup> This number kept on increasing. But by the end of May the out-

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19. Carey Scott, "Grozny nears its final hour", The Times, London January 15, 1995.

20. Ibid.

21. Moscow News Weekly December 9-15, 1994 quoted in P.L. Dash's, "Russia's WAR of Attrition in Chechnya", Economic & Plitical Weekly 38(7-8) February 18-25, 1995.

flow of migrants from Chechnya practically stopped. By then total number of refugees had increased upto 400,000, among them around 66,000 returned to Chechnya by the beginning of July'95.

The Chechen war has also hampered the Russia's economic reforms, fueling inflation and straining the 1995 budget with an estimated cost of \$ 5 million, which equals 2.5 per cent of Russia's gross national product (GNP) as on March 1, 1995.<sup>22</sup>

According to Moscow officials, Russia was compelled to use military force against the renegade Chechen republic, as Russia wanted to restore the constitutional order and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. As the Article 42 of the Russian constitution says, "The State unity of the Russian Federation will be secured by the integrity of its territory and the territory of the Russian Federation will be integral and indivisible".<sup>23</sup> Dudayev's secessionist move was considered as a threat to Russia's integration. As Yeltsin considered Dudayev as a mafia, so according to the official statement, Russian aggression of Chechnya was both to secure its international borders and to protect Russian citizens terrorized by the Dudayev regime.

Without question, the preservation of Russian integration was a major objective behind the offensive in Chechnya.

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22. Michael McFaul, "Eurasia Letter : Russian Politics after Chechnya", Foreign Policy (99) Summer, 1995.

23. Dash, P.L., "Russia's war of Attrition in Chechnya", Economic & Political Weekly, February 18-25, 1995.

But the second objective of "protecting" the Russian citizens in Chechen territory seems a bit absurd. If it was so, then why Russia did not try to protect those innocent Russian civilians, who were also killed in the war by their own military men. When all the minorities were being killed in the Chechen war and those who were remaining, were leaving the Chechen territory, then Russia was preserving whose protection and interests? Besides, the decision of offensive was taken after three years of Dudayev regime. The Russian leadership could have crushed the first instance of secessionist move in Chechnya, before it got a foothold on Chechen territory. By this, it can be assumed that in the chaos of August coup, Boris Yeltsin was seeking an opportunity to dismantle the Soviet Union. He wanted to encash the slogan of democracy in his Presidential election of 1991. But his 1994 aggression on Chechnya showed, what type of Democracy he wanted in his country. The Chechen crisis could have been solved by negotiations and compromise like in the case of Balkans and Tatarstan, where the resonance of Chechen example of 1991 was quite visible. But Yeltsin decided to use force in Chechnya against the will of Duma and his fellow citizens. By January 15, 1995, only 16 per cent of the Russian population supported the use of force in Chechnya while 71 per cent opposed it.<sup>24</sup> It clearly shows that the war was quite unpopular among the common men.

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24. Michel McFaul, "Eurasia Letter : Russian Politics after Chechnya", *Foreign Policy* (99), Summer, 1995.

Nearly all the Duma members opposed the invasion. They wanted the issue to be negotiated.

Russian P.M. Mr. Chernomyrdin distanced himself from the party of war during the initial intervention, even the deputy Prime minister Chubais also refrained himself from publicly supporting the War. The Human rights Commissioner Sergei Kovalyev emerged as an outspoken critic of Chechen Intervention and he even warned that the future of Russian Democracy was at risk. The leader of the liberal Russia's choice Party and former Prime Minister, Yegor Gaidar criticized the invasion on Chechnya and described it as a massive military crime. Though at the same time, all the Duma members rendered their support in maintaining the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, if Yeltsin wanted to resolve the crisis peacefully.

The killings of civilians provoked the public opinion. Mounting criticism came from every walks of life. Even Yeltsin's allies were against his decision. Pro-yeltsin reformist - democrat, Gregory Yavlinsky asked for Yeltsin's resignation in following words - "Boris Nikolaevich resign ! Do not wash Russia with blood"<sup>25</sup> Sergei Kovalyov remarked that the blood was being spilled not to solve Chechen conflict, but to drain the strength of Russia's weak democracy.

The Chechen conflict had clearly shown that Yeltsin had done a mistake in undermining the Chechen spirit. He believed Mr. Pavel Grachev, with his vast experience in Af-

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25. The Times (London) January 16, 1995.



ghanistan, would solve the Chechen conflict and Russia would capture Chechnya. Even when the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armed forces, General Edward Voroblow resigned from the post refusing to assume control of the Russian military operations in Chechnya, Yeltsin did not retreat back from his decision. At least five generals had expressed their reservation about the campaign. Many Russian soldiers had refused to advance in Grozny on the plea that they would not fire on civilians.<sup>26</sup> Besides Yeltsin did not realise the strength of Chechen forces. Being an army man himself in the Soviet airforce, Dudayev had trained his forces according to the need of the hour. He made constant effort to enhance Chechnya's defence capabilities. His call for "Jihad (Holy war) was supported by the Islamic countries. The "mercenaries" were reportedly send to Chechnya by these countries. Dudayev said that his country was fighting "Satanic" Russia to establish an Islamic State. Dudayev got support not only from the Muslim republics of Former USSR, but also from Pakistan, Jordan and Turkey. The Jamat-i-Islami of Pakistan even declared that it had sent its people to fight the just war in Chechnya against the Russians.<sup>27</sup> Whatsoever truth was behind the propaganda that so called mercenaries were fighting on Chechen sides, one can't underestimate the Chechen fighters.

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26. T.V.K. Unni Krishnan, "Yeltsin way off the mark in Chechnya," The Times of India (New Delhi) 7 January 1995.

27. The Indian Expres (New Delhi) January 5, 1995.

But the west's response on the Chechen crisis was very normal. They ignored the killings and justified Russia's action. The US President Mr. Bill Clinton supported Yeltsin and said that Chechnya was a part of the Russian territory and he supported the territorial integrity of Russia. His secretary of State, Mr. Warren Christopher even went one step ahead to predict that the \$ 90 million aid - package for Russia would be approved despite fierce opposition in the US Congress. And US defence minister said on January 15, that Russia had the right to defend its federation.<sup>28</sup>

This stand was approved by most of the European Governments. Though the German Chancellor expressed deep concern on the Chechen crisis, but expressed his support to Russian President. Indian leadership compared Chechnya with Kashmir. ^

But the Chechen rebels hiding in the mountains did not put an end to their fighting against the Russians and their conflict spread beyond the Chechen Republic and into the Russian Federation's main territory on June 14. As Margot Light of the London School of Economics pointed out that the fire-power of the Russian army may drive the rebels away from the town and villages, but they would continue to fight their battle from the hills and mountains. The seizure of Grozny will not put an end to this conflict, "but will only

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28. Anirudha Gupta, "Grozny and Return to Big Powerism?", Economic and Political Weekly 38(12), March 25, 1995.

distance prospects of its solution".<sup>29</sup>

On June 14, 1995, at least 100 Chechens rebels armed with automatic weapons attacked Budennovsk, an industrial central, some 200 kms north of Chechnya. At least 41 persons were killed and 50 injured in the attack. Hundreds of people were seized in the town and marched to the hospital by the rebels. They had taken hostage about 1000 to 1500 people and threatened to kill their hostages unless Russian Forces ceased hostilities in Chechnya. The Chechen rebel leader, Dudayev denied his giving orders to his troops to launch the attack. Thousands of Interior Ministry troops were rushed to Budennovsk and surrounded the hospital. The Defence Minister demanded the use of military force to end the crisis. Despite the danger to terrified patients, Russian troops opened fire at the building which was later on justified by the Deputy Government Spokesperson Valery Grishin as he said that assault had been an 'emotional' reaction by Russian forces concerned at the hostage plight.

<sup>30</sup> When the Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin promised to halt the war in Chechnya and to back peace talks with the rebels and offered them a safe passage to Chechnya in exchange for the hostage release, the rebels released the hostages on June 20.

Peace talks started and on July 30, 1995, the Russian Federation and Chechen rebels signed a peace agreement to

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29. Rama Sampath Kumar, "Chechnya: Russia's Renegade Republic", *Mainstream* 33 (14), February 25, 1995.

30. *Keesing's Archives*, June 1995, Vol. 41, No. 6.

end fighting in Chechnya. This agreement envisaged a halt to hostilities, a gradual withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya, disarming of the Chechen separatists and an exchange of prisoners. But this peace agreement couldn't end the hostilities and the fragile peace in Chechnya was still in threat. On September 22, 1995, an attempt on the life of Yeltsin's personal envoy was made by the rebels and again on October 7, 1995 an attempt on the life of General Anatoly Romanov, Chief of Joint Russian Armed troops in Chechnya was made, which resulted in imposition of emergency in Chechnya.<sup>31</sup> In retaliation Chechen rebels suspended the accord as a whole.

The Chechen Supreme Soviet and the Committee of National reconciliation elected Doku Zavgayev as the Prime Minister of Chechnya on October 24, 95 and subsequently declared him as the head of the State on November 1, 1995. This post had been created in attempt to facilitate stability in Chechnya.

After what has happened in Chechnya, one can't deny the fact, that the results of the December 1993 election showed the declining popularity of Yeltsin in his country. This election saw the revival of Communists and the emergence of ultra rightist Zhirinovskiy. The next presidential election of Russian Federation is due in mid 1996. Communists are becoming stronger day by day against the liberals but Yeltsin seeks his re-election on two major points. Firstly

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31. The Times of India (New Delhi), 8.10.95.

- liberalisation of economy and his promises for it's long term good implication on Russian economy. Secondly by virtue of being strongest among the CIS countries, Yeltsin is also looking for an integration of maximum number of republics in some sort of an union like European Union. But at the same time the Chechen problem had become a bone of contention for Russian leadership as whether it was left or liberals or for that matter rightists, they all wanted a total integration of Chechnya at whatever cost Russia has to pay. So, Russia's intervention in Chechnya was really to solve the constitutional crisis, which had emerged due to Chechen independence or was it an attempt on Yeltsin's part to save his image and presidency and an election propaganda for forthcoming elections, still remains a matter of debate.

## **CHAPTER - VI**

## CONCLUSION

Ethnicity has been a key factor in determining the nature of a nation state. These days most of the nation states are multi-ethnic, in which each ethnic group works as a pressure group and influences the policies and course of action of that nation.

Ethnicity is a much debated concept in Social Sciences. There are various opinions on the subject, but most of the social scientists agree, that ethnicity is referred to as shared culture, such as language, religion, territory, customs and institutions.

The erstwhile Soviet Union has inhabited of the most complex social structures in 20th century. Soviet Confederation was a product of centrifugal and centripetal forces. Obviously then, the Union was a Conglomiration of some 128 major nationalities and innumerable others. One of these nationalities is of Chechens, which occupies mainly Chechena Ingushetia region of Transcaucasia. Throughout its history, Transcaucasia has always been a turbulent area. Being a gateway to Europe and Asia, Russia always wanted to get a foothold on this area. In some way or other, the local population itself was responsible for inviting Russians to Transcaucasia, as their ethnic and national identities were under threat under Turkish and Persian rules. The Turkish and Persian nadir was at its zenith in 16th and 17th centuries and the local population was in great distress. The Russian Tsar Peter the Great started his expansionist policies, which were later on successfully carried out by

his successors. By 1864, Russia annexed the entire Transcaucasian region.

Though, incorporation to Russia proved somewhat progressive for the local people, but soon they realised their mistake and found out that Russian Tsars were no better than the Turkish and Persian kings.

In the 20th century, the rise of Bolshevism led to the emergence of a culture of anti-nationalism because in theory Marxists are internationalists and argue for unity of working class around the globe. But Lenin was well aware of the emotional attachment of the people to their religion Language and culture. Lenin was of the opinion that if these feelings were interrupted with, organisation of mass movement would be impossible. Therefore, he not only tolerated but also let the people practice their religion and culture. This is why during his time most of the minority cultures and languages were supported and even encouraged, but his successor Stalin reverse the entire nationality policy of the Union. During his time Russian language and culture were given prime importance, actually the minority languages and cultures were given the status of second rank languages and cultures, even in those areas where predominantly minorities stayed. This led to emergence of sense of identity crisis among minorities, which in turn led to a rise of nationalistic feelings among minorities followed by violent protests against the Soviet empire throughout its existence, but definitely in bits. The present nationalist movements came to forefront in Soviet politics after the introduction of



Perestroika and Glasnost by Gorbachev. During this period innumerable major and minor protest among different nationalities were organised. The resentments, which were brewing in the human mind, took the shape of bloody conflicts. These protests were directed towards those Soviet policies, due to which many demographic changes were made and the result of which was the creation of multiethnic republics and regions inside USSR. Demographic resettlement left many regions, mainly populated by one ethnic group inside another republics inhabited by another ethnic groups. Such was the case of Armenian populated Nagorno-Karabakh, which was incorporated to Azerbaijan. And during Perestroika and Glasnost period this place become a hotbed of ethnic strife, with no permanent solution in near future.

Besides, the lopsided economic development of the regions was an another reason for this situation. The local people started thinking that they had become a mere raw material supplier for Russia and meant only for maintaining the Super Power status of Soviet Union. Their nationalistic feelings started compelling them to enjoy the seats of power and the natural resources, which, they thought, were used for the betterment of Russian lives. though in the later stage of Soviet rule, in many republics native population had become very powerful, but Russian hegemony was seen everywhere. Their better standard of living became the main cause of envy.

In the Chechen case, we can see that Chechens never wanted to be a part of Soviet Union. They became the part

of Soviet empire due to some historical compulsions. But throughout the Soviet rule, they nurtured a secret feeling to become independent. they even tried to break loose from Soviet Union in 1940-42 revolt, but their spirit was dampened by Stalin and even their republic was abolished and chechen population was deported to another regions. This incident only enhanced their anti-Russian feelings.

During the reform period, their grivances got voice and like other republics, this autonomous republic also started demanding for the independence. When Dudagev became the President of the Chechen National Congress, he recognised the public mood, which flared up the national aspirations among the people and Dudayev gradually became very powerful. As he was following the rightist policies, Boris Yeltsin, the main rival of Gorbachev, even encouraged him and promised his help in restoring the past glory of Chechnya. the August Coup of 1991 was the culmination point and Dudayev get Chechnya freed from the Communist regime and even got support from the Gorbachev's rival groups. After the disintegration of Soviet Union, Boris Yeltsin wanted Chechnya back into Russian Federation. But Dudagev, who once was recognised as "Yeltsin's man" now defied his orders and result was the financial and economic sanctions imposed upon Chechnya by Russia. But even then Russia did not take any measures to control the situation. For about three years Chechnya remained cut off from Russia. But situation took a new turn in 1994, when in Russia Boris Yeltsin's reform programmes were failed and his popularity began to decline.

The results of 1993 elections were the clear indication of this trend, where his party Russia's choice could get only 15.5 per cent of the popular vote. So for Yeltsin it was necessary to improve his image, if he wanted a re-election in the Presidential election of 1996. He, who talked about the democratic tradition and values, crossed all the limits and ordered an military invasion on Chechnya in December, 1994, as the Russian leadership regarded the Chechen problem as a bone of contention. Though after the invasion a rift was quite visible in Russian parliament, but no one tried to avert this situation openly. Besides, Kremlin officials even claimed that Russia was compelled to use military force against the renegade republic in order to restore constitutional order and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. Here again the question arises that why this drastic step was taken after three years. The matter, which could have been solved through negotiations like in the case of Tatarstan and other autonomous regions, was solved through bloodshed. But it is not a permanent solution. Yeltsin's high handedness has only worsened the situation. Though the Chechen aspiration has been crushed for the time being; the crisis which emerged after the collapse of Soviet Union, ended in massive causality of Chechen masses in general and troops in particular. In 1996, the leader of Chechen rebellion Dudayev was killed. Thus Yeltsin scored a victory over Chechen nationality question. He has also invited second line leadership for talks. But a victory scored in battle-

field can not last long, as there is no guarantee that how long this fregile peace could be maintained.

Though the international community had dismissed the Chechen war as a home affair, but only the time can show its consequences. The Chechen war has been used as a gangplank for the coming presidential election, but it was also a major set back for Russia's transition. It had showed the weakness of parliament and the strong presidency in Russia.

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