

A study of Islamic revival In Russia since 1991

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CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the Dissertation entitled **A Study of Islamic Revival in Russia since 1991**, submitted by **Siddharth Shanker** is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University and is his own work.

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Dedicated to Nanaji

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SIDDHARTH SHANKER

Introduction

The issues, which are associated with Islam, since the last couple of decades, have come to assume great importance. Islam is seen as a religion whose followers are in inextricably knitted with the bond of religion and see the world as 'they' and 'us' thus creating a situation of Islam versus the rest. It is seen as a single civilization which extend from the Sahara desert to the Indonesian Islands.¹ Islam is seen by many as inherently expansionist and aggressive, as a result many view it with trepidation and suspicion. Although it is true that many areas where Muslims (those who are followers of Islam) reside there is violence and conflict, whether between Muslims themselves or between Muslims and non-Muslims. It is also true that there is an anti-west and sometimes anti India diatribe launched by some Islamic groups, some of them Islamic militants. There have also been subversive activities and militant attacks on the civilian population in the name Islamic holy war, Jihad. Yet, the belief that Islam needs to be feared, needs to be examined. Violence, militancy and religious fundamentalism are not confined to Islamic areas alone. Secondly, an opinion of a few individuals can not be attributed to all Muslims. Then why this paranoia for Islam? Is it justified? These issues are to be

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisation and the Remaking of World Order* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India (P) Ltd., 1997), pp.109-120.

looked into in detail. The fear and suspicion of Islam results in a clouded vision and sweeping generalisations are given, frequently in case of Islam. In the zeal of labeling and branding Islam as militant and aggressive it is often forgotten that at various points of history the Muslims have been subjected to aggression and aggrandizement. When the Islamic people in some regions were subjected to coercion they were denied their freedom to practice religion. This aspect is important in understanding Islamic revival as it is intrinsically linked with the de-Islamisation and denial of the freedom of religion to the people in the past. This is because Islamic revival can occur only if in the past there have been attempts to undermine Islam. The crucial question regarding Islamic revival is what implication it can have on the polity and society of a region. To answer it we will first have to look into the relationship between Islamic revival and Islamic fundamentalism. For some both are synonymous, Islamic revival is often equated with Islamic fundamentalism.

The world fundamentalism is derived from the term 'fundamentals' which was used by certain Protestant groups in United States in the early part of 20th century. These groups gave a call for a return to 'fundamentals'. By which they meant that the various modernist, even secularist idea which had invaded Christian theology and practice and leading it astray and should be purged. This term when applied to Islam meant that Islamic fundamentalist are those

groups who get that modernist views and practices have led the 'faithful' astray and call for a return to older, purer and more correct views and practices.² But here lies the problem the interpretation of these older, purer more correct views and practices are their own. They get increasingly intolerant in implementing them. As a result what follows is a tyrannical rule of a minority over a majority. In their call for return to older 'purer' religious practices fundamentalists are inherently intolerant. Therefore Islamic fundamentalism may be understood as, anti-secularist currents and movements aimed at re-institutionalizing the *Sharia* (Islamic law), where the government is run and the law implemented in conformity with the religious norms. As already mentioned Islamic fundamentalism is intolerant to divergence of opinion as the religious norms which the fundamentalists perpetuate cannot be questioned.

Religious revivalism on the other hand is a reassertion of older religious beliefs and practices, it is perhaps this aspect which makes one to think fundamentalism and revivalism as synonymous, since both find justification for their action in the past. This impression however is incorrect. By revivalism Islamic or otherwise it is meant that there is a reassertion of religious beliefs and practices, which have

² Immanuel Wallerstein, "Islam, the West, and the World", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 10:2, 1999, pp. 109-125 and Akeel Bilbrami, "What is a Muslim? Fundamental commitment and Cultural Identity" in Gyanendra Pandey, *Hindus And Others: The Question of Identity in India Today* (New Delhi: Viking, 1993)

been undermined in the past and are now sought to be reinvigorated. The religious revivalists do not have the agenda of redefinition of these beliefs and practices, a feature, which is there among the religious fundamentalist. Revivalism just aims to reintroduce those beliefs and practices which have become dormant, yet which exist in the society. Thus it works at the level of 'popular religion' that is religion as practiced amongst the people.

To understand the implications that Islamic revival can have on the society a long-standing debate in the literature on ethnic-nationalism must be discussed. The debate is, whether nation creates the state or the state creates the nation. The former supposition would mean that common language and shared culture leads to a sense of political community, which leads to political aspirations for statehood and in some cases to statehood itself. The latter supposition would want us to believe that state precedes the nation as it leads to a shared perception of belonging to a common political community that leads to nationhood. This debate can be applied to the debate about the relationship between religion and state (which in our case would be, between state and Islam) for sometimes religion is an important component of ethnicity or ethnic consciousness.³ If elaborated the debate deals with two maxims, whether previously existing and

³ Shams-Ud-din, "The Ethnic and Religious Revivalism in Central Asia", in Shams-Ud-din, *Nationalism In Russia and Central Asian Republics: Unfinished Democratize Revolution* (New Delhi: Lancers Books, 1999), pp.102-104.

deeply- rooted religious beliefs are responsible in part for the emergence of national identities or are new states and political circumstances responsible for the emergence of new commitments to religion. In Russia if the former is true, that is Islamic revival is an awakening of traditional beliefs, practices and institutions, then we may expect that the traditional conservatism yet political moderation of Islam practiced till now in these regions, will continue in the successor states, if there are any. If on the other hand, the turn to Islam is a political phenomenon rooted not as much in the past but in insecurities and traumas of today, then it is more likely that the Islamic revivalism itself will be politicized, fundamentalist and against the non-Muslim world.

To understand the working of Islamic revivalism it is also necessary that we do not view Islam as a monolith, an often committed blunder. On the contrary there are many variations in Islam, which may be viewed both horizontally and vertically. Vertically Islam may be divided into 'high Islam' and 'popular Islam' in other words Islam in theory and Islam in practice. 'High Islam' follows the classical Islamic literature while 'popular Islam' follows non-written religious traditions and communication, which have often little to do with classic Islamic norms. Islamic society can be divided horizontally in terms of variations occurring for every geographical

region where Islam exists. The set of traditions and norms which, people follow differ from one geographical region to the other.

When we look at Islamic revivalism in Russia the above raised issues are relevant for it. The ground for Islamic revival can exist only if religious persecution or de-Islamization has occurred earlier. An analysis of historical data tells us that in Russia such a phenomenon did take place, both at the level of 'high Islam' and 'popular Islam'. It occurred during the Tsarist regime and then during the Soviet period as well. Therefore there did exist a ground for Islamic revivalism in Russia.

Before undertaking the study it would be better if we elaborate on some facts about Russia. As we know, Russia is a vast country that has a population as diverse as its geographical area. It is truly a multi-ethnic and a multi-religious country. Russia or the Russian Federation came into being in the early 1990's with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when the erstwhile Soviet Republics became independent states and what was left came to be known as the Russian Federation. Russia after the disintegration charted a new course for itself, which was different from the one undertaken by the USSR. Yet being different from the USSR it is bound to it by history. It has to face the consequences of the actions undertaken during the Soviet period and during the Tsarist period. The Russian Federation is as much a successor state to the USSR as the USSR was to the Tsarist

Russia. The USSR was divided into many Soviet Republics, Russian Federation was one of them. These Soviet Republics were further divided into autonomous republics. The Russian Federation of today is still divided into these autonomous republics called ASSR a division which continues from the time of the Soviet period. These ASSR are:

North European Russia – Karelia, Mordova, Chuavash, Mari-El, Tatarstan, Udmurtia, Bashkurtostan, Pomi-Permyak AOK, Komi, North Caucasus – Adygey, Karachay-Cherless, Kabardino-Balkar, North Ossetia, Checheno-Ingushetia, Dagestan, Kalmykia

Siberia – Altay, Khakasia, Tuva, Ust-Orda, Buryat AOK, Buryatia, Aga-Buryat AOK, Jewish AO, Sakha (Yakutia)

Arctic – Nenets AOK, Yamal-Nenets AOK, Khanty-Mansi AOK, Tanyr AOK, Chukotsk, AOK Koryak AOK

Among these the mulisms inhabit the ASSR of Chuvash, North Ossetia, Kabadino-Balkar, Checheno-Ingushetia (now renamed as Republic of Ichkeria). Baskortostan, Adygey, Tatarstan, Mari-El Republic, Karchay-Cherkess and Dagestan.

The various nationality which are followers of Islam are the Chechens, Tatars, Bashkirs, Kabards, Ossetians, Ingush, Avars and others. Most of them live in two regions of North Caucasus and the Volga-Ural. Many of the ASSRs are infact name on the predominant nationality known as the titular nationality, in that republic. The

highest percentage of titular nationality in 1989 was highest in Chechnya.⁴

Russia contains people who follow different religions such as orthodox Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Catholicism, and Judaism. They also are from different ethnic stocks for example there are Slavs, people of Turkish origin, people of the Mongoloid race.

The Muslims in Russia and elsewhere in other republic of USSR were prevented from practicing Islam by the Soviet State in more than 70 years of its rules. But with the policy of '*Perestroika*' and '*Glasnost*' of Gorbachev and finally with the disintegration of the Soviet Union the restrictions imposed on the people were relaxed. As Russia reeled under economic crisis people increasingly expressed their faith in religion a thing, which until now they were not allowed to do. This was also the case where Muslims resided. However it is only in Chechnya and Tatarstan and parts of Dagestan that religious revivalism became synonymous with nationalism and there was a demand for sovereignty of their own. Amongst these, Chechnya and Dagestan come in the regions of north Caucasus, home to the lofty Caucasian Mountain which are almost impregnable and Tatarstan in middle Volga region. The Caucasians are ideally suited for the Chechens to wage their separatist struggle against the Russians, as the

⁴ Chancey D., Harris, "Geographical Analysis of Non Russian Minorities in Russia and its Ethnic Homeland", *Post-Soviet Geography*, Vol. 34 No. 9, November 1993, pp.543-97.

rebels can attack the Russian and then hide in the mountains to which they are more familiar than Russian. It is these areas which are crucial to the survival of federalism in Russia and therefore for survival of Russian Federation as a country itself and hence will be the main focus of our study.

In the course of the study, various aspects of Islamic revival in Russia have been studied. The study comprises of three Chapters. Chapter I discusses the historical background of Islamic Revival in Russia. This has prepared a ground for Islamic revivalism in different parts of Russia, mainly in southern Russia and the middle Volga region . Chapter II mainly discusses Islamic revival during the Yeltsin's period. It also discussed the Russo-Chechen war. It analyses the linkages between the demands for separatism in Russia and Islamic revivalism. Chapter III deals with the conflict in Dagestan. It also deals with the issue of Islamic militancy in Russia. It elaborates on its international linkages and its implications for the Muslim nationalities in Russia.

Chapter 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Soviet State which came up during the October Revolution under the Bolsheviks, and which later came to be known as USSR was a successor-state to the Tsarist Russian empire. Similarly, the Russian federation of today may be viewed as a true heir to the USSR. Hence, it becomes imperative that to understand Islamic revival in Russia in the period of our study (1991 onwards), a closer look is taken into its historical background. Here the coming of Islam in Russia, the expansionist policies of Russian Empire and then of the Soviet Union carried on in the Islamic areas, is dealt with.

ISLAMIC AREAS DURING THE TSARIST EMPIRE

The Islamic regions of Russia have, since long faced naked aggression from the various regimes of Russia. It started from the time of the Russian empire under the Tsars. Which was an imperialist state and was different from the other colonial states only in the sense that it had contiguous colonial territories while

others had overseas colonies. The conquest involved two-fold operation of first conquest and later extermination of rebellious people supplanting them with Russians, Ukrainians or Cossacks.¹

THE NORTH CAUCASUS

The Caucasian region first experienced Russian aggression at the end of the 16th century when the Russians had built two fortresses one on the river Terek (1587) and the other on the river Sunja (1591)². By the end of Tsarina Catherine's reign Russians had captured North Caucasus lowlands and the Nogay Tatar country³. But it was only in the 19th century that major campaigns were launched to capture North Caucasian people. The important point to note here with regard to the numerous mountainous north Caucasian nationalities is that conquest by the Russians did not mean the end of the matter. After the conquest they soon rose in revolt, which involved a fresh military campaign of the region. Thus this area remained a boiling pot till 1864 and even later than that if we take into account minor revolts. The chief reason for the stiff resistance that these people gave to the Russian invaders was

¹ Kalpana Sahni, *Crucifying the Orient: Russian Orientalism and the Colonization of Caucasus and Central Asia*(Oslo: White Orchid Press,1997), p. 91

² Ibid, p.36

³ Ibid. p.36-37

the martial spirit of the people and the unique topography and society of the North Caucasus region. North Caucasian society from time memorial had been divided into numerous clans which often fought with each other and followed there old customary laws, the *adat* and followed the justice system of blood feud called *Kanli*⁴. These clans lived in the Caucasian Mountains, which also divided them. The Caucasian mountains are one of the highest in the world with living conditions very severe. As a result, any attempt by the advancing Arabs and the Turks on the possible Islamization of the area could not succeed. However where force failed, gradual persuasion worked. The Sufi mystics who settled in this region, through their missionary activities, converted the people to Sufi Islam. Many of them also laid their lives in the process⁵. The *sufi* way of life with it's tradition of *Pir* and *Murid*⁶ became acceptable to the people as they were already organised under clans where members had to maintain unquestioned loyalties towards the clan chief.⁷ The first *sufi* order (*Sillsillah*) to enter the

⁴ Kerim Fenari, "Jihad of Imam ShamyI", 7/6/2000, <naqshbandi.net/haqqani/sufi/NaqshSufiWay/Imam_Shamil.html>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bulent Gokay , "The Russian Debate over Shamil" in Ben Fowkes(ed.), *Russia and Chechnia, The Permanent Crisis:Essays on Russo-Chechen Relations*(Houndmills:Macmillan Press, 1998), p.27

⁷ David Damrel, "The Religious Roots of Conflict: Russia and Chechnya", *Religious Studies News*, Vol.10, No.3.,September 1995, p.10

region was Naqshabandi order later came the Qadiri⁸ order, which after the decline of the former became as popular. The basic difference between the two was that while the Naqshabandis recite the 'Zikr' silently the Qadiris recite it loudly.⁹ Sufism gave a semblance of unity to the hitherto divided Caucasian people. As a result they could unite to fight against the Russians. Though this unity was hard to maintain, it provided the people with great leaders who were inspired by religion to give the call of *Jihad* (holy war) and *Ghazawat'* (religious struggle). It also gave the people a greater cause, of saving one's religion, which was now identified with their way of life.

The North Caucasian people's struggle against Russians continued for a long time. The earliest revolt occurred in 1707 but the earliest important leader of the Islamic revolt was Shaykh Mansour who started his struggle in 1785 and defeated the Tsarist forces at the river Sunzha. He briefly united much of what are Dagestan and Chechnya under his rule.¹⁰ But at the battle of Tatar-Toub in 1791¹¹ he was defeated and was taken as prisoner. The

⁸ Ben Fowkes(ed.), *Russia and Chechnia, The Permanent Crisis: Essays on Russo-Chechen Relations*(Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1998), p.4

⁹David Damrel, no.7, p.10

¹⁰ Ibid.,p.10

¹¹Kerim Fenari,no 4,

second leader was Ghaji Mollah who belonged to the Avar people of Dagestan. He organised the people against the Russians and made them give up their old customary laws the *adat* and the *Kanli* vendetta (the tribal system of justice by taking revenge for a particular action) for the Islamic law, the *Shariah*. He captured a few mountain villages, which had become pro-Russians his siege on the Russian fort of Vnezapnaya was also success. However the Russian laid seize on the *aoul*¹² of Gimri and Gazi Mollah was defeated and killed however his associated and disciple Shaykh ShamyI later known especially as *Imam* ShamyI escaped.¹³

Later *Imam* ShamyI's name became synonymous with the free spirit and the love for freedom of the Muslim people of North Caucasus. Their refusal to accept Russian rule led them to declare open war against the Russian under the leadership of the ShamyI. This was by far the greatest rebellion in the region against Tsarist Russia. At first the struggle of the Mountain people was purely defensive. They defended the *aoul* of Ashilta in central Dagestan against Russian attack¹⁴. Through his experience of struggle with large well-equipped technologically superior Russian army, he

¹²An *Aul* is a mountain village see Bulent Gokay, no.5, p.27

¹³Kerim Fenari, no.4

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

understood that it was very difficult to defeat them on the open ground. They could be defeated only through Guerilla warfare, which was possible in the Caucasian Mountains. But here his limitations were that while he with his army could escape in the hills the mountain villages though well fortified were vulnerable to Russian siege. In spite of this Shamyl carried on his struggle.

During the period 1839 to 1847 Shamyl constantly harassed the Russians even at the face of many defeats. In 1847 he gave a crushing defeat to General Vorontsov in the jungles close to his capital Dargo, for the next 10 years. Russians left Shamyl alone and as a result he set up a kingdom in present day Chechnya and Dagestan, which is referred by the Caucasian people as the 'time of Shariah'.¹⁵ The command of the Russian army now came under General Berateinsky who adopted measures similar to General Yermolov¹⁶ as he cleared the forest so as to force the Caucasian to fight on the open ground. In 1858 there was a last big battle between Russians and Shamyl's forces as he came to support the Ingush who had revolted against the Russians. In June 1859

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Kalpana Sahani, no.1,pp. 40-42

Shamyl was captured from the *Aoul* of Ghounit and later banished to a small town near Moscow.

What emerges when we take a look at this struggle is that the Caucasian people offered stiff resistance to the Russians at every stage offering great sacrifice. On the other hand Russians many times showed excessive cruelty as was committed by the legendary General A.P.Yermolov.¹⁷ Thus the Muslim people of North Caucasus were incorporated into the Russian Empire at the great cost of men and money. By 1864 the region was firmly under the Russian control though there were a few revolts till 1877. The Circassians and the Ubykh were mostly expelled between 1864 and 1866 as they continued with Shamil's fight even after his defeat¹⁸. With the conquest of the region Russians tried to consolidate themselves, many schools and churches were built and the Christian missionaries got engaged in active proselytizing.¹⁹

THE VOLGA-URAL REGION

The Muslims of the Middle Volga Region also experienced the same kind of aggression and repression that as was faced by the

¹⁷ Kalpana Sahani, no.1, pp. 40-42

¹⁸ P.B.Henze, "Caucasian Resistance to Russia" in Marie B. Broxup(ed.), *The North Caucasus Barrier* (New York: St. Martin's Press,1992) , pp 62-111

¹⁹ Kalpana Sahani, no.1, pp. 44-46.

Muslims of North Caucasus. The people who are called as Volga Tatars live in the Volga-Ural region. They are Turkic speaking people and are the Sunni Muslim people of the Hanafi school. In terms of language they trace their descent from the Turkic-speaking Kypchak tribes that migrated across the Urals in the ninth and tenth centuries and mixed with already present Finno-Ugric and Slavic peoples in the region. The region got converted to Islam in 922 A.D. during the period of the Bulgar civilization, which existed in the region during the 9th century, before the conversion of Russians to Orthodoxy. The roots of Tatar culture are however contested. Some historians argue that Tatar culture was strongly influenced by the Mongols of the Golden Horde, who conquered the region in the 13th century. Others, including most Tatar nationalists argue that despite the conquest, the Turkic-speaking peoples of the Volga-Ural region retained much of the pre-existing culture of the Bulgar civilization. Regardless of this, there is agreement that a distinct “Tatar” culture had emerged in the region by the time the Golden Horde collapsed and the Kazan Khanate (circa 1445-1552) was established. By the sixteenth century, a

distinct Tatar literary language using Arabic script had developed.²⁰

During its 107 years of existence, the Kazan *Khanate* fought episodic wars with *Muscovy* and alternated between periods of relative independence and relative dependence. These cycles came to an end with the storming of Kazan by Ivan the Terrible in October 1552 and in 1556 was captured the *Khanate* of Astrakhan, which gave the Russians outlet to the Caspian sea²¹. As a result the people of the Volga-Ural region that is the Tatars and Bashkirs²² came under the rule of the Russians.. The people of the region who were mostly Muslims now came under the control of the Russian Tsars. What followed the conquest of Khanate of Kazan was prosecution of the Muslims, mosques were destroyed or converted into Orthodox churches.²³ Motivated largely by militant Orthodoxy, Ivan put much of the population of Kazan to death, expropriated the lands of the Tatar nobility, and devastated the local economy and traditional Tatar social system. He then

²⁰ Ron Wixman, "The Middle Volga: Ethnic Archipelago in a Russian Sea", in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras Kuzo(eds.) *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*(New York:Cambridge University Press,1993),p. 187

²¹ Kalpana Sahani, no.1, p.36

²² Chancey D.Harris , "Geographical Analysis of Non Russian Minorities in Russia and its Ethnic Homeland",*Post Soviet Geography*,Vol.34, No.9, November 1993,pp.543-97

²³ N.,Devlet, "The present situation of the Soviet Muslims: The example of Kazan Tatars", 5/6/2000, <salam.muslimonline.com/~azahoor/tatar.html>

celebrated his victory by laying the cornerstone of the Orthodox Cathedral of the Visitation in Kazan and St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow.²⁴

In the following centuries, as Russia's imperial reach extended across Siberia and to the south into the Caucasus and eventually Central Asia, Moscow's colonial policies alternated between harsh campaigns of religious conversion and cultural assimilation on the one hand, and relative tolerance toward non-Russian, non-Orthodox peoples on the other. The state supported the arbitrary dealings of the Russian Orthodox Church, which lasted for more than 200 years and, among other things, forced Muslims to be baptized, similar to Muslims in Spain. In the year 1756 in the province of Kazan out of the existing 536 mosques 418 were destroyed. Until 1759 Volga Tatars were not permitted to build mosques and *madrassahs*²⁵. The Muslim peoples of the Volga-Urals region (the ethnonym "Tatar" was used equivocally by Russians prior to the twentieth century, sometimes designating Muslims, sometimes Turkic-speaking peoples, and sometimes all "Orientals," and it was not accepted by the Volga Muslims

²⁴ M. B. Broxup, "Tatarstan and the Tatars", in Graham Smith(ed.), *The Nationalities Question in the Post Soviet States*(New York:Longman,1996), second edition, p.76

²⁵ N.Develet, no. 23

themselves until late in the nineteenth century) reacted with frequent rebellions, They participated, for example, in the great uprisings of Stepan Razin and Emilian Pugachev. These rebellions were put down harshly by the Tsar's troops.

The Volga Tatars were at the same time subject not only to demographic but to cultural pressure as well. Russian popular culture makes much of the victimization of Russians at the hands of Genghiz Khan and the Golden Horde. Russian children are raised on stories of Russian heroes repelling the attacks of Mongol-Tatar barbarians, with no distinction made between Tatars and Mongols. There is also a long tradition in Russian intellectual history of decrying the pernicious influences of Asiatic barbarism on the Russian soul, an influence that allegedly accounts for Russia's "backwardness" relative to the West. Nevertheless, the Tatars demonstrated a remarkable cultural resiliency over the centuries of Tsarist rule. At times, this resiliency was accepted by Moscow under Catherine II, for example, the first Central Muslim Religious Board was established in Orenburg in 1783. But with the Tsarist conquest of Central Asia in the nineteenth century, Moscow again grew intolerant of Islam, renewing its efforts to create a Christian and Russified Tatar elite that would be loyal to, and

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dependent upon, Moscow. The Tatar intelligentsia responded by embracing *jadidism* (renovation) movement. The movement's founder, Imam Shihabeddin Merjani (1818-1889), was an ethnic Tatar and a Muslim scholar who had studied and conducted research in Bukhara and Samarkand on Islamic thought, the natural sciences, and history. He returned to Kazan in 1887, where he played an important role in the development of the *jadidist* movement, the central themes of which were the right of individuals to interpret the Koran without mediation by the clergy, the importance of free of thought, and the value of education. Over this same period, Kazan University was acquiring a reputation as one of the leading universities in Tsarist Russia. By the end of the century, the Volga region had become a leading center of intellectual learning and enlightened Islamic thought in the Russian empire, while the Tatar intelligentsia was engaged in a project of cultural and religious revival familiar to students of nationalism in Europe and elsewhere.²⁶

The 1905 Revolution contributed to the politicization of the Tatar nationalist movement. Tatar activists began to demand

²⁶ See, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983), 1991 reprint and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

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autonomous status and even full independence for a Tataria that would incorporate Tatars, Bashkirs, and the Finno-Ugric peoples of the region--the Udmurts, Chuvash, Marii, and Mordvinians. Predictably, their demands were however rejected by the conservative government in Moscow.

THE MUSLIM AREAS UNDER THE SOVIET RULE

With the coming of the Soviets there was no respite for the Muslims. The Soviets due to their belief in Marxism considered religion to be an evil and as a result suppressed the Muslims in Russia. The Soviet policy however acted as a double-edged sword for the Muslims. First, they suffered due to the attempts of the Bolsheviks to get a greater control over the provinces, where the provinces, which were mainly in Asia, came under the control of Russians in Moscow. Secondly as already mentioned the official policy of the Soviet government was to deny the people freedom of practicing their religion. When the Bolsheviks came to power their official policy was to give the right to self-determination for all the nationalities of the Russian empire. A closer examination of that period tells us that this was a policy on paper only. Though in 1914 the right of self-determination was a political stand taken by the

Russian Marxist it was not something they desired. Lenin from his writings comes out as a champion of the oppressed but a closer reading of his statements and writings tell a different story. What he wanted was the self-determination of the various nationalities but under the umbrella of Soviet Russia.²⁷ In 1918 when the Bolshevik's needed the support of the Russian borderland in their struggle against the whites they agreed with their right to secede but once they had been defeated their views changed. This policy of denial of the self-determination to the nationalities can also be seen in the vacillating stand the communist Government took in the formation of the various Republics within Russia. The 1922 Treaty on the Formation of USSR only four territories were included. Amongst these were Byelorussia and the Federal Republic of Trans-Caucasus, which included (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaizan). Rest of the areas about 90% of the country made the part of the Russian Republic²⁸. Later once the Soviet power was consolidated the autonomy promised to the various administrative and territorial divisions of the USSR was not given.

²⁷Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), revised addition, p.197

²⁸ Kalpana Sahni, no.1, p.114

THE NORTH CAUCASUS

The revolution in Russia prompted the mountainous people of the North Caucasus to set an autonomous state i.e. the 'union of mountain people which would work within the framework of Russia'. This mountain republic had the membership of most of the North Caucasian nations and its leading figure was a wealthy Chechen oil industrialist Tapa Chermoev. The Bolsheviks set up their own Terek Peoples Soviet in January 1918. The Mountain Chechens rejected both sides and were led by their own religious leaders. Thus occurred a five-cornered struggle between liberal nationalists, mountain Chechens and Ingush, Cossacks (assisted by local Russian) Russian reactionaries from outside (volunteer army led by General Denikin) and Bolsheviks. The important point to note here is that at one point of time the Bolsheviks made an unprincipled alliance with their polar opposites, the 'sufi' leaders of the mountain Chechens and Ingush. The Bolsheviks with their help were victorious but once the other elements were cleared they turned towards the Islamic leaders. There was an uprising from August 1920 to March 1921, led by Sheikh Gotsinskii alongside

Saidbak, ShamyI's grandson.²⁹The Bolsheviks crushed this uprising. There was another revolt started by Shaykh Uzun Haji. He had been for some years maintaining an independent existence by carving a 'North Caucasian Emirate'. He had supported the Bolsheviks who subsequently turned against him. The revolt was crushed in 1925.³⁰ . The Soviet authorities had learnt some lessons from the zeal with which the Muslims had fought them. They therefore introduced indiginization, which mainly meant that non Russians were to be brought under party work and to be involved with the Soviet policy making. But there were very few communists in Caucasus. As a result there was a policy of respecting Caucausian religious institutions such as *Sharia*, *Waqf* properties and *Mazaars* .This policy was stopped by 1923.The head of south east bureau of the Bolshevik party AnastanMikoyan got rid of the main instrument of moderate policy, Tashtemir on grounds of clericalism. After this an anti-Islamic campaign was put in hand by southeast bureau and the work of the earlier years was undone.³¹This was the first experience the Bolsheviks had of the

²⁹ Marie Benningsen Broxup, (ed.), 'The Last Ghazavat:The 1920-1921 Uprising' in Marie Benningsen Broxup, *The North Caucasus Barrier:The Russian Advance Towards The Muslim World* (London: C.Hurst and Company,1992), pp. 112-45.

³⁰David Damrel, no.7, p.10

³¹ Ben Fowkes(ed.), no.8, p.8

spirit of resistance of the Caucasian people. The Bolsheviks on their part were behaving no differently than the imperialist Tsars. In fact the Soviet government was causing much greater suffering to the various nationalities and which included the Muslims, than the Tsars. This was through their deliberate policy of divide and rule. In January 1921 the North Caucasus was divided administratively into two, the Dagestan ASSR (autonomous socialist Soviet Republics) and the Mountain ASSR, the Chechens and the Ingush were included in the later republic. Meanwhile a policy of divide and rule was followed in Trans-Caucasia administrative regions were carved out arbitrarily and often people of the same linguistic and ethnic stock were divided. In spite of this the Chechens were able to get a separate autonomous region in 1922. Ingushetia was separated from the Mountain ASSR in 1924 and was incorporated in Chechnya. In 1936 Chechno-Ingushetia was elevated to the rank of Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of the RSFSR. But the Balkars and Karachai though practically identical were split up and combined with different ethnic people administratively. The Cherkess or the Circassians were divided three ways and were never united. In 1929 the Sunzhen district was added to Chechnya similarly the Cossacks and Grozny was include

which added a big Russian minority to the republic. Nevertheless the policies followed during the period of Lenin seem much lenient when compared to the latter period of Stalin. The figure of 1926 show that there were still 106 mosques, 126 religious lower schools, 427 religious middle schools and sixty thousand *murid* (members of the Sufi brotherhoods) in Chechnya.

During Stalin's period, in the late 1920's an attempt was made to liquidate the *sufi* brotherhood. But this policy was unsuccessful as *sufi* brotherhood survived leading to the revolt of 1929-30 against the introduction of collective farms. This revolt was followed by further rising in 1940 and in 1943³² in Chechnya that is during the Second World War period. This act of the Chechens prompted Stalin to deport the Chechen-Ingush people en-masse. It was said that these people were Nazi sympathisers who rebelled to divert the forces of Russia, however there was no substantial evidence of the involvement of the total population thus was carried out one of the biggest Human Rights Violation of all times. The main implementer of the deportation in North Caucasus

³²David Damrel, no.7, p.10

was Beria. In fact the policy was able to not only achieve its target but exceed it.³³

THE MIDDLE VOLGA REGION

The Muslims living in the Volga region also faced similar denial of freedom of religion. Here also the Soviet State had the policy of discouraging people to practice their religion. In the beginning Bolsheviks had talked of right to self-determination. This can be seen, in the newly adopted policy by Moscow and announced in the famous declaration of December 20, 1917, addressing the Muslim workers. The Soviet government then promised the Muslim workers freedom of religion and practice of their manners and customs without restrictions. The December 4, 1917 declaration jointly signed by Lenin and Stalin said:

‘To the Muslims in Russia, be they Tartars of Volga, the inhabitants of Crimea, the Kaukaz of Siberia or Turkistan, the Turks of Kaukaz, the Charks, the dwellers of Kaukaz mountains, to all those whose mosques and worship places and whose faith and traditions were trampled upon by the Tsars of Russia or the other tyrants; Be assured that your traditions and faith and your national and cultural institutions shall be free from this day and nobody will object to these in future. You are free to organize your national life without any interference and obstacles from outside.’

³³ William Flemming, “The Deportation of the Chechen and Ingush Peoples: A Critical Examination” in Ben Fowkes(ed.), *Russia and Chechnia, The Permanent Crisis: Essays on Russo-Chechen Relations*(Houndmills:Macmillan Press,1998), p. 65-86

The declaration of Nov. 15, 1917, jointly signed by Lenin and Stalin said:

“Nations in Soviet Russia are entitled to decide about their future any time. They have the right to secede from the Union and pronounce complete freedom, and also have the right to forsake all national and religious bindings and discrimination”.

After having come to power, the Soviet government, however, broke all these promises: religious leaders were persecuted, religious institutions were closed, religious education was not permitted and churches and mosques still "working" were highly taxed.”³⁴

After 1905, the chaos of 1917 presented Tatar nationalists with another opportunity to pursue their political agenda. On November 29, 1917, a “Tatar Milli Medzhlis” (National Assembly) declared the formation of an independent “Idel'-Ural Republic” covering the territory of modern-day Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, much of Orenburg oblast, and territories extending south to the Caspian Sea. The Republic was short-lived, however. The Bolsheviks dissolved it in the spring and created instead a “Tatar-Bashkir Soviet Socialist Republic” on March 23, 1918. The Bolsheviks promptly evacuated the area in the face of an advancing White army, however, and when they finally reoccupied

the region the following year, in 1919 a liberation movement started in Bashkiria (Bashkortostan), which was a result of the arrest of the Bashkir Central Committee in 1919. The rebellion was quelled. It was then decided to create two autonomous within the RSFSR, the Bashkir autonomous republic and the Tatar autonomous republic. The Bashkirs and the Tartars had been living together since long and had close similarity in culture and language yet they were divided.³⁵

Although the Bolsheviks purged the nationalists who had established the Idel'-Ural Republic, they were soon confronted by another Tatar national movement this time led by Sultangaliev. Mirsaid Sultangaliev was a Tatar teacher who became involved in the anti-tsarist socialist opposition after 1905 but did not join the Bolsheviks until 1917. He quickly rose to become the highest-ranking Muslim in the new socialist state. While he considered himself a committed Marxist, Sultangaliev also believed that the oppression of Muslim peoples at the hands of the colonial powers (including Tatars at the hands of Russians) made them de facto proletarians and turned their national revolutions into proletarian

³⁴ N Devlet, no.22,

³⁵Kalpana Sahani, no. 1, p.140-141

revolutions.³⁶ As essentially classless peoples, Muslims could forgo the class struggle. He called for the establishment of an independent Muslim Communist Party, a separate Muslim army, and a separate Muslim state uniting all the Muslim peoples of the Tsarist Empire that would be called “the Republic of Turan.” After his views were emphatically rejected by Stalin, Sultangaliev was arrested in 1923. He was freed in 1924, but he was later arrested again and finally executed in 1939.

Following Sultangaliev's first arrest in 1923, Stalin launched a crackdown on “Sultangalievism” that led eventually to the annihilation of the bulk of the Tatar political and cultural elite.³⁷ He also unleashed a devastating assault on Islam that included the destruction of most of Tatarstan's mosques. The terror in Tatarstan only abated in 1940 after the *Mufti* of Ufa convinced Stalin to sign a decree legalizing Islam and establishing an official Islamic administrative apparatus.

Despite the purges, Tatar nationalism survived, surfacing most notably in 1936 when the Stalin constitution was adopted for

³⁶ Douglas Taylor Northrop, “Reconsidering Sultan-Galiev” in “Selected Topics in Soviet Ethnopolitics” (Berkeley-Stanford Program, UC Berkeley, Soviet and Post Soviet Studies, Berkeley, 1996),pp.1-44

³⁷ M.B. Broxup, no.24, pp. 79-81

the USSR. Representatives of the republic asked that, in view of the size of its population and territory and the distinctiveness and vitality of Tatar culture, Tatarstan's status be raised to that of a full union republic. The petition was denied, however, the official explanation being that the republic lacked an external border. Tatarstan continued to raise these demands right upto 1977.

In the years following World War II, Tatarstan experienced a period of rapid urbanization and industrialization, as a result of the discovery of oil in 1946. Russian in-migration increased as Russians arrived in search of jobs, particularly in the cities. Assimilation pressures on Tatars accordingly intensified. By the end of 1980s, only 12 percent of Tatar children in the republic were being educated in their native language. And although Tatars had a high rates of native language retention 96.6 percent of Tatars in Tatarstan, and 83.2 percent for Tatars in the USSR as a whole the use of Tatar at home was declining, particularly for the younger generation. Russian was the language of government and the workplace, while Tatar was becoming essentially a “home language.” Native language retention was declining particularly rapidly among Tatars outside the republic, in part because Tatars living outside the republic had lost many of the cultural benefits

afforded them before World War II.³⁸ And the percentage of Tatars who considered themselves believers in Islam was low and declining 17.9 percent in 1967 and 15.7 percent in 1980. Thus, while the Tatars had managed to preserve their distinct identity, by the late 1980s Tatar culture was under serious and intensifying pressure.³⁹

In the city of Kazan there had been 13 mosques among 45,320 people in 1917. This got reduced to only one by 1986 while the Muslims had become one million. In spite of the religious persecution Islam remained a prominent force in the region. The Tatar people had a strong sense of ethnic distinctiveness rooted in their traditional Islamic beliefs, distinct language, and record of intellectual and cultural achievement.

Thus it was during the Soviet period that Muslims in USSR were persecuted. During the Russian Empire there had been 28,000 mosques which by the end of the Soviet era got reduced to only 400.⁴⁰ Yet, Islam was and has remained a part of the national identity. If today the national, non-religious consciousness is even

³⁸ Ron Wixman, no.20, pp. 442-43

³⁹ N. Develet. no.22 ,

⁴⁰ Ibid.

stronger, this fact is nevertheless due to Islam. The Volga-Ural Muslims and the Muslims of the North Caucasus have succeeded in keeping their religion through a period of missionary work and reprisals by the state during the Tsarist period.

The following Soviet rule, having lasted almost 70 years, again made it extremely difficult for the Soviet Muslims, to practice their religion. The Soviets even succeeded in reducing the number of believing Muslims considerably, but they could not exterminate the influence of Islam as an important part of their national identity. Were the Soviet Muslims given the opportunity to practice their religion without pressure from the state, certainly the number of Muslim believers would have risen in the USSR.

GLASTNOST AND PERESTROIKA AND RELIGIOUS REVIVAL IN RUSSIA

As *glasnost* and *democratizatsia* made the Soviet Union a more open society, a demand started coming from various nationalities for a separate homeland. The new openness allowed the growth of national feelings as well as a desire to have more rights. It produced a chain reaction where openness and aspirations of the people fed on each other. It also de-legitimised the

Communist Party elites, consequent disintegration of the party as a nation wide institution led to a rapid and uncontrolled fragmentation of the power.⁴¹ *Glasnost* provided the various people in Russia to air their grievances and give such views as hitherto not expressed such as views on National Culture, Cross national relations and religious freedom. In the period of *glasnost* Soviet scholars started expressing for the first time that the earlier views of the Soviet scholars tantamount to self-deception. With time as the reforms gathered some momentum even the official attitude started changing, in the year 1986 a number of previously banned books were published. Many Soviet scholars started criticising the official actions of the past. By 1988 the attempts made in the past to portray Shamil in the negative were officially condemned, this was a result of the demand by the North Caucasian intelligentsia to fully rehabilitate their national heroes. This was followed by an article by A.Khalilov in, which Shamil's actions were completely justified.⁴² In this atmosphere of openness the various nationalities started expressing their grievances and separatist aspirations, these demands were not new in the history of

⁴¹ Sanjay Kumar Pandey, "Ethno-Religious Nationalism in Russia: The Case of Chechnya" in Shams-Ud-din, *Nationalism In Russia and Central Asian Republics: Unfinished Democratic Revolution* (New Delhi: Lancers Books, 1999), p.117

Soviet Union. What was new, however was the hope attached to it, that in the era of *glasnost* their demands would be heard. It was then not just pure coincidence, that there were many violent and inter-religious clashes in the Central Asia and Caucasian region. This was so because the Soviet citizen's were now less inhibited in raising their demands even if it meant acting unconstitutionally, as they did not expect the severe penalties of the earlier years.

⁴² Bulent Gokay, no.6, pp.49-51

Chapter 2

ISLAMIC REVIVALISM IN RUSSIA DURING THE PERIOD OF BORIS YELTSIN

The Soviet Union contained about 50 million Muslims, having the sixth largest population of the Muslims.¹ After the break-up of the Soviet Union only a seven million of them remained in Russia, the rest went to the newly independent states in Asia, such as Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Uzbekistan, etc. The Muslims which are now in the Russian federation are known as 'internal Muslims', while those living in the Central Asia are known as 'external Muslims'. These internal Muslims reside mainly in the region of North Caucasus: Chechnya, Dagestan, Adygey, Karachai-Balkar, Ingushetia, etc, and in the Volga-Ural region: Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. When one talks of Islam in Russia, it actually means Islam in these areas. Religion is an essential component of culture of the people, all over the world. It has an important bearing on the customs, traditions, and life style of the people. Such an important component was undermined in Russia, during the Soviet era. In spite of this, religious consciousness could not be exterminated and this was the case in Islamic areas as well. A study of

¹A, Bennigsen and Marie Broxup, *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State*,(Beckenham: Kent, 1983), p. 1

religious consciousness has all the more relevance if it gets people to act, i.e., if it leads to social and political actions. Though religious consciousness exists in other areas of North Caucasus and Volga-Ural region, it is only in Chechnya and Tatarstan that there is a movement for sovereignty. Incidentally, Chechnya and Tatarstan house two of the biggest communities of 'the internal Muslims' in Russia² the Chechens and the Tatars. Hence, it will be Chechnya and Tatarstan, which will be the main focus of our study.

CHECHNYA

In Chechnya, the Chechens gradually started regaining control over their republic, after the trauma of deportation. They started returning to their lands in large numbers. The rate of increase of population of any titular nationality of Russia was the highest in Chechnya, about 251%.³ The year 1990 saw the setting up of an organization called the OKChN⁴, which in English would mean Pan-National Congress of the Chechen people or the ANCC.⁵ The agenda of OKChN at that time was raising the

²David Damrel, "The Religious Roots Of Conflict :Russia And Chechnya", *Religious Studies News* Vol.10,No.3,September 1995,p.10

³ Chancey D. Harris, "Geographical Analysis of Non Russian Minorities in Russia and its Ethnic Homeland", *Post-Soviet Geography*, Vol.34 No.9, November 1993, pp.543-97

⁴ The Initial Stand for *Obshchenatsional'nyi Kongress Chechenskogo Naroda*

⁵ Sanjay Kumar Pandey, "Ethno-Religious Nationalism Among the Minorities In Russia:The Case Of Chechenya" in Shams-Ud-Din,*Nationalism In Russia And Central Asian Republics:Unfinished Democratic Revolution*, (New Delhi: Lancers Books), pp. 117-119.

status of the ASSR Checheno-Ingushetia to a higher level of Union Republic, SSR, which would put it outside the Russian Federation. The pressure of OKChN led to the declaration of sovereignty by Chechen-Ingush Supreme Soviet, the official parliament of the republic, in November 1990, an executive committee whose chairman was Dzhokar Dudaev, a General in the Soviet airforce and also a Chechen. He was brought up during the time of deportation. He had a charismatic personality and his asset was that he was not attached to any particular Chechen clan and so could claim to unite the whole nation. Dudaev's Pan-National Congress Executive Committee (IK OKChN) engaged in active democratic and nationalist kind of agitation, over the next year. It became more radical with the disintegration of USSR and started demanding a treaty with the USSR on the basis of 'unconditional recognition of the rights of the Chechen nation to independence'⁶. Meanwhile Doku Zavgaev, the official leader of the Chechen-Ingush communist party, preferred loyal caution to the more headlong behaviour of the leaders such as Ardzinba, Shamiev and Rakhimov.⁷ Zavgaev's balancing act came to an end with the putsch of August 1991 when he played a waiting game,

⁶ Ben Fowkes (ed.), *Russia and Chechenya: The Permanent Crisis Essays on Russo-Chechen Relations*, (Houndmills: Macmillan Press), pp.12-15.

⁷ Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in And After the Soviet Union: The mind Aflame* (Sage Publications: New Delhi, 1997), pp. 45-50.

neither supporting nor opposing the coup leaders. He was eventually overthrown by Dudaev and the IK OKChN on 6 September 1991. On 15 September 1991, a Provisional Supreme Council of 32 was set up in Grozny to rule the republic in place of the Supreme Soviet of Checheno-Ingushetia, though the members still remained the same. But its chairman, Husain Akhmadov, was a supporter of the OKChN and was unable to control the activities of the latter body. All attempts of negotiation with the OKChN ended with the seizure by the OKChN paramilitary forces of the local KGB head quarters. Dudayev had now become an eyesore for Yeltsin and wanted to get rid of him. The democratic opposition was of no use. On 8 October 1991, as planned by Yeltsin and his colleagues in the Russian Supreme Soviet, the Provisional Supreme Council proclaimed its authority over the whole of Checheno-Ingushetia, thereby breaking with the OKChN because of the latter's alleged 'excesses'⁸. However, in the course of October, the OKChN strengthened its control over the republic, and organised presidential elections, boycotted by the supporters of the central government, which Dudaev duly won on 27 October 1991.⁹ On 1 November 1991, the Chechen Republic declared independence; Yeltsin, on the other hand, declared a state of emergency on 7 November and tried

⁸ Ben Fowkes, no. 6, p. 14

⁹ Sanjay Kumar Pandey, no. 5, p. 117

to overthrow Dudaev by force. This led to resistance by Chechen and a strong disapproval from Yeltsin's liberal allies in the Russian parliament and, thus, cancelled it after three days. Chechnya, therefore, became the only republic in the former Soviet Union without Russian troops in its territory. The years between 1991-94 were marked by the political struggle waged by Dudaev simultaneously against his opponents within Chechnya and the Russian federation. Chechnya insisted on independence; this also involved separation from the Ingush. Even though the latter decided to remain within the framework of the Russian federation, it did not sever the friendship between the two nations. This was demonstrated by the participation of Chechen in the short war between the Ingush and the Ossetians over the Prigorodnyi district even more by the pledge by Dudaev and his Ingush counterpart Ruslan Aushev not to establish a border between Chechenia and Ingushetia 'in view of our common Vainakh roots'.¹⁰ In 1992-93, the Chechen opposition to Dudayev acted through the local parliament and the city council. Dudayev's eventual answer to this was to dissolve the parliament on 17 April 1993, close down the Grozny city and rule by force. The opposition then went over to military action, making use of forces of 'warlords' each with a different 'fief'. The men in question were Gantemirov, Umar Avtorkhanov and Ruslan Labazanov.

¹⁰ Ben Fowkes, no.6, p. 16

The forces behind the Chechen opposition were locales and clan-based, and hence they were unable to counteract Dudaev's national appeal. Thus from 1991 to 1994 Chechnya continued to have an independent existence. Repeated attempts by Yeltsin to dislodge Dudayev failed. He was also able to wade through the economic blockade clamped by Russia mainly by bypassing the Russian officials and selling oil to other countries.

TATARSTAN

Similar demands of sovereignty were also raised in Tatarstan. By early 1988, Tatar intellectuals started airing their grievances. In 1989, a political club was formed that dedicated itself to the ideas of Sultan Galiev. In February 1988, a new organization the Tatar Public Centre (Tatarskii Obshchestvenni Tsentr or TOT) was formed. The TOT also initially wanted the elevation of Tatarstan from an autonomous republic to the Union republic. In March 1990, a radical nationalist group *Ittifak* (Alliance) National party began to challenge TOT for leadership. It gave the call of 'Tatarstan for Tatars'.¹¹ In particular, the most vocal leader of the party was Fauzia Bairamova¹². On August 30 1990, Tatarstan in response to 'Declaration of State sovereignty of RSFSR' issued its own

¹¹Edward W walker, "The Dog That Didn't Bark:Tatarstan and Assymetrical Federalism in Russia" (Research Paper, UC Berkeley, Soviet and Post Soviet,Berkeley,1996), p.8-9

¹² Valery Tishkov, no.7, p.45

sovereignty declaration. Shortly afterwards, CPSU's first secretary Mintimer Shaimiev declared that Tatarstan government no longer considered the republic a part of the RSFSR. Subsequently, in the wake of Yeltsin's Presidential referendum, the Tatar Supreme Soviet amended its constitution declaring itself a sovereign state in 1991. During the time of the brief coup, Shaimiev had sided with the coup leaders, in the hope perhaps that Tatarstan would be separated from the Russian republic. After the coup Yeltsin naturally saw Shaimiev as an opponent. Just as Soviet Union was about to disintegrate Yeltsin in late 1991 declared that there would be a federation treaty on the lines of the abandoned 'Union Treaty of USSR', for Russia. This treaty would govern the relationship with its republics. Tatarstan did not sign this 'Federation Treaty' in 1992 on the grounds that it would not be a party to a treaty, which did not recognize it as a sovereign state. On March 20, 1992 Tatarstan held a referendum of its own which asked for sovereignty for Tatarstan. The referendum was approved by 61.4 percent of those voting which was 81.6 percent.¹³

The above account makes it clear that both Chechnya and Tatarstan definitely wanted separation from the Russian Federation. The question then arises what were the factors, which were responsible for such

¹³ Edward W walker, no.11, pp. 8 – 17

demands from these republics. Some of the factors, which are provided, are applicable only to both Chechnya and Tataristan, while others are peculiar to one of them alone. One factor that is given says that the struggle both in Chechnya and Tataristan was a secular democratic struggle. The movement for sovereignty was not unique to Chechnya and Tataristan for almost all the republics of the Russian federation declared sovereignty during 1990.¹⁴ In this regard it is mentioned that it was being led in an institutionalised manner. In Chechnya the demand was first raised by the ANCC (All National Congress of Chechen People)¹⁵ or the OKChN a committee headed by Dzhokar Dudayev. In fact, in the beginning, the demand was limited to raising the status of Chechnya - Ingushetia from an ASSR to a Union republic SSR. It was only later that the OKChN pressurised the Chechen-Ingush Supreme Soviet to declare sovereignty.¹⁶ Further, it is said that the Chechens were not very religious people. Chechnya unlike Bukhara, middle-Volga region and even Dagestan was never known as a centre of traditional Islamic learning. Most of the Chechens drank alcohol, smoked cigarettes, ate pork, Chechen women did not cover their faces and participated in the labour force.

¹⁴ Ben Fowkes, no.6, p.13.

¹⁵ Sanjay Kumar Pandey, no.5, p.117

¹⁶ Ben Fowkes, no.6, p.12-14.

Dudaev himself was a Sovietised Chechen. He was an ex-officer of the Soviet Airforce and married to an ethnic Russian.¹⁷

Similarly in Tatarstan, the TOT (Tatar Public Center) led the movement. Its initial demands were also moderate, calling for a Tataristan that would embrace both Tatars and Russians. It also demanded that the status of Tataristan be raised from an autonomous republic to that of a Union republic. Though there was the radical *Ittifak* (Alliance) National Party, but its call was not on religious lines rather it gave the slogan 'Tatarstan of Tatars'. The real leader of the movement however was Mintimer Shaimiev who was a member of the Communist party and he too was a Sovietised person¹⁸ with no trace of being a religious fundamentalist. Another factor that is given is that the separatist demands were a result of the power struggle between the centre and the periphery, over the control economic and natural resources such as the mines, forests, and mineral deposits (in case of Chechnya and Tatarstan petroleum).¹⁹ Yet another factor given is the ethnic consciousness of the Chechens and the Tatars. The Chechens and Tatar language, dress, customs, traditions were all unique and different. The Chechens had the highest language retention

¹⁷ Edward W. Walker, no.11,s pp.14-16.

¹⁸ Valery Tishkov, no.7, p.9

¹⁹ BenFowkes, no.6, p.151

in 1989.²⁰ The ethnic consciousness of the Chechens and Tatars was heightened by the Russian attitude. The word 'Tatar' is a Turkish word, which means alien people. Earlier it was used for the people living east of the river Volga, but was later came to be applied to all those professing Islam, Turkic or non- Turkic such as people of Azarbaizan, the Chechens, the Ingush etc. The poet G. Derzhavin in his 'The Lyrical Song dedicated to the Russians on the capture of Izmail' describes these people as vermin, insects and snakes.²¹ Soviet Union for many years had been celebrating the fall of Kazan as the day of liberation for Tatarstan.²² Finally, there was a feeling among the various republics that the distinction between autonomous republics and a Union republic was often due to arbitrary decisions by the Soviet authorities which may often date back to as late as 1930's. So, if the sovereignty could be given to the Union republics at the break-up of the Soviet Union, then why not to the autonomous republics. For example, the Chechens felt that Chechnya was a part of Russia by a historical accident. Kazakhstan was more close to Russia than Chechnya. As late as 1936 its status was similar to Chechnya, yet it became a separate country just because it had become a union republic.²³

²⁰C.D Harris,no.3, pp.543-97

²¹Kalapana Sahni, *Crucifying The Orient: Russian Orientalism and the Colonisation of the Caucasus and Central Asia*(Oslo: White Orchid Press), p.17

²² Edward W.Walker, no.11, p.14

²³ BenFowkes,no.6, p.18

After looking at all the above factors one imagines what was the role of religion in the demand for sovereignty by the republics. All of the factors listed above miss the central theme. It is true that most republics had raised a demand for separation from Russia in early 1990s, yet by 1992 only Chechnya and Tatarstan were left which had not ratified the Russian federation treaty of 1992.²⁴ Had this purely been a democratic republican struggle fanned by the dissatisfaction of the republics with the central government it would have been resolved like similar other cases. Had it been only a struggle by the regional elites for the control over the resources it could still have been resolved by the promise of more autonomy. What then was the factor that made these republics take an extremist stand? The answer will emerge only if one looks a bit deeper into the issue of the influence of religion in both Chechnya and Tataristan.

In Chechnya Sufism signifies religion. These Sufis had entered fairly recently in the region. The Sufis 'Sheikhs' often acquired reputation for miracles and their tombs became *Mazaar* which became places of pilgrimage. Sufism harmonized the religious teachings with many of the pre existing socio political structures such as clan-based organization of society. They also allowed many of the customs and traditions otherwise considered as unIslamic. It knitted the fractured North Caucasus society

²⁴ David Damrel, no.2, p.10

into mystical brotherhoods. The influence of these over the people was great. The two most popular Sufi orders were Naqshabandi and Qadiri. The mystical brotherhoods kept the Chechens united even during the deportation. At the height of religious repression during the Soviet era, people did not abandon their faith in Sufism. The Sufi brotherhoods were working clandestinely among the people. In this regard the Sufi's were helped by the fact that they do not require formal symbols of religion such as Mosques or priests.²⁵ Sufis believe in faith and worship and venerate the great Sufi saints. The Chechen also continued to venerate the Sufi saints even during the Soviet rule. As late as the 1970s, Soviet authorities testified to the abiding attraction of the *Mazaars* (tomb of the Sufi saints) listing more than seventy *Mazaars* in Dagestan and thirty in Chechnya.²⁶

Similarly in Tatarstan a sociological study performed by the Atheistic Institute in Penza Oblast shows that among the Russians 28.4 percent were believers, among the Tatars 31.5 percent were believers, In Gorkov Oblast the percentage of believing Muslims was sixty one percent among the Tatar women and forty percent among the men; in 1986. In 1965 various Tatar villages 40 to 50 percent of the parents named their children according to Muslim tradition and had their sons circumcised, 55

²⁵ Sanjay Kumar Pandey, no.5, pp. 121- 22

²⁶ David Damrel, no.2 ,p.10

to 60 percent had a Mullah performed the marriage ceremony and 90 percent had their dead buried according to religious rituals.²⁷ Thus, the Tatars in spite of the rigors of the soviet rule were able to preserve their religious beliefs. The Tatars have also been fiercely protective about their culture and are greatly proud of it.

The factor that it is ethnic consciousness of the Chechens and the Tatars that was responsible for their demand for sovereignty also becomes clear in this light, as religion and ethnicity are not antithetical. In fact religion reinforces ethnic consciousness, religion is sometimes an integral part of ethnicity.²⁸

Thus religion was an inseparable part of the consciousness of the Chechens and Tatars as a nation. Religion was an important component of the force that kept them united even in the face of repression and exploitation. This expression of nationhood emerged when Soviet era ended and state control weakened. It was hardly surprising then that these places demanded sovereignty. What makes these regions unique is their religious consciousness, which survived and played its role in keeping them united as a nation.

²⁷ N.Devlet, "Soviet Muslims:Kazan Tatars"

²⁸ Shams-Ud-Din, "The Ethnic And Religious Revival in Central Asia" in Shams-Ud-Din, *Nationalism In Russia And Central Asian Republics: Unfinished Democratic Revolution* (NewDelhi:Lancers Books,1999), pp. 189-191

THE RUSSO CHECHEN WAR

The OKChN which was headed by General Dzhokhar Dudaev deposed the government in Grozny and seized power in September 1991. After various attempts of reaching a compromise failed Yeltsin sent in the armed forces. The forces were however soon withdrawn. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the Russian forces deployed there had to leave under humiliating circumstances leaving all their arms and ammunition worth 1.11 billion rubles behind. From the time that Dudaev seized the government till the invasion of Chechnya in 1994, Dudaev's government maintained its tenacious existence. Opposition to Dudaev gradually emerged. In November 1992 Dudaev declared emergency. Next year he had to dissolve the Chechen parliament when a motion to impeach him was introduced. Since 1993 the Russian had started supporting various opposition groups of Dudaev but with the aim of itself not getting involved in armed confrontation. These opposition groups however were unsuccessful against Dudaev. The reason for this was although Dudaev's regime was not democratic other political groups in Chechnya could hardly claim any greater political legitimacy. The Russian government also imposed an economic embargo but was unsuccessful in implementing it. The oil and arms trade continued in the republic.

In September 1994 there was another armed attempt to dislodge the Dudaev regime. This time the attack was launched by the Provincial Council. This attack received covert military support from Russian armed forces. The attempt subsequently failed and about 21 Russian soldiers were captured. Chechnya now demanded that they be accepted as prisoners of war or else they shall be executed. The Russian government did not want to do so as it would mean covert recognition of the Chechen government. After all hope for a peaceful settlement ended the Russian President Yeltsin under pressure from public opinion and both Rightist and Leftist political parties ordered for Russian military columns to begin an offensive operation against Chechnya.²⁹

The question then arises what imperatives were there for the invasion of Chechnya. If the Dudaev regime was allowed to exist from 1991 to 1994 then why was it attacked only in 1994. Many reasons have been forwarded regarding the Russian invasion of Chechnya. The official justification has been that it was necessary for the protection of the integrity of the Russian Federation. The statements of Russian President himself and the Russian officials emphasised that if Chechnya was

²⁹ Pontus Siren, "The Battle for Grozny: The Russian Invasion of Chechnya, December 1994 – December 1996" in Ben Fowkes (ed.), *Russia and Chechnya, the Permanent Crisis: Essays on Russo-Chechen Relation* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 92-96.

allowed to leave the Federation other constituent republics would demand political independence. Another view maintains that Russia did not want to lose the mineral and oil resources that exist in Chechnya. A popular belief in Russia also is that Chechen war was fought for liquidating the many criminal gangs that had been operating in Chechnya.³⁰

Another reason for the invasion is the ‘blitzkrieg’ that is the Chechen invasion was stage managed by the Russian President.³¹ None of the above views completely explain the Russian invasion of Chechnya. Amongst these the views that it was the preservation of the Russian Federation and the attempt to dismantle the various criminal gangs that led to the invasion seem most improbable. For one if the Russian Federation was to be saved why was it only in 1994 that it was attacked. Chechnya was in all possible ways an independent territory since 1991. Secondly, the whole of Russia is infested with criminal gangs today, then to isolate Chechnya and attack for it would be the most implausible reason. As already mentioned it was a combination of factors that led to the invasion of Chechnya. These include the pressure from the military, which wanted to strengthen itself through the war. The representatives of the military in

³⁰ Valery Tishkov, no.7, pp. 190

³¹ Ibid. pp.191

the government and some cabinet ministers deliberately gave the scenario of a rapid conquest of Chechnya specially Grozny.³² The aims of the army establishment were further helped by the strategic location of Chechnya as it is the 'gateway to Russia' from the south and also it contain economic resources although its importance should not be over emphasised. Finally the personal initiative of Yeltsin also account for the Russian invasion. Although he did not stage-manage the war he could not have afforded not to respond to the provocation by the Chechens as he was under tremendous pressure from both the Left and Right wing political parties. In all of this, the capture of Russian soldiers worked as a catalyst and precipitated the war.

The war in Chechnya proved to be a failure. Instead of the rapid conquest of the territory the Russians got involved in the war for two years and without any positive outcome for them. The attack on Grozny in December-January 1994-1996 also known as New-year eve's attack, inspite of heavy firepower being used by the Russian could not dislodge the Chechen rebels. Grozny could come under Russian control only in February 1995. But by that time the theatre of the war had shifted to the countryside and the hills. The fighting in Chechnya now became Guerilla

³² Oleg Grinevsky, "Comparing Soviet and Russian Decision -Making in Afghanistan and Chechnya", North Caucuses Newsletter, Issue 6, Fall 1998, pp.3-11

warfare. This was history repeating itself. The Chechens could not win in the plains but could not be defeated in the hills. The hills were their familiar territory.

In the Chechen war there were heavy casualties from both sides. This was further aggravated by the Russian bombardments of the cities and villages, in order to flush out the Chechen rebels, thus causing heavy civilian casualties. All this further estranged the Chechens from the Russians.

The main reasons for the Russian failure were the high quality of Chechen resistance. A number of Chechen fighters had served in Afghanistan and were familiar with the tactics of the Russian army. A large proportion of the Chechen population was also mobilised with even civilian citizens participating in the war. The poor planning of the operation and the poor stranded of the Russian forces comprising mostly young inexperienced soldiers were also the reasons for the Russian failure.³³

It shall be a futile exercise to determine whether the demands for sovereignty prompted religious revivalism in Chechnya or vice versa. The Russo–Chechen war has been viewed as a clash of two religions Christianity and Islam, rather between two civilizations the Christian west and the Islamic east³⁴. The region of Chechnya falls in the zone of fault lines which are the most volatile areas, where two different civilizations come into conflict with each other. In this scheme religious revivalism is

³³ Pontus Siren, no.29, p. 128.

seen as preceding the demands for sovereignty in Chechnya and Tatarstan. In fact it is seen as a main determinant of these demands. What is inherent in this argument is to see religious or Islamic revivalism in Chechnya and Tatarstan as fundamentalist. Fundamentalism as already discussed is a call for return to the purer and older form of religion. It has a definite agenda of redefining religion in this case Islam. This particular definition of Islam is arrived at by a few individuals who are intolerant to dissention and may even use violent means. Islamic Fundamentalism is inextricably linked with the call of pan-Islamism that is uniting the Muslims living in different geographical, political and cultural divisions into a single entity. This Pan-Islamism in fact traces its identity in terms of the non-Muslim world and in that sense it is negative, it is often directed against the non-Muslim world.

So does this phenomena exist in Tatarstan and Chechnya . Firstly Islamic revivalism and demand for sovereignty in these areas emerged almost simultaneously and it is very difficult to place them in a sequential manner, secondly Islamic revival has definitely taken place in Chechnya and Tatarstan attendance at Mosques in Chechnya is rising and there is enormous pride in the value system it instills. Similarly Tatarstan also witnessed a revivalism of Islam . Mosques that had been converted to other uses in the Soviet period were returned to the Muslim clergy and restored, including the prestigious Azimov Mosque in Kazan. New Mosques were built particularly elaborate Mosques appeared in

³⁴ Samuel P Huntington, Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of World Order, (New Delhi: Penguin

Naberezhnye Chelny , Nizhnekamsk and Bugul'ma. The number of pilgrims to Mecca have risen and Muslim clergy has become much more active in educational and missionary work. Islamic revival was given a boost by the celebration in August 1989 of the eleventh centennial of the adoption of Islam by the Volga Bulgars. A pole taken in 1989 indicated that the percentage of Tatars professing Islam had increased from 15.7 percent of 1980 to 43.4 percent.³⁵

In spite of this there is no indication that these republics are converting to fundamentalist Islam. The Islamic revival which is taking place here is not of the fundamentalist nature. There is no call for Pan-Islamism. In Chechnya the traditional religious elite mainly the Sufis are opposed to the fundamentalist Islam being preached by those coming from the Arabian countries. The fact that Chechens supported a secular and moderate Maskhadov and before him Dudaev is an indication that the Chechens have not strayed towards Islamic fundamentalism. In Tatarstan the people continued to show their faith in Shaimiev who is moderate and secular. He in fact steered Tatarstan towards a compromise with Russia. On February 14, 1994 was signed a treaty entitled "On the Delimitation Of Jurisdictional Authority and the Mutual Delegation of Powers Between the

Books, 1997), pp.95-120.

³⁵ Edward W Walker, no.11,p.14

State Bodies of the Russian Federation and State Bodies of the Republic of Tataristan.” The treaty was signed by President Yeltsin and Shaimiev and Prime Ministers Chernomyrdin and Sabirov. An additional five inter-government agreements were signed at the same day bringing the total agreements to twelve. The key element of the agreements that while Tataristan recognizes that it as a part of the Russian federation, Russia recognizes that Tatarstan is united with it through a treaty and the two parties to the treaty are formally equal³⁶.

Thus now technically speaking there is a separatist demand only in Chechnya. The fact that Tataristan had a big Russian minority all most 43 percent. It is surrounded Bu Russia from all sides, Tatars have taken to an urban living, they are more into modern professions; all contributed in Tatarstan finally reaching a compromise and taking a different path than Chechnya.

In Chechnya on the other hand Chechens mostly live in rural areas and have not taken to urban lifestyle. The scars and trauma of deportation have also contributed to the Chechens taking an uncompromising stand. Never the less in the aftermath of the Russo Chechen war there was

³⁶ Ibid. and Text of: Treaty Between The Russian Federation and the Republic of Tatarstan, <www.tatar.ru.com>

Khasavayurt agreement between Russia and Chechnya, by which both the parties agreed to defer the issue of Chechen sovereignty till 2001. This agreement was later ratified as a treaty in 1997.³⁷

³⁷ Sanjay Kumar Pandey, no. 5, p.117-119

Chapter 3

CURRENT PHASE OF ISLAMIC REVIVALISM IN RUSSIA: ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM AND MILITANCY IN CHECHNYA AND DAGESTAN

The people of North Caucasus have been traditionally the followers of Sufism. After the break up of the Soviet Union restrictions on religion ended and there was a reassertion of age old religious beliefs of the people. There was thus an Islamic revival, which was definitely taking place, but it was in the form of Sufism (which is not fundamentalist rather moderate and lenient). Sufism had been suppressed during the Tsarist and Soviet period. In the recent past however the nature of this Islamic revival has undergone some changes. The reason is the entry of radical Islamists or Islamic fundamentalists, who have made inroads in the region. The Russians however understand these Islamic fundamentalists as 'Wahabbis'. Wahabbism is an Islamic puritan movement that emerged in the early 18th century and was adopted by the Saudi ruling family in 1744. It will not be far fetched to call it fundamentalist in the true sense of the word as it calls for a return to the original teaching of the Quran and Mohammad and opposes changes in Islamic doctrine. It is still the version of Islam embraced by the Saudi royal family. It is now

widespread not only in the Arabian Peninsula but also increasingly in other areas such as Pakistan.¹ For the Russians however Wahabbism is the name of any kind of politicised Islam, which demands a separate homeland for Muslims. There has been great paranoia in Russia and even in the west about Wahabbism. As a result the term "Wahabbism" has been overused and abused by government officials and the media in Russia. They tend to blame all unrest in the region on this order. But Wahabbism is one amongst the many radical Islamist movements, which have entered Russia. Regardless of the banner, however, it is true that radical Islam has made inroads in some sections of the population in Southern Russia, mainly in Chechnya and Dagestan.

Radical Islamists first got a foothold in Russia when during the close of the Soviet era the iron curtain got lifted and there was resumption of contacts between Soviet Muslims and the Muslims abroad, mainly through the 'Hadj' pilgrimages. It was not that the governments of Saudi Arabia or other Arab regimes were spreading Islamic fundamentalism, for they had terrorist threats of their own. There were some Saudi individuals however who contributed funds for the construction of mosques, and 'Hadj; pilgrimages.

¹ Edward W. Walker, "Islam in Chechnya", North Caucasus News Letter, Issue 6, Fall 1998, p.17

CHECHNYA

In this regard the watershed was the Russo-Chechen war of 1994-96.² During that period, Islam had provided spiritual support to fighters facing militarily superior (at least on paper) Russian forces. There was an increase in reliance on Islam in maintaining discipline and enforcing orders. The rise of radical Islam thus has a beginning in this war. Islamic fundamentalism has also got a foothold because of the rise of Islamic militancy in Chechnya and other parts of the North Caucasus. The militants are of various nationalities who have taken refuge in North Caucasus particularly in Chechnya. These militants are the veterans of Chechen, Abkhaz and Afghan conflicts.³ It can be thus said that the demons of the past are now coming to haunt the North Caucasian region. North Caucasus specially Chechnya is a safe haven for such elements, due to the breakdown of government there. These militants are in the possession of sophisticated weapons they are also knowledgeable about terror tactics, bomb making and the use of biological weapons.⁴ They have carried a series of terrorist attacks in

² Pontus Siren, "The battle for Grozny" in Ben Fowkes(ed.), *Russia and Chechnya: The Permanent Crisis, Essays on Russo-Chechen Relations*(Houndmills: Macmillan Press,1998), p. 87-130

³ Yossef Bodansky, "Chechnya:The Mujahedin Factor, January 1998", 05/06/2000, <www.americanfriends.org/Kashmir/chechnya_K23-1.html>

(Yossef Bodansky is the director of the Task Force on Terrorism and unconventional Warfare of the US Congress, as well as World Terrorism. He is also an analyst with the Freeman Centre for Strategic Studies, Houston Texas)

⁴ "archive: Bin Laden help bankroll Dagestan war, expert says", 5/6/2000, <www.sjmercury.com/premium/world/docs/dagestan10.htm>

Russia.⁵ Crime syndicates increasingly control the region.⁶ They indulge in smuggling of narcotics, abduction of Russians, members of the international community (such as journalists, aid workers) and prosperous people of the region. The authority of Chechen President is considerably diminished as local military leaders who maintain their own fiefdom in Chechnya and have become a rival centre of power, control the region. The call of fundamentalist Islam, which includes Wahabbism, is greatest amongst these militants, as they have no employment opportunity. They possess few skills beyond war fighting and few other career options in these impoverished lands. Islam provides a cause to sustain their fight – and more fighting produces more generations of people uprooted from their homes and professions. The categorical moral purity of the Islamic message also appeals to those disillusioned with corruption and poverty plaguing the former Soviet republics. Their only job is to continue the armed struggle whether it is the Russians, the traditional religious elite, political moderates or occupiers of traditional Chechen land. An unfortunate fallout of the rise of Islamic militancy and fundamentalism is that the Chechen President Maskhadov (a former

⁵ “A series of terrorist acts Shakes Russia, 10.09.1999, Chronology of event – NUPI, Centre for Russian Studies”, <www.nupi.no/_vti_bin/shtml.exe/RUSSLAND-DATABASE>

⁶ see Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and After the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997), pp. 208-209 and Pontus Siren, “Battle for Grozny: The Russian Invasion of Chechnya, December 1994-1996” in Ben Fowkes, *Russia and Chechnia, The Permanent Crisis: Essays on Russo-Chechen Relations*, (Hound Mill: MacMillan 1998), pp. 87-145

Soviet army officer and known moderate up till recently) under pressure from these elements has declared of transforming the Chechen Republic (renamed as Republic of Ichkeria in 1992)⁷ formally into an Islamic state. He has declared that the Republic would be renamed as 'Islamic Republic of Ichkeria'. In 1997, the Chechen government announced a ban on alcohol sales, introduced Islamic law (*Sharia*), established *Sharia* courts and two public executions were carried according to it.⁸ In spite of this people have remained secular Islamic fundamentalism has made an impact only in certain sections of the population such as the militant youths as discussed above. A reason for this has been that in the North Caucasus Islamic fundamentalism is greatly opposed by the Sufis and the traditional clergy. They see it as a threat to their influence and position. The Islamic radicals are seen as Arab sympathizers who are introducing a militant and fundamentalist brand of Islam into the region. It is alien to the traditional forms of Islam i.e. Sufism which follows moderate Islamic practices. More importantly it hurts the traditional Sufi loyalties of the Chechen people as Wahabbism considers Sufism particularly the veneration of Sufi masters and the pilgrimages to their *mazaars* as un-Islamic. The fact that Chechens

⁷ Ben Fowkes, *Russia and Chechnia, The Permanent Crisis: Essays on Russo-Chechen Relations*, (Hound Mill: MacMillan 1998), p. 3

⁸ Edward W. Walker, no.1.

had voted for moderate and secular Maskhadov over his more radical rival⁹ is a proof that people preferred secularism, internal order and moderate Sufism to fundamentalist Islam.

DAGESTAN

The impact of Islamic fundamentalism has also been felt in the Dagestan. The republic has traditionally been practising Sufi Islam but in the 1990s Wahhabi emissaries and other Muslim radicals from Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries indulged in propagating their beliefs. They have appointed Imams and have built mosque without the official consent of the local Muslims Religious Board and are sending young men to get religious education in colleges abroad. This has been an eye sore for traditional religious leadership.¹⁰ Two people were killed and several injured in the village of Chaban-Makhi in the month of May 1997. These were not the first of clashes, similar ones had also occurred in the summer of 1995 and in 1996.¹¹ Most of the population in the North Caucasus region including has historically been Muslim, dominated by the Naqshabandi (later the Qadiri order also became popular)¹² Sufi order. This particular order blended original pre-Muslim traditions with Islamic customs; this aberration

⁹ 'Turnout heavy as Chechens pick a president', Web posted at 8:00 p.m. EST, January 27, 1997, <www.CNN.com/world/9701/27/chechnya.vote>.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Fuller "Russia: Dagestan Faces Religious Rivalries And tensions, Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty 1997", <www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/dstansuller1905.html>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ben Fowkes (ed.), no. 6, p. 5

was further strengthened through the decades of isolation from the rest of the Muslim world, during the Soviet rule. Sufi Islam survived even the darkest years of Soviet religious persecution and became closely intertwined with nationalism and with the existing social structures in most North Caucasus republics, this was also the case in Dagestan.¹³

However, there are some changes in nature of religious beliefs in the region. 'Wahabi' missionaries in the Caucasus are openly hostile to the traditional Sufi Islam of the region, particularly the pre-Muslim traditions and peculiar local rituals. But just like in Chechnya here also the rise of the radical Islamic followers encountered violent opposition from both local religious authorities and parts of population. They were suspected of having killed Dagestan's Mufti, the country's religious leader¹⁴. Deadly clashes between Islamic radicals and Sufis became a regular occurrence in Dagestan in the late 1990s. The situations had been different earlier the 'Wahabis' in the North Caucasus used to number a few, with minimal influence; but religious radicalization produced by the Russo-Chechen war, the arrival of former Arab *Mujahedin* who had served in Afghanistan and, above all, Arab money, have since made a strong impact.

¹³ David Damrel, 'The Religious Roots of Conflict in Russia and Chechnya', *Religious Studies News*, Vol. 10, No. 3, p.10

¹⁴ Elizabeth Fuller, no. 10

In spite of this Dagestan is a myriad of many ethnic nationalities and is too complex for simplistic solutions. Dagestan opens on the Caspian Sea and the coastal plain of Dagestan is the only North-South passage in winters.¹⁵ There are about 30 ethnic groups in Dagestan, the largest of which were the , Avars followed by Dargins, Kumyks, Lezgins, Russians and Laks.¹⁶ Dagestan is marred by interethnic conflicts. These include the conflicts between Laks and Chechens and Chechens and Avars. Chechens were deported along with the Ingush from their homes in Dagestan and Chechnya at the time of the mass deportations in 1944.¹⁷ They were repatriated only in 1956. They have however experienced problems in returning to their old homes taken over by Avars and Laks.¹⁸ It is therefore imperative that the stability is maintained among the ethnic groups in Dagestan. Dagestan's highest executive authority, the State Council, is composed of one representative of each of fourteen major ethnic groups. The makeup of the Constitutional Assembly, which elects the State Council and makes amendments to the Constitution, also reflects the relative size of ethnic groups. Moreover, the Constitutional Assembly elects State

¹⁵ Shirin Akiner, *Islamic People of the Soviet Union* (London:Routledge and Keegan Paul), 1986, p.123

¹⁶ Paul B Henze., 'Demography of the Caucasus : According to 1989 Soviet Census Data', *Central Asian Survey* Vol.10 No. 1-2, October 1991,p.161

¹⁷ William Flemming, 'The Deportation of the Chechen and the Inguish People: A Critical Examination In Fowkes Ben (ed.), *Russia and Chechnya the Permanent Crisis: Essays on Russo-Chechen Relations*(Houndmills: MacMillan Press, 1998), p. 65

¹⁸ Elizabeth Fuller, no. 10.

Council candidates on a cross-ethnic vote, which encourages the office-seekers to obtain support from outside their ethnic group.¹⁹ This system is built to maintain the ethnic stability in the region. In spite of this there are interethnic conflicts present in Dagestan. For example, the Chechen minority who had been deported from their homes in Dagestan, have been demanding the return of their ancestral lands which had been subsequently taken over by the Avars. Some Lezgins pursue unification with their kin in Azerbaijan²⁰, and the Kumyks have called for an independent state. In such a complex situation where there are different ethnic nationalities and which are constantly fighting with each other the call of fundamentalism is not enough to bring them together. Where Sufism, which has deep roots in Dagestan failed to bring the different nationalities together it is unlikely that the call of Islamic fundamentalism will succeed where Sufism failed.

Today the issue of Islamic fundamentalism and militancy has become closely linked with the Chechens in Dagestan, known as Chechen-Akkins, which number around 70,000, In recent years the state of Chechen-Akkins' relations with Chechnya fluctuated. For example, Chechens in Dagestan remained, for the most part, neutral

¹⁹ Robert Chenciner and Magomedkhanov, "Dagestan Avoids Violence", Paper Presented at the conference on the contemporary North Caucasus, School of Oriented and African Studies, University of London, London, 22-23 April, 1999), pp.12-13.

²⁰ "More ethnic unrest in Dagestan, 07.10.98, Chronology of events, NUPI, Centre for Russian Studies, Database", 23.5.2000, <www.nupi.no/_vti_bin/shtml.exe/RUSSLAND-DATABASE>

during the 1994-96 Chechen-Russian war. Individual Chechens and another closely related ethnic group, the Ando-Dido, however, opened their territories to serve as supply routes for fighters in Chechnya. The latest conflict followed a similar pattern - official Chechen organizations took a neutral or opposing stance on the invasion, while the reaction among people ranged from quiet sympathy to support. The National Council of Chechens in Dagestan responded to the outbreak of fighting in early August, 1999 with sharply worded criticism. "Armed religious fanatics are trying to seize power...the Chechen people definitively condemn such methods of dealing with existing problems," read the Council's August 11 statement. The reality was more ambiguous. Chechen-Akkins have a number of outstanding issues with other ethnic groups in Dagestan. The returnees were forced to resettle elsewhere –and have since harbored a grudge against the government of Dagestan. This act of injustice has a ground for driving the Chechen-Akkin population closer to Chechnya. Unable to recover the lost lands themselves, many Chechens-Akkins hope for a union of the defacto independent Chechnya with their original territories in Dagestan.²¹ But the official Chechen organisations have

²¹ Akkin, Chechens call for border revision, 19.10.98, Chronology of events, NUPI, Centre for Russian Studies, Database”, 23.5.2000, <www.nupi.no/_vti_bin/shtml.exe/RUSSLAND-DATABASE>

taken a neutral or opposing stand on the invasion.²² While the reaction among people ranged from quiet sympathy to support. The only support for the invading Chechens were the number of communities which had openly denounced the Dagestani government's policy and declared the rule of Islamic *Sharia* law on their territory. By some estimates, over 60 such localities exist in the republic, mostly in the central Dagestan region of Buynaksk. In August 1998, residents of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi proclaimed their villages independent Islamic territory.²³ Following talks with then-Russian Interior Minister and later Prime Minister Sergei Stepansin, the rebels rescinded their declaration of independence, but they retained their weapons and control over the settlements.²⁴ The 1998 showdown prompted to villagers to make a number of defensive fortifications, stockpiling weapons and digging underground structures. The extent of the preparations became clear a year later when Russian forces needed more than two weeks to subdue the villages with air support and heavy artillery. By August 1999 when fighting between militants and

²² 'Dagestani Leadership protests Incursion', 7/9/99, Chronology of events, NUPI, Centre for Russian Studies, Database", 2.6.2000, <www.nupi.no/_vti_bin/shtml.exe/RUSSLAND-DATABASE>

²³ 'Dagestan placates rebellious villagers, 03.09.98, Chronology of events, NUPI, Centre for Russian Studies, Database", 25.5.2000, <www.nupi.no/_vti_bin/shtml.exe/RUSSLAND-DATABASE>

²⁴ Ibid.

Russians began, some 10,000 residents lived under effective self-rule and villages governed by strict Islamic laws.

The link between the Islamic radicals and Chechnya goes beyond common goals—in December 1997 the militants from Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi allegedly joined a Chechen raiding party in an attack against the Russian armored brigade near Buynaksk, ending in three deaths. Shamil Basayev has stated that he wants a union of Chechnya and Dagestan under an Islamic banner. There were at least three potential sources of assistance to Basayev – the local Chechen population of Dagestan, the Wahabi community, and the fighters reporting to the Khachilayev brothers.²⁵ The Khachilayev brothers represent the gangster politicians in Dagestan. They are suspected of involvement in the terrorist attack on Makhachkala in which 18 people were killed, they had also captured the Parliament building in Makhachkala by force.²⁶

CONFLICT IN DAGESTAN

It was against this background that militants from Chechnya invaded Dagestan. Militants in Chechnya welcomed the holding out of few rebellious villagers. They saw this issue as an opportunity and a

²⁵ 'Situation in Dagestan Remains Tense, 16/09/98, Chronology of events, NUPI, Centre for Russian Studies, Database', <www.nupi.no/_vti_bin/shtml.exe/RUSSLAND-DATABASE>, 25.5.2000

²⁶ "archive: Bin Laden help bankroll Dagestani war, expert says", no. 4

justification to invade Dagestan. Apart from helping the rebellious villages the militants wanted to incorporate those regions in Dagestan where the Chechen-Akkins live. which are occupied by the Chechens. According to the words of Shamil Basayev himself, he wanted a union of Chechnya and Dagestan under one Islamic banner.²⁷ The militants were led by Shamil Basayev himself and they entered Dagestan in the month of August 1999. The insurgents perhaps also timed the offensive to take advantage of political and economic instability in Russia proper. The present President and the then Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, took office just days after the Aug. 7 invasion of Dagestan. These militants were very well-armed with anti-tank weapons, Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, heavy mortars and armored cars. This was a culmination of a series of violent raids that had been taking place on Chechen-Dagestan border since the past few years. The intrusion was led and masterminded by Shamil Basayev. His involvement makes it clear that by the militant activity in Dagestan is closely linked with internal politics in Chechnya and the gradual penetration of the Islamic militants in the North Caucasian region. Basayev is the opponent of the Chechen President Aslan

27 'EXCLUSIVE: Interview with Shamil Basayev.', 2/6/2000, <muslimmag.org/webversion/caucasus/basayev_interview.htm>

Maskhadov.²⁸ He is one of the warlords in Chechnya who acts on his own independent authority. Through this conflict Basayev has put Mashkhadov in an impossible situation siding with Moscow against Basayev would expose to the wrath of the various field commanders who run Chechnya as their personal fiefdoms. While siding with Basayev Maskhadov runs the risk of provoking Russian military action against Chechnya. The armed men from Chechnya occupied a number of villages and strategic points in the Botlikh region of Dagestan. After days of fighting, a combined force of Russian Federation troops and self-defense units formed by local inhabitants dislodged the combatants from their positions.

But the trouble for Russian did not end, as they had to still fight the radical Islamic villages in the Buynaksk region of Dagestan. These villages had renounced the secular governments of Dagestan and Russia in 1998 itself.²⁹ Enjoying a de-facto independent status since then. But this situation was now different as no longer the Russians were fighting the Chechen leaders rather they were attacking the native Dagestanis. This could result in wide spread resentment against Russia in Dagestan. Perhaps thinking that the Chechen invaders could

²⁸ "Dagestani Leadership protests Incursion, 7/9/99, Chronology of events, NUPI, Centre for Russian Studies, Database", 2.6.2000, <www.nupi.no/_vti_bin/shtml.exe/RUSSLAND-DATABASE>

²⁹ "Dagestan Placates Rebellious Villager, 3/9/98, Chronology of events, NUPI, Centre for Russian Studies, Database", no. 22

use this as an advantage they returned again in September. But as in the previous case, local resistance and federal troops repelled the invasion.³⁰

The territories controlled by the Islamic radicals i.e. the rebellious villages in the Buynask region, had remained largely quiet during the first invasion of militants from Chechnya. Their inactivity, however, did not spare the rebellious villages from near-destruction in the latter stage of the war. When the combined Russian and Dagestani defense troops forced Shamil Basayev's forces to retreat for the first time, the Russians set about disarming the villages. Local population resisted, triggering a fierce battle concentrated primarily on the villages of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi. At the height of the battle, in September 1999, the militant groups from nearby Chechnya reappeared to the north of the villages, prompting concerns in Moscow and Dagestan that their forces may become overstretched. The invading forces, however, could not be held off. Russian forces briefly occupied Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi on September 3 but defenders succeeded in forcing the troops to retreat few days later. The two villages finally fell on September 12th.³¹ While never directly linking up with Chechen insurgents, the Islamic radicals aided their cause

³⁰ "Islamic militancy expelled from Dagestan, 16.09.99, Chronology of events, NUPI, Centre for Russian Studies, Database", 1.6.2000, <www.nupi.no/_vti_bin/shtml.exe/RUSSLAND-DATABASE>

nevertheless by tying down large numbers of Russian forces after the latter attacked villages in the Buynaksk region. The combined units of Russian military, Interior Ministry, and the Dagestani defense forces, however, proved strong enough to prevail in both places of fighting simultaneously. Despite the defeat of the insurgents there is still tension in the region. The Russian forces had repeatedly bombed the rebel bases in Chechnya during this campaign. As a result there were fears of another Chechen-Russian war.

Basayev's forces, were only around 1,200 strong, they could not have hoped to capture Dagestan without the help of the local population. For a variety of reasons, local support for the Chechens never materialized, at least not on the scale required for such ambitious undertaking as the conquest of Dagestan. The refusal of the Dagestanis to cooperate and their active resistance to the invasion was perhaps the single most important factor foiling the insurgents' plans. But the important question is that why did the Dagestani oppose the Chechen? The answer lies in the ethnic diversity of Dagestan. Radical Islam has failed to cut across the many ethnic divides in Dagestan.

While the marriage of nationalist and religious appeals fueled the Chechens' fight, the same link had undermined the efforts by Basayev and other radicals in Dagestan. Radical Islam has failed to cut

³¹ Ibid.

across the many ethnic divides in Dagestan. If a fundamentalist Islamic state were to be formed in Dagestan, crucial issues would have to be solved: Which, if any, ethnic group, would dominate? Can the difference be solved without resort to violence? Thus Ethnic allegiances in Dagestan seem to supersede and sometimes directly contradict religious affiliations. The religious radicals in Dagestan are seen as too closely linked to specific ethnic groups, which elicits mistrust and suspicion among the rest. For example, the Khachilaev brothers Magomed and Nadyr, whose gunmen seized the parliament Makhachkala on May, 21.1998 and briefly raised the Islamic green flag over the building, also represent the Laks – a relatively small but politically powerful ethnic group. Magomed headed the Laks' political organization, Kazi-Kumukh.³² Some authors point out that Islamic fundamentalists draw most support among Dagestan's most powerful ethnic groups – the Avars and Dargins, and the Chechen-Akkins. But such division inevitably sows mistrust among the Lezgins, Tats and other smaller groups. Consequently, it is very unlikely that any one religious school of thought will acquire hold over all of Dagestan. An attempt by the larger ethnic groups to impose religious rule on the rest of Dagestan would probably lead to the country's disintegration and

³² 'Dagestan's Laks demand their leaders' release, 17.09.98, Chronology of events, NUPI, Centre for Russian Studies, Database", 5.6.2000, <www.nupi.no/_vti_bin/shtml.exe/RUSSLAND-DATABASE>

inter-ethnic violence. Since most Dagestanis feared this violent scenario, they also opposed the intervention from Chechnya and actively resisted Basayev's fighters – with few notable exceptions. Until now, the people in Dagestan have opposed the Islamic militants who want Dagestan to separate from Russia. The continued presence of Religious radicalization, social tensions, and the increasing presence of armed militants, however, may yet cause this political contract to unravel. An important reason for Dagestani support to Russia is the Dagestani belief that Russia is a strong link that binds Dagestan's disparate ethnic groups together. The use of the Russian language and the sense of belonging to the Russian Federation gives Dagestanis a degree of unity which the country would normally lack. Some observers go as far as predict that the "Russian withdrawal would inevitably trigger a disastrous struggle between Dagestan's around 30 different nationalities. The economic assistance provided by Russia has also been a consideration. This assistance, however, is far from sufficient to solve Dagestan's mounting economic woes. Social tensions Unemployment, poverty and popular anger at corruption are fueling the rising wave of radical Islam in Dagestan and elsewhere in former Soviet Union More than 85 percent of the Dagestan's wealth is in the hands of 200 families, while most of its 2.2 million residents live far below the poverty line. Overall unemployment is about 30

percent, and tops 80 percent among workers younger than 25. In fact economic instability has increased resentment towards Moscow in Dagestan and this was another reason why Chechen and international Islamist groups began targeting Dagestan.³³

THE PAN-ISLAMIC DIMENSION OF MILITANCY IN NORTH CAUCASUS

While in the Russo-Chechen war Chechen alone were involved in Dagestan there is evidence of Islamic militancy, which has linkages across international borders. A well-trained international force is waging the war unfolding in Russia's Dagestan province. Far from being a rag tag group, the insurgents are a multi-national force disciplined and well armed. According to the words of Shamil Basayev himself the insurgents in Dagestan is an international corps comprising Chechen, Dagestani and other nationals. According to him 'in the Botlikh operation:' five of his men which included '14 Chechens, 8 Dagestani, 5 Arabs, 3 Turks, 2 Uzbeks, 2 Ingush were killed.'³⁴ Shamil Basayev is the principal field commander who was commander of Chechen forces during the Russo-Chechen war of 1994-1996. There has also been a flow of 'Mujahidin'(Islamic warriors) i.e. the insurgents from Afghanistan and Pakistan, Bosnia ,

³³ "archive:Bin Laden helped bankroll Dagestan war, expert says", no. 4

³⁴ "EXCLUSIVE: Interview with Shamil Basayev", no. 27

Middle East, Egypt and Sudan. The well armed fighters have been trained months ago at secret bases in Chechnya and other Muslim countries of Pakistan, Sudan, and Afghanistan Shamil Basayev himself visited Pakistan and Afghanistan twice recently to inspect and modify the training programmes provided to his people. By 1997, several hundreds of Chechen were being trained in ISI-sponsored camps near Warsaj (Takhar), Jabal ol-Saraj (Parwan), Khowst (Paktia), and other smaller sites. Some 250 Chechens were undergoing clandestine training in a camp near Peshawar by ISI operatives and expert terrorists from Egypt and Sudan. Some 100 Chechens were being trained by the ISI in the Lahore area, in sophisticated terrorism and urban warfare. Several hundred 'Mujahidin', mainly Afghans and Chechens were also being trained by the HizbAllah in Sudan. In Afghanistan Mohammed Ali Akhund organised a Taliban force for deployment in Chechnya. Most important are the Islamic commanders from Afghanistan, Pakistan and other Arab states. They are all veterans of Afghan, Balkan and Chechen conflicts, who built a new generation of Chechen 'Mujahidin'. They also constitute the core of the elite terrorists and the special operations unit of the Chechens. They train cadres from other Caucasian states and nationalities. The aim of the countries, which support Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, is that this region right

from Afghanistan to Caucasus would come under their influence. The specifics of the impending escalation in Chechnya were decided in the summit of the senior commanders of the HizbAllah international, held in Mogadishu, Somalia. Among the participants were also Osama Bin Laden and the Commander of the al-quds Forces based in Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Yemen. The summit decided to deploy between 500 and 700 'Afghan' *Mujahidin* (Arabs, Pakistanis, Afghans, etc.) to Chechnya. These *Mujahidin* came from camps in Afghanistan (particularly ISI-run camps under the normal supervision of Abdul Rasul Sayyaf), as well as Sudan and Lebanon (a combination of the recently trained Chechen HizbAllah, and HizbAllah veterans from Persian Gulf states and Bosnia. The ISI was also directly responsible for the transportation, logistics and the transfer of weapons to Chechnya. The in charge of the Pakistani part of the operation was General Asharaf of the ISI. He was the head of the ISI branch in charge of support for Islamist causes and he also, met Basayev in 1994. Additional funds were moved to Chechnya from Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf via Western Europe.³⁵ Although this has been denied by Shamil Basayev.³⁶ Follow up decisions on the accelerated implementation of these designs were reached in the follow up summit

³⁵ Yossef Bodansky, no. 4

³⁶ "EXCLUSIVE: Interview with Shamil Basayev", no. 27

of the commanders of the HizbAllah International that was also held in Mogadishu, Somalia. The implementation of these plans almost began immediately, by October, 1996 at least 200 Mujahidin were already sent to Chechnya from camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Pakistani minister of interior, Maj. General (ret,) Naseerullah Khan Babar, personally arranged for the safe conduct for these insurgents through both the Taliban and Ahmad Shah Masood lines, as part of the Pakistani mediation effort in Afghanistan. From North eastern Afghanistan these militants were transported eastward on the supply route, which had been established for the Afghan *Mujahidins* during the Soviet-Afghan war of the 1980s. They were then taken to camps near Chitral. From there were flown to Chechnya from a nearby airport already used by the ISI for traffic in and out of the Commonwealth of independent states. About 100 *Mujahidins* from the Arab countries also reached Chechnya from bases in Sudan and Yemen. These *Mujahidin* reached Chechnya via Iran and Afghanistan and Azerbaizan.³⁷ Further Chechen *Mujahidin* trained in Pasdaran run HizbAllah camps in Biqaa by November 1996.³⁸ According to some reports there could also be a role of fugitive Saudi millionaire who may have financing these militants. Bin Laden has often expressed his

³⁷ "archive;Bin Laden helped bankroll Dagestan war, expert says", no. 4

³⁸ Yossef Bodansky, no. 3

desire to see Islam supreme in the World and to end what he calls western and other countries oppression of the Muslims Bin Laden, has been accused by the US of orchestrating the US Embassy Bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. To achieve his motive he believes in terrorist methods. In Chechnya Bin Laden communicated through his secret emissaries to arrange financing, training and arms shipment to the region. He may have used clandestine e-mail network to finance these activities. He also made a week long visit to the village of Serzhen-Yurt in Chechnya shortly before the rebels crossed into Dagestan.³⁹ Other outsiders who have a role in the region are Husan al-Turabi, leader of Sudan's National Islamic Front and Ameer Khattab who is perhaps a Jordanian. In Chechnya numerous *Mujahidin* commanders who belong to other Muslim countries are now serving as assistants and aides to key Chechen commanders. Ameer Khattab is one of them, who is working with ShamyI Basayev.⁴⁰ Prior to his arrival in Chechnya, he had fought in Afghanistan and in several Persian Gulf countries. He also claims to have personally conducted a number of terrorist strikes against Israeli and French citizens. In Chechnya, Khattab established an elite force of veteran *Mujahidin* and Islamist Chechen that played a central role in

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "EXCLUSIVE Interview with ShamyI Basayev" no. 27

some of the more demanding battles and terrorist strikes. He is a revered commander, considered harsh but caring and fair. A specialist in sabotage and subversive activity, Khattab was in command of the special forces that destroyed a Russian armoured convoy near the village of Serzhen-Yurt and Yarysh-Mardy in the Spring of 1996. In 1997 Khattab converted to peacetime operations. He established terrorists-commando training schools near the village of Serzhen-Yurt, Vedenno Rayon, where he and several of his senior veteran 'Afghan' and 'Bosnian' 'Mujahidin' serve as instructors.⁴¹

In the process of trying to flush out the militants and take control of the rebellious Dagestani villages Russians have started bombing the border areas of Chechnya. This has created the frightful prospect of another Russo-Chechen war. Russia, which will soon reinforce its 15,000 soldiers in the troubled North Caucasus region, thus finds itself mired in an escalating crisis which could be even worse than its disastrous war in Chechnya, which cost Russia tens of thousands of lives. The Russian bombardments have also created a refugee crisis. The Chechens are fleeing into the neighboring Ingushetia. In spite of the Russian claims that it would finish off the war in a brief period, the conflict seems to be long drawn out. According to Alexander Iskandaryan, head of the Center for Caucasian Studies in

⁴¹ Yossef Bodansky, no. 3

Moscow. “The Russian authorities were not quite sincere when they were saying this war would soon be over”.⁴²

At the time of the writing of this study the conflict was going on. There are also larger issues at stake. Russian President Vladimir Putin has sought this as an opportunity to increase his prestige amongst the Russians. In seeking a victory in this war he wants to present Russia both to its citizens to the world as a country which has not collapsed completely and can still restore order.

As discussed above the people of North Caucasus have not fallen prey to Islamic fundamentalism their Sufi roots are to be mostly credited with this. There is no guarantee that this scenario will continue in perpetuity, the emergence of new elements are producing a transition which may produce momentous results. Islamic fundamentalism is one of these elements. The only way it can be checked is through strengthening the traditional Sufi beliefs of the people and the democratic structures in their society. Both these elements have been hitherto neglected in fact they have been harmed. What course North Caucasus takes will depend on the success of the above two.

⁴² “archive:bin Laden helped bankroll Dagestan War”, no. 4

Conclusion

The Islamic areas of Russia were first brought under the Russian yoke during the time of the Tsars. As far as the Muslims were concerned the subsequent rule of Soviet regime was no different. The talk of the rights of nationalities and self-determination some how could never translate into practice. The Tsarist regime had been most ruthless in conquering the Islamic areas, an inherent component of the Russian policy towards the Islamic people was racial arrogance. These people were considered as barbaric, cruel and uncivilized. Often in the conquest of these areas excessive brutality was exhibited.

This policy more or less continued during the Soviet period. The Chechens had to face the trauma of deportation. They had to suffer because of an arbitrary policy that unjustly convicted them of being Nazi conspirators. The psychological trauma of that atrocity still bears heavily on the psychic of the Chechens.

In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's decline the North Caucasus particularly Chechnya and Tatarstan witnessed the reinvigoration of their age old religious beliefs. These beliefs were dominantly that of sufism which had over the centuries made a place for itself in the hearts of the

people. Sufism is inherently moderate and liberal. Thus a religious revivalism was certainly occurring in Russia yet this religious revival was not fundamentalist infact Islam in Russia was never fundamentalist. Unfortunately modern Russia which undertook the path of democracy and liberalism could also not understand this integral aspect of the north Caucasian societies.

The Russian government at the time of the Chechen conflict, particularly raised the bogey of Islamic fundamentalism. World at large has been become increasingly alarmed at the aggressive stand of some Islamic fundamentalist groups. Though these groups do not represent the majority of Muslim is not even a consideration here. Through this bogey the Russian government was able to get the sanctioned of the western countries for its policy in Chechnya. In the long run however this policy is detrimental to the Russians themselves.

Sufi form of Islam is the best safeguard against fundamentalism. Sufism is completely harmonised with the culture of the land, it is infact entrenched in the traditional democratic structure of North Caucasus an is also the under lying force in the Middle Volga region. Sufis are known

opponents of the fundamentalists and have strongly opposed their entry into Russia.

This fact however is not realised by the Russian leadership and even by the Russian citizens. Instead of strengthening the traditional belief of the people the policy has been to undermine it and therefore, making it vulnerable to Islamic fundamentalism. Moscow leadership has now for long followed a policy of placing personal agendas above the common good. The above feature particularly signified Yeltsin's policy. If Russia's traditional value systems are strengthened it would lead to a stronger Russia not a fragmented one, as it mostly thought.

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