CHAPTER TWO

EVOLUTION OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN KYRGYZSTAN AND TURKMENISTAN
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Evolution of Democracy and Human Rights in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan: A Historical Perspective

In this chapter, an attempt is being made to examine the historical background of the political system of the Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. It would take into account the various political developments that had occurred in the region. In this chapter an effort is also made to explore the various factors that have helped in the evolution and development of human rights in these republics. Evolution of Democracy and Human Rights in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan can be examined as that in pre-Tsarist, Tsarist and Soviet periods.

Political System prior to the Tsarist Period

Prior to Russian conquest of Central Asia, the culture and political life of the region did not differ greatly from other parts of the Muslim world (Badan 2001: 22). The Kyrgyz society was nomadic and tribal in nature (Ploshikh 1998: 1). The Turkmen society was semi-feudal patriarchal society based on customs and traditions.

In the 15th-16th centuries, the Kyrgyz people settled in present-day Kyrgyzstan. In the early 19th century the southern part of the area fell under the control of the Khanate of Kokand. After the medieval age Central Asia broke down into three native Khanates, i.e., the Khanate of Kokand, Khanate of Khiva and Emirate of Bukara (Badan July-September 2001: 98). The Khanates were ruled by a group of elite known as Khans and Emirs (Shams-ud-Din 1992: 22). They were very cruel and used to punish
the native people if they did not follow the instructions issued by them. Moreover, they exploited the poor people of the region in making them do unlimited work for them. In the Khanate period, the worst victims were the women. The women had no liberties and were ignorant about the political process of the society. They were not allowed to come out of their homes and were forced to remain in Burka. The restrictions were also placed on the extent of their social interactions.

The political powers in Khanates were concentrated in the hands of the provincial government known as beks (Badan 2001: 39). The government was tyrannical and exploitative. The people had no role in decision-making. During this period the clergy was very powerful particularly in the sedentary region. The clergy interpreted the Islamic laws for their self interests and enjoyed high status and respect in the society. In this period the system of administration, taxation and land tenure was based on the Perso-Arab system of Transoxiania with heavy levies and punishment including the death penalty (Badan 2001: 22).

The judicial system consisted of two types of courts: 1) courts for the settled population, and 2) courts for the nomadic population. The Kazi was the main source of justice for the settled population (Williams 1966: 6). Initially the Kazis were appointed for life but with the passage of time the Kaziship acquired a hereditary character (William 1966: 37). They settled all disputes whether social, economic or religious. Hence Kazis enjoyed a high social status and economic privileges in the society. Like the rulers, the Kazis were authoritarian and biased in delivering the justice and their
verdicts were usually in favour of the rich and powerful persons of the society. Another community of religious elite was the Mufti who used to be the exponent of Islamic laws (Sharia). The Muftis were the legal and the spiritual heads of the Khanates.

The second types of courts were for nomadic people. The system was based on the unwritten customary laws passed on orally from generations to generations. Disputes were settled before a group of respected elders called beys (Pierce 1960: 76-77). All the disputes and offences including murder were settled by paying Kun, a system of payment for release of criminal (Williams 1966: 12). If a dispute could not be settled or the decision was considered unsatisfactory the dispute could be put before another group. Unlike in modern society, the punishment in this period was severe. Torture, cutting of hands and feet, burning eyes and ears, and various more or less ingenious forms of death penalty were employed (Pierce 1960: 76).

Thus we can say that the political system in pre-Tsarist Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan was exploitative in nature. People had no civil liberty and political rights. They did not participate in the political process of their country and they were not allowed to criticize the government.

During the nineteenth century the region came under the Russian empire. The main motive behind the expansion of Russians towards Central Asia were to fulfil their economic interests, to establish new market for her trade, its desire to conquer India and to resist British expansion towards Central Asia (Pierce 1960: 1-2).
To fulfil their objectives and to capture Central Asia, the Russians in 1839 started annexation of the region (Vaidyanath 1967: 30). In 1865 Tashkent was captured and declared part of Tsarist Russia and Governorship of Turkestan was established. By 1873 the Khanates of Bukara and Khive were consolidated in Tsarist Empire and by 1876 Khanate of Kokand was captured. By 1884 when Merv was captured by the Russian military, the whole region of Central Asia came under the Tsarist Empire (Vaidyanath 1967: 30).

**Political System during Tsarist Period**

In the 19th century Khanates of the region lost their power and the Russian forces captured the region (Silverstein 2002: 96). In order to control the area Russian Government followed a policy of forced resettlement of ethnic Russians and Cossacks to various regions of Turkestan. The Russians treated this region more like their colony and less like the territory of Russian Empire.

The Russian administration in Turkestan was of military in nature and was run by the Ministry of War (Pierce 1960: 65). It was headed by Governor-General who was responsible to Ministry of War (Badan 2001: 80). The Governor-General exerted his authority through an office staff consisting of number of secretaries and clerks. The Russian army officers ran the administration and exploited the local people in their own interest (Sharma 1979: 5). The local people were not involved in the administration and they had no right to criticize the policies of the Tsarist administrators in the region (Ploshikh 1998: 21). However, at the local level the administration
was largely in the hands of native administrators with customary courts retaining jurisdiction over criminal and civil cases.

At the local level the fundamental unit of administration was kabika each of which was considered to constitute a family or household. Up to 20 kabikas constituted an aul, and up to 200 kabikas or ten auls constituted a volost. The inhabitants of the auls chose electors, and these in turn met in a volost meeting to elect a volost headman (Pierce 1960: 76).

The Tsarist Government maintained the traditional types of courts. The judicial system as earlier consisted of two types of courts (1) for the settled population, and (2) for the nomadic population. The Kazi was the main source of justice for the settled population. Initially the Kazi was appointed by the Tsarist governor but later the Kazis were elected by the people. The Kazi dealt with both civil and criminal cases (Williams 1966: 7). In this period the powers of Kazi in judicial sphere was limited and the more serious cases were decided by the Governor-General of the Turkistan.

Similarly, the second types of courts were for nomadic people. The system was based on the customary laws and disputes were settled before beys as earlier. They had jurisdiction over all criminal cases except with the general order of the region and over all criminal matters not based on documents completed by or witnessed by Russian authorities and not involving Russians. In this period the Tsarist Government reformed the traditional courts and introduced election of the judges (Pierce 1960: 77). Both Kazis
and Beys were elected for three years and received regular salaries drawn from local tax funds.

In addition to judicial reforms the Tsarist government introduced various reforms in Turkestan. The main objectives of all these reforms were to strengthen their hold on this region and to run their administration smoothly. They established a new type of education system based on Russian model. It was based on three types of school system. Firstly, there were schools for teaching Russian language to the local people. In the second types of schools the Russian administrators taught Russian culture to the local people, so that they could suppress native religion and tightened their hold on local people and thirdly, there were schools for the native Russians who were serving in the region.

During this period, the Tsarist Government encouraged the people of other parts of Tsarist Empire to migrate to the region. The main purpose of migration was to tide over the misery prevalent on the farm lands of south-western Russia and Siberia. As a result, by 1892, large number of Russian population migrated to Turkestan. The migrants made tremendous influence on the colonial society. The most notable feature of the migrant people was their Russian (European) character.

The Tsarist regime developed the region as their colony (Wheeler 1964: 69). The main purpose of Russians which led to conquest of this region was its economic and military exploitation to fulfil the basic needs of the industries in the metropolis of Russia. The policy of economic exploitation
changed the nature and structure of the Central Asian society (Vaidyanath 1967: 50). Some of the outstanding changes were the emergence of native intellectual class, particularly Dijadidists intellectuals, the establishment of modern means of communication like posts and telegraphs, the emergence of new class of industrial workers and moneyed aristocracy, etc. The Dijadidists started Dijadidists movement in the entire Turkistan. The main objectives of this movement were to introduce economic and social reforms in the Central Asian society. The Dijadidists also spread political awareness among the people by raising various issues of rights and freedoms of people. In this period the conditions of women had slightly improved, as the administration did not force the women to follow the Islamic rules. However, the native people did not appreciate these relaxations and approaches.

**Political System after October Revolution**

Russian Revolution took place in October 1917. With Bolshevik Party coming into power in Russia, the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic was formed in 1918. In April 1921 the Governor Generalship of Turkmenistan became an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (R.S.F.S.R). The Soviet government in Central Asia adopted the policy of territorial delimitation of Central Asia on ethno-nationality grounds. The major causes behind the delimitation according to Soviet policy makers were to solve the complex nationality problems and clan tribal feuds so that they can spread socialism in the Central Asian society. However, such policy was adopted to check and control the political revolts and rebellions against the Soviet
government in Central Asia. According to Soviet scholar Mustafa Chokaev, “the plan of the division of Turkestan into tribal states was invented by the Bolsheviks at Moscow to counter the attempt made by the ‘Mussalman Communists’ to secure the unification of all the Turkic tribes around the nucleus of Soviet Turkestan”.

In December 1922 Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was formed with four constituted parts (union republics): (i) the Russian S.F.S.R, (ii) the Ukrainian S.S.R, (iii) the Byelorussian S.S.R, and (iv) the Trans Caucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (consisting of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia). In 1924 after the territorial demarcation of the Central Asian republics on the basis of nationality, new states of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan entered the USSR as union republics and Kyrgyzstan became Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast, as a part of the Russian Federation. In 1926 it was reorganized as the Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic in the structure of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic. After the new Constitution of 1936, these oblasts became the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic with the equal status as other union republics of the Soviet Union as mentioned in Constitution (Ploshikh 1998: 3).

According to the Soviet Constitution the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was a federal republic consisting of autonomous units known as the Union Republics. The Article 70 of the Soviet Constitution further declared that the Soviet state to be a federal, multinational state “formed on the principle of socialist federation as a result of the free self determination
of nations and the voluntary association of equal Soviet socialist republics". It was based upon the sovereignty of constituent units. All the Union Republics were stated to be sovereign Soviet states having their own Constitution.


Additionally, the executive powers of the USSR were exercised by the Council of People’s Commissars of USSR (Constitution of Soviet Union
1936: Article 64). It was appointed by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and consists of the Chairman of the People’s Commissars of the USSR, Vice Chairman of the People’s Commissars of USSR, the Chairman of the Planning Commission of USSR, People Commissars of USSR, Chairman of the Committee of Arts, Chairman of the Committee of Education and the Chairman of the Board of State Bank (Constitution of Soviet Union 1936: Article 70). According to the Article 68 of the Soviet Constitution, it coordinates and directs the work of the Union and Republic Commissars and other institutions. It also adopts measures to carry out national budget and to maintain law and order in a country, and exercises general guidance in respect of the relations with foreign states (Constitution of Soviet Union 1936: Article 68).

Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic being the highest organ of the state authority of the Union Republic (Constitution of Soviet Union 1936: Article 57), it was the sole legislative authority of the republic and was elected by the citizens of the republic for four years. According to Article 60 of the Soviet Constitution (1936), the Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic adopts the Constitution of the republic and amends it. Additionally it approved the national economic plan and budget of the republic.

According to the Soviet Constitution, the People’s Commissars of the Union Republic was the highest executive organ of the union republic (Constitution of Soviet Union 1936: Article 79). It was appointed by the Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic and consisted of chairman of the
People's Commissars, vice chairman, chairman of the Planning Commission and the various People's Commissars (Constitution of Soviet Union 1936: Article 83).

In the judicial sphere, the traditional Sharia courts were banned and changes were made in the system of law courts and the penal code. The new courts initially promulgated in Russia were part of the fight against oriental societies in the Soviet Union (Roy 1997: 79). According to Article 102 of 1936 Constitution of USSR, “In the U.S.S.R. justice is administered by the Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R., the Supreme Courts of the Union Republics, the Territorial and the Regional court”. The Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R. was the highest judicial organ in the country. The Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R. was charged with the supervision of the judicial activities of all the judicial organs of the U.S.S.R. and of the Union Republics (Constitution of USSR: Article 104). They were elected by the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. for a term of five years (Constitution of USSR 1936: Article 105).

During the Soviet period there was a provision in the Soviet system that no person can be arbitrarily arrested and put in jail (Constitution of USSR 1936: Article 127). Thus, no person shall be placed under arrest except by decision of courts or with the sanctions of a procurator. But in practice, the judiciary had no authority to judge over the actions of the legislature and executive to determine whether or not fundamental rights of persons were violated. There was no system of judicial review for the protection of fundamental rights.
The Constitution described the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics as a socialist state and all powers belonged to the Soviets (Constitution of USSR 1936: Article 1). Moreover, the Soviet Union was a one party state. The Soviets of districts, cities, provinces were all guided and regulated by the party. According to Article 6 of the 1977 Constitution of USSR, CPSU is the “leading and guiding force of the Soviet society”. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union was the only political organization that was allowed in the elections of the country. Government role was managed by the Communist Party. The party took all major decisions of the government without any opposition.

The governing body of the CPSU was the Party Congress which met annually. This Party Congress would elect a Central Committee which in turn would elect a Politburo. In theory, supreme power in the party was concentrated in the Party Congress; however, in practice the power structure became reversed and supreme power became the domain of the General Secretary after the death of Lenin.

At lower levels, the organizational hierarchy was managed by Party Committees or partkoms. A partkom was headed by the elected partkom secretary. At enterprises, institutions, kolkhozes (collective farms), etc partkoms were working. At higher levels, the Committees were abbreviated accordingly: raikoms at raion level, obkoms at oblast level (known earlier as gubkoms for guberniyas), gorkom at city level, etc.
The bottom level of the party was the primary party organization or party cells. It was created within any organizational entity of any kind where there were at least three communists. The management of a cell was called as party bureau. The party bureau was headed by an elected bureau secretary.

During late 1920s and 1930s, various developments towards repression of people took place in the USSR. Before the creation of Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, Soviet policy aimed at repressing nationalist and bourgeois forces, as exemplified by the bias against wealthy landholders, stock raisers, and merchants, and the manaps, clan leaders in control of armed military groups. The Islamic clergy too was repressed for insisting on the existence of a single Turkic nation. Due to this, in 1928 a co-coordinated intense anti-Islamic drive was launched. In 1931, another most powerful anti-Soviet uprising was organized in the Kara-Kum which was brutally suppressed by the security forces (Bremmer and Rao 1993: 385). Between 1928 and 1932 opposition to Stalin’s collectivization policies also surfaced and even ministers in the Turkmen government were implicated in a supposed plot to establish an independent state.

During the late thirties mass repression (great terror) was organized in Soviet Union (Cooper and Maureen 1995: 161). During the terror mass arrests were carried out in the economic, state and party institutions (Cooper and Maureen 1995: 159). In this period the main blow of repression was directed against members of the party, mainly those who has shown some kind of dissent with Stalinist policies (Cooper and Maureen
The main aim of the mass repression or purges was the removal of strata of the population which were considered hostile or potentially hostile.

The purges carried out by Stalin radically altered the nature of political development in Soviet Central Asia. Many party leaders were accused of deviation from party programmes and ideologies and were prosecuted for breaching party ideology. In Turkmenistan a national opposition movement, called the Turkmen Azatlygi, appeared in 1930s in response to Stalinist excesses. This movement was banned and its local party leaders were charged fomenting sedition and were executed. Kyrgyz republic also could not escape from the impact of purges. Although many purges were conducted in Kyrgyz party structure before 1930s, these were allegedly done to ensure smooth functioning of administrative mechanism.

It was by these crude means that the repression was carried out among members of party and leading workers both in the centre and the localities. At first those whoever had participated in oppositions or had some 'political deviation' (the limits of such workers, complied on the basis of the study of archival material, was in the hands of N.K.V.D), were arrested. On the basis of their testimony obtained, in many cases by torture and duress, new arrests were carried out. This is clear from the fact that in 1936 alone 134000 people were expelled from the party, in 1937 more than 117000 and in 1938 more than 90,000 (Cooper and Maureen 1995: 170).
Throughout Stalin period, the regime spent tremendous resources on the management of secrecy. For each unit of society, that is, for each factory, office and college, there was special department (spetsotdel) that used to protect state and party secrets and collected politically sensitive information about students and employees. This department was also responsible for issuing clearances to employees whose work required confidential reports (Shlapentokh 2001: 58).

During the great terror days, censorship played an important role in the cult of secrecy. An army of censors (employees of Glavlit) carefully read each printed word in every type of publication, ranging from local newspapers in remote villages to the party publishing houses in Moscow. The same cult of secrecy deemed many officers and factories off-limit to ordinary people. Visitors needed special permission for entry. The most important objective was to prevent the people from learning about the real state of affairs in the country, particularly about the cruel actions of the authority (Shlapentokh 2001: 58).

The cult of secrecy also helped to maintain the atmosphere of fear in the country. It fomented mutual suspicions among the people, especially at the highest level of the party and the state hierarchy. Access to classified documents was one of the most significant indicators of one’s status in society. Access to privileged information tended to increase one’s fear of KGB. Many thousands of people had been imprisoned on allegations that they had disclosed state secrets, and their imprisonment helped spread fear across the country (Shlapentokh 2001: 59).
Many aspects of the cultural liberties were retained despite the suppression of nationalist activity under Stalin, and, therefore, tensions with the all-Union authorities were constant. In this period the traditional life style continued with high rate of private ownership of housing, including in the towns; the rate in Kyrgyzstan was 40.8 percent as compared to 16.4 percent in Russia (Roy 1997: 82).

The Soviet Government changed the structure of Central Asian society dramatically. During the Soviet period Bolsheviks, however, made attempts to repress culture of the native people and tried to wipe out Islam from Central Asia. The main objective of such attempt was to propagate socialist principles and establish socialism in that region. In order to bring about cultural changes in the Central Asian society the Soviet Government adopted the new system of education.

In the 1920s cultural, educational, and social life developed considerably in the Central Asian republics. The compulsory universal elementary education was introduced between 1929 and 1939 for removing illiteracy from the Soviet society (Tarnovsky et al. 1984). Due to this, literacy rate in Central Asian society greatly improved and reached ninety percent in 1936 (Badan 2001: 43). The main task of educational revolution at the initial stage was to propagate the teaching of Marxism-Leninism and the ideas of socialism to the people and to give them the knowledge necessary to participate actively in the building of the new Soviet society (Yeryomin 1977: 104).
In order to spread education, a network of literacy centres and schools were set up for both illiterate and semi-literate peoples. Provisions were also made for those who were not able to attend regular classes. In addition, some literacy centres were mobile, as they were set up in yurts (the circular felt tents used by Turkic peoples, who were still nomadic). In view of the lack of native teachers, abolition of illiteracy took a considerable time. Education was free throughout the Soviet Union (Badan 2001: 43). The main functions of literacy schools were threefold: to teach students the elementary skill of reading, writing and counting; to develop culture; and to promote better understanding of political problems and bring about the active participation of the people in community affairs and in the building of socialism.

During this period, universal and compulsory seven years education in the rural areas and compulsory 10 years education in urban regions were introduced. In campaign against illiteracy and for the introduction of universal education many deep-rooted prejudices were removed. One main objective of education during this period was meant to prepare highly qualified specialists for the development of nation.

In the Soviet Union there were three different stages of education. The preschools were established for the all round development of beginners. The second stage of education the secondary education started at the age of seven. During the secondary level, school students were given vocational training along with regular education. The higher education was the third stage of education.
The termination of Tsarist restrictions on the use of non-Russian languages and initiation of Soviet approval of their use resulted at once in their extensive employment in the press, literature, schools and administration. For many of the backward peoples it was necessary to create alphabets, since their language had never before been used in written form, and in many regions including Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan schools in the native tongue were established for the first time in history.

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During this period the use of Arabic script was prohibited. Latin script was imposed in 1922 and in September 1940 new alphabets based on Cyrillic was introduced. In Central Asia, Russian became the main language in school curriculum. By 1936, Russians were involved in every sphere of socio-economic life from education to religious matters. For the development of education modern state institutions and a modern
bureaucracy were established. Additionally, the traditional art forms in music, literature, dance and paintings were reviewed. In their place modern Soviet art such as theatre, open and orchestral music were encouraged (Sajoo 2002: 15).

Similarly, although the Soviet Constitution separated the religion from the state, but in practice the Soviet Government followed the anti religious propaganda to eliminate religion from Soviet society and spread socialism (Rahul 1996: 127). In 1917 the Soviet Government declared the equality of men and women, and in 1921 declared polygamy and the kalym (bride price) to be illegal (Shlapentokh 2001: 97).

During the Soviet period, Central Asian religious institutions like mosques and prayer houses were either destroyed or converted into social clubs and theatres (Yaacov 1999: 9). Moreover, the Soviet government also banned the holy book of Koran (Rahul 1996: 127). Besides, the Soviet Government started a campaign against traditional clothing, veil and introduced Russified names to speed up the Russification of the Central Asian society (Roy 1997: 74).

After the repression of religious freedom indirectly, the Soviet government began a direct assault. Authorities forbade zakat (giving of alms) and hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and closed down the mosques in the region (Badan 2001: 38). During the Stalin period the government ordered the execution of Muslims who possessed a copy of the Koran. In order to suppress Islam, the Soviet authorities made major improvements in the educational system.
of the region. The Soviet leaders were also convinced that secular education would lead many Muslims to recognize the superiority of Marxism over Islam (Sharma 1979: 18).

The Soviet authorities suppressed Islam but it failed to abolish the Islam from heart and mind of the native population. Though the practice of Islam was not done publicly, but they followed it clandestinely. *Salat* (daily prayers) could be performed once, instead of five times, a day. *Sawm* (fasting during the month of Ramadan) was reinterpreted as a means to gain awareness of deprivation and hunger, which could be achieved without actually fasting for an entire month. Similarly, the impossible *hajj* to Mecca was replaced by pilgrimages to the local Sufi and Islamic saints of the region.

In the Central Asian society the rituals of Muslim people such as circumcision were respected and burials and weddings were always accompanied by prayers. These rites were celebrated with big festivals, involving ostentatious expenditures. Religious practices were very much alive, albeit in watered-down form (people don’t eat pork; names given to children were massively Muslim even in families of Russified cadres (Roy 1977: 82).

Similarly, pre-Soviet structure of classic patriarchy (system characterized by early marriage of girls, who upon marriage live with their husband's family under the domination of the oldest male, who is usually the bride's
father-in-law) continued. In the Soviet period the new brides were usually subordinated not only to males but to senior women.

During the Soviet era, the primary change in popular Islam was that leaders of Sufism, an unofficial Muslim mystical movement, came to be regarded, in effect, as unofficial mullahs. In the absence of actual mullahs, especially in rural areas, people naturally turned elsewhere for spiritual counsel and guidance. The Sufis were considered to be the holiest of all people.

The Soviet Constitution provided the political rights and civil liberties to the citizens of Soviet Union. But all these Rights and Liberties were on paper only. The entire notion of rights in Soviet Union was different from the notion of western democracy. Unlike in the west, the Soviet constitution gave first place to socio-economic rights rather than political rights. Some of these rights were for example right to work, right to rest and leisure, right to maintenance in old age and sickness and right to education (Constitution of USSR 1977: Article 40).

In the political sphere, people were granted various rights in conformity with the interest of the working people and in order to strengthen the socialist system (Constitution of USSR 1977: Article 50). Among the various rights that were given to people were the right to universal suffrage, right to be elected to the public offices and right to join political party; but at the same time, state restricted the citizens from forming or joining a political party other than Communist Party. In the Soviet Union citizens who had reached the age of eighteen were given right to elect and right to
vote (Constitution of USSR 1977). According to 1977 Constitution, the age for getting elected in Supreme Soviet was fixed at twenty-one years. Similarly, the age to be elected to all other Soviets was fixed as eighteen years. In Soviet Union, unlike in Western democracies or India, there was no choice of candidates for the voters. The voters had, however, the opportunity to cross off the names of the candidates on the ballot paper.

The Soviet national election campaign was extremely extensive. The CPSU took the responsibility of campaign on behalf of the candidates. The electorates were made aware of the issues and programmes which party considered important through campaign which was mainly done by the party cadres. The party cadres carried the campaign door to door and they also propagated the policies through newspapers, radio, television and pamphlets. The entire process from the issue of candidates to the announcement of results was controlled by CPSU.

In the Soviet Union everybody did not had the right to contest the election. The candidates were first nominated by any public organizations such as party or trade union or by the meeting of collective forums. All such nominated candidates were then discussed at the constituency level pre-election meeting attended by representatives from various organizations and a decision was reached on the candidate to be supported. The successful person was registered with the District Electoral Commission in the name of the organization nominating him/her (Lane 1985: 182).
Moreover, though the Soviet people were given the freedom to associate including the holding of mass meetings and freedom of street processions and demonstrations, these rights were on paper only (Morley Ayearst William Bennett Munro 1959: 659). In practice the freedom of assembly was qualified by the provision that all meetings whether held indoors or outdoors were to be licensed. Similarly every association, whatever its nature is, was licensed. As for as the right of national self-determination is concerned, the Soviet regime upheld it in theory but discouraged it in practice, offering as a substitute the right of quasi-independent and quasi-autonomous organization. There was no opportunity for the Soviet citizen to print, to assemble, to form associations without the prior permission of the state. Censorship of print and electronic media was strictly enforced. This censorship was applied in two main directions. Firstly, state secrets were handled by main administration for safeguarding state secrets in the press (also known as Glavlit) was in charge of censoring all publications and broadcasting for state secrets. Secondly, censorship of political correctness in accordance with the official ideology and politics of the Communist Party was performed by several organizations such as Gosteleradio in charge of radio and television broadcasting. In the same manner, the freedom of speech was restricted. In practice, the people were told to elect their representatives but were given no choice. They were told that they were sovereign but their actions were controlled by the party. They were promised democracy but were not allowed to express their views freely and they couldn’t hold even peaceful demonstrations.
According to the Soviet Constitution all citizens have equal rights and
duties and there is no discrimination on the basis of sex, nationality, race,
social status, religion, etc. Like the citizens of the other parts of the Soviet
Union, the Central Asian people were given the right to vote. This right
meant that in addition to elect Soviets the people were allowed to take part
in nation wide discussion on important issues. Moreover, as citizens of the
Soviet Union, the people could take part in referendum, which might be
held on important national issues. During the Soviet period the Kyrgyz
people were given the rights to criticize the policies of the government and
various state organs to the extent the Communist party approved and
permitted it.

In the Soviet system the right to property was not granted to the citizens. In
this context private property was non-existent. The government acquired all
the land, and system of collective agriculture was introduced (Constitution
of USSR 1936: Article 5). At the same time industries were run and owned
by the government. In other words, concentration of wealth for the purpose
of exploitation of the have-nots had been completely done away with.
However, this did not mean that the individuals did not own any property.
Articles 9 and 10 of the 1936 Constitution provide for the personal (non-
private) property, which may not be used for exploitation of man. Thus, the
people could own income from work and savings. They could own their
own houses, furniture, utensils, and articles of operational use and
convenience including personal conveyance. No person could let out a
portion of his house. He who lived in a house owned it. No one could
employ servants for the business purposes; it was considered a form of
exploitation. The Soviet citizens were not only allowed personal property but they could inherit it also. Nevertheless, private property ownership of means of production and means of exploitation had no place in the Soviet system.

During this period the Kyrgyz and Turkmen society greatly remained traditional and nomadic society. In this period the society mainly remained rural agrarian society. The Soviet government introduced new techniques of agriculture such as modern irrigation system to increase the production of cotton. They treated this region more as colony than as their republic. Like the other colonies, Central Asia was the main source of primary goods. The Russian masters encouraged the primary sector and Central Asia became the source of the raw materials to the metropolis, such as tobacco, cotton, wheat, vegetables (potatoes, sugar beets, beans), fruits (apples, apricots, peaches, grapes, berries), sheep, goats, cattle, wool, etc (Sharma 1979: 152).

In this period the manufacturing sector was not encouraged in Central Asia, and as a consequence the managerial and entrepreneur class did not fully develop. The overall economic development in the Central Asian republics in the period from 1980 to 1987 in terms of national income was lower than national average (Warikoo and Norbu 1992: 135).

In the entire Soviet Union there was an improvement in the condition of women (Shams-ud-Din 1992: 29). A major campaign known as the assault (hujum) was launched for the emancipation of women (Roy 1997: 79). The
women were given equal property rights. During the Soviet period efforts were made to get women into the labour market and into the party structure. Unlike in the past, now the women for the first time in the history of Central Asia had been given the opportunity to take active part in the political process of the state. There were improvements in pre-school care for children – in 1960 there were 500,000 places but by 1971 this had risen to over five million. According to the Soviet census the number of women in higher education as a percentage of the total has risen from 28 percent in 1927, to 43 percent in 1960, to 49 percent in 1970. However this did not fully change the traditions of Central Asian women. This was reflected from the fact that family size in Central Asia remained larger than that in the non-Islamic parts of Soviet Union.

Material advances also facilitated the full involvement of women in all spheres of social, economic and political life. There were provisions of free school meals, milk for all children, and special food and clothes allowances for children, pregnancy consultation centres, maternity homes, crèches and other facilities.
Selected Statistics on Woman Membership in CPSU by Union
Republics,
1971 Communist Party Congress Delegates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of women</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
<th>Number of women</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
<th>Women Membership in CP as Percent of Female Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>110,000</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>12,884</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>83,000</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>3,311,000</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>1,204</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the Soviet period the women were given civil rights for the first time. The women enjoyed equal rights with men in all spheres of social, cultural, economic and political rights (Usha 2002: 146). The Soviet Government banned the evil practice of bride barter, polygamy and medieval customs. Due to spread of education among the women, they became more aware about their political rights. Additionally, many women took active part in the political process like elections, voting, referendums, etc and even held the memberships of political offices as shown in table below. In some areas women's contribution during elections exceeded that of men. The table above explains the trend of women's contribution in the political process of Soviet Central Asia.

**Political System during Gorbachev Period**

Gorbachev came to power in 1985 as General Secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). After coming to power, he faced the problems of economic deterioration, a corrupt and command bureaucratic
system, etc. His first aim was to bring economic reforms, but it was impossible without bringing any change in social, cultural and political spheres. To overcome the above said shortcomings, he introduced radical economic and political reforms commonly known as *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* in the Soviet Society (Mitchell 1990: 175). *Perestroika* literally means restructuring, renewal, rebuilding, and reconstruction. And the word *Glasnost* means openness.

In the opinion of Gorbachev, restructuring was a revolution in “entire way of life” (*Current Digest of Soviet Press*, 4 October 1989: 2). In other words, he said, it was a revolution without bullets (Baradat 1989: 130). These policies were adopted by the C.P.S.U and initiated in the 27th Party Congress in February 1986. At the twenty-seventh party congress in 1986, Gorbachev announced that economic reform was “the key to all our problems, immediate and long term, economic and social, political and ideological, domestic and foreign” (Anan 1990: 24). The adoption of economic and political reforms of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* influenced the political, cultural, social and economic life of the people of the entire Soviet Union (Hill 1999: 188). Gorbachev’s programme led to the wave of reforms including freedom, of press, multi-candidates elections and economic liberalization, etc.

At some point in time, the concept of accelerated socio-economic development (*uskorenie*) emerged. It called for the all round intensification of production on the basis of scientific and technical progress with an ultimate aim of creating a new qualitative State in Soviet Society. This was
announced at the April 1985 Plenary meeting of the Central Committee which inaugurated the programme as the new strategy of perestroika and formulated its basic principles. Later it was endorsed by the 27th Party Congress as the party’s general policy line. Within some limits, Gorbachev wanted to create an ‘open’ society. The right of free expression and freedom of the press were to be safeguarded. Citizens had more rights of determination, and the decision making process in the politics and economy were to be more transparent. Gorbachev did not want to abolish the Communist system but to reform it.

The 1986-87 reform was concerned with higher education and special secondary schools. These reforms came after the great efforts of Gorbachev. The objectives of these reforms included integrating higher education with the economy, improving instructions, acquiring new scientific technology especially computers for science and engineering and upgrading administration and faculty department. To fulfil these objectives the reforms, which were done in 1987-89, stressed that the fundamental goal of education is to improve the national economy. In practice the schools were asked to build a new socialist society.

Meanwhile a plenum was held in January 1987. In this plenum Gorbachev emphasized the need to democratize the Soviet society, party and state life to implement Perestroika (Current Digest of Soviet Press, 27 February 1987: 1-2). At this plenum Gorbachev gave a meaning to Perestroika and stressed on electoral reform.
In June 1987 another party Plenum was held in which the concept of Perestroika was further developed when reforms were stressed by members and the radical restructuring of economic management of the system was discussed (Arvind Gupta 1991: 66), and introduction of material incentives, self financing, and increase in wages were proposed (Current Digest of Soviet Press, 29 July 1987: 1). Moreover, elections of leaders in enterprises, multi-candidate district for election to the Soviets, openness in media, etc. were implemented.

In 28 June 1988, an event of potentially historic significance took place in Moscow. For the first time since 1941, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) convened a national party conference to extensively review the course of the implementation of the decisions of the 27th CPSU Congress. In January 1987, when Gorbachev first proposed the restructuring of this institution after forty-seven years while CPSU convened a national party congress, he added that “it would also be logical for the conference to discuss ways to further democratize the life of the Party and society as a whole.” The Democratization of social sphere implies a systematic effort to simplify the structure and perfect the methods of work of the entire state apparatus (Garg 1988: 25). Convening the All-Union Party Conference, he observed, “would be a serious step toward making our Party life more democratic in practice and developing the activity of communists”.

At a conference of the Communist party held in late June 1988, Gorbachev proposed a series of constitutional reforms that would shift power from the
party to popularly elected legislatures, reduce the party’s role in local economic management, and greatly increase the powers of the presidency. Three months later, Andrei A. Gromyko retired as state president (a post he had held since 1985), and Gorbachev assumed the office.

The All Union Conference of the CPSU held in June 1988 also passed a special resolution on legal reforms. The resolution focused on the organizational and technical aspects of legal reforms – bringing order and hierarchy into the law making process, reducing the number of normative regulations, especially at the level of various departmental orders and institutions and so on (Mlynar 1990: 99). Attention was mainly given to economic and administrative law, than to criminal law.

In November-December 1988, the political reforms of ‘Glasnost’ were adopted in the twelfth special session of the Supreme Soviet. During this special session many important amendments were made and the new Electoral law was adopted. Some of the important changes were: Presidium lost most of its powers, and multi-candidate system and new Congress of People Deputies were introduced (Rakesh Gupta 1990: 15). Under these reforms, competitive elections were introduced for the posts of officials within the Communist Party.

Additionally, the reforms resulted in separation of the party and the state, decentralization of power, establishment of the institution of Executive President who is independent from party, the introduction of multi-candidate system (Arvind Gupta 1991: 68). The reforms also included
secret ballet, limited terms of important offices, revival of the Soviets, and multi candidate elections to the Republican Supreme Soviet (Bialer 1989: 217-18). The reforms that Gorbachev instituted also included relaxing of censorship and political repression, democratization and improvement in the human rights of people, reducing the powers of the KGB. The election laws of 1988, for the first time, gave freedom to the people to openly demonstrate, express their views, defeat official candidates and elect those who were not liked by the party.

Relaxation of censorship resulted in the Communist Party losing its grip on the media. Before long, much to the embarrassment of the authorities, the media began to expose severe social and economic problems, which the Soviet Government had long denied existed and covered up. Problems such as poor housing, alcoholism, standard of living of common people and the second rate position of women, which the official media had long ignored, were now being aired in the open. However, Gorbachev’s relaxation of censorship and attempts to create more political openness had the unintended effect of re-awakening long suppressed nationalist and anti-Russian feelings in the Soviet Union’s constituent republics. Glasnost had become visible even in Soviet judiciary. In a historical judgment in June 1988, the Supreme Court held that many people were condemned by the courts during the Stalin-Brezhnev period. The media also began to expose crimes committed by Stalin and the Soviet regime, such as Gulags and the Great Purges.
The *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* had wide ranging consequences. Gorbachev’s policy of *glasnost* opened the door for political pluralism in the entire Soviet Union. After the introduction of reforms by the Gorbachev, the Central Asian republics witnessed the emergence of new groups and movements. However, in spite of the emergence of new political parties, the C.P.S.U continued to be the main political organization. The C.P.S.U remained the state structure rather than party and continued to control the government (Bialer 1989: 25). Though in almost all the Central Asian republics the pattern of political development was the same, the formation of these groups however is based on their own social, cultural, political and regional interests (Tadjbaksh 1994: 325).

The June 1988 party conference adopted the reforms, which included policies to create chief executive position, to remove the party from day to day interference in society, to establish a new legislative body, to insulate the judiciary from political control, to reduce ethnic tensions, and to increase the protection for human rights. In this conference the Gorbachev proposed limited tenure for all public offices. In March 1989, Soviet voters took part in their first nationwide competitive election since 1917, choosing the newly reconstituted Congress of People’s Deputies. The congress was convened in May to select the Supreme Soviet and to elect Gorbachev for 5-year presidential term.

Gorbachev’s introduction of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* led not only to democratic elections at all levels from the local soviets to the parliamentary changes but also to accountability of leaders (Chenoy 2001: 20). The policy
of *Glasnost* (openness) also influenced the press. For the first time, the USSR Supreme Soviet adopted a law on press and other news media in June 1990. The passage of the law re-established credibility of the Soviet press in the Soviet Union and abroad. The press started looking at the developments from the people’s point of view. The freedom of press resulted in the launching of several new media outlets and led to change in contents and form of newspapers and magazines.

In Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan the introduction of reforms led to the emergence of new political parties, groups and the media and the end of the monopoly of the Communist party. At the same time it was seen that the Communist party became weak particularly in Kyrgyzstan and lost its old glory and dominance.

In Turkmenistan along with democratic movements such as Agzybirik, nationalism and determinism also have found fertile soil. In May 1989 citywide riots took place in Ashkhabad and Nebitdag. While these were attributed to hooliganism on the part of youths, later interpretations of these events cast a different light on the occurrence. A “round table” discussion at the Turkmenistan council of Trade Unions stressed efforts by “scandalmongers and extremists” to stir up feelings of nationalism among Turkmen youth (Bremmer and Rao 1993: 387-88).

On 16 December 1988, two unprecedented events took place in Turkmenistan. First Imam-Kazi Ibadullayev (he also leads the congregation at the Shalyka mosque in Tashauz) met with party workers who were taking
an advanced course at the House of Political Education in Ashkhabad. The report noted that “as a result of perestroika this conversation between party workers and the clergy has taken place. Despite the contradictions between the idealistic and the materialistic worldviews, religious believers and confirmed atheists found some common ground. The second unprecedented event was that a report on this event was published in party media” (Bremmer and Rao 1993: 390).

In Kyrgyzstan Glasnost led to the emergence of ethnic tensions. From the perspective of the Kyrgyz, the most acute nationality problem was the one that had long been posed by the Uzbek ethnic minority living in the southern part of the republic. According to the 1989 census, about twelve percent of the Uzbek ethnic population living in the Kyrgyzstan were concentrated in the southern part of the country, particularly in Osh and Jalalabad regions situated in the Fargana Valley. Tensions had existed between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks throughout the Soviet period, but Moscow was able to preserve the image of Soviet ethnic harmony until the reforms of Gorbachev in the mid-1980s. In the general atmosphere of glasnost an Uzbek-rights group called Adalat began airing old grievances in 1989, demanding local Uzbek autonomy in Osh region and its annexation with Uzbekistan.

The real issue behind Adalat's demand was land, which was in extremely short supply in Osh. To protect their claims, some of the people had also formed an opposing ethnic association, called Osh-aimagy (Osh-land). In early June 1990, the Kyrgyz-dominated Osh City Council announced plans
to build a cotton processing plant on a piece of land under the control of an Uzbek-dominated collective farm in Osh Province. As a result bloody riots took place between Uzbek and Kyrgyz in Osh Oblast which left 2320 people killed. A lot of families were left homeless when their houses were burned out. The government finally stopped the rioting by imposing a military curfew.

Since 1989-90 the Communist Party of the Soviet Union came under tremendous pressure to permit political freedom to the people by reforming Article 6 of the 1977 Constitution, which identified the party as the leading and guiding force of the Soviet society (Judson 1990: 175). In February 1990, the Central Committee plenum of the Communist Party of Soviet Union agreed to the amendment of the Constitution and Articles 6 and 7 were changed to refer to 'political parties', with no particular privileges for the Communist Party of Soviet Union (Hill 1999: 187).

In Kyrgyzstan in 1990, the leadership was transferred to Asker Akaev after the bloody riots of Osh in Southern Kyrgyzstan. Soon after coming to power, the new government started a policy of economic and political reforms. The disintegration of the Soviet Union further gave a boost to the process of democratization in the republic. The Kyrgyz President Asker Akaev continued the reform policy in the republic which offered the people new opportunities to raise issues that were earlier suppressed by the Soviet Government.
Similarly Turkmenistan had the reputation as one of the most conservative and backward Soviet republics. In August 1990, Turkmenistan declared sovereignty, but like the other heads of the Central Asian Communist Parties, the leadership in Ashgabat did not seek or welcome the break-up of the Soviet Union.

The next chapter will analyze the working of democracy and human rights in each republic of Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. This chapter will focus the working of various political institutions and structures that have developed in these republics in the post-soviet period. It will also examine the role, which the political institutions play in the strengthening of democracy in these two countries. The chapter will make an attempt to analyze the electoral process and the role of various institutions like opposition political parties during the elections. This chapter will also deal with the Governments’ position on democratization and the implementation of human rights in the republics.