"The fundamental and most stable feature of Russian history is the slow tempo of her development, with the economic backwardness, primitiveness of social forms and low level of culture resulting from it." Leon Trotsky

These are the words of famous Russian historian, uttered before the Russian revolution of 1917, about the nature of Russian development. In the twentieth century Russia witnessed many upheavals. In 1905 it was defeated by Japan in a war. In the same year a revolution took place which forced the Tsarist rule to introduce some political reforms. Though these reforms were introduced due to public pressure, but they were never implemented in a true spirit and therefore failed to satisfy people’s aspirations. This led to increasing dissatisfaction against the Tsarist rule. Finally, its decision to join the First World War in spite of Russia’s poor economic condition culminated into the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. It was the end of Tsarist rule in Russia. A new Socialist system based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism was established. A new federation consisting of various nationalities of the Tsarist Empire was also established. It was called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). After the Second World War the Soviet Union emerged as a super power and the leader of the Socialist bloc. However, growing economic crisis and finally failure of political and economic reform programs of Gorbachev led to its disintegration in December 1991.

Even after going through so many ups and downs the problems cited by Trotsky are still there in the new Russia that emerged after the Soviet collapse. What is more significant is that all these developments have not only affected Russia but also the world at large. Therefore the world community is keenly observing the changes in new Russia. In spite of its slow tempo of development, everyone feels that Russia will rise again and emerge as a super power as it was prior to 1991. Will it be able to do so? The answer to this question lies in the womb of future.

Russia is known for its uniqueness. It has a different history and a unique culture. Russia’s ‘otherness’ was characterized by the U.K. Prime Minister Winston Churchill as ‘a

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Since the appearance of modern nation-state the world has witnessed emergence, evolution and collapse of various states. Though the journey of nation-state began in Western Europe, the evolution of Russian state is also very significant development. History of Russia is a story of the rise and decline of empires, movements, revolutions and wars and has passed through many phases.

Beginning with the emergence of modern Russia during the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725), the first phase ended in the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. It led to collapse of the tsarist Russia and establishment of world’s first Socialist state based on principles of Marxism and Leninism. This second phase did not last for long and collapsed in 1991. After this a new Russian state based on western style multi-party democracy and liberalized-market economy came into existence.

The socialist experiment and emergence of the Soviet system was the most unprecedented event amongst all these developments. It was a ‘state with a difference.’ Its economic system was based on the principles of social control over means of production and abolition of private property. In the initial years the Soviet state made remarkable progress in achieving social and economic equity unlike capitalist system where emphasis was on economic freedom than justice and equality. The Soviet political system, as opposed to the western democracies – where a multi-party system and plurality of ideas were favored - was based on the principle of one party dominant system and democratic centralism.

However, in due course of time the Soviet state turned into a system under the hegemony of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In the name of protection of the Socialist economy all freedoms, which are considered vital for the development of individual, were curtailed. As a consequence, the Soviet system turned into an authoritarian-totalitarian system. Furthermore the Soviet economy also started stagnating due to the rigidities of planning process. The most difficult part was shortage of essential goods. Even the Soviet military industry, which was the backbone of its economy, faced problems. In the 1980s attempts were made to tackle these political and economic problems. But due to various internal and external factors the reform programs failed. As a consequence the whole
experiment of building a state without poverty, hunger and inequality failed and the Soviet state disintegrated into fifteen new independent states.

Collapse of Soviet state was also interpreted as the end of 'ideology' and 'history'. It was declared as a triumph of capitalist system over the socialist system. To some extent the leaders of the newly emerged fifteen countries also agreed with this notion.

The post Soviet Russia started its journey towards a new economic and political system based on the principles of western type liberal democracy and market economy. However, the process of transition has not been very smooth. The politics in new Russia suffers from the legacies of the Soviet system. In fact the situation was worse in the initial years of transformation.

In the post-Soviet states the issue of democratization has become a great concern for political scientists, economists and politicians. Russia's distinct civilization, her contribution to the world in various fields and great power status in the past makes it more important among these newly independent countries. Furthermore, Russia was also recognized as the successor of the former Soviet Union. Consequently, any development in Russia has direct or indirect influence on Europe and Asia, the two continents, which Russia straddles. These factors together make Russian transition significant to the research scholars across the world.

The process of establishing a liberal democratic order is known as democratization. Broadly democratization is defined in two ways: in a narrow and a broader sense. In narrow sense democratization focuses on establishing minimal democracy i.e. creating western type liberal constitutional system based on the principles of multi party system and individual rights.

The narrower definitions are criticized for their sole focus on elections and multi-party system. There are numerous examples where the political system has both these features but the state of democracy is quite poor. The broader definitions of democratization trace these problems to the structure of the political system where various institutions are dominated by a particular elite section of the society.
The broader definition of democratization on the other hand also includes democratic rights and citizenship issues along with the minimalist democracy. It gives importance to the substantive notion of democracy emphasizing on economic equality and social justice. In broader sense democratization also addresses structural problems of a democratic system. It emphasizes on equal rights to all the citizens. These rights not only include equal political rights, as the minimalists favor, but also equal social and economic ones. In other words these democratization theories favor liberal democratic values of western societies on the one hand, and take into account socialist values of economic and social equality on the other. However, both notions favor free and fair elections, a multi-party system and rule of law.

This study adopts the broader notion of democratization. It not only looks at the evolution of democratic procedures and institutions in Russia but also their performance, outcomes and structures. Here structure of democratic institutions means who runs them – a larger section of society or small elite. It depends on whether the functioning is truly democratic and represents larger wishes of various social sections or is just a facade for democracy.

Various democratization studies on Latin America and Africa reveal a different aspect of democratization. In spite of having multi-party system and regular and largely free and fair elections, these countries score low on democracy index. The freedom of media, civil society and civil liberties are under serious threat. The administrative machinery suffers from rampant corruption. On the economic front these countries have been suffering from high inflation, unemployment and instability of economic laws. Besides, the benefits of economic development are cornered by a handful of people.

This study is an attempt to analyze political developments in the post-Soviet Russia. It analyses whether it is following the path similar to the Latin American and African countries or it has its own features? This study tries to fill the gap in the existing literature on Russian democratization. The available literature on Russian democratization attempts to describe features of Russian democracy and the state. A study by Gordan Hahn (2003) explains the nature of Russian state in the light of various models of revolution. It explains how the Soviet time nomenklatura and apartchiki continue to control the political and economic system.

However, their focus has been the process of evolution and performance of various institutions of the fledgling democracy. They do not touch upon the aspect of popular perceptions. It is noteworthy that in spite of various western criticisms of democracy in Russia, the popularity of Russian president has been high. Study by Stephen White (2002) touches upon these aspects of Russian democracy. This study argues that in order to understand the real nature of Russian democracy there is a need to assess these tendencies in a more holistic framework.

The political and economic developments in Russia are dichotomous. On the one hand, the democratization process in Russia faces problems of suppression of media freedom, rampant political and administrative corruption, declining law and order, and centralization of political and executive powers in the hands of Russian president. On the other hand high economic growth, radically changing economic profile, reemergence of Russian state, and growing popularity of top political leadership are few positive aspects of it.

In order to comprehend the complex nature of the Russian development this study emphasizes on the nature of state a more appropriate approach to understand democratization. Instead of focusing merely on free and fair elections and freedom of civil society (as most of the western funded organizations do) this study also takes into account Russian popular opinion about the performance of democratic institutions.

Besides, what makes the study of Russian governance important is the unavailability of readings on this aspect of Russian politics. Only the reports of International Development Agencies such as UNDP and World Bank provide some assessment of governance aspects in transitional countries including Russia. This thesis is an attempt to fill this gap in the literature on Russian polity. However, governance has various facets and one needs to be selective in choosing the area and approach.
This study combines historical and descriptive approaches with analytical and empirical methods. Historical survey of the evolution of Russian state, based on content analysis of important documents both government and non-government are supplemented by surveys available on web and published in journals and books.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter deals with the theoretical aspects of governance and state. It discusses various problems of existing democratization studies and their shortcomings, especially their tendency to emphasize on minimalist aspects of democracy and ignoring structural problems of democratization. It is argued here that analysis of nature of states undergoing democratic transition could be helpful in overcoming these shortcomings.

This study proposes governance approach as a more holistic model for analyzing various aspects of the state system. There are multiple reasons behind adopting governance as an approach. The governance studies include two conventional arenas of democratization process: institutional and procedural. Institutional governance emphasizes on the evolution, performance and problems of various political and administrative institutions. The procedural governance on the other hand focuses on various decision-making and implementation procedures and participation of people in these. Beyond these conventional spheres, the governance approach also includes popular perception about regime and government performance in any country. The governance approach also helps in measuring the government in terms of its performance and its impact on public life. Here it is argued that an analysis synthesizing all these aspects can explain the nature of any state in a more complete sense. It also helps in identifying the location of power in a political system. Is it a handful of sections that have been running the system and taking advantage? Does democratic system helps people in raising their demands more effectively or only extra-constitutional methods are the only means to get attention and redressal? These are the litmus test for any democratic political system. The first chapter tries to explain nature of the post-Soviet Russian state in the context of these theoretical foundations.

Second chapter deals with the procedures by which the principles of governance are established in the post-Soviet Russia. The study includes the constitution making process and elections as two such major procedures. This chapter is based on the hypothesis that the
origin of existing democratic system is neither an outcome of open debates and consensus among the various sections of the Russian political society, nor a creation of a constituent assembly elected through popular vote. This has compromised its legitimacy and hampered the development of democratic governance in the country. It is argued here that in the initial phase principles of democratic governance were ignored which has hindered the evolution of constitutional law in Russia. Elections are the most significant democratic procedure as they provide an opportunity to the voters to judge the governance performance of the ruling regime. However, elections are relevant only if they are free and fair. In post-Soviet Russia elections are recognized as largely free and fair. Yet number of reports has highlighted unfair practices and political maneuvering. Unfair elections lead to poor governance as they restrict entry of genuine leaders in the political system. It also negatively affects faith of the people in the whole democratic process.

The third chapter deals with institutions which have the responsibility of formation as well as implementation of governance principles. This chapter deals with three significant political institutions in Russia: the legislature, the executive and the Civil Society. The chapter is based upon two hypotheses. Firstly, the ‘Centralization of political power’ in the hands of presidency has constrained the development and autonomy of other organs of government and civil society. Secondly, limited role of political parties in government formation and decision-making has hampered the growth of a stable and vibrant party-system which is a pre-requisite of a democratic political system. The study of Russian legislature touches upon the influence of people’s representative institution and its role in the law making. This chapter analyzes political parties in terms of their representativeness, competitiveness, effectiveness and influence on the political system. It also discusses growth and effectiveness of civil society institutions. It makes an attempt to understand people’s participation in these institutions.