Chapter - V
Conflict is an outcome of irreconcilable objectives and goals amongst groups with multiple identities. It is integral to all social processes. The realists define conflict as an outcome of the pursuit of interests and power while the structuralists find flaws, which are very subtle and not easily discernible, within the imperfect structure. The conflict in Chechnya can be analyzed in terms of the quest for and the consolidation of power by the Chechens as well as Russians. The issue of Chechnya came to light after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. The confusion over the status of Chechnya was a result of pervasive ambiguity surrounding the concept of sovereignty in the post-Soviet Russia. Yeltsin permitted the republics, without realizing the repercussions, to snatch the sovereignty from the Soviet Union. This opened the pandora box and the ethno-secessionist upheavals in the early 1990s posed a serious threat to the integrity of Russia. In this period, the political and juridical basis of the Russian Federation itself was contested. The uprising of Chechnya questioned the ideological basis of Russian nationality which
the Russians assumed settled with the break of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The crisis in Chechnya has also been a byproduct of fledgling democracy and deficient federalism. In the absence of a consistent ideology and policy Russia in the early 1990s encouraged multiple identities and interests. The incoherent ideologies, weak institutions and the concomitant political fluidity provided the backdrop of secessionism in Chechnya. The high perception of ethnic distinction combined with the calculative and strategic behaviour of political leadership created conditions for ethnic secessionism in Chechnya. Today, the ethnic Chechen community has transformed itself into a nationality and given the opportunity, a large section of the Chechens would support the secession of Chechnya from the Russian Federation.

Unable to find a quick solution, Russia launched an open military intervention in December 1994. The attempts for political solutions were systematically and arbitrarily thwarted by the military high command in Moscow which wrongly anticipated a swift military control of Chechnya. The then Defence Minister declared that all the questions in Chechnya could be resolved in two hours with one parachute regiment. This proved to be a fatal error of judgment since
war continues, as we have seen, for more than a decade. The continued military deadlock resulted in the Khasavyurt Agreement of August 1996. This resulted in the withdrawal of the Russian troops from Chechnya and any further negotiation on the status of Chechnya was postponed for five years until 2001. Another war in Chechnya began in 1999 when some Chechen terrorists led by Khattab tried to capture the neighbouring Dagestan. This war continues. The Chechens are applying guerrilla techniques to beat the Russian army. The terrorist bombings in various cities of Moscow are other facets of this war.

**Russian Policy towards Chechnya**

The policy of Russia towards Chechnya has been guided by various factors. First, Russia considers Chechnya to be an integral part of its territory and the secession of Chechnya would imply the failure of the state and its ideology. Second, a general apprehension among the Russians prevails that if Chechnya were allowed to secede it would be difficult to control other regions with similar aspirations. The voice of separatism though not as prominent as Chechnya was also heard in Tatarstan, Ural Republic in the East, Tyumen in Western Siberia and Sakha-Yakutiya in the Far East. Third,
Chechnya has economic and strategic importance for Russia. The Caspian oil fields and the pipelines that run through Chechnya can not be controlled by Russia if Chechnya becomes an independent state. On account of the loss of oil producing regions with the break-up of the USSR and in the context of increased activity of the USA and other countries in the region, it has become essential for Russia to control the pipelines through which oil is transported. An alternative route to gas and oil pipeline, outside Russian borders, can significantly alter the geo-political situation in this region. Russia can control the Caspian oil-field only if it controls the pipeline.

Apart from the tremendous loss of life and property, which we have discussed earlier, the Chechen conflict has had profound impact on the evolution of politics in Russia. The war in Chechnya demonstrated the weakness of Russian state, its army and its nascent democracy. The intensification of conflict in 1994 and 1999 was the result of the failure of the state, frail policy-making institutions in Russia and selfish intra-elite rivalry and the dichotomy between the executive and the legislative branches in Russia. The increasing control of Islam over the society and politics of Chechnya and the
intensification of terrorism have been other byproducts of this protracted conflict.

The Chechen conflict also has some unanticipated impact on the democracy of Russia. It conferred a validation to the very powerful executive (president) and the adoption of an authoritarian style of governance by him. Press censorship was another result of this war. In short, this conflict has impeded the growth of a democratic society in Russia. To thrive, the Russian democracy has to overcome all these bottlenecks. But this seems unlikely in the present situation.

**Conflict Resolution in Chechnya: Centralism, Partition or Federalism**

The debate on methods of conflict resolution in Chechnya revolves around centralism, federalism or partition. As we have discussed in Chapter 3, once an ethnic movement reaches an advanced stage, the policy of centralism proves to be counter-productive. This can suppress an ethnic conflict for a brief stint, but can never resolve the conflict and a fear always prevails that the conflict will resurface with greater vigour once the circumstances are favourable. In the case of Chechnya, Russia has been following this policy but as we have seen earlier this policy has boomeranged and the conflict continues unabated.
Partition or secession appears to be another solution to an ethnic conflict. But as we have argued in the previous chapters, the competence of partition cannot be overestimated. Partition requires certain geographical and political prerequisites. If the ethnic community does not occupy a separate geographical territory, partition is not possible. Moreover, even if an ethnic boundary exists but the unit is multi-ethnic, partition can exacerbate the problem further. Since most of the units are multi-ethnic, partition only pushes the conflict down to a lower level and it resurfaces in microcosm and gets proliferated. It has also been observed empirically that a state created on ethnic basis is bigoted to other ethnic minorities in that state. The instances of certain former Soviet Republics, Bangladesh and Kosovo demonstrate this. Further, partition requires political support on the part of the parent state as well as the international community. Till date, partition is not accepted as a desirable outcome or a positive development by most of the states. Since most of the states are multi-ethnic, a general apprehension prevails that similar demands can flare up in other multi-ethnic states. There are innumerable ethnic communities in the world today and if ethnic secessionism gets a universal endorsement, the two hundred states of today
will proliferate into thousands with no assurance that it will not split up again since ethnic identity can be constructed further based on certain ever-existing primordial elements.

In this thesis, we have argued against the creation of a state on an ethnic basis due to aforementioned reasons. This applies to Chechnya as well. Chechnya is a multi-ethnic republic and 30 percent of its population till 1991 was non-Chechen. Though there are no reports of ethnic genocide by Chechens, the number of ethnic Russians living in Chechnya has reduced drastically since 1994. In Chechnya, there is an increasing control of Islam over Chechen politics and society. Gradually, the movement has become more religious and conservative. However, the most important obstacle in the creation of a Chechen state is the absence of its recognition by Russia as well as the West and other important countries. As we have seen in our survey in Chapter 4, less than 20 percent of the Russians support the cause of Chechen independence. The West fears that independence of Chechnya can induce similar demands in the neighbouring Europe. It also believes that the secession of Chechnya can weaken Putin and strengthen communists or nationalists which can jeopardize the ongoing liberalization and democratization of
Russia. Therefore, the existing circumstances are not conducive for the secession of Chechnya.

**Democratic Federalism**

Democratic federalism is prescribed as the universal panacea for ethnic conflicts. But the capacity of territorial restructuring and the devolution of power to resolve ethnic conflicts is conditional and limited. It is contingent upon a geographical segregation of that ethnic community and the economic and political demands of that community. The federal redistribution of territory and power can ease up ethnic conflicts only when the federal units represent ethnic boundaries. If the unit in question has a mixed ethnic character, federalism cannot provide a solution to an ethnic crisis.

To be successful, federalism should be applied at an early diagnostic stage rather than as a solution to a flared up ethnic crisis. A full blown ethnic struggle often entails aspirations that trespass the boundaries of federalism. All major ethnic conflicts demand the creation of a separate statehood while the maximum that federalism can provide is autonomy.
As we have discussed earlier, ethnic conflicts have also emerged in many of the well governed federal states. The cases of Chechnya in Russia, Basque in Spain, Kashmir in India and Quebec in Canada illustrate such failures. Some of the ethnic conflicts are so complex that they cannot be resolved by territorial restructuring or the devolution of power. It should also be noted that in countries, such as, United States, Brazil, Mexico, Germany, Argentina, Venezuela and Australia federal units do not represent ethnic boundaries and serve only as politico-administrative units. In short, federalism is not necessarily a response to ethnic diversity and its capacity to resolve ethnic conflicts is also conditional.

These constraints nonetheless, federalism is the finest available mechanism to manage ethnic conflicts in a majoritarian democracy which itself has the latent potential to upset the cause of minority. To conclude, when ethnicity and nationalism marshals the unflinching allegiance of the people and where democratic federalism remains the most sought after prescription, ethnic conflicts are here to stay.

In the case of Chechnya, the options of centralism and partition have been ruled out. This leaves us with the sole alternative of federal solutions to this crisis. As has been
discussed earlier and shown vividly in our survey, people from both the sides are tired of the war of attrition. More than 50 percent of the Russians in our survey supported a peaceful negotiation of the conflict. On the other side, the overwhelming support of the Russian constitution by Chechens, in the referendum conducted in early 2003, clearly vindicated the desire of the Chechens to revert to a normal life. In such a situation, granting autonomy or special status to Chechnya short of independence seems to be a credible device.

**Tartarstan Model**

Many of the scholars have projected the Tartarstan Model as the ideal prototype for the resolution of the conflict in Chechnya. In this model, Russia sidelined the issue of the status of the republic and signed agreements on economic and other peripheral questions. According to the republican constitution, Tartarstan is a sovereign state, a subject of international law, associated with Russia on the basis of a treaty on mutually delegated powers. But according to the Russian constitution of 1993, Tartarstan is an integral part of Russia. The 1994 treaty between Tartarstan and Russia defines Tartarstan as a republic “united with Russia” on the
basis of the constitution of the two states. Therefore, the status of Tartarstan was left undefined for suitable interpretation by both the parties. But the treaty of 1994 granted immense economic autonomy to Tartarstan. It gave the power of budgeting, taxation and establishing foreign relations with other countries till the extent these laws do not contravene federal laws.

But there are several factors which distinguish the case of Tartarstan from Chechnya. First, Tartarstan does not have an international boundary. On all sides it is surrounded by Russian territory. Second, Tartarstan has a balanced and well-distributed Russian and Tartar population. In Tartarstan, more than 40 percent of the total population is of ethnic Russian. According to the 1989 census, 70 percent of the total Tartar population in Russia lives not in Tartarstan but in other parts of Russia. Tartars of Tartarstan (1.8 million) constitute only about 30 percent of the total of 5.5 million Tartars in Russia. Also, Tartar Muslims are very tolerant and unorthodox.

By contrast, there is an incredible hold of conservative Islam over the Chechen politics and society. In Chechnya, more than 70 percent of the population are Muslims and this percentage must have gone higher since most of the ethnic
Russians migrated from Chechnya after the war began in 1994. The Chechens, unlike the Tartars, have fought two wars and suffered unprecedented atrocities committed by the Russian army. All these contributed to the emergence of a strong ethno-political identity among the Chechens and they will not relent voluntarily. Therefore, the Tartarstan Model has only limited implication for Chechnya.

To sum up, Chechnya can be granted an economic autonomy of Tartarstan type, while at the political front, it can have an "associated status" with only defence, currency and foreign policy remaining to Russia. More important, however, would be the reinstallation of the faith of the Chechens towards Russia and its constitution. The advancement of democracy and democratic institutions in Chechnya as well as Russia will contribute immensely towards such development.