CHAPTER-V
CONCLUSION

The "great socio-cultural transformation of all" such as the abolition of private property in the means of production and the consequent exploitation of man by man constitutes the essence of the socialist project. The task of a socialist transformation was not only unique but also much complicated. It was required not only to generate productive forces but also to create an altogether new socio-cultural and economical order of socialism. The project of creating a socialist society had special repercussions for women. Central Asian women were caught between the tradition they inherited on one hand and the Soviet modernity, which was supposed to replace the old ways on the other hand. However, the progress was slow and hesitant at first, but as the educational reforms began to take effect, women started to play an active role in public life, in a broad range of professions as well as in the communist party organization.

The Soviet government passed many legislative measures to provide social and gender equality. The first legislative measure known as "the Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia", adopted on 7th November, 1917, offered equal rights to all citizens irrespective of their creed and nationality. It also provided equal status to all religious cults. The ordinance issued on 11th December, 1917, asked all religious organizations to hand over schools, institutions and academies which were managed and controlled by them to the Commissariat of Education. As a result, the younger generation was not affected by any religious influences in the republics. The most important decree named as "On separation of church from the state and
school from the church" issued on 23rd January, 1918, called for demolition of all pervasive influence of religion on socio-cultural and political life.

Basically Central Asia is a Muslim majority area. It was another challenge for Soviet authorities to have moderate policies in their dealings with Muslims, such as adoption of legislative measures, setting up of Soviet power, nativisation, creation of nation state and expansion of education. During that period, prevailing socio-cultural structure of Central Asia sometimes prevented the Soviet government from carrying ahead anti-religious campaigns.

Central Asia was a patriarchal society where women had little say in the public affairs. Early marriages, fewer divorce and the existence of large families confined socio-occupational mobility and women's participation in social production. Early marriages led to more children and bigger families resulted due to traditional values and cultural entities. The average family size in Soviet Central Asia was about six to ten as compared to the European republics. Family planning supporters believed that large families affected women's activity in the public sphere such as in education and participation in social production. It was accepted that as number of children rose, the educational levels of women drop which also was one of the reasons for unemployment and high birth rate.

However, the level of modernization among Soviet Central Asian women was low as also their intelligentsia or white-collar personnel. Due to continuation of traditional division of labour within the family, those women who participated in social production hardly had any functional specialization. Women's activity were limited only within agricultures, collective farms or the state farms. The rate of women's participation in labour activity did not exceed 40 per cent in any of the
Soviet Central Asian republics. The existence of large families and a high birth rate had a negative impact on economy and on the quality of labor, which affected the education and skill levels of women.

After disintegration, the post-Soviet central Asian republics in general and Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, in particular faced a sudden reaction to the transitional process to market economy. The government of both republics have faced imbalance that led to the increase of inflation and the lowering of the living standards of people. The high level of unemployment among young generation, segregation in the labour market, reduction of salary, increasing violence against women and the high level of maternal and infant mortality showed the socio-economic crisis among the people of these republics.

One of the grave consequences of the transition process is that pushed out of regular work, with no social security, increasing number of women are being lured into prostitution. The incidence of child labour is also growing. The state has no policy measures to deal with such problems. It cannot be denied that women had broad range of opportunities in the Soviet period the opportunity to obtain education, engage in scientific work, improve social status, and take an active part in all spheres of public life.

After the adoption of constitutions in Turkmenistan on 18th May 1992 and in Kyrgyzstan on 8th May 1993, gave women equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, social, cultural and political life. It guarantees men and women with equal rights to work and equal wages for equal work, social protection, education, and so forth. Women and men have equal rights in the household with regards to the children, property, and in decision-making. The state defends the interests of the
mothers and the child, provides assistance to families with many children and single mothers.

All workingwomen in Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan enjoy a number of benefits comparable to those enjoyed by men. Female workers along with other employees, and collective-farmers have the right to retire five years earlier than men (at age 55), or after 20 years of service (compared to 25 years for men). In a number of professions, retirement age and length of service for women is even lower. Women who have five or more children have the right to retire at the age of 50 years or after 15 years of service. In addition, the state provides material assistance for women to take care of their children. However, the level of benefits is not sufficient under the current trend of rising cost of living, and problems of job-placement are also unsolved.

It is also significant that women receive special state maternity benefit after the birth of a child. Women maintain uninterrupted length of service and work experience. This measure has great importance for the children who grow up enjoying the close attention of their mothers. At the same time, the state provides workingwomen with leave to take care of sick children.

In Soviet time, even though there were problems with political freedom the people in general had some kind of social security and facilities (almost free housing, free education, health care and jobs-security). But the transition period after disintegration did not fulfill the same amount of needs of majority of the people of the republics. Education has been one of the major casualties of the transition difficulties.
Teachers are leaving the profession due to poor working condition and low salaries. Salaries of teachers are not being paid regularly. Very few teachers, who are genuinely interested in helping the students, cannot finish the course within a fixed time, so they need to take classes in two-three shifts. The buildings are used for other purposes, which affect the quality of teaching. Operating multiple shifts to teach the students leads to the low quality of teaching. Limited number of teachers are not able to provide qualitative education. Teachers are neglecting their teaching profile and providing poor quality education.

There are other reasons for students' negligence of the study and not coming to the schools because of distance of the schools from their houses. After a certain period of time they bunk the schools and later stop coming to the schools. That increases the percent of dropouts.

Gradually Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan have shifted the responsibility of maintaining schools to the local administration. Now the general education is funded from the local government budget and local governments are responsible for the preparation and execution of the budget. The Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan establishes standards for all budget items. It also allows implementing different programmes in various areas owing to the differences in developmental levels. In some regions' local budgets are also insufficient to cover general educational costs because of the economic crisis. Lack of funds resulted in poor maintenance and implementation of new policies and facilities. Schools are no longer able to supply students with textbooks and other materials. Printing of textbooks in the country has been drastically limited due to the shortage of funds and raw materials.
Emigration is another problem, which hinders the development of education. Many professional teachers had emigrated from the republic because of the difficulties which they found in teaching higher education. Other teachers, professors are also leaving higher educational institutions because of financial constraints and lack of infrastructure. The aspiring teachers, due to lack of adequate training, return to their native villages and begin to teach without having special training.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the breakdown of the distribution system and the changes that followed have a negative impact on the health sector in terms of both goods like medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and vaccines and services like medical care, medical and nursing education. This has led to the increase of infant and maternal mortality rates. Since independence many innovative ideas have been mooted, but the most important obstacle is financial. In Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, severe budget constraints have resulted in the deterioration of primary health care, while worsening living conditions have led to an overall decline in the health of the population. Outdated equipment or shortages of medication, other medical supplies and poorly maintained facilities are reflected in worsening health indicators over the past few years.

Gradually republics are trying to reform the social sectors. Kyrgyzstan became the first republic in the region to adopt a Health Insurance Law in 1992. Of course, the law was implemented only in 1997. The independent status of the Health Insurance Fund is maintained. The Fund working together with the Ministry of Health to define and implement joint functions (such as payment to providers) and joint systems such as Health Information System (HIS). In Kyrgyzstan, a demonstration project was initiated in Issyk-Kul in 1994. The project aimed at
introducing new payment mechanisms, giving the fund holding function to primary care providers and contracting with hospitals on the basis of case-based reimbursement. In addition, it focused on the formation of Family Physicians Groups. The regions like Issyk-Kul, Chui and Bishkek city in Kyrgyzstan, family group practices are being formed accordingly. The physicians who are working in the polyclinics are undertaking a retraining programme of 12 weeks duration spread throughout a 12-month period. Then the same project initiated the payment of Family Physician Groups by capitation in 1998.

In Turkmenistan, a system of Voluntary Insurance was introduced in January 1996 based on a 4 percent tax on payroll. The contributions are collected through the regular tax collection system and transferred to the Ministry of Health. In Turkmenistan, the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry issued an order in February 1996 to introduce the family physicians and nurses to the health care system, defining their functions and responsibilities. Currently all physicians are working at rural Polyclinics (Selskaya Vrachebnaya Ambulatorya) SVAs that classified as family physician.

In the national health care system, in 1996, the Kyrgyz government adopted the 'Manas' programme and changed the old Soviet system of health care. The programme focused on providing medical assistance at the primary care level through family doctors. By establishing mandatory medical insurance fund in 1997, it has been expanding the coverage it provides. Primary health care reform will be carried out under the sub-programme on primary health care and disease prevention supported by the International Development Association (IDA) under the World
Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the German and the Swiss governments.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) assists the Ministry of Health with implementing comprehensive reforms in the health care sector. It is working to create greater competition in the health sector, achieve higher efficiency in the allocation of resources, and greater involvement of the population in decision-making related to health care. In addition, USAID has planned to modernize and expand health services within the family group practices.

It is not possible to measure the cultural wealth of a nation, or define criteria for the scope of its culture. Health and education can be easily measured but that is not true for culture. Number of libraries, museums, monuments or books indicate to be enlightened and self-educated, in a particular area, community or about a nation. But the citizens of the republic also have emotional and empathic needs, emotional conception of artistic forms, and eagerness to accept the cultural norms, which they want.

After 1991, artistic ties between theatrical teams, composers, artists, musicians and their colleagues in former Soviet republics have been curtailed. This has narrowed down the artistic scope and vision of local artists, which led to the emigration of many cultural leaders, artists, actors and musicians. The rest are forced to take other jobs for economic reasons. The loss of these talents led to the closure of the cultural centers. A number of cultural institutions in the Kyrgyz republic since independence have suffered because of the economic crisis. Many cultural establishments have been closed and the lack of funds also leaves many cultural buildings without maintenance.
Gradually, the republics have got the opportunity to showcase their art forms and revive their ethnic traditions, an assertion which reflects an element of self-identification.

However, revival of cultural forms has also led to other issues, like religious revival. Because many ethnic groups are based on religion, it seems revivalism of religion and ethnicity are intermingled, which makes it difficult to differentiate between the two. In practice Islamic revival has taken two forms; one, which the regions can live with and the other, which they have firmly rejected. However currently Islamic revivalism has entailed a rediscovery of ancient cultural heritage and people have shown enthusiasm to participate in religious rituals, celebrating religious public holidays and favoured giving more space to religious institutions. Nonetheless, wary of the potency of religion, the leaders of Central Asia have taken steps to control religious institutions.

After independence, in Kyrgyzstan, organized religion is quite new for most of them. Some people are trying to adjust with it, while others are indifferent. The rest of the people are Russian orthodox. They do not have any strong religious tradition existing in the republic. The republic's southern territory is more conservative, while northern section, which is closely bordered by Russia, is industrialized and less religious.

In 1996, the Kyrgyz government created a State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA), in order to promote religious tolerance, protect freedom of conscience, and oversee laws on religion. According to 1997 Presidential decree, all religious organizations must register with the SCRA, and each congregation must register separately. If a religious organization engages in commercial activity, it is
required to pay tax in accordance with the tax code. Though Kyrgyzstan has experienced religious revivalism, still it does not have any state religion.

Even in Turkmenistan, too, no religion is accorded the status of state religion. But a modest revival of Islam has occurred since independence. People of Turkmenistan are very much influenced by the moderate Islam of Turkey. Since it is an authoritarian republic, control over religion is also very natural. The government of Turkmenistan has incorporated some aspects of Muslim traditions to present a Turkmen identity. On one hand the government pays the salaries of Muslim clerics, while on the other hand it applies some restrictions on the establishment of Muslim places of worship.

The Constitution of Turkmenistan provides for freedom of religion, while in practice the government exercises control over all forms of religion. The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, which was amended in 1995 and 1996, also provides for religious freedom. By law, all congregations are required to register with the government for which at least 500 citizens (each at least 18 years old) in every locality has to be willing to do so.

The Law on Public Associations specifically excludes its application in the case of religious gatherings. While the Law on Religious Organizations does not prohibit non-registered religious groups from gathering, government permission is required for any mass meetings or demonstrations for religious purposes. According to Human Rights Watch in January 2000, the President of Turkmenistan claimed that the law enforcement agents had confiscated 350,000 religious books and 80,000 cassettes that were incompatible with the country's faith.
In October 2002 the President of Turkmenistan published a spiritual and historical guidebook for the nation entitled *Rukhnama*. It is intended to supersede other established religious codes as well as historical and cultural texts and thereby shape citizens’ religious and cultural behaviour. Prizes would be distributed to those citizens who faithfully follow *Rukhnama’s* code and all high level officials have to keep their own copy of the book.

Ethnic minorities, including Russians and Armenians, will also have to abide by the new rules. Mostly Muslims but largely secular Turkmenistan has attempted to foster a national identity since it gained independence in 1991 by fashioning a personality cult around Niyazov by encouraging nationalism.

The Soviet system, however, encouraged the development of ethnic identities, for a variety of cultural, ideological and political reasons. Though ethnic problems existed at the subconscious level, people refused to acknowledge such issues.

Although the Central Asian region has suffered various ethnic conflicts during Perestroika and Glasnost, where hundreds died, means that rumors were widespread in the region and are often difficult to distinguish from facts. The confusing status of the Soviet legacy such as ‘nations’, ‘states’, and ‘ethnic groups’ referred to in Central Asia has led to an exaggeration of ethnicity.

After disintegration, gradually the republics are taking up policies to integrate the ethnic groups. The 1993 Kyrgyz Constitution states that all citizens of the republic are equal before the law. Nobody can be discriminated on the basis of origin, gender, race, ethnicity, language, faith, political or religious preference or
other grounds. Similarly, the Turkmenistan Constitution of 1992 provides equal rights and freedom to all citizens. There is no legal basis for discriminating against ethnic minorities.

When one reads through the entire Soviet reforms in socio-cultural sectors, and those pertaining to women, though they were gender friendly, one feels that there was an imposition from above without attempting to prepare society to accept such changes. In a deeply traditional society like Central Asia, things broke apart, once the protective Soviet umbrella collapsed. Despite staying there for decades, the Russians were not able to integrate themselves with the local society and had to emigrate once things begin to change. The indigenous language and customs were less encouraged and it is only after disintegration, that people are getting an opportunity to assert their "selfhood". This transition period is like a churning process, which throws up new challenges and hopefully, the local people, will arrive at their own solutions without any interference from the outside world.