CONCLUSION

The Islamic areas of Russia were first brought under the Russian yoke during the time of the Tsars. The Tsarist regime had been most ruthless in conquering the Islamic areas, an inherent component of the Russian policy towards the Islamic people was racial arrogance. These people were considered as barbaric, cruel and uncivilized. Often in the conquest of these areas excessive brutality was exhibited. This policy more or less continued during the Soviet period. Thus as far as the Muslims were concerned the subsequent rule of Soviet regime was no different. The talk of the rights of nationalities and self-determination some how could never translate into practice. The Chechens had to face the trauma of deportation. They had to suffer because of an arbitrary policy that unjustly convicted them of being Nazi conspirators. The psychological trauma of that atrocity still bears heavily on the psychic of the Chechens. The Soviet Union was also therefore a culprit in the oppression of the Chechens. The Soviet attempts to impress
upon the communist ideology upon the people proved to be counter productive. It was considered by them as an attempt to undermine their age-old traditional beliefs, which in the closed environment of Soviet Union remained dormant and was never expressed but resurfaced after its collapse. Even the communist ideology developed a regional flavour for example of the type of Sultan Galiev who believed that the oppression of Muslim people at the hands of the colonial powers in this case at the hands of the Russians made them defacto proletarians and turned their demands for sovereignty into a proletarian revolution, Muslims being essentially classless people they could forgo the class struggle. The Soviet Nationality policy contained contradiction between the principal of ethno-territorial federalism and the actual repression of national aspirations. The much proclaimed Soviet policy of providing autonomy to the various nationalities of the Soviet Union was in name only. The Soviet government made federal territorial divisions to fulfill these aspirations was a farce. History is filled with numerous
instances where these units were separated, divided, joined together and then again divided paying scant regard to the wishes of the indigenous population which were sometimes even had to be relocated. Lenin to some extent tried to solve the nationality policy but the autocratic policy of Stalin particularly his deportation of the Chechen people compounded the ethnicity and nationality issues, the price of which, had to be paid by contemporary Russia. Thus the Soviet Nationality Policy was a complete failure the association of religion by the people as part of their identity compounded the problem further. The issue of religious identity of the people has compounded the problem considerably.

In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's decline the people of North Caucasus particularly Chechnya and Tatarstan initiated the process of reinvigoration of their age old religious beliefs. Thus a religious revivalism was certainly occurring in Russia yet this religious revival was not fundamentalist. In fact Islam in Russia was never fundamentalist. The Islamic beliefs
were in the form of *Sufism* which had over the centuries made a place for itself in the hearts of the people. Sufism is inherently moderate and liberal.

Islam in the Caucasian region was spread by the missionary activities of the Sufi saints and not by the might of the sword. Sufi form of Islam became compatible with the indigenous culture of the clan based Caucasian society. The Naqshabadi and Qadari Sufi orders were most popular in this region. The tradition of *pir* and *murid* and pilgrimages to the *dargah* of sufi saints was a hallmark of sufi way of life. These sufi orders assimilated the tribal culture of the region. They accommodated the ancient beliefs and practices of the North Caucasian people which orthodox Islam would have prohibited. For example some of the Sufi practices such as pilgrimages to dargah of sufi saints is disapproved by the orthodox Islam. Thus during the Soviet era in the process of reducing religiosity among the people the Soviet government discouraged sufi faith from being practiced. Mosques and *madarsas* were closed down, Sufism however remained
dormant. It even played a positive role in helping the Chechens survive the deportations ordered by Stalin in 1944. In the post Soviet period this age old religious belief of the people resurfaced. The attendance in mosques and participation in religious activities increased. Chechens now saw the renewal of age old beliefs as a reassertion of their cultural identity which had been continuously and systematically subdued by the Tsars and then by the Soviet Union.

In a way Islamic revival can occur only if in the past there have been attempts to undermine Islam. This was the process of de-Islamisation as it happened during the Soviet rule. De-Islamisation should be considered as denial of freedom to practice religion of the Muslim people. Islamic revival had crucial implications on the polity and society of Chechnya, which was unique in its culture and tradition. The Chechens had been oppressed by the Russians during the Tsarist rule and during the Soviet period. Years of oppression however could not undermine the free spirit and love of
freedom of the Chechen people in the chaotic situation of the
Soviet Union collapse this spirit re-emerged in the form of
demands of sovereignty by Chechnya. The situation was
further compounded by economic collapse which was
happening all over Russia and it occurred in Chechnya too.
Economic condition of Chechnya was deplorable, there was
widespread unemployment and it was the youth which was
largely responding to the lure of militancy. For this situation
the government of Russia was also to be blamed. Lack of
foresighted approach and inadequate handling by the Russian
government turned Chechnya into an unruly republic thus
memories of the past and blunders of the present made
Chechnya get out of the Russian grip. Thus the initial Chechen
demand for sovereignty did not have its linkages with Islamic
fundamentalism, as the aim of the Chechens was not to
establish an Islamic state. Though Dudaev played the Islamic
card when he found himself encircled by opponents or found it
convenient to rally around the Chechens by and large his
regime was not fundamentalist in nature, Dudaev himself was
not a staunch Muslim. The religious identities of the Chechens was of Sufi Islam which was closely enmeshed with their centuries old national identity.

Thus Islam has been an inextricable part of the separatist struggle of the Chechens. Though initially it was not fundamentalist in nature, gradually fundamentalism took hold of Chechnya. The traditional sufi Islam was pushed to the margins and Islamic fundamentalist took Chechnya into its grip. The first Russo-Chechen war on the other hand was not a result of Islamic fundamentalism. There developed a relationship between militants already operating there and the pan Islamists and fundamentalists. This symbiotic relationship developed in Chechnya overtime and now the chechen militants became Islamic militants because they wanted to implement an Islamic state. It was with this motive that the militants thought of intervening in Dagestan. There aspiration was to spread their area of control over neighbouring Chechen republics such as Dagestan, Ingushetia and others.
The Russians however at the time of the Chechen conflict, particularly overstretched the problem of Islamic fundamentalism while forgetting their past repressions and mistakes. The world at large has become increasingly alarmed at the aggressive stand of some Islamic fundamentalist groups and acquiesced to the Russian policy. Though these groups do not represent the majority of Muslim it has made the world skeptical about Muslim demands of sovereignty. Through this policy the Russian government was able to get the sanctioned of the western countries for its policy in Chechnya. In the long run however this policy is detrimental to the Russians themselves.

Findings

The nationality policy of the Soviet Union was a complete failure. Moreover all these acts of the Soviet Union were a proof of failure of their nationality policy. Their claim of granting autonomy and self determination to the various nationalities within the Soviet Union was in name only. There were numerous instances of populations and territories which
were administratively divided or joint with other territories arbitrarily. The Soviet attempt to impress upon the people of the Soviet Union with their concept of the ‘Soviet Man’ also did not succeed. The religious and cultural beliefs of the Soviet Union could not be successfully moulded in accordance with the Soviet ideology. They remained dormant and resurfaced when its collapse was imminent.

There was a process of religious revivalism which occurred in different regions of Russia which got initiated in the period of perestroika and glastnost. Where Muslims were residing this was manifested in the form of sufi form of Islam which has been the traditional religious belief of the Muslims living in different regions of Russia.

Religious revivalism inspite of having its roots in the past cannot be equated with Islamic fundamentalism. Though fundamentalism also talks of reviving a golden age of the past it is rather an interpretation of the past which has been done by the people of the present. Religious revivalism on the other hand is a reinvigoration of traditional belief of the people.
A look at the problem of Islamic militancy in Russia tells us that when Nation precedes the State the resulting political entity is more stable. In Chechnya this has not been the case. Though made a part of Russian empire and then of the Soviet Union by way of conquest the Chechens have been unable to imbibe the identity of being a Russian. Religion is an important component of identity of the people. In Russia this identity exist in the form of Sufism.

In the Russo-Chechen conflict of 1994-96 religion played an important role in uniting Chechens to fight against the Russians. However in this conflict it only provided an identity and a sense of unity to the Chechens' fight against the Russians. But this religious identity was not fundamentalist. It was in the form of Sufi Islam which is moderate and tolerant. Moreover during this conflict the Chechens were not fighting to formulate a fundamentalist theocratic Islamist State.

In the period proceeding the first Russo-Chechen conflict Islamic fundamentalism started taking roots in the Russian region of North Caucasus particularly Chechnya.
There developed a nexus between those who wished to implement a fundamentalist form of Islam and those who wanted sovereignty by way of militancy and violence. Thus militancy in Chechnya assumed Islamic fundamentalist character. There developed a symbiotic relation between Islamic fundamentalism and militancy. These Islamic militants had links with the Pan Islamic fundamentalist groups, which also entered Chechnya and subsequently fought the Russians alongside the Chechen militants. The economic hardship and chaos in the post Soviet period reinforced religious identities.

The solution to the problem of Chechnya can be sought if Moscow gives importance to the traditional Sufi leadership. The appointment of Mufti Akhmad Kadyrov was a step in this direction. However the biggest hurdle to Moscow’s such attempt would be that whomsoever it reposes its support to would be considered by Chechens as a protégé of Moscow as Chechens have a strong sense of Nationhood. They have not been able to erase the scars of aggression, oppression and
deportation inflicted by Russia on them. This Chechen spirit of freedom and sovereignty was expressed aptly by S. Kh. Abumuslimo, a Chechen political scientist.

'Real Chechens cannot identify themselves as Rossiyane [citizens of Russia], even if they wanted to refer to themselves by this name and suppressed their human and national pride. In this case, their Chechen memory would rise from the deep recesses of their souls where it had been thrust by 200 years of spiritual colonization and tear their souls and their bodies apart. Even if they remembered nothing their genetic memory would be set aflame by the history of humiliation of the martyrs and victims of the century long genocide."

It is true that Russia has not inflicted any less wounds on Chechnya by way of its oppression of the Chechen people. There exist ample grounds for Chechens to demand sovereignty from Russia. In the post Russo-Chechen Conflict period (1996 onwards) developed into Chechens adopting a

---

Jihadi mentality. This was signified by discrimination showed towards Russians, enforcement of Shariat in Chechnya and attempts at unifying all the North Caucasian Nationalities under the banner of Islam. Sufi form of Islam is the best safeguard against fundamentalism. Sufism is completely harmonised with the culture of the land, it is in fact entrenched in the traditional democratic structure of North Caucasus and is also the under lying force in the Middle Volga region. Sufis are opponents of the fundamentalists and have strongly opposed their entry into Russia.

This fact however has not been realised by the Russian leadership and even by the Russian citizens. Instead of strengthening the traditional belief of the people the policy has been to undermine it and therefore, making it vulnerable to Islamic fundamentalism. It is imperative that Russia formulate an adequate policy to address the aspirations of the Muslims within their territory as they are an essential component of the federal structure of Russia and survival of Russia itself would depend on this policy. Moscow leadership has now for long
followed a policy of placing personal agendas above the common good. The above feature particularly signified Yeltsin's policy. If Russia's traditional value systems are strengthened it would lead to a stronger Russia not a fragmented one, as is mostly thought.