CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION
Uzbekistan, located at the heart of the Central Asian region is a doubly landlocked country sharing its borders with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan. Lying between the two very important rivers, the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya, Uzbekistan is famous as the land of the great ancient civilizations, for its historic cities, cultural achievements and architectural splendors. Its strategically sensitive position at the crossroads of Russia, China, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan, favorable geopolitical position and autonomous energy and water systems help it to form a link between the republics of the region, bridging the gap between the west and the Islamic world.

The collapse of Soviet Union and the independence of Uzbekistan resulted in high rate of inflation, a decline in the production and a rapid increase in unemployment. Thus the main economic objective of independent Uzbekistan has been transforming from a socialist economy to a market economy. Measures through various laws, ownership rights, entrepreneurship, and privatization have been adopted from time to time in order to develop the economy of Uzbekistan. The vast majority of the labor force has been engaged in agriculture and forms the dominant core sector of the national economy. Cotton was the leading agricultural product in the region during the Soviet rule and continues to provide the foundation for the whole economy in Uzbekistan even after independence. Being the world’s second-largest cotton exporter and fifth largest cotton producer, the country relies heavily on cotton production as the major source of export earnings along with other resources such as gold and uranium.

Uzbekistan witnessed a radical transformation of the socio-economic structure under the Soviet rule. Age old widespread poverty, illiteracy, primitive agriculture, small raw material processing industries and antiquated technology got an opportunity to modernize themselves. Modernization, mechanization, diversification of agriculture and industrial sector along with newly expanded irrigation and transport system created new social conditions in Uzbek Republic. Additionally, the Soviet rule
brought a change in the status of women in Uzbekistan. Conditions of women seemed better and more advanced than many other countries during the Soviet era. Women were liberated from the strict Islamic laws and social customs. The veil system (*purdah*) was discarded. They were granted opportunities for education and favorable conditions were created for them to join the work force. Their participation substantially increased in many fields of the economy. As a result women constituted a major share in the healthcare and social services of the republic.

Women constitute more than half (50.1 percent) the population of Uzbekistan and play a vital role in the social as well as economic development of the society. Independence of Uzbekistan in 1991 opened a new chapter in the evolution of the position of women in Uzbekistan. As a result of several years of economic recession, unemployment has been growing among the Uzbek women. Many women were forced to open small businesses or become day laborers. Budgetary allocations for kindergartens reduced particularly in the countryside. Women with small children had no choice but to stay at home. In the traditional patriarchal society of Uzbekistan, women became primarily responsible for household work and children, which resulted in limiting their opportunities. In rural areas of Uzbekistan, 45 percent of the women were employed in agriculture in 2002. Women are engaged mainly as agricultural workers and cattle breeders in rural areas. Besides this, women's share in employment has been adversely affected by the decline in employment opportunities in the formal sector due to the restructuring of the former collective farms. As the collective farms are gradually transformed into private farms, women gradually get employed mainly on a temporary basis. Lack of employment opportunities increases insecurities and vulnerabilities such as domestic violence and drug trafficking. Women's inaccessibility to paid employment contributes to a reduction in their ability to influence decision-making in the household. Women are mainly employed in social sectors such as health, education and fine arts. Their participation in politics and policy-making posts are limited. Economic
hardship has extended into areas of health as well. Women are faced with frequent births, inadequate nutrition and poor quality of water and other health related problems. Hence Uzbek women experience societal pressure to maintain their role as traditional mothers and wives in the family.

Domestic violence is a regular feature in Uzbek homes. Rather than protecting the women from violence, local authorities force the women to remain in violent marriages, blocking their access to divorce while compelling them to return to their husbands. Even the father of the tortured wife also advises her to go back to her husband’s place as the woman who leaves her husband’s place is not considered of good morals in the traditional society of Uzbekistan. However the local self-governing community or the 'mahalla' as well as the District Women’s Committees have a tremendous impact on the social status of women in Uzbekistan, their participation in economic and social life, and on how they view themselves.

The government of Uzbekistan has been making remarkable efforts through the National Action Plans to support the cause of women. Non-governmental agencies and other interested international organizations are being supported by the Government through technical assistance and funding. Government has guaranteed gender parity in all respect through its constitution to all citizens of the country. As far as education sector is concerned, the Government has introduced "National Programme for Personnel Training" in 1997 to increase the obligatory duration of school education from 9 to 12 years. This reform programme has also provided a long term strategy to strengthen and develop the education system. Universal access to primary and secondary school education has been maintained and literacy rates are almost cent percent among all. Higher education is being organized along the lines of bachelor’s and master’s degree programs and certain areas like Computer Science, Business Administration and English language have gained importance and are being expanded. However, limited attention has been given to women’s
participation in higher education. It is still considered as a traditionally male dominated branch. In case of rural areas, women are not preferred to access higher education. Even children enrolled in rural schools often miss part of the schooling in order to help in cotton harvesting. Overall number of women entering into higher education and vocational education has declined due to increasing costs and the introduction of fee-paying system for some students and many families cannot afford higher education for their daughters also.

Uzbekistan had a relatively well-developed health care system at the beginning of the transition. Nevertheless, it could not maintain this status due to poor economic condition. Now the Government has begun to introduce changes in the structure of healthcare services with focus on guaranteeing and maintaining the health of women such as reproductive health, family planning services, protection of mother and childhood. As Uzbekistan is the most populous state among all the republics, efforts are undertaken to avoid unwanted pregnancies and to educate the people on the use of all types of contraceptives. Still the field of sexual and reproductive health requires further research and suffers from paucity of literature. Most women feel sex education should be conducted at home where the womenfolk could clarify doubts and queries unhesitatingly. The rural areas specially suffer from poverty, malnutrition and anemia. Hard manual labor, poor quality of food and water lead to an unhealthy health status for the rural women.

The quota system for women in parliament, which was introduced by the Soviets, guaranteeing equal representation to both men and women disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union. But the Uzbek Government has reintroduced the "quota system" subsequently and the percentage of elected women members to the national parliament, the Oliy Majlis, has increased from 4 percent (1994) to 22 percent (2010). This has been done to increase women's participation in public and political life. This is really a noteworthy effort made by the Uzbek
Government to draw more and more women in to policy and decision-making.

The growth and expansion of women NGOs is another most positive and vibrant achievement in terms of women’s political participation in Uzbekistan. International organizations working in Uzbekistan have played a noticeable role in the development of NGOs in the region. They are providing a helping hand in the form of training programmes and technical assistance as well as giving grants to local NGOs for the execution of social projects. In Uzbekistan, the primary focus of the NGOs is the improvement in the status of women in the family, society and economy. Government of Uzbekistan is also providing assistance to consolidate and coordinate the activities of womens’ organizations dealing with womens’ issues, implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action along with other international documents such as Millennium development Goals, aimed at achieving gender parity in the country.

All womens’ NGOs, despite their differences in the programs, are directed towards protection of womens’ rights, equal opportunities, improvement of women’s status in family and society, women’s participation in politics etc. These NGOs also carry out seminars, meetings, and discussions to raise public awareness. The growth of foreign assistance mainly from United Nations Organization, the Soros Foundation, the US Government, the European Union and the Dutch development agency etc. have fostered the growth of NGOs in Uzbekistan. These international organizations along with other national and local NGOs are targeting the development of women through organizing various seminars, training and awareness programmes.

Paucity of data and limited access to statistics is a major problem for identifying critical issues in Uzbekistan. There is a paucity of data especially pertaining to the Uzbek women and their contribution to the socio-economic development. It becomes of crucial importance that there is a lack of holistic and interdisciplinary approach towards studies related
to Women of Uzbekistan. Areas such as health, HIV AIDS, human trafficking, domestic Violence etc are still lagging attraction by scholars and researchers. Such issues need to be addressed urgently by international and local Non Government Organizations to draw attention of the Government for the betterment of Uzbek women.

Moreover, it is the duty of the Government to bridge the gap between men and women not only in theory but in practice as well. In Uzbekistan, the task of the Government is really tough as the society is male dominated and traditional thought oriented. Hence the Government should take measures to create public awareness in the Uzbek society about the vital role played by a woman in the society and economy as well. As Uzbek women constitute more than half of the entire population and almost half of the working population, their role in the development of both society and economy cannot be under rated. The Government should encourage local Non-Government organizations as well as international organizations to take active participation in the process of emancipation of women from the grass root level. The state statistical committee of Uzbekistan should give prime importance to various women related issues while preparing its national and other documents and reports. As we have already seen that, women’s opportunities to participate in various economic sectors have been limited because of the reduction in the availability of child care facilities and due to preference towards the traditional roles as mothers and wives, women usually have a greater time burden than men. It resulted in limiting their energy, time and skills. As we have seen that despite of contributing nearly half of the total employment of Uzbekistan, women are still far behind men in occupying positions in decision-making and policy-making processes. Hence it is the responsibility of the Government to recognize their contribution towards economy as well as to provide new opportunities for their betterment.

There is an urgent need to work with the young generation to raise gender awareness and confidence among themselves and to encourage
the girls as well as their family members to take up higher education, which is essential to reduce their vulnerability in the society. Uzbek women, who can act as a major catalyst in bringing socio-economic changes, need more attention and recognition from both the Government and the society. By which, women of Uzbekistan would be able to enjoy all their rights and opportunities provided by the state not only in theory but also in practice.