CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE SURVEY
This chapter attempts to review all the literature available that is relevant to this research work. The literature review has been thematically organized catering to different periods of time. Such a survey would reflect a better understanding and give an insight on the current role of the women in Uzbek society from a historical perspective. The literature survey highlights the role of women in the Uzbek economy since independence, highlighting the Government and other non-governmental organizations’ initiatives.

2.1 Historical Background

Uzbekistan’s history has been spelt out in great details by a number of scholars like (Khidayatov, 1997), (Harmatta, 1996), (Negmatov, 2003). These authors have given focus on rich vegetation, favourable climate and geographical location of the Central Asian region which attracted foreign conquerors during ancient period. Such studies reveal that the most ancient states that existed on the territory of Central Asian region were Bactria, Sogd, Khorezm, Ferghana, Chach and Ustrushana. Persian king Darius I, founder of the Achaemenid Empire (521-485 B.C.) annexed the whole region and subjugated these states into his empire (Khidayatov, 1997). As a result of which, Persian domination lasted almost two hundred years in this region. These above mentioned authors have emphasized the on-coming of the great warrior like Alexander the Great to this region as his campaign intensified cultural contacts and trade among Central Asian region and the outside world. Influence of Hellenistic culture continued through the Greco-Bactrian and Parthian states even after the death of Alexander. However, the process of Hellenisation got disturbed as a number of other Turkic tribes came into prominence and later the Great Kushan Empire was built in the Indian subcontinent. Khidayatov and Harmatta have highlighted the promotion of trade along the silk route by the Kushans and how the silk route became the basis of international trade. These studies have also dealt with flourishing trade centres like Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Kokand and Ferghana and the confluence of various cultures as well.
The above-mentioned works have given a picture of how Buddhism got replaced by Islam during 7th century with the coming of Arabs into the region. According to these scholars, over a period of time, a variety of religions also flourished around this region. By 10th century, the area became an important hub for the Muslim world. Bukhara emerged as a theological centre for the Muslim people. Profound and genius scholars like Al-Khorezmi, Ibn-Sina, Al-Beruni and Al-Farabi took birth in this land and created land mark in the pages of ancient history. Great warriors like Chingiz Khan and Timur have been referred by these scholars. Timur (Tamerlane) created a vast empire with Samarkand as his capital. He has left a rich architectural history behind him, much of which still survives in Samarkand. Babur, another Turkic-Mongol warrior, who took birth in the Andizan region of Uzbekistan, was the founder of the great Mughal dynasty in India, which created a different history in itself in the medieval period of India.

2.2 Ethnic Composition

Studies like (Bohr, 1998), (Harmatta, 1996), (Khidayatov, 1997), (Mesamed, 1996), (Negmatov, 1996), (Pierce, 1960), (Sharma, 1979) and (Wheeler, 1964) have dealt with various ethnic groups in the Central Asian region as well as Uzbekistan. Authors like Harmatta, Khidayatov and Negmatov have given a clear understanding about the expansion of different ethnic tribes and people in Uzbekistan over the ages. These studies have detailed about how the vast territory of Central Asia gradually became the homeland for nomadic cattle breeders. Broad classifications of tribes and ethnic groups have been made by these authors. Harmatta and Negmatov have dealt in detail with the coming of Achaemenid Empire under Darius I to the territory of Uzbekistan and the settlement of Iranian people in this region. Coming of Alexander the Great to this region has been emphasized by these authors along with Khidayatov as it resulted not only in the intensification of cultural ideas but coming of Greek people to the region as well. Wheeler has focused on the coming of Uzbeks to the area between lower Volga and the Aral Sea after the invasion of Shaibani Khan Uzbek and later on their settlement in the regions of Bukhara, Samarkand and Tashkent region. Pierce has
talked about the mixing of Uzbek people with the other tribes, mainly the Iranian people and their settlement in different parts of Uzbekistan. Sharma has focused on the "Slavs" to Uzbekistan along with Russians. According to him, "Slavs" comprising of Russian, Ukrainian and Byelorussian nationalities got added to the indigenous local population of Uzbekistan.

Moreover, authors like Bohr and Mesamid have dealt with the ethnic situation in Uzbekistan after its independence. Bohr has focused on interethnic relations among various groups in Uzbekistan after its independence. This article has given emphasis on emigration of Russians from Uzbekistan to their own land after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It has also cited a number of viable reasons in justifying the Russian emigration to their own country. It has also dealt with other non-indigenous population, who came to this region during Soviet era, with a special focus on Tajiks. This article has dealt in detail with the conflict between Tajiks settled in different parts of Uzbekistan and the indigenous people in the sphere of language, culture and their origin. However, the author does not see any significant effect of these conflicts on the relations between the two countries at the state level.

Mesamid has considered the ethnic situation in all the Independent States of the former Soviet Union as complicated and complex, as they are affected by the drastic changes in the socio-political, cultural and economic spheres. The author has focused on the ethnic groups of the present Uzbekistan with a historical background. He has given detail description about the coming of various ethnic groups such as "Slavs" to Uzbekistan during Soviet period. Interethnic conflicts like, Uzbek-Tajik and Uzbek-Meskhetian Turks have been taken in to account by the author. However, the author has hoped for better interethnic cooperation and harmony among various groups in Uzbekistan to guard its own national interest.

2.3 Status of Women during the Soviet Period

Scholars reveal that the Soviet rule brought a great socio-economic change including the emancipation of women in Uzbekistan. The Soviet policy
Towards Uzbekistan was to modernize the country with a special focus on women of Uzbekistan. Conditions of women seemed better and more advanced in Uzbekistan than many other countries during the Soviet era. Women have been a bondage to Islamic Laws and social customs over the years. Studies such as (Lubin, 1981), (Kaushik, 1970, 1976), and (Gidadhubli, 1987) depict how the Soviet's had taken steps to free women from the strict Islamic laws and social customs. The Soviets undertook various initiatives to supplant Uzbek traditions, customs and attitudes eliminating what they termed as "female seclusion", including reforms of the legal system and the creation of the Department for Work among Women (Zhenotdel) within the Communist Party.

By 1924, the Communist Party issued an order to begin a mass campaign across Central Asia called the Khudjum to promote the emancipation of women. As a result of which, women discarded the veil system (purdah) and took part in the construction of the society. The social system at that time provided the people with a high degree of basic human security. Life expectancy and literacy rates rose during this era. Women 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 70 percent of the employees in the healthcare, social services and agriculture. Around 73 percent of women received secondary or college education in Uzbekistan (Mohan, 2002). Furthermore, the state provided women with significant benefits such as maternity leave up to three years, pension entitlements and early retirement for those who had five or more children (Uzbekistan: Common Country Assessment, 2003). Families could rely on the support provided to mothers who wanted to work or study, as there was a well developed preschool system. Such deductions are also seen in reports like (http://www.cer.uz, 1999).

However, there were some drawbacks of the Soviet system. Studies like (Lubin, 1981) and (Patnaik, 1996) have criticized the participation of indigenous women in the economy. Women’s role however was restricted to the study of secondary earners mostly engaged in less strategic and non-productive sectors. Such a trend continued even after independence.
Women continued to remain at the bottom of the economic hierarchy, with the rural women securely placed within the low skilled rural occupations. Lubin argues that despite the impressive educational attainment and greater job opportunities among indigenous Uzbek women, non-indigenous or Slavic women continued to dominate the higher-skilled positions in industrial sectors. Therefore, data reveals that in 1992 i.e. just after independence, 14 percent of the potential working population in Uzbekistan was unemployed as compared to the 5.5 percent unemployed in other republics. Approximately 90 percent of the unemployed constituted of rural women, as they were the main workforce in agricultural sector (Uzbekistan: Common Country Assessment, 2003).

2.4 Economic Development during Soviet Period

After the October Revolution of 1917, Russian forces occupied Turkestan, Bukhara, Khiva and the Steppe region. The restructuring of Uzbek economy started under the leadership of Lenin. Soviets aimed at transforming the economy of the USSR from a privately owned to a publicly owned socialist system of economy (Gidadhubli, 1987). However, Uzbek republic became the supplier of cotton for the textile mills of Russia, which were mainly established in the central part of it. Mechanization to increase the productivity of the agriculture through new machines and Tractor System (MTS) and new transport and irrigation system in this region helped in smoothening the flow of agricultural and natural resources to a great extent. The Ferghana Valley, one of the most important cotton, silk and fruit growing areas of the then Soviet Union received much attention in expansion of irrigation also. As a result of these efforts, cotton production, which became the primary agriculture crop, considerably increased in Uzbekistan and became the main supplier of raw material for the soviet textile industries (Ruziev et al, 2007) (Mehta, 1987). Cotton became the strongest base of Uzbek economy during the Soviet period. These facts have also been attested by (Akiner, 1983), (Gidadhubli, 1995), (Kaushik, 1976) and (Rahul, 1996).

Along with cotton production, industrial development was given importance as well in this region during the Soviet era. Scholars like
(Gidadhubli, 1987), (Mehta, 1987) and (Nachane, 1987) have highlighted the industrial development made by the Soviets in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian Republics. (Gidadhubli, 1987) has analyzed the Soviet way of industrial development in Uzbekistan through the five year plans. These studies reveal that in the post world war II period, the process of reconstruction was started in full swing in Uzbek republic. Mechanization of industries along with other sectors like industrial goods, textile, agriculture machinery, chemical and mining equipment, electrical equipments, aviation etc became leading industries (Report, 1954). Tashkent, Samarkand, Ferghana region became the major industrial centres in Uzbekistan. Apart from agriculture and industry, mining of precious and semi-precious metals such as gold, silver, copper and natural resources like oil, gas and coal became prominent.

However, scholars like (Ruziev et all, 2007) have criticized Soviet’s policy of emphasizing the production of non-consumption goods over consumption goods for satisfying their own needs. (Gidadhubli, 1987) has also highlighted the insufficient development of agricultural productions like potato, grape and other vegetables. According to Ruziev et all, heavy industries like steel, iron, energy accounted for almost half of the industrial productions during Soviet era. Along with it, one of the most abundant natural resource i.e. gold of Uzbekistan accounted one-third of the Soviet gold production during 1980s (Ruziev et all, 2007). The main concentration was on the production of heavy industries, chemical, petro-chemical, fuel, power and machine industries mostly for domestic use (Ruziev et all, 2007). Another major disaster of the soviet policy was the diversion of water from rivers like Amu Darya and Syr Darya which led to dramatic reduction in the volume of Aral Sea. It has been criticized by a number of scholars like Gidadhubli, Mir and Mee. Their studies reflect how the use of massive quantity of fertilizers and pesticides for production of cotton highly polluted water bodies like Amu Darya and Aral Sea, one of the worst environmental disasters of the world. Before the demise of the Soviet Union, a national average (former USSR) of 1 kilogram of pesticides was used per hectare in comparison to 22.5 kg being used in Uzbekistan (Mir, 1997). It resulted not only in contaminating the fresh
water supply but also affected the health of people. (Mee, 2001) has specifically highlighted its impact on the health of women and children. Mostly pregnant women were affected by the poor quality of food and water supply. Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings economic development along with modernization was a great success in Uzbek Republic during the Soviet era. Soviets transformed the primitive economy of Uzbekistan into a modern one.

2.5 Post independence

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, a world system dissolved. The transition to a market economy has been characterized in Uzbekistan by decline in income, employment, growing poverty and inequalities. The stability and security that people had enjoyed was no more. The transition has been compared with the Great Depression of the 1930s by many scholars. After independence, as a result of several years of economic recession, unemployment had been growing among the Uzbek women. Studies such as (http://www.uoregon.edu, 2006), (Tadjbakhsh, 2004), (Nunn et all, 1999) and (Mohan, 2002), state many women were forced to open small business or become daily wagers. Women with children were the first to lose their jobs. Budgetary allocations for kindergartens reduced substantially in the countryside. Women with small children had no choice but to become "housewife." (Gidadhubli, 1999), (Gidadhubli, 2005), (Mir, 1997), and (Hunter, 1996) tells us a picture of the Uzbek economy after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The sharp decline in the economy in the post soviet period resulted in no state subsidies. Enterprises have either closed or carried on with a large number of under employed (i.e. employed workers on unpaid leave underpaid, etc). Even wages of the employees are withheld for more than a year; woman found taking unpaid leave was better as compared to job termination. Another feature of women's participation in labour force is that more than half of the female workers are concentrated in the peripheral sectors of education, health care, arts and culture. But in a traditional patriarchal society of Uzbek, women are primarily responsible for all domestic and tasks and including that of the children. This resulted in
limiting their energy and time, which they could devote to upgrade improve
their skills (http://www.unece.org, 2005).

A report on Uzbekistan prepared by the International Women's Rights
Watch (IWRAW) in 2000 reveals the fact that male workers also tend to be
promoted faster and their overall salaries and status are much higher as
compared to women with the same education and experience. In the rural
areas of Uzbekistan, 45 percent of the women were found to be employed
the in agriculture sector in 2002. 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 have been the worst victim getting transformed from
the formal labor sector to the informal one.

It has been found that a lack of employment opportunities increases
insecurities and vulnerabilities such as domestic violence and drug
trafficking. Women’s inaccessibility to a regular paid employment
contributes to a reduction in their ability to influence the decision-making
process in the households (http://www.unece.org, 2005). Hence Uzbek
women experience societal pressure to restrict their role as traditional
mothers and wives in the family (http://www.adb.org, 2001) and

2.6 Women and Politics and Decision Making

The “quota system” in parliament, introduced by the Soviets which
guaranteed equal representation to both men and women disappeared with
the collapse of the Soviet Union. However the Uzbek Government has
reintroduced the “quota system”. The number of women elected to the
national parliament, and the Oliy Majlis has increased from 9 percent to 18
percent since December 2004 elections. This has no doubt contributed to
the enhancement of women’s participation in public and political life (ADB
Report, 2004 and http://www.unece.org, 2005). This measure of the Uzbek
Government has been appreciated in the above mentioned reports.
Nevertheless, participation of women in higher managerial positions is still
lagging far behind their counterparts, which shows the reluctance of the
society in giving equal share to women in decision and policy making (ADB Report, 2004 and Mee, 2001). This fact was also ratified by a number of women in Uzbekistan during field visit (Primary Survey, 1).

2.7 Women and Education

Women's participation in the socio-economic development depends mostly upon their access to education. Uzbekistan inherited good educational indicators from the Soviets and has made efforts to maintain them. An education reform programme has been introduced by the Uzbek government in 1997 to increase the obligatory duration of school education from 9 to 12 years (Karimov, 1997). Currently, Uzbekistan has a system of free and fee-paying educational institutions. Universal access to primary and secondary school education has also been maintained and literacy rates are 100 percent for both men and women (http://www.unece.org, 2005). Article of (Cooper, 2003) has also given the same view about the literacy rate of Uzbekistan among women.

Due to this system of compulsory primary educational system, there is no significant difference in attendance in primary schools among boys and girls. Children's education is accompanied by work in the field or at home; girls are involved particularly in household tasks. The majority of girls (about 1.7 million) have no access to secondary or higher education or have to drop out of the educational system because of poverty or early marriage (World Fact Book: Uzbekistan, 2000).

Women's participation rate in prestigious higher educational institutions is also not very significant. They are still encouraged to study traditional subjects unlike their male counterparts. Poor economic condition of parents as well as the social system is the main cause behind this. Though higher education is being organized along the lines of bachelors' and masters' degree programs and certain areas like Computer Science, Business Administration and English language has given importance and are being expanded, still limited attention has been given to women's participation in the growing sector like Information and Communication Technology (ICT). It is still considered as a traditionally male dominated branch.
In the rural areas, the patriarchal society hardly allows women to access higher education. Even children enrolled in rural schools often miss part of the schooling in order to help in the cotton harvesting. Reports such as (www.unece.org, 2005), and (http://www.cer.uz, 1999) show that, overall the number of women entering into higher education and vocational education have been on the decline due to increasing costs and introduction of fee-paying system for some students and many families cannot afford higher education for their daughters.

2.8 Women and Healthcare

Uzbekistan inherited a well-developed health care system at the beginning of the transition. Nevertheless, it could not maintain this status due to falling public expenditure on health from 3.8 percent of GDP in 1995 to 2.5 percent in 2003 (http://www.unece.org, 2005). The Government of Uzbekistan has now begun to introduce changes in the structure of healthcare services. The main focus has been on guaranteeing and maintaining the health of women. Studies (http://www.unece.org, 2005), (http://www.cer.uz, 1999), (Mee, 2001), and (Mohan, 2002) clearly state the importance of 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 vigorous research and suffers from scanty literature. Most women feel sex education should be conducted at home where the womenfolk could clarify doubts and queries unhesitatingly from women teachers (http://www.unece.org, 2005). The rural areas specially suffer from poverty and malnutrition. Hard manual labour leads to an unhealthy environment for the rural women. Infant and child health is under constant threat from chronic malnutrition reflecting mother's poor health status.

Furthermore, unhealthy environments and unsafe water supplies have also contributed to women's poor health leading to reproductive complications. Surveys conducted in different regions of the Uzbek Republic reveals the
status of early marriage. For the purpose of obtaining feedback of the rural families, it was found that women have children at an early age and women marry early. The birth spacing in three fourth cases of the women do not exceed 2 years. Rural women deliver babies during the whole period of reproductive age but when they reach the age of 28-30, the birth spacing increases. All rural families tend to have many children and there is no such documentary evidence which might steer them to having fewer children in the future. Nearly 60 percent of the rural families have two children who are less than three years in age (www.cer.uz, 1999).

As socio-economic conditions of most rural families are poor, most of these families have many children; their health condition is also relatively poor. The demographic development of rural families does not correspond to the level of socio-economic development of the rural area. All this contributes to the formation of a slow lifestyle concentrated on narrow family interests. As such on an average a rural Uzbek family lags behind other such families from the industrial regions of the country as far as their cultural and socio-economic development is concerned.

A majority of women suffer from anaemia in Uzbekistan. Frequent child birth, inadequate nutrition and poor quality of water are some of the major reasons for causing anaemia. Parts of Uzbekistan face serious environmental pollution which, mainly affect the health of women and children. Areas such as the Aral Sea region, Fergana Valley, and the provinces of Bukhara and Tashkent industrial zone have relatively unsafe levels of air and water pollution. Drinking water and food contain unsafe levels of chemicals such as fertilizers and pesticides, which further deteriorates the health condition of women and children particularly (Mee, 2001). However, the Ministry of Health is planning to establish an outpatient family clinic and to train physicians to provide family planning services ranging from modern contraceptives to natural methods of family planning. But all these efforts have failed to give any satisfactory result. Women are still victim of inadequate medical facilities, unqualified doctors, and bribes given to the doctors. So an overall deterioration has taken place in the health status of women.
Coupled with health problems, it is also true that discrimination through sex determining tests is also prevalent in Uzbekistan (www.cer.uz, 1999). Areas such as the Aral Sea region, Ferghana Valley, Province of Bukhara and Tashkent industrial zones face serious environmental pollution. The women and children are the first to be affected, particularly the pregnant women. There has been no respite from the existing chemicals like fertilizers and pesticides which one of the main reasons for their increasing health problems (www.unece.org, 2005) in these areas.

Apart from this fact, abortion is legal without restrictions in Uzbekistan since 1995. Although it is supposed to be provided free of charge, women are pressurized to pay a high price for an abortion (Olenick, 1998). If the doctor does not receive the payment, the abortion may not be performed or performed a without anaesthesia or precautions to ensure the woman's safety and health (World Fact Book, 2000). Like other Central Asian countries, the first HIV epidemic in Uzbekistan occurred among injection drug users (IDU), with cases exponentially increasing between 2001 and 2002. A study conducted in Tashkent among IDU between April 2003 and March 2004 reported an HIV prevalence of 29.8%. However, there have been indications that the HIV epidemic has spread beyond IDU into the general population because more than 20 cases of HIV infection had been diagnosed among pregnant women in Tashkent during 2003.

2.9 Early Marriages

In the Uzbek society, arranged marriages are still prevalent and the bride price custom continues. Due to the prevalence of high bride price, many parents prefer to give their daughter in marriage in close relatives rather than giving away their wealth to another clan. Though legally, the minimum age of marriage for girls is at 17, it is not followed strictly. Early marriage is another characteristic of the Uzbek society, especially in rural areas (Agadjanian and Makarova, 2003). Due to early marriages, Uzbek girls are suffering from numerous difficulties and risks, which ultimately results in domestic violence and the traditional role of wives.

Although the law gives the Uzbek Women the right to divorce their husbands, many find it almost impossible since the system is weighted
against them and the government does its best to hold families together, whatever the wife may want. Besides this, worsening economic conditions in the region are regarded as one of the main reasons behind the surge in polygamy. It is also an accepted part of the Islamic faith as long as husbands adequately provide for their wives (Pogrebov, 2006). Though the practice is still officially illegal, there are no reliable statistics on the number of polygamous marriages in the region, most of which are performed in secret. Women and young girls from impoverished families become the second or third wives of relatively prosperous men (Country Report, 2000).

2.10 Violence Against Women

Uzbek women have been brought up in the spirit of obedience and subordination before the elders of the family prior to marriage and to husband after marriage. Their devotedness to traditional set up has enhanced their submissiveness to all humiliating treatment within the family and the society as a whole. Reports (http://www.hrw.org, 2001), attest that domestic violence against women is common in Uzbekistan. Domestic violence is a serious and pervasive problem in Uzbekistan. In interviews conducted by Minnesota Advocates (an NGO), government officials and members of legal system of Uzbekistan initially denied the existence of the problem. But when questioned further, they were forced to describe various cases that correspond to the United Nations’ definition of domestic violence. Several studies like (www.mnadvocates.org), (www.unece.org, 2005) and (Mohan, 2002) reveal that violence in the family is linked to both physical as well as psychological torture. But the women hesitate to involve the police or any other outsider so as not to bring shame to the family by airing the conflicts outside the home. The act of complaining against family violence is also widely considered to be humiliating for the woman herself as it gives an indication of immoral character. But when the violence becomes beyond endurance she often leaves her husband’s home and returns to her parent’s home (www.unifem.org).

However, the maternal poverty and the social stigma attached to a woman who leaves her husband, often discourages her from exercising this option.
One study revealed that a 34 yr old woman with three young children has been receiving frequent and severe beatings even after 9 yrs of married life. Her parents are unable to protect her and send her back each time she leaves her husband (www.hrw.org, 2001). Such cases are quite common and frequent in Uzbekistan. Reports based on surveys conducted by Minnesota Advocates reveals the fact that despite the high incidence of such domestic violence, the government of Uzbekistan has failed to acknowledge the problem and has not taken adequate steps to address it.

Uzbekistan is a member of the United Nations and a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However still it has failed to respond to the widespread abuse against women. In fact, while Uzbek law punishes physical assault, no legal provisions specifically prescribe domestic violence and many criminal justice officials do not take the problem seriously. In cases women seek to prosecute abusive husbands they receive minimal assistance and support from the government. Though law enforcement officials acknowledge that women turn to divorce as an escape from violence, divorce procedures fail to address their concerns besides divorce is highly discouraged as mentioned earlier. The government is also not very keen in marinating records on the statistics on the assault or other crimes on the victim as this would lead to identification on the quantum of violence initiated against the women.

2.11 Role of Women Committees

A unique feature of Uzbek life is the Mahallas, a centuries-old form of communal or neighbourhood self-governance. Since independence, the government has increased the mahalla’s power in both social welfare and public order functions. The Mahalla serves as a community-level governing council, currently possessing a dual nature. It serves as a vehicle for reviving national traditions and also as the lowest administrative unit in the government structure. Its size ranges from a few hundred to several thousand people. Mahallas are mainly staffed by volunteers. The mahalla chairman and secretary are paid staff. A council of elders (Aksakal)
informally advises the *Mahalla* chairman and act as a mediator. Each *Mahalla* consists of a number of committees, out of which women’s committee and the reconciliation committees are the most important with regard to domestic violence. *Mahallas* play an important role in handling domestic crises. Family problems are often resolved through the *mahallas*, rather than through judiciary. Along with the local ‘*Mahallas*, District Womens’ Committees have a great impact on the lives of the women (Massicard, 2003). Even the *Mahallas* become involved before the police can be contacted. It is the *Mahalla*, who decides whether or not to allow residents of their communities to refer the matter to the local police.

The *Mahallas* and the District Women’s Committees try to intervene in the family dispute to settle the matter. They are often successful in persuading the women to return back to their husbands. Even the court’s verdict and priority is to prevent divorce and keep the spouses together despite violence. In fact in some case, judges apparently disregard accounts of violence. The case of Rano, an Uzbek woman even after providing ample evidence of persistent beating was denied a divorce by the court (www.hrw.org, 2001). Sometimes the *Mahallas* coordinate with the police and courts. The women’s committee and reconciliation committee, as well as the committee of elders, act as mediators in both divorce and potential criminal cases, speaking with husbands, wives and other relatives. In a male dominant patriarchal society like Uzbekistan, elimination of discrimination and violence is necessary to further the growth of the society.

A recent study also suggests that hospitals, police stations and courts don’t record data related to rape and domestic violence (www.unece.org, 2005). The police tend to treat the complaints of domestic violence as an internal family affair and leave the matter for the couple to resolve. There is also a lack of information to monitor through secondary sources whether preference is given to a boy or a girl in the preschool education and whether employment opportunities women in the emerging private sector are pro-men in the emerging private sector.
2.12 Trafficking of Women

Illegal transnational business on trafficking for sexual exploitation is increasing in Uzbekistan. Trafficking of women occupies the third place after trade in arms and drugs. Trafficking of women goes beyond the border of Uzbekistan and Central Asia and establishes much a strong network. Trafficking of women for slavery and sexual exploitation of is immoral and violates human dignity and the basic human rights of people. The trafficking routes from Uzbekistan reach countries such as Kyrgyzstant, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Bahrain, India, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, Thailand, Turkey, Russia and Western European countries. The young generation is major target groups among the dealers in Uzbekistan as well as other Central Asian countries. The transition from planned to market oriented economy is a major contributor to this problem.

The US State department asserts that since 1991, poverty in Uzbekistan has drastically increased and now affects between 40 and 80 percent of the population. Due to informalisation of the formal labor, it is the women who have become victims of poverty. It is the economic decline, unemployment and people’s inability to fulfill their life’s goal lead to human trafficking (www.eurasianet.org). This fact was also ratified by a professor of an university of Uzbekistan (Primary Survey, 2). The younger generation are the most valuable subjected, especially the young girls who are trying to find work after graduating from school, college, or university, divorced women who do not have skills for well paid jobs, street children, orphans and children who have to earn money due to alcoholism or drug use in their family. The government, NGOs, and the media have achieved some progress with campaigns and preventive measures in reducing human trafficking. However, there are no substantial funds allocated to preventive programs by the government. Uzbekistan’s Women’s Committee (a Government-sponsored NGO) has established the Centre for Rehabilitation and Adaptation of Sexual Traffic victims in one of the country’s districts, however it has not been operational because of lack of financial resources (Taksanov: Times of Central Asia, 2003).
2.13 Role of Civil Society Organization

The growth and expansion of women NGOs is one of the most positive and important achievements in terms of women’s political participation in Uzbekistan. Such facts are amply evident from reports and studies such as (www.hrw.org, 2001) and (www.unece.org, 2005). International organizations working in Uzbekistan have played a major role in the development of NGOs in the region. Their development was further encouraged by the President’s proclamation of 1999 as the “Year of Women”. Besides this, international organizations are providing training programmes and technical assistance as well as giving grants to local NGOs for the implementation of social projects.

In 1999, a law on NGOs was adopted in Uzbekistan. Before this, social organizations were the only legal category, which now come under the legislation governing NGOs. Since independence, more than 2,300 NGOs have been created in Uzbekistan, but no concept of an NGO is as yet universally accepted. The NGOs are spread all over Uzbekistan. 22 percent of all women’s NGOs are working in Tashkent (ADB Report, 2004).

In Uzbekistan, the primary focus of the NGOs (mainly women’s NGOs) is for improving in the status and empowering women in the family, society and economy. They are committed to enhance the political and legal status of women and have extensive grassroots network. In August 2003, the Association of Women’s NGOs in Uzbekistan was created (www.unece.org, 2005). Its main objective was to consolidate and coordinate the activities of women’s organization dealing with women’s issues, implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action along with other international documents aimed at the protection of women’s interest and strengthening the potential of the women’s movement in the country. Some important women NGOs of Uzbekistan are the ‘Business Women’s Association of Uzbekistan’, ‘Olima’ a scholarly women’s association, ‘Perzent’-the Karakalpak center of human reproduction and family planning, and ‘Women’s Resource Center’ (www.hotpeachpages.net).

In addition to this, within the structure of Women’s Committee of Uzbekistan there are a number of associations including ‘The Association of
Women and Ecology’, ‘the Association of Creative Women’, ‘The Association of Business and Economist Women’ and ‘The Association of Women Lawyers’, etc (www.microfinance.uz). All Women’ NGOs, despite their differences in the programs, are directed towards protection of women’s’ rights, equal opportunities, improvement of women’s’ status in family and society, women’s’ participation in politics and adaptation of new economic conditions and giving a helping hand to trafficked victims of Uzbekistan etc. They all work towards empowerment of women and achieve gender equality according to the goal set by the Millennium Development Goals. These NGOs also carry out educational seminars, meetings, and discussions to raise public awareness (www.cer.uz; 1999). By June 2005, 58 Women’s’ NGOs from different parts of the country had joined the association of Women’s’ NGOs in Uzbekistan.

Despite the positive role of the NGO sector in Uzbekistan, reforms have not assisted in the smooth functioning of the activities of women’s NGOs. A resolution was passed by the Cabinet of Ministers on 4 February 2004 on “steps for increasing efficiency of technical assistance, grants and humanitarian aid money received from different international government and non-government organizations”.

2.14 International Organizations

The growth of foreign assistance mainly UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), World Bank, ADB (Asian Development Bank), OSCE (The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), USAID (United States Agency for International Development), the Soros Foundation, the US Government, the European Union and the Dutch development agency etc. have fostered the growth of NGOs in Uzbekistan. These donors mainly focus on gender related issues through the NGOs, (csawiki.undp.sk). The NGOs are mainly targeting the development of women through organizing various seminars, training and awareness programmes (widm.iatp.by, 2002). A Gender Equality Coordination Unit (GECU) has been created in order to coordinate the activities and technical assistance of these international organizations.
International organizations like UNDP is playing a vital role in Uzbekistan by addressing the women related issues through its reports and publications. State Statistical Committee of Uzbekistan has prepared two statistical bulletins on "Men and Women of Uzbekistan: for the period of 2000-2007 with the help of UNDP. Additionally, CEDAW Committee of UNDP is also publishing its periodic reports regarding women of Uzbekistan and efforts made by government and other non-government organizations to achieve targets set for MDGs. It has helped the Uzbek Government in preparing its first national report on MDGs in 2006. UNDP is also publishing National Human Development report in Uzbekistan, which is quite useful for various studies. The 2006 Human Development Report of Uzbekistan has focused on Health standard of people. This report has given special emphasis to health condition of women and children of Uzbekistan along with the healthcare reforms introduced by the Uzbek Government. The Human Development Report of Uzbekistan for the year 2007-08 has given emphasis on education. It has dealt in great detail with educational system of Uzbekistan and participation of women in it. Other International organizations like ADB, Human Rights Watch have prepared "Country Gender Assessment" in 2004, and "Report on Domestic Violence in Uzbekistan" in 2000, respectively. ADB’s report not only criticizes the Uzbek Government for its shortcomings, but also suggests meaningful measures to achieve gender parity in the country. Human Rights Watch’s report is very useful for this research work as there is a dearth of governmental statistics and data with regard to domestic violence.

2.15 Government Policies for Women

Apart from the NGOs, the Uzbekistan Government is also introducing new measures to emancipate the weaker section of the society including the women (www.hrw.org, 2002). The Government has targeted to achieve certain goals related to development of healthcare services, education, employment, reduction of poverty etc. within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (www.globalpolicy.org, 2002). Uzbekistan, as a member of United Nations is committed to integrate the issues of Millennium Declaration in its national development agenda and achieving the MDGs target by 2015.
Besides this, the Uzbek Government has also introduced National Action Plans for the socio-economic development of Uzbekistan with the special focus on women (www.state.gov, 2002). For example- a presidential Decree was made in 1995, aiming at increasing the number of women in executive positions. As per the decree, a woman was appointed to the post of the deputy prime minister and the women representatives were appointed at the provincial, district and municipal level, as deputies to the Governors of those territories. As a result they became responsible for administering social welfare payment to women and families and for other policies related to women. Apart from this, the government has adopted National Action Plan to achieve its goals. The National Action Plans outline the strategy and priority areas of the national policies regarding women and ensuring equal opportunities for women and men according to the Uzbek constitution. The social and economic reforms introduced by the Government of Uzbekistan can be seen in studies like (Karimov, 1995) and (Karimov, 1997).

2.16 Legal Reforms for Women

As far as Uzbekistan's legal system is concerned, it guarantees citizens many basic rights and freedoms. Uzbek government legally reinforced the equality of rights and opportunities for all citizens regardless of gender, ethnicity and religion. Uzbek family law also provides theoretical equality between men and women in marriage and divorce. But in practice as we know situation is different. Even women succeed in overcoming their reluctance to disclose violence in the family and seek legal recourse; the legal system continues to place often insurmountable barriers in their way.

Besides this, Uzbekistan has a number of laws against assault and other acts of violence. But a variety of obstacles within the criminal justice system hinder investigation and prosecution of cases for domestic violence cases. Even when women turn to the legal community in cases of domestic violence, they cannot rely on these institutions for effective help as mentioned above. Article 46 of Uzbek constitution guarantees equal rights to both men and women, but under customary law women might not get agricultural land. In some cases, families without sons receive less land
from collective farms as under customary law, daughters are not supposed to inherit equal amount of lands as sons. Therefore, though women have been guaranteed equality of rights by law and government, but are unable to get it implemented in the society. There is a wide gap between theory and practice.

2.17 About the Study

There is no dearth of literature in analyzing the status of women in Soviet period. A number of scholars and authors have done research on how the Central Asian Women in general and Uzbek women in particular got rid of the age old primitiveness and stepped in to a new modern life. However, literature on Uzbek women in the post independent period is not well enough to study the status and role of women in the present context. There is a lack of holistic and interdisciplinary approach towards studies related to Uzbek Women. Areas such as health, HIV AIDS, human trafficking, Domestic Violence etc are still not gain much attraction by scholars and authors. Hence, the present study attempts to follow an interdisciplinary approach. It analyses and compares the condition and status of Uzbek women before and after the independence of Uzbekistan. This research work gives attention to the role of Uzbek women in various sectors of economy and in the Society. Along with women, men are also taken into consideration to compare and analyze the position of women at various levels. Hence, the current research work is a noble attempt to study the overall situation of women in Uzbekistan rather than throwing a myopic or narrow vision.
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