CHAPTER-VI

Conclusion
This study seeks to analyse Uzbekistan’s quest for democracy after its emergence as an independent state following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It has taken into account various aspects of democratisation process such as, democratic institutions, which facilitate the democratisation process, the historical legacy, and the ethno-religious challenges which hinder the development of democratisation process.

The end of Second World War heralded the dawn of a new era in international political scenario. Most of the countries librated from the yoke of colonialism and imperialism adopted different political systems of governance of their country. It basically was to facilitate their transition from one set of governance under colonialism to develop a form of governance which can ensure unity and stability of the country. Most of the countries adopted democracy as a form of government for the governance of their country as the political elites of those newly independent countries thought that it will ensure smoothening of the transition process. But problem arose when every country claimed itself to be democratic no matter how it functions. However, in their insatiable quest for democratisation, the newly independent states faced numerous hindrances, which acted as obstacles in the development of democratisation process. One of the major problems they faced was low level of economic development, where the state was unable to meet the rising expectation of the masses, which in turn led to growing dissatisfaction among masses and in turn induced structural imbalances in the political system. In its extreme manifestation it even led to the
collapse of political system. Another notable feature of Third World political system is the lack of development of various political institutions, like organised and competitive party system, thus making the political system unstable.

After attaining independence, societal cleavage among the newly independent countries re-emerged. This cleavage was sharpened when the dominant group at the forefront of the anti-colonial struggle tried to monopolise political power and the consequent benefit was denied to others. This in turn created resentment in those social groups which were denied the fruit of power. It led to serious confrontation among the various political forces in the country often leading to breakdown of nascent constitutional system, which in turn bred authoritarianism and dictatorship. Hence, political parties failed to perform the role of interest articulation and interest aggregation and subsequently an appropriate political culture conducive to a liberal democratic framework failed to strike root. The proliferation of political parities with divisive agenda and narrower outlook further hinders the development of pluralistic political culture. Similarly, social structure of a country also plays a key role in the development of democracy.

In a traditional society, the value system is different in nature. For example, in a traditional society joint family structure involves joint ownership of property, common responsibilities, strong group loyalty not only to the members of one's own family but also to the near kin. The traditional social structure simply cannot wither away rather it modifies itself to suit new circumstances. This leads
to duality of authority structure— one is formal and legal, while another is informal. Informal authority structure plays crucial role in decision-making.

The Central Asian republic of Uzbekistan is also facing the same challenges as mentioned above, like low level of economic performance, unstable political system, greater role of traditional social structure, which hinder the development of democratisation process in Uzbekistan. But a question naturally arises whether western notion of democracy can be replicated in Uzbekistan? The multi-ethnic character of Uzbek society, low level of economic development and not having any experience of democratisation in pre-Soviet phase, hinder are factors that influence the democratisation process.

The republic of Uzbekistan came into existence after the national state delimitation in 1924. Before the October Revolution, the socio-economic conditions of Uzbekistan under Tsarist administration were in shambles. The Tsarist rule supported the exploitative system and the local rulers with the aim of securing their support for exploitation of the natural resources of the region and to increase the colonial state’s sphere of influence. The administrative apparatus was also not sufficiently developed, with less participation of masses in decision-making process. The Governor-General appointed by the Tsar enjoyed enormous power. In the administrative hierarchy, the military governor stood at the apex of the Oblast administration and all the powers were concentrated in his hand.
Although, in the lower level of administration, certain posts like, *Kazi, Aksakals* and *Starsiy* were filled through local elections, but these elections of local officials were only a farce since these had to be confirmed by military governor of the *oblast* and person being wealthy could hope to get elected. Hardly any sort of democratic political culture was there in Turkestan, of which Uzbekistan was then a part.

This low level of social, cultural and political development in Soviet Turkestan provided opportunity to the local intelligentsia to spread the message of socialism among the masses. They also challenged the traditional order and values, which were prevailed in Turkestan. After the 1924 national state delimitation in December 1924, Communist Party of Uzbekistan came into existence. In order to spread the message of socialism, it recruited local cadres to the communist party. This led to the formation of a society known as *Koschi* (plough men). The basic objective of the organisation was to raise the political consciousness among the local peasants and landless workers. The *Koschi* acted as an important link between party and people. The important role which *Koschi* played in spreading awareness among the masses could be evident from the membership it had. It had around 3, 54, 763 members by the end of 1926.

Although, democratic development in Uzbekistan took place through spread of socialism among the masses, but in the top echelon of political power the infighting among various political factions undermined it. One can find some sort of paradoxical democratisation in Soviet Uzbekistan. While general masses
readily accepted socialistic democratisation, elites were in favour of democratisation only theoretically. The elites were ridden with dissension and factionalism with each group jockeying for power. This development can be best fitted to the pluralistic model of democracy, as elaborated by C. Wright Mill in his power elite model where various groups compete with each other to capture power. After coming to power Stalin changed whole top political echelon of Soviet Uzbekistan and put his own person in top posts in the party hierarchy. Faizullah Khodjaev, Chairman of the Uzbekistan’s council of People’s Commissars was executed. Akmal Ikramov, First Secretary of Uzbekistan was sentenced to death after being dubbed as enemy of the people and Stalin favoured those who sided with him like Sabir Kamalov, Siradzh Nurutdinov etc. The same process continued even after the Stalin’s death. Many top leaders of Uzbek Communist Party, who were sidelined during the Stalin’s period, again rose to prominence like Mukhtidinov, who replaced Niyazov as First Secretary of Communist Party of Uzbekistan. Khrushchev’s removal in October 1964 produced a great momentum in Soviet politics. After Khrushchev, in Soviet Uzbekistan, Rashidov rose to power, and became the longest serving First Secretary of Soviet Uzbekistan. Despite his stronghold over Uzbekistan’ politics, he faced numerous challenges, but he used his clan and regional affiliation to strengthen his position. This shows that social structure plays a crucial role in the political process. It should be further noted that though the ideal of democracy is a modern concept, the traditional forces continued to play an important role in policy formulation and implementation. This factor to some
extent hindered the development of socialistic democracy in Soviet Uzbekistan. Similarly, almost all the First Secretaries and other higher officials were part of power game and acted to pursue their narrower objectives. The other issues in Soviet Uzbekistan which closely resembled the politics of Third world were issue of corruption among political elites and promotion and patronage of one’s own clan, patron-client relationship and favouring of one region instead of development of the whole republic.

An attempt to remove the drawbacks which were there during the Soviet period was made after the introduction of Glasnost and Perestroika. The impact of Glasnost was felt in the social, political and economic sphere. Glasnost and Perestroika provided opportunity to social forces that were previously marginalised to play an active role in the national mainstream. This led to formation of “Popular Front”. The Popular Front championed a number of causes and their typology included social democratic and cultural movements. In the political sphere, the newly elected members of the central and republic level debated every issue, voted irrespective of communist party’s stand and hence simply ceased to act as rubber stamps. They also discovered various issues concerning at the centre and regions. Like other republics of Soviet Union, the impact of Glasnost was felt in Uzbekistan also. Glasnost provided a golden opportunity to the Uzbek writers to press their demand for restoration of the native language, rehabilitating past Uzbek literary figures who were persecuted during the Stalin period, and protecting historical religious monuments, which
were neglected in Soviet Uzbekistan. A strong correlation can be found in
growth of such demands with increasing democratisation in political sphere.
Once the people became aware of their past heritage, culture, they demanded
similar reforms in political sphere, like increasing participation of people in the
political sphere. This confirms the hypothesis that social and culture factors play
a crucial role in the success of democratisation process. In Soviet Uzbekistan,
the formation of the ‘Popular Front’ named as Birlik, played a crucial role in
raising the awareness of the people regarding various problems concerning the
republic. This movement was formed to protect the rich historical, cultural,
spiritual and ecological heritage of Uzbekistan. The movements gained immense
popularity among urban youth and in rural areas the Birlik members consisted of
village teachers, librarians etc. who constituted the rural intelligentsia. In the
political field Glasnost made tremendous impact on democratisation process.
Under the influence of Glasnost, numerous changes took place in the
Uzbekistan’s Supreme Soviet. The New laws were introduced in the Supreme
Soviet to strengthen the role of local and republican bodies of self-government.
Further these bodies were entrusted with power and responsibilities that had
been earlier performed by the central authorities exclusively. Elections to the
Supreme Soviet were held on the basis of single seat electoral constituencies and
universal, equal, direct suffrage and secret ballot. Despite various allegations of
electoral malpractices the election process was somewhat free and fair. Through
Glasnost people became aware of their rights and learnt to air their dissent
against the government. It also provided platform for the growth of informal
organisations, which later played an important role in educating the masses. So, Glasnost somewhat smoothened the transition to the post-Soviet democratisation process.

In the post-independence phase, the process of democratisation has not been so smooth either. Independent Uzbekistan in its transition from socialism to western model of democracy, as a form of governance has found the transition difficult, especially as the leadership remained unchanged and so did the style of functioning.

In the initial phase of independence, which is known as 'Period of Transition', after being elected to the post of President, Karimov acted as some sort of exponent of the will of the people and messiah of the masses. To reinforce his authoritarian style of leadership and to legitimise his role in the initial phase of independence, Karimov used a number of decrees aimed at curtailing the freedom of press, restraining the activities of opposition etc. He not only regulated the activities of legislative and executive branches of government but also removed potential opponents. One such example was the removal of Mirsaidov from the post of Vice President. President Karimov justified such crackdown and censorship of opposition on the plea of 'resuscitating democracy'.

During the second phase of democratisation in Uzbekistan, which is also known as 'Phase of Consolidation', some attempts were made in the direction of democratisation. A new constitution was adopted on 8 December 1992, with a
number of provisions to protect rights and liberties of the people. It also deals extensively with all the three legislative, executive and judicial branches of the government. Despite adopting the constitution, the suppression of opposition continued. During this period, the first parliamentary election to the Olly Maflis was held. Although election was held, it was not a free and fair. A number of irregularities were noticed and harassment of opposition continued during the elections. The dominance of Peoples Democratic Party continued even after the elections, the other opposition party Vatan Tarakkiyeti has basically reconciled itself to playing a second fiddle to PDP.

The third phase of democratisation which is also known as 'Phase of Development' can be said to have rightly begun when Karimov got extension to his term bypassing the constitutional provision. The new parliament which met on 24 February 1995, decided to extend his terms of office to 2000, so he can get another chance to contest for the post of President. During this period, due to increasing pressure from foreign countries, like the United States of America, some efforts were made to protect and promote human right situation in the country. As a result of this, National Centre of Human Rights of Uzbekistan was created through a presidential decree. Similarly, another institution was established for the purpose of further deepening the democratic reforms in Uzbekistan. In September 1996, a Conference of Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan was established with the permission of the government. Karimov
also resigned from the Peoples Democratic Party, so that he can be seen to act in a non-partisan manner without any soft corner for any party.

The second parliamentary elections, which was held in 1999 was somewhat free and fair in comparison to the first one which was held in 1994. In the 1994 parliamentary elections, two parties were allowed to contest the elections, but in 1999, five political parties participated in the elections. Even international observer like OSCE commented that first step towards democracy has been taken with the 1999 elections.¹

The subsequent presidential election, which was held in 9 January 2000, Karimov faced challenge from Abdul Khafiz Jalalov, of PDP. But in the election, he won comfortably securing 91.9 percent of votes. This time also foreign observers praised the elections. Recently on 26 January 2002, following Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan also decided to extend the terms of President from existing 5 years to 7, and created a bicameral legislature, which was overwhelmingly endorsed by the people.

The first period of democratisation, i.e. ‘Period of Transition’, closely resembles the guided democracy model as offered by Dodd and Skalar, in which the political leaders think they know the interest of people and they try to implement it without any constitutional check. Political and economic equality are enjoyed by the citizens to the extent the ruler thinks is desirable.

¹ SWB/SU/3717/G/3, 14 December 1999.
The Delegative model of democracy, as discussed in Chapter IV, can be best applicable to the second and third phase of democratisation i.e. 'Period of Consolidation' and 'Period of Development' in Uzbekistan. Although, constitution was adopted, numerous rights were provided to citizens, but President Karimov tried to strengthen his hold over Uzbekistan's politics, in order to combat the challenges posed to democratisation process from radical Islamist forces. The government also adopted many measures, like rewriting history, in which the developments made in Uzbekistan during Soviet period, was totally neglected. The political leadership in Uzbekistan made significant endeavours to resurrect the pre-Soviet Uzbek history and to rehabilitate Uzbek men of letters who in the past had made significant contributions to the culture and politics of Uzbekistan. The works of Jadid movement appeared in various forms like poems, dramas and prose works etc.

This type of rewriting of history and too much emphasis on past, which aimed at creating a super-Uzbek identity, led to fear psychosis among the minorities. For example, an organisation named as National Council Cultural Centre of Tajiks and Tajik-speaking population based in Samarakand gained popularity in its activities to protect the cultural heritage of the Tajik people. The suppression of the Tajik culture led to exclusivist tendencies among the Tajiks in Uzbekistan. The Russians also faced discriminatory practices like change in language law, rewriting of history that vitiated the atmosphere for ethnic Russians in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. The government also banned since 1991 TV broadcasting
from Moscow, and Russian language programmes have been gradually reduced and at present it is for six hours a day on national Uzbek TV. Apart from the language law, re-emphasis on traditional Uzbek history, decreasing representation of Russians and other minorities in legislative bodies provide impetus for growth of fear psychosis among minorities who are residing in Uzbekistan. Similarly, due to the uneven growth of regions, separatist movement is currently going on in Kara Kalpak province.

Apart from the ethno-nationalistic factor that poses a challenge to the growth of pluralistic, multi-culture society, which are essential elements in the growth of liberal democracy, the other factor which hinders the development of liberal democracy is the growth of radical Islam and efforts to establish a theocratic state. Soon after disintegration of the Soviet Union, some sort of ideological vacuum took place in Uzbekistan’s political culture. Aided and abetted by external forces like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Taliban ruled Afghanistan and exploiting local conditions, the Islamists tried to impose their brand of radical Islam on Uzbek society. As a result, a number of Islamic radical groups like Islamic Renaissance Party, Hizb-ut-Tahrir-al-Islami and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan emerged in the scene. All these parties basically aimed at establishing a theocratic state in Uzbekistan. They are also getting arms and ammunitions and training in other countries to destabilise the political system in Uzbekistan. The government headed by Karimov has tried to meet the challenges posed by Islamic radical groups through various measures like
establishing Uzbek Islamic spiritual authority. Apart from the above, he also pandered to religious sentiments through acts such as visit to Mecca, which is generally considered a holy act in Islam, and establishing an Islamic university. Despite these religious gestures to harness popular religious sentiments, Islam Karimov is also taking some harsh measures to contain radical elements in Uzbekistan, like banning, arresting them and sentencing them to long imprisonment. The threat nonetheless, remains.

In Uzbekistan’s case, the only model of democracy which seems to be applicable is the Consociational democracy, in view of the pluralistic nature of society, due to existence of various ethnic groups and the Mohalla culture, where one pays much more obedience to the head of the Mohalla rather than a legal authority. Consociational democracy can be applicable after political stability is achieved. In view of grave situation that is currently prevailing in the country, like challenges from Islamic radical groups, declining economic standard of life of the people, and collapsing economy, a delegation model of democracy looks viable, but it can be applicable to Uzbekistan only for the time being. In the long-run the former model will be desirable for a society like Uzbekistan’s.

Although Uzbekistan’s democracy has made relative progress, there are also numerous violations of human rights. An individual is completely subordinated to the state and society. One, however, should not be too pessimistic, because, a decade is too early to predict success or failure of democracy in a country like
Uzbekistan. The collective modernisation process that is adopted by Islam Karimov and which Uzbekistan inherited through its *mohalla* system closely resembles Japanese model of modernisation, where the society counts and not individual efforts. But collective efforts of society led to amazing growth of Japan in technical and economic sphere. Similar situation in Uzbekistan at present looks far off though not unattainable.