CHAPTER-III

Glasnost and Rise of Urges for Democracy in Soviet Uzbekistan
After coming to power, Gorbachev introduced far-reaching reforms in the contours of Soviet political system through his policies of Glasnost and Perestroika. It brought about a radical change in Soviet Politics and had a profound impact upon social, political and economic system of the country. In 1988, he commented that his reform “included not only the economic but all other sides of social life, social relations, the political system, the political and ideological sphere, the style and work methods of the party and all of our cadres. Restructuring is a capacious word. I would equate restructuring with revolution. A genuine revolution is in the mind and heart of people”.¹

The three main problems that Soviet society faced during this period were inefficient economic system, backwardness and poor moral. The Soviet Economy was declining at an alarming rate and had subsequently lost the abilities to compete with the Western World. The rate of growth of Soviet Economy had declined since the 1960s and that in the early 1980s it sank to 2 to 3 percent a year.²

With regard to backwardness, Gorbachev recognised that Soviet technology and techniques were far behind the times. He found that quality of Soviet products were quite inferior to those of the highly industrialised society of West. As Gorbachev himself admitted in his book, “A country that was once quickly closing on world’s advanced nation began to lose one position after another.

² Ibid.
Moreover the gap in the efficiency of production, quality of productions, scientific and technological development, the production of advance technology and the use of advanced technique began to widen and not to our advantage.”

Another issue which confronted Soviet System during this period was the issue of corruption. The issue of corruption reached its zenith during Brezhnev period and continued to affect Soviet society. As he himself admitted in his book, “a gradual erosion of the ideological and moral values of our people began... The needs and opinions of ordinary working people of the public at large were ignored. At some administrative levels there emerged disrespect for the law and encouragement of eyewash and bribery, servility and glorification.

Another major issue that Soviet Union faced during that period was that Soviet Union was composed of numerous nationalities, religions, and languages that were observing different customs and traditions. The 70 years of Communist rule brought vast amount of change in the lives of people, but its major loopholes were felt by political leadership under Gorbachev and he thought the problems are interrelated and can be sorted out by radical restructuring of social, political, economic and cultural system in Soviet Union.

Glasnost and its Impact on Soviet Society

Gorbachev introduced his programme of reforming the Soviet political system in the 27th CPSU Congress through the policies of Perestroika (restructuring the

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economy and society) and Glasnost (for greater openness and transparency). Although the programme primarily intended to reorient the government and economic apparatus which had become obsolete it also brought major changes in social and cultural aspect of Soviet political system. Glasnost operated in overlapping phases and dealt with a range of issues: from criticising shortcomings in society and defusing rumours to re-examinations of history. The cultural programme of the reform included encouragement to a broad spectrum of opinions and willingness to address a wider array of social problems than previously tolerated.5

Glasnost led to the development of new forms of political mobilisation and creation of new socio-political movements among various nationalities. In an effort to revitalise Soviet society, Gorbachev’s reforms, according to Lapidus, initiated what was, in effect, a major regime transformation: a transition, however limited and fragile from post-totalitarianism towards liberalisation and incipient democratisation of Soviet System.6

In the post-Glasnost phase, the ruling Communist Party tried to seek support from various social forces, which were previously excluded from any role in social, political and economic sphere, in order to legitimize its position in a changed context. These changes initiated through Glasnost and Perestroika

provided opportunity for emergence and mobilisation of new social actors. In particular, it altered the relationship between state and society, legitimised new forms of expression and activity, expanding the resources at the disposal of new groups and altered the perceptions associated with political activism.\textsuperscript{7}

**Gorbachev and Democratisation in Soviet Society**

While introducing democratisation, Gorbachev had two main goals in his mind. Firstly, he wanted to use it as a means to get rid of those bureaucrats and Communist Party members, who were corrupt and had old ideas and opposed reform programme. Second, he hoped democratisation would unlock popular energies and initiative and give people a stake in the system.\textsuperscript{8}

The process of democratisation in Soviet society after Glasnost led to the formation of “Popular Fronts”. The main objectives of these popular fronts were to create a nationwide political movement that would not only challenge the single party regime, but would also support the party reformer led by Gorbachev against the old guards in the party and state apparatus.\textsuperscript{9} These “Popular Fronts” championed a number of causes and their typology included, social, democratic, and Green movements.

In the Baltic republic of Estonia, first such movement of “Popular Front” arose in the spring of 1988 and subsequently spread to other republics like Lithuania and Latvia. ‘Popular Front’ movement was characterised by the active role

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{8} John M Thomson, op.cit, p. 262.
\textsuperscript{9} Gail W. Lapidus, Victor Zasalavsky, Phillip Goldman (*From Union to Commonwealth*), op.cit. p. 3.
played by the writer’s union of the republics and the intelligentsia. The popular fronts stood for defence of national rights and reversing the effects of decades of “Russification”. The right of self-determination in its homeland was the starting point of their programmes and constituted the rationale for proposals to elevate the status of national language vis-à-vis Russia, to restrict immigration, to establish republic citizenship and corresponding political rights and to combat various forms of “Russification”.

The intellectuals of Baltic republics demanded that their historical, cultural, and geo-political location make them quite distinct from Russia. Their fears were further compounded by the fact that the presence of large number of Russian immigrants which they thought will turn them into a minority in their own country. This provided impetus to the development of nationalistic movement in the Baltic.

The Slavic republics of Ukraine and Byelorussia confronted some what different set of challenges. Their close historical and cultural relationship with Russia obstructed development of ethnic separatism. But in the late 80’s demand for powerful and sovereign Ukrainian state with its own armed forces grew rapidly and culminated in an overwhelming vote for independence in December 1991.

Introduction of competitive election as a result of Glasnost brought significant changes in the Soviet political system. Its major impact was felt on the Soviet

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10 Gail W. Lapidus, *(From Union to Commonwealth)* op.cit, p.56.
11 Gail W. Lapidus, Victor Zaslavsky, Phillip Goldman, *(From Union to Commonwealth)* op.cit, pp. 9-10.
political system, on the role of Communist Party, and also on the federal question. It gave an impetus to the process of political organisation at the local level. The elections were held throughout the USSR in March 1989 to choose two-third of the members of newly formed Congress of Peoples Deputies for the Soviet Union and for each of its republics. The remaining one-third deputies were appointed by various organisations including the Communist Party, trade unions, scientific groups, etc. The National Congress of 2,200 representatives in turn elected a Supreme Soviet of almost five hundred deputies. The elections were conducted in a free and fair manner and voters rejected some of the senior Communist Party leaders. Still 87 percent of those elected to the National Congress of the People’s Deputies were Communists and 65 percent were party or government officials.¹²

Glasnost also brought vast changes in the role of Communist Party. Critics both within and outside the party strongly attacked its monopoly of political power (as enshrined in the Article 6 of the Constitution) not only in the media but in debates at the fall of 1988 session of the new Supreme Soviet.¹³ Party officials previously accountable for their performance only to superior party organs were now obliged to stand for election by a wider local constituency, including non-party members.¹⁴ In the Baltic republic of Lithuania, the Communist Party of Lithuania declared its independence from Moscow, even though a minority of Communist Party members comprising Russians and Poles opposed it. In the

¹³ Ibid, p. 283.
¹⁴ Gail W. Lapidus, (From Union to Commonwealth ) op.cit, p. 57-58.

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27th Party Congress, the reformers threatened the leadership with a massive wave of resignation from the party if their view did not prevail, while conservatives assaulted Gorbachev for his departure from party values. The process of democratisation got further impetus when the newly elected members at the central and republic level debated every issue, voted irrespective of Communist Party’s stand and hence ceased to simply act as rubber stamps. They also discussed various issues concerning republics at the centre and issue concerning regions at the republican level and made legislature an arena of expressing opinion on diverse issues. Soon problem arose on the question of precedence of laws and regulations. Both the union legislature and the republic’s legislature claimed to make rules and regulation and conflict arose over which law will take precedence.

Thus Glasnost created a conducive atmosphere which transformed the nature of Soviet political system by making it more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people and at the same time redefined the nature of Soviet federal system.

**Glasnost and its Impact on Nationality Question**

Impact of Glasnost was perhaps felt the most on the question of nationality. The seventy years of the Communist rule was not able to bridge the gulf that existed among various Soviet nationalities. Whether the problems had their roots in Lenin’s own faulty approach to the issue of nationality as some scholars and

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15 Ibid, p. 58.
activists now allege or whether they were derived from Stalinist distortions of Leninist principles, as others insisted. The whole Soviet record was now up for reassessment.  

Nationality groups aimed to protect and revive their native culture, language etc. Boris Oleimik, a noted Ukrainian poet and Secretary of the Ukrainian Republics Writer’s Union in Kiev deplored the fact that in Ukraine and Byelorussia the opportunity for parents to choose the language of instruction for their children was limited by simple fact that in some cities “there is simply nothing to choose from as there just are not any Byelorussia or Ukrainian schools”. In Moldavia, in 1989, an Inter-Departmental Commission was set up by the Moldavian Supreme Soviet to study the history and problems of the Moldavian language, although in a context of continuing Moldavian-Russian and Russian-Moldavian bilingualism.  

It was not only in the cultural, language and political sphere that vast changes took place, but the issues of environment and economy also came into prominence. The regional political leaders demanded scrapping of vast economic powers enjoyed by Centre and their ministers. They were also equally vocal about the wide power enjoyed by Central ministers on the issues like

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setting industrial units, bringing large numbers of workforce from outside the republics which in turn changed the demographic scenario of many republics and reduced natives into a minority. The republican political leaders demanded wide powers to their respective republic to manage their own economy, which they thought will improve their condition. Closely related to economic issues another issue which came into prominence was the issue of environmental degradation. This led to the formation of environmental movements in the republic. The environment movement got added momentum after the Chernobyl incident, although, the economic and environmental issues were not clearly related to the development of a broad democratic movement in Soviet Union.

**Gorbachev's Policy of Glasnost and Central Asia**

Central Asia being part of Soviet Union could not remain immune to the momentous political changes taking place in the Soviet Union. The policy of Openness (Glasnost) provided the opportunity to the native intelligentsia to reflect on their native history, culture which was a taboo subject during the earlier period. The relative free flow of information and growth of free press led to the rekindling of general people's interest in their past history and culture.

One of the most important issues that confronted the Central Asian republics during this period was rampant corruption and involvement of political elites in it. In the post-Stalin era, the central party leaders gave considerable freedom to the regional elites of Central Asia to ensure cordial relationship between centre and republics. However, instead of ensuring betterment of the people, the
political leaders were involved in massive corruption cases. After coming to power Gorbachev, tried to probe the corruption charges levelled against the political leaders. In Kyrgyzhia, issues relating to corruption first surfaced during 1980 cotton harvest. This led to the removal and punishment of party officials and Soviet executives.\(^\text{19}\)

In Turkmenia republic, revelation about clan, corruption and crime nexus came out on a large-scale in the Tashauz province in 1984 and continued till 1986. Thaelmann collective farm in the Leninisk district of the province fell short by more than 2,20,000 roubles. Farm’s Chairman, Piriyev, concealed the shortfall by manipulating and falsifying financial documents, including so called “advances” of some 2,44,000 rouble paid to the collective farmers for cotton which the state never received.\(^\text{20}\)

In February 1996, Kazakh Prime Minister Nursultan Nazarbaev criticised local officials, who siphoned off construction funds into projects to built themselves bigger and better apartments, and found themselves the subjects of whispering campaign initiated by other members of the republican elite.\(^\text{21}\) In order to combat corruption and check clan politics, efforts were made at the 27\(^{\text{th}}\) Party Congress in February 1986. Yegor Ligachev, suggested that time had come to rethink aspects of “personnel policy of regionalism and localism”. If regionalism


\(^{20}\) Ibid.

and localism are to be combated it was necessary to promote an “inter-regional exchange of personnel and exchange of experienced worker’s and republics”\textsuperscript{22}. Between 1983-86 all the five Central Asian First Secretaries were replaced. Although it was done as an administrative measure to bring efficiency in administration, it backfired; it was seen as a Russian attempt to suppress the titular groups. The situation took a serious turn when Kazakhstan’s First Secretary D. Kunaev was replaced by G. Koblin, an ethnic Russian. This incident led to violent rioting in Alma Ata.

Apart from the issue of corruption, another issue which was causing concern to the central party leaders was the Islamisation of society. Though it was officially claimed that the importance of Islam in social-political life of Central Asia had declined to a considerable extent, but in reality Islamic values and practices guided the life of the people especially in the rural areas. The central party leaders under Gorbachev called for an end to the continuing hold of Islamic values and practices on the people. The economy of Central Asia was in shambles. This was partly due to the over exploitation of land resources which led to the decline of productions, particularly of cotton.

Cotton was the staple agricultural product of Central Asia. But, when the Central leadership directed the republics to be self-sufficient in food production, this

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Pravda}, 28 February 1986, cited in John Anderson, op.cit, p. 58.
created problem for Central Asia and led to large-scale resentment among the people.

The other important issue that emerged after the Glasnost was the language issue. Many Central Asian intellectuals demanded greater role for the titular language vis-à-vis the Russian language. In the Soviet period many changes took place with regard to titular languages. During the 1920s, the script of local languages in Central Asia was changed from Arabic to the Latin alphabet and further before the war it was changed from Latin to Cyrillic. Many new words were also introduced which were of Russian or Slavic origin. Considerable efforts were made to improve the status of local languages, but after Glasnost it got real impetus. The intellectuals demanded language reform and argued that introduction of Cyrillic script led to great difficulty as many of their classical literature were in Turkic and Persian language.

Another issue which confronted the Central Asian republics was environmental degradation, particularly gradual disappearance of inland water that had increased the temperature of this region. Alongside these problems, other related issues like over-use of pesticides and depletion of sea and water resources had further aggravated the environmental problems. One important thing that should be noted is discussions regarding these problems that were not confined only to the republican elites but informal groups, which also played an important role in creating awareness among the masses on various issues confronting their republics. Informal groups were established in Kazakhstan by September 1988.
A Deputy Republican Prosecutor of those times gave a figure of more than 300 informal groups with more than 3,000 members in Kazakhstan.23

Among the informal groups the most prominent informal group that emerged in Kazakhstan was “Nevada Semi-Paltinsk Movement”. The main goal of this movement was to stop all nuclear testing, responsible handling and disposal of hazardous radioactive materials and nuclear wastes. It also demanded conversion of military industries to environment friendly industries and, in particular, the shutting down of the Semi-Palatinsk testing site. Besides Neveda Semi-Palatinsk movement in Kazakhstan, other nationalistic parties that emerged in Kazakhstan were, Zeltoksan Azat and Alash.24

In Turkmenistan, issues like Turkmenistan’s position as a potential source of raw materials supplier, environment and health hazards which took place due to intensive agriculture, resulted in resentment among the masses following publications of reports in the media. In order to protect Turkmenistan’s vital interests, Turkmen intellectuals formed a ‘Popular Front’, Agzybirlik. The main issues raised by Agzybirlik were protection of the Turkmen language and addressing the environmental problems which Turkmenistan faced. Initially it was registered, but later it was subsequently banned. Similarly, in Kyrgyzstan, as Sovietskaia Kyrgyzhia noted that there were nine informal groups in capital Frunze, out of which six were political clubs. The Kyrgyz leaders, however,

24 Ibid, pp. 91-92.
opposed development of unofficial quasi-political groups, several of which were established in 1989. In Tajikistan an informal group named “Tajik (Farsi) language Fund” came into existence. One of its major objectives was to promote the classical Tajik language and culture and enjoy official patronage. Besides this, other groups emerged with the intention of alleviating acute housing crisis in the republic, seized vacant land for the construction of houses. “Ashar” which led the squatter’s movement was partially tolerated by the authorities and soon assumed a wider public role. Osh Aymaghi, a similar group like Ashar based in Osh Oblast, attempted to obtain land and houses for ethnic Kyrgyz in the region. This in turn precipitated violent confrontation between Kyrgyzs and Uzbeks in 1990, in which more than 900 people were killed.25

Thus it can be pointed out that like other republics of Soviet Union, in Central Asia, glasnost provided opportunity for Central Asian intellectuals to put forth their grievances before the Soviet leadership. This provided an impetus to the growth of democratic movements in Central Asia.

Glasnost and Its Impact on Democratic Development in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan being part of Soviet Union could not escape from the developments that took place in the rest of the Union after the introduction of Glasnost. It provided an opportunity to the Uzbek people, like other republics of Soviet Union, to raise their grievances in an atmosphere of freedom. The impact of

25 Sovietskaia Kirgiziia, 7 December 1988, cited in ibid, pp. 95-96.
Glasnost was greatly felt in the spheres of culture, language, and environment and also in the political sphere. This provided a major boost to the process of democratisation in Uzbekistan

Culture

With regards to the issue of culture, unlike other Soviet Republics no radical change took place in the beginning in Uzbekistan. The Republican Party Secretary followed a carrot and stick policy with regards to the issue of culture. A good manifestation of attitude of the leadership towards culture can be proved from the fact that under the direction of Third Secretary Ra’na Abduallaeva, the official commemoration of the holiday Nowruz was prohibited. Although the history of this festival can be traced back to pre-Islamic times and was widely practiced during the Zoroastrian period, yet it was considered an Islamic practice. When Abdullaeva was removed from the post of Third Secretary, some policy changes with regard to culture were witnessed. The head of Uzbekistan’s Writers’ Union Adil Yaqubov urged his fellow writers to learn boldness and fearlessness from the Russian writers. Yaqubov noted that Russian journals are already making plans to publish work by such controversial writers as Tvardovsky and Pasternak. Similarly poet Shukrula cited the positive outlook.

of the journal Ogonok\textsuperscript{28} and charged that in contrast to it, Uzbekistan's press lacked decisiveness, boldness and audacity in telling truths.\textsuperscript{29}

Despite growing awareness among writers about rehabilitating the Uzbek culture, there were some groups of writers who supported official policies.\textsuperscript{30} One such individual was Laziz Polatovich Oaumov, the Chief Editor of the Uzbek language party daily \textit{Soviet Uzbekistani}. His paper never raised sensitive questions and issues and also failed to reflect the popular aspirations regarding Uzbek culture. The major areas in which Glasnost made tremendous impact on Uzbek culture were: renewed emphasis on past historical Uzbek culture, emphasis on Uzbek cultural figures that were sidelined in pre-Glasnost era and matters concerning language affairs. These three issues require critical analysis to find out how these movements helped to develop a broad democratisation process in Soviet Uzbekistan.

\textbf{Renewed Emphasis on History and Uzbek Culture}

Like other Central Asian Republics, Uzbekistan's culture has its own historical and cultural legacies. After its incorporation into Soviet Union, especially during the Stalin period, effort was made to suppress the indigenous culture and in consequence much of the past indigenous Uzbek culture was destroyed. Although during 1960s and 1970s sustained efforts were made to revive traditional Uzbek culture, especially during the Rashidov period. For example

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, p. 7.
Maqum, a musical form and many words of Arabic and Persian origin began to reappear. But it was not enough in the context of reviving overall Uzbek culture. As noted by poet Muhammad Salih, history curriculum in the republic paid more attention to the Joan of Arc and many other heroes and historical figures than many heroes who lived in Central Asia. Another issue that was intimately concerned with Uzbek culture was that of Islam. Many Soviet historians and political leaders considered Islam as a negative force. For example, at the Uzbek Communist Party Congress in January 1986, the First Secretary, Usmankhodjaev indicated that “Popular Tradition must be respected and a sense of love for home and history must be fostered in the rising generation, but the past of Uzbek people ... is not of course patriarchal tradition and the dogma of the Shariah”. But many Uzbek writers demanded positive assessment of the role of Islam. As Nadir Narmatov noted that “our great scholars- Biruni, Ibn Sina and Ulughbek”, all formulated their world views based on the Quran. In this context, he asked if it is possible to demand knowledge of Marxism-Leninism from a Twelfth Century person.

Similarly, issues relating to the protection and rehabilitation of a large number of historical monuments which were originally constructed as Mosques, Madrasas or Mausoleum were raised. During the Stalin period, many of these structures were either destroyed or handed over to the governmental agencies. The lack of protection of architectural monuments was highlighted by Nurail

Qubul who deplored the state of historical monuments of Samarkand, Bukhara, and other cities. Qubul asks, do we not realise that one cannot fight religion with a bulldozer.33

A closely related issue relating to culture gained prominence during this period was the issue of the Arabic script. In Uzbekistan, before its incorporation into the Soviet Union, all literatures were written in Arabic script. But, after its incorporation into Soviet Union, the script was subsequently changed to Latin. One of the reasons why the Soviet leadership switched from the Arabic to the Latin and then to the Cyrillic script for Central Asia was to put a break on the existing literary tradition that had a strong Islamic influence and inflow of literary activities in other Islamic countries. As a result of Soviet policies, in the second half of the 1980s, most of the students graduating from language and literature departments in Uzbekistan’s universities and scientific institutions could not read the Arabic script and were ignorant of their literary heritage, which had been written in Arabic and Persian.34 Glasnost provided a golden opportunity to the writers to press their demand for restoration of the native language. For example, they demanded that Arabic script should not be taught only to the selected few who go on to higher education but rather to secondary school pupils too.35 These writers also refuted the claim that study of Arabic alphabet might tell upon socialist ideology and pointed out that, Aydin, an Arabic script publication, “ideologically extremely reliable” was published in

33 Ibid. p.10.
USSR and circulated exclusively abroad. Writer Nadir Narmatov argued that if the Arabic script was taught in schools, its superstitious use in teaching religion would decrease. The link between Arabic script and religion apparently takes place when believers accept as pupils young people interested in learning the Arabic script and proceed to teach them religious practice as well.

Many writers also called for sympathetic attitude towards Islamic religious practices like participating in funerals of their own relatives. For example, the well known poet Erkin Vahidov criticized, the punishment meted out to the innocent people who participated in the religious funeral procession which he argued has developed over centuries and is worthy of respect.

The argument of Vahidov can be substantiated by the speech of Usmankhodzhayev’s report to 21st Congress of Communist Party on 30 January regarding participation of Communist Party members in religious activities. He pointed out that “one of the serious problems facing the Republican Party Organisation is that of anti-religious propaganda and atheist education. Some party organisations connive at and sometimes openly flirt with religion and pander to backward traditions and customs. Religious rites with their extravagance have captivated many people. There are by no means isolated cases of Communists, Kosmol members and leading personnel taking part in the

36 Ibid. p.11.
38 William Fierman, 1989, op.cit, p. 11.
performance of religious rites". He further pointed out that "the Central Committee must heighten the demands made on party committees regarding the organisations of people for atheistic education, formulate and implement specific measures to improve the existing religious situation and increasing communist responsibility for the state of atheistic propaganda and introduction of new Soviet rites".

Renewed Emphasis on Writing of Past Uzbek Literary Figures

The second issue with regard to culture concerned with renewed emphasis on the writing of those writers whose writings were suppressed during Soviet era especially during Stalin’s period. After Stalin, some efforts were made to rehabilitate those writers who were prosecuted in the Stalin era. In 1956, the First Secretary of Uzbekistan’s Communist Party, Mukhitdinov published some of the works of Qadiri, a leading Uzbek literary figure. He also published suppressed reports regarding this famous author’s arrest and trial that took place during the Stalin period. The other important writers whose rehabilitation was made during this period were Cholpan and Firat. Firat and Cholpan were vehement critics of Soviet powers and expressed their opinion regarding pan-Turkic ideals and had close links with the Jadidist movement. The Soviet history also presented a negative picture of these writers. Although during Khrushchev period, de-Stalinisation took place and a commission was established to look into the works of these writers, but nothing concrete emerged. Due to the impact

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39 Summary of World Broadcasts / SU/8/82/B/5, 13 February 1986 (Henceforth SWB).
40 Ibid.
of Glasnost, the Secretary of the Board of the USSR Writers Union, Yuriisurovtsev spoke in Samarkand in May 1987 and gave qualified support to their rehabilitation. Uzbek writers also demanded that the Jadid movement should be understood in a proper perspective. Naim Karimov, a writer, insisted, “it is impossible to imagine the history of Central Asia on the eve of revolution without the Jadid movement”. Moreover, Karimov insisted that on balance the Jadid movement was a positive phenomenon. Many writers also greatly criticised the role played by Sharaf Rashidov, former President of Uzbekistan Writers Union from 1949-50 who also held the post of First Secretary. He did not do anything to rehabilitate those writers who were victimised. The main objective of Uzbek writers in exploring their past as writer Shukrulla put it was not to put blame on our creative worker friends, but to draw conclusion for today and to provide lesson to future generation so that they will be on their guard watching for such mistakes. There was close resemblance between renewed emphasis on writings of Uzbek writers and the writers in other republics of Soviet Union.

**Language Issues**

The other important area in which Glasnost had strong impact was concerning language. Adil Yagubov noted that until just recently “it was difficult (even) to talk about the native language. Formerly a simple appeal for a good knowledge

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43 *Ozbekistan Adabi yoti va sanati*, 5 Feb.1968, cited in ibid, p. 15.
of the native language was called "national egoism". Uzbek writers found that, due to low status of their language, it acted as a hindrance for the people of Uzbekistan to enjoy same benefits as was enjoyed by other Soviet nationalities. The low status of native Uzbek language was highlighted by a well known Uzbek writer at a Writer's Congress. The Uzbek writer recalled having to help an Uzbek shepherd in gaining admission to the offices of the Uzbek Central Committee, because the receptionist could not understand his language. He reminded his listeners that if they became ill in Tashkent, or if their homes were to catch fire, they would be unable to get help by telephoning in Uzbek.

Similarly, many writers like Muhammad Salih pointed out that in 1940, six hundred (Uzbek language) books were published for the republic with four million Uzbeks. While in the republic's Uzbek population had reached fourteen million, only 900 books have been published. Too much emphasis on Russian language led to some sort of structural imbalance as those specialists who were trained under Russian were not able to communicate with the people living in rural areas.

The writers also expressed grave concern over the fact that in future many Uzbeks cannot write Uzbek without mistakes. Uzbek writers also took active interests in reviving Uzbek language. In the words of I. Haggulov, "A people's

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44 Pravda Vostoka, 12 April 1988, cited in ibid, op.cit, p. 16.
45 Lapidus, (From Union to Commonwealth) op.cit, p. 51.
46 William Fierman, 1989, op.cit, p. 16.
fate is intimately linked to the fate of its language. Therefore it is necessary to raise Uzbek to the level of state language". 47

Like other republics of Soviet Union, the party and government in Uzbekistan also decided to improve the native language and tried to give it prominence. On 4 May 1989, the Presidium of Uzbek Supreme Soviet worked out a draft law for the Uzbek SSR to make Uzbek an official language, while providing bilingualism, in Russian and the titular language. The Presidium also decided to submit to the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of Uzbek SSR for subsequent publication and nationwide debate and discussion on proposals for inserting the corresponding amendment to the Constitution of the Uzbek SSR. 48 At the 11th session of the Uzbek SSR Supreme Soviet, a law was passed on the State Language of the Uzbek SSR article by article. 49 The Republic Constitution was authorised to declare Uzbek language as the republican state language. Uzbek language had this status following the formation of the republics in 1924, but it was deprived of it in the 1930s. 50 The law on the State Language of the Uzbek SSR consists of a Preamble and thirty articles. The major objective of language law was to increase its use in public life. Article 3, for example, guarantees inhabitants of Uzbekistan the right to address state and public organisations and enterprises in Uzbek language and to receive response in the same language. The law further states (Article 4) that managers and workers (in the Russian

48 SWBSU04501b5, 4 May 1989.
50 Ibid.
text) are obliged to learn Uzbek to the extent necessary to fulfil their job responsibilities. Article 5 to 12 and article 22 raise the status of Uzbek language in public meetings, provides for use of Uzbek language in the preparation and adaptation of the republic’s laws and enhance the role of Uzbek language in official work, accounting and financial documentation in enterprises, establishments and organisations. All these developments in the field of culture and language and recognition of the great Uzbek writers of the past show that Glasnost provided opportunity to the people to think and to know the lacunae that existed in their society. These developments gave an impetus to the democratisation process in Uzbekistan.

**Glasnost and its Impact on Cotton Cultivation and Environmental Issues**

Like other Soviet Central Asian republics, there existed a close relationship between growth of democratic movement and environmental awareness due to the impact of Glasnost. Uzbekistan due to its suitable climatic and soil condition produced large amounts of cotton. During the Stalin period, Uzbekistan abandoned cultivation of most crops, except cotton so that USSR could achieve self-sufficiency in cotton production. Simply, producing cotton affected food production to a large extent. This led to short fall of food production and increase in the prices of food products. As one writer Timur Polatov asserts, “as new lands were developed in Uzbekistan, only cotton was planted on them as a

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result of which we lost many things". Otkir Hashimov, another writer, complained that peaches which was sold for three roubles per kilogram in the stores of Siberia cost five rouble at the markets in Tashkent. This he felt was due to the result of sacrificing Uzbekistan’s orchards in order to grow cotton. Hashimov pointed out that, residents of the rural areas where fruit might have grown had to travel to rayon centres simply to buy apples or lemons.

Uzbek writers also expressed grave concern over the harmful effect of the cotton-based economy on health. Adil Yaqubov, a writer, also blamed the inadequate compensation which cotton growers received. As example, he said that local women, “who have not yet reached thirty have already aged like old women”. Besides cotton, the other ecological issue which received writers’ attention was severe water crisis. The fate of the Aral Sea received greater attention from the literate community. Aral Sea which once got water from Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya, no longer got water from these rivers and consequently it shrank. As a result of this, population of this region reeled under severe water crisis. Pirmat Shermuhamedov, Chairman of the Uzbekistan writer’s union committee to save the Aral Sea, pointed to the severe problems for the population of the Kara Kalpak Autonomous SSR, which is in the region of Aral Sea. He narrated the terrible problems of water scarcity especially in rural areas. Consumption of contaminated water led to the spread of various

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diseases like anaemia, jaundice, dysentery, malfunction of digestive tract and cancer. He also pointed out that water scarcity was the major cause of infant mortality rate in the Kara Kalpak ASSR, which rose from 44.7 in 1965 to 71.5 percent in 1986. This shows that the writers played a significant role in spreading and increasing awareness of the people towards environmental problems. They even created a fund to save the Aral Sea from disaster.

Issue of Corruption

Corruption had eaten the very vitals of the society in Soviet Uzbekistan. The involvement of top level political leaders and officials in this process further worsened the situation. People got an opportunity to know about the large-scale corruption unearthed by the liberalised atmosphere created under Glasnost.

Khudaiberidiev, then Chairman of the Uzbek republic’s Council of Ministers was sentenced to nine years of deprivation of freedom and confiscation of property for crimes and bribe. He was accused of giving 50,000 rouble bribes to Churbanov (Brezhnev’s son-in-law) for the purpose to garner his support and protection. Similarly, at Uzbek Communist Party Congress, corruption issue dominated and the Congress severely castigated the role of S. Rashidov. Congress pointed out, “gross violation of party norms, morals and Soviet laws and other shortcomings”. It pointed out over reporting, thefts, embezzlement and bribery that were widespread there, leading to demoralisation and degeneration of cadres. These negative phenomena became extremely dangerous. The

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55 Ibid. p. 25.
56 Ajay Patnaik, op.cit, p. 164.
Congress also severely criticized the role of S. Rashidov, former First Secretary of the Republican Communist Party and condemned his patronage to many corrupt persons. They included, Karimov, former First Secretary of Bukhara Oblast Party Committee, Yakhayayev, former republican Minister of Internal Affairs and others. The issue of corruption first came to light during the Andropov period. It was known as “cotton affairs”. In order to meet the excessive targets for cotton production, the political elite over reported the cotton production amount than what was actually produced. During 1985-86, Gorbachev criticised the Uzbek leaders for bribery and other related crimes. Usmankodzhaev, Rashidov’s replacement was charged with corruption along with other officials and was later sentenced to imprisonment for his complicity in “cotton affairs”. Moreover this assault on ‘corruption’ launched by Moscow backfired to some extent as it strengthened local elites who could portray themselves as victims of the centre’s elder brother syndrome that paid little attention to local sensitivities. A good example in this regard could be cited from the fact that Adil Yagubov, a writer, in his speech at the plenum of the USSR Writer’s Union, described how he was humiliated by constant questions from friends all over the Soviet Union asking about the latest ‘big fish’ caught in Uzbekistan.

57 SWB\SU\B9, 7 Feb.1986.
58 John Anderson, op.cit, p. 57.
Yaguov stated that although he restrained himself, he felt like retorting, "Does every thing smell like a rose garden in your republic?"59 The Central newspaper, especially *Komsomolskaia Pravda* brought public opinion and the attitude of the country to the Uzbek people to such an extent that Uzbek children at the Orlionok Pioneer camp were isolated by fellow campers who told them, "you are children of thieves, and bribe takers; go home; and the children had to be sent back to Tashkent".60

Like other Central Asian republics, Peoples’ Movements also emerged in Uzbekistan. These movements were formed to protect the rich historical, cultural, spiritual and ecological heritage of Uzbekistan. Prominent among the movements was *Birlik* (unity). A working group was set up in Tashkent by 18 intellectuals who chose Abdurahim Pulatov as their chairman. It started its activities in November 1988. It gained immense popularity among the intellectuals, especially among the youth. In rural area, the members of Birlik consisted of village teachers, librarians, who constituted the rural intelligentsia. However, the organisation’s draft programme contained many programmes and policies of the Republican Communist Party leadership led by R. Nishanov, and it indicated that Uzbekistan would remain a part of Soviet Union governed according to a Leninist nationality policy. The organisation’s first demonstration took place on 19 March 1989, reportedly drew a crowd of 12,000 participants. It

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60 *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, 1 April 1988, cited in ibid, p. 3.

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was not sanctioned by the authorities and was ignored in the republican press.\textsuperscript{61} The demonstration took place to demand Uzbek as one of the official languages of the USSR.

Soon after the formation of Birlik, it was divided into two factions. While one faction led by Pulatov favoured a more direct confrontationist approach towards the Communist party leadership, the moderates led by Salih tried to achieve Birlik's goal through parliamentary means. The moderate group led by Salih argued that it was not in a position to adopt a confrontationist approach towards the Communist authorities and it will gain less through confrontation. Attempt to reconcile the differences between the two factions failed. Finally, in February 1990, some of the "moderates" of Birlik established a new organisation called "Erk" on 11 March 1990. They declared 'Erk' a political party which held its first Congress on 30 April 1990.\textsuperscript{62} After the break up of Birlik, its support base declined to some extent. It had only 4000 members left.\textsuperscript{63}

In the initial stage of Birlik, the republican authority showed a negative attitude towards it and wanted to suppress it. They considered it as an extremist group, vociferously championing the causes of Pan-Turkism and advocating separation of Uzbekistan from USSR. However, the republican authorities adopted a pragmatic policy in dealing with this organisation after it launched its first public demonstration in Tashkent. The Republican First Secretary Nishanov

\textsuperscript{61} Bess Brown, op.cit, pp. 88-89.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
criticised certain organisations for inciting people to hold demonstration, which indirectly referred to *Birlik* which was considered to include anti-social elements.

The replacement of Nishanov and appointment of Karimov as the First Secretary of Uzbekistan facilitated a new approach towards these informal organisations. As the latter pointed out, “in this movement (*Birlik*) there are a lot of young people who are intelligent, full of initiatives, who are not indifferent to the fate of our people and who are ready to struggle for our bright future. We are prepared to work together with them”.  

Despite showing flexible attitude towards ‘*Birlik*’, the republican authority did not approve uncontrolled street demonstrations nor did it allow public meetings before forthcoming elections. Birlik raised concern about Uzbek language its history and environmental issues.

With regard to the language issue, the *Birlik’s* Draft Programme called for an end to policies which discriminated against Uzbek language. It advocated an unbiased and truthful interpretation of Uzbek history. It also called for increasing the living standard of people and meeting their spiritual needs. The charter also called for struggle to establishing genuine sovereignty within the USSR.  

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Another complex issue which Birlik raised was concerned with cotton economy and agricultural organisation. The draft programme called for a sharp reduction in Uzbekistan’s cotton quota and allow long term lease on land; it also called factories to be established to process raw materials.\(^\text{66}\)

In addition to Birlik and Erk some other informal organisations also came into existence in Soviet Uzbekistan after Glasnost and Perestroika. During August 1989, an informal group named as Intersoiyz emerged, to protect the interests of the non-indigenous nationalities, especially Slavs.\(^\text{67}\) Some Birlik leaders asserted that Intersoiyz was itself an invention of the KGB.\(^\text{68}\) The other informal group that emerged in late 1989 in Uzbekistan was Democratic Movement of Uzbekistan (DMU). It failed to attract popular imagination, but supported political reform. On language and cultural issues it attempted to balance the interests of various nationalities, taking a middle ground between Birlik and Intersoiyz.\(^\text{69}\)

**Communist Party of Uzbekistan’s Response to Birlik Agenda**

The Republic on Communist Party under the unbridled leadership of Karimov showed a greater flexibility to issues, especially those relating to the rehabilitation of past Uzbek Writers and environmental issues. For example, in February 1990, the CPU’s First Secretary Karimov quoted the “Great Poet”

\(^{68}\) Ibid.
\(^{69}\) Ibid.
In September 1990, he signed a presidential decree, stating that Uzbek youth would not be called for service in construction units located outside the republic. He also supported the environmental issues raised by Birlik and other informal groups and wanted to raise the price of cotton, so that Uzbek people can benefit out of it.

One of the most significant issues on which the Republican Party leadership adopted a position similar to that of Birlik\ Erk was concerning the issue of Uzbekistan’s sovereignty. In June, 1990 Uzbek Supreme Soviet adopted a declaration on the sovereignty of the Uzbek SSR within a “Renewed Soviet Federation”. The document proclaimed the state sovereignty of Uzbekistan and supremacy of the laws of the republics on its entire territory. According to the declaration, matters of domestic and foreign policy were to remain within the jurisdiction of the state authority of the Uzbekistan.

Even Karimov began to speak of “informal movements” as a natural (Zakonomernyi) and objective “phenomenon in democratic development” and an indicator of the “politicisation of our society. He explicitly recognised the past CPUZ mistakes with regard to informal groups and said that now the party moved from total non-recognition to constructive dialogue with them. This shows that republican leadership under Karimov subscribed to some of the issues raised by Birlik. It is necessary to analyse what are the factors that

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71 Ibid.
72 SWBiSU\079\1B\2, 22 June 1990.
compelled the republican leadership to transform them and make conciliatory approach towards *Erk* and *Birlik*.

The first factor which was responsible for the change of attitude of the authorities towards *Erk* and Birlik was the change of leadership that took place in Uzbekistan. Unlike Nishanov, Karimov paid sufficient attentions to many of the concerns shown by the *Erk* and *Birlik* leadership.

Second factor which facilitated the process was the fact that the Communist Party was discredited before the masses. Due to the reforms initiated in Uzbek society under the influence of Glasnost, many informal groups raised issues, which concerned the public. This led to considerable loss of credibility of Communist Party before the people. But the Communist Party of Uzbekistan under the leadership of Karimov tried to refurbish the image of the party by reconciling with *Erk* and *Birlik* leaders.

Finally, Karimov realised that the failure of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan to achieve legitimacy among the masses might create an explosive situation. In order to check it, Karimov made sincere efforts and subsequently adopted a conciliatory approach towards moderate leaders of *Erk* and *Birlik*. By this way, he hoped it will help the Communist Party in checking radical elements within the *Erk* and *Birlik* party.\(^73\) This tactics employed by Karimov was intended to win over the public and to divert the attention of the people from *Birlik's* agenda.

\(^73\) William Fierman, "Political Development in Uzbekistan", op.cit, p. 369.
Glasnost and its Impact on Political Development in Uzbekistan

Glasnost resulted in profound changes in the socio-cultural process in Uzbekistan as well as left an indelible mark on the political process of the country. Gorbachev’s political reform infused hopes and inspirations among formerly excluded and alienated political groups that they could not only participate but also share political power. It should be noted that the economic, social and ecological problems which had accumulated over the years in combination with the rising expectation and a break down in discipline provided the primary basis for pessimism in Uzbekistan. However Islam Karimov, the First Secretary of Uzbekistan, consolidated his hold over the republic in contrast to other republics of Soviet Union, where the party and government faced serious problems.

Uzbekistan’s Supreme Soviet which met in October 1989 amended the constitution and passed several long-awaited laws, including laws on election to republican and local Soviets. The draft law on elections banned discrimination against citizens on ground of origin, nationality, language, religion or duration of residence.74

The new laws which were introduced in parliament geared to strengthen the role of local and republican bodies of self-government. Further they were entrusted powers and responsibilities that had been earlier performed by the Central Union

authorities exclusively. The session brought about changes in the composition of the Presidium of the State Commissions of the Supreme Soviet of the republic.\textsuperscript{75} It envisaged retaining the republic’s Supreme Soviet, where 500 deputies were to be elected. Elections to the Supreme Soviet and local Soviets would be held in single seat electoral constituencies on the basis of universal, equal, direct suffrage and secret ballot. The law also further pointed out that “any citizen of the Uzbek SSR who had reached the age of 21 could be elected as Deputy of the Uzbek SSR Supreme Soviet.”\textsuperscript{76} The elections of the People’s Deputies were held on 18 February 1990. The Central Election Commission registered 368 deputies. There were 42 women among 368 deputies registered by Central Election Commission. They made up 13.6 percent of the deputies. There were 25 collective farmers constituting 6.8 percent of the total number of deputies. There were 348 party members and candidate members among the elected deputies or 94.6 percent. People of 17 nationalities residing in Uzbekistan were also elected.\textsuperscript{77}

According to writer Timor Polatov, authorities decided in advance who was supposed to be nominated in each district and did what they could to prevent meetings to nominate other candidate. Polatov also maintains that 200 of the candidates who secured nomination mostly in districts without any contest were workers of the Communist \textit{apparat}.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{SWB, SU\10570\B\12}, 25 September 1989.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{SWB\SU\0698\B\12}, 26 February 1990.
\textsuperscript{78} William Fierman, “Political Development in Uzbekistan”, op.cit, p. 373.
The post-election analysis showed that despite many violations alleged by opposition groups in comparison to the earliest ones Soviet election were somewhat free and fair and efforts were made to usher in democratisation.

During this period, *Erk* transformed itself into a political party on 30 April 1990. Its founding *qurultay* (conference) elected a thirty-five member Central Committee headed by Muhammed Salih. The Communist Party of Uzbekistan, under Karimov, became the first mass organisation registered by the Ministry of Justice. Uzbekistan’s residents thought that Communist Party led by Karimov can revitalise the society and make it more democratic. In an attempt to put his image as moderate, reformist Uzbek First Secretary Islam Karimov left the politburo of the CPSU Central Committee. He argued that actions of the orthodox leadership of the politburo and Secretariat of the CPSU Central Committee dealt a fatal blow to the honour and dignity of both the party in general and hundreds of communists in particular. He also argued that Communist Party of Uzbekistan has its programme and rules, is registered by lawful procedure and therefore reserves the right to examine all the issues resulting from the situation that occurred. 79

Karimov transformed his Council of Ministers into a presidential cabinet in the third session of Uzbekistan’s ‘New Parliament’. He even included some members of *Birlik* in the state council to tone down the growing opposition that was vocal against President Karimov’s authority.

79 *SWBISU* 1159\18\19, 24 August 1991.

107
On February 15 1991, in order to check growing opposition, Uzbekistan passed a “law on public association in the Uzbek SSR”. Article 3 of this law prohibited the creation of activity that was “directed towards the destruction of the moral foundation of the society, universal humanistic values and likewise, whose goal was the illegal change of the constitutional structure or the destruction of the unity of the territory of the USSR, the Uzbek SSR and Kara Kalpak ASSR”.\textsuperscript{80} Similarly, provisions of the republic law ‘on the mass media’, adopted in June 1991, and also restricted the opposition’s ability to gather support.\textsuperscript{81} For example, this law prohibited censorship under Article 2 and Article 4 prohibited “use of mass media... to propagandise war, violence, cruelty or racial, national or religious exclusivity, to disseminate pornography, or for the purpose of committing other criminally punishable offences. Significantly, in contrast to the analogous All Union law adopted in 1990, Uzbekistan, did not give individual the right to establish mass media.\textsuperscript{82}

Through these rules and regulations, Karimov tried to curb the growing opposition to his rule. Similarly, the opposition was not quite effective in challenging Karimov. They did not have enough propaganda machineries like holding mass meetings, issuing pamphlets and newspapers.

Thus, it should be noted that, despite passing of these acts and laws, post-Glasnost Uzbekistan was much more democratic in comparison to pre-Glasnost.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, p. 377.
Uzbekistan. 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.