

DOI: 10.24411/2221-3279-2020-10044

ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN NORTH CAUCASUS

Monalisha Acharjee

*Jawaharlal Nehru University,
New Delhi, India*

<p>Article history:</p> <p><i>Received:</i> 03.11.2018</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> 03.07.2019</p>	<p>Abstract: Ethnic conflicts are a challenge to the state as it impacts the foreign policy as well as the domestic politics of a nation. The region of North Caucasus has been the most unstable region among the Republics of the Russian Federation. The present article will analyse the causes of the rising tensions among the ethnic groups and the role of Russia in solving the problems in the region. It will further explain the drawbacks of the Russian authorities and will recommend policies which could bring a positive change in the conflict. The use of force would not be able to bring any change in the region rather it would be more fruitful if efforts are made to address the causes for the ethnic violence.</p>
<p>About the authors: PhD Research Scholar, Center for Russian and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University</p> <p>e-mail: monalishaacharjee20@gmail.com</p>	
<p>Key words: North Caucasus; ethnicity; Russia; security; Islam; Chechnya; conflict</p>	

The end of cold war and the disintegration of the Soviet Union have resulted in an increase in the number of ethnic conflicts in the region. North Caucasus has been one such region in the Russian Federation where till date there has been continuous conflicts and instability challenging the security of the entire Russian territory.

The region of Caucasus in the Eurasian continent has been described as an element of ‘the new world disorder’.¹ The reason behind this definition was the ethno-political conflicts and the warfare in the region. However out of the total eight civil conflicts in the region of the former Soviet Union five have occurred in the Caucasus region. For example the conflicts in the Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, the Prigorodniy Rayon of North Ossetia and Chechnya. These conflicts together have resulted into death of thousands of people and large number of refugees and internally displaced persons.

The region of North Caucasus has been defined by Thomas Wall as a region which

has a vast density of languages anywhere on earth.² The geostrategic location of the North Caucasus has played an important role in the multi diversity of the ethnic group in the region. It was invaded by the Persian, Ottoman, Byzantine and Tsarist empires. North Caucasus has been inhabited by a large number of ethnic groups and thus it has been referred to as the “Mountain of Tongues”.³ Alexander Rondeli has argued that the geopolitical location has led to loss for the Caucasian people rather than any benefit. Territories of the Caucasian people have been annexed; their population have been deported and suppressed violently. Caucasus has been an important communication route between Europe and Asia and is an important site for production and export of oil and gas resources from the Caspian Sea.⁴

¹ Cornell, Svante. *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethno political Conflict in the Caucasus*. Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York, 2000.

² Wall, Thomas D. *The Caucasus: An Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2010.

³ Catford, J.C, *Mountain of Tongues: The Languages of the Caucasus // Annual Review Of Anthropology*, 1997, Vol. 6, PP. 283-314.

⁴ Rondeli, Alexander. *The North Caucasus: A View from Tbilisi*, Turkish Political Quarterly, 2011.

Concept of ethnicity

An ethnic group can be defined as a set of people who share common language, religion, culture, race, territory or economic system. The concept of ethnicity is defined by various scholars. There is no one definition of ethnicity. For some “ethnicity” is understood in terms of ancestry for others it means physical attributes. Norman Yetman argues that ethnicity is matter of identity or a sense of belonging to a particular group.⁵ Ethnicity is subjective in the sense as it is a product of human mind and human sentiments. On the other hand it is defined as objective in the sense that it has objective characteristics as well as it is constructed by power relations and social forces. There are some who also argue that ethnicity is a combination of subjective perceptions based on some objective physical attributes such as culture, ancestry or national origin.

All over the world the importance or the identity based on ethnicity has been rising. Some of the evidences are the war in Yugoslavia has led to fragmentation of its territory, ethnic conflict in Northern Ireland, Quebec and other European countries despite several peace-making efforts in the Israeli Palestinian conflict the clash between the two groups remains continued. In India the ethnic collisions between Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and other communities is a concerning issue. In Sri Lanka the conflict between the minority Tamils and the majority Sinhalese has resulted in death of thousands of people and many as refugees. In Rwanda ethnic clashes remain evident in 1994 between the majority Hutu and the minority Tutsi tribe.

Ethnic conflict is a world view phenomenon. It persists in every part of the world and has been a central feature of places where heterogeneous population live.⁶ At the beginning of the twenty first century the term ethnicity has replaced the terms “races” or “nations” which were used in the nineteenth century. The rise of multi-ethnic societies has brought the concept of ethnic conflict as separate from the generic “war”

fought between the nations.⁷ The shift from the generic war to the ethnic war was evident especially since the collapse of the multi ethnic Soviet Union and the homogenous Yugoslavia during the 1990s. In both the cases the ethnic conflicts resulted into violence and civil war.⁸

Different theories of ethnicity

Primordialist school. In this school ethnicity is understood as an ascribed identity or assigned status. It is something that is inherited from one’s ancestors. For example if your ancestors are Japanese then you are also Japanese because you inherit certain features from your forefathers. Thus, the proponents of this school argue that ethnicity is very deeply rooted, it is a primal bond to one’s ancestral bloodline. The primordialists argue that ethnicity relies on the concept of kinship between members of the ethnic group. Horowitz further supports this argument and state that the kinship is the factor that enables the ethnic groups to think in terms of family resemblances. The second argument of this school is that there is a demarcation between who is a member of ethnic group and who is not a member. Therefore, ethnicity is static, fixed and cannot be altered. Thus, if you are born a Japanese you will be forever a Japanese – the membership of an ethnic group cannot be changed.

The third argument is that ethnicity is determined by common ancestry. Thus, members of an ethnic group share similar biological and cultural origins. This school is called “primordialist” because it emphasises on the primordial factors such as lineage and cultural ties in determining ethnicity.⁹

Constructivist school. The origin of the Constructivist school could be determined since 1970s. The proponents of this school argue that ethnicity is socially constructed identity. In other words, ethnicity is created it is contrast to the argument by the primordialist that ethnicity is inherited. The next assumption of this philosophy is that ethnic boundaries

⁵ Yetman, Norman R., ed. *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Racial and Ethnic Relations*. 5th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991.

⁶ Horowitz, D. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985. P. 57.

⁷ Center for Systemic Peace, 30 October 2006.

⁸ Smith, A. *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*. Cambridge: Polity, 2011. PP. 54-55.

⁹ Berghe, Pierre L. van Berghe. *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, Greenwood Press: London, 1981.

are flexible and changeable. Lastly ethnicity is a dynamic entity which is determined and constructed by the society. Any change in the social environment of the society has an impact on the ethnic communities existing in the society. William Yancey explained ethnicity in terms of an “emergent phenomenon” which is created by the structural conditions. He further argues that industrialization process in the society has an impact on the development of ethnic identity of the communities.¹⁰

Instrumentalist school. The scholars in this school view ethnicity as an instrument or strategic tool for gaining resources. Anthony Smith in his work traces the origin of the instrumentalist view. According to him, this school evolved during the 1960s and 1970s in United States in the debate about (white) ethnic persistence in what was supposed to have an effective “melting pot”.¹¹

According to this theoretical framework people are affiliated to their ethnic groups till they are benefitted for being a member of the group. In other words, “ethnicity and race” are viewed as instrumental identities organized as means to particular ends. Instrumentalists claim that differences in ethnic groups are not the only cause for conflict rather ethnic conflict begins from difference in human relations and from the believe that some ethnic groups benefit from the disadvantage of the other. These inequalities among various groups lead to ethnic conflicts resulting in the instability in the region. The pioneers of these school Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan state that ethnicity is like class and nationality which are ways for political mobilization for advancing group interests.¹²

Integrated approach. This approach is a combination of all the three school. In this they argue that ethnicity is socially constructed by ancestry as well as by the society. Max Weber

defines ethnic groups as “human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both because of memories of colonization or migration – in such a way that this belief is important for the continuation of the non-kinship communal relationships”.¹³ In some countries people are given the freedom to choose their ethnicity whereas in certain countries they are not. People are considered to be born into the ethnic group according to the rules set by the society.

Causes of ethnic conflict in North Caucasus

Ethnic conflicts are based on three factors such as religion and language, ethnic discrimination like political, social and economic and the third factor is the conscience people who write or speak their views on ethnicity through books newspapers and or any other form of social media. Ethnicity implies both structural (material) and cultural (subjective) features. Structural ethnicity refers to the relative location of the ethnic group in terms of its relation with the other social groups in the stratification of the society. On the other hand cultural, social and psychological sense of ethnicity refers to a feeling of belongingness to a particular group who share common cultural, linguistic, religious and national features.¹⁴

Security Dilemma

In the words of Vesna Pestic ethnic conflict is caused by the “fear of the future, lived through the past”.¹⁵ Barry P. Posen has for the first time used security dilemma in international relations with reference to ethnic conflict. Security dilemma occurs in a state of anarchy. In anarchy the states are dependent on the self-help system for their security. Thus, the groups maintain and expand their military capabilities. This could threaten others who start arming themselves

¹⁰ Yancey, William; Ericksen, Eugene P.; Juliani, Richard N. Emergent Ethnicity: A Review and Reformulation // *American Sociological Review*, 1976, Vol. 41, No. 3, Pp. 391-403.

¹¹ Smith, A. Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History. Cambridge: Polity, 2011. Pp. 54-55.

¹² Glazer, Nathan; Moynihan, Daniel Patrick. Ethnicity: Theory and Experience. Harvard University Press, 1975.

¹³ Weber, Max. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Eng. Tr. Economy and Society). 1920.

¹⁴ Shibusaki, T., et al. *Ethnic Stratification: A Comparative Approach*. Macmillan, 1965.

¹⁵ Pestic, V. Remarks on the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation (IGCC) Working Group on the International Spread and Management of Ethnic Conflict, October 1, 1994.

resulting in the arms race between the ethnic groups. The dilemma follows from the inability of the two sides to observe each other intentions. If the party would know that they are arming themselves only for defensive purposes and not to attack the other group. As Posen sums up his argument in the statement, “what one does to enhance one’s security causes reaction that, in the end, can make one less secure”.¹⁶ Lake and Rothchild have argued that ethnic conflict is caused by the collective fears for the future and not because of inter-ethnic differences, hatred for the other group or age-old rivalry. They state that as groups begins to fear for safety, strategic dilemmas arise that contain within them the potential for tremendous violence. As the security dilemma widens groups becomes apprehensive the state weakens and the conflict is more likely to occur.¹⁷ The fear of the future arises among the groups when the state is unable to arbitrate between groups or provide guarantees of protection for the groups. Barry Posen refers to this scenario as “emerging anarchy” and in this situation physical security becomes the foremost concern for the survival of ethnic groups.¹⁸

Territorial Demarcation

Since Soviet era there has been several times readjustment of the territory’s borders. For example, the division of the Union and Autonomous Republics into separate units, subdivisions of the Circassian people of the North Caucasus in the 1920s and 1930s. There were some cases in which different nationalities were merged into a single territorial unit as was evident in case of Kabardino-Balkaria in 1922. Further in 1936 the autonomous unit of Kabardino-Balkaria was promoted from Autonomous Oblasts to Autonomous Republics. On the other hand some of the autonomous units were even dissolved. For

example, in case of Checheno-Ingushetia ASSR in 1944 after the deportation of the entire ethnic group. The motive behind the alteration of the administrative boundaries was a reward for a particular national group in favour of the loyalty by the group to the state.¹⁹

On the contrary the intention of the government was to weaken a coalition or large ethnic group that either posed a threat to Russia’s domination of Soviet politics or had the objective of secession from USSR. For example in case of Circassians their territories were divided into new Soviet “nationalities” of Adygei, Cherkess and Kabardins or in cases the territory which belonged to other ethnic groups were added to their individual national units in order to dilute the population even further and keep them in constant competition over political and economic resources.

Historical Factor

Historical events in the region has an important impact on the memories of the ethnic groups. History not only tells about the events in the past but it also leaves many issues unanswered which are used as advantage by the leaders to be interpreted by them. In case of North Caucasus, the memories of the deportation in the minds of the ethnic groups had great significance in their lives. This experience among the groups had evolved a feeling of hatred for the Soviet authorities and sense of deprivation in comparison with other ethnic groups who were favoured by the Russians. The stories of ethnic groups and the miseries and brutalities experienced by them were told from one generation to another. This kept the flame of hatred keep blowing among the people for being ostracized by the Russian authorities from the territories. On the other hand, the groups who were not deported or the Russian communities had a sense of hatred for the deported groups as they were told that these groups had favoured the German to invade the Russian territories. The deportations of the specific ethnic groups were as a punishment to them for being disloyal to the Soviet authorities.

¹⁶ Posen, Barry P. *The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict // Survival*, 1993, Vol. 35(1), Pp. 27-47.

¹⁷ Lake, D.; Rothchild, D. *Ethnic fears and Global Engagement: The International Spread and Management of Ethnic Conflict // Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation*, 1996, No. 20, Pp. 5-47.

¹⁸ Posen, Barry P. *The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict // Survival*, 1993, Vol. 35(1), Pp. 27-47.

¹⁹ Wixman, Ronald. *Soviet Nationality Policy and Practice. Language Aspects of Ethnic Patterns and Processes*. University of Chicago: Department of Geography, January 1980. Pp. 121-170.

Thus, the elders of the communities told the stories to their successors which was carried forward by the coming generations. The gross human rights violations by the Soviet authorities during the deportation were also mentioned in the history books.

Economic Factor

North Caucasus is Russia's leading agricultural region producing almost one quarter of all its annual agricultural output. North Caucasus Economic region along with Rostov Oblast accounts for 50% of Russia's vegetable oil, 42% of Russia's sugar 33% of Russia's wool, 25% of Russia's grain, 20% of Russia's vegetables and 15% of Russia's meat.²⁰ In spite of its pre-eminence as a center of agricultural output North Caucasus faces a severe economic crisis since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The main reason for the economic decline is the deteriorating population density. Prior to 1991 North Caucasus had the largest rural population in Russia with 43 percent of rural population living in the rural areas. Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan and Karachaevo-Cherkessia had the highest ratio of rural to urban population in the region. During the Soviet period the high birth rate and the population density was used as a labour surplus in the North Caucasus. This surplus was used by the local authorities to avoid destabilizing levels of unemployment. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union the boundaries were permeable and encouraged people to migrate for work. As a result, working population migrated from the mountains to the lowlands and the urban centres. According to the 1989 Census one in four North Caucasians lived beyond the borders of their National Republics. With the dissolution of Soviet Union and deterioration of command economy left large number of unemployed in rural areas consequently increasing pressure on land and housing. Due to the asymmetrical population profile and corresponding low level of industrial development has led to the weakening of the economy of the seven North Caucasus republics making them largely dependent on the subsidies from the Centre. The major industries in the

North Caucasus region are mainly dominated by the mineral and raw material extraction and the production of oil and gas.

In case of Chechnya, prior to the attempt of secession from the Russian Federation Chechnya accounted for 50% of the total oil production in the region. It was also the centre of oil refining in the North Caucasus with the refinery in Grozny producing 90% of Russia's aviation engine oil. Prior to 1992 50-70% of the budget revenues of the republics came from direct federal subsidies and centralized bank credits with Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan being the most heavily subsidized. By 1992 the industrial production in the region fell in different regions of the North Caucasus for example in North Ossetia it fell by 36 percent, in Chechnya by 30 percent, by 28 percent in Dagestan. By 1992, the industrial production in the North Caucasus by 23 percent and further in 1993 by 21.6 percent. The factor which further had a deteriorating impact on the economy was the average salaries of the working population in the North Caucasus declined to one third of the average for Russia on the other hand the prices of all commodities rose across the entire federation. By 1993 the entire economy of the region had collapsed and the impact on the economy of the region was as such 97 percent of the republican budget of Ingushetia came from the Russian federal government subsidies. These economic hardships in the region of the North Caucasus has been an important factor in enhancing the ethno-political conflict in the region.

Political Factor

Elections can have enormous influence on inter-group collaboration as well on the negative side and evolve the circumstances for conflict. In favourable circumstances an agreement on the rules of the political game, broad participation in the voting process and a promising economic environment election can promote stability. On the other hand, the multiparty systems and in an undemocratic countries election leads to violence in the state due to corruption and the inefficiency of the State to control it. There are cases when there are opportunities given for coalition with other parties as a result this coalition gives the minority parties to gain

²⁰ Hill, Fiona. Russia's Tinderbox / Conflict in the Caucasus and Its Implications for the Future of the Russian Federation, September 1995, Pp. 1-97.

power in the future and a chance to advance their individual and collective interests. However, in a multi ethnic state the impact of election can bring problems. In legislature where minority groups are represented there is a possibility that the minority groups would not be involved in the decision-making process as most of the resolutions would be passed by the majority voting. One of the ways to ensure the minimal representation of all ethnic groups in the society is to imbibe certain electoral rules which would ensure minimal representation of all ethnic groups in the society. There should be a proportional representation of all ethnic groups in the legislature. In case of elections in the Russian Duma in a chamber of 450 members half were represented on the basis of single member constituencies and half were represented on the basis of proportional representation.

Religious Factor

The next reason was the religious affiliation of the people in the region. Most of the people professed Islam in the North Caucasus region in contrast to the majority of the Russians following Orthodox Christianity. As Huntington terms it “clash of civilizations”²¹ according to him in the post-cold war era the main source of conflict would be cultural and religious identities of the people. In case of North Ossetia and Ingushetia one group is a follower of Christianity and the other is an ardent Muslim populated region. The objectives of the ethnic groups also includes demands for some religious favour from the authorities. In case of Chechnya the Wahhabi Islamic leaders from Saudi Arabia supported the demands of the Chechens for an independent state and later the demand was to establish an Islamic state in the region.

Feeling of Victimization

The Russians have hostile attitude towards the people from North Caucasus. This was evidence for example from 1992 to 1994 the authorities in the Moscow city had attacked the vendors and traders in the region from

²¹ Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Touchstone, 1997.

North Caucasus on the pretext that they were responsible for the increasing crime since the collapse of USSR and thus expelled them from the Moscow city. The Moscow government uses the term “people of the Caucasian a nationality” in the official usage in order to refer to a person having his origin from Caucasus. Even though Caucasians are a group of people in the Caucasus region and not a single ethnic group. In Moscow the people from Caucasus were called by the name as “blacks”. These prejudices of the Russians towards the people from Caucasus have furthered a sense of deprivation and humiliation among the people who restore to violence against the Russian authorities.²² On the other hand there has been an equal hostile attitude against Moscow by the North Caucasian groups. The reason is the result of the historical legacy of struggle against incorporation into the Russian Empire in the 19th century and repression by the Bolsheviks and Soviet governments in the 20th century.

Foreign Influence

When an outside country tries to support an ethnic group in their claims and promote anti-Russian sentiments. Example of it was when Chechens were supported by the Wahabbis in the Arab countries.

Migration of the Population

The other aspect to be kept in mind is the migration from the region “hot spots” due to conflicts in Chechnya, Dagestan and the region of Ingush- Ossetia conflict. The migration flow affects the economic and demographic situation in North Caucasus. The North Caucasus is characterised with high birth rate and a large younger population had a negative impact on the economy of the region as the working educated and professionally trained population of the region either migrated to other places for employment. At the same time the young people who stayed back in the region were influenced by the radical forms of Islam and joined the extremist’s groups.

The intensive migration processes have

²² Kaplan F. *Moscow Cracks down on Outsiders: Police Take Advantage of State of Emergency to Drive Many Ethnic from City* / *The Boston Globe*, October 14, 1993.

restructured ethnic composition of the population as well as the economic pattern of the region. The inflow of immigrants from Dagestan in the steppe regions of Stavropol krai contributed to the spread of distant pasture cattle raising there, putting competitive pressure on other forms of farming and leading to the exhaustion of grazing areas and hayfields. Most of the ethnic conflicts in the region are due to the changing population dividend in the region putting pressure on the economic structure of the region.

Ethnic conflict in the North Caucasus region

Ingushetian and Ossetian conflict

The conflict between Ingushetia and Ossetian arose in 1992 in the district of Prigorodniy. Ingushetians are the indigenous Caucasian people who lived in the mountains but due to Russian coercion they had to shift from the mountains to the valleys and towns. Whereas the Ossetians were called as the ‘foothillers’ as they lived at lower altitudes in the plains or the hills. The other factor in the relation between the two groups is that the Ingush are the indigenous people of the Caucasus on the other hand the Ossetians are the ‘immigrants’ who had settled in the Caucasus in the sixth century AD.²³ They have a difference in language the Ossetians are more closely related to Persian and the Ingush are more familiar with the Caucasian language closely related to the Chechens. The difference in languages between the two communities resulted in lack of communication between the two groups even though they both used Kumyk a Turkic language. The difficulty in communication was one of the factors which further increased the tensions between the two groups. The other point of difference is on the basis of religion. The Ingush are the people who are mainly Sunni Muslims who have a strong Sufi influence particularly the Qadri tariqat. Most of the Ossetians are traditional Orthodox Christians and in the northern part of the region a minority of the Muslims also exist in Ossetia.

Thus throughout history the relations between the Ossetians and the Ingushs were

²³ Birch, Julian. *Ossetia: a Caucasian Bosnia in Microcosm // Central Asian Survey*, 1995, No. 1, Pp. 43-74.

neither brotherly nor as foes. It was the foreign involvement in the region that deteriorated the relations between the two groups. With the advancement of Russia in the region of North Caucasus the Ossetian supported the Russians and they became one the important allies of the Russians in the region.

During the Soviet era the Ossetians and the Ingush were part of the Gorskaya Republic. In 1924 this Republic was dissolved and the Ingush were allocated their autonomous oblast. At present this autonomous oblast has been a disputed territory. The distinction between the territorial claim of North Ossetia and Ingushetia has been very uncertain, the reason being that the border passed through Vladikavkaz it is a densely populated areas and is the present capital of North Ossetia but has a majority of Ingush living in the region.

The root cause of the problem began during the Second World War. In June 1946, the Chechen Ingush ASSR was abolished and distributed among its neighbours and the Ingush were deported to Central Asia and Siberia. During this period the important Prigorodniy Rayon of Vladikavkaz was handed over to North Ossetia. This region was significant for the Ingush as it comprised of half of the Ingushetia’s territory.²⁴ In January 1957 when the Chechen- Ingush ASSR was restored, the Prigorodniy Rayon remained within North Ossetia. When the Ingush were allowed to return during Khrushchev’s era they found Ossetians settled in their homeland. When the Ingush tried to restore their homes they were resented by the local Ossetians who were supported by the North Ossetian authorities. The North Ossetian authorities initiated every possible way to prevent the Ingush from returning to their residences. In the later years legal instruments were implemented to make it impossible for the Ingush to resettle in the region. Some of the measures were in the period between 1982 and 1990 decrees were issued to limit the movement of people by implementing compulsory “propiski(internal passports)” in the district of Prigorodniy.²⁵ Yet these decrees could

²⁴ Nekrich, Alexandr. *The Punished Peoples: the Deportation and the Fate of the Soviet Minorities at the end of the Second World War*, New York: Norton and Co., 1978. P. 9.

²⁵ Cornell, Svante. *Small Nations and Great Powers a study of Ethnopolitical conflict in the Caucasus*.

not stop the Ingush from settling in their lands. They used both legal as well as illegal ways to occupy their land and by 1989 there were almost 33.000 Ingush were living in the North Ossetian ASSR out of which almost 17.500 had settled in Prigorodniy region. By this time the relations between the Ingush and the Ossetians had strained and sporadic violence on the basis of ethnic grounds had begun between the two communities.

According to the Human Rights Watch there was an arms race between the Ingush and Ossetians.²⁶ The Ingush bought arms from Chechnya and on the North Ossetia side they cited the war in the South Ossetia as a need for them to arm themselves. Even the Russian authorities also supplied arms to the North Ossetian. Thus it could be argued that the North Ossetia was in a better position than the Ingush as they had the support of the Republican administration. Tensions between the two communities had increased since the 1991 with the Ossetians blaming the Ingush for the violence and extremism on the other hand Ingush alleged that the paramilitary forces of Ossetia harassed and killed Ingushetians. The increasing power of the Ossetian paramilitary forces was responded by the Ingush in the Prigorodniy region constructed fences, armed themselves and even organized guards in the villages.

In October 1992 war occurred between the two communities. One of the reason was on October 20 a pipeline which transported gas from Russia to Armenia and Georgia passing from Prigorodniy was destroyed. On the same day in the settlement of Oktyabrskoye, a 12-year-old Ingush girl was trampled by a loaded personnel transporter from the North Ossetia.²⁷ The Ossetian justified the incident as a mere accident but when two more Ingush were killed the next day the Ingush had become suspicious. Thus, leading to conflict between the two communities in Yuzhniy leading to the death of six men.²⁸

Taylor and Francis: London, 2001.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch/Helsinki. Punished Peoples' of the Soviet Union: the Continuing Legacy of Stalin's Deportations. New York: Human Rights watch, 1991. Pp. 48-49.

²⁷ Tschewonnaja, Swetlana. Der Ossetisch-Inguschische Konflikt im Nordkaukasus / Osteuropa, August (8) 1995, P. 741.

²⁸ Izvestiya, 20 October 1992.

Chechnya

The cause of ethnic conflict can be traced back to the Stalin period when the entire ethnic group of Chechens were deported to Central Asia. The event is remembered as genocide in the minds of the Chechens which cannot be erased till date in the successors of the victimized Chechens. The Chechens also faced the problem of territorial demarcation and their land was occupied by other ethnic groups when they returned in 1957 after the Khrushchev's reforms. Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika gave an opportunity to the Chechens to demand independence from the Russian federation. In 1994 the demand for independence by the Chechens took a violent turn and in 1994 they fought a violent war with the Russian authorities. The violence again erupted in 1999 but now the course of the war had changed. The territories of Chechnya were invaded by the foreign Islamist Wahhabi leaders. The earlier demands of the secessionists were now converted to the demand for the establishment of an Islamic state in the territory. The invasion of Islamic extremists in the region posed a security threat to the entire Russian Federation. The unemployed youth joined these extremist forces and carried out violence in the region. These terrorist activities were not confined to Chechnya it even spread to its neighbouring territories of Dagestan and Ingushetia. The ethnic conflict which began with aim of cession from Russia had now turned bloody resulting in the death of thousands. Suicide bombing, kidnapping, hijacking are forms of terrorist activities were involved in order to threaten the civilians. The Beslan tragedy was a one of the violent activities carried out by the extremists.

The Russian authorities used force to deal with the issue. On the Russian part they initiated "mob up" operations in the region. A mob up operation is that the authorities could arrest randomly anyone on the suspicion that he had links with the extremists.

North Western Caucasus

The region of west central part of the North Caucasus is inhabited by two different ethnic groups. The first group belongs to the indigenous Circassian people composed of the Adyge, the Kabardins and the Cherkess. The linguists divide the Circassian language into

two parts one which is spoken in the western part and the other which is spoken in the eastern part of the region. The western vernacular is spoken by the Adyge and Cherkess whereas the eastern vernacular is spoken by the Kabardins.

The second group of people are the Karachais and the Balkars who live in the high valley of the central North Caucasus. They speak a dialect which is similar to Western family of the Turkic languages. The number of Karachais are double the number of Balkars.²⁹

Of all the Muslim Caucasian mountain people, the Kabardins were the ones who were the most pro-Russian and their feudal elite was co-opted to a great extent by the Russians during their conquest of the Caucasus.³⁰ On the other hand the Circassian are more anti-Russian in their attitude. Religion plays an important role in the lives of Karachai-Balkars in comparison to the Circassian. The reason behind the importance of Islam is the events in Second World War when the entire ethnic group of the Karachai-Balkars were exiled to Siberia and Central Asia.³¹

Since 1920s the region of North Western Caucasus has been divided into two independent units the Karachai-Cherkess and the Kabardino-Balkar republics. The Circassians live to the north and the Karachai-Balkars live towards southern portion. Both these ethnic groups lived peacefully in their units the problem arose by the policies of Stalin. Stalin initiated the policy of divide and rule with an aim to create two ethnically heterogeneous units. The northern boundaries of these units were drawn further north extending its boundaries to the Slavic populated regions mostly the Cossacks. The Cossacks have age old enmity with the Muslims. The relations between the Karachai-Balkars and the Circassian people have unstable relations

due to the fact that the Karachai-Balkars were the vassals of the Kabardin nobility from the fifteenth century. The Kabardins consider themselves superior due to their nobility on the other hand they consider Balkars as inferior and primitive.³² The Balkars area was not advanced due to the lack of education amongst them caused by the deportation during Stalin era. In this region also the Russia government used its policy of instilling an ally in the region. The role of ally was played by the Cossacks. In 1993 the Cossack units were made part of the Russian armed forces. The same year the tensions between Cossacks and Karachai-Cherkessia arose as the Cossacks were accused putting pig carcasses in the mosques. The Russian government had given the Cossacks the authority to patrol the streets at night.³³

The Karachais led a national movement called Jamagat with an aim for the division of their autonomous oblast in 1988. The Centre responded to the demand by raising the status of the region to an ASSR however the Karachais had a demand for a full territorial rehabilitation which they enjoyed from 1926 to 1943.³⁴

Demand of Lezgin for unification

The Lezgin are the successor of the Dagestani people. They lived in the Southern portion of Dagestan and some of them even lived in the Northern part of Azerbaijan in the region through which the Samar River flows.³⁵ According to the density of the population they are the fourth largest group after the ethnic groups of Avars, Dargins and Kumyks. There were no territorial problems till the First World War, however during the national delimitations of the early Soviet era there was still peace in the region even though Samur river was taken as a

²⁹ Bennigsen, Alexandre; Wimbush, S. Enders. Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide. London, Hurst, 1985. Pp. 190-200. See also: Smeets, Riëks. Circassia // *Central Asian Survey*, 1995, No. 1, PP. 107-125.

³⁰ Lemerrier, Chantal. Quelquejey, Cooptation of the Elites of Kabarda and Dagestan in the Sixteenth Century / Marie Bennigsen Brozup (ed.) *The North Caucasus Barrier*. London, Hurst, 1992.

³¹ Bennigsen, Alexandre; Wimbush, S. Enders. Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide. London, Hurst, 1985. Pp. 190-200.

³² Arutionov, Sergei. Ethnicity and Conflict in the Caucasus. / Paper presented at a 1997 symposium of the Slavic Research Centre, Hokkaido University. P. 8.

³³ Pustilnik, Marina. Caucasian Stresses / Transition, 15 March 1995, PP. 16-18.

³⁴ Hill, Fiona. Russia's Tinderbox: Conflict in the north Caucasus and its Implications for the Future of the Russian Federation. Cambridge. Harvard University, JFK School.

³⁵ Matveeva, Anna; McCarthy, Clem. The Lezgins: A Situation Assessment / International Alert Report, May 1997.

border between the RSFSR and the Azeri SSR. There was still no problem as this boundary was not considered as an international boundary. The main agitation of the Lezgin started in 1991 as their territory was divided between two sovereign states of Russia and Azerbaijan. This was the result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union resulting in the independence of Azerbaijan. Earlier to the independence of Azerbaijan the border between the RSFSR and Azeri SSR had created no obstruction to the Lezgins.

It was in 1965 when the Lezgin demanded a territorial entity under the national organization headed by Dagestani writer, Iskander Kaziev. This organization protested against the assimilation policies towards the Lezgins and demanded for a unified territorial unit which would comprise of the territories of Dagestan and Azerbaijan. The main aim for the demand of the unified Lezgin entity was to enable the Lezgin freely practice their culture and traditions and would prevent assimilation. The Lezgins have denounced the policies of the Azerbaijan government in particular. The official figures of the Lezgins in the Azerbaijani documents account to around 180,000 on the other hand in reality some accounts show the number as much as 700, 000 Lezgins in Azerbaijan.³⁶

If we focus on the condition of the Lezgins in Azerbaijan in comparison to their position in Dagestan the Lezgins in Azerbaijan are in a better position with a better quality of education than those in Dagestan. The Lezgins have also integrated well in the society of the Azerbaijani leading to inter marriage of Lezgin and Azeris.³⁷ The Lezgins in Azerbaijan consider their existence of ethnic kin in Dagestan as of much importance. The Lezgins have been able to preserve their language and ethnic identity through the contacts with Dagestan on the other hand the Talysh, Tats and Kurds in Azerbaijan has lost relevance and subsumed their identity with the Azeris.³⁸ During the later phase of

the Gorbachev era Lezgins began to organize themselves politically and in July 1990 the Lezgin Democratic Union was formed in Union Sadval was formed in Southern Dagestan The demands of the Lezgin were not responded by the Russian government as a result they turned towards radical measures. However after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991 the All Nation Congress of the Lezgin people declared the creation of an independent state of Lezgistan which had incorporated territories of both Dagestan as well as Azerbaijan. By 1992 the relations between Russia and Azerbaijan deteriorated as a result Russia imposed stricter border controls on the Azeri border to an extent that the Lezgins crossing borders would have to apply for visas either way they were travelling. The main objective behind initiating visa was to put obstacles to contacts between the Lezgins living across the borders.

The Lezgins demonstrated on both the sides of the border with the help of Sadval. In response to these unrests there were meetings between the Azerbaijani, Russian and Dagestani governments. The government of Azerbaijan were threatened by the uprising of the Lezgins as it was facing a war period in the Karabakh it was not ready to fight another ethnic conflict on its territory. On the other hand Russia was also weary of the unrest on its southern border. The justification for the border control as given by the Russian government was that such a step was taken to prevent smuggling. Furthermore, the Azeris considered the Russian hand behind the demonstration by the Sadval with an intention to further destabilize Azerbaijan in order to force the country to accept the Russian military bases and border troops as had been done in case of Georgia.

In order to resolve the issue in October 1992 at as Sadval Congress in Makhachkala the Lezgins in Dagestan as well as the Lezgin in Azerbaijan had gathered to find a solution to movement policy. There were differences between the two the Lezgins in Azerbaijan was more radical than their Dagestani kin. They were ready to use arms if the Azerbaijani government did not accept their demands. On the other hand the Dagestani Lezgins were less militant and were more fearful of the ethnic

³⁶ Fuller, Elizabeth. *Caucasus: The Lezgin Campaign for Autonomy* / in RFE/RL Research Report, 16 October 1992. Pp. 30-32.

³⁷ Akiner, Shirin. *Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union*. London, Kegan Paul, 1983.

³⁸ Cheterian, Vicken. *Les Milleet Une Guerres du Caucuse* / *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 1994.

conflict due to the fact that Dagestan comprised of multi ethnic groups and conflict in one would influence the other ethnic groups. For example a city called Derbent in the Southern Dagestan populated by Azeris, Lezgins, Tabasarans and Tats. In May 1994 the murder of several Lezgins in the region brought ethnic tension to the point of civil war.

There were explosions in Baku in March 1994 resulting in the death of twelve people and over 50 were injured. From the investigation it was found that Sadval were involved in the terrorist activities. Further it was found that there were connections between Armenian security services and Sadval. The Armenians aimed to stir ethnic conflict in Azerbaijan. Two years later two Sadval activists were sentenced death punishment and eleven of them were sentenced to prisonment for this act. In July Ramazanov who had become the leader of the Lezgin in Azerbaijan was arrested on the accusation that he had been organizing training camps for terrorist in Dagestan. On the other hand, in reaction to the detention of Ramazanov around 300 Lezgins captured four Azeri police officers on the Dagestani border with a demand for the release of Ramazanov. The Azeris responded to this action and on 14th July Ramazanov was released. The acceptance of demand of the Lezgins by the Azeris proved that Azerbaijan would avoid ethnic conflict at every cost.³⁹

Conflict of Kabardins and Balkars over land

The Parliament of Kabardino-Balkaria on June 28, 2011 passed a law on distant pastures. According to the law the large pastures land in the Balkar regions could not be privatised and can only be rented. The law was considered by the Balkar as a violation of their right to land and economic self-sufficiency and a number of federal laws. One of the laws which they cited as violated was the “Law on General Principles of Local self-Government in the Russian Federation”. This law gave the Balkars the right over lands adjacent to their settlement in mountain areas. There is not even a single enterprise in the territory of Balkaria. The main subsistence of the Balkars is from their gardens

or cattle breeding. Thus, this new law on pretext of distant pastures would deprive them of 80 percent of their territories.⁴⁰ Earlier also there were laws passed in order to curb the land which belonged to the Balkars. In 2005, new republican legislation certified that a significant part of the Balkar property to “inter- settlement lands” which would have put it under republican jurisdiction. The law was to transfer two large Balkar rural settlement populated by 15,000 people would be transferred to the capital city of Nalchik. The Balkars challenged both these decisions in the Constitutional Court in 2007.

These claims of Balkars are criticized by the Kabardins they argue that the Balkars claim of high altitude pasturages as 60 percent of the Balkars live in plains. The remaining 40 percent if gets the pasturages they would have access to half the territory where most of the natural resources are concentrated. The Kabardins argues that the real objective of the Balkars to gain as much as mountain property as possible with an aim of establishing their own ethnic territory and secede from the KBR as they attempted to do in November 1991. On the other hand the Kabardins want to keep the land public so that they can continue to use it independently of the Balkar municipalities.

These differences have failed to reach an agreement between the Balkars and the Kabardins. Any concession by the government to one community has an immediate protest on the other side. As a result the 2007 Constitutional Court decision was not implemented instead a conciliatory commission was set up which failed to reach an agreement. Since 2008 the interethnic relations has deteriorated between the two communities. Leading activists of both the groups were targeted resulting in violence in the region. Some of the evidences are in 2011 a Kabardin activist and leader of the group named Ibrahim Yaganov was twice attacked and beaten ruthlessly. On the Balkar side also several Balkar leaders had to face violence. Some of the incidents were twice a journalist Ruslan Buduyev was attacked; Balkar leaders Baydayev and Rakhayev cars were burned; a member of the Council of Elders of the Balkar

³⁹ Tension in Dagestan on Eve of Lezgin Congress // The Jamestown Monitor, 2 December 1997.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group Interview. Ismail Sabanchiyev, chair, Council of Elders of the Balkar people, Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria, December 2011.

people named Tamara Gereyeva was illegally arrested and her arm was also broken. Even the office of the Council of Elders was burned and the organization was closed in May 2010 by the orders of the Supreme Court of Kabardino-Balkaria.

Clashes in Stavropol Krai

This is the only region in the North Caucasus Federal District with a majority of the ethnic Russians. The Russians were asked to settle in the North Caucasus to replace the deported people during the 1940-1950s. But now there is an outflow of the Russians from the region due to security reason and socio-economic concerns. Tensions occur mainly in the region's eastern districts where local authorities try to contain the migration from neighbouring republics and in the urban centres of Mineralnye Vody and Stavropol. Those towns have the largest concentration of students from other North Caucasian republics while businessmen from the neighbouring republics purchase real estate and invest in local enterprise. Since 2007 to 2008 there has been continuous violence among interethnic groups mainly involving the youth. Many of these conflicts in the east are between local Nogays and Dargins, they had replaced the Russians in the region.

Recommendations to avoid ethnic conflict

The law should define "hate speech" and should hold accountable the people who use hate speech. Thus the media person educationist, activist or those involve in activist groups should refrain from the use of any such words which would invoke to the use of violence by the people.

There should be a propagation of political pluralism, ethnic and religious tolerance among the people. Different ways should be initiated in order to encourage people in the active participation of citizen in public affairs.

In order to combat the impact of role of Islamic leaders in the ethnic conflict a preventive approach should be followed rather than a punitive approach. Efforts should be made to address the causes of extremism rather than the consequences of extremism. There should be an analysis of the ways in which the Islamic extremists try to mobilise and recruit people in

their activities and the causes underlying the problems needs to be addressed.

The federal authorities should work more efficiently in the region. There should be a regular inspection of the civilian officials, politicians and experts who should spend time in the republics to assess needs engage in dialogue and explain policies. There should be a regular evaluation of federal programmes by assessing their relevance, effectiveness, impact, sustainability of the policies among the people.

The government should ensure that common cultural space is observed in all North Caucasus Republics. The religious people should be allowed to follow their religion on the other hand secular people should be given the freedom to ensure a secular life without any pressure from religious authorities.

In the post conflict regions, the government should take initiatives to maintain peace and stability. As in case of Prigorodny district there should be a joint collaboration between North Ossetian and Ingush scholars to look into the problems of internally displaced people, effective ways in implementing decisions and agreement taken on the issue.

Initiate ways to contribute to the positive development of students such as development of sports, organize debating clubs, essay competitions or cultural activities. The state should make efforts to provide formal employment or involve them in professional development after their secondary education so that they do not get attracted to the extremists. Further the representatives of the state should initiate ways to listen and try to solve the problems of the youth.

The authorities should keep a record of social media, internet or mobile phone technology which is mostly used by the youth. Ideological extremism is spread through these social media.

The institutions of governance should be accountable to the people. Effective public enquiry mechanisms should be implemented effective and transparent implementation of policies. Corruption should be minimized effective punishments for officials involved in it. In order to reduce corruption independent media, NGOS should be given the freedom to conduct surveys to monitor system operated

by Ministry of Regional Development. Performance ratings should be implemented to analyse the working of the Republics in comparison to others.

Investigation of all breach of law such as abduction, torture and implement justice as early as possible. The human rights activists should be allowed to monitor police and other law enforcement officials' activities and also the detention operations by the officials⁴¹.

Conclusion

Thus, North Caucasus remains an important region in the southern portion of Russian Federation. Stability in North Caucasus is crucial for the framing of the policies of Russia as stability or instability in this region affects the entire region. Russia's communications with the Transcaucasus and its objective to influence the three independent republics of the region depend on the stability in North Caucasus. Thus ethnic conflicts pose a security challenge and question the survival of Russia in its present territorial structure.

References:

- Akiner, Shirin.* Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union. London, Kegan Paul, 1983.
- Arutunov, Sergei.* Ethnicity and Conflict in the Caucasus / Paper presented at a 1997 symposium of the Slavic Research Centre, Hokkaido University.
- Bennigsen, Alexandre; Wimbush, S.* Enders. Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide. London, Hurst, 1985. Pp. 190-200.
- Berghe, Pierre L. van Berghe.* The Ethnic Phenomenon, Greenhood Press: London, 1981.
- Birch, Julian.* Ossetia: a Caucasian Bosnia in Microcosm // *Central Asian Survey*, 1995, No. 1, pp. 43-74.
- Catford, J.C.* Mountain of Tongues: The Languages of the Caucasus // *Annual Review Of Anthropology*, 1997, Vol. 6, pp. 283-314.
- Cornell, Svante.* Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethno-political Conflict in the Caucasus. Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York, 2000.
- Glazer, Nathan; Moynihan, Daniel Patrick.* Ethnicity: Theory and Experience. Harvard University Press, 1975.
- Hill, Fiona.* Russia's Tinderbox / Conflict in the Caucasus and Its Implications for the Future of the Russian Federation, September 1995.
- Horowitz, D.* Ethnic Groups in Conflict. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985.
- Huntington, Samuel P.* The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order. New York: Touchstone, 1997.
- Kaplan F.* Moscow Cracks down on Outsiders: Police Take Advantage of State of Emergency to Drive Many Ethnic from City / *The Boston Globe*, October 14, 1993.
- Lake, D.; Rothchild, D.* Ethnic fears and Global Engagement: The International Spread and Management of Ethnic Conflict // *Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation*, 1996, No. 20, pp. 5-47.
- Nekrich, Alexandr.* The Punished Peoples: the Deportation and the Fate of the Soviet Minorities at the end of the Second World War, New York: Norton and Co., 1978.
- Posen, Barry P.* The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict // *Survival*, 1993, Vol. 35(1), pp. 27-47.
- Shibutani, T., et al.* Ethnic Stratification: A Comparative Approach. Macmillan, 1965.
- Smeets, Riëks.* Circassia // *Central Asian Survey*, 1995, No. 1.
- Smith, A.* Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History. Cambridge: Polity, 2011.
- Tscherwonnaja, Swellana.* Der Ossetisch-Inguschische Konflikt im Nordkaukasus / *Osteuropa*, August (8) 1995.
- Wall, Thomas D.* The Caucasus: An Introduction, Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Wixman, Ronald.* Soviet Nationality Policy and Practice. Language Aspects of Ethnic Patterns and Processes. University of Chicago: Department of Geography, January 1980.
- Yancey, William; Ericksen, Eugene P.; Juliani, Richard N.* Emergent Ethnicity: A Review and Reformulation // *American Sociological Review*, 1976, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 391-403.
- Yetman, Norman R., ed.* Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Racial and Ethnic Relations. 5th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991.

⁴¹ Report on "North Caucasus: views from within People's perspectives on peace and security", 2012 published in Saferworld.

DOI: 10.24411/2221-3279-2020-10044

ЭТНИЧЕСКИЕ КОНФЛИКТЫ НА СЕВЕРНОМ КАВКАЗЕ

Моналиша Ачарджи

*Университет имени Джавахарлала Неру,
Нью-Дели, Индия*

<p>Информация о статье: <i>Поступила в редакцию:</i> 3 ноября 2018 <i>Принята к печати:</i> 3 июля 2019</p>	<p>Аннотация: Этнические конфликты являются вызовом для государства, поскольку они влияют как на внешнюю политику, так и на внутреннюю политику нации. Регион Северного Кавказа является наиболее нестабильным регионом среди республик Российской Федерации. В данной статье будут проанализированы причины роста напряженности среди этнических групп и роль государства в решении проблем в регионе. Анализируются недостатки государственной политики и предлагаются меры, способные привести к положительным изменениям. Применение силы не сможет привести к каким-либо изменениям в регионе; более конструктивные усилия по устранению причин этнического насилия.</p>
<p>Об авторах: PhD, научный сотрудник, Центр изучения России и Центральной Азии, Школа международных исследований, Университет имени Джавахарлала Неру e-mail: monalishaacharjee20@gmail.com</p>	
<p>Ключевые слова: Северный Кавказ; этнос; Россия; безопасность; ислам; Чечня; конфликт</p>	

Для цитирования: Acharjee, Monalisha. Ethnic Conflicts in North Caucasus // *Сравнительная политика.* – 2020. – № 3. – С. 174-187.

DOI: DOI: 10.24411/2221-3279-2020-10044

For citation: Acharjee, Monalisha. Ethnic Conflicts in North Caucasus // *Comparative Politics Russia*, 2020, No. 3, pp. 174-187.

DOI: DOI: 10.24411/2221-3279-2020-10044