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## DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled “**State and The Personal Rights of Women: The Politics of Abortion in USSR and Russia**” submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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## CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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*Dedicated to my parents and my sister*

*For*

*Their constant support towards my education.*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The study of the law of abortion is highly ironic. The decision to resort to abortion, is very personal to a woman. “Laws on abortion, however, separate the act and the choice from their very bases in each woman’s experience.” (Savage 1988). As a result of this each abortion either becomes legal or illegal, based on the laws formulated on abortion, in the resident nation of the woman in question. This in turn makes women an instrument of the State’s demographic policies.

Feminist scholars have been arguing for a very long time now, that reproductive rights are personal rights. Personal rights are the rights that a person has over her or his own body. These are rights appertaining to a person. These include personal security, personal liberty, private property, personal choices etc. As such even “abortion” comes in the purview of personal rights, but unfortunately the encroachment of the state upon this right, clearly reveals that “abortion” is not treated as a personal right of a woman. Since the state plays an important role in the devaluation of abortion as a personal right of a woman, it becomes important to first describe the ‘state’ and then analyze the reasons behind such a behavior of the state.

Feminism and feminist theories have become a part of the mainstream discourse only recently. Put in a very simplified form ‘Feminism’, talks about equality of Gender. Its basic aim is to ensure socio-economic and political equality among individuals of all genders. Feminism as a theory looks at the existing structure as being ‘patriarchal’ in nature, in which the individuals of a particular gender (males) are privileged and the rest are subjugated. Charles Fourier is credited with coining the term ‘féminisme’, in 1837. “Until recently, social theory approaches failed to recognise the centrality of gender to understanding modernity. There are two important issues: first, power imbalances Shape theoretical construction ; second, a group’s place within the social structure influences theoretical attention they are afforded.” (Powell 2013). With the advent of modernity, came the segregation of ‘public’ and ‘private’ (Powell 2013). This did

not exist in the earlier societies, however, sexual division of labour did exist even in the earlier societies, owing to the patriarchal system. This division of labour facilitated male presence and dominance in the public sphere, while women became restricted to the private sphere. Over the course of time, this resulted in the subjugation of women and they became deprived even of their rights over their bodies. Thereafter feminists started demanding 'personal rights' for women as it became evident that women were treated as 'bodies', that had to be controlled and regulated in the patriarchal system. The State, which was also a part of the same patriarchal structure, also did not treat women as citizens but as bodies.

The right to abortion, is one of the personal rights of women, that many feminists have been fighting for. Abortion has been a widely debated topic. The debate on abortion is a complex. The supporters of abortion generally argue in favour of abortion on the basis of 'choice'. The opponents of abortion also known as 'pro-life' supporters, argue that the fetus in the womb of a woman has life and hence rights. Therefore in this debate the rights and interests of a woman are pitted against the rights and interests of an unborn fetus, which makes the debate very complex. The role of the state becomes important here, because different states have different laws and policies related to abortion, depending upon the will of the state. If the state opines that the right of the fetus is more important than the rights of women then abortion becomes illegal and vice versa.

Since the state plays an important role in the devaluation of abortion as a personal right of a woman, it becomes important to first describe the 'state' and then analyze the reasons behind such a behavior of the state. Gettle had understood Political Science as the science of the state. In political science state is defined as an entity with four essential elements, that is, population, territory, government and sovereignty. There are multiple definitions of 'state'. Some scholars like Gettle and Hegel, opine that everything revolves around the state and it is the most important entity in the study of political science. Hegel believed that the state was supreme and infallible. Therefore he had said that the '*State is the march of God on Earth*' (Hegel 1820: 279). For a very long time the study of political science was focused on state. However, with the coming of

globalization, many non- state actors also started gaining prominence in political science. Nonetheless the significance of state cannot be undermined even today. The state still plays a determining role in the political arena. In my research the state becomes important because it not only influences the personal lives of its citizens but also shapes their personal choices to a large extent. It still holds its position at the apex of the power structure and molds the choices and thereby the lives of its citizens. Many personal decisions like that of 'abortion' are guided by the policies of the state. Abortion as a decision of a woman is always made within a legal or an illegal framework which is framed by the state through its laws and policies. The decision of abortion is never a free and independent choice, unlike other personal liberties. The primary reason behind this is that abortion is not viewed as a personal right because even today in most parts of the world reproductive rights and choices are not perceived as being personal to every single individual but are largely dominated by the societal norms, which are manifested through the policies and laws of the state.

The fact that reproductive rights or abortion are not considered to be a personal right, is primarily because, even after decades of feminist movement which talks against the sexualization and instrumentation of women and their bodies, women are considered to be the tool for bearing and rearing children. Each state formulates its laws on reproductive rights depending upon certain factors, out of which, one is the dominant ideals existing in its society. For example if the ideal of 'individualism' is strong in a society then the state has less restrictive reproductive laws, like legalization of abortion and if a society is family centric then the state formulates restrictive reproductive laws like criminalization of abortion. Another factor is the demographic condition of the country. This implies that the state controls the independent reproductive choices of women. This politics of controlling the reproductive choices of women, through different laws on abortion, for fulfilling certain interests of the state is 'politics of abortion'. The political rights of women and their personal choices about reproduction, are shaped, to a large extent, through the politics of abortion.

According to Richard Byrd, “Many civilizations which have entered the domain of history seem to present two evolutionary periods. The first period is that in which the individual seeks to safeguard himself against the excesses of arbitrary power, by extorting guarantees from the sovereign; the second is that in which these guarantees are gradually surrendered to the collective power of the mass.” (Byrd 1909). Due to this there has always been a perpetual tension between the rights of an individual and the rights of the society. As civilizations prospered, they also became more complex. As a result many individual rights had to be subordinated to collective rights which were the manifestation of societal norms that had emerged gradually, due to the increasing interdependence of individuals under a continuously growing civilization. Among many individual or personal rights that had to be subordinated, reproductive rights of women was one. Women were bound with the ‘sacred duty’ of producing children. It became their primary task. A woman not bearing a child was looked down upon and became a mockery in the entire society. Few women who dared to say no to their ‘sacred duty’, were not only socially boycotted but also became the reference point for examples of ‘bad’ and ‘immoral’ women. All this was at the societal level. At the legal level, the state bound women with the duty of producing children through anti-abortion laws. Anti-abortion laws implied that the personal right of a woman to choose or reject motherhood did not exist. However the situation was different in the ancient times. At that time reproduction or abortion was not a politicized topic. It was solely the choice of a woman, either to give birth or to abort. Nor was it seen as an evil practice in most societies. It was seen as a matter of the personal life of a woman. However when civilizations started growing, multiple actors started influencing the society as influence over society implied power to the influencer. Among these multiple actors there emerged a section of people who became concerned with the fear of under population, especially after the two big wars which shook the entire world, and since women were the ones who bore children, they became the target for that section. For increasing population the bodies of women had to be controlled, their reproductive choices had to be controlled and their personal rights had to be curtailed. On the other hand the state with its patriarchal tendencies did not have a view contrary to the opinions of this section of the society and hence came up with laws to bind women to the role of bearing children, for the ‘larger good of the society’, and criminalizing abortion was one such law.

In ancient times abortion was a common practice across the globe, in different cultures and civilizations, though the methods used were different. In various civilization there is a history of women helping each other to abort. The only evidence of death penalty for abortion was found in the Assyrian law. Until the late 1800s women healers widely practiced abortion in the Western Europe and in the US. They also trained others to do so. Till the 19<sup>th</sup> century abortion was a common practice and was not a part of any political discourse. As civilizations grew and societies became more complex new ideas and principles emerged. One such idea was the idea of humanitarian reforms in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century which argued for the criminalization of abortion on the pretext that abortion was a dangerous procedure done with crude methods, and it also increased the mortality rate. However it has to be noted that due to the backwardness of medicines and medical technologies, the treatment for most of the diseases was dangerous, crude and risky, but there were no demands for prohibiting them either under the humanitarian reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or even after them. For instance, risky surgical techniques were used because they were considered necessary for saving people's lives and hence were not prohibited. In the name of 'Protecting Women' from the dangers of abortion, women were actually restricted to their child-bearing role. Antiabortion legislation was part of an antifeminist backlash to the growing movements for suffrage, voluntary motherhood, and other women's rights in the 19th century. At the same time, doctors who were mostly men, were tightening their control over the medical profession. Doctors considered midwives, a threat to their own economic and social power, because they were the preferred abortionists for a very long time. The medical establishment actively took up the antiabortion cause in the second half of the 19th century as part of its effort to eliminate midwives. Also, with the declining birth rate among whites in the late 1800s, the U.S. government and the eugenics movement warned against the danger of "race suicide" and urged white, native-born women to reproduce. Budding industrial capitalism relied on women to be unpaid household workers, low-paid menial workers, reproducers, and socializers of the next generation of workers. Without legal abortion, women found it more difficult to resist the limitations of these roles. Lastly, religion (Christianity) played an important role in politicizing abortion. Important Christian theologians like St. Augustine in the 5<sup>th</sup> century

and St. Thomas Aquinas had undermined sweeping positions about a definitive Christian position on abortion. Dogmatism and ethical certainty on abortion were rare in the past and only became dominant themes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This happened because by that time protestant Christians had strengthened their position in the society and were being influenced by the antiabortion politics which was gaining grounds at that time. The protestant medical profession played a pivotal role in this. This made it mandatory for the Catholics and the Christian Orthodox church to take a position on abortion. Keeping in mind the internal politics of the churches and the rising tides of antiabortion politics, the Catholics and the Christian Orthodox church took an anti-abortion position. The debates during that time and the prevailing social conditions influenced the churches to rethink on sexuality and the role of women, which ultimately resulted in controlling the sexuality of women and restricting them to the role of bearing and rearing children, by the church.

As such it becomes clear that growing civilizations resulted in complexities within societies, with many actors like the Church, anti-feminist groups, etc., trying to make their place in the power structure by strengthening their hold on the society, over questions like abortion, as by that time abortion had become an important topic for political debates and owing to the mounting demand of restricting women to domestic chores, most states came up with anti-abortion laws.

Sunila Abeysekera, a South Asian feminist claimed that when she first became active in the women's movement the feminists were fighting for women's health, women's access to information regarding contraception, women's legal rights and their right to have an abortion. Women all over the world had engaged in battles against their states, to ensure that the power to make decisions about their bodies lie with women themselves (Abeysekera Sunila 1997).

This makes it clear that across the globe the bodies of women were being controlled by their states. Women were struggling to establish their rights over their bodies as personal rights. This struggle was being fought at two fronts:

1. The Society – one has to keep in mind that most societies are patriarchal in nature due to which they have never given equal status to women. Hence when women started asserting that their bodies exclusively belong to them and therefore the decisions regarding their bodies should also exclusively belong to them, the conservative and patriarchal elements of the society could not come in terms with this assertion. In return they became more rigid on their ideas and became a huge challenge for this kind of a feminist movement.

2. The State – the state is a powerful entity. It has the power to reshape societies through its laws and policies and throughout history it has done it. We have seen how the Nazi state under Hitler, intervened into the lives of its citizens, affected their personal decisions and completely changed the existing society. The norms of any society at a given point of time depend upon the kind of state that exists during that time. As such even societal norms are molded by the state. For instance the societal norm of looking at women as the weaker sex was broken in the USSR during the time of the socialist state when women were employed in factories. The feminist movement which was fighting for the personal rights of women – rights over body and reproductive rights including the right of abortion, had to challenge this powerful entity ‘state’, which was very patriarchal in its approach.

Before any further discussion on the state, personal rights and the politics of abortion, I would like to talk about the ideology of socialism in brief. This is so because, I would be talking about the politics of abortion in the USSR and in Russia. The erstwhile USSR was a socialist country and contemporary Russia is said to be the successor of its socialist legacy. Hence it becomes important to give an idea of the ideology of socialism.

It is very difficult to define the ideology of socialism. It is a broad concept, which many a times make it difficult to precisely define what socialism is. Due to the diversity of this ideology, its opponents equate it with the Stalinist period which was one of the dark periods of the Soviet history and its supporters tend to talk about the particular form of socialism they favour (Newman 2005). “ The British politician, Herbert Morrison, argued that socialism was ‘what a

Labour government does'. Yet socialism has taken far too many forms to be constricted in these ways." (Newman 2005). "One way of discussing so diverse a phenomenon is to claim that all forms of socialism share some fundamental characteristic, or essence, by which the doctrine as a whole may be defined. Certainly, this would simplify analysis, but this essentialist approach normally degenerates into rather dogmatic assertions about the nature of 'true socialism' and becomes a weapon to use against the heretics. However, there are equal dangers in defining socialism so broadly that the subject cannot be analysed meaningfully." (Newman 2005). Therefore, in order to define socialism, one has to take into account some of the basic principles of this ideology. One such principle is its commitment to the creation of an egalitarian society. (Newman 2005). It is true that there was no consensus among the socialists about the extent to which inequality can be eradicated from the society and they all had different ways of eradicating the existing inequalities. However eradication of inequalities was the primary agenda of socialism. Socialism has aspired to establish the kind of society in which every individual has equal opportunities to better their lives without having to face the difficulties and hurdles of the existing socio-economic and political structure.

Thus 'equality', is one of the core features of socialism. As such the inequality existing among different genders, especially women, was a concern for socialism. However in states like the erstwhile USSR, where socialism got established, the state could not ensure the emancipation of women, though their condition improved in many areas. At least in the domain of personal rights, even a socialist state did not do much.

"Sexuality and reproduction are essential dimensions of the lives in the Soviet life of each human being. Historically, women's ability to express choices in these areas of life have been conditioned and constrained under economic, political, religious and cultural patterns, responding to a model of 'normality', which disallows any kind of behaviour which deviates from this. Reproduction has been the basis for the social inequality between men and women; women's identities have been limited to motherhood. Society and the law have repressed any

behaviour that could challenge the reproductive role of women in societies throughout the world.” ( Pandjarian 2003).

The only state which seemed to be an exception to this worldwide phenomena was USSR. USSR or the Soviet Union had legalized abortion as early as 1920. This early legalization of abortion opened debates across the globe. In Germany, this topic was fiercely debated, especially in the German medical discourse, where the arguments from pro-abortionists were based on the concept of ‘free motherhood’, and that of anti-abortionists were based on moral, medical and demographic grounds. In 1930s the USSR recriminalized abortion. In 1955 abortion was again legalized. This time countries like Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland and Hungary witnessed heated debates over abortion and ultimately in all these countries abortion was legalized. In The People’s Republic of China abortion was criminalized in 1910. In 1920 when the Soviet Union legalized abortion, the People’s Republic of China saw discussions over it in many circles, but did not decriminalize it. It was only in 1953 that the Chinese Government legalized it due to demographic reasons. However it is important to note that it was the Soviet Union’s decision to legalize abortion as early as 1920, which not only initiated discussions and debates over the topic in many countries, but also gradually turned it into a political subject. The adverse effect was that the politicization of abortion gave more space to the states to intervene in the personal choices of women over abortion, for their own interests. This ultimately led to the erosion of personal rights of women.

It might come to one’s mind that the principles of socialism which treated women as equals led to the legalization of abortion in the USSR. It might seem that the personal right of women especially those related to reproductive rights like the freedom and right to abort, were not curtailed. The bodies of women were not regulated or controlled and the ‘sacred duty’ of bearing children was not forced upon them by the state. Unfortunately this is not true. Even the Soviet Union was controlling the bodies of women though its aim, at the time when it legalized abortions was not to control the population. Abortion rights were given to the women of the Soviet Union because the state needed to expand its productive capacity by bringing the women

population also into the working force, for which they had to be freed from their conventional task of bearing and raising children.

The politics of abortion has a long history in the USSR. Under the rule of the Czar Romanov, abortion was a punishable offence. Death sentence was given to the practitioners of abortion. Death sentence was removed by Peter the Great. However it remained a serious crime till 1917. The punishment for this crime was exile, sentence to hard labour and deprivation of civil rights. In 1889, the question of abortion was raised for the first time. The Pirogov Society, which was a medical learned society, raised this question in its third congress. This issue was re-discussed in 1913 and 1914.

However the discussion was not about the right of women to resort to abortion nor was it anything like the pro- choice debate of modern times. The discussion was about the social factors which caused abortion, lack of health facilities for those resorting to abortion and unhygienic conditions of places providing abortion facilities. During that time abortion was seen as a social evil that would disappear inventively, once the society was reformed and the living condition and standard of people was changed. Hence in 1920 when abortion was legalized, it was a logical culmination of the discussion going on after the Czarist Empire ended, rather than being influenced by the new principles of the new ideology socialism. The Czarist regime was seen as a cruel regime which had created huge economic disparities and the living conditions of the common masses, who were mostly peasants and workers, was appalling. Due to this many women could not afford to have many children and hence resorted to abortion. After the fall of the Czarist regime it was anticipated that the economic and living conditions of the masses would improve and hence the need to resort to abortion would eventually end. Having more number of children would no longer be an economic liability if the economic condition of the people improved. The pro-abortion stand was therefore the need of the time due to dreadful economic condition of the people. It had nothing to do with socialism as an ideology, though it can be argued that an ideology like socialism should have talked about women's right to

abortion, as a free choice, not dependent on any socio economic and political condition of the state.

The Preamble to the edict of 18 November 1920, stated:

“The Soviet State combats abortion, by reinforcing the socialist regime and the anti-abortion campaign conducted among working women and by making provision for mother and child welfare. This will lead to gradual disappearance of the practice. However the traces of the past and the current economic conditions lead women to have recourse still to this operation. The People’s Commissariat for Health and the People’s Commissariat for Justice, while protecting women’s health and in the interests of the race, considering that repression in this field has not given the expected results, decrees that abortion is authorized.”

Certain conclusions can be drawn from the above preamble.

1. The Soviet state considered abortion as a negative phenomenon but acknowledged its existence, which was a result of the the poor economic condition of the state.
2. It opined that it could gradually and eventually eradicate this phenomenon by ensuring health and welfare facilities and by improving the economic condition of the state at large.
3. However, it authorized abortion because it was the need of the hour.

The legalization of abortion in 1920 was based on certain social considerations. Free of charge abortion was prioritized as the following:

- Ø Single unemployed woman
- Ø Single and working with children
- Ø Industrial workers with several children
- Ø Wives of manual workers with several children

Ø Other women with social insurance

Ø Other women.

This order of prioritization clearly reflects that birth control and standard of living were considered to be inversely proportional. Hence it was the economic need and not the free choice of a woman, on the basis of which abortion was understood and authorized.

It is precisely because of the manner in which abortion was looked upon, that it got banned in 1936. It was assumed that abortions were a result of poor economic conditions and economic upliftment of people would mean lesser abortions. However by the end of 1935 it was observed that economically well off women were registering more abortions than the poorer women. The reversal of the earlier proposed logic about economic condition and abortion, forced the state to recognize the futility of the earlier proposed logic and it banned abortions. Had the state looked at abortion as a personal right of a woman, it would not have banned it. The idea of 'motherhood', and the ethical responsibility of women to bear children, existed in a very strong form even in the USSR, due to which legalized abortion with health facilities could only be seen as a temporary method of bettering the lives of women.

S.A Tomilin, a Ukrainian demographer opined that state intervention was needed in case of abortions because in the contradiction between what an individual wanted and what a nation needed, the state had to ensure the fulfillment of the latter. In other words the fear of depopulation (need of the nation) made the state to ban abortion in the USSR. The rate of population decreased and fluctuated, in-between 1920 to 1936, hence the ban. Again the ban was lifted in 1955 due to increasing rate of population. Dr. Dag Stenvoll argues that under socialism, birth control policy was not based on the normative difference between contraception, which was considered to be relatively legitimate, and abortion, which was considered to be relatively illegitimate. Hence in countries like USSR abortion was legalized and used as the primary method of controlling the population (Stenvoll 2006). At the time when the Soviet state had legalized abortions, USSR was not facing the 'fear of depopulation', and its major concern, at that point was to increase the productivity of the nation for which they had to bring women into

the working force by relieving them from the responsibility of bearing and rearing children. The detailed demographic situation of USSR, based on which the laws on abortion were framed and reframed will be discussed in the later chapters.

According to the United Nations data, the Soviet Union had the maximum number of abortions. In ‘Contraception, Abortion and State Socialism’, Dr. Dag Stenvoll argues that reproductive politics function within different ideologies to encourage or counter population growth, to increase or decrease gender differences or to construct individuals or families as primary units of the society (Stenvoll 2006). Throughout history, we have seen that abortion has been used by states as tools to counter population growth, China being one of the best examples. Similarly the Soviet Union had been changing its policies and laws on abortion according to the demographic needs of the state and after its disintegration, Russia became sharply polarized on the question of abortion precisely because the opponents of legalization of abortion were arguing that if abortion was not criminalized, then it would adversely affect the population growth and pose a threat to the national security of the nation. As far as the question of increasing or decreasing gender differences goes, both in the USSR and in Russia it was portrayed that the pro-abortion stand of the state was to minimize gender differences by bringing women into the working force, but in reality it was done to increase the productive capacity of the state. Also both USSR and Russia have been highly family centric societies, hence legalizing abortion was not an easy step for the state, but it had to do so in order to serve its economic interests. Therefore we observe that legalization of abortion always faced opposition in both USSR and in Russia and hence the policies and laws surrounding abortion fluctuated time and again. The state time and again took into account its economic needs, demographic conditions and the resistance coming from the society to adjust and readjust its laws on abortion. It should also be noted that under the socialist Soviet Union citizens were mildly vocal about their opposition to the laws and policies framed on abortion by the state, but after the disintegration of the USSR, they openly criticized pro-abortion laws and policies. This was also facilitated by the role of the Christian Orthodox Church which had negligible presence and say in the Soviet Union, but became a dominant force in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, many saw abortion as a symbol of delegitimized past and opined that it should be completely eliminated. In Russia there have been several attempts to criminalize abortion. According to the supporters of criminalization of abortion, abortion was dangerous and immoral as it represented a woman's rejection of motherhood. As a result, Russia's abortion rate has steadily declined from 100 per 1,000 women of reproductive age in 1991, to 55 in 2000, and to 44.1 in 2005 (Sakevich 2007). In 2013, the percentage of abortion had declined to 34.8% from 67.3% in 1991. This change was mainly due to the increase in religious orthodoxy and conservative parliamentarians after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 2011, Russia's Orthodox Church teamed with Conservative parliamentarians to push legislation that would radically restrict abortions. The legislation would ban free abortions at government-run clinics and prohibit the sale of the morning-after pill without a prescription. Also abortion for a married woman would require the permission of her spouse, while teenage girls would need their parents' consent. A bill proposed in late 2010 called for the criminal prosecution of doctors who performed abortion in the later stages of pregnancies. But this proposal faced government opposition and was never put up for a vote. The effort to restrict abortions has strong backing from the Russian Orthodox Church, which has sought a more muscular role in society in recent years. An agreement was signed between the Russian state and the church to prevent abortion in 2015 and article 9 of the agreement established cooperation "on the protection of maternal and child health, including reproductive health, promotion of family values and prevention of abortion".

Michele. R. Fish, in 'Unmaking Russia's Abortion Paradigm: A History of Contemporary Reproductive Politics', states that abortion rate from USSR to Russia has been declining steadily because the Orthodox Church leaders and nationalists are campaigning to criminalize abortion so as to morally correct the permissive Soviet abortion policies and to give a practical solution to the country's low birth rate. They see abortion as a threat to 'national security', as it facilitates fertility decline (Fish 2013). The low population growth of the country was looked upon as a

continuous hindrance in the expansion of the country's military power and hence the question of 'national security'.

All these initiatives taken against abortion is not new. Even during the soviet era there were multiple initiatives at different points in time when abortion was either criminalized or numerous amount of restrictions were levied upon it. Hence the debate between pro-abortion and anti-abortion dates long back in the history of Russia and the Soviet Union. However one has to note that this debate was not a result of women rights movement, awareness of the rights of women, 'the right over body' argument, or any feminist movement. In fact all the steps taken, both during the Soviet era and after its disintegration, in Russia, either to criminalize abortion or to put restrictions on it or to decriminalize it, were deliberate attempts by the state to meet the socio-economic and demographic needs of the nation.

Therefore the 'pro- choice' versus 'pro- life' debate was neither applicable in the Soviet Union nor is it applicable in Russia. The women of the Soviet Union or of Russia never had a 'choice', in the true sense of the term. Their choices were always controlled by the state. If the state decriminalized abortion, huge number of women went through registered abortions and if the state put restrictions on abortion or criminalized it, then 'risks' increased as proper health facilities were not available and the conditions under which underground abortion was practiced, were enormously unhygienic, also, being caught performing an abortion or resorting to it meant fines and imprisonment and in many cases the license of the doctors were cancelled. Hence the number of women opting for abortion automatically went down.

It is to be noted that in spite of being a socialist country, the Soviet Union saw women as mere instruments for regulating the population of the state and satisfying its economic needs. Abortion was not seen as a right of women. It was rather used to regulate the behavior of women as per the requirements of the state. Russia, which carried the socialist legacy, also did not talk about

abortion as a free choice for women. It too used abortion as a tool to control women in order to suit the needs of the state.

Abortion which should have been under the personal rights of women is used as a political tool. The state in essence is masculine in its structure and functioning, owing to patriarchal notions that have historically dominated the societies in general. A state is non tangible but its nature can be determined by the kind of people who run the government of the state and the ideological orientations they have. Most governments are dominated by the male members. Not only do they have numerical strength, but they also hold the most important positions in the government which gives them more political power, authority and say. No doubt that the Soviet Union was a socialist country and it successfully addressed the question of the working class and the peasants, but it too was not immune from patriarchy. Hence the questions of gender was never their primary concern. Like any other patriarchal society, there also, the idea of 'sacrifice' was inherently linked to women. The Soviet state therefore used, misused and sacrificed women for its aims and interests. For doing so it had to intervene in those choices of women, which otherwise should have been regarded as personal rights, abortion being one of them. In the perpetual conflict between the interests of the society articulated by the state and the personal rights of women as individual beings, the personal rights of women were subordinated and curtailed. This practice continued even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the formation of Russia. In fact interference in the personal rights of women grew under Russia.

Russia is the only country which has declared a national holiday on the 'Working Women's day'. In the USSR women would work in factories. Presently in Russia women constitutionally have equal economic and social rights. Women are employed in almost every sector of the Russian economy. Constitutionally women enjoy the right of equal pay for equal work. All such examples might make one conclude that the erstwhile Soviet Union and present Russia are fairly gender just societies. The ideology of socialism has made them progressive societies in which women are treated as equal citizens. However it is not true. For instance, women do enjoy the right of equal pay for equal work, but the important positions in the Russian society is still

dominated by the male members. In the USSR women used to work in factories, but were also the first ones to be removed whenever there were issues like overpopulation in the working force. Surely socialism did influence, both the Soviet state and the Russian state when it came to providing elementary and higher education equally to all its citizens including women, or employing women in sectors which were traditionally seen and are still seen in many parts of the world, as areas of men, like working in factories. At the surface level it suggests the importance given by the Russian state to the question of women. However this contradicts the kind of space given to the women (both in Russia and during the Soviet era), in matters relating to ‘the right over body’ for women, when one looks at the abortion politics of USSR or Russia. Therefore I chose to study the politics of abortion in USSR and Russia. Both the Soviet Union and Russia failed miserably in treating women as individual beings who have certain personal rights- the right of abortion being one of them.

The hypothesis of my research work is that both in the USSR and in Russia the choice of abortion has never been an independent choice of a woman, rather it has always been the state which has shaped this ‘choice’, for its own interests and prevented it from becoming a personal right of women.

The questions I would be trying to address in my work are as follows:

1. What was the condition of women in USSR and what is the present condition of women in Russia?
2. How has ‘abortion’, been historically used in the Soviet Union to fulfill the ends of the state by using women as the means?
3. How is ‘abortion’ seen in Russia?
4. Why a socialist country like the USSR, and Russia which carried down the socialist legacy of USSR, became unsuccessful in granting ‘choice’ for women in case of abortion rights?

In the first chapter, I would be giving an introduction as to how the state has been interfering in the personal rights of women through the policies on abortion. The second chapter on ‘*Gender*

*and the Ideology of Socialism*’, would discuss about the placement of women in the ideology of socialism. I would try to look at how the question of gender and in particular women have been theorized and dealt with under socialism. In this chapter I would try to address the following research question:

Why a socialist country like the USSR, and Russia which carried down the socialist legacy of USSR, became unsuccessful in granting ‘choice’ for women in case of abortion rights?

The third chapter, *The Status of Women in the USSR and in Contemporary Russia*’, would deal with the general condition of women in the erstwhile USSR and in present Russia. I would look at their socio-economic-political rights and status. In the fourth chapter, titled *The Politics of Abortion in the USSR*’, I would be talking about how abortion had been historically used in the USSR as a tool in the hands of the state and never seen as a personal right of women. The fifth chapter, *The Politics of Abortion in Russia*’, would look at the debates surrounding abortion in Russia. This chapter would focus on how abortion is seen in contemporary Russia. Also, I would be looking at the role of religion and conservative nationalists and their political influence on this debate and on the policies of the state relating to abortion. In the final chapter or the concluding chapter I would sum up the relationship between the state, personal rights of women and the politics of abortion.

In my research I have taken the help of different theories in order to understand the state. These theories include the absolutist theory of the state, pluralist theory of the state and the Marxist theory of the state. My research is a normative study and I have used historical approach, analytical approach and comparative approach. This research is historical because I am looking at different events that have shaped the politics of abortion in USSR and Russia historically. On the basis of these historical events I have analyzed the role of state in shaping the personal choice of women in USSR and Russia. Hence the analytical approach. Since I am looking at the politics of abortion in both the USSR and Russia it is also a comparative study. The sources for this research work includes:

Primary source- legislation and laws on women in the USSR, legislations and laws on women in Russia and survey of the United Nations on women in Russia and the USSR.

Secondary sources- books, articles and internet sources.

## Chapter 2: Gender and the Ideology of Socialism

After the establishment of the Soviet Union, the Soviet women gained unprecedented rights to equal jobs, pay, education, etc. However equality was elusive. Schwartz (1979), was of the opinion that even though the Soviet women were employed and economically independent; this equality was not much different from the equality enjoyed by the women of capitalist societies. “The social differentiation of sex roles is supported by the ideology, and the existing institutional arrangements ensure that the primary role of the woman remains that of mother and wife.” (Schwartz 1979).

‘Equality’, is the core of Socialism as an ideology. However, even this ideology did not prove to be fruitful in bringing gender equality. From the above argument of Schwartz (1979), it becomes clear that just like a capitalist society, which focuses on private ownership and profit making, and does not talk about equality, the Soviet Union which followed socialism, could not provide gender equality, to its citizens, as a result of which women suffered, and this was not very different from the inequality in gender practiced in Capitalist societies. However, one has to remember the fact that none of these ideologies ever prioritized gender equality. Both these ideologies catered to the demands of women and addressed their problems, as per their aims and interests. Nonetheless, since equality is central to Socialism, one could have expected it to have catered to the problem of gender biases both at the legal and the social levels.

Socialism was established in the Soviet Union, after the Tzarist regime came to an end, through the Revolution of 1917. After the Revolution of 1917, many steps were taken to give equal rights to the Soviet women, which they were deprived of during the tsarist empire, suffrage being one of them. Many socialist leaders openly urged women to break their shackles of domestic work and come out of their homes. Leaders like Lenin encouraged women to work and gain economic independence. Also it was the Soviet Union that legalized abortions, in the early 1920s and

stirred a controversial debate in the world. However, there was a difference between the promise of uplifting women through socialism and the reality.

Engels had continuously argued that under socialism there would be collective ownership of means of production, which would ensure complete equality of men and women, 'family' would not remain the economic unit of the society, domestic work would change into a public industry and caring and rearing of children would become a community work. The early legislations of the Soviet Union, indeed incorporated these aspects of Engels vision through equal right to work and equal pay, access to educational institutions, protection from hazardous work, the right to divorce, to obtain an abortion, and to select a domicile and name. Apart from this, the move towards industrialization, demanded for women participation and women got access to schools, education and training.

Interestingly from around 1936, the above mentioned policies started changing. Due to collectivization, purges, famine and world war, there was a huge decline in the population of USSR. Therefore in the first place, abortion was outlawed. Divorce laws became more restrictive and expensive. This was a subtle method of promoting family system, in order to expand the population and this in turn re-burdened women with the responsibility to bear and rear children.

Sure there was proclamation of equality of men and women but the traditional values were again gaining grounds. This situation was very tricky, especially for the female population of the Soviet Union because the earlier policies had succeeded in ensuring the participation of a viable female population into the work force and now women were working and at the same time were obliged to take on the domestic responsibilities as well. This was the situation of 'Double Burden'.

It was highly ironic, that the ideology which brought women into the occupational sector, could not challenge the 'sexual division of labour'. The Soviet State came up with new and innovative

policies that would enable women to take up both domestic responsibilities and be employed. No such policy came out for men. This shows that the Soviet State was not ready to deal with the core issues of gender biases even though it followed the ideology of socialism.

It is true that Soviet leaders like Lenin and others wanted to emancipate women. Lenin had asked to liberate women from 'household bondage'. However these kinds of demands were pushed aside due to the following reason:

The most important reason behind bringing policies and laws that abolished abortion, made divorce laws more restrictive, etc., was that the population of USSR had been constantly falling. This fall became a concern for the Soviet state especially after 1936. This was so because the USSR had fought the First World War and had lost many lives. Then there were famines and purges which further reduced the population. Another important fact to be noted is that the sex ratio of the Soviet Union was gradually deteriorating. As a result of which women were recruited in huge numbers in factories and industries. The number of working women rapidly increased during the time of Stalin when industrialization of the Soviet Union was rigorously being followed. Between 1929 and 1935, around four million women were working for wages, out of which around two million were employed in industries ( Ilic 2011). In 1930s, the Communist Party in the USSR started a full-fledged campaign to recruit around 1.6 million women into the working force (Ilic 2011). In the industries, even if the managers were unwilling to recruit women, they had to because of the skewed sex ratio due to which fewer men were available for work. This also meant that women had to be given proper education and training in order to work in factories and industries. Hence education among women increased. Once women started getting education, training and other kinds of soft skills, most of them started to prefer to work and earn. As a result of which women became self -dependent, marriage rate started falling, and women preferred to have less children or no children, both outside and inside wedlock. During that time abortion was legal and it was also used as the primary means of contraception. Therefore birth rates started falling and it adversely affected the Soviet economy as there was scarcity of the working force. Stalin's great purge which started in the middle of 1930s also contributed in decreasing the population. The people who opposed industrialization and

collectivization were exterminated between 1930 and 1933. He then got his political rivals exterminated. In 1934 Kirov was murdered, who was a political rival of Stalin. Next he moved on to the 'Red Army', because he was suspicious about a coup being planned by the 'Red Army', against him. Many people who were in labour camps also died. Around 10 million people belonging to the working class also died. As such there was a huge blow to the population of USSR.

The constantly declining rate of USSR started bothering the Soviet leaders because labour had to be made available in order to continue with 'industrialization'. Therefore, changes were brought in many policies of the Soviet State to create viable conditions for the increasing the rate of population growth. In this process, women were affected the most because they either had to sacrifice their work and go back to the traditional role of bearing children, looking after the family, etc., or had to manage both.

'Abortion', which clearly should have been a personal choice of a woman, became like a magic wand, in the hands of the state. This magic wand was used to optimize the population of the Soviet Union. For a very long time abortion was legal in the Soviet Union and it had also become the primary method of contraception, hence criminalizing it, would mean an automatic increase in the number of child births. Therefore in 1936, abortion was criminalized. The Decree of 1936 read as follows:

1. Abortion, in view of the undeniable harm which it causes to health, is forbidden, whether in hospitals or in special nursing homes, or in the private houses of doctors or pregnant women. Abortion may be induced only when continuation of the pregnancy puts the pregnant woman's life in danger or threatens to cause serious injury to her health, or else in cases

of severe hereditary diseases of the parents, and then it may only be effected in hospitals and in maternity homes.

2. If an abortion is performed outside a hospital, or in a hospital but in contravention of the above, the doctor who has performed the operation is liable to a term of imprisonment of between one year and two years. If an abortion is performed in unhygienic surroundings, or by a person who is not medically qualified, the punishment shall not be less than three years detention.

3. Where the woman is induced by some other person to undergo abortion, that person shall suffer detention for two years.

4. Pregnant women who undergo abortion in contravention of the above, shall be punished by public reprimand, and, if the offence is repeated, by a fine of up to 300 roubles.<sup>1</sup>

This decree makes it perfectly clear that abortion could be performed only due to medical reasons and women lost their right to choose whether they wanted to have children or not. Similarly other changes were brought like giving emphasis on ‘family structure’ and marriage, making divorce laws restrictive, glorifying ‘motherhood’, etc.

It is interesting to note that all these steps were being taken in a state, which had talked about the rights of women since its inception. In 1917 when the Tzarist regime ended, socialism was established in the newly formed Soviet Union and

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Marxist.org

people were of the opinion that unlike the Tzarist regime, under this ideology women would not be exploited anymore. One of the first pathbreaking steps taken by the Soviet Union was to legalise abortion, as early as 1920. This was indeed a remarkable step because no other state had recognized any personal right of women. The Soviet leaders like Lenin often talked about ‘domestic work’, being a bondage for women and how women needed to work in order to emancipate themselves. Nonetheless, things gradually changed and the Soviet women ultimately found themselves in a very difficult position, because liberty and rights were given to them and then taken away suddenly.

It is however, important to understand why an ideology like ‘Socialism’ which revolves around the concept of ‘equality’ could not ensure the rights of women and end their exploitation.

Initially under socialism there was no talk about equalizing household work and childcare. The Utopian Socialists talked about cooperative arrangements for doing household work and for rearing children. This concept was the result of the criticism of ‘privatized’ and ‘self-interested’ family structure. It did not come from the realization that the categorization of work was based on sexual division of labour and it needed to be rearranged. Later on, Marxist thinkers started arguing that it was the domestic work which was keeping women in chains and women had to break it through education and employment. In the erstwhile USSR, leaders like Lenin argued on similar lines. However the problem was that this idea to emancipate women through work was not combined with other programmes like ‘socialising domestic work’, creating awareness regarding the rights of women over their bodies, etc. Even the right to abort, was not given to women as a personal right or because they had rights over their bodies, but was given to women in order to create a productive labour

force that would increase the economic productivity of the Soviet Union. Clearly then, it was very difficult to bring equality between the two sexes- male and female, because the core of the issues remained untouched.

For socialists all over the world, 'class' was the first priority and this was true even for the Soviet Union. Moreover there have been instances where the 'class card' has been played to undermine sexual equality. "When Selina Cooper, for example, argued the case for women's suffrage at the 1905 Labour Party Conference, Harry Quelch of the (Marxist) Social Democratic Federation announced that 'Mrs Cooper has placed sex first...we have to put Labour first in every case.'"(Phillips 1996). This was the situation in the Soviet Union as well. Class, industrial development and working force were given more importance than the issues related to women. In fact the the state talked about women as per its interest surrounding the economic conditions.

According to scholars like Anne Phillips (1996), the problem was that none of the socialist policies at that time talked about eliminating sexual division of labour and also none of the policies was formulated to encourage men to participate equally in household activities and take equal responsibility for the upbringing of children. As a result of this there was no basic change in the socialization process of both men and women. Both the sexes were still socialized in a manner that kept inculcating the traditional thinking about sex specific roles in the society. The Soviet Union was no different. However it was one step ahead in the sense that it was providing education and economic opportunities to women, though the real reason behind such a step was industrial and economic development of the Soviet State. The Soviet women therefore were going out of their small world locked inside their homes, and were

learning new things. By 1940s about 40 percent workers in the national economy were women (Ilic 2001). This implies that a good number of women had become economically independent and were less burdened by the domestic responsibilities. Many women chose to have fewer or no children because they were working and abortion was legal in the Soviet Union till 1936. By the 1930s the underpopulation of the Soviet Union had become a big problem for the industrial development of the Soviet Union, hence abortion, which was the most widely used method for contraception, was abolished and the state introduced policies that would encourage women to have more children. As a result of all this, women started being dragged inside their homes again and the women who continued to work faced the problem of double burden.

Mere economic independence could not solve the problems of the Soviet women. Men and women from their very childhood were socialized in a way that the expectations of both men and women regarding the ways in which they would balance work and family, were very different. Women primarily had the responsibility of caring for the young ones, the elderly and the family. This created systematic disadvantage on the labour market (Phillips 1996). “If the post-war expansion of women's employment tells us anything, it is that the sexes cannot be equal in their job opportunities when they are so profoundly different in their domestic lives. Unless the responsibilities of care work are equalised between women and men (which depends not only on the level of social provision, but also on major restructuring of the hours and conditions of paid employment), women's income, position, and conditions will continue to reflect the bad luck of being born females” (Phillips 1996).

In the socialist nation of the USSR, the political leaders who tried to establish socialism, officially stressed upon the notion of liberation of women through work - the view put forward by Engels. "According to this reasoning, women's participation in paid labor would facilitate their economic autonomy, which would allow them greater control over their lives. In turn, men's recognition of women as equal workers would abolish patriarchal attitudes and practices as they played out both at work and at home." ( Penn and Massino,2011).

However at the ground level the situation was completely different. The notions theorized by Engels and the policies formulated in the new socialist state of the USSR never got materialized in the true sense of the term. It is true that the Soviet women were constitutionally given full equality, education, health care, guaranteed a place in the workforce, etc., but the state's intention was not so much the emancipation of women in a genuine manner; rather these policies were formulated more around strategic decisions.

Women in the Soviet Union occupied positions that were low-skilled and low-paid. In Spite of the Soviet women being educated, they were paid lesser than their male counterparts and were highly underrepresented in high level administrative and political positions. One very important point that should be noted is that most of the policies of the state concentrated on industrialization and hence attempts to improve and socialize different aspects of the family structure, such as childcare were negligible. This ultimately manifested itself in the form of 'double burden' for women. The restrictions put by the Soviet State on the reproductive rights of women since the 1930s, adversely affected the physical and psychological health of women.

The question, “*Did Socialism liberate women ?*”, is very difficult to answer. It can not be answered with an emphatic ‘no’. There are numerous layers of a variety of answers that need attention. In the first place, it is important to recognize that the Socialist Soviet Union provided space for discourse on women- their right to work, to get education, lead a dignified life and so on. It has to be admitted that ‘gender’, was an important aspect in the decision making of the State. If the question of women had not been important, the socialist state of the Soviet Union would not have bothered about giving the Soviet women voting rights, educational rights and many others, in the beginning of its inception, nor would have generated the discourse on making women economically independent. The question of women was instrumental in the formulation of many policies that sought to refashion the Soviet society. Laws regarding divorce and abortion, formulated in the initial phase of the Soviet Union were partly economical but were also influenced by the the thoughts of Engels and Lenin, who opined that women should be freed from ‘the bondage of domestic slavery’ and be included in the working force if they had to be emancipated.

However, legal recognition of women as equal beings was not enough to eliminate the discriminatory mindset of the people against women. The entry of women in many high profile jobs was faced with many restrictions. Most of the times the employers, who were generally males, deliberately disqualified women. Moreover gender specific family policies such as maternity leave reinforced rather than challenge gender biases.

From 1930s onwards, it can be argued that the question of women had become a tool for manipulation and mobilization of women into the work force to increase production in the Soviet State. Nonetheless it has to be recognized that it was

also a basic lens, along with other identities, through which individuals interpreted, negotiated, resisted and in some cases ignored state policies and discourses. The point I am trying to make is that, irrespective of the fact that the Socialist State of the USSR started using the underprivileged position of women in the society to meet its economic needs and interests, it was this Soviet State which talked about women as an equally important part of the society as men and provided them with many rights earlier denied. Some rights like the legalization of abortion was not even thought about in the rest of the world when the Soviet State provided it to the Soviet women. This was possible only because the Soviet Union was a follower of Socialism, which talks about 'equality' and many socialist scholars and leaders openly criticised the position given to women in every society and the need to bring women on equal platform, so as to provide for an equal and dignified life for women. It can not be overlooked that 'Socialism', as an ideology did not undermine the question of women, but regrettably, due to economic and political reasons, this important discourse became instrumental in making strategic economic decisions, which catered, less to the needs of women and more to the economic interests of the state.

However by the 1930s, a huge number of women had become aware of their rights, many women were educated and a large number of women had entered into the working force. Hence, women were fighting for better lives. Donna Harsch found out that many Soviet women lobbied the state to solve their family disputes, secure benefits, seek justice in their marital lives, etc., in order to improve the quality of their lives. The laws and policies formulated by the Soviet State affected women in a variety of ways but it is important to acknowledge that these laws and policies gave space to the Soviet women to respond to the state policies and use them to better their daily lives. Moreover there were women, mostly of younger age, who were constructing their

identities around socialism and feminism. This became possible only because, during the initial phase of the Soviet Union, both the state and the socialist leaders had tried to sensitize the citizens on gender issues through the ideology of socialism.

In order to analyse the Socialist State of the Soviet Union, on the question of women, it is important to look at both the impact of the policies formulated around the issue of gender biases, on the Soviet society, and the intent of the Soviet State behind such policies. It is true that Socialism did not succeed in liberating women. However, it did provide opportunities for the Soviet women to get educated, to work and to improve their living conditions. It was the ideology of Socialism which generated the discourse to bring equality among the sexes in the Soviet Union.

It is also true that State Socialism affected different people in different ways. Some people criticised the manner in which the Soviet citizens were moulded to fit in certain specific roles, like that of a worker or an activist. On the other hand many citizens did not find this limiting or oppressive. Most women found State Socialism of the Soviet Union to be liberating and empowering.

The main issue with the Soviet ideology of Socialism was that it prioritized economic interests of the state over establishing sexual equality in the Soviet society. Socialism as an ideology provides for the structural conditions that are necessary to materialize 'equality' (Phillips). Initially, especially in the European nations and America, the Feminists were more inclined towards 'liberalism' than 'socialism'. The scenario changed in the 1970s, when feminists found themselves more closely connected to socialism. Many feminist activists during that time had prior involvement with socialism or were influenced

drastically by the 'left'. Many feminists distanced themselves from the socialists but were similar to them in their approach and reproduced the same analytical traditions.

In the 1950s and 60s, very few feminists opined that women's emancipation was possible through women's entry into socialized production, but the socialist notion that women's sexual inequality was rooted in their confinement to the private household, was agreed to by many feminists, because at that time domestic enslavement of women was a huge problem.

Dora Russell, an activist of the British Labour Party, worked on the relationship between the '*body*' and the political ideology. She started her work in the twentieth century and tried to construct a socialist politics, in which her major point of argument was that the material experience of the '*female body*' in sex and motherhood, indicated towards a deep rooted politics, emerging out of the working conditions of the working class women. This politics was gradually being reconstructed according to the contemporary concepts of modernity, sexuality and freedom (Brooke 2005). Russell 's immense interest in this field encouraged her to explore the "uncharted territories of interwar socialism" (Brooke 2005).

Russell, a British author, a socialist and a feminist, is known for her attempts to argue for a 'socialism of body' (Brooks 2005). She tried to establish connection between the female body and socialism. She strongly argued that the female body was political which was reflected in the experiences women had in the fields of sex and reproduction. Hence birth control was an important aspect for the emancipation of women. Working for the Labour Party, Russell realized that

even after sex reform movements, which brought into prominence the question of control over the female body (reproductive control), the ideology of Socialism was unable to deal with this issue. Hence it becomes clear that it was not just the Soviet Union which did not prioritize gender. Elsewhere too, gender was not very important and except for some socialist leaders, others did not consider it as important as 'class'.

In the 1920s, many socialist feminists, in Britain were campaigning for birth control. The major reason behind this was that multiple pregnancies and frequent pregnancies were affecting the health of the working class women. Therefore the debate over reproductive rights or what one can call the personal right of women, were focused on health of women and not seen as a matter of sexual emancipation or the question of claiming the personal rights of women. In fact the campaigns that the socialist feminists took up for abortion rights, especially in places where other forms of contraceptives were not easily accessible, was because multiple pregnancies were not only restricting women to the household, but were affecting their health too. Therefore 'reproductive health' was talked about, but reproductive rights as personal rights of women was not a part of the mainstream discourse at that time.

In Britain, the Labour Party stressed on equality between the sexes, but did not take any concrete steps to break the grip of old, traditional, gender biased notions that were practiced in the society (Brooks 2005). The Labour party during the period of war, concentrated on improving the plight of males in the working class. In reality the Labour Party practiced its ideology in a manner that male work in public sphere continuously overshadowed its conception of citizenship. Welfare of citizens automatically implied the welfare of males in the

working class. Women were seen as citizens whose political subjectivity was different from that of men and was derived from the socially constructed notions which encouraged to view the contribution of women, not through their work, but through their roles as wives and mothers. In fact many socialist feminists reinterpreted the importance of women and propagated their active participation in the Labour Party. However this came in the form of attempts to bring policies like family allowances, good maternity clinics, access to birth control and the right to abortion. This clearly reveals that even within the socialist feminists, the contribution of women to the society was woven around their sexual division of labour. The campaign for abortion rights in the 1930s, was based upon the belief that both private and sexual spheres, were the legitimate areas for socialist actions.

Russell, was a scholar who believed that birth control was instrumental in making a woman as independent in her reproductive work, as a man was in his productive work (Brooke 2005). Therefore she consistently worked towards getting abortion rights for women by talking about class difference and maternal health. Russell also contrasted the treatment given to male miners, their bodies and their work and treatment given to female bodies. She argued that just like certain facilities were given to the male miners for the risks involved in their work, due to its nature, facilities should also be given to women for their reproductive work. Just like the male miners were constantly insecure about choking coal dust or breaking their limbs, women were also constantly insecure about childbirth. “Mothers had a trade union interest in this matter, which needed safeguarding by political action” (Labour Party Report 1928). Hence Russell was claiming the rights of female bodies through birth control, on the basis of their reproductive labour. She strongly argued that citizenship of any

state should include workers of mind, hand and womb. Therefore Russell constructed socialism through the material experiences of the bodies of women.

Russell like many maternal feminists did not challenge motherhood as the primary identity of women. She however, transformed the concept of maternity in many radical ways. She emphasised on motherhood as the criteria for claiming citizenship, but at the same time she saw women as individual autonomous units, who could claim private rights over their bodies. This explains her support for abortion rights. Russell combined socialism, maternal feminism and the concepts of work and productivity, to form a new kind of socialism. However even in her work 'reproductivity', remains the primary focus of a woman. She saw a woman's labour primarily as reproductive labour.

Russell tried to construct socialist politics around class and gender inequality through the material experiences of a woman's body. Some scholars like Brooke (2005), opine that Russell had "utopian hopes for the emancipation for female sexuality and motherhood". This was a major problem of socialism. Even in the erstwhile Soviet Union Lenin had high ideals for resolving gender discriminations, but it could not be implemented at the root level because huge social changes were involved in the process.

It has to be acknowledged that socialism as an ideology recognized the inequality between the sexes and many socialist leaders worked to bridge this gap, by formulating different laws and policies. Article 122 of the Soviet Constitution gave equal legal status to women, education was made accessible to women, women were asked to leave their homes and work, etc. In spite of this, in the Soviet Union, women could not get equal status because the Soviet

State had to cater to its economic needs, especially that of industrialization for which it continuously formulated and reformulated policies in the name of women, but were in fact the policies that regulated the demographic needs of the state. Hence socialism as an ideology did not dismiss the question of women completely, but the interpreters of socialism and later on the political leaders of the socialist Soviet Union, gave more weightage to the question of class, hence economic concerns were more important to it than to address the question of gender inequality.

## **Chapter 3: The Status of Women in the USSR and In Contemporary Russia**

Ideologically, both Marxism and Bolshevism were strongly and unequivocally in favour of the emancipation of women in every aspect- economically, politically and socially. “Woman was to be freed from her low place in traditional social and familial hierarchies, from the duty of unquestioning obedience to father and husband. Industrial production, which was already undermining her economic dependence on the male breadwinner, would be infinitely expanded, communalized and humanized under conditions of socialism.” (Tay 1972). Tay was of the opinion that this would ensure the mental and physical security of women. Many thinkers like Marx, Engels and Lenin were of the opinion that socialism could end the household drudgery of women. Trotsky claimed that socialism could free women from the mind and soul destroying tyranny of nursery and kitchen. (Tay 1972).

Women in most societies, have historically been viewed as the sole caretakers of the household. They also have been restricted to homes, and denied employment and thereby economic independence. This situation prevailed in the erstwhile Soviet Union also. After the revolution of 1917, one of the problems the leaders of the Soviet Union had to resolve was the acute deficiency of women in the working force and they needed to increase the productive capacity of the Soviet economy for which they had to ensure the participation of women in the working force. One should also remember that the population of men in the Soviet Union had drastically gone down because of the first World War, so bringing women into the labour force for economic reasons, had become the need of the hour. At this juncture, the Soviet leaders argued on the lines of Engels, who was of the opinion that the prerequisite of the emancipation of women was their economic independence. Engels claimed that only through participation in labour force outside the home can the ‘open or disguised domestic enslavement of a woman’, begin to be challenged

(Engels 1968:810). According to him the 'household bondage', was the kind of oppression which had its origin in the structure of the 'family system'. Hence it was important to transform the 'household', into a social industry, with the passage of means of production into the common property, since only then would the individual family cease to be an economic unit of the society (Engels 1968).

1970s onward, the question of 'women' started gaining importance in the Soviet Union. There was a clear increase in the amount of attention paid by the Soviet press in matters relating to 'women'. The press had started raising issues related to women employment, marriage, divorce, femininity, etc. However, the policy of bringing women into the economic field by providing them employment in the labour force had started long back. The Soviet leaders had been arguing in favour of economic independence of women for a long time, though their hidden purpose was increased production and not the emancipation of women.

Nonetheless, the economic independence of women in the Soviet Union might suggest to some, that the status and position of the Soviet women were not extremely poor. However to truly understand the status of women in the Soviet Union, it is important to look at the positions of women in the economic and social arena.

#### I. Economic arena:

The Soviet labour force was, to a large extent depended upon female labour. In 1928 women constituted 24% of the labour force, while in 1980s it rose up to 51%. 49% of the industrial labour force comprised of women in 1980s. On collective farms women comprised of 51% of the total workers, and 45% of state farm workers were women ( Upravlenie 1975: 27). By the end of the 1960s, 80% of working age women were employed outside the home and 7.5% were studying (Pankratova and Iankova, 1978: 19). The average length of female employment rose to 33.5 years in 1970 from 28.7 years in 1959 (Kotliar and Turchaninova, 1975: 106). This clearly

shows that the productive capacity of the Soviet Union was heavily affected by the women labour force. However, the high percentage of women being involved in the economic sector, did not come from the ideological commitment of gender equality, rather it was due to demographic and economic reasons. It was evident that if the Soviet Union had to stick to its aim of maintaining a high rate of economic growth, it had to involve women, especially because at that time they formed the majority of the population. Due to The First World War, the Revolution and the Civil War, the male population had drastically decreased. In 1926 the sex ratio in the Soviet Union suggested that there were seventy-one million males to almost seventy- six million females. During the 1930s, the number of males further decreased due to the casualties of collectivization and the purges. The situation was further worsened by the Second World War.

By 1946 the Soviet population pyramid stacked according to age group as well as sex was highly skewed (Dodge 1966: 11). Women of working age drastically outnumbered their male counterparts by twenty million. The highly skewed sex ratio is indicative of the fact that the Soviet Union had no option but to involve women in the economic arena. However, it was not just the demographic reason which ensured the high percentage of working women. This also happened because of Stalin's First Five Year plan (1928), which talked about rapid industrialization. Rapid industrialization required a huge number of working force which was not possible through the exclusion of any particular sex. All sexes had to be involved in the labour force if the Soviet Union was aiming at rapid industrialization. The other reasons for involving women in the Soviet labour force are as follows:

- ❖ Female labour was cheap. Women were paid either half or slightly more than half the amount which was paid to their male co-workers.
- ❖ Due to the socialization of women which was highly patriarchal in nature, women seemed to be more passive, submissive and obedient than their male co-workers, hence it was easier to command and control them.
- ❖ There existed strict regulation against child labour, in the Soviet Union and therefore women were recruited to replace them.

## II. Social Arena:

In the USSR, there eventually came a time when 51% of the labour force constituted of women. However this did not undermine the role of women as primarily ‘mothers’, and this became more evident when the Soviet Union started aiming at successful combination of motherhood and work for women, through its policies and laws. Its aim was not to strike at gender specific roles in order to bring gender equality; rather it aimed to bring women into the labour force to increase productivity of the Soviet Union but with minimal challenge to the existing societal norms at least on the question of women.

Article 122 of the Soviet Constitution adopted in 1936 gave equal status to women. The constitution of 1977 provided the same rights as were provided by article 122 of the 1936 constitution. However, according to Edmund Nash, on the basis of such articles, the Soviet Union claimed to have given equality to women but that was not the real interest of the Soviet state (Nash 1970). Nash argues that all able bodied women without family obligations or any other justified excuse (like pregnancy), had the moral and legal obligation to work (Nash 1970). This suggests very clearly that the Soviet State was not challenging the societal structure, wherein, a woman’s priority was service to the family. The Soviet State was reiterating the societal norms which considered ‘family’ and ‘domestic work’, as the most significant aspect of a woman’s life, and therefore ‘the obligation to work’, applied only to those women who had no family obligations.

To understand the status and condition of the women of the erstwhile Soviet Union, I have divided the Soviet history into three different phases:

- The early period ( 1917-1930s)
- The shift to conservatism (1930s-1950s)

- The last phase of the Soviet Union (1950s onwards)

### The Early Period:

In 1917 when the reign of the Tsarist Empire ended, both the socialists and the non-socialists welcomed it as the tsarist empire was extremely anti- women. (Tay 1972). Therefore the Soviet leaders provided for women suffrage and gave equal status to women by incorporating article 122 in the constitution. Lenin wanted women ‘into the work of revolution’(Tay 1972). This implied that the Soviet women had to step out of their households and work in different sectors of the Soviet economy. However, the majority of them were employed in the labour force. This was a positive step as women started earning and became economically independent. In 1918 political equality was granted to both men and women. Matrimony, which was a religious matter earlier, was turned into a purely civil matter. Women got the right to divorce, which did not exist earlier. Another important change, which the socialists tried to bring was to give social equality to children born outside of wedlock. They propagated that concepts of ‘virginity’, ‘cleanliness’, ‘purity’, etc., were bourgeoisie preconceptions which facilitated gender inequality in bourgeoisie societies and hence the Soviet society had to get rid of it. However, it has to be noted that the Soviet legislation emphasized the economic rather than sexual aspects of the new policies. According to Alice Erh Soon Tay, even Lenin was hesitant to talk about sexual rights (Tay 1972: 670). Lenin also argued that family as a structure would ultimately wither away, however he did not want to talk about it at that point of time as it would have resulted in social and political crisis because the pre socialist relationships existed in the Soviet society, even then (Tay 1972). Child rearing and household activities were not forced upon women. Such activities were taken up as social and state concerns. However one of the most bold steps taken by the leaders of the Soviet Union was to legalize abortion in the early 1920s. This step initiated debates around the globe and the discourse on ‘abortion’ started coming into mainstream. Nonetheless, these steps taken in the Soviet Union could not bring any major structural changes because a large number

of Soviet women were still uneducated and submissive due to the social norms. Hence they were little interested in their new freedoms and legal rights. For example, the peasant women rarely sought alimony in case of a divorce (Tay 1972: 673).

Therefore one can conclude that during the early phase of the Soviet Union, there were attempts to improve the social structure. However, even the Soviet state and the socialist leaders did not choose to work towards complete elimination of gender biases. At the same time they were fully committed towards attaining a 'classless society' and they formulated policies keeping this goal in mind. This vividly demonstrates two things:

1. Firstly it has to be noted, that like most societies of the world, the Soviet society was also highly patriarchal and family as a unit was an exceedingly important component of this society. As such, challenging the mainstream notions on gender was extremely risky and could have resulted in the social collapse of the Soviet Union. Hence Soviet leaders like Lenin were of the opinion that the family structure should be dismantled gradually. Therefore only subtle measures to improve the conditions of women were taken but there seemed to be no real change on the ground level. Scholars like Janet S. Schwartz have argued that equal status was given to women only in law, but in reality they were the victim of gender biases, at home and in workplace (Schwartz 1979).
2. Secondly, women were seen as 'bodies' that were economically beneficial for the Soviet State. In order to increase the economic productivity, women were facilitated into the Soviet economy, from their homes, through the laws and policies of the soviet state, as the then present labour force which comprised of men was not sufficient to increase the economic productivity of the USSR.

## The Shift to Conservatism

The crisis, of 1920s, which occurred because of the war, continued in 1930s and was also accompanied with the rise of Stalin. Stalin emphasized upon five year plans to increase the economic strength of the Soviet Union. This gave impetus to the conservative section of the Soviet society, to grow, as women were going out to work. This culminated into a gradual retreat to conservatism. “A new image of the ‘strong Soviet family’ was fostered to counteract the growing problem of juvenile delinquency, enforce parental responsibilities and encourage a much- felt need for an increase in the birthrate. Soviet writers began to refer to the family as ‘a basic unit’, faced, in contemporary conditions, with the task of bringing up children for the future. Domesticity was no longer denounced, household work, once described by Lenin as monotonous petty drudgery, was now proclaimed to be ‘socially useful labor’, love of parents, formerly conditional upon their adherence to Soviet values, was elevated as an ethical absolute. Accordingly, decrees were issued imposing new liabilities on parents and youths. In 1934, a decree denounced hooliganism and urged parents and teachers to supervise children more rigorously. Parents became criminally liable for the delinquent acts of their children; the militia was authorized to impose administrative fines upon parents guilty of neglecting to supervise their children adequately. Parents were also made liable for children's torts, parental neglect was to be reported to the place of work of the guilty parent, and a procedure was set up to transfer children to children's homes if parental supervision was inadequate.”(Tay 1972). Abortion, which was earlier legalized, was criminalized in 1936, in line with the new family policy. However this step taken by the Soviet State was not solely because of societal pressure. An important reason behind this step of the Soviet state, was the fact that population of the Soviet Union had shrunk too much, to support any kind of major economic productivity, hence there was an urgent need to increase their population. The prohibition on abortion was justified on the following grounds:

“The 1920 Decree was necessitated by ‘the moral heritage of the past and the difficult economic conditions of the present’ which then still ‘forced a section of women to submit to this operation, but now no longer applied. Only under conditions of socialism, where exploitation of man by

man does not exist and where woman is an equal member of society, while the continual improvement of the material well-being of the toilers constitutes a law of social development, is it possible seriously to organize the struggle against abortions by prohibitive laws as well as by other means.” (Tay 1972).

Allowances were given to mothers with larger families to encourage child births. The registration fees for divorce was also increased. The concept of ‘Heroine Mother’, was widely used to encourage women to bear and raise more and more children. This term was used for women who brought up ten children. The Soviet state also instituted the order ‘Motherhood Glory’ and ‘Motherhood Medal’. The ‘Motherhood Medal’, was 1st class and 2nd class medals for mothers with 6 and 5 children respectively, and the Order ‘Motherhood Glory’, was 1st, 2nd and 3rd class for mothers with 9, 8 and 7 children respectively. Soviet citizens with less children were taxed more. Also only registered marriages had legal status, which not only encouraged marriage, which is the foundational stone of every family structure, but also made unregistered relationships a taboo. A woman had no right to move the court to seek guardianship of her child, if she had not done a registered marriage, and also she had no legal right to ask for maintenance from her partner.

“The Court issued on 16 September 1949, an Instruction on judicial practice in dissolution of marriage declaring that a Court may dissolve a marriage only when, upon studying the concrete circumstances of the case, it arrives at the conclusion that the action has been brought on well thought-out and thoroughly substantiated grounds and that continuation of the married state would be contrary to the principles of communist morality and interfere with the creation of normal conditions for living together and bringing up children. The dissatisfaction with the situation of unmarried mothers and ‘illegitimate’ children was so great that two significant practices developed. First, fathers of children who could not enter into a registered relationship with the mother adopted their own children, thus conferring upon them the father's name, support, inheritance and other rights. Secondly, in 1960, an article was applied to compel

putative fathers to maintain extramarital children if they had ever been in 'permanent cohabitation' with the mother and the child" (Tay 1972).

### The Last Phase of The Soviet Union

Article 122, of the Soviet Constitution, provided for equal status to women economically, politically and socially. In writing, women had the right to equal payment, right to choose the kind of work and the right to choose any professional training. However, in substance it was the complete opposite of this. Women were underpaid. Most women were part of the working force and were absent in powerful positions. Even in the Communist Party, women were underrepresented. In 1967, only 20.9 percent women were members of the Communist Party. In 1966 election of the Supreme Soviet, only 28 percent of women deputies were elected.

The following data clearly shows that socially women were not considered to have equal status with their male counterparts, as in every sector of the economy, women were highly under represented and almost absent from powerful positions. This data has primarily been taken from the work of Alice Tay In 1969, women in the USSR formed 54 percent of the total population. However, women were thinly employed in almost every sector except for the labour force. Women workers, teachers, doctors, engineers and scholars, together formed only 42 percent in the Soviet Union. However in 1968, things changed a little favourably for women and 31 percent of women were employed in the Judiciary, while 35 percent women were in academics. However in the same year, there was a huge drop in the percentage of women who held doctorate degrees. Earlier it was 31 percent, which later came down to 12.5 percent. Women in the labour force were distributed as follows:

55 percent were domestic servant.

25 percent were farm- hands

13 percent worked in industry (mainly textile and sewing)

However, towards the later period, the condition of Soviet women improved to a large extent. 72 percent of doctors were women in the 1970s. 68 percent of women were in teaching profession, 63 percent were accountants and 30 percent were engineers with diploma. About 54 percent women were educated and 47 percent of the total students in higher education, were women. Apart from this most of the schools became co-educational, except for military service schools. This implied that women had better access to education. During World War II, in secondary schools of Moscow, the sexes were separated. This was then introduced in other parts of the Soviet Union as well. The number of students going to these schools was never large and schools for women were so few in number that most women did not have access to education. This changed gradually, and when coeducational schools were introduced, more women started getting educated.

The criteria of equal payment was being followed almost everywhere. The labour industry, especially textile, still consisted of predominantly the female population but the condition of women working in factories was not very good. In factories, women were employed as they provided cheap labour and their working conditions were also not very good. In spite of special legislations, attending to working conditions of women in industries, the ground reality changed little.

In matters of Social security, women were given more privileges. Old-age pensions were payable, regardless of capacity to work. For men it was 60 years of age with 25 years of employment service and for women 55 years of age with 20 years of employment service. During pregnancy, medical aid for women was free of cost. Articles 70, 71 and 75 provided for a sliding scale of payment during maternity leave which varied from full pay to two-thirds of pay. One has to note here that, even during that time when the condition of Soviet women was improving gradually, most laws and policies, related to pregnancy and childbirth were guided by the motive of providing suitable social conditions for ensuring a 'happy motherhood', which is indicative of the fact that women were still being seen primarily as 'mothers' and 'keepers of the family'. Nonetheless, their roles in their families had changed. A woman now played her new

roles in the family, such as an educator in the family, organizer of the home, etc. This gave rise to new family structures, in which women had better conditions and status than they enjoyed previously. However they also got overburdened as they had to perform the above mentioned new roles as well as the old roles which consisted of mostly domestic chores. This happened because the burden of domestic work was not shared by most men. A study reveals that men performed only 20 percent of the total traditional household work. As a result of this working women with families had very little leisure or free time.

It is interesting to note that the problem of inequality between men and women got restricted to domestic arena, during that time. Political arena, in which gender biases were huge, was never neither addressed properly, nor was it even openly discussed. Sure there were some changes in the initial phase, as few women were elected as political representatives but overall till the disintegration of the Soviet Union, women remained highly underrepresented in the political arena.

Marx and Engels had argued that the first examples of class oppression was that of female by male and was caused by the existence of private property and consequently real freedom of women was possible only through communism. (Women and Communism: Selections from the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin 1950: 9, 35-36).

Also the Bolshevik Revolution was seen as an opportunity to liberate women. Article 22 of the first Soviet Constitution and article 122 of the Constitution of 1936, removed all legal restrictions that had placed women in an inferior position. Lenin tried to organize women workers and peasants and Stalin made use of woman power on collective farms and factories. Nonetheless during the Soviet time, gender and family policies have been fluctuating, according to the needs of the state and society. For example, Stalin formulated policies on gender and family that could advance industrialization, and birth rate. He never addressed issues like self-development of women or role of men in domestic arena.

Therefore one can conclude that throughout the Soviet era, there has been various laws and policies, formulated majorly according to the interests and aims of the society and the State, some of which made positive changes to the status and condition of the Soviet women and contributed in the improvement of the lives of the Soviet women, though not in a very big way. Ultimately, till the disintegration of the Soviet Union, overall, the status quo of women being inferior to men was maintained. The only important change came in terms of women education, but even that could not yield very impressive results when it came to occupying important and powerful positions within the Soviet State.

Nash (1970), has argued that although article 122 of the Soviet constitution provided for complete equality for women in economic, political, governmental, cultural and public activity, the soviet women, in reality were far from being equals. The lack of women at the top positions of the communist party, lack of women in the political arena, etc., clearly proved that the women in the Soviet Union were not as emancipated as they were expected or portrayed to be. Lenin had opined that the Soviet Union should ensure the inclusion of women in the productive labour and free them from 'domestic slavery'. Hence in the economic field the condition of women was good. They were employed everywhere from education industry to health industry to administrative field to the agricultural field. However they were still dually burdened- they had to take care both of the family and work. Therefore the living condition of working women was not very satisfactory. They enjoyed only two hours of leisure on an average working day compared to four hours enjoyed by men.

In Russia also similar conditions can be seen. Salganic (1994), has called the Russian women 'emancipated cinderellas'. This is so because at the policy level the Russian state has ensured equality to women and their emancipation. But at the social level things remain unchanged. Women are still expected to be economically dependent on men. Moreover even women prefer to do so. The author opines that both in the USSR and in Russia the patriarchal notions were

clothed in socialist slogans without any actual transformation. The women were gradually losing the patriarchal shackles but the state hastened the process in order to bring women into productive labour force. In the hasty move towards industrialization, women were overburdened and their living conditions were bad. This was so because the Russian state tried to free women from domestic chores and from the shackles of motherhood to bring them in the labour force but it could never free them considerably from the responsibility of the family. This combined with the fact that state made greater efforts to include women in the working force, left women overburdened. This gap increased patriarchy in later stages when women started preferring to be economically dependent on their husbands rather than bearing the responsibility of both family and workplace.

In the Soviet Union, due to socialism and communism, religion did not have enough space to flourish. This was a relatively better scenario for the Soviet women because almost all existing religions of the world, give inferior status to women and hence are very discriminatory towards women. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, in the newly independent nation of Russia, religion came to play a dominant role. In fact, during the initial phase of Russia, the conservatives were gaining grounds and had become quite influential. Orthodox christianity became very popular in Russia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This religious inclination of Russia proved to be very fatal for women. The church was against many personal rights and freedom of the Russian women. It believed and propagated that certain laws like legalization of abortion, right to divorce and the like were the mistakes of the past that happened during the Soviet times and it should no longer be carried forward.

“The very word “patriarchy” applies more literally in Russia than it does in other Christian religious traditions. The Russian Orthodox Church is headed by a man whose title is ‘patriarch’ ( Kizenko 2013). The Russian clergy is essentially all male because they follow Roman Catholicism. Hence most of the decisions taken regarding women by the church council are

patriarchal in nature. There is absence of any alternative opinion because of the domination of one particular gender. However the Russian women have been trying to enter into the church. Women have started filling the ranks of 'virtuosi'. This term was first coined by Webber (Kizenko 2013). A virtuosi is a person who strives to fulfil her/his most important goal of carrying forward her/his religious tradition. Nonetheless this seems to be an incredibly difficult task. It is extremely difficult, even for the daughters of the priests to enter the church. They are merely looked upon as privileged women ( because they are the daughters of priests), who are supposed to fulfill their religious duties by marrying clergymen and producing children (essentially males), who would grow up and provide services to the church. The maximum contribution a priest's daughter or wife can make is to study choir and get involved in the church choir. However there are many women who represent the Russian Orthodox Church as its lawyers. Many women have also started entering the religious media, but inside the church the say of women or their influence in decision making is still negligible.

During the Soviet times the religious inclination of the people was invisible because of the strict check on religious practices, by the state. After decades of propagating atheism, when the Soviet Union finally disintegrated, the Russians turned back to not only practicing religion but resorted to Orthodox Christianity, which is the most conservative form of Christianity. This makes it clear that the Soviet State did not succeed in penetrating its notion regarding the futility of religion, among the masses. Atheism in the Soviet Union, as such was just an imposition. The Soviet State failed miserably in changing the perception of the Soviet people regarding religion. Hence, the moment the socialist state was gone, a huge number of Russians openly welcomed religion into their lives.

The Russian women were encouraged to be inclined towards religion, because in most cases, women were unhappy about the sexualization and commodification of women, which was the result of the new market. This new market was also pressurizing the Russian women to follow the path of commodifying themselves and was also imposing its notions on them ( Kizenko 2013). But unfortunately inclination towards religion could not solve the problems of Russian

women. It surely was against the sexualization and commodification of women but had other problematic ideas which gave an inferior status and position to women.

The political scenario of Russia has also not been very conducive for the emancipation of women. The coming of Putin, has given a masculinist colour to Russia. The consolidation of exclusive masculinist power under Putin, has forced many feminist projects to either stop, or very little importance has been given to these organizations. Groups, within Russia have emerged, who have protested against the masculinist approach of Putin- the 'Pussy Riot', being one of them. It was a group of women protesting against 'patriarchy' being perpetuated through religion and the masculinist approach of Putin, who were arrested in 2012, and charged with hooliganism. 'Feminism' has come to mean a degraded word in Russia. Feminists, are looked upon by many Russians as women who are not fulfilled in their personal lives and hence want to take out all their frustrations on men (the daily beast, 3/10/2014). This change has come about in Russia due to the structural changes it has undergone after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. A new market was introduced in Russia which replaced the older pictures of working women during the Soviet days, with the posters of beautiful young women, strategically being used to create markets for products by sexualising and commodifying them. Hence the perception of women changed drastically when compared to the Soviet times. The new political system and the coming of Putin contributed in masculinizing Russia further. The Christian Orthodox Church, which is influential politically, played a major role in socializing the Russian people with patriarchal notions.

Another important reason for the degraded condition of the Russian women, can be traced back to the Soviet era. During the 19th century, the soviet women seemed to enjoy better social status and position than women of other countries. "Women were encouraged and expected to advance in their studies and professional training, to become scientists, journalists, doctors, engineers. They were not barred from such male-marked jobs as truck driver or construction worker. Even when the government balked at the idea of Soviet women in combat during World War II, the

female students it had trained as potential soldiers lobbied vociferously and successfully to be admitted into the fighting ranks. Yet, as studies by Wendy Goldm, Barbara Alpern Engel, Lynne Attwood, and a host of other scholars have revealed, Soviet women's emancipation declared the achievement of women's equality and never realized it. The government did not address the major obstacles that women encountered on the job and the domestic obligations they tacitly absorbed. When the country was not wracked by war and desperate for every citizen's self-sacrifice, women were denied high-wage jobs and leadership positions. While the Soviet command economy poured money into heavy industry, women workers were confined to light industry requiring lesser skills and paying lower salaries; on the poorly funded and technically under equipped collective farms, women subsisted as the majority of an impoverished labor force. Women suffered sexual harassment on the job as a matter of course, with no reliable means of protection" ( Holmgren 2013). There was absence of effort from the side of the Soviet State to educate or socialize its citizens regarding gendered roles within the domestic sphere. As such the Soviet women continued to play the role of primary caregivers and the entire domestic responsibilities rested on their shoulders, as a result of which they faced the problem of 'double burden'. In the 1970s, the Soviet state resorted to gender stereotypes when they blamed the rise in male hooliganism and alcoholism on 'masculinized women'. Gorbachev, tried to free the Soviet women from the problem of double burden, during the times of Perestroika by asking them to return to their domestic responsibilities, as it was their natural domain. Therefore, the transition phase brought to the forefront, many patriarchal notions, that were always present in the Soviet Union, both in the state and among people, but could never surface explicitly. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, these notions surfaced remarkably because they got the conducive environment in which the economic market, the political scenario and religion played important roles. Therefore the newly formed Russian Federation had more patriarchal tendencies.

Yet Russia has been successful in solving many issues related to women, domestic violence being one of them. Apart from solving the problem of domestic violence by the Russian state, a large number of Russian women are able to avail education and higher education, and abortion, though vociferously debated, is still legal. However these can not be the basis of claiming

women emancipation in Russia, as the core issues surrounding women, their reproductive rights, their sexuality, their gender specific roles in the domestic sphere and in the society still remain unchallenged. Moreover even today, the presence of women in influential and powerful positions is negligible.

However, one has to acknowledge that all is not bad for the Russian women. There are groups like 'Femen' and 'Pussy riots' which are challenging the patriarchal structure of Russia. Despite enormous efforts from the Russian clergy and the conservatives to ban abortion, the Russian women still enjoy this right. There are political groups like 'The Women of Russia', who had won seats in the parliament from 1993 to 995. Hence, the condition of Russian women, though not very good, does not seem to be hopeless.

## Chapter 4: The Politics of Abortion in The USSR

The Soviet Union, established after the Revolution of 1917, was one of the most radical states in Europe. Its ideas on the state, the government and the society was completely different from the mainstream western ideas. The Soviet Union proposed very different ideas regarding the family structure, roles of men and women and the working class. Lenin had stated, "*The success of a revolution depends on the participation of women.*" ( Si-eun 2008). Hence it is clear that the leaders of the Soviet Union had a very different picture of women, which was absent in any European country at that time. Lenin highly valued the support of women and wanted the Soviet State to work for their emancipation. It is true that Lenin's ideas failed to penetrate the Soviet society, but he tried hard to convince his party members about emancipating women and also succeeded in formulating progressive policies and laws. Constitutionally women were given equal status. In 1920, abortion was legalized in the USSR. This was indeed a very big step not just for the Soviet society but also in the international scenario where, in most nations, the mainstream idea was against abortion. In fact in many countries, this was never even a point of debate.

The Soviet State, during its inception was not in favour of the family structure. The Bolsheviks wanted to eliminate this structure. They argued that the structure of family had kept women in chains for a very long time and leaders like Lenin argued that women had to come out of their domestic slavery, if they wanted to empower themselves. Hence, laws on divorce became very flexible, women were given the right to divorce, abortion was legalized, etc. The aim of the Bolsheviks was to create a community where the labour of women would be replaced by communal dining halls, day care centres and the like. These ideas manifested themselves through legal measures that were taken to improve the status and condition of women in the society. The idea was to create a society which did not have the influence of capitalism and the family structure existing during that time, which created gender hierarchies, keeping men at the centre as head of the family, was seen to be the result of Capitalism. Alexandra kollontai, was of the

opinion that family should be a union of comradeship, in which women and men would be equal to each other and would share roles inside the family(Si-eun 2008). This would mean that women would no longer have to pay servitude to the men.

The legalization of abortion in the USSR, had its roots in Marxism and Socialism. The Soviet state was the first state to have widely and openly legalized abortion and saw it as a woman's right. Marxists saw abortion as a right of a woman, which should be granted to them in order to liberate them from the oppressions of capitalism, marriage and family. "A Marxist believes that personality and human value are imparted by the external and economic environment, not by any inherent spiritual value, or even by biological processes . . . . The fetus, according to a Marxist, becomes a person when he is judged as such by 'someone of higher wisdom.' The humanity of the fetus depends upon how the mother perceives the 'social relationship' that exists between them. If the mother desires to keep the baby, then she 'fantasizes' it into becoming a human being. But, if she does not want the pregnancy, 'it is something else entirely.' Her opinion of the fetus thereby denies it of personhood . . . . 'Biological processes,' says Albury, 'do not carry automatic moral values as the Right to Life suggests . . . . Human economic, social and political relationships create moral values'" (Marxism and abortion 1988). Essentially the debate surrounding abortion, is related to the personal rights of women. The Soviet Union was the first state to have legalized abortion, even though it did not recognize this as a personal right of a woman. It had the intention of ending the gender biases existing in the society.

In 1913, when abortion was illegal everywhere, Lenin had written that there was an immediate need to eliminate all laws against abortion or against the sale and purchase of materials talking about contraceptives. Hence in the early days of the Soviet Union, the State strived took steps to ensure socio- economic and political rights of women.

The Decree on Abortion, brought in 1920 in the Soviet Union was as follows:

"People's Commissariat of Health, On the Protection of Women's Health. November 18, 1920

During the past decades the number of women resorting to artificial discontinuation of pregnancy has grown both in the West and in this country. The legislation of all countries combats this evil by punishing the woman who chooses to have an abortion and the doctor who makes it. Without leading to favorable results, this method of combating abortions has driven the operation underground and made the woman a victim of mercenary and often ignorant quacks who make a profession of secret operations. As a result, up to 50 per cent of such women are infected in the course of operation, and up to 4 per cent of them die.

The Workers' and Peasants' Government is conscious of this serious evil to the community. It combats this evil by propaganda against abortions among working women. By working for socialism, and by introducing the protection of maternity and infancy on an extensive scale, it feels assured of achieving the gradual disappearance of this evil. But as the moral survivals of the past and the difficult economic conditions of the present still compel many women to resort to this operation, the People's Commissariats of Health and of Justice, anxious to protect the health of the women and considering that the method of repressions in this field fails entirely to achieve this aim, have decided:

- (1) To permit such operations to be made freely and without any charge in Soviet hospitals, where conditions are assured of minimizing the harm of the operation.
- (2) Absolutely to forbid anyone but a doctor to carry out this operation.
- (3) Any nurse or midwife found guilty of making such an operation will be deprived of the right to practice, and tried by a People's Court.
- (4) A doctor carrying out an abortion in his private practice with mercenary aims will be called to account by a People's Court.

People's Commissar of Health, N. Semashko.

People's Commissar of Justice, Kurskii." (Semashko 1924).

From the above decree it is clear that the Soviet State did not declare that it had legalized abortion because it was the personal right of a woman. Instead it agreed that abortion was evil. However to eliminate it fully, first women and the society had to be uplifted both economically and socially. If this was not done then the ban on abortion would adversely affect women. They would be pushed to go through abortion via underground means which were highly risky and life threatening. This was done because the Soviet State knew that it was impossible, at that point of time because the society was not fully ready for this. It is true that Lenin had talked about abortion as a personal right of women but both internationally and in the USSR, the society was not ready for such a discourse. Therefore the Soviet State resorted to an explanation that would not antagonize the people and at the same time would also give the Soviet women their rights.

This struggle for the emancipation of women ended after the death of Lenin. In 1936 Stalin criminalized abortion. The reasons for this were purely economical. In the 1920s, when women got the right to abort, the demographic condition of the USSR was not a major concern. Soloman (1992) argues that for most part of the 1920s, the demographic argument that is the fear of depopulation, played a minor role in the debates regarding the legalization of abortion in the USSR. However, in the post war decade, in countries like Germany and France, the fear of depopulation played a major role in their stands against the legalization of abortion. This was so because the demographic situation of USSR was very different from that of Germany and France. USSR had a good population and even after the war its recovery was rapid. The demographic argument played a minor role till the 1930s, but later on when the fear of depopulation gripped USSR, it started being used widely, even in the medical discourse, where this argument had been totally absent. At that time, the population of the USSR, was sufficient to provide human resource for the economic development of the Soviet state. Moreover the State wanted to make full utilization of the available resources, by including women into the working force. Many leaders, including Lenin were of the opinion that there was no point in increasing the population when the existing economic condition of the Soviet State was not very satisfactory. It was important to end the existing inequalities of the society and also poverty, first. To end discrimination against women, one of the many inequalities existing in the Soviet Union

at that point of time, it was important to urge them to come out of their homes and gain economic independence in order to better the quality of their lives. For women, the liberty to work, had many pre requisites, like lessening the burden of family including the bearing and rearing of children from the shoulders of women. For this it was important to legalize abortion, so that women had the choice of not having such responsibilities if they thought that working and raising children simultaneously would put extra pressure on them.

Unfortunately what was absent in this process is rather an important step towards the emancipation of women. The gender roles performed within the family structure remained almost unchanged. The reorganization of the traditional gender roles would have released the pressure from those women who were working and had families.

Avdeev, Blum and Troitskaya, (1995) talk about t abortion during the Soviet era and after that in Russia. They talk in detail about different phases in which abortion was legalized and criminalized. They argue that legalization of abortion in 1920 was ‘one of the most fundamental breaks from Czarist era, and a legal landmark that was to profoundly affect population behavior.’ Hence the authors’ main point of argument is that abortion was a social phenomenon which was used by both the Soviet State as a political tool to affect the pattern of population.

During the 1930s, the Soviet Union was in a crisis. The World War had taken a toll on the Soviet Union. Before this, there was a shortage of male population in the Soviet Union which very likely would have affected the economy, if it had been for any other nation, as in most nations the working population comprises of generally the males. However in the erstwhile Soviet Union, this situation was compensated for, because, since the inception of the Soviet State women were facilitated into the labour force. A large number of women were employed in the factories and the collective farms. Moreover the overall demography was not in a bad state.

By 1930s, the Soviet Union realized that its demographic situation was getting imbalanced. This was due to many reasons like the World War, whose effect was not visible earlier, famines, the process of collectivization and Stalin’s purges which took many lives.

When Stalin had come to power, he very rigorously initiated the process of industrialization. Industrialization obviously required a good amount of human resource. Even after the involvement of the female population into the working force, Stalin realized that it would not be sufficient to continue with the process of industrialization. Therefore it became urgently important to increase the population of the Soviet State. In order to ensure the increase in the population many policies and laws were gradually altered by the Soviet State. The first step was to ban abortion. It is also important to remember that abortion was the primary means of contraception used in the USSR. Hence the state was under the impression that this step would definitely increase the population. Gradually divorce laws were made more restrictive and 'family' again became an important unit of the society. Women were now encouraged to have more children. The concept of 'motherhood', started being glorified. Mothers with more number of children were given monetary compensations and titles of honour. Women were asked to produce more children and inculcate into them the ideas of socialism, as a service to their socialist state (Avdeev, Blum and Troitskaya 1995) The responsibility of bearing and rearing children was once again made the primary task of the Soviet women.

However, as far as abortion was concerned, the Soviet women kept resorting to it. The official figures of the Soviet Union showed a decline in the number of abortions after it was banned by the Soviet State, but the Soviet women used this process as contraception on a regular basis through underground medical clinics. This worsened the condition of women because, proper facilities were not provided to them, the conditions under which abortions were performed were very unhygienic and the doctors who performed abortions began to charge more. Since the risks were high and there were provisions for legal course of action if abortion was practiced, there was a fall in the number of abortions performed, even unofficially, but most women still chose this option.

The decree of 1936 was as follows:

1. Abortion, in view of the undeniable harm which it causes to health, is forbidden, whether in hospitals or in special nursing homes, or in the private houses of doctors or pregnant women. Abortion may be induced only when continuation of the pregnancy puts the pregnant woman's life in danger or threatens to cause serious injury to her health, or else in cases of severe hereditary diseases of the parents, and then it may only be effected in hospitals and in maternity homes.
2. If an abortion is performed outside a hospital, or in a hospital but in contravention of the above, the doctor who has performed the operation is liable to a term of imprisonment of between one year and two years. If an abortion is performed in unhygienic surroundings, or by a person who is not medically qualified, the punishment shall not be less than three years detention.
3. Where the woman is induced by some other person to undergo abortion, that person shall suffer detention for two years.
4. Pregnant women who undergo abortion in contravention of the above, shall be punished by public reprimand, and, if the offence is repeated, by a fine of up to 300 roubles.

This was a drastic change brought in the Soviet Union. Hence for a very long time abortions were performed illegally in underground clinics but over time the number of abortions performed fell, though not drastically.

The supporters of anti abortion laws and policies in the Soviet Union started claiming that women had no rights to reject the 'joys of motherhood.' It now became the patriotic duty of the Soviet mothers to increase the toiling population by producing more and more children. The reactionary cry of 'hero mothers, give birth to increase production', became very common

(Jaquith 2011). The bolsheviks openly criticized Stalin for taking such measures. Trotsky was totally against this state enforced motherhood. Once when a judge justified the ban on abortions on the pretext of demography, Lenin replied:

“Then have the kindness to bear them yourselves,” might be the answer to the high judge of millions of toiling women, if the bureaucracy had not sealed their lips... . These gentlemen have, it seems, completely forgotten that socialism was to remove the cause which impels women to abortion, and not force her into the ‘joys of motherhood’ with the help of foul police interference in what is to every woman the most intimate sphere of life.” (Trotsky 1936).

In 1936, the official figures for population given by the Soviet Union was around 170 million (according to the census of 1939). After this there were no census conducted till 1959. In 1952 the rate of increase of population was 19 percent, in 1953 it became 20 percent and in 1954 it was 24 percent. From 1955 the rate of increase in population started declining. In 1955 it dropped to 22 percent and in 1956 it became 20 percent (Brackett 1964).

The rate of increase in population, started to fall after 1955, because in 1955 abortion was again decriminalized. This was done not so much because the population of the USSR had been stabilized compared to earlier years, rather the real reason was something different. After the Second World War, which was also known as the Great Patriotic War, the male population of the USSR had again gone down, so women were asked to join the working force again. Therefore ‘abortion’, was being used as a strategic tool to regulate population and also to ensure economic development and industrialization by using the services of women in the absence of men.

In 1934 the percentage of abortions performed in the Soviet Union was at 20, in 1936 it was 17 percent. After the ban on abortion, the percentage fell to 7 percent in 1937. In 1940 it was 12 percent. After the decriminalization of abortion in 1955, the percentage again increased. In 1957

it was 54 percent. It went up to 73 percent in 1965. Since then the percentage of abortions performed has been consistent ranging from 60 to 70 percent, till the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Johnston 2017).

The Soviet Union was a strong critique of the Malthusian Theory of Population. However it could not avoid playing an important role in the regulation of its population. Its doctrines related to abortion makes it clear that the Soviet State regulated the size and growth of its population, as one of its most important responsibilities.

Therefore it becomes clear that the Soviet State was using abortion as a tool to regulate its demographic needs. Laws and policies surrounding abortion had nothing to do with the right of women over their bodies.

“The widespread reliance on abortion in the Soviet Union, occasionally even referred to as an “abortion culture”, has been documented in a number of studies. However, the notoriously high abortion rates are not the only reason why the Soviet case stands out in the global history of abortion. Having decriminalised abortion by decree in 1920, Soviet Russia became the first country in the world where the termination of pregnancy was discussed as a legalised phenomenon.” ( Skjulestad 2012). However the manner in which the abortion debate was carried forward in the Soviet Union and the constant changes in the laws related to abortion, makes one wonder if the legalization of abortion in 1920, was in fact, a path breaking decision.

When one looks at the history of abortion in the Soviet Union, it is very inconsistent. The fluctuation in policies and laws surrounding abortion, was the

result of the contradictory ideas and notions of its leadership, just like any other state. “The onset of Stalinism led to a stifling of the discussion (Buckley 1989: 108). For ‘reasons to do with social change, labour discipline, dislocation, the need for emotional support, reaction against the ‘liberation’ of the 1920s, birth rates and anxiety about war (Buckley 1989: 129),’ the state set out to promote stable, nuclear families. Along the new ideological lines, childbirth and motherhood were idealised; on 27th June 1936, abortion was outlawed altogether. It remained prohibited until 1955 – two years after Stalin’s death – when abortion was legalised again. Increasingly adapted to fit the new ideology, the abortion discourse of the 1930s started to diverge from the debates of the preceding years. These developments can be illustrated by the following quotes from two abortion essays (1936 and 1938 respectively):

‘Our vast, rich country needs to be populated by numerous, strong, healthy and happy peoples (narod), guided by the Communist Party [that is] headed by the brilliant Stalin. Therefore, we are resolutely against abortion and in favour of strong and serious marriages, in favour of the healthy, happy Soviet family with many children.’” (Skjulestad 2012).

The major concern of the Soviet State was to ensure the increase in population. The population of the Soviet Union was growing, but the pace at which it was growing was not considered fast enough, especially for Stalin’s vision of industrialization in the Soviet Union (Heer 1965).

It is true that Lenin genuinely wanted to emancipate and empower the Soviet women. Therefore during his time, many laws and policies came up that aimed at bringing equality among the sexes. Lenin believed that abortion was the personal right of a woman, hence he lobbied in his party for the support to legalize abortion. However this aim of Lenin could not be fully materialized and

gradually faded away. This happened due to the completely opposite ideas Lenin and Stalin had about the Soviet society.

Lenin was of the opinion that women could gain equality in the society through breaking the chains of domestic slavery and by gaining economic independence. Hence he asked the Soviet women to get involved in the Soviet economy. His party members on the other hand, though were not appreciative of certain laws and policies related to women, agreed with him because according to them, it was the economic need of the time. During the First World War, the Soviet Union had lost many lives due to which the male population had declined drastically, hence there was shortage of human resource in the Soviet economy. Therefore they decided to utilize the female population to increase productivity, which required them to be relieved of their domestic responsibilities. Less children would mean lesser responsibilities. One also needs to keep in mind that abortion was the only form of contraception known to the Soviet people, during that time and therefore legalizing abortion made it easier for women to deal with unwanted pregnancies.

Another important reason behind legalizing abortion was that the economic condition of the Soviet Union at that time was not favorable for a big population.

Stalin on the other hand prioritized industrialization and economic needs of the Soviet Union over the true emancipation of women. He was of the opinion that the Soviet economy was not in the state to bear the cost of community kitchens and collective childcare centers, which were started by Lenin to encourage

community living which is an important part of socialism and also to relieve women of their individual domestic responsibilities. Instead he believed that the population of the Soviet Union had to be increased in order to ensure industrialization at a good pace. The human resource of the Soviet Union was not sufficient for Stalin's plan for industrialization, even after including the female population. The Second World War, or The Great Patriotic War had taken a heavy toll on the population of the Soviet Union. Therefore Stalin urgently wanted to increase the population of the Soviet Union. Therefore he banned abortion.

Another important point of difference between Lenin and Stalin was related to the family structure. Lenin opined that the structure of the family system was such that it was inherently patriarchal and was the best perpetuator of capitalism in the Soviet society. Hence the family system had to be dissolved gradually, through community living. Hence Lenin formulated laws and policies that would discourage the family system, like making divorce laws less restrictive, giving the right to divorce to women, community childcare centers, etc. Stalin had completely opposite views on the family structure. He saw 'family' as the basic unit of the economic system. He believed that the family structure existing at that time was a necessity for economic development of the Soviet State because the family system ensured the bearing and rearing of children and demography was a major concern for Stalin. But at the same time he also ensured the participation of women in the work force. This put the Soviet women in a more oppressed position because now they had to be mothers producing children in the service of the Soviet State and at the same time had to work and earn.

The following chart shows the family size of women who had access to abortion in 1926, six years after the legalization of abortion in the Soviet Union:

Number of Children	Total percentage of Women Preferring Different number of Children
None	17
One	30
Two	24
Three	14
Four	7

Source: Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation/Ed. By B.E.Clements, B.A. Engel and Ch.D.Worbec. University of California Press 1991 p. 254.

One can see how most of the Soviet women preferred to have one or two children. The third option preferred by most women, during that time was to have no children at all.

By 1936, even in the rural areas, the rate of abortion was 1.3 times that of birth. (Severyanova and Anisimovab 2013). Therefore the Soviet State became convinced that the threat to depopulation was real. The moment it realized this fact, it criminalized abortion. A large number of the Soviet women resorted to abortion not only because of the the lower availability of contraceptives, but also because this method was cheap as the State was providing free medical facilities related to abortion, during that time.

After the criminalization of abortion in 1936, the number of abortions fell to a large extent. This was so because resorting to abortion or practicing it, both involved the risk of being penalized. Another reason was that underground abortion facilities were highly unhygienic and involved the risk of infections which could prove to be fatal. Hence the number of abortions came down. The table below gives the statistics for the number of abortions performed between 1936 to 1939.

Year	Total number of abortions
1936	803058
1937	682823
1938	429695
1939	464246

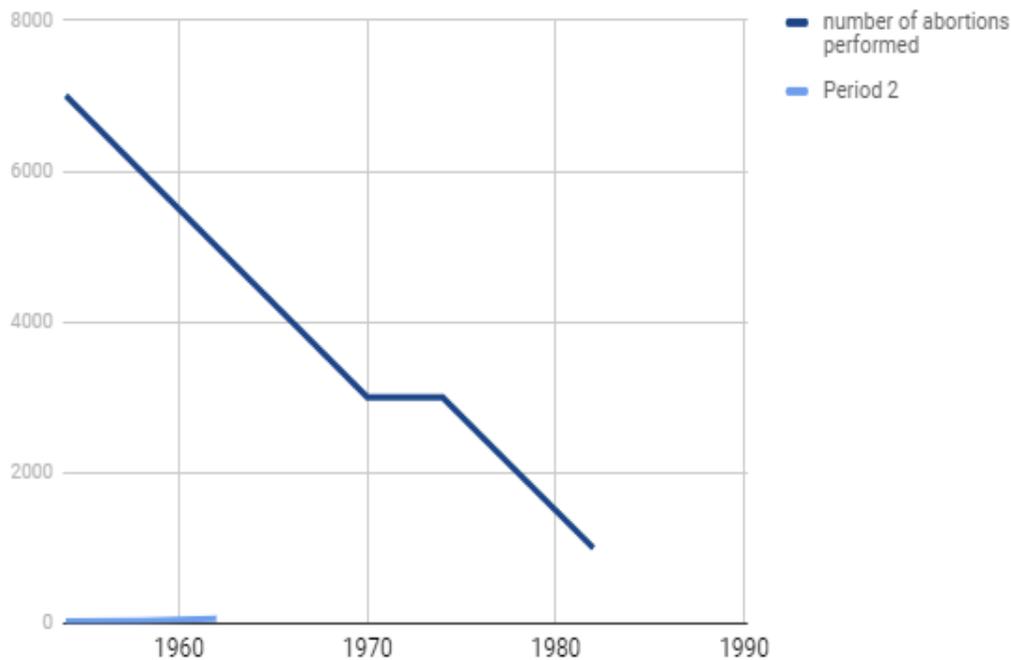
The data for this table is taken from “The History of Abortion Statistics in Russia and the USSR from 1900 to 1991”, by Alexandre Avdeev, Alain Blum and Irina Troitskaya.

In 1955, abortion was decriminalized again after Stalin’s death. This opened up a new period in which contraceptives gradually started becoming acceptable and accessible. However between 1955 to 1958, there was a sharp increase in the number of abortions.(Avdeev, Blum and Troitskaya 1995). The most important reason behind legalizing abortion again, was to maintain the population of the USSR, which by 1954 had become more or less stabilized.

The following graph shows the number of abortions performed between 1960 to 1991. It shows a large number of abortions being performed in the early 1960s, just after the decriminalization of abortion, which decreases towards the 1970s

and decreases further in the 1980s.

Number of abortions performed between 1960 to 1990



The data for this graph has been taken from “The History of Abortion Statistics in Russia and the USSR from 1900 to 1991”, by Alexandre Avdeev, Alain Blum and Irina Troitskaya.

The new laws surrounding abortion formulated in 1955, produced a sharp and rapid increase in the number of abortions, which peaked in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The number of abortions then stabilized. The decrease in the number of abortions in the 1970s and 1980s was due to the fact that by that time, the Soviet women had started using contraceptives due to the increase in its acceptability and availability.

In 1959, Khrushchev had very vaguely expressed a pronatalist policy (Avdeev, Blum and Troitskaya 1995). Therefore a policy of encouraging contraceptives was undertaken. In the beginning this policy was not very successful, but towards 1970s and 1980s, it became successful in reducing the number of abortions.

Avdeev, Blum and Troitskaya (1995), had stated, “In the mid-1960s, of the 8 million abortions registered in the USSR, there were roughly 7 million 'complete' abortions induced in a medical establishment, that is, about 150 abortions for 100 live births. After 1965, there is a slow but steady fall. The abortion ratio was 148 in 1970, 138 in 1975, 130 in 1980 and the present level, in 1990, is 124. In Russia, the total abortion rate only really started to decline after the mid-1970s; from 4.2 at that time, it has fallen to 2.6 today. The gradual convergence of the age patterns of fertility and abortion suggests that women are increasingly using other forms of birth control.”

The vague resortment of Khrushchev to pronatalist policies reveals the Soviet dilemma regarding its demographic situation. Even though abortion was still legal, Khrushchev took a vague pronatalist stand because the state was not sure about any rigid policy regarding its demography. It was a period when the Soviet Union did not know if they should focus completely on increasing the population or on controlling it.

Due to the increase in contraceptives, not only did the number of abortions come down, but also the population of the erstwhile Soviet Union was no longer in a very bad shape. In 1979, the population of the Soviet Union was 262 million and in 1989 it became 286 million. The population of the USSR in 1926 was 148 million, which became 168 million in 1939, which was three years after the criminalization of abortion. By 1959 the population of the Soviet Union

became 209 million, which was four years after the decriminalization of abortion in the Soviet Union. By 1959, the demography of the Soviet Union had started changing because contraceptives had been gaining popularity, hence the Soviet women had started using them; as the probability of infertility was more after abortion.

Therefore the Soviet State succeeded in securing its interests and maintaining its desired demography, by formulating and reformulating policies and laws around abortion. In the beginning abortion was legal which ensured the participation of women in the working force and when the state needed to increase its population, hence it banned abortions. Abortion was legalized again in 1955, when the population of the Soviet Union got somewhat stabilized. However, the legalization was combined with the introduction of contraceptives which has less probability of causing infertility. Hence the population of Soviet Union steadily improved.

Thus it becomes clear that the fluctuating laws and policies formulated around abortion, was the result of the different interests, the State had, at different points of time. These interests were influenced by different views and ideas that the Soviet leaders had.

Therefore abortion, even in the Soviet Union could not be seen as a personal right of a woman, though Lenin had tried to open up this debate long back but it got lost in the process of fulfilling economic needs of the Soviet Union. 'Abortion' was merely reduced to an instrument, which was used to control the bodies of women and regulate their choices and behavior according to the requirement for increasing or decreasing the population of the Soviet Union.

## **Chapter 5: The Politics of Abortion in Russia**

The contemporary Russian state has been considered to be the successor of the erstwhile Socialist Soviet Union. During the time of the Soviet Union, Russia was the largest republic. Hence it was taken to be the successor of the former Soviet Union after its disintegration. It came into existence in 1991, when the Soviet Union disintegrated. There were many structural changes that were brought when contemporary Russia came into existence, both in the political and economic arena. Unlike the former Soviet Union, democracy was adopted in Russia and markets were liberalized. Therefore, contemporary Russia did not follow completely the course taken by the Soviet Union. It also did not carry forward the Socialist legacy of the Soviet Union, as was thought it would. Therefore one of the important changes that took place after the inception of Russia as an independent state, was the flourishing of Orthodox Christianity. 'Atheism', which was propagated by the erstwhile Soviet Union, was not embraced by the Russians, after the disintegration of the USSR. The increment in the importance of 'religion', socially, influenced the political scenario of Russia to a considerable degree.

Abortion which was legalized by the Soviet Union in the 1920s, making it the first country in the world to do so, was being vigorously challenged by the citizens of contemporary Russia. One of the major reason behind this is the growth of orthodox christianity in Russia. In this religion abortion is seen as a 'sin'.

The Orthodox Church has had a long history of outspoken condemnation of abortion. The idea that the 'unborn child' which in medical terms is known as the fetus, possesses a soul, has been

propagated by the orthodox church for centuries. *'Didache'*, is the oldest christian document that has outrageously criticised abortion (Orthodox Christians for Life 2002). This document also known as 'The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles', is a very old document, dating back to, around, the later phase of the first century. "Other similar condemnations of the practice are found in Canon 63 of the Council of Elvira (306AD); Cannon 21 of the Council of Ankara (314AD); but it is in Cannon 91 of the Quinsext Ecumenical Council (Trullo, 692AD) that the Church's teaching on abortion took its final expression and was formally codified in the document The Photian Collection in 883AD, which remains unaltered to this day." (Orthodox Christians for life 2002).

The christian orthodox church considers abortion to be a pre planned murder and the person performing abortion as well as the woman who has asked for abortion, are considered to be murderers. Tough in the present scenario, the church does not have any authority, to give any kind of punishment for those practicing and resorting to abortion, there are religious laws like going through penance for ten years, which is the same for a murderer. This clearly indicates to the fact that in the eyes of religion, the complicated issue of abortion is just about killing and murder. The mere acknowledgement of personal rights of women, alo does not exist. Women are seen as a community, who are meant to serve - the family, the society and the human race. The history of christian orthodox religion reveals that the female followers and believers of this religion saw having children as their religious obligation in order to add more numbers to this religion, so as to facilitate the spread of this religion across the globe.

The christian orthodox church accepts abortion only if the life of the mother is at stake. The christian orthodox church has had an anti abortion stand since its inception. This church has a firm belief that abortion is murder. Therefore at a seminar at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary on Orthodox Approach to Contemporary Medical Ethics, it was concluded that:

“...human life begins at the moment of conception and all who hold life sacred and worthy of preservation whenever possible are obliged at all costs to defend the lives of the unborn children regardless of the stage of their embryonic development” (Orthodox Christians for Life 2002). In 1973, the All American council of the Orthodox Church had stated:

“The very moral foundations of our society are being subjected to doubt, and there is no open objection...the whole meaning and context of life is being reduced to the seeking of material goals, external successes, and the gratification of the senses...As a horrible symbol of this moral decay I cite the legalization of abortion, this frightening transgression of the most sacred of all Divine commandments.” (Orthodox Christians for Life 2002).

Hence when orthodox christianity was embraced in contemporary Russia, by a large number of people, its notions on abortion came in conflict with Russia’s pro abortion laws and policies, which had been carried down from the Soviet era.

Authors like Chandler have argued that the Russian state has evidently shown its gender inequality through the abrupt policies on abortion. Chandler (2009) has argued that Russia from the beginning has been a post-communist pronatalist state, owing to religious orthodoxy which grew after the disintegration of USSR and other conservative elements of the society which somehow considerably influenced Russia politically. This resulted in abrupt policies against abortion, from time to time and simultaneously increased the glorification of ‘motherhood’ and deepened further the gendered notions already existing in the Russian society. It is true that in the contemporary Russian state, the status of women has gone down, in certain respects, when compared to the Soviet era. Salganic opines that the russian women can be called ‘emancipated Cinderellas’, due to their condition in the russian society. (Salganic 1994). As explained in the earlier chapter, this is so because at the policy level the Russian state has ensured equality to women and their emancipation. But at the social level things remain unchanged. Women are still expected to be economically dependent on men. Moreover even women prefer to do so. The author opines that both in the USSR and in Russia the patriarchal notions were clothed in socialist slogans without any actual transformation. The women were gradually losing the

patriarchal shackles but the state hastened the process in order to bring women into productive labour force. In the hasty move towards industrialization, women were overburdened and their living conditions were bad. This was so because the Russian state tried to free women from domestic chores and from the shackles of motherhood to bring them in the labour force but it could never free them considerably from the responsibility of the family. This combined with the fact that state made greater efforts to include women in the working force, left women overburdened. This gap increased patriarchy in later stages when women started preferring to be economically dependent on their husbands rather than bearing the responsibility of both family and workplace.

Many people saw legalization of abortion as a mistake done by the Soviet state and the contemporary Russia and wanted the Russian state to throw away the burdens of the delegitimized past by criminalizing abortion. In Russia ‘abortion’, has not only remained a major topic of discussion in the social arena but its political importance has time and again been reflected through the policies of the Russian state. Scholars like Fish (2013), have stated that due to the increased use of contraceptives, the rates of abortion has been declining gradually, from the erstwhile USSR to present Russia. However the Orthodox Church leaders and nationalists, in the Russian Federation have been campaigning to criminalize abortion so as to morally correct the permissive Soviet abortion policies and to give a practical solution to the country’s low birth rate.

According to the theory of Realism, the core unit of the political structure is the state and it is the primary requirement of the state to ensure its survival. The traditional definition of a state, states that the state has four essential components :

1. Territory
2. Government
3. Sovereignty

#### 4. Population

Population is an important component for any state because it provides human resource to the state. Therefore almost every state tries to regulate its population according to the economic needs of the time. If population is taken out of the list of essential components of a state, then the very existence of the state in question, would be wiped out. Therefore, in the political scenario, which is majoritily based on the principles of ‘realism’, the states, in order to ensure their survival, resort to all kinds of means, and regulating the population is one of them.

The fear of survival was present in both the erstwhile Soviet Union and in the contemporary Russian state. Therefore both have tried to regulate the population of their respective states and this process has involved the debate surrounding abortion. This has happened because in the former Soviet Union, abortion was the most widely used method of contraception. Hence to regulate the population, the state had to formulate and reformulate laws and policies surrounding the issue of abortion. In 1920s when the population of the newly formed Soviet Union was not a concern, abortion was legalized to facilitate the entry of women into the working force and when the population needed to be expanded, the Soviet state criminalized abortion in 1936, which was again decriminalized in 1955. By the time Russia became an independent nation, it was recognized that the density of population is low in Russia.

According to the data provided by the United Nations, in 2016 the population of the contemporary Russian state was 143440 and the density of population was 8.8. per kilometre square. Contemporary Russian state consists of 1.91 per cent of the total population. The table below shows the statistics on population of the Russian Federation from 1990 to 2017.

Year	Population	Yearly % change
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2017	143,375,006	-0.05 %
2016	143,439,832	-0.01 %
2015	143,456,918	0.04 %
2010	143,158,099	-0.06 %
2005	143,622,566	-0.38 %
2000	146,400,951	-0.26 %
1995	148,293,265	0.1 %
1990	147,568,552	0.63 %

The data for this table is based on the statistics provided by the United Nations.

During the time of the Soviet Union, the population was a major concern for a very long time. The Soviet state had undergone two very big wars which had negatively impacted the demographic situation of the Soviet Union. Especially 1930s onward, the problem of population had been an area of concern for the Soviet leaders. The famine, the process of collectivization and the ‘purge’ ordered by Stalin, contributed majorly to the decline in population of the Soviet Union. After its disintegration, the independent state called the Russian Federation also faced the same problem. In fact the table constructed above, clearly shows that in contemporary Russia, the population has decreased over the years, though the rate of decrease has more or less progressed.

These existing conditions related to demography have time and again encouraged both the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation to resort to the politics of abortion. In the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, abortion was the primary method of contraception. In socialist ideology, there is no normative difference between contraception and abortion; both have legitimacy (Stenvoll 2011). In other words, all birth control means, be it contraceptives or abortion are seen equally. The scenario existing in most of the other countries, where contraceptives are relatively acceptable and has more legitimacy than abortion, stood untrue for the erstwhile Soviet Union. There was no moral policing (at least openly), in the Soviet Union regarding abortion and one of the major reasons behind this was that the socialist state of the Soviet Union had legalized abortion very early, which over the years normalized this phenomena as a huge number of people practiced it and resorted to it. In socialist countries like the former USSR and countries of Central and Eastern Europe, abortion was not seen as a moral evil. Abortion has had a long history and it has been used since the time when other contraceptives, either did not exist or were not mass produced. This made abortion a reliable source for birth control (Stloukal 1999). Therefore the socialist states resorted to abortion for regulating the population. There were many conceptualizations around contraceptives, like birth control pills have side effect, due to which many women avoided them. There was no proper knowledge about contraceptives, which discouraged people from using them. The states, including the Soviet state never spread the knowledge of contraceptives and during the 1970s, pills were banned (United Nations 2002).

Karpov and Kääriäinen (2005) opine that this resortment to abortion during the Soviet era was carried forward by the Russian Federation which gave rise to the phenomena known as ‘abortion culture’. The high abortion rate in the former USSR and in contemporary Russia has come to be noticed, however one should not come to the conclusion that this is not problematic for the present Russian state or was not problematic for the erstwhile USSR. The erstwhile Soviet Union and the present Russia problematized this issue in a manner that was completely different from

the mainstream notions on this issue, which was mostly the western perspective. According to the western perspective abortion was morally wrong and hence had to be criminalized. However for the former USSR abortion was not a moral issue, because the the ideology of Socialism did not talk about the concept of morality. Infact Marx had critiqued ‘morality’ (Fisk 2007). He was of the opinion that morality should be transparent because “Marx saw morality being used as a smoke screen behind which groups and individuals could advance their purposes. Its class or other limited purposes hid behind morality’s claimed universality, which allowed one to express morality in the form of general principles. This was, though, only half of his critique. Marx also objected to the derivation of the moral force of these principles from their alleged otherworldly associations. Our own period has a different list than his of such associations. Today, the moral force of principles might come from a hypothetical contract with others in conditions so ideal they could never exist. Or it might rest in a process of reasoning with others that could end in universal consensus only at some limit point just outside this process. Or finally, as in Marx’s time, it might be based on a revelation from a source such as pure reason, clairvoyance, or divine spirit, all considered as distinct from capacities used in familiar critical thinking.”( Fisk 2007). “Lenin ([1920] 1977: 291) said that communists rejected all ethics and morality based "on idealist or semi-idealist phrases, which always amounted to something similar to God's commandments" or on "extra-human and extra-class.” ( Karpov and Kaariainen 2005).Therefore for the erstwhile Soviet Union high rates of abortion were a demographic concern. In the Russian Federation, high rates of abortion remains a demographic concern but now the angle of ‘morality’ has also been added to it.

The Russian Federation has one of the world’s highest abortion rates. The table below shows the number of abortions performed by the Russian Federation since 1991.

Year	Number of Abortions Performed
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1991	3,608,421
1993	3,243,957
1995	2,766,362
1998	2,346,138
2000	2,138,750
2001	2,014,710
2002	1,944,481
2003	1,864,647
2004	1,797,567
2005	1,675,693
2006	1,582,398
2007	1,479,010
2008	1,385,600
2009	1,292,389
2010	1,186,108
2011	1,124,880
2012	1,063,982
2013	1012399
2014	929963

The data for this table has been taken from Abortion statistics and other data--Johnston's Archive.

According to this table, the number of abortions has decreased consistently. However it is still not very low. This is the result of the socio-economic conditions of Russia and the Soviet legacy ( Karpov and Kaariainen 2005). "Women's formally equal rights in a nation with low standards of living and conservative gender stereotypes translated into the necessity of combining motherhood with two full-time jobs ~ inside and outside the household. In addition, modern contraceptives were unavailable or scarce, and the very theme of contraception was almost a taboo in public discourse. Considering these circumstances, one can understand why the Russian epidemiologist Larissa Remennick (1991: 841-42) wrote that abortion 'has never been a matter of choice for Soviet women (hence 'pro-choice' terminology would be inappropriate here) but rather a pressing necessity created by the lack of alternative.' Objective conditions, say Popov and David (1997: 241), 'were gradually enveloped by psychological tolerance.' This resulted in the development of an 'abortion culture' reinforcing the abortion industry. Within that culture, abortion was viewed as an ordinary, if painful, 'medical procedure, comparable, say, to the removal of a tooth'(Remenick, 1991: 844)."( Karpov and Kaariainen 2005).

It has already been mentioned that Socialism did not recognize the mainstream notion of morality which generally comes from an external supernatural source. However a different form of morality existed in the former Soviet Union. The definition and content of morality changed according to the rules, laws and policies formulated by the Bolshevik Party. Therefore an issue like abortion became morally correct when the party (implying the Soviet State), decided to legalize it and became morally incorrect when it criminalized it. Hence, "if it advocated unlimited abortion rights, as Lenin did, abortion was good. If it said abortion would automatically vanish with socioeconomic development, abortion was just a natural rudiment of the past. If it banned abortion as harmful, as Stalin did, abortion was unacceptable. Yet, when it

said that legal abortion was better for women's health, as was the case after Stalin, it became acceptable again. Although Lenin's doctrine of communist morality was never radically revised during the Soviet era, it was supplemented by his successors. Thus, under Stalin, the ideal of a stable family gained official recognition. Yet, as Kon (1995: 79) convincingly shows, this was by no means a restoration of traditional moral values. Rather, it was a manifestation of the growing authoritarian-conservative tendencies in the regime and an attempt to use family as an instrument of social and political control.” (Karpov and Kaariainen 2005).

As has been argued before, abortion in the Soviet Union, became a mere tool to regulate population and this idea was passed down to the Russian Federation. The reason for abolishing abortion rights, given by the conservative section of the Russian society, is that abortion has not only adversely affected the population but has made many women infertile, which has drastically limited the scope for population growth in Russia and due to this the Russian Federation has started facing economic and military hardships. This section of the society is strongly backed by the the Russian orthodox church, for whom abortion is a moral issue. The conservatives and the church have become considerably influential and hence even the Russian state can not ignore their demands. Moreover Putin is very close to the Russian orthodox church and therefore the Russian state is also not fully in support of abortion rights.

Although abortion has always remained legal in Russia, the above mentioned conditions have resulted in fiery debates among the supporters and non-supporters of abortion. In 1996, the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation came up with a new directive that allowed abortions to be performed within 12 weeks of pregnancy, on social grounds which included like pregnancy due to rape, divorce during pregnancy, etc., owing to the pressure coming from the conservatives and the church. Therefore it becomes clear that the right to abort, which is technically a personal right of a woman, was sacrificed under the pressure coming from the clergy and the conservatives, for whom abortion was just a moral issue which was a social evil and had nothing to do with the rights, rather the personal rights of women. The Russian State

took this step because it knew that the low population of Russia was turning into a dangerous situation and hence it did not oppose the clergy and the conservatives, instead came up with a directive which would not portray the Russian State as being opposed to the rights of women and at the same time would appease the church and the conservatives.

“In 1990, a total of 3.9 million induced abortions were registered in the Russian Federation, giving an abortion rate of 119.6 per 1,000 women aged 15-44 years, one of the highest in the world. The actual figure is believed to be much higher, because this total does not include most abortions performed in departmental health services and commercial clinics, early vacuum aspirations and self-induced abortions. Owing to the implementation of family planning programmes in the period 1994-1997, abortions declined by 29 per cent according to the International Planned Parenthood Federation. Still, the abortion rate for 1995 was estimated to be 68.4 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44. The total number of abortions in the Russian Federation is still estimated to be almost double the number of births.” ( United Nation).

In order to improve the demographic condition of the Russian Federation, the Committee for the Family and Demographic Policies, under the Council of Ministers of the Russian Federation, formulated a programme that would generate awareness among people regarding family planning, protection of reproductive health and to enable the Russians to have healthy children. This programme was a strategic move, which integrated and accommodated diverse sections of the Russian society like organizations working for reproductive health of women, organizations promoting the use of contraceptives, the church and the Russian conservatives. In 1994, the Russian State, created the Presidential Family Planning Programme and the Presidential Safe Motherhood Programme and later claimed that these programmes helped in reducing the number of abortions by one third. (The United Nations).

In 1991, that is at the time of inception of the Russian Federation the number of abortions reported were 3,608,421. In 1997, after the Ministry of Health came up with their new directives, the number of reported abortions came down to 2,498,140. Owing to the building of moral and social pressures on the issue of abortion, during the first half of 2000s, the number of reported abortions came down to 1,797,567 in 2004. In 2014, this number further decreased to 929,963 (Johnston 2017).

The change in the number of reported abortions reveal that the social stigma related to abortions had increased because abortions were still legal but the moral pressure had increased, due to which many women either did not resort to abortion or did not do so openly. Secondly the changes in laws and policies related to abortion along with new programmes to promote contraceptives, motherhood, etc., initiated by the state played a major role in reducing the number of abortions in the Russian Federation. Thirdly the awareness regarding contraceptives and their availability increased, which gave women other options, instead of abortion, as a means of birth control.

In 2003, the Russian Ministry of Health, suddenly rescinded the majority of criteria by which women in Russia could access abortion in their second trimester. This step was criticised by many scholars like Fish, who argued that the laws framed around abortion or other reproductive health issues were not based on women's rights to bodily integrity and equal access to political autonomy. Rather, many of these policies, like the former USSR have decreased the use of abortions by establishing habits of contraception use, thereby preventing secondary infertility caused by abortions and positively affecting the birth rate. More generally, Russian reproductive health activists supportive of family planning, sex education, and home birth have construed their goals as struggling to improve the nation's health in its physical and spiritual (moral) dimensions and to revive traditional families, not as political campaigns for women's equality or reproductive rights ( Fish 2004). The decision of the Russian Ministry of Health came as the

result of the discourse generated majorly by the conservative section of the society regarding the fear of underpopulation.

In between these economic and political decisions surrounding abortion, taken by the Russian State, the core issue got neglected. It is true that the rate of abortion in Russia was very high and had to be brought down, but not because the Russian State needed to increase its population or because abortion had moral consequences which was alienating certain sections of the society. It should have been done to ensure good reproductive health of women. The process of abortion was painful and affected the overall health and the reproductive health of women. This should have been the grounds for increasing the use of contraceptives and decreasing the use of abortion as the primary birth control method. Abortion should have been looked upon as a personal right of a woman - this was the core issue which never got addressed.

“The issue of population growth is also important to consider in exploring the history of abortion in Russia. Traditionally, great emphasis has been placed on population growth because increased population has translated into a larger work force. Such an emphasis likely began as a reaction to massive losses of life in the Bolshevik Revolution, the forced collectivization of agriculture, World War I, and the famines that followed. This sentiment remains strong today, but the population does not. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has seen a sharp decline in its life expectancy and birth rate. The United Nations Population Fund puts Russia’s 2003 life expectancy at 60.8 years for men and 73.1 for women down from 61.5 and 73.6, respectively, in 1996. In the world’s most developed countries, life expectancy is 72.1 years for men and 79.4 years for women. The birth rate in Russia in 2003, calculated by births per 1000 women aged 15-19, was thirty births per year, compared with a world total of fifty in 2003 and thirty-seven for Russia in 1996. Today, it is estimated that Russia’s population is declining by approximately one million people per year.” (Stewart 2004).

This concern of declining population forced the Russian State to take up certain steps that would restrict the laws and policies around the issue of abortion. These were:

1. Bill No.567 passed by the Russian State in 1996, emphasised on “social situations” in which a woman could obtain an abortion between the twelfth and twenty-second weeks of pregnancy. “This list permitted abortions in limited cases, such as when one parent was unemployed or when the family already had three or more children. This law was the first limitation on the right to abortion since the Stalin era.” (Stewart 2004).
2. In 2003, the Russian State amended its Family Code and talked about ensuring and safeguarding the rights of children before birth. “Its purported purpose is to guard the rights of children before birth and to bring Russian law in compliance with international law, pursuant to its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.” (Stewart 2004).
3. “In 2003, the Russian Government issued Decree No.485, which reduced the ‘list of social indications for induced termination of pregnancy’ from thirteen to four. Between the twelfth and twenty-second weeks, a woman is still theoretically allowed unlimited access for medical reasons, such as one that threatens the life of the woman. A woman is also permitted to have an abortion during this time in the following cases: (1) a court ruling related to depriving a person of parental rights or restricting one’s parental rights; (2) pregnancy resulting from rape; (3) incarceration in a detention center; and (4) a husband’s severe disability or death at the time of the spouse’s pregnancy. According to the Decree, women in their twelfth to twenty-second weeks of pregnancy must seek permission from the doctor at the local obstetric clinic and, in some cases, the local social welfare organization, to obtain an abortion. Women who want an abortion but are denied permission are left to either find another way to abort the child or to carry the pregnancy to term. The requirement of such permission leads to more late-term and illegal abortions, which are more dangerous for women” (Stewart 2004).

4. In 1990, the Russian Federation, ratified The Convention On the Rights of the Child, also known as CRC. “The Family Code Amendment relies on the Preamble to the CRC to support its assertion that fetuses are entitled to certain rights. The Preamble states, ‘the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth.’ The Russian government interpreted this as granting rights to unborn children under international law.” (Stewart 2004).
  
5. CEDAW, which was ratified in 1981, that is during the Soviet State, provided a woman’s right to health care. It suggests that the State “must take appropriate legislative actions to ensure a woman’s right to health care. The General Recommendation says that states should not restrict a woman’s access to health clinics by requiring authorization from a husband, partner, parent or health authority, or because they are unmarried or women. A state also should not criminalize medical procedures specific to women. The General Recommendation further requires that states take measures to ensure timely access to ‘the range of services that are related to family planning, in particular, and to sexual and reproductive health in general,’ and advises that a high number of couples that would like to limit their family size but do not have access to contraception is a possible indication of a breach of a country’s duty to provide health care. Finally, states parties should prioritize the prevention of unwanted pregnancy through family planning and sex education and reduce maternal mortality through safe motherhood services and prenatal assistance.” (Stewart 2004).

All the above mentioned factors, played a major role in bringing down the rate of abortion in the Russian Federation. It is very unfortunate however that this has not been done to safeguard the the reproductive health of women but to fulfill certain economic and political interests.

Therefore it is important to recognize that abortion rights should be seen as personal rights of women, in which even the state can not intervene. Being a part of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation could have talked about this because in the Soviet Union abortion was legalized in 1920, which opened up debates not only in different parts of the world but also within the Soviet Union. However the politics of abortion started being practiced by the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation carried this practice forward. The only difference was that in the Soviet Union regulating the demography was the reason for the politics of abortion and in contemporary Russia both demographic concerns and religious concerns have resulted in the politics of abortion.

Due to the fact that abortion rights were not given as personal rights, they have been twisted and moulded over and over again to suit the requirements of both the Soviet and the Russian States. This implies that there is no principle basis for keeping abortion legal in Russia. If ever the Russian State feels the need to criminalize abortion completely to fulfill certain goals, it can do so. With the kind of developments that have happened to laws and policies related to abortion since the Soviet times, it would not be a surprise if the contemporary Russian state moves towards a complete reversal of abortion rights.

Stigmatization, criminalization or restrictions on abortion exist in most countries of the world today. Reproductive rights are not in the priority list of many countries. The former Soviet Union, by legalizing abortion in 1920, made a positive start in the direction of recognizing reproductive rights but got lost in the way majorly due to the economic conditions of the Soviet State at that time. In contemporary Russia the debates on abortion have continuously taken place, though abortion has never been completely criminalized in Russia. However it might happen that abortions are banned completely in Russia because the Russian State has never seen abortion as a personal right, has no rigid stands on this issue and the Russian Orthodox Church is also politically influential.

In the regime of Putin, the anti abortion section of the society has grown because Putin himself is very close to the Russian Orthodox Church. Legal attacks on pro abortion groups have also increased. In 2015, Google was fined because it had played a pro abortion advertisement. There are politically powerful and socially influential figures, apart from Putin who are completely opposed to abortion. Svetlana Medvedeva, who is the wife of Dmitri Medvedev, has continuously spoken against abortion. She even launched a campaign raising the slogan 'Give me Life', in 2011. According to the New York Times, this campaign was asking for a week against abortion. Medvedev also signed a law that required the advertisements on abortion to dedicate a minimum of ten percent of their advertisements on showing the negative impacts of abortion. These advertisements were barred from showing abortion as safe and any advertisement doing so would be banned.

The Russian Federation since its inception has witnessed continuous debates regarding the issue of abortion. At different points of time there have been strong demands, to break away from the Soviet past by either criminalizing abortion or at least by restricting it. There have been multiple attempts to criminalize abortion in the Russian Federation. . According to the supporters of criminalization of abortion, abortion was dangerous and immoral as it represented a woman's rejection of motherhood. As a result, Russia's abortion rate has steadily declined from 100 per 1,000 women of reproductive age in 1991, to 55 in 2000, and to 44.1 in 2005 (Sakevich 2007). In 2013, the percentage of abortion had declined to 34.8% from 67.3% in 1991. This change was mainly due to the increase in religious orthodoxy and conservative parliamentarians after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As discussed in one of the earlier chapters, in 2011, Russia's Orthodox Church teamed with Conservative parliamentarians to push legislation that would radically restrict abortions. The legislation would ban free abortions at government-run clinics and prohibit the sale of the morning-after pill without a prescription, said Yelena Mizulina, who headed the parliamentary committee on families, women and children. She added that abortion

for a married woman would also require the permission of her spouse, while teenage girls would need their parents' consent. A bill proposed in late 2010 called for the criminal prosecution of doctors who end late-term pregnancies, but it faced government opposition and was never put up for a vote. The effort to restrict abortions has strong backing from the Russian Orthodox Church, which has sought a more muscular role in society in recent years. An agreement was signed between the Russian state and the church and article 9 of the agreement establishes cooperation on the protection of maternal and child health, including reproductive health, promotion of family values and prevention of abortion. All these initiatives taken against abortion is not new. Even during the soviet era there were multiple initiatives at different points in time when abortion was either criminalized or numerous amount of restrictions were levied upon it. Hence the debate between pro-abortion and anti-abortion dates long back in the history of Russia and the Soviet Union. However one has to note that this debate was not a result of women's rights movement, awareness of the rights of women, 'the right over body' argument, or any feminist movement. In fact all the steps taken, both during the Soviet era and after its disintegration, in Russia, either to criminalize abortion or to put restrictions on it or to decriminalize it, were deliberate attempts by the state to meet the socio economic and political requirements of the State. Therefore the 'pro- choice' versus 'pro- life' debate was neither applicable in the Soviet Union nor is it applicable in Russia. The women of the Soviet Union or of Russia never had a 'choice', in the true sense of the term. Their choices were always controlled by the state. If the state decriminalized abortion, huge number of women went through registered abortions and if the state put restrictions on abortion or criminalized it, then 'risks' increased as proper health facilities were not available and the conditions under which underground abortion was practiced, were enormously unhygienic, also, being caught performing an abortion or resorting to it meant fines and imprisonment and in many cases the license of the doctors were cancelled. Hence the number of women opting for abortion automatically went down.

In the contemporary Russia, the nexus between the state and religion, has increased conservativeness, which has resulted in the demand for scrapping one of the personal rights of

women, which is the right of abortion. In the former Soviet Union, which is the predecessor of the Russian Federation, the right to abortion was pitted against the economic development of the Soviet State. In contemporary Russia, the right to abortion is being pitted against the economic needs of the state and also the religious beliefs of a vast number of people in Russia.

In Russia abortion is seen differently, by different sections of the society. The conservatives look down upon it as being morally incorrect. They are of the opinion that ‘motherhood’, is the responsibility of every woman and women who shun this notion are exposed to social stigmatization. The conservatives also believe that women provide great service to the nation by bearing and rearing children as they are the future of the nation. The church looks at abortion as a ‘sin’ because it involves the killing of an ‘innocent, unborn child’. Then there is a section of progressive citizens and feminist groups like the ‘Pussy’ band, who are fighting for the rights of women, during a time when ‘masculinity’, is strengthening itself in the Russian Federation, under Putin. This section is strongly pro abortion. However, at least in the mainstream discourse, there is absence of viewing abortion as one of the personal rights of a woman.

The Russian State, on the other hand, looks at abortion, as a major tool to regulate population and even though it never completely criminalized abortion, it has always tried to twist and turn the laws and policies on abortion, mostly in order to combat underpopulation. The Russian State knows that in order to regulate the population of the Russian Federation, it would have to control the bodies of women and the best way to do so is to formulate and reformulate laws and policies on abortion, in a manner that would best serve the economic and political interests of the state.

Therefore it is important to understand that even in contemporary Russia, where ‘abortion’ has been legalized since the Soviet era, abortion is a social and political phenomena. It was not considered to be personal to a woman and hence certain restrictions were put on abortion. This right of abortion became available to the Russian women only during medical emergencies or

social pressures. The very idea of abortion being a personal choice and right of every woman, which should be performed, solely based on the decision of women and not under moral, social, political or economic pressures, got completely squashed after restrictions were put on abortion. Before that there was total legalization of abortion, which at least provided the scope for 'choice' to women. Any woman unwilling to carry a child could resort to abortion, she did not have to be a rape survivor or a divorcee or someone going through medical conditions. Therefore the space to exercise 'choice' was gone, and with that the chances of viewing abortion as a personal right of the Russian women also became blurred.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Personal rights of women, since ages, have been overlooked, neglected and ignored. Going by the 'Social Contract Theory', a 'state', is very important because it plays the role of a 'sovereign', which has authority and legitimacy. In 'structural realism', a state is considered to be the most important actor in international politics. In all the theories related to the origin, evolution and development of a 'state', certain responsibilities have been given to the state, which might have differed according to the theories and time period but the idea of making the state responsible for certain aspects of the society, is present in all of them. On such responsibility has been to ensure rights to its citizens. As such it is the responsibility of the state to ensure 'personal rights' for its citizens. Unfortunately the state has failed in this respect.

Neither was the Soviet state an exception to this reality nor is the present state of Russia. It is true that the former Soviet Union did not follow the mainstream ideology of that period and instead chose Socialism, which talks about equality. However even this state failed in bringing equality among the sexes because it focused on its most important agenda of building a 'classless society'. The recognition of hierarchy in gender relations existed among some of the Soviet leaders like Lenin, but the Soviet State ultimately could not ensure gender equality. Right after the Soviet State came into existence, it provided for equal voting rights for all because women were not given voting rights before that. It gave equal status to women in its constitution. In 1920, it legalized abortion, becoming the first nation to do so. Therefore in the beginning, the Soviet State took steps which were quite ahead of its time because the debate on gender had not

reached the stage where it could completely legalize abortion. This decision of the Soviet State generated multiple debates on this issue in the world.

Lenin was a person, who had always argued in favour of the emancipation of the Soviet women. After the establishment of the USSR, Lenin in his speech had thanked all the Soviet women for making the 'Revolution' successful. Lenin always gave equal importance to the question of 'women'. In 1899 when Lenin was in exile, he communicated to his party members about the subjects he wanted to write about, and one of them was a pamphlet titled, 'Women and the Workers' Cause' ( Krupskaya 1933). "In his book '*The Development of Capitalism in Russia*', Lenin describes how cattle farmers exploit peasant women, how the merchant-buyers exploit women lace-weavers; he shows that large-scale industry emancipates women and that the work at factories broadens their outlook, makes them more cultured and independent and helps them to break the shackles of patriarchal life. Lenin said that the development of large-scale industry would create the basis for complete emancipation of women. Characteristic in this respect is Lenin's article '*A Great Technical Achievement*' written in 1913." (Krupskaya 1933). Unfortunately, the ideas and dreams of Lenin could not materialize. The complete legalization of abortion, was an important milestone, because it could have proved to be the first step towards ensuring the personal rights of women. However, keeping in mind the socio-economic and political scenario of the Soviet Union, the Soviet State, later on criminalized abortion.

It is important to note that during the time of Lenin and also, some years after his death in 1924, the economic and demographic conditions were such that the decision to legalize abortion did not put any drastic negative impact on the existing economic development or the demographical situation. The Soviet State had concentrated on factories and industries, in order to achieve economic development and it also provided more employment opportunities. Demographically, the population was not a very big problem for economic development, during that time but the composition of population had changed because the Soviet Union had lost many Soviet men in

the First World War. Therefore now, the Soviet State had to make use of its female population in economic development. It decided to utilize one half of its human capital, which had not been utilized by that time, and Lenin's idea of bringing more women into the working force to emancipate them, fitted very well with the intention of the leaders and the Soviet State, after Lenin. Therefore the Soviet State had no problem in providing the right of abortion, by that time, because women free from the responsibilities of child bearing and rearing, could work more efficiently in the factories and industries thereby facilitating economic development of the state.

When Stalin came to power, his priority was industrial development. In the initial years of Stalin's rule, population was not a major concern. However, due to famine, purge, unhygienic working conditions, etc., the Soviet State lost many more lives. This now became a point of concern for the Soviet State. Therefore the Soviet state, decided to increase the population. The most important barrier to increasing the population was the right to abortion. Abortion was the most commonly used method of contraception at that time in the Soviet Union. Therefore if the state banned abortion it would automatically increase the population. In 1936, the right to abortion was taken away from the Soviet women. This did have an impact on the rate of abortions performed in the Soviet Union, but, there still existed a good number of the Soviet women who resorted to underground abortions.

The criminalization of abortion placed women in a very difficult position, in which they had to take the responsibility of both work and home. The ban on abortion was complemented by the propagation of the 'family system', as one of the basic units of the society. It is true that for more than a decade, the Soviet women had been accessing education, working and gradually becoming independent; but the State perceived them as mere bodies that had to be controlled in order to serve its economic and other interests. Hence the state did not take any steps to reduce the gender gap existing at the societal level, where there was nearly no change in the sexual division of labour. At least when abortion was legalized, the Soviet women had the choice to not shoulder the responsibility of bearing and rearing children, but its criminalization in 1936, left no option

for women as abortion was the most commonly used method of contraception. This situation put 'double burden', on the Soviet women. Abortion remained prohibited from 1936 to 1955 and then it was re legalized. In 1991 when the Soviet Union disintegrated, the Russian Federation came into existence and it continued with the legalization of abortion. However due to the growth of religious orthodoxy and conservatism, many Russians protested either for the total ban on abortion or for putting restrictions on abortion. Hence, some changes were brought in the laws related to abortion. Essentially abortion was made restrictive. This was done by the Russian Federation because, apart from being concerned with the low population, it also wanted to appease certain sections of the society, especially the clergy, because the church is influential in the Russian Federation.

By looking at the history of abortion in the former Soviet Union and the present Russian Federation, certain conclusions can be drawn. These are:

1. Socialism in the Former Soviet Union could not Ensure Gender Equality:

Socialism has been defined in a variety of ways. "Hyndman, an English socialist, calls it 'an endeavor to substitute for the anarchical struggle or fight for existence, an organized co-operation for existence.' Bradlaugh says : 'Socialism denies individual private property and affirms that Society, organized as the State, should own all wealth, direct all labor and compel the equal distribution of all produce.' John Stuart Mill says: 'Socialism is any system which requires that the land and the instruments of production should be the property not of individuals but of communities, or associations, or of the Government.'" Proudhon calls it: 'Every aspiration towards the amelioration of society.' Of the later writers Robert Flint (1895) says: 'Socialism is any theory of social organization which sacrifices the legitimate liberties of individuals to the will or interests of the community.' He further adds: 'No definition of Socialism at once true and precise has ever been given, or ever will be given', for Socialism is essentially indefinite and indeterminate." (Allen 1912). However, the principle of equality is very important in Socialism. In the Soviet Union, like every other society, inequalities existed and after the Revolution of 1917, socialism was adopted and these inequalities were sought to be dealt with.

Nonetheless class inequality was the first priority of the Soviet leaders. The former Soviet State, recognized that gender inequality existed and hence provided rights and equal constitutional status to women. However achieving gender equality was compromised in the middle of the Soviet journey, due to the economic situation of the state.

## 2. Clash between the Interests of the State and Women:

In the Soviet Union, the Soviet State was most concerned with the economic development of the state and the establishment of a 'classless society'. To achieve these goals, the state at times ignored the needs, demands and rights of the Soviet women and at times used the Soviet women as instruments to regulate its population in order to ensure optimum generation of human resource for economic development.

This does not imply that the Soviet state did not recognize the fact that gender inequality existed in the Soviet State, however its major concern was economic, at that time. The issues related to gender have always found themselves ranked towards the bottom of the list of priorities, not only in the Soviet Union but also elsewhere in the world.

This was because the interests and aims of the Soviet State were different from those of the Soviet women. This implies that the development of the Soviet state was exclusionary in nature. The Soviet women, in spite of the fact that most of them were economically independent, were socially not equal to the male members of the Soviet society. The state was not very concerned with this fact because it was securing the labour of women to ensure economic development, which was the top most priority of the Soviet State at that time. However to reduce the gap between the gender relations it was important to improve the condition of the society. Also Soviet leaders like Lenin believed that economic independence could emancipate the Soviet women and therefore he stressed on the employment of women. However economic

independence alone can not emancipate women, it has to be complemented with changes at the social and the political levels.

Therefore it becomes clear that 'abortion' was a political tool for the Soviet State. In different phases of the Soviet Union, 'abortion', was politicized in different ways to suit the economic interests of the state. This 'Politics of Abortion', was later practiced in the Russian Federation also.

In 1991, when the Russian Federation came into existence, the laws on abortion remained unchanged. In 1996, certain changes were made in the laws pertaining to abortion and the right to abort was given on 'social grounds'. These grounds included cases where the pregnant woman has been raped or divorced or was going through any medical condition, etc. Thus making abortion laws restrictive and inaccessible to a good number of Soviet women. During the later years there were some other changes also. The reasons for such changes were:

A. Religion had become very important in Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church had gradually become influential, who equated abortion with murder and therefore did not favour abortion. The conservative section of the society was also against abortion majorly because of the concerns related to the low population density of the Russian Federation. Therefore, the state came out with a solution and did not prohibit abortion completely, thus preventing the total alienation of the Soviet women and at the same time ensuring the appeasement of the influential actors, on the issue of abortion.

B. The Russian State, under Putin has been promoting the family system, because the population of the Russian Federation still remains low. Even though, abortion is no longer the most

commonly used method of contraception, it is practiced by a good number of women, which has affected the fertility of women, thereby making the population of the Russian Federation vulnerable. The population of the Russian Federation is already low and it also faces the risk of further depopulation, hence the state has tried to make abortion restrictive. More importantly Putin is very close to the Orthodox Church, which has increased the political influence of the Church, over the State in the recent years.

Even today in Russia, abortion remains one of the most debated issues. Abortion is a very personal choice of a woman, but both in the former USSR, and in contemporary Russia, it has been politicised in a variety of ways, which has constructed a social system in which abortion, though legal, is never an independent choice of a woman. In the former USSR, this 'choice' was influenced by the propaganda of the state, either to come out of domestic slavery to emancipate themselves, or to embrace 'motherhood' and provide an important service to the state by helping in the creation of future citizens. In contemporary Russia this 'choice' is influenced by the propagation of abortion as a 'sin' by the Church, complemented by the aspect of 'social grounds' in the laws of abortion, created by the Russian State, due to the fear of depopulation.

Therefore Mark Savage opines, "One undertakes the study of the law of abortion with a sense of irony. Abortion is very personal to the woman considering it. Laws on abortion, however, separate the act and the choice from their very bases in each woman's experience. Hence each abortion becomes either legal or illegal, depending upon the law of the country where the woman lives, and becomes an instrument of a state's demographic policies." (Savage 1988).

The 'Politics of Abortion', has been resorted to, by both the former Soviet Union and the contemporary Russian State, to secure the aims and interests of the state, by intervening in, what should have been the personal right of a woman, the 'Abortion Rights'. The interference by the state in the personal rights of women, was not exclusively practiced by the Soviet State or in

present by the Russian State. There are many countries in the world today, who have completely banned abortion, except in some cases to save the life of a woman. Some of these countries include Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Angola, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Yemen, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Ireland, Malt, etc. In many other countries abortion rights are highly restrictive like Argentina, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Ethiopia, etc. In these countries abortion is illegal, but if a woman's life is at threat or if her physical health is at stake, then the resortment to abortion is permissible.

Hence, it becomes clear that 'Abortion', is still not seen as a personal right of a woman. The laws around abortion are formulated and reformulated by the states, according to the socio-economic and political conditions it faces. It is true that in contemporary times, the international feminist discourse includes the reproductive rights as personal rights of women. However securing the personal rights of women is a herculean task, given the present socio economic and political structure, in which the sexuality of women is repressed and their bodies are regulated and controlled to suit the multifaceted interests of the States.

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[1] Taken from Marxist.org