

# Status of Women in Soviet Central Asia: A Case Study of Tajik Women

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**Abstract-** Women in Central Asia in general and in Tajikistan in particular during Soviet period lived a very diverse life. In a patriarchal society she remained all obedient to the male members of her family, in daughter to father, wife to husband, etc. In tribal societies she worked shoulder to shoulder in the fields for production purposes with the male members of her family and in a Communist setup she lived as good a life as her male counterpart. However, the overall status of the Soviet women in Tajikistan though remained highly respectable but secondary to her male counterpart.

**Index Terms-** Soviet Central Asia, Tajikistan, Women, Family, Society, Status.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Women in Central Asia, like elsewhere in the world, have gone through different stages of development. In pre-Soviet period Central Asian family was of patriarchal type in which father was to be followed by all members in all domestic matters. Nevertheless, woman in mother's role enjoyed independence in maintaining her home in a way that suited her. But her contact with males was limited, even in joint families she could hardly meet freely with her relatives like cousins etc. she always went veiled outside her home.<sup>i</sup> However, the women of nomads and semi nomads enjoyed freedom in personal lives for they contributed much in everyday economy, they went out unveiled and could interact freely with men folk.<sup>ii</sup> The people of these regions would practice polygamy, women would cover their faces in the presence of men and husbands would never allow their wives to be treated by the male doctors.<sup>iii</sup> Woman was subjected to the practice of bride purchase and bride price (kalym), child marriage, etc.<sup>iv</sup> She was also subjected to isolation, suppression and discrimination through the practices of veil (paranja), polygamy, violence and complete domination. She was considered as the acquired property of her husband.<sup>v</sup> In addition, female health and hygiene was appalling for women were considered impure and daughters a burden. In the field of education, women were left behind and instead were engaged as productive labour in carpet weaving, animal husbandry, etc.<sup>vi</sup> By and large, women in Central Asia lived in a social setup which was male dominated and her status was comparatively low. Despite being engaged in continuous domestic production activities, women were socially isolated, and economically dependent. It was only during the Soviet rule that they experienced a marked change in their status. Apart from stressing equality between men and women, their improvement in socio-cultural, economic and political fields became a part of the Soviet reconstruction programme.

In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the major areas in which Central Asian women in general and Tajik women in particular have improved their lot during the Soviet period.

## II. SOCIO-ECONOMIC UPLIFTMENT

As a part of the Soviet policy to Russianise the people of Central Asia, Soviets embarked on a rigorous policy of atheism as an attack on the Islam as well as on Christianity. Due to this reason the other things related to religion were also influenced. Among these the liberation of woman from veil, seclusion and at the top from the domination of the men folk. All this put a special emphasis in the Muslim areas to emancipate women. For Soviets, the "tradition" in whatever form, was to be abolished: marriage age was raised to eighteen; polygamy was almost abolished, and marriage without mutual consent of the couple and the practice of bride price were declared as crime.<sup>vii</sup> Divorce was simplified and women got equal access and right on the property. Education in particular was pivotal in bringing changes; erected a massive educational-institutional structure, western in form and secular in content. It is because of the education that new ideas were exchanged. Give and take in the socio-cultural field was possible particularly through this channel. The cumulative effect of the new system was that women acquired equal and active role in the society through the opportunity of education<sup>viii</sup> and employment. Lead in female education was given by Kazakh and Kyrgyz women who were more attracted towards higher education, which in turn led to the up-gradation of their status in comparison with the women of other three republics especially during 1960's.

In Tajikistan by the end of 1930s, women was allotted land where they worked equally with men in the process of production and by 1980, they contributed 39% of the total workforce of the republic.<sup>ix</sup> The educational change, however, was not brought in one go. Since women in Central Asia, particularly in Tajikistan, belonged to orthodox culture, therefore, they did not accept the change at once. After the World War II, women started attending schools at primary level though their attendance until 1970s remained low in the secondary and higher educational institutes.<sup>x</sup> But after 1970s, their number increased and those who attained modern education, secured larger proportions in the employment outside home which resulted in accepting modern education as a means of change, both for economic reasons as well as for socio-cultural milieu.<sup>xi</sup> This is also revealed by the statistical figures given in the following table.

**Level of Education of Men and Women in Tajikistan.**  
 (Per 1000 population of the respective sex with education).

Years	Higher & Secondary (complete & incomplete)		Higher		Secondary	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
1939	53	25	4	1	49	24
1959	381	275	19	12	362	263
1970	471	374	39	20	432	354
1979	625	534	64	35	561	499
Population engaged in Economy						
1939	55	30	5	3	50	27
1959	424	385	26	21	398	364
1970	633	566	64	42	569	524
1979	801	736	103	62	698	674

Source: National Economy of Tadzhikistan SSR in 1979, p. 186. Cited in Sheila Gujral, *Asian Republics: U.S.S.R*, Gowarsons Publishers (p) Ltd., Gulab House, New Delhi, 1987, p. 48.

Soviet authorities, through various incentives, encouraged (Muslim) women in Central Asia to come out of the traditional seclusion and their customary veils,<sup>xii</sup> which resulted into an increase in the women working outside their homes. However, the house hold work / labour and the care of children and infants, to a large extent, hurdled them to take strenuous or non-strenuous jobs and thus denying them equality with the men folk in employability. In case of Tajikistan, this was more evident. However, the situation changed with the opening of kindergartens and relaxed pre-neonatal and post- neonatal leaves with full salaries, introduced by Soviets.

Apart from stressing equality between men and women the Soviet system also provided legal safeguards to women. As a constitutional provision Soviet Union laid restrictions on heavy and underground work or work in dangerous conditions for women, besides limits were put on working over time, night shifts and business trips. Such provisions helped women to work on higher positions. For example, during the concluding years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, out of 482 private enterprises of Khujand, women occupied 25% of legal and senior management posts.<sup>xiii</sup>

An important development in the status of women in Central Asia was that they also occupied policy making positions. In 1970s, there were 123 women members in the Tajik Supreme Soviet out of its total number of 350.<sup>xiv</sup> In 1980, one-third of all deputies of Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan were women.<sup>xv</sup> In 1981, as many as 20.5% of the members of the CPSU of Tajikistan were women.<sup>xvi</sup> These facts reveal that women became an important part in the political life of the country.<sup>xvii</sup>

### III. CONCLUSION

During the Soviet rule women in Tajikistan like other republics of Central Asia, received a special attention: polygamy was abolished; education, equal opportunities to work, medical and health practices, etc. not only improved the health standards but also raised their life expectancy by several years. Education system was remodeled on the western lines and literacy rate

touched the highest water mark. In sum, it can be safely concluded that the Soviet era was a blessing for the Central Asian women. Remolded on modern western forms with scientific outlook, Tajik women became torch bearer of socio-economic development of Soviet era. Post-independence environment painful, frustrating and not so congenial, posed new challenges to her as a gender as well as citizen of Tajikistan. Her upbringing and scientific temperament eased the passage of the transaction.

Identify the constructs of a Journal – Essentially a journal consists of five major sections. The number of pages may vary depending upon the topic of research work but generally comprises up to 5 to 7 pages. These are:

- 1) Abstract
- 2) Introduction
- 3) Research Elaborations
- 4) Results or Finding
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**In Introduction you can mention the introduction about your research.**

### IV. IDENTIFY, RESEARCH AND COLLECT IDEA

It's the foremost preliminary step for proceeding with any research work writing. While doing this go through a complete thought process of your Journal subject and research for it's viability by following means:

- 1) Read already published work in the same field.
- 2) Goggling on the topic of your research work.
- 3) Attend conferences, workshops and symposiums on the same fields or on related counterparts.
- 4) Understand the scientific terms and jargon related to your research work.

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