

THE ISSUE OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE TURKESTAN PRESS

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Abstract

This article analyzes coverage of women's issues in the Turkestan press and how this topic was used to implement the colonial policies of Tsarist Russia and the subsequent Bolshevik government. The primary sources used are articles in the Turkestan News, the Turkestan Regional Newspapers, and other Jadid and Soviet publications, as well as archival materials. It is argued that after the establishment of Soviet power, women's legal equality was proclaimed by the Constitution and decrees. However, in practice, this policy served to separate women from their families and convert them into the workforce in the interests of "socialist construction."

Keywords: Jadid movement, traditional society and women, women's education, polygamy prohibition, family and marriage reforms, gender equality.

Introduction

Women's rights are a topic that constantly remains at the forefront of social development. The opportunities and rights afforded to women, who make up half of society, reflect a democratic and just society. Throughout history, various civilizations and revolutions have repeatedly raised the issue of activating women's voices and restoring their rights. This topic has become a leading one in the global media. In Uzbekistan, in particular, it has been covered regularly since the advent of the press.

As is well known, after the occupation of Turkestan (Uzbekistan) by Tsarist Russia, when Turkestan was declared a Russian province and a governor-generalship was established, the press was published in the interests of the colonizers. The first periodicals—Turkestan News and Turkestan Regional Newspaper (1870–1917)—were published by Governor-General von Kaufman. Along with various topics related to life in the region, they published dozens of articles devoted to women's rights and their place in society.

During the Russian Empire and later the Bolshevik rule, state policy towards women in Turkestan (Uzbekistan) was formed based on colonial ideology and interests. The press also approached this issue not from the interests of women, but from the political and social interests of the existing society. The Russian Empire from the very beginning intended to make effective use of women in order to completely conquer Turkestan. The famous Russian academician Barthold said in one of his works: "Among the population of Turkestan, the most reliable support of the Russian administration are merchants, peasants and women."

The tsarist government considered it important to include women in its sphere of influence when pursuing its Russification policy. In a letter to the Russian Emperor, General Korolkov wrote about raising the country's women and children in the Russian way of life: "Female

doctors of the Russian people, called by history to fulfill a high mission in the Turkestan region, bring a different understanding to the free, carefree, and disenfranchised lifestyle of Uzbek women and awaken new aspirations."

"The cohabitation of a native woman with a Christian woman," the general wrote, "and constant and close contact with her gradually awakens in her a desire to improve her way of life. Like Russian women, she instills Christian ideas in them, and this cannot but impact the upbringing of her own children. The sons and daughters of such a woman will not be intolerant and hostile toward non-Muslims." To successfully carry out this work, Korolkov proposes increasing the number of women's clinics in the country. He also emphasized the need to involve Russian convents in the service of "instilling Orthodox Russian views" in the women of Turkestan.

For this reason, the newspaper "Turkestan," whose editors were primarily military personnel, regularly published reports on the outpatient clinics opened in Turkestan. These reports often took up two to three pages. The report was compiled by the head of the outpatient clinic and indicated the number of women and children visiting the hospital, the causes of the most common illnesses, and the ethnic composition of the women. For example, the report of the head of the Tashkent Women's and Children's Outpatient Clinic, A.V. Poslavskaya, noted that in 1885, 1,749 women visited the outpatient clinic, making 3,812 visits. The ethnic composition of the patients was as follows: Uzbeks and Tajiks – 1,674 people, which constituted 95.5% of the total number of patients; Kazakhs – 49 people, or approximately 2.9%; Tatars – 18 people, or 1.02%; and Jews – 8 people, or 0.4% [4].

Such reports were prompted not by the colony administration's concern for the health of the local population, but by a desire to determine their trust and attitude toward the Russian government. In fact, the activities of the outpatient clinics launched a mechanism for the deep and systematic introduction of Russian "cultural influence" into the female population. This subsequently became one of the main foundations of political initiatives and ideological work on women's issues.

Most of the articles by Muslim authors in the newspaper presented women's issues as if they were based on the principles of Islam, while in fact they attempted to interpret women's rights in a restrictive manner. This openly expressed a position against the Jadid intelligentsia. In particular, an article titled "Women Are Not Equal to Men," published in the September 20, 1909, issue of the newspaper, criticized the Jadids' equal rights for women.

The article takes an approach that seeks to justify the restriction of women's rights on religious, biological, and social "grounds," and presents the following interpretations of the idea of equality as a dangerous, unnatural, and deviant movement:

1. It is written that in America and European countries there were big conflicts to equalize women's rights with men. That is, the idea is given that "equality only brings instability."
2. Writing about the movements taking place in Eastern countries for women's rights, the Tatars write about equality in this way. They say that this does not correspond to the Quran and Hadith. The Young Turks tried to equalize women's rights with men. However, later, according to the "opinion of Sheikhul Islam," these movements were canceled. "The opinions of Sheikhul Islam" are presented as the decisive "final verdict."

3. The author tries to prove biologically that women cannot be equal to men in rights. "Scientists in America and Europe have dissected thousands of male and female bodies and have concluded that women's brains are smaller and lighter than men's, and their breathing is also less efficient than men's." Therefore, they try to present as a "scientific fact" that women's minds, emotions, and physical structure are "naturally" inferior and weaker than men's.

This article is a reflection of the debate between Jadids and conservative scholars in the press of that time.

Jadids considered women's education, expanding their participation in social life, and getting rid of oppressive customs to be an important part of the reforms. Dozens of articles, pamphlets, and dramas in newspapers and magazines addressed the issues of women's rights in society, forced marriage, polygamy, and women's education.

After February 1917, the Jadids' actions regarding women took on a political direction. Previously, they had been concerned with educating women and making them aware of their will and rights as human beings, but after February they began to fight for women's suffrage. This led to clashes with the so-called "old-timers." When the Provisional Government granted women the right to vote in 1917, the issue took practical form. Turkestan conservatives strongly opposed women's suffrage. When the Bolsheviks came to power, they achieved the legal reforms that the Jadids had dreamed of in a short time.

If the tsarist government, fearing the uprising of the people, could not be decisive enough in using the women of Turkestan in its interests, the Bolsheviks, who acted as their successors in governing Turkestan, did not turn a blind eye to this issue. They planned and carried out great practical work to turn women into their supporters in establishing a new system. When Soviet Russia declared the legal equality of men and women in all spheres of social life in 1918 and included this article in its Constitution, a similar article was included in the Constitutions of all Soviet Republics, including the Constitution of the Turkestan Autonomous Republic (October 1918). This first Soviet Constitution granted women the right to vote and be elected to state positions along with men. However, since the Muslim society, living according to Sharia and customary laws, traditionally accepted women only as housewives, the struggle against the Soviet model of women's liberation was waged for many years.

In September 1919, a special department was established in the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) to work with women and involve them in the political and economic life of the country. In 1921, the women's department of the Turkestan Regional Committee of the RCP (Bolsheviks) was transformed into the women's department of the Turkestan CPSU Central Committee. Based on the specific features of the economic, cultural, and everyday life of women in the Soviet East, the women's departments carried out their activities in the following three directions:

- 1) ensuring the economic liberation of women by involving them in appropriate artels and trade unions;
- 2) organizing schools, clubs, and other cultural and educational institutions;
- 3) political education based on the broad coverage of all forms of involving women in the practice of "socialist construction" through propaganda and agitation [2].

The press also raised this issue. For example, one article stated: "The mass involvement of women in public affairs brings the establishment of socialism closer. It is impossible to involve the masses without involving women in politics. Because women were oppressed during the capitalist era" [3]. In addition to involving women in councils and executive committees, the author of the article raises the issues of involving them in trade unions, youth organizations, the silk industry, artels, and capitalist enterprises to provide them with financial support, and improving the work of women's clubs.

In the Soviet government's program to "liberate the women of the East," the "broad rights" of women included not only freedoms such as throwing off the veil and marrying anyone they wanted, but also the goal of using them to raise children, "pull them out" of household chores, and use them on the "ideological front" of deception, as well as to meet the endless needs of the newly created state for labor, under the slogan of saving them from the "black prisons of life." However, the realization of these goals required the alienation of women from the family environment. Therefore, at the first meeting of the organizers of the Eastern Women's Union, held on April 5-7, 1921, issues such as the development of a "Decree on Freedom of Divorce" and a "Decree on the Age of Marriage and the Bride" were on the agenda. In June 1921, a decree of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets of the Turkestan ASSR was adopted prohibiting the marriage of underage girls and polygamy, and abolishing the bride. The marriage age was set at 16 years instead of the 9 years in Sharia law. It was established that both husband and wife have equal rights in the matter of divorce. Weeks and even days were set to combat "polygamy" and special events were held. Also, one of the decisions they issued contained a clause that said: "Divorce cases should be considered within a week." Because the courts received a huge number of applications for divorce. As a result, the policy pursued in family and marriage issues led to the breakdown of thousands of families, children wandering between their parents, the spread of divorce cases, the devaluation of the family and the loss of its social status, and the punishment of women who filed applications by their husbands, fathers, or brothers. Because for centuries, traditional life ensured a privileged position for men in the family. The revolutionary changes in the family and marriage issues that the Soviets imposed with great force, first of all, dealt a severe moral blow to men, but also pushed women towards an unimaginable "bright life." This led to the deprivation of women's true happiness, their family [2].

By the 1930s, women had become victims of the Soviet administrative system. Every minute of their lives was controlled by the government. The consciousness of women, formed as a result of national and religious influences, was also renewed, and noticeable changes were observed in the worldview and behavior of the "newly discovered Gulsarakhans". A group of "initiative" women was formed, who took the initiative with determination and courage. They had full confidence that the ideas of "socialism" and socialist construction were for the interests of the people and the future of our children. The situation reached such a point that on the day of Eid al-Adha, women went to the cemetery without a veil and explained the essence of the new law to the women there. (In Namangan) Local Women's departments and Komsomol activists organized a concert at the cemetery, despite the recitations being held there. The 150 women who attended the event watched a performance about the "negative consequences of

marrying off underage girls" and heard a lecture about how traditional cemetery customs (such as kissing tombstones) are hygienically harmful and can lead to syphilis and tuberculosis [1]. These thoughtless measures cost the lives of many women. Hundreds of women were killed. In the early years, the Soviets were cautious in using women's power. However, by the end of the 1920s, this approach had changed dramatically, and under the policy of "equalizing" women with men in all aspects, women began to be increasingly involved in public and socio-economic work. When using women as a labor force, no attention was paid to preserving their lives and health. As a result, Uzbekistan ranked first among the republics in terms of mortality of women and children.

In short, the Soviet government continued the policy initiated by Tsarist Russia in relation to the women of Turkestan.

The press and archival documents of that time testify to this.

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