ASSERTIONS OF SELF

The Nascent Women's Movement in Central Asia
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Marfua Tokhtakhodzhaeva

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INTRODUCTION

In the former Soviet Union women's equal rights - and responsibilities - were enshrined in the Constitution of the USSR and various other pieces of legislation; and as an illustration of women's equality, the Soviet Union could point to the fact that it had put the first woman in space and had among the world's highest proportion of female legislators. Officially, therefore, the so-called 'Women's Question' was considered resolved for much of the Soviet Union's 70 year history. This is equally true of the Central Asian states that were included in the USSR. But Gorbachev's introduction of perestroika in 1985 and the collapse of the Soviet Union four years later allowed a truer picture of women's status to emerge. These events also led to sweeping economic and political transformations that have had a dramatic impact on women's lives.

A growing number of women's groups and organisations are among the myriad semi-governmental and non-governmental organisations that have emerged in response to these changes and stepped in to fill the vacuum left by the abandonment of socialism as the state ideology. The specific character and direction of the women's movement emerging across the newly independent states of the former USSR is still unclear, not least because overwhelming communications problems and a general atmosphere of mistrust between individuals has meant many groups currently operate in isolation of each other with little cross-fertilisation of objectives and strategies.

Nevertheless, many of the groups share a remarkable number of features, indicating a commonality of women's problems across the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), no matter whether it is the more European lifestyles of the Baltic States or the essentially feudal lifestyles of Central Asia. As a consequence, a shared analytical framework is gradually but undoubtedly developing.

One striking feature of the nascent women's movement, to paraphrase one of the articles in this publication, is the seemingly contradictory pattern of enthusiasm and wariness among its activists. On the one hand is the joy of finally being free to articulate women's problems and a desire to join the global women's movement; on the other a certain wariness about what CIS activists perceive to be the pitfalls of the movement.

This is in fact only one of many contradictions visible in the current debate and analysis within women's writings that reflects a paradoxical reality in the CIS. On the one hand, many women have welcomed the introduction of economic reform and political pluralism as prerequisites for social transformation in the direction of greater gender equity. On the other hand, there is no doubt that in the current period of transition women are in danger of losing a certain measure of economic
security and many of the rights they took for granted under socialism.

Concerns central to women’s groups in the CIS include women’s rights as workers, ecology and related health issues, status within the family and violence against women. These are structural questions, more closely allied with the collective pre-occupations of women’s groups in the developing world than questions of individual choice, such as sexuality, which have dominated feminist discourse in the North.

Rejecting both the socialist past and calls from some quarters for a return to the supposed idyll of the feudal pre-Revolutionary past, women’s groups across the CIS are left searching for alternatives and a new direction for which there is no comparable experience within the global women’s movement.

An additional problem confronting the nascent women’s movement in the CIS in its effort to evolve its own identity and conceptualise strategies is the absence of a tradition of independent academic research. Lacking both reliable statistical data and experience in gender analysis, the emerging movement is bereft of a solid foundation in both quantitative and qualitative research.

The papers included in this publication indicate that women’s groups in Central Asia are attempting to tackle these problems. They are by no means definitive writings, nor do they reflect the full diversity of women’s organisations in the region. Nevertheless, their authors are amongst those at the forefront of efforts to develop the women’s movement in Central Asia.

Marfua Tokhtakhodzhaeva, an architect by profession, is a founder of the Women’s Resource Centre, a multi-ethnic group of women professionals in Tashkent, Uzbekistan; Svetla Shakirova is a Research Scholar at the Al Farabi Kazakhstan State University and the founder of the Feminist League of Almaty, Kazakhstan; Anara Tabyshalieva, a historian, is the Vice-President of the Diamond Association of Kyrgyzia. All three were able to attend the NGO Forum held parallel to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing this September, indicating that independent women’s groups in Central Asia have started reaching out to link up with the global women’s movement.

While there is a commonality of concerns across the diverse regions of the former USSR, this publication reveals that women in Central Asia equally confront problems bearing a striking similarity to the issues which dominate the concerns of women living in Muslim countries and communities across the world: for example, a lack of choice in determining their marriage partners; polygamy; the question of how to attain gender equity without sacrificing one’s cultural identity; the rise of religious obscurantism and ethnic tensions; and calls for women to return to the domestic sphere against a background of economic uncertainty.

We hope this publication brings the concerns of Central Asian women to a wider audience and is one step in the mutually beneficial process of sharing strategies and strengthening the movement worldwide.
WOMEN AND LAW IN UZBEKISTAN
Marfua Tokhtakhodzhaeva

I. INTRODUCTION

The formal legal status of women in Uzbekistan, one of the republics of the former USSR, more closely resembles that of women in the USA and Europe than the status of women in lesser developed countries in the Southern hemisphere. The status of women in the family, however, is influenced by cultural imperatives similar to those of other countries that have predominantly Muslim populations. Thus research under the international Women and Law Project addresses the problem of how Uzbek women perceive their role in society and in the family following the challenges posed by the post-Independence economic reforms. From this fairly extensive framework, the present study has selected to focus on two sub-themes: women’s status and role in the workplace and their position in the family.

The reasons for undertaking a study on the legal status of women in Uzbekistan are clear. It is now widely recognized that efforts under the communist regime to establish legal equality and social equity for men and women have not had the desired results, nor are the post-communist legislative and regulatory changes that have been either implemented or are currently under consideration expected to have such results. In many ways, as will be revealed by this study, recent legal changes have driven women back into traditional roles, rather than allowing them to participate as equal partners in the reconstruction of their country. Yet, the full contribution of women, unhampered by restrictive legislation and societal rules, is essential for a smooth political and economical transition in Uzbekistan. It is therefore important to have an overview of what is happening in the area of new legislation, and to anticipate its potential impact on women.

II. SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE DE JURE AND DE FACTO POSITION OF WOMEN

Under socialism, the state ideology promoted the equality of the sexes and full employment, i.e. women were to be educated and employed at the same rate as men. In Uzbekistan, however, women’s labour force participation rate was lower than that for men (47% in Uzbekistan compared to 87% in the Russian Federation). Women’s employment in Uzbekistan has been characterized on the one hand, by their broad participation in all branches of the economy as specialists and qualified workers and, on the other hand, by a concentration of Uzbek working women in the unqualified and arduous tasks of cotton agriculture, where they have not had the possibility of increasing their education and qualifications.

Communist ideology was combined with traditional gender roles assigning women the main
responsibility for the maintenance of the house and children. Women's traditional role was legally reinforced under the state's paternalist policy of placing restrictions on the types of jobs women could hold, and through special measures for the protection of and support for employed mothers. The conflicting roles of women under the Soviet system led to the 'triple burden' of full-time employment, full-time mothering, and full-time domestic responsibilities.

Women held political office but were rarely in positions of power in the state and Party structures. Discussing women's issues, real equality and women's independent organizations was prohibited.

Nevertheless, despite evidence of extensive occupational stratification and pay differences by sex, at a superficial legal level women appeared to be treated fairly (in the conditions of a changing society). Women were educated at a rate equal to men and made up half of the labor force. A common property law decreed equality of claims to marital property for husbands and wives, and, at least in theory, there were no restrictions on access to family planning or abortion, although in reality there were few options. Ethnic and religious differences influenced gender relations especially between Muslims, who tried to preserve their style of life based on the past and on Muslims laws.

The tension between the socialist model of gender roles in the public sphere and the traditional models within the family (with men as household heads and women as homemakers and care givers), was magnified with the economical and political breakdown in the USSR. The centrally planned and state-controlled system guaranteed employment, minimum living standards and basic social services. These are no longer available. By default, the household is incurring the additional costs of handling these tasks during the period of transition, and the crisis is placing an additional burden on women, magnified by inflation and unemployment.

An assessment of the differentiated impacts of broad societal changes on the sexes, leads us to examine the interface between the household and the broader economy, and the respective roles of women and men in and across these two settings. Gender roles refer to a common division of labour and rights and responsibilities between men and women in a society. This gender perspective provides the context for assessing women's legal status in Uzbekistan.

2.1 The Transition Period

The economic crisis of the 1980s in the former USSR has meant many women are now concerned first and foremost with basic survival.

Loss of work, income, and social services has limited their ability to meet their daily economic needs. A major issue facing women in Uzbekistan, as in all new states of the former USSR now and in future, is how to balance their roles as mothers and home managers with their public lives. The paternalistic, protective legislation currently in place may have paradoxical consequences for women; in effect 'protecting' women from equal
work opportunities, opportunities for promotion and incentives to invest in marketable skills.

In part, the current crisis is the result of a mismanaged planned economy. Once the political and economical transformation was set in motion, the break up of the Soviet Union into independent republics followed. These forces redefined politics as well as the management of industry. Reconstruction was based on the major elements of market capitalism and was enforced through free-market prices, artificial exchange rates, and a cross-subsidisation between industries and regions in an area of planned production. Such dramatic changes would have resulted in economic chaos in even the most politically cohesive and prosperous of nations.

The economic status of women relative to men during this transitional period depends on: 1) the degree to which women were assimilated into public life and the economy prior to the transition; 2) the response of employers to labour and social legislation.

The transition from a planned economy to a market economy is a long and difficult process in which the social and economic status of women critically depends upon their ability to acquire new and relevant skills and on the willingness of prospective employers to reward these skills without regard to gender. The conditions necessary for promoting women's participation in the fields of labour and social life include a political system based on pluralism and consensus, and an economic system that promotes competition. These conditions do not, however, guarantee all citizens opportunities for political expression or for the attainment of economic goals.

The paternalistic nature of current labour laws and social insurance regulations in Uzbekistan may have adverse consequences for women now and in the future. Such legislation is based on the preservation of women's reproductive role and traditional family responsibilities. Young and old women are covered by special provisions. In particular, the current labour code stipulates: "Women retire at age 55, and are eligible for pension at this age. For men the equivalent age is 60." (Law on Retirement of USSR, 1991) "A grant and allowance are paid to all mothers. Paid maternity leave generally lasts six months. Child allowances now extend up to the age of 15. Children are eligible for allowances independent of the family's income." (Law on Retirement of USSR, 1991)

Economic markets operate on principles of benefits and costs. The traditional division of labour limits a woman's choices. Evidence suggests that in the current restructuring phase, Uzbek employers who are looking for ways to `rationalize' production costs, are choosing men more readily than women.

Recognizing the limited nature of job market opportunities undermines the incentives for a woman to invest in marketable skills. Often her husband will enjoy relatively higher wages and promotion opportunities. Thus, for women investment in marketable skills will pay less than `investment' in marriage.

In a period of transition, pay policies for women focus on maintaining a minimum standard of living and depend upon the extent of compliance by enterprises and the ability of
governments to enforce legislation. Women live longer than men, earn lower lifetime wages but contribute a larger share than men of their income towards pensions. Given high rates of inflation, women's benefits have not kept pace with rapidly rising prices. To complicate matters, maternal leave and benefits are decided by the enterprise administrations and, even if it seeks to, it is difficult for the government to monitor the compliance of these enterprises. Further, because society was not based on the rule of law, most Uzbek women are not very well aware of their legal rights.

The motive of creating current and future profits has led to job conflicts with gender-based wage differentials. It is not known whether the developing private sector will be responsible for picking up the costs of entitlements such as paid maternity leave, early retirement and early eligibility for pension benefits.

The transition period has revealed both the rational (based on the cost of women's entitlements) and the irrational (based on prejudice) hidden discrimination against women workers that are likely to be reinforced in the future.

2.2 Economic and Social Indicators

Women's participation in the economic life of a society reflects their status, their level of personal independence, and social freedom. Women's employment rate depends upon the public sphere rather than on their individual consciousness and mentality. The analysis of some available official statistical data shows that, in general, the rate of unemployment among women is almost the same in urban and rural areas.

The level of women's unemployment depends on the state of the labour market, the underlying socio-economic conditions of Uzbekistan's different regions and, what is sometimes more important, on ethno-cultural and religious traditions. According to my calculations (based on official statistics), the percentage of women out of the total number of unemployed was the lowest in the least economically developed region of Fergana - 65.65% (compared with the city of Tashkent where it is 34.6%). Analysing female unemployment from the perspective of their educational level shows that the majority of unemployed are made up of women with secondary or lower education; uneducated women make up a small share in both urban and rural areas (3.3% and 1.5%).
Presently the growing 're-domestication' of women is linked to unemployment on the one hand, and to the fall in the number of job opportunities on the other. Other factors also limiting women's potential to participate in economic activities and forcing the 'withdrawal' of women from economic life include: childcare responsibilities, the lack of job opportunities in their area of speciality, early marriage, decreased socio-occupational mobility of women, long breaks in employment due to child-bearing.

Education and training which can help in occupational mobility have had limited effect with indigenous women. Since professional choice has been limited to the non-productive sphere, technical education has received low priority among women. In rural areas, where most women are in agriculture, learning or improving their skills are impossible.

The data in Table 1 (see over) reveal that more than half of the population is rural, a ratio that is high compared to the equivalent ratio in developed countries. Uzbekistan's low-income, agrarian economy differs from the relatively well-off Russian Federation and Latvia. Women's labour force participation rate is noticeably lower in Uzbekistan.

The segregation of women's work is evident. Women are over represented in professions such as education, public health and engineering-economic positions. In contrast to western countries, the pay is generally lower for these white collar occupations than for jobs in production, especially in heavy industry.

Table 2 (see over) provides demographic and health indictors, where Uzbekistan represents the extremes: high fertility, high infant mortality; large families and low life expectancy. Uzbek couples are less prone to divorce. There is a high use of abortion as a contraceptive method. Women live longer than men but the aging differences are more acute. For example, in Latvia with greater economic development, aging differences translate into a greater economic dependency of women: pensions are the major income source for elderly women.

The female labour force in Uzbekistan consists of women aged 16-55. Economic dependency on the state is therefore greater for women who, independent of their longer life expectancy, work for relatively low wages. In 1979, women's labour force participation reached its peak (87% average in USSR and 47% in Uzbekistan). Since then, this has declined.

On average women were slightly more likely to continue schooling in higher education. But not all female students in Uzbekistan held jobs while attending institutes of higher education. Women were more likely than men to drop out of school once married since traditional roles and household demands competed for the time required for them to invest in additional skills-acquisition. In urban areas, there is a significant number of educated women in low-paid white collar employment. Women with secondary school education dominate light industries such as textiles and garments. In rural areas women are employed in non-mechanized agricultural tasks. In 1988, women accounted for nearly 39 percent of workers in agriculture. With limited the mechanization of work in agriculture, many women are unemployed in the rural areas. The persistence of traditional norms is one reason for the low migration of people, especially women.
Table 1: Economic Indicators for 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>per capita GDP $ 1990</th>
<th>rural pop. %</th>
<th>female pop. %</th>
<th>female employment %</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>1.579</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Fed</td>
<td>4.224</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>4.542</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Computed from World Bank. OECD. 1991

Table 2: Social Indicators for 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>inf. mort</th>
<th>pop. growth</th>
<th>abortion</th>
<th>fertility</th>
<th>life expectancy</th>
<th>divorce rate</th>
<th>ave. family size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Fed.</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>105.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Senior management jobs are generally not open to women who, in 1989, comprised only 4.2 percent of top managers in Uzbekistan. Since then, their number has decreased (in the Russian Federation women constitute 10.8 percent of top managers.) By contrast, women overwhelmingly dominate education, accounting for 55 percent of all educators in Uzbekistan. However, the percentage of women educators decreases as the level of education increases.

In times of economic reconstruction the position of less well-off people tends to worsen in absolute as well as relative terms. They have little wealth to offset job loss and their limited skills make them less desirable to potential employers.
III. WOMEN AS CITIZENS

Much of the legislation on the statute books has not been implemented while other laws have been interpreted through a cultural bias that keeps women politically and economically marginalized. Despite proclamations and legislation aimed at promoting women's equality, political, social and economical biases against women have prevailed, and strong inequalities in all spheres of life remain vivid.

The Soviets declared formal legal equality between sexes in the first Constitution of the Russian Federation in 1918. Women had the right to vote - but in a state that had no free elections for 70 years. So the legal systems of the republics of the former USSR contain false declarations on equality, while social reality has ample examples of how women are subordinated everyday and everywhere.

Society in the former USSR was not based on the law, but on the 'legal lawlessness', of totalitarian rule. The Communist Party cultivated disdain both for the law and legal institutions. State structures had no respect for the law and often only paid lip service to laws and regulations. Many instructions issued by the state and Party institutions revoked official laws. The rulers used legal institutions to harass, persecute, and terrorize countless individuals. People came to regard the law and legal system with considerable distrust and disdain.

During the Soviet era there were quotas for women in state structures and although there were women in positions of power they did not really represent women. Moreover, there were no women in the powerful leadership of the Communist Party. Therefore, people were not fooled by the presence of women in high positions. Knowing the type of women who filled the reserved quotas, like the men around them, these women had to be incompetent conformists. Consequently, the quotas failed to foster the acceptability of women being in positions of public power.

Restrictions on free speech and the mass media were all encompassing. They prohibited a public dialogue on women's issues and repressed all opinions contrary to the Party line or Party leaders. Throughout the Soviet period, those in power supported issues of women's equality as part of an economic policy designed to use the cheap female labour force. The authorities did not enforce legislation prohibiting sex discrimination in employment and further, when unemployment became a problem in times of crisis in the USSR and after independence, legislation and official opinions supported standard male views on the social place of women. Discussions on the status of women were directed towards the domestic sphere where women must be first and foremost housewives and mothers.

In the transition to a market economy and as the stakes rise for economic survival, the influence of the male dominated post-soviet consciousness will force the legal system to evolve away from notions of equality, eventually contributing to women's economic and political impoverishment.

To fully understand the law, it is imperative to recognize at the outset that the law does not operate in a vacuum and studying legislation in isolation of their social context does not
give an accurate picture of any person's status in society, be it that of women or others. This is very important in Uzbekistan, where law was ignored in the pre-colonial time, during the colonial period and in the Soviet era, so that now there is little respect for the law.

One important measure of women's political activity is the proportion of women amongst the members of elected structures. Before Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev introduced glasnost, 30% of the seat in the various levels of soviets (councils) throughout the country were reserved for women. Women also comprised about one third of the Communist Party membership. Women were also members of the government and Secretaries of Party Committees at the town, province and district levels. Female members of the Supreme Council of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic were drawn from women who worked on kolkhoz (collective farms), in industry and from the nomenklatura (the administrative hierarchy); only 5-7% were intellectuals: poets, writers, teachers and medical professionals. As there were no open elections, all members of the pseudo-elected structures were nominated. Mr. Gorbachev provided citizens with the first major open elections based on democratic principles of choice. In 1989, the Congress of People's Deputies was created.

But the processes of democratization in Central Asia lagged behind those of other republics, so members of the Uzbek Republic's Supreme Council were elected on the basis of the old principles of nominations. Alternative candidates were registered in less than half the election areas. Most members of the last Soviet Parliament in Uzbekistan were members of the nomenklatura. Although this included female functionaries, there were fewer women than in the past. Elections to the new parliament of independent Uzbekistan are to be held at the end of 1994, but it is not clear whether these will in fact be conducted through an open system of elections. Women are present on the lists of candidates from the Khalk-Democratic Party of Uzbekistan and the Vatan Tarakisty Party. Most of these women are from amongst former Comsomol (Young Communist League) members and party functionaries.

Women's groups which could express an alternative view on the place of women in society, are few and far between. They are registered as non-political organisations and have not fielded any candidates in the current elections.

3.1 Economic and Political Rights

Throughout the former USSR there is a marked inequality for women that is primarily due to an absence of women in the political process and a lack of awareness amongst women that stems from entrenched patterns of patriarchal socialisation and cultural perceptions of women as less capable members of society. Despite the fact that one third of the seats in the state parliaments were reserved for women during the Soviet period, these attitudes have persisted because the Supreme Council (Soviet Parliament) was only a decorative institution. Women members of parliament were only there to illustrate the article guaranteeing equal rights for men and women in the Soviet Constitutions of 1935 and 1977. This article is also incorporated in the 1992 Constitution of Uzbekistan.

Constitutional guarantees of equality do not necessarily transform into actual equality. For
example, the Constitution ensures women and men equal employment opportunities, remuneration and promotion. However, these guarantees are not enforced. On the contrary, the number of women in high positions has decreased in the past five years. Notions popular amongst males that women are unfit for many positions of authority or supervision, for example, continue to prevent women from having the same upward professional mobility as men. As a result, women do not receive equal pay for equal work. (see M. Tokhtakhodzhaeva, `Market reforms and status working women in Uzbekistan', WRC, Tashkent, 1994)

The transition to a market economy - which includes property rights and a political system based on the rule of law - has elevated the significance of economic law in Uzbekistan. In the past there was no private economic law; individuals could have only minimal personal property. Private economic activity among individual citizens was limited and, therefore, often took criminal forms as, for instance in the black market economy. The process of economic restructuring and the development of new substantive law, such as personal property law and the law of real estate, is largely being undertaken by former leaders, for only they have the necessary skills and knowledge of the past and present economic systems. This is a group that excludes women.

Highly represented amongst these officials are members of the nomenklatura, a select group of persons from the Communist Party deemed fit and trustworthy for key posts. Women used to figure in this group, but after 1991 they were forced out of the new structures. The nomenklatura operated according to a system of connections and influence. The influence of the nomenklatura is strong in Central Asia. The new state has had to turn to old hands for drafting new legislation that directly affects their interests. Economic power is reappropriated by and for those with economic clout.

Furthermore, there is an economic restructuring of the property of the ruling elite. And most working people, especially working women, will not receive an amelioration of their wages. In the same way that women's labour is subordinate to and more precarious than that of men, so too, women's property rights are at a comparative disadvantage.

Despite Constitutional provisions, equal job opportunities for women are being discontinued, since the relevant legislation is unenforced. Women, already less skilled than men, have less opportunity for advancement and promotion than legislation indicates. The present legislation implies that women need protection to be equal and thus treats women as subordinate.

3.2 Education and Promotion for Women

The influence of the Soviet Constitution is still visible in Uzbekistan's Constitution of 1992. This guarantees persons of both sexes equal access to education and advanced vocational, professional and technical training. In urban areas and villages boys and girls receive equivalent primary and secondary education. Although schools are coeducational, in rural areas it is common for girls to remain home to help in the house, and therefore receive little to no schooling at all. Families view education for girls as less important than for boys. The
dropout rate for girls in villages is higher than in urban areas with the primary cause of being early marriages. The number of early marriages is increasing. Girls of fourteen and fifteen years of age are forced to marry by their parents consequently the ratio of women in higher education and professional training institutions and programmes decreases. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of girls in religious schools set up in mosques.

In 1988, the gender ratio in institutes and universities was roughly equal: 46 percent females and 54 males (Hapo B 1988 T. 1989). But since then the proportion of women has decreased. Many disciplines are not evenly divided, and female students are concentrated in disciplines that offer them good prospects for future promotion. In legal education, for example, educational patterns subsequently lead to gender divisions within the legal profession and the legal structures. Until the 1970s the legal profession had been predominantly male but since the 1980s the sexes had been roughly equally represented. Although a standard course of study is prescribed for the first two years of the five-year legal (university) education, once students begin to choose their specialties, informal gender channeling becomes more pronounced. The legal profession is therefore informally divided between 'men's' and 'women's' law. Men's law includes criminal law, international law, and - nowadays - economic law. Women's law includes family law. When the economy was state-controlled, women's law also included civil law.

Positions of political and economic power - or influence - have always been held by men in Uzbekistan. In the past (1970-80), the head of the Ministry of Justice was a woman, and a few leading legislators were female, but this was during a period in which there was no rule of law in the USSR. It was a decorative policy to illustrate the promotion of women by the state. This has been revealed by the currently dwindling number of female legislators and women in state structures, non-government organisations and the private sector.

Amongst educated career workers, earning differentials increase with age. When men and women enter their jobs, wages are relatively equal. Differences that arise over time are justified with reference to men's greater dedication to their career leading employers to bear training costs for workers who are expected to stay with the enterprise for longer periods. Economic calculations suggest that older workers who change careers will not receive training because of the short time remaining for the enterprise to recover costs. The same argument (of not recovering investment) is applied to women of childbearing age, who are viewed as likely to marry and interrupt their career to care for children.

Job training leading to the possibility of higher future benefits creates a long term relationship between employees and enterprises. If women do not receive training, their career advancement is limited, and their loyalty to a specific employer declines. In effect, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of lower female dedication. Enterprises cannot afford to train women because they might leave. Lacking opportunities for promotion, women are indifferent to the choice between the current low-wage job and another that may be offered by competing employers.

Educated workers also receive more on-the-job training than less educated ones. The
lifetime returns to initial education are affected by the future employer's willingness to make additional investments in workers. For persons already in the labour market, incentives to acquire education diminish.

3.3 Protective Legislation

The protective Soviet labour legislation for women had several components. In independent Uzbekistan this legislation continues to be upheld, but many articles cannot be effective in a transitional economy. Women who talk of the virtues of the legal protection available to them, often refer first to the benefits and privileges provided to pregnant and nursing women. Formally, there are multiple guarantees: all women are guaranteed paid maternity leave of 58 days before and after birth, with the option of additional unpaid leave until the child is one year old. Employers may not have pregnant women, or women with infants, work overtime, and may not send them on business trips without their consent. Women in more taxing jobs must be transferred to easier work during pregnancy, but must be paid their prior salary. Women who are breast-feeding are guaranteed special workday rest periods and free vouchers for sanatoria and rest homes. Mothers with children are also given priority in the allocation of coupons for free or substantially discounted goods. Notwithstanding these guarantees, many women are unaware of them and never take advantage of them.

Another major 'protective' component of existing labour legislation is the legal exclusion of women from performing certain jobs. Women are currently forbidden from as many as 460 jobs and from working at night. Rather than allowing women the choice to determine for themselves whether they wish to engage in certain types of employment, the state has determined that certain jobs are inappropriate for women or that women are unfit for them.
The majority of jobs considered harmful for women's health often fall in the category of manual labour, largely in the construction, chemical and mining industries.

The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in employment and includes specific provisions prohibiting pregnant women from being either hired or fired. Employers have flouted these laws with impunity. Sex and age discrimination in all aspects of employment are rampant. Women who are either recently married or pregnant suffer greater discrimination. When all benefits and wages came from the state, employers had no problem providing paid leave and other benefits. With the conversion to a market system and a new requirement that enterprises be self-financing, however, both mismanaged and well-managed enterprises have found themselves unable to provide a generous benefit package. As a consequence, employers now refuse to hire these women and target women as the first to be laid off. There was general agreement in unemployment offices that nobody would hire women. Once unemployed, it is more difficult for women to turn to self-employment to support themselves. Furthermore, despite existing legislation it is harder for women to get involved in medium-sized and small business, and harder for them to get bank credits.

Many managers question why should they employ women when men remain unemployed. They believe it is better that men work and women take care of children and do housework. They think that women cannot work better than men. This is the reason given for forcing women out of the labour market especially from high wage jobs/sectors.

For its part, society is promoting more traditional norms in the mass media. New values proclaimed by our writers and mass media people seek to make women voluntarily choose a lower status. The attempt is to ensure that unemployment among women is not looked upon as a social problem.

IV. WOMEN IN THE FAMILY:
LEGISLATION AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Before Independence, in 1991, the Soviet Family Code was in use under the title: the Fundamentals of Family Legislation, the Code of Marriage and the Family of the Uzbek SSR. This legislation is still in use today. In 1993 a proposal for a new family law in the Republic of Uzbekistan, based on equality between men and women in family relations, was completed. This was discussed for a few months and may now be complemented by new parts and articles, which will reflect the cultural context. A comparison of these provides a glimpse of woman's legal status.

Before the October Revolution two laws operated in colonial Central Asia: Russian Codes regulated relations in society and were common to all citizens, and Sharia laws regulated relations in Muslim families and the Muslim part of society. The first Soviet Constitution declared the political equality of women. Then the Decree on the Separation of the Church from the State abolished the Sharia courts, it was met by militant resistance from the
Sharia courts. Consequently, Muslim educational and judicial systems continued parallel to Soviet systems of education and justice from 1927. The abolition of religious courts by the state did not overturn the people's Muslim style of life and many norms in the domestic sphere were preserved informally and existed as national traditions in the consciousness of people who adhere to Islam.

Throughout the Soviet period, therefore, contradictions between official legislation on the family and informal norms were conserved in the relations between relatives, nuclear families, husbands and wives, parents and children, men and women. Conflict within these relationships was based on the inequality of women in the family.

Today Uzbekistan is a secular state, but the majority of the population considers itself Muslim and the cultural context of life-styles includes many things which people consider to be Islamic norms. Amongst these is the subordinated status of women in the family. Men expect women to be submissive daughters, patient wives and then respectful mothers of adult sons. They dream about the same roles of women in the present context. Modern men discuss amongst themselves the new legislation on family and, perhaps, this viewpoint is one of the features that will cause the decline of women's status in the future.

4.1 Family Law

Currently the Family Code of the Soviet era, based on the equality of men and women in family relations, (specifically in regard to personal and property rights) is implemented. The Family Code (*Kodeyk o brake i semie Uzbekskoy SSR*) stipulates mutual spousal obligations. All marital property acquired by spouses during their marriage belongs to both spouses in equal share and is to be divided into equal shares upon divorce. Judges have the prerogative, however, to divide the property unequally so that, for example, only one spouse (often the wife) is given custody of the children.

However, this clause of the Code is often mis-used in the context of women's subordinated status in the family. For example, when a husband leaves his wife and children, she waits for his return, often staying with her parents and failing to use the property acquired during the marriage. She does not want to be an initiator of divorce, so the marital property is used by the parents or relatives of the husband or by himself, and, in fact, she loses her share of the property.

Divorce was not difficult in the former USSR, especially if ex-spouses mutually consented. However, there were some limitations aimed at protecting women: a husband could not divorced his wife if she was pregnant or if they had a child under one year of age. This provision has not changed. But the rate of divorce in Uzbekistan was half that in Russia because of the strong influence of traditional norms regarding women which expected them to remain submissive and not create the circumstances which could lead to divorce. As a result many women who have grounds for divorce do exercise their right for fear that their parents and relatives would hold them responsible for the breakdown of their marriage. They tolerate domestic violence, polygamy, and humiliation for the sake of preserving the family and for the sake of their children. Women are aware that the threat
of divorce puts them at a serious disadvantage, particularly since married women are accorded more respect than either unmarried or divorced women.

Today, the main issues in divorce law concern the division and maintenance of property. As noted earlier, current law stipulates that property equally between spouses. This raises questions regarding the ownership of the couple's residence: will the apartment belong to both spouses as individuals, each with a joint and full interest in the living space; or will it belong to the family? This issue currently remains unresolved. Further, most women going through a divorce remain wholly unaware of the potential ramifications of new property legislation.

Divorced mothers are entitled to child support from their former spouses, but awards are notoriously low and inadequate. Mechanisms exist to exact back payments from delinquent fathers, but women are largely unaware of these and in any case are not inclined to seek legal counsel or utilize social services to ameliorate their situation.

The centrality of woman's role as mother is one trend in the women's policy of the Uzbekistan Government. It believes that motherhood should command the nation's respect and esteem, and should be protected and encouraged by the state. There is no reciprocal provision for the encouragement and protection of paternity. As during the Soviet period, fathers have limited responsibilities even though patriarchal systems dominate domestic relations. The promotion and protection of motherhood has become one feature of the demographic policy in a country where the fertility rate is 4.3 and abortion rate is 50.8, with most of the population living in rural areas.

Abortion is legal, and is the primary form of contraception. In 1989 the government eased the abortion law, expanding the period (from the 12th to the 28th week of gestation) in which a doctor can legally perform an abortion. Family planning has been a topic of debate in Uzbekistan since 1989 and has been negatively viewed by Uzbek writers and intellectuals who are of rural origin.

The proclamation of equal relations in marriage and the priority accorded to motherhood assign women special obligations. The fundamental concept underlying this point of view is a notion that the family is the building block of the state, which serve to relegate women to the domestic sphere and their domestic responsibilities. Failure to comply implies not only disservice to the family, but to the state as well.

There was a heated discussion on a proposal for a mandatory limitation of the work week to 35 hours for women with children under age 14. Many women writers, who had good wages and income, supported this. Such a protective viewpoint is tantamount to sacrificing women workers as unemployment escalates and the economy deteriorates.

Uzbekistan has not signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women since many legislators consider that existing laws offer sufficient protection of women's equality. However, like much of Soviet legislation that was allegedly for women's benefit, current laws appear to be more of a political program of declarations in that they lack provisions for implementation. There is, therefore, a need to
research legislation and compare this with the real status of women in different spheres of life. It is especially important to analyze the co-existence of customs and traditions (often termed `Muslim') in private life and in the family.

4.2 Customs and Traditions

Soviet propaganda fought against the 'prejudices of the past', but this struggle was not successful because people had no desire for the state to interfere in their private lives and in the family. Therefore, many customs and traditions (both positive and negative) were preserved and many of them were diametrically opposed to the official legislation that existed.

Many customs and traditions are derived from Sharia laws and from folk customs rooted in pre-Islamic religions of Central Asia which co-existed with Islam. Their existence sometimes seems very strange in modern society. A few seem part of a medieval way of life that was not open and free. Many old customs and traditions are sanctified in people's consciousness a part of their culture. It is for this reason that they are viable and are not viewed critically. Customs related to marriage and weddings are an example.

Women usually do not have the right to marry on their own; according to tradition, they have to be given in marriage by a man. It is stated that the aim of marriage is reproduction, so a woman who does not have a child can be divorced, and the family takes her back. In rural areas the norm is that parents decide the match, with the main deciding authority being the father. In big cities and among highly educated families girls are given a limited say. Fathers who have common interests often decide a match among their children in order to strengthen their linkages. Subsequently, when the interests of the parents go in separate directions, this often becomes a reason for divorce. Before the marriage, the parents of the bridegroom must give kalam (a form of dowry) - often a big sum of money and presents. Usually, a couple will go through a double wedding: a legally recognised civil marriage at the town hall and a ceremony at the mosque where their nikah (Muslim marriage contract) is orally sanctified.

One very detrimental custom is that of holding lavish weddings. Weddings in rural areas are a holiday for the entire village's population, entailing substantial expenditures: all family members work hard to be able to pay for the future weddings of the children. Even the high elite of the nomenklature try to hold weddings according to tradition, though they do not display the kalam and presents.

Polygamy existed during the Soviet period, especially in rural areas, but was not very common in the cities; only amongst those prominent in the blackmarket was polygamy very common. Now the idea of officially permitting polygamy has grown, especially amongst the new rich who are of the view that if Islam permits polygamy, then it should be legalized.

The custom of adopting children of close relatives continues. A father can decide to give his child for adoption to a close relative who has no child (or son). Alternatively close relatives adopt those children who have lost their parents.
4.3 Domestic Violence

The law is woefully inadequate in matters of domestic violence, and the criminal justice system in the former USSR was biased against rape victims. Jurists are informed that occasionally a woman who agrees to have intercourse with a man will later falsely allege that a rape has occurred. A forensic medicine test gives similar advice to doctors who examine rape victims, warning them that sometimes rape is simulated. As a result, doctors are advised to carefully consider all evidence available, including an analysis of the victim's previous sexual experience.

The crimes of rape and domestic violence are seriously underreported in Uzbekistan. Before 1991, rape was reported only to the police, or perhaps to the hospital emergency staff. There are no figures on the number of unreported rapes or incidents of domestic violence, nor is information available on those that may have been reported but were not investigated. Historically, rape was one of the crimes committed in times of international conflict, yet nobody knows how many girls were victims of rape in the conflict on the border of Kirgizia or at Fergana in 1989.

Cultural attitudes towards domestic violence parallel those towards rape. Medieval Central Asian history provides examples of traditional influences that encouraged men's violence within the family. Official reports place domestic violence in the criminal categories of both hooliganism, and light and grave bodily injury. This crime is defined as a premeditated act of violence and appears to focus on the degree of publicness involved and the social harm caused by a given incident. The limitations of this law for abused women are clear: as long
as the violence is domestic and private, the abuser can escape with impunity.

The idea of family privacy in not grounded in individual autonomy and integrity, but rather in the notion of the male right to control women and that our duty is to obey men. In addition, since, law enforcement resources are overwhelmed by organized and violent crime, traditional cultural attitudes justify subordinating and ignoring cases of domestic violence.

The failure of society and the law to fully recognize, investigate, and prosecute crimes of domestic violence constitutes a tacit permission or approval. It implies the presumed unimportance of these crimes and the insignificance of the abused. Legal remedies such as civil protection orders signify respect for the bodily integrity and work of all citizens, including women. The state shows its disrespect for women, or an abused person of either gender, when it fails to take steps against such interpersonal inequality as violence. Indeed, violence against women implicitly becomes state or socially sanctioned when state authorities fail to respond to requests for help. By ignoring the appeals of beaten or battered women, the state contributes to their sense of worthlessness. Due to state inaction, abused women infer that they are not worthy of assistance.

V. CONCLUSION AND REMARKS

In the current transitional period in Uzbekistan, there is a need to examine new and proposed legislation to assess its likely impact on women, and to emphasize the need to explicitly mention women’s individual rights as household members, workers and owners of property. If the effects on women are not examined and controlled, women may be excluded from the benefits of, or even hurt by, privatization, especially through their displacement in the labour force when enterprises privatize and look to cut costs and the number of workers.

Women's inequality in Uzbekistan exists as a direct result of the totalitarian system that made superficial declarations of women's equality but which contained hidden discrimination in all spheres of life. The absence of women in the political processes and the lack of gender awareness in society resulting from firmly entrenched patriarchal socialization and cultural perceptions of women, result in the belief that women are less capable members of society than men.

There is a disparity of income and opportunities between women and men in economic life. A very important issue, therefore, is to promote equal opportunities for women and to enhance women's potential to participate as equal partners with men in building a market economy in Uzbekistan.

The existing social structure and services are inadequate for addressing women's subordination in the family, including domestic violence against woman in the family. Reproductive health in the area of public health is either not available or not accessible. This leads to great losses and economic costs in absences from work place and lower productivity and motivation among workers.
To make legal reforms less ambiguous and more conducive to legal equality and social equity for men and women, a number of legislative measures are of particular importance in promoting or maintaining women's equality. Of specific concern is legislation governing family property. Women's names should be included in land rent titles and other ownership documents relating to private property. Legislation might be drafted explicitly stating that there shall be no discrimination against women wishing to start businesses.

Finally, there is a need to increase gender awareness amongst a wider audience, to support the establishment of women's centers that provide information and training on various issues.

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PHILOSOPHY AND FEMINIST THOUGHT

Sveta Shakirova

In Russia, during the second half of the nineteenth century, feminism developed in association with the revolutionary democratic movement, anti-monarchist concepts, the abolitionist movement and philosophies opposed to capitalism. The struggle for women's enlightenment, and participation in the social, professional, scientific and cultural life was necessitated by the persistent subordination of women in the social and familial spheres of feudal Russia.

Due to nearly a century of Marxist ideology, a definite divide was drawn up between bourgeois feminism and the working women's movement. The struggle by middle class women for independence was dismissed by communists as 'bourgeois' and likely to distract proletarian women from the revolutionary struggle.

Marxist thought, it goes without saying, does give importance to women's problems, and regards the level of emancipation of women in a society as the standard by which to measure its social development. In "The Origins of Family, Private Property and the State," by Frederick Engels, "Women and Socialism" by August Bebel, "The Social Origins of Women's Problems," by Alexandra Kolontai, and in numerous articles by Vladimir Lenin, the socioeconomic dependence of women on men, and the hierarchy of the sexes is linked to the concept of ownership. The Marxists also associated discrimination against women with generally oppressive and antagonistic male social structures. Consequently, they believed that the oppression of women would be overcome by the transformation of society through class struggle.

Seventy years of socialism in the USSR gave the world many examples of women achieving important social rights (such as the legal equality of men and women, access to administrative posts in government and economic sectors, the working woman, a free and high standard of education, opportunities for professional and cultural growth, health care etc.). A number of rights which were won by women in the West were also achieved in the USSR as a result of the profound socioeconomic and cultural changes. Over the last decade, the effect of socialism, including its impact on women's issues has been undergoing a critical reevaluation. The solution to women's problems on a class struggle basis is gradually and naturally evolving into an approach based on the ideas of contemporary feminism which suggests different roles and identities for women in society.

In my view, a distinctive feature of local feminist research is the combination of activists' enthusiasm with a highly critical evaluation of the women's movements in other countries. Due to a strong desire in the feminist community not to repeat the theoretical and practical mistakes of the past, we are undertaking a thorough philosophical re-evaluation of the achievements made by women in Soviet and post-Soviet eras.
As in other countries, feminist ideas in our country are predominantly promoted by intellectuals, social scientists and cultural activists. We combine our efforts in different social organizations and publications. In the active women's movement of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, there are a number of organizations with feminist programs, as well as the official women's organizations, Muslim, ecological and pacifist groups.

Over the past two years there have been a number of international women's conferences held in Alma Ata: "Women in Contemporary Society" (August 1993), "International Conference of Women's Organizations of Eurasian Countries (September 1994), "Women, Rights and Society" (June 1994), and "Women of the East and the Market" (October 1994). During these conferences we have discovered a number of shortcomings in the focus and tactics of the women's movement of Kazakhstan.

The core of the movement is comprised of former and current representatives of the nomenklatura from the State Committees for Women's Problems, the heads of some non-governmental organizations, such as the Muslim Women's League, Union of Large Families of Kazakhstan, the Kazakh Association of Disabled Women, and the Association of Women Employers of Kazakhstan among others. The scientific vanguard of our movement is represented by an association of women lawyers, sociologists, ethnographers, historians, philosophers, and ecologists, all working to resolve the theoretical as well as practical aspects of women's problems in independent Kazakhstan. Women social scientists, including teachers, doctors, artists and journalists are also well represented.

The women's press in Kazakhstan is still weak, since existing press standards which have a simplified and distorted understanding of readers' interests, are unable to meet women's interests and needs.

The women's movement of the republic has taken various following approaches to the problems of women in modern society and a brief discussion of each follows below.

**The State Approach**

This approach is a continuation of socialist traditions in the solution of women's problems and is time-tested in terms of content and methodology. These are the methods of women, who, as in the past, believe in social justice and a socialist oriented economy. The focus is on Women and the State.

According to paternalism and atheist ideals, the state can and must support women (it offers grants to large families and single mothers, unemployed women, defense of women's rights in case of staff cutbacks or loss of jobs due to other reasons). Supporters of this approach also demand appropriate action from government officials, and that legislators pass pro-women laws.

**The Economic Approach**

According to the ideas of neo-liberalism, citizens must be given total freedom to achieve their material well-being. Home-based work, handicraft production by the family, and the
promotion of small private businesses are suggested. According to this approach, the fate of women from now on is in their own hands. Women must courageously compete with men in the business and professional fields, and engage in healthy competition, and honest struggle, strictly abiding by the rules of ethics. The primary focus is on Women and The Market.

**The Religious-Patriarchal Approach**

Due to the current revival of various confessional and religious activities in the Republic as throughout the former USSR, a number of women have been attracted to religious groups. They preach a return to the family, a return to archaic moral values, cleansing of conscience through religious values, purification through Islam, motherhood, and the cultivation of 'natural feminine values', such as tolerance, peacefulness, compassion, and gentleness. The focus here is on Women and God, Allah, Guru, etc.

**The Liberal Reform Feminist Approach**

Along with the traditional demands of the women's movement (equal opportunities for men and women in the fields of education, qualifications, careers, politics), this approach demands a change in society regarding the socio-sexual roles of men and women. The proclaimed aim is to introduce a new type of gender relationship based not on domination and subordination but on complementary gender roles in the family and society.

An important element of the feminist program is the prevention of threats of violence and restrictions on women in the family and between partners, and the resistance against massive anti-woman indoctrination through the creation of one-sided (mother, wife,
housekeeper) or unfavourable (witch, prostitute, object of decoration) images of women.

Thus the women's movement of Kazakhstan mirrors the diversities and complexities of women's problems and their solutions. As a component of the international women's movement, we are looking forward to participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women and NGO Forum being held in Beijing in September.

A Critique of Dualism

Feminist thinkers have put forward a question to philosophers: has not philosophy been influenced by the fact that the subject of European history has been man, and that the culture in which philosophy developed was patriarchal?

Dualism, (or the basic idea that the world is composed of mind and matter), fundamental to western traditions, has led to dualism between the sexes. A weak point in much feminist literature has been the promotion of this dualism between the sexes, rather than the removal of it. For example, Carol Gilligan, a well known defender of the 'female ethic' or, as she renames it, the 'ethic of concern', contends that kindness is an inate trait of women and that women's 'ethic of concern' is superior to the male ethic of individualism in all parametres.

In the opinion of American anthropologists, Roger T. Aims and David L. Hall, the fundamental and multi-dimensional nature of this dualism explains the often unnoticed similarity between feminism and a number of parallel philosophical questions of our time such as the status of the environment, pluralism, comparative philosophy, the status of animals and children, socialism, and racism among others. We cannot, therefore, solve any of these conditions in isolation, they assert, adding that as long as social, religious, and political convictions support dualistic thought, all the efforts to overcome sexism will be in vain. For this reason most modern philosophy (like post-structuralism, neo-pragmatism, post-modernism, neo-marxism, deconstructionalism) is oriented towards breaking the myth of preordination. This turn in western philosophy may be directed towards the removal of the dualistic method of thinking, which, as with other contradictions of western culture, gave rise to the contradictions between man and woman.

Originating in Platonic thought, dualism represented ideas of man on his own existence, which comprised of two opposite, asymmetrical, interdependent systems, namely man and woman. This dichotomy was, in turn, applied to all living and non-living objects. This bipolar image of reality, which appears in the duality of the consciousness and the body, the rational and emotional, objective and subjective, knowledge and opinion (etc.) is associated with images of man and woman created within a patriarchal culture. As a result, even such phenomenon as nature and culture, expressionism and rationalism, and the celestial and earthly were respectively symbolized as either male or female.

Some feminist theorists are suggesting a new non-traditional approach to overcome dualism, by integrating existing theoretical polarities. They seek to purge philosophy of the socio-sexual subjective factor of dualism, hierarchy and fundamentalism, through which
feminine attributes were accorded lower status by philosophers who held masculine ideals. Female subjectivity, sensualism, the feeling of belonging and depending on the universe, harmony with all forms of life, and the struggle for consensus, are the suggested attributes of the new doctrine.

In comparison to traditional philosophy, scientific history and culture, ethics are more prominent in feminist theory. There has been a noticeable flourishing of ideas in social philosophy, such as feminist theory, where new solutions have been found for problems concerning ruling, dominance, inequality, family, and self realization. Only in the twentieth century, thanks to the contribution of feminist theory, have problems concerning love, happiness, care, motherhood, reproduction, pornography, prostitution and ecology found theoretical status.

To conclude, one can state that feminism is attempting to bring an end to age old views which regard women as a being, whose anatomy has been politicised. It a fundamental sense, feminism has posed a challenge to the structures of 'traditional society'.

■ The ideal woman ?: traditional, beautiful, modest but accomplished. (Taken from a brochure on Turkmenistan, Ashkhabad, 1992)
WOMEN OF KYRGYZSTAN: TRADITIONS AND NEW REALITIES

Current Status Of Women Of Kyrgyzstan

Camilya Kenenbaeva, Anara Tabyshalieva, Altynai Karasaeva

Kyrgyzstan is a small mountainous country in Central Asia with an area of 198,500 sq.km. Its population is 4 million 450 thousand people. Kyrgyz people make up 59.7%, Russian people make up 16.2% and other nationalities live here as well. Over 60% of the population resides in rural areas and is engaged in agriculture. The capital of the Kyrgyz Republic is the city Bishkek with a population of about 600 thousand people. Kyrgyzstan comprises 40 districts, 6 regions and 21 towns. Almost 100% of the people are literate.

Currently the number of women in the Kyrgyz Republic is 4.2 million (51% of the whole population). About half of the women are of childbearing age which makes for a high birth-rate. In 1993 there were 26 new-borns for every 1000 people in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan has every prospect of becoming a democratic sovereign state, where, as the Constitution states, the rights and liberties of every person will be guaranteed. The wide range of political parties and non-governmental organisations testifies to the democratisation of society: 426 social organisations, including 10 political parties, 24 national and cultural centres, 6 social and political movements and 11 women's organisations have been registered in Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, being proud of independence and striving to join the world community, the nation of Kyrgyzstan suffers from a difficult economic crisis. The transition from a command economy to a market economy is accompanied by inflation, slackening of social protection and decline in living standards.

Women feel the economic and social uncertainty of the transitional period especially painfully. They endeavour to cope with the new reality in various ways: the development of new democratic initiatives, revival of religions and the emergence and development of entrepreneur business are indicative of this.

Simultaneously, the growth of social apathy, a moral crisis and idealization of the communist past are observed in society.
Major achievements in the status of women in the country include:

- the existence of legislative acts protecting the basic rights and liberties of women. There is no open sexual or ethnic discrimination;
- the high level of women's education;
- a high percentage of women's participation in public industry.

Negative factors in the position of women include:

- more and more women becoming poor; high maternity and infant death rate;
- existence of violence against women in everyday life and concealed discrimination in society;
- a general trend towards reduction of the percentage of women in the state authority structures;
- the weakness of women's non-state social organisations.

The Inequality in Division of Power and Decision-Making

In the Soviet period women made up over 30% of the deputy corps. They occupied important posts in the party and government staff. Usually the third secretary of a party body was a woman. It was an unwritten rule that women controlled the problems of culture, education, art and realization of party commands. In this way a female elite was established, which imitated real equality of men and women in the Soviet society. Representatives of the female elite headed women's movements, financed by party authorities and correspondingly strictly controlled by them.

Out of 102 republican-level officials endorsed by the republican government nine are women, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Finance Minister and so on. Out of 90 of the republican government staff, only 14 were women (14%) in 1994. Eighty four people make up the presidential staff, 38% of them - women. In the Soviet period, certain quotas were envisaged for women in the party and state leadership, currently such proportions are not officially endorsed. Therefore the number of women at the upper level of authority has declined noticeably. Now only 5 members of Kyrgyzstan's Parliament or 4% of the total number of deputies are women. From the above proportions it is possible to make the following conclusions: the absence of a regime favouring active participation of women in the power structures results in a low proportion of women at that level. In the decision-making sphere, masculinization leads to the loss of valuable female creative resources.

What is the reason for such a small percentage of women in the upper echelons of the deputy corps? The reasons for this phenomenon are concealed in the domination of patriarchal consciousness, which becomes apparent in women's lack of preparation for real political struggle, and in the low popularity of the image of women as leaders held by of the broad masses of society. Women are promoted to leading posts, but mainly are concentrated
at low and medium levels of governance. The proportion of women in upper levels of governance is small. This 'pyramid' can be observed everywhere in the society. The phenomenon can be explain by the stereotypes of the existing patriarchal consciousness. The first stereotype is: 'Politics is not a business for women; a woman engaged in politics is lost to the family'. This stereotype sticks hard not only in the male mind but also in female minds. Any man may be considered a potential leader, but the same does not hold for any woman. The second stereotype is: 'only a woman should combine professional and family duties.' She depends on the will of the man to help her, to take over at least some of the family responsibilities. Men do not face such problems: as a rule, married women support their husbands striving for a career and relieve them of domestic work.

Non-governmental public women's organisations

In the Soviet period public women's organisations existed. They were actually maintained by the state and carried out its instructions and, as a rule, were void of their own initiatives. Since the 1991 democratization of social life in Kyrgyzstan, alongside the former women's organisations, emerged various funds and movements defending the interests of women, the family and children. Currently these organisations are not financed by the state and do not experience pressure from the higher authorities as was the case in Soviet times. Under these conditions, defense of women's interests, family and childhood support activity has drastically changed. Gender research has become more active. The major obstacle to the realisation of initiatives in women's organisations is the lack of funds for the numerous projects in this field of activity. Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan's women, despite the hard economic conditions, manage to find funds to hold conferences, seminars, and to render humanitarian aid to mothers with many children, to pensioners, and to children. Women's organisations held a number of conferences in 1993-1994 on the problems of women's rights and improvement of their conditions.

Women's organisations have so far been created and developed mostly in Bishkek so far. However, southern Kyrgyzstan's women are discriminated against more than anywhere else, due to the traditions of seclusion and customs humiliating women's dignity. Those traditions are widely spread and firmly based on the patriarchal family system. There is one more reason: the women's movement does not yet enjoy broad social support from wide strata of the population. There are in Kyrgyzstan 11 women's associations active in improving the position of women along various lines:
Kyrgyz Republic Women's Committee
Diamond Association
Kyrgyz Republic Women's Congress
The Women's League For the Preservation
and Development of People's Traditions and Customs
Women in Development
Women's Art Union
Kanykey Women's Association
The Jer-Ene Kyrgyzstan Moslem Movement
The Shoola Karakol City Women's Counsel
The Women's Association of Artists and Art Critics
Central Asian Women's International Congress

In addition, various Kyrgyzstan non-governmental organisations and funds assist the democratic women's movement and render humanitarian aid to families, motherhood institutions and children. The most active are; Meerim, The Kyrgyz Republic Fund for the Protection of Mother and Child, Ukuk, Umai-Ene, The International Charity Fund to Support Orphan Children, Great War and Industry Veterans.

Poverty

The economic situation in the Republic has been extremely tense in recent years. The standard of living has dropped. In 1991 inflation amounted to 82%, in 1992 it was 845%, in 1993 it grew to 1208.7%. As was stated above women feel the poverty worst of all. With the economic reforms progressing, the female work force is growing; women work force market is developing, the characteristic features of that force being: low wages, low professional skill, mechanical work, small limited number of professions, bad working conditions, horizontal professional mobility, and part-time employment. The poorest group are: unemployed women, women on leave for child care receiving a pension, single mothers, and mothers having many children.

The percentage of female unemployment in all territories fluctuates within 76-80%. Unemployment prevails among indigenous women. The transition to market relations accompanied by a production decline has made the problem of women's employment more acute.

In addition to misery and personal defeat, women of the vulnerable groups experience the deep demoralizing effects of unemployment. This is evident from how the economic recession has affected the social and cultural norms. The feminization of poverty has become a distinctive feature of the post-Soviet period. Women make up the core of the 'new' poor.
Health Care

A birth rate reduction has been observed in recent years. According to data for 1993, the birth rate was 26.1, against 28.5 in 1992, per 1000 people.

The mother's death rate per 100,000 births has been calculated according to the World Health Organization criteria in the Republic since 1989. The number of women having died of pregnancy, child birth and post-child complications is 44.5 (per 100,000 births) in 1993.

The infant mortality rate (for infants under the age of 1 year) per 10,000 born was 318.9 (in 1993), including deaths from infectious and parasitic disease 43.6, and respiratory diseases - 151.2. The infant death rate varies ethnically in the Kyrgyz Republic: Kyrgyz and Uzbek infant mortality is higher than the Russian one. This is due mainly to the fact that indigenous people have more children and this prevents them from taking high-quality care of the children. In rural areas the traditions of feeding and nursing of new-borns still remains, thus increasing the probability of infant deaths.

In 1993 the number of fertile-aged women (14-49) in the Republic was 1,217,000. A high percentage (54%) of women giving numerous births in the total number of fertile women is characteristic for the Republic. Some birth-rate drop has been noticeable in recent years. From 1991 till 1993 the birth-rate fell by 10%. The average number of children borne by a woman in her fertile period has fallen from 4.1 in 1980 to 3.3 in 1993. The fertility rate of women over 40 has noticeably dropped. Birth-rate varies from nationality to nationality and within national groups. This is caused by ethnic and cultural traditions. The total birth-rate coefficient for Kyrgyz and Uzbek people was 31-32 children per 1000 people in 1993, that with the Kazakh and Tadjik people was 23-28 children, with Tatars and Germans it was 11-13, and with Ukrainians, Belorussians and Russians it was 8-9 children. Internal group fluctuations (city, village) depend on many factors, levels of education included. Women with a higher educational level have, as a rule, less children.

Measures have been taken for reasonable regulation of the birth-rate and family planning in the Republic since 1989. The reproductive regulation policy corresponds to the World Health Organization Charter and guarantees the right of the family to control reproductive choice and is aimed at making the interval between births optimum (2.5-3 years). Contraceptive means are not produced in this country.

The percentage of women, as against the number of fertile women, having used contraceptive means in 1993 was 25.4%. The decrease in number of abortions confirms contraceptive usage by fertile-aged women. The Republic dramatically lacks contraceptive means and requests the international community's help.

Health care services

In the Kyrgyz Republic there is no ethnic or sexual discrimination in access to health care services. A streamlined state system of stage-by-stage medical services has remained. It is free for all strata of the population. The following specialists render medical aid: assistant doctors, medical nurses and midwives at the predoctor stage; at the stage of aid by qualified
doctors: gynaecologists, therapeutists, paediatricians, dentists and other specialists according to need. The Kyrgyz Republic ranks high among the progressive countries in the availability of doctors per 10,000 persons. According to the data of foreign experts from the USA International Development Agency, World Health Organization, UNICEF and other doctors the professional level is sufficiently high. However, the health service institutions' lack of treating and diagnostic equipment reduces the quality of medical and sanitary aid.

Conclusions and Priorities

The following list of trends requiring attention applies generally to all Central Asian states:

- the expansion of women's work force marginalization;
- further 'feminization' of poverty and the emergence of new groups of poor, especially unemployed women taking care of very young children or elderly parents;
- growing number of women pensioners whose pension is less than that of men;
- single mothers;
- mothers having many children;
- rapidly decreasing levels of female education under the pressure of the economic crisis, religious practices and other factors.

However, Central Asian women's problems will be solved differently, as the chosen political and economical development models in the countries of the region differ. Alongside the general democratization there is scope for a full-scale women's democratic movement. The mass movement will help create an egalitarian strategy based on the ideology of autonomy, i.e. transferring the emphasis from protectionism to the creation of equal social opportunities for men and women in all spheres of life.

At the same time, as the economic crisis deepens and the family's and women's conditions worsen accordingly, Kyrgyzstan's female population's attitude towards democratization processes and the implementation of new reforms is changing. The majority of them associate better material well-being with the past Soviet era, experiencing some nostalgia for the lost social system.

All this really jeopardizes the further democratization of Kyrgyzstan's social life and increases the Communist Party's opportunities to take power, considering the fact that women make up 51% of Kyrgyzstan's population.
Practical Recommendations for the Transitional Period:

- conduct combined and numerous scientific research works on Kyrgyzstan's women's conditions and to develop on that basis a national women's program;

- organize a women's professional retraining Center to involve women in market relations;

- create a women's bank for favourable credits for women, so they could start small and large enterprises and develop business;

- reorganize the social protection system and to reform employment service.

Priorities for Action:

- to bring the legislative acts defending women's rights and interests in society in conformity with international conventions and agreements;

- to work out a national program to reduce women's poverty, involving them in the private sector/family business;

- to create a system of state and other forms of credits for women, to create a system of professional training and retraining for women workers;

- to create a special program to train women for governance work in state and other structures of governance;

- to facilitate the development of women's social organisations and to integrate them into the international women's movement. The democratic reforms, the rise of the women's movement, women's high educational level, and their preparedness to defend their rights, all create real prospects of raising women's status in society, to achieve successes in their aspirations for equal rights, development and peace in Kyrgyzstan.
The Contemporary Status Of Women in Kyrgyzstan: A Summary

Emil Shukurov

Discrimination against women in Kyrgyzstan has recently become especially obvious. The share of women in representative power bodies is not regulated by the quotas which were in use in Soviet times.

The most painful problem, the solution of which must not be delayed, is the problem of violence. Violence is rather widespread in our society, and it appears in various ways. In this respect, society even lags behind the criminal world by condoning rape and often excusing a rapist. The most disgusting form of violence is the abduction of a bride, which is accompanied by rough violation of human rights and humiliation of the girl's dignity. It is a disgrace to the nation that such a 'custom' is not dealt with as it should, and neither state nor society demonstrate their rejection of this custom. References to the 'delicacy' of the problem are completely groundless; with persistence and consistency it could be solved.

The practice of wife beating has become usual and, possibly, on a mass scale. It is supported by mutual guarantees that involve not only the husband's, but also the wife's relatives. Violence in the family is presented as non-existent. Such a bigoted approach means, for a great number of women, absence of hope and the horrors of being beaten up.

The revival of national traditions, positive on the whole, often brings with it a revival of humiliating and wasteful ceremonies accompanying marriage, birth of a child, and death.

In many families, the situation is critical. In a number of regions starvation and near starvation actually exist. Society in general and everybody individually expects that someone other than themselves will solve their problems. This passive state inherited from the past may cost a lot to a country which chose the way of independent development.

One of the indicators that the seriousness of the problem associated with the status of
women has been recognised, is the creation of the women's public movement. By now, there are over a dozen organisations. But that is only a beginning. If they are not really mass organisations, if all of society and the state do not turn their attention to solving women's problems we can hardly expect the situation to change for the better. A happy society cannot be built for the comfort of only one of its parts.

Traditions and Women

Anara Tabyshalieva

Before the Soviet period there was great variety in the status of women in Central Asia. Among Tadjiks and Uzbeks, Shariat held great influence over the lives of women. The situation of Kazakh and Kyrgyz women largely depended on traditions which included only a few Islamic elements. Before the revolution of 1917 sexual segregation was most pronounced in the urban areas. In the Soviet period the status of women in the whole population became more unified. Differences among them were primarily based on their status as urban or rural residents and on education.

In the post-Soviet period differentiation relative to territorial, confessional and economic status is re-emerging. Polarisation between more emancipated urban women and rural Muslim women is increasing drastically.

An incredible experiment took place in the Soviet period. The forced emancipation of Muslim women was a unique event in terms of scale, speed of implementation and lasting consequences. The Communist Party's policy, first of all, aimed at de-Islamization. For this reason, there was greater attention given to emancipation of women in Central Asia than in Russia, and Asian women were emancipated faster than European women. They were promoted to leadership positions; their employment in production rose. Tatar and Russian women played an outstanding role in the voluntary emancipation of native women.

The social purpose of the emancipation of women of the Soviet East was achieved by a number of active and mass actions which included at the initial stages public burning of the paranja (veil). The whole campaign to attract women to the side of power and distance them from Moslem values - called the Hujum (Offensive) - was largely ineffective. For example, on the 8th of March, 1929, about 9 thousand women in the Kyrgyz ASSR Osh canton, took off their paranja, but on the next day many of them put it on again. The fierce resistance of the population to the violent forms of emancipation was interpreted by Soviet authorities as class resistance and was suppressed by corresponding ruthlessness. On the other hand, with the passage of time, millions of Central Asian women felt that they were capable of not only performing their biological functions, but also of participating in social and political activities. Deislamization, Europeanization and general literacy, and Soviet technical achievements changed the traditional surroundings of Kyrgyzstan's women. All
that brought the region considerably nearer to European standards, and not to Asian standards. The tremendous changes affected the status of the woman, her role and the nature of her work.

The important distinction between Central Asian women and Western women may be noted in the following: in the West emancipated women mastered male professions and replaced men in their traditional professions; in Soviet Central Asia industrialization, collectivization and cultural revolution resulted in new professions. Women filled these empty niches. One can say that socialism was built by women. Some occupations, such as health care, education, parts of the service sector, etc. were completely feminized. However, most of these professions are usually low-paid. Nowhere else in the world were these professions so monopolised by women as in the post-Soviet countries. In schools male teachers are an exception.

In the post-Soviet period we are facing a common problem in Central Asia: the problem of changing this situation. The number of women working in science and education is very high. Even in Uzbekistan 40-45% of scientists are women. There is no other Islamic country where there is such a great number of women scientists. The feminization of science and education increased even as compared to the Soviet period. These are non-prestigious, low-paid professions. That is why positions in science and education are occupied by women and some men who feel unable to adjust to the new economic situation. The most entrepreneurial men go into business.

There was a double standard in the status of women in Central Asia. They enjoyed a number of political rights which were not economically guaranteed. For this reason, women found themselves in an ambiguous situation: socially they were encouraged to be emancipated, but at the same time they had to comply with some traditional norms of behaviour. Central Asian women differ from those in Europe - they usually suffer from 'a guilt syndrome'.

Communist ideology precipitated Muslim women's emancipation, but it also gave rise to the painful situation in which they were torn between social activities and participation, and the family. The strong resistance to forced and non-forced emancipation was seen by the Soviet government as class resistance; consequently, it was ruthlessly suppressed. For women, the image of working outside the home became the ideal; domestic work lost its respect. The combination of the two behavioural standards, the European standard and the traditional one, was not organic. This gave rise to a conflict situation: the complete rejection of traditions would inhibit women's acceptability within the community whereas the rejection of European elements in behaviour would inhibit their advancement in the work place and in the public sphere at large. This resulted in the so-called 'double-conformism' in women's behaviour - women confronted with the unresolvable problem of choosing between the traditional and the modern.

In is common knowledge that the physical biology of women accounts for heir long life-expectancy in comparison with that of men. In Russia and in the Baltic states women constitute 53% of the whole population, whereas in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan
- only 51%, in Tadjikistan - 50%, and in Kazakhstan - 52%. These figures are even lower in rural regions. Women’s burden of work both outside and inside their homes has led to an increased maternal death rate; for every 100 thousand newly born infants in Turkmenistan there are twice as many maternal death as in Russia and Belorussia. In Tadjikistan there are 178 still-born infants per thousand, 153 in Turkmenistan, 143 in Uzbekistan. In contrast to the situation in Russia, the number of abortions in Central Asia is half as much as in Russia, but the number of still-born infants is twice as much.

The majority of women work not because they want to, but because of economic necessity. According to a survey, in the CIS working women spend 37 minutes a day with their children.

In the post-Soviet period women have in fact lost their privileges and the social benefits of child care. Their economic situation has deteriorated more than the economic crisis. One can expect in future that women will become poorer and poorer.

For economic and confessional reasons, the number of well-educated women and women professionals will decrease. This will result in deterioration of their status in society. Even in democratic Kyrgyzstan the former parliamentarians seriously discussed the question of introduction of polygamy in the country.

The revival of pre-Revolutionary Islamic values has its strongest impact in rural communities among less educated women.

For economic, confessional and cultural reasons the differentiation among women will deepen not only across the borders but within the Central Asian republics themselves.

I would like to mention that a feminist movement in Central Asia already exists. During the Soviet period it was held that the Communist Party would take care of women as much as they needed. The typical title of a number of publications on women’s issues was ‘The Path to Happiness’. For the first time, there have been conferences of Central Asian women who began to realize the peculiarity of their situation as victims of a huge social experiment.
Old Stereotypes and New Tendencies: Some Aspects of the Status of Women in Naryn and Issyk-kul Provinces

Dina Shukurova

There is nothing new in the idea that, in societies that keep some nomadic traditions, women play an important independent role. But, if we study the inner structure of the status of a society: distribution of functions, social status and so on, the situation seems to be more complicated. It is especially true in the recent situation in Kyrgyzstan. In Soviet times, the real progress in the status of women was used to prevent all attempts at honest research; now, the problem is declared to have already been solved in nomadic times.

This is an attempt to reveal some features of the recent state of women, based on data from Naryn and Issyk-Kul regions. Naryn region is relatively homogeneous and economically poorly developed; old traditions are kept there. Issyk-Kul region is not as homogeneous ethnically and has a more stable economic basis and perspective; the process of transformation of the old way of life is more developed there. Unfortunately, neither earlier nor more recent reformers pay due attention to centuries-old traditions, the peculiarities in the mental and social stereotypes of the nation. Study of the state of women enables us to understand the most painful problems of developing society.

The Naryn region is more rural than Issyk-Kul. This means low living standards, poor nutrition, lack of vitamins, cultural backwardness, bad medical and social services, hidden and visible unemployment, absence of perspectives on development, dependence on power and officials, archaic forms of customs and communication and many other negative things which neutralise the positive side of country life. Women and children are the most sensitive part of the population. It is not by chance that child mortality is much higher in Naryn oblast (region) than Issyk-Kul (31.2 per 1000). The structure of the population proper leads one to think that there are more men than women in Naryn. The opposite is true in Issyk-Kul oblast. If we take into account that women in Naryn have low a index of longevity, and 80% of confined women are exhausted, we can't say that having the lowest percent of divorced men and women means comparative well-being in women in Naryn.

Economic changes negatively influence the state of women first of all, as they have the main burden of the family. The health of women and children and political and social aspects of the unequal status of women considered in the article are proved by the very bad situation of women in Naryn and Issyk-Kul regions. The slightly better situation in Issyk-Kul correlates with better economic conditions and sometimes with the ethnically less homogenous structure of the population in Issyk-Kul oblast.

A brief review of some aspects of the status of women in Issyk-Kul and Naryn oblasts in the context of the general situation in the republic indicates serious problems, derived from factually unequal status of women in comparison with men. While the female part of the
population is largely responsible for carrying out very important functions in the family (and nobody can replace women there), and their participation in the workforce is accompanied with almost equal responsibilities as men, the representation of women in decision-making bodies is not comparable to their real contribution to society. Economic and everyday inequalities must be given seriously consideration and the incorporated into policy at the state level. Not only in the form of declarations but in the form of a helpful program and concrete actions, including the improvement of existing legislation.

Rights of Women in Kyrgyzstan: Utopia and Reality

Leila Sydykova

The exhausting of the state budget, privatisation and the elimination of state ownership of industrial and agricultural enterprises ruined the system of social protection for women (allowances for children, grants to mothers with many children, maternity leaves etc.). Nowadays it is not rare that women do not get any help from the state at all. Women in rural areas are the most vulnerable. Most of them do not even know what colour the national currency is. In remote districts, natural exchange of goods is very common. A large number of families make a living by selling cattle and products from their farms. According to official data, over 80% of the population is beneath the poverty line.

There are too many unemployed men in our country. How are they going to feed their families? We need more jobs for our men.

Women are lucky. They have husbands. They have nothing to worry.

- 'As Women, As Workers', Committee for Asia/Women

The unemployment of women in Kyrgyzstan had resulted in an increase of suicide, especially among older women, an increase of abortions among teenagers, and an increase in the number of prostitutes and female criminals.
In the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic currently in force, criminal responsibility is provided for the following crimes: murder on the grounds of tribal prejudice with respect to women (article 94, paragraph 8); compulsion to sexual acts (article 109); sexual acts with a person under 16 (article 110); sexual acts depravation of juveniles (article 111); giving and taking ransom for a bride (article 114); compulsion to marriage (article 115); bigamy and polygamy (article 117); prevention of equality of women (article 130); encroachment on the person and right of citizens as a form of observing religious procedures (article 136/1); refusal to give work to a pregnant woman (article 138) and others. It is obvious from an analysis of investigative and court practice that the above articles are practically not used. There is not a single case registered under some of them, despite the fact that such situations do occur. As one poll indicates, many women do not even know that international documents on human rights exist.

New Waves of Emigration

Gulmira Mamatkerimova

The militarisation of the economy and the transfer of Russian-speaking people to Kyrgyzstan to develop industry which occurred in Soviet times became the ground for the current conflict situation. It may be defined as a lack of qualified personnel. The attraction of specialists from Russia, the neglect of the issue of training of technical specialists, and the recruitment of workers from among the local population caused the recent collapse of industrial production.

As a result of the strong emigration, the republic lacks tens of thousands of qualified specialists which previously worked in industry, construction and the energy sector. The few Kyrgyz specialists and workers without knowledge, experience and skills in industrial culture were not enough to fill in this gap. This immediately influenced the quality of products and terms of production. Besides, this was aggravated by the economic crisis and break down of links within the former USSR.

Thus, demographic conflict is gradually taking on the appearance of interethnic tensions. In June, 1990, ethnic conflict in Osh and actions taken by youth and political movements in Bishkek revealed these conflicts.

It became obvious that the immobility of the Kyrgyz nation is a myth: their migration behaviour and readiness to territorial transfer (especially among youth) exceeded the potential of cities and towns to assimilate the new urban inhabitants and provide them with dwellings, work and acceptable living conditions.

In such circumstances, interethnic conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbek caused consequent sharpening of differences between Kyrgyz and Russian, and between the official and democratic opposition, which took a nationalist position. Under pressure from the
opposition, the central government made partial changes in local governing agencies and allotted land for housing around Bishkek and Osh, mostly for people originating from Kyrgyz rural settlements.

Thus, migration of the original nation to urban areas, especially to the capital and oblast centres, which had been prevented for many years, was 'released'. The transition to the market stimulated this process. Free trade in houses and city apartments turned many rural people to town-dwellers.

Flows of refugees have become a new phenomenon in post-Soviet reality. This problem is caused by numerous and complicated factors, including violation of human rights on mass scale. According to official data, in the Kyrgyz Republic there are 1,369 families of refugees counting 6,360 people in total. Almost all of them are in Chu and Djalal-Abad oblasts. Less than half of them (3,075) are able to work, 3% are retired people, 49% are children under 16 (percentage according to age); 51% are women and 49% are men; 80% are Kyrgyz and 10% are Tadjik. Women and children are the most vulnerable elements. According to observation, there are many pregnant women and nursing children who do not get appropriate nutritional and medical service. It is more difficult for mothers to obtain work. Very often children do not go to school.

Migration in Kyrgyzstan is a very complicated phenomenon which has a serious impact on the status of women. Only sustainable economic and social development, providing observance of human rights and strengthening of democracy can facilitate the solution of the problems of migration and maintenance of peace in the Republic.

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"As Women, As 'Workers', Committee for AsiaWomen"
THE WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTRE, TASHKENT

Background
The Women's Resource Centre, Tashkent was organised as an informal group at the beginning of 1994. The WRC was later registered on the 1st of November 1994 under the umbrella of the Historic Cultural Inheritance Society 'Yodgorlik' of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Documents were given for registration as an independent, non-governmental organisation on 28th February 1995 to the Department of Justice, Tashkent Khokimiat and on July 12th, 1995 the WRC was fianlly registered as a public society.

Our Aims and Objectives are to:
- disseminate information;
- foster enlightenment;
- support the initiatives of individuals; and
- provide a forum for cooperation and mutual support.

Our main areas of activity focus on:
health, ecology and sustainable development, cultural development, and the status of women.

Our activities are designed to be culturally enlightening, and are directed at:
- raising awareness regarding the tremendous problems confronting women;
- broadening women's own consciousness and awareness of current global trends;
- promoting women's identity as a social group.

The WRC seeks to collaborate with other women's groups both locally and abroad. It currently has links with the international network of solidarity and support WLUMIL and with the Network East-West Women. The WRC is working with both networks in two basic areas: communication and information exchange, and common projects and programmes.

Organisational Structure
The WRC is a non-governmental, non-profit, a-political, grassroots organisation. Its structure is simple, with members electing three women managers and a Chairwoman, who is responsible for documentation, while other members work on various projects. Decisions are made through consensus and funds are raised through membership fees.
Work so far...

Two books about the history and current status of Uzbek and Central Asian women (forthcoming - translated and edited by Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre);

Articles and papers for a UNESCO conference and WLUML workshop;

Study of the status of women working in the textile industry and pharmaceuticals for the UN University in Helsinki, Finland.

Activities Planned for 1995

Organising an information resource centre, including a library for women;

Preparing a report on 'Ecology and Women's Health' for the Conference in Nukus, September 1995;

Holding a meeting in November with women's groups from Central Asia, Pakistan and from women's NGOs in Tashkent.

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The uncertainty prevailing in the transitional period in the Kyrgyzstan Republic is, first of all, felt by women. The worsening economic situation is combined with the feeling of personal failure in the professional sphere. Mass unemployment has affected all categories of women, including highly qualified specialists in fields such as, science, welfare, education, and culture.

Women's reactions to the situation have been varied. The majority, who do not believe in state help, nor in non-governmental structures, are actively adapting to the changing economic climate.

Adaptation to the new way of life, new norms and values are largely determined by a person's level of culture and education. Thanks to an almost one hundred percent literacy rate, people in Kyrgyzstan have generally tended to readily accept the economic and social reforms. Women, making up half of the Republic's population, play a decisive role in the democratic conceptualisation of development.

The realization of women's roles in social change is the objective of the Diamond Association. This women's international democratic organization, created in 1994, does not discriminate on the basis of age, race, gender, faith, level of education, etc., in its search to realize our shared interests, solve the scientific problems confronting us and carry out projects and independent civic initiatives.

The Diamond Association is a non-governmental, non-commercial, non-political organisation. Its activities are not determined by material gain, and it is of the view that only free, well-educated, and socially active people are able to create and develop an atmosphere of stability, civic responsibility and economic confidence in society.

The Association's main goal is the development of women as individuals, their rights, health and role in society.

Apart from volunteers, professors and students of higher education institutions of Kyrgyzstan, researchers from the National Academy of Sciences, and scientific unions and centres have been involved in our programs.

Through scientific investigation and the analysis of social development through economic and other indicators, the Diamond Association hopes to find real reference points for improving women's social status and economic independence.

We invite all interested persons and organizations to collaborate with us.

The DIAMOND Association are:

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Bermet Tugelbaeva
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Anara Tabyshalieva
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