



Uzbekistan Women from Pre Soviet Period to Till Pandemic

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Introduction

Almost every year, international research organizations view the position of women in society. Many reports were published on the status of women as a question, utilizing a league table system like Global Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum, which keeps track of gender equality around the world. Throughout history, the issue of women's rights has occupied a central position in practically almost all communities around the world. The answer is obvious: women have been maintained in utter subjection for thousands of years because most societies are patriarchal.

" It's pointless to communicate gender equality to people if you start with the assumption that 'the man is the family's head.'"

Whenever a trial takes place to understand the woman's position in Uzbekistan, Liana Natroshvili believes that society plays a prominent role in it. For many years, almost all societies reflected that women were placed at less recognised status as compared to men and so had to submit to their authority in order for the family to run smoothly. The deplorable state of women has been weaved into the historical pattern of society as well. Historically, it turned out as natural law throughout the ages. In social institutions like Family, Marriage and Kinship, the role of parent, brother, or husband, the men showed major dominance in the life of women, to have mastery over her and to choose her future. She was thought incapable of making decisions outside of her sphere and was confined to her house, family and hearth. Since 1991, the new Central Asian nations including the Republic of Uzbekistan undergo a new transition period as a new independent state highlighting their path dealing with difficult problems. The Republic of Uzbekistan is defined by a mix of economic reforms and government strengthening with authoritarian essence. Uzbekistan has progressed along a path of progressive democracy, socially oriented market economy, and nation-building while retaining indigenous ethno-national culture and traditions at the heart of the independent state. In Uzbekistan, where traditionalism and modernism coexist, traditionalists wanted women to stay at home while liberals wanted to promote women's equality and equal involvement in society with males. Uzbekistan is on a road of national revivalism, resurrecting a time when women were thought to be less recognised to men in terms of capability. Uzbekistan Women were sometimes supposed to give her opinion for household and family matters, including child rearing. Women's standing in modern Uzbekistan is strongly influenced by history.

In the broader gender structure, the Republic has inherited the legacy of the Soviet Union of apathy and softness toward women. As a result, the socio-economic standing of women, as well as their public lives, is being impacted.

II. Tracing the status of Uzbekistan Women before Soviet

In pre-soviet period, "the severe customs and canons of Islam" largely controlled women's position in Central Asian history, the erstwhile colonial fringe of imperial Russia. Western writers who visited Central Asia in the past painted a bleak picture of the country's society, particularly of women, who were regarded as chattels, forced into horrible marriages, and lived lives of virtual servitude, according to them. Traditional culture was shown in a negative light by Soviet publications due to their colonial mentality. They regarded Turkistan's women as little more than slaves, subject to their lords' and masters' whims and fancies, due to their lack of understanding of Central Asian family system. Marriages were arranged by close relatives according to Islamic and customary law during the pre-Soviet period; neither the bride nor the bridegroom had any influence in the choice of their future mate. Because the financial duties undertaken by the male, particularly the payment of the bride price (Kalyn), were quite costly, there was frequently a significant age gap between husband and wife. Only young men from the wealthiest households could afford this. The cost varied according to the groom's wealth and status. Instead, the bride would bring a dowry, which was usually linen and household items. Although polygamy is acceptable in Muslim law, and males are allowed to have up to four wives at a time (provided that they are all treated equally), only the wealthy have more than two. Similarly, a man can divorce his wife at any moment, but he must also return all of her property and pay the Kalym if it has not previously been paid, according to Muslim law. This Kalym tradition looks to be a form of captivity and debasement of women, but it also served as a check on divorce. Divorce was an expensive luxury that not everyone could afford because of the bridal price and dowry. Divorce would be prohibitively expensive for craftsmen and rural cultivators, whose women contributed significantly to the family income. Furthermore, a woman can compel her husband to divorce her on the following grounds: one, if the husband is absent for an extended period of time with no news of him; two, if the wife is a minor, she can refuse to continue the marriage until she reaches majority; three, if she can prove that he is mistreating her or has married a second wife without her formal permission. Despite the fact that women are subordinate to their husbands, they nevertheless have certain rights. She is entitled to food, clothing, lodging, servants, money, and any other costs associated with her station. If the husband fails to fulfill these, she may file a complaint with the Qazi or a court, who may authorize her to borrow money on her husband's behalf or even compel the sale of some of her husband's property to meet her financial needs. Traditionally, women were not entitled to a portion of the parental inheritance. After marriage, the next major boost in women's status, rights, and respect comes from having a child. Her position becomes significantly more safe and steady as a result of this. When a boy is born, the mother obtains property rights as well: if she is widowed, she becomes guardian of her son's share of the estate while he is a minor. The levirate is another example of increasing rank. In some ways, the levirate is a type of social insurance, as the widow will be provided for. The foregoing facts reveal a mismatch in Western experts' comments portraying Central Asian women as worse than slaves. Their perspective of the issue is based on their limited knowledge of Central Asian marriage systems such as bride-price or Kalym, polygamy, child marriage, and the Naranja system. They have overlooked Muslim

women's wonderful and significant position in court politics, as well as middle-class women's ability to exert authority over the entire family through their industry, especially in the face of a patriarchal family system. Women played a vital part in the socioeconomic field and contributed significantly to their families' financial well-being. Not only that, but even the spouses of high-ranking officials created crafts at home and sold them to supplement their income. A wife has supported her family by selling her embroidery and hatching silkworm eggs in the past. Women were solely responsible for the hatching industry. Some of the ladies labor with metal and create bowls and other items, while others sell embroidered caps in the bazaar. Centrasia has a long tradition of female teachers known as *Otines* who were in charge of religious education in their own houses for both boys and girls. Families encouraged them to participate in rituals like as births, marriages, and so forth. During religious ceremonies involving women, such as *Mavlud* (the remembrance of the Prophet Mohammad SAW's birth), these *Otines* offered prayers or mystical poems. During this time, education was based on Islamic teachings, and women were only allowed to attend if they were from a wealthy family. *Otines* were honorary titles given to educated women, particularly those of the court. Long before the Bolsheviks, a progressive national intellectual movement known as Jadidism had raised the subject of bringing women into social and cultural life as part of its mission to rejuvenate and reform society. Shura-i-Islam, a Jadidist organisation, was the first to make women's electoral participation a priority in its agenda. They felt that the status of women influenced the intellectual level of society in various ways. They believed that society's transformation should begin with reforms in the spiritual, cultural, and everyday realms, as well as a shift in the perspective of women's place and function in Muslim life. Women's equality and secular education were promoted by Jadidism, which criticised polygamy and ill treatment of women. Because of the critical role of women as mothers of the next generation, they concluded that a nation's progress and civilization are dependent on women's educational, moral, and intellectual progress and civilization.

III. Tracing the status of Uzbekistan Women during Soviet period

Ever since the starting point of the Soviet era, Soviet authorities have already been committed to the cause of women's freedom in all parts of the country, as well as the idea of putting women on an equal step with men across all determinants of social, economic, and national politics. Women were to be designated as producers of the new social order, according to them. To achieve this goal, they first determined that it was necessary to end this oppression of Muslim women derived from native khans and tsars by favoring them with that so socio-economic liberation so socio-economic liberation, not for any philanthropic motive, but to increase the labor force to ensure the success of the cotton drive and foster the creation of a socialist economy. Second, the status of Central Asian women in traditional society appeared to Russian eyes to be akin to slavery, and third, the communist party sought to suppress Islam. This transition was necessary to clear the ground for the advent of communism, which would not have been possible without women's involvement. The Bolsheviks were hell-bent on changing the status of Muslim women because they believed that women had taken on the role of protectors of the faith, which they aimed to eliminate through a gigantic propaganda machine that lasted until perestroika. The Soviet women's policy was executed in two stages to attain their goal. Secularization of family law was the first stage. The old and Shariah-based tribunals were replaced by a new set of codes and civil tribunals. Religious weddings (Nikah) were outlawed in 1918, and legal registration of marriages, births, and deaths became mandatory. To give women more security, the

Soviet divorce legislation was established in place of the Shariah code. Polygamy, the payment of Kalym (bride-price), and marriage without the consent of the bride were all outlawed between 1921 and 1923, with the legal age of marriage set at sixteen (rather than nine) for girls and eighteen (rather than sixteen) for boys. Women were granted the freedom to vote and equal access to all levels of power (Article 64 of the Soviet constitution of 1918). It took a lot of work to get the word out about these new legal protections. The legislation was converted into regional languages and widely distributed. Women's civil and constitutional rights were explained in public assemblies and rallies. Most were given basic instruction in Soviet law as well as assigned to People's Assessors' courts. Later, extended courses were offered, and they started to join the judiciary near the end of the 1930s. The preparation of local cadres was another feature that came as a result of years of hard labor. The earliest activists were almost exclusively young Russian Communists, and just a few of them knew any of the native languages or customs. They were gradually joined by local sympathizers, beginning around 1925. They were primarily poor young girls who had been interested in the emancipated movement for one cause or another. In Central Asia, various communist women's organizations (Zhenotdels) had formed by 1920. Women activists were organized by the Zhenotdels to go from home to home and form women's social clubs, cooperatives, stores, and special facilities where women could learn to sew, read, and write without coming into contact with men. The Zhenotdels' principle technique of operation was persuasion. They were able to build up a discreet, safe atmosphere for women to feel comfortable outside of their own homes in this setting. The formation of women's social clubs was one of the most essential aspects of the women's groups' work. In 1924, the very first club was founded in Tashkent's old neighborhood. These clubs educated women about their constitutional rights under the new Soviet government and made them aware of them. Later, the clubs focused their efforts on women's cultural advancement. Illiteracy was eradicated, as was training in many modern ways of living, medical assistance, educational guidance, theatrical performances, nutrition, hygiene, and free childcare consultations, as well as lectures, film displays, and concerts. Finally, through boosting women's skill levels, the clubs began to highlight women's participation in social production. Women's training classes for various types of factory jobs and trades were conducted by the clubs in numerous districts. The clubs even established seminars and trade schools for this aim. They were the first tentative steps toward full participation of women in public life. The second part, known as the Hujum (offensive) emancipation movement, was undertaken concurrently against conventional life patterns, women's cloistering, slavery's legacy, and other issues. During 1927, on International Women's Day (8 March), the first large-scale unveilings took place, marking a watershed moment in Uzbek women's history. Thousands of women walked the streets, squares, and bazaars of Central Asian cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Kokand on that day, ceremonially burning their parandzha (traditional garb that covers the entire body) and Chachvan (a woven screen burqa) on huge bonfires. The veil was not outlawed by law (though some activists advocated for it), but a range of so-called "administrative" tactics was taken to prevent women from wearing it. Women who ditched the veil were granted special advantages, and those who remained to do so risked having their husbands punished. On occasion, more harsh measures were utilized, such as intimidating women into uncovering or forcing them to do so. Women in rural areas and old city neighborhoods, on the other hand, continued to wear enormous head scarves to conceal their heads and shoulders. Any unveiled lady was thought to be a prostitute outside of the home. During these years, over a thousand uncovered women were executed, either by relatives or by

Basmachi (local guerrilla forces). In Uzbekistan alone, 203 women were slain throughout 1928 and then another 165 during the first part of 1929 for refusing to wear the veil. For Central Asian women properly trained more by communist party, the year 1932 represented the start of a new era. These female Communists were dispatched to Moscow to supervise political education, with the goal of instilling culture and a "civilizing impact" on indigenous women. Education was considered a crucial component of politically and economically mobilization by the Soviet authorities. Special ABC classes (likbez) were set up in train coaches, tents, industries, and just about any other possible location. By the 1930s, both boys and girls were required to complete primary school. The elimination of illiteracy among women was given special consideration. Women's higher education institutions were established in several places. Following that, women pursue careers in law, medicine, teaching, and scientific research, among other fields. The school was not simply a venue where a general studies program was delivered; it was also a conduit for instilling in the youngsters the ideals and purposes of communism. The process of learning was also utilized to question societal gender roles that had been passed down through the generations. Efforts to incorporate women in the political-administrative process were attempted at the same time. At both the municipal and republican levels, female members were supposed to be representing their communities at public meetings. However their participation remained weak, considering their absence of previous political experience, actual numbers were rather considerable; in Uzbekistan, for example, there had been approximately 1000 Uzbek women, party members, party members by the beginning of 1929. Positive discrimination was utilized to speed up advancement, and a quota system was implemented, with women receiving around a third of the positions in government and party-administrative bodies. Women's cooperatives were the first step toward bringing women into socialized labor. Women were able to market their products directly through special stores and consumer cooperatives. There was a profusion of light industrial firms toward the end of the decade, and a growing number of local women found jobs in factories involved with food processors, silk spinning, and the fabrication of clothes and hosiery. The heavy industry emerged later, but there were few female workers in this sector because the working conditions were deemed undesirable for women for both physical and psychological reasons. Land and water reforms were implemented throughout the Soviet period, enforcing the right to equality for both men and women and granting women economic freedom.

IV. Tracing the status of Uzbekistan Women during post-Soviet period till today

With the creation of five separate republics in the region and a significant revision of prior ideology, from the post-Soviet period to pandemic, laid the stage for enormous political and economic developments in Central Asia . One of the newly independent republics' political catchphrases is the resurrection of local cultural values symbolised by Islam. As a result of the stimulation of religious and national awareness, the equality between men and women, which was closely identified with Soviet ideology, became the focus of fierce criticism. During the transition period, a clear trend toward a change in the social order arose. Despite the fact that the ideal of equality remains in the Central Asian Republics' constitutions, official institutions favor a new patriarchal order. Uzbekistan's constitution forbids all types of discrimination and guarantees equal rights to men and women. There are, however, specific sections in several codes that apply primarily

to women, like the family code, which was approved in 1998, and the labor code. These circumstances establish privileges and safeguards based on women's biological and reproductive functions. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Uzbekistan embarked on a new chapter aimed at bringing socio-cultural reforms to women's status. Although independent Uzbekistan experienced socio-cultural changes, these changes saw women's status in society deteriorated which further reflected in themes below.

Social views oppressing women

After Uzbekistan gained independence from the Soviet Union during 1991, women faced new challenges. Women were promised emancipation from patriarchal practices by the Soviets, who invaded the area in the later half of the nineteenth century and saw them as oppressive to women. This movement promoted female education, and by the 1980s, women made up approximately 41% of university students. However, after Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, conservative social traditions were reinstated in an effort to recreate Uzbek tradition. As a result, women's rights in Uzbekistan suffered a setback. Just six years later, by 1997, the percentage of women enrolled in institutions of higher learning fell to 37%, and it is projected to have decreased even more in recent years.

Education

Uzbekistan experienced an economic crisis following the fall of the Soviet Union, and women became the primary victims in the educational development process. Many schools were forced to close due to a lack of funding, which could have harmed children's readiness. Access to obligatory and higher education has dramatically decreased as a result of a rise in paid services in secondary and postsecondary education. Teachers are also abandoning the field due to bad working conditions and salary cuts, as well as payment uncertainty. In 2007-2008, the proportion of boys and girls enrolled in school was about equal, with 51 percent of boys as well as 49% of girls.

Legislation

The Women's Committee was founded in 1991. It is the country's premier institute for developing and implementing government policies on women's concerns. Local self-governance structures exist, including so-called women's councils, which are led by women. Women's rights are gaining a higher emphasis in Uzbekistan. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev passed a decree in February 2019 with the goal of "fundamentally improving women's support and strengthening the family institution." The law expressed dissatisfaction with the current level of women's rights and involvement in government matters. The Oila ("Family") research centre was also established by this order, with the goal of strengthening marriages, studying reproductive health issues, investigating issues faced by modern families, and compiling records of low-income households. Oila staff flew around the country, speaking with women about domestic abuse and their own home situations. The Centre was also tasked with "strengthening families" and divorces. Previously, you had to seek authorization from the local council office to terminate your marriage, but presently the Oila Centre is in charge. Of course, this government initiative to promote women is significant in and of itself, but it has an inherent contradiction. On the one side, the Oila centre must do everything to assist women and strive to

find solutions to problems. On the other side, the centre must do everything possible to maintain a family intact. This can cause considerable conflict: in cases where the divorce should be authorized, centre workers try to convince the couple to stay together. Two new legislation protecting women's rights were introduced in 2019. The first goal is to ensure that men and women have equal opportunities and freedoms, and the second goal is to protect women from domestic violence and assault. In addition, around 200 shelters for women fleeing violence have been established across the country. Unfortunately, there isn't much money available to keep these shelters running. While this is unquestionably a step forward from the country's more traditional notions on women's roles in society, more concrete steps must be taken to secure these newly acquired rights and maintain protective services.

In search of help

Uzbekistan's first report to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was reviewed by the Committee in January 2001, merely gives a sketch of domestic abuse. There is almost little public mention of violence against women, especially domestic abuse by husbands or in-laws, in the media or elsewhere. Domestic abuse has a legal standing in Uzbekistan. Domestic violence facts have either been hidden or portrayed as isolated incidents. Domestic abuse is considered a family problem rather than a crime. Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union, a desire to reaffirm traditional values has resulted in women being treated as second-class citizens in the home and, to a lesser extent, in society. Women are restricted in how they conduct their life outside of the home, with educational and employment opportunities limited in favor of marriage and children. Uzbekistan has mainly overlooked women's rights within the home, despite the fact that women in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence. According to reports, violence at women has escalated in recent years. The Women's Committee launched a helpline for women who have been victims of abuse in 2018; where women can now reach a psychiatrist, doctor, or lawyer by dialing 1146. The committee's chair, Tanzila Narbayeva, says Uzbek women weren't prepared for the phone conversations and requests for assistance that the line prompted.

The committee also established its first shelters for domestic violence victims in 2018. According to sources familiar with the issue, committee members were originally unsure what all the shelters were meant for but created handicraft groups instead of providing shelter. "The Women's Committee reports on the opening of shelters and hotlines," explains psychologist Liana Natroshvili, "but there are either too limited shelters or they haven't opened yet, and all of this information has to be checked. "This is the same for the helpline: some of the women have attempted to call it when they were in a crisis, but the line had been either down or unreachable."

The tradition of an early marriages

The tradition of marrying children under the age of 18 is still popular. The majority of Uzbek families feel that a woman's responsibility is to do marriage and manage the home. Child marriage is encouraged across the nation, particularly in rural areas, by this social notion. Because girls marry at early ages than boys, child marriage has a direct impact on female education, as women are typically restricted to the house after marriage. Furthermore, despite a dearth of understanding about reproduction and childbearing, women are

expected to give birth during their first year of marriage. The body of the female is not often developed or matured enough to deliver a baby safely in young brides. This has resulted in health issues such as fertility problems and chronic illnesses. Although the minimum age for girls to marry is 17 and for boys it is 18, under unusual circumstances and with the agreement of the hokim (head of local government), the age may be reduced by up to one year if valid reasons or extraordinary circumstances exist (article 15 of family code). Early marriage is supported by parents because it lessens moral and social pressure on them to assume responsibility for their children's future. Early marriage is also preferred by the majority of families because it fits the idea of traditional culture, ensuring higher acceptability of conventional values. This traditional thinking usually extended to women for early weddings; for example, in 1991, 42.7 percent of girls under the age of 19 were married in Uzbekistan. By 1994, it had risen to 49.7%. Arranged marriage remains the norm in the social sector. Given the continued popularity of the bride price system, many parents encourage to marry their daughters to close relatives rather than risk losing their riches to another clan. The Uzbek government ordered all weddings to be documented in order to combat polygamy, but the age-old practise is difficult to eradicate. By either not documenting the other marriage, the male went for polygamy. These marriages, particularly second marriages, are solemnised by a Muslim ceremony (nikah) that has no legal standing. If second wives leave their husbands, they frequently encounter issues with property and child custody. As a result, de facto polygamy prevails in society.

The pattern of divorce

Divorce in Uzbekistan isn't really difficult, especially if both spouses agree to the divorce. At the very same time, several legal safeguards meant to provide protection for women in these conditions were in place. For example, if his wife is pregnant or if they have a child under the age of one year, he cannot divorce her (article 39 of the family code). Because of the significant impact of traditional social values respecting women, which required them to stay subservient and not create situations that could lead to divorce, the divorce rate in Uzbekistan is half those of the Russian Federation. As a result, many women with valid reasons for divorce do not utilize their right to legal divorce due to fear of being blamed by their parents and relatives. Instead, they put up with domestic violence, polygamy, and humiliation in order to protect their families and their children. Other variables such as economic troubles, an increase in kalym expenditure, and lavishness in marriage rituals are among the causes that do not favor divorce, with statistics ranging from 30000 in 1990 to 21200 in 1995. The *Mahalla* could serve as a beneficial informal conflict resolution centre. Their mediation had a high rate of success, although *mahalla's* efforts are mostly dependent on moral persuasion. Victims of abuse are frequently advised by *Mahalla* leaders to persevere or improve their own behaviour in order to achieve reconciliation. *Mahalla* ignores the real harm caused to domestic abuse victims and refuses to act on the concept of domestic violence is indeed a criminal violation. They see "reconciliation" as a cease of complaints instead of a stop to the violence in family conflicts. As a result, their intervention is frequently aimed towards appeasing the abuser rather than assisting the victim.

Reform for women rights at a government level

President Mirziyoyev has made steps to rectify Uzbekistan's lack of female rights. Mirziyoyev, who was elected in 2016, spoke on the value of women in Uzbek society, emphasising their problem-solving ability and administrative qualities. He encouraged their participation in government and industry organisations, including appointing Tanyila Narbaeva, Uzbekistan's first female Senate President. After years of men controlling government roles, a female in a powerful government post represented a progressive transition and an optimistic outcome of political developments.

V. Conclusion

Uzbek women may have gained official rights under the law, but traditional society will continue to stifle their advancement. The negative effects of Uzbekistan's rapid socioeconomic transition hit women disproportionately more than men. Factors such as rising poverty, rising unemployment, a lack of resources in several families to start educating their boys as well as girls, political marginalization, domestic violence, and so on are exacerbated by the fact that women are oppressed and exploited on all fronts in a male-dominated society where women are granted equal rights not by society but by government decree. Government, NGOs, and some other civil society organizations' efforts to educate women concerning their rights, position, and responsibilities are insufficient in their reach and efficacy to create results. The country's past as a Soviet Union colony, and the country's subsequent counter reaction to reinstate traditional cultural values, has made the fight for women's rights in Uzbekistan more challenging. Women have been confined in recent years by societal demands to marry early and spend their life caring for the home. Uzbekistan women have not fully realized their human rights since they have limited control over their own destiny. President Mirziyoyev, on the other hand, has declared his intention to improve women's rights in Uzbekistan. Women's rights in Uzbekistan should hopefully improve with the newly appointed female govt. official and the passage of progressive legislation.

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