

**CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN IN RUSSIAN POLITICS:
A STUDY OF CHANGES, 1991-2001**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of*

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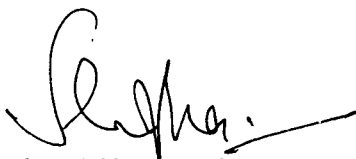
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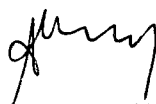
DECLARATION

This dissertation entitled "**Changing Role of Women in Russian Politics: A Study of Changes, 1991-2001**", submitted for the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university and is my original work.

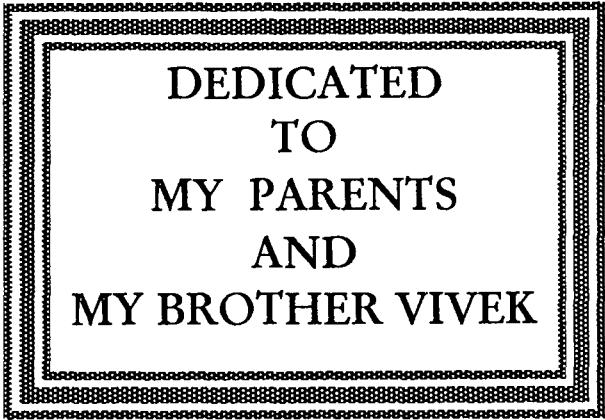
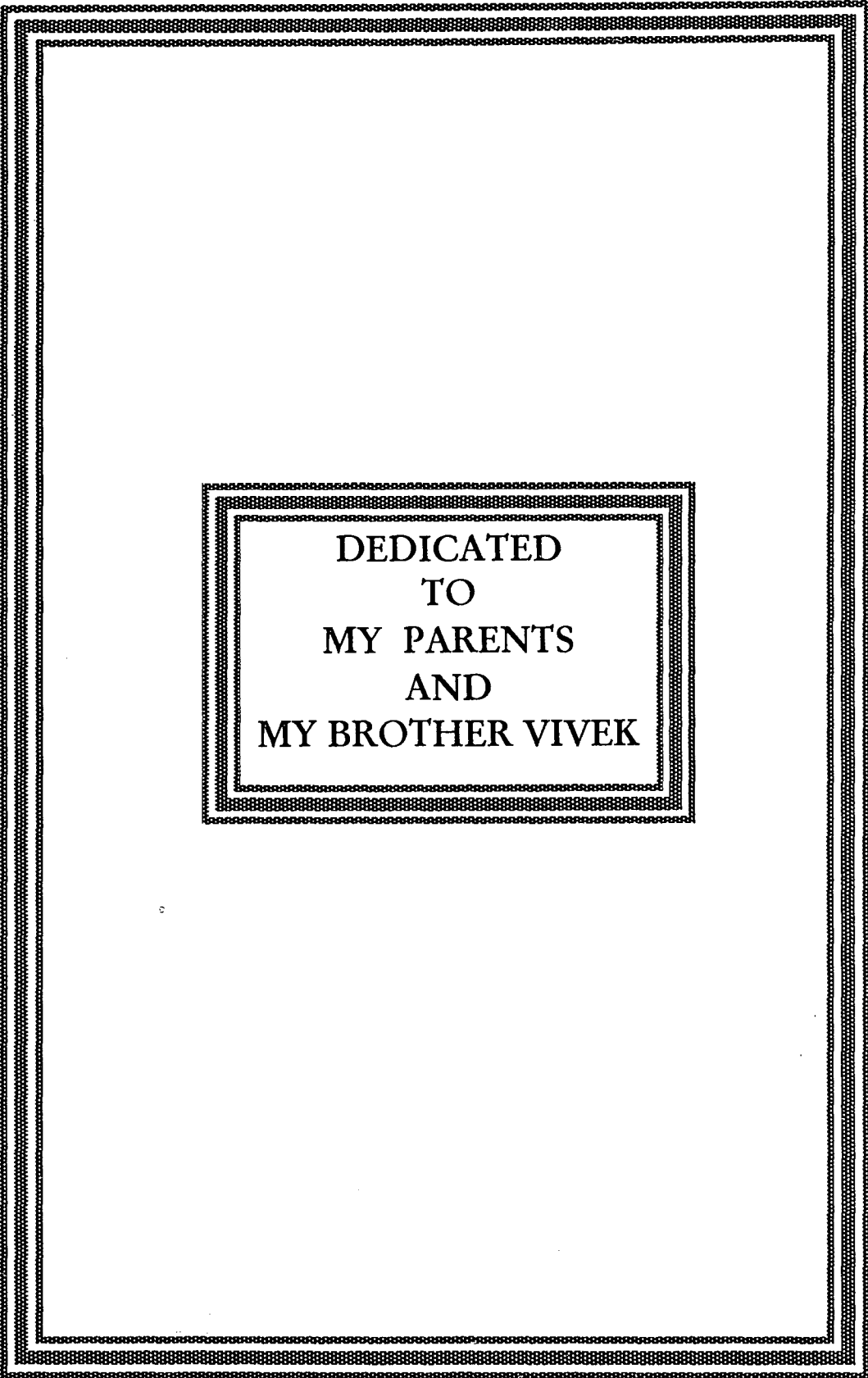

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DEDICATED
TO
MY PARENTS
AND
MY BROTHER VIVEK

PREFACE

Role of women in Russian politics has been changing, ever since the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1989. The collapse of 'really existing socialism' and its eclipse as an economic and political alternative, had repercussions on population of the affected countries, not all of them positive. For the half that is female, there have been both losses and gains. As the state retreats from its self-designated role as 'emancipator of women' and is being replaced by market forces, civil society and new ideological configurations, the vulnerable social group – such as women – are threatened by the abandoning of old commitments and by a deepening of existing social division and political tensions. At the same time, such groups are now able to form their own organizations and have challenge the limited conception of the citizenship that prevailed under the old state structures.

To assess the contours of change for women in the realm of politics, has to be seen in background of status of women in Soviet politics. This would give us a clear picture of their changed roles in post-communist Russia. In 1917 Russian Communists installed a revolutionary government that called for an end to private property and the beginning of collective ownership of industry agriculture and commercial ventures. Their system-called Communism was based on the ideas of Karl Marx, who maintained that human oppression developed principally from inequalities in the system of producing goods (including food) necessary to sustain life. Between 1917 and the collapse of Soviet Union in 1989 official Communist decrees had also declared women equal and had set quotas to ensure women jobs government offices and political representation.

The collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1989 opened a debate about the place of women in post-Soviet societies in Russia. The fall of Communism and the turn to free market brought drastic unemployment to women. It also resulted in their departure from

government, and the curtailment of services such as day care centers that had allowed women to work in the first place. 'Equality of women,' which they had never actually enjoyed- was seen as part of Soviet oppression, inequality was equated with being modern and western, as the west had visible inequalities in wages and in women holding public offices etc. Thus, feminism was a taboo subject in Russia as it had been discredited in the Communist past.

This meant that defending women's position bad though it had been under Communism, was difficult, if not impossible, in the new political and social order. Moreover, under Soviet censorship the household and private life had become a refuge, public debate and experience in conducting civil society had become virtually nonexistent. How then could women turn back the tide that was ending their rights to contraception and abortion, to day care and medical treatment, and even jobs? What would their relationship be with the state that had simultaneously declared them equal and kept them unequal? As one government after another imposed their decisions on women (eg. end to abortion rights of women), the would be women activists searched for answers to such constraints.

The present study gives an account of what was the real status of women in Russian politics and how the contours of change had been influencing their rights. Did they really wield power under new political conditions, if so how far have they been successful in motivating policies to their advantage . It also focuses on the role played by emerging civil society in the empowerment of women.

This study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter deals with Gender theory and ideological perspectives on gender. While the second chapter elucidates the role of women in Soviet Politics from 1917 to its disintegration. This chapter deals with ideological perspectives on women's question and also examines the achievements of Zhenotdel and how the abolition of the Zhenotdel in 1930 demonstrated the rejection of

autonomous political activities of women by the socialist leadership of the party. It also examines the political role of women under Khrushchev and Brezhnev. The third chapter discusses the impact of post Soviet transformation on women in politics, their representation in Duma, political rights etc. While the fourth deals with development of civil society in Russia and its implication for women. It focuses on certain organisations and NGOs that have formed an important lobby to demand for rights of women and are taking active part in Russian politics. The fifth chapter deals by way of conclusion with the strategies for attainment of Gender equality and tries to foresee the future of this entire discussion especially in context of role of women in Russian politics, the past, present and future.


The methodology followed in the study is based primarily on secondary sources. However, some primary sources have also been consulted.

I feel deeply indebted and obliged to my supervisor Professor Shashikant Jha of the Center for Russian Central Asian and East European Studies, for his initiative, patience, encouragement and able guidance needed for completion of this dissertation.

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance rendered to me by the staff of the Center for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), Delhi. I owe my special thanks to my friend, Mr. Rajani Mohan and a research associate of my center Dr.K.B.Usha, for their kind assistance and advice throughout my research work.

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(Shradha)

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CHAPTER 1

GENDER AND IDEOLOGY

The question of women's rights has recently become of universal significance, and the women's movement is increasing in strength from year to year, enlisting into its ranks millions of new participants throughout the world. The year 1975 was proclaimed *International Women's Year*. The present decade is the decade of women.

Many great national and international women's organizations, United Nations Commissions, and national parliaments are seeking a means of solving the problem of the status of women. The government and leaders of states have begun to listen to the voice of women. In fact, in some countries women have governed under most difficult conditions. Women are able to become ministers of state and are appointed to other responsible posts. There already even exist ministries of women's affairs. Yet women's emancipation and equality between the sexes remains a mission. This chapter aims at discussing the concept of gender, current debates on gender, gender ideology historicity of gender, political practices, cultural dynamics and the various strands of feminism.

I DEFINING GENDER

Gender is defined as the social meanings given to biological sex differences. It is an ideological and cultural construct but is also reproduced within the realm of material practices; in turn, it influences the outcomes of such practices. It affects the distribution of resources, wealth, work, decision making, political power, the enjoyments of rights and entitlements within the family as well as public life. In spite of variations across cultures and over time, gender relations throughout the world entail asymmetry of power between men and women as a pervasive trait. Thus gender is a social stratifier, and in this sense it is similar to other stratifiers such as race, class, ethnicity and age.¹ It

¹ <http://www.ica.coop/ica/issues/Background%20to%20Gender%20Strategy.pdf>

helps us to understand the social construction of gender identities and the unequal structure of power that underlies the relationship between the sexes.

Gender is a term that is employed by social scientists to refer to the ways in which human societies distinguish between women and men. Sexual dimorphism – the physical differences between the male and female members of *homo sapiens* – is the physical reality on which gender ideas are based, but those ideas are social constructs. They are, in the words of Gisela Bock, ‘ a complex set of relations and processes’ that extend their influence in every sphere of human activity. ‘ As a structure’, Judith Lorber writes, ‘ gender divides work in the home and in economic production, legitimates those in authority, and organizes sexuality and emotional life.’ Gender norms are taught from infancy and in many cultures they become so internalized as to seem expressive of an essential and unchanging human nature.² But in fact ideas about men and women do change, as do all social constructs. Even within individual societies, gender notions are differentiated in accordance with the hierarchies of power. The lowly can and do contest norms that grant superiority to those with power over them, and the contest sometimes leads to change. ‘ That gender is not fixed in advance of social interaction, but is constructed in interaction, is an important theme in the modern sociology of gender,’ writes R.W. Connell. In short, gender ideas are complex, significant, and malleable. Because they change, they have a history.³

“Gender relation” and “gender studies” came to Russia in the early 1990s from Anglo-American feminism. This approach in the women’s movement in the West bases the analysis of relation among men, women, and the environment not on the experience of the sex, but on the experience of the gender, regarding the female component of the

² Lise Qstergaard, Gender and Development : A Practical Guide (London, New York : Routledge, 1992), Pg. 6.

³ Ibid

community as a part of humanity. Moreover, the concepts “gender studies,” “feminist studies” and “studies of women’s problems” are in many cases regarded in Western sociology as being similar or even identical in content.⁴

i) The Gender Theory : Basic Concept and Lines of Research

The 1980’s were characterized by a new phase in the development of women’s studies. There was a transition from the analysis of patriarchal society and women’s specific experience to the analysis of the gender system. Women’s studies have gradually become gender studies, in which the primary approach is to view all aspects of human society, culture, and relationships as aspects of gender. A gradual shift in emphasis can be observed from a focus on the feminine, and the confirmation of male domination to the analysis of how gender exists, is construed, and is reproduced through all social process and how this affects both women and men.

The differentiation between the concepts of sex and gender marked the attainment of a new theoretical level. The difference between the concepts of “Sex” and “Gender” was first noted by the psychologist Robert Stoller in 1968. Later, in 1972, this idea was taken by feminist anthropologist. In their studies of different societies, they found substantial difference in the conception of masculine and feminine roles, position and character traits, in any given society’s view of what man and women should be. In 1972, Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere came with the famous publication of Women, Culture and Society. Sherry Ortner’s “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?”, published in this collection, provoked heated debate. Ortner highlights the universal failure to consider woman’s reproductive role in determining her social status and points out that women have been pushed out of

⁴ G.G.Sillaste, “Sociogender Relations in the Period of Social Transformation in Russia”, Sociological Research, Jan-Feb 1995, Pp. 35-47

the social sphere into the private sphere because they are associated not with social but with natural events.⁵

One of the first studies that explicitly addressed the aforementioned difference between the concepts of “Sex” and “Gender” was probably an article by Gayle Rubin.⁶ Combining the methods of psychoanalysis and structural anthropology, Rubin studied the symbolic meaning of men exchanging women in so-called primitive societies. As a result, she concludes that exchanging women between tribes reflects male domination and a structure of gender identity in which women are regarded as biological entities and confined to the family. On this basis the “sex-gender system as a set of agreements” is constructed. In other words, the gender system-which views the two sexes as different, unequal, and complementary is infact a system of power and domination, the purpose of which is to concentrate material and symbolic capital in the hands of fathers.⁷

It is useful to mention a work by the psychologist Rohda Unger, “On a Redefinition of the concepts of Sex and Gender”. Unger proposes that “Sex” should be used only to refer to the specifically biological aspects of a human being, whereas “gender” should be used only in discussing social, cultural, and psychological aspects associated with traits, norms, stereotypes, and roles that are considered typical and desirable for those whom society has defined as women or men.⁸

The next important work in the development of gender theory was Adrienne Rich’s, “Motherhood as Experience and Institution”. For the purpose of this study, Ol’ga A. Voronina, mentioned the idea that she drew from an analysis of the works of “black feminists.” The idea that “gender” is not a monolithic category, which makes all women exactly the same, but instead designates a position of subordination (i.e., gender

⁵ Olga A. Voronina , “Socio-Cultural Determinants of the Development of Gender Theory in Russia and in the West”, Russian Social Science Review, Vol.43, No. 4, July – Aug 2002, Pp. 34 - 35

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

is a type of social stratification). From this, Rich concludes that gender as a system is interconnected with other types of power or stratification. In her view, then, gender is a part of complex network of power components.⁹

During the last two decades of the twentieth century gender studies acquired phenomenal popularity. However, both the interpretation of the term “gender” and the methods used in the research vary greatly. Overall, Voronina distinguishes three basic theories of gender: a) the theory of gender as a social construction; b) the view of gender as a type of stratification; and c) the idea that gender is a cultural metaphor.¹⁰

II IDEOLOGY

Ideology is defined, by Selvy Thiruchandran, as the mental framework, thoughts, concepts and systems of representations which find expression in law, in religion and philosophy, and which are disseminated through various channels like the mass media, books and specific institution. Ideology explains, justifies, and legitimises positions of persons and groups, of the institutions and customs, of the social order in general.¹¹

Like so many other enticing things, in the word ideology is of French origin. The Enlightenment thinkers were the intellectual precursors of the French revolution of 1789; it was in the immediate aftermath of the French revolution that the term ideology was first coined. Its originator, in 1797, was Antoine Destutt de Tracy, one of a group of philosophers whom the Revolutionary Convention had put in charge of the newly founded institut de France specifically to spread the ideas of enlightenment.¹²

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Selvy Thiruchandran, Ideology, Caste, Class and Gender, (NewDelhi : Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.,1997), Pp.3-4

¹² David Mc Lellan , Ideology (Delhi : World View Publications, 1998), p. 5

In his Elements d' Ideologie , written between 1801 to 1815, de Tracy , proposed a new science of ideas an idea-logy, which would be the ground of all other sciences. Rejecting the concept of innate ideas, de Tracy explained how all our ideas, free from religious or metaphysical prejudice, would be the foundation of a just and happy society. For the investigation of individual ideas would show their common origin in universal human needs and desires. Those needs would form the framework of laws regulating society on a natural basis and promoting the harmonious fulfillment of the relevant desire. For the natural and social coincided. And this coincidence would be laid bare by the rational assessment of the origin of ideas, by ideology.¹³

In the subordination of women we need to see the ideological implications i.e. with the relevance of the “role of ideas” and the “conceptions of the world”. The concept of ideology has a complex and long history. With growing controversies and widening disputes from the time of Hegel to Marx, Althusser and Foucault, the concept has met many challenges. It has become a significant arena of social inquiry cutting across various disciplines in social sciences and humanities. The concept initially had a negative meaning as “false consciousness” and distorted and inverted perceptions “Camera obscura” was Marx’s original metaphor for ideology Marx and Engels . This was because at the early stages of Marx’s intellectual development, he used it as a critique of religion and also to contest and criticize the speculative mysteries of Hegelianism. In this process, the distorted elements in ideology were predominant in his thinking.¹⁴

During the second stage Marx conceded that ideas are not in themselves mistaken but the social contradictions are, and the ideas are their consequence. The second phase of the development in the conceptualization of ideology was expressed in the following statement

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Thiruchandran, n.11, Pp.4-5

Ideas, thoughts, concepts determine and dominate men, their material condition and real life. It is not the consciousness of men that determine their being but on the contrary, their social being that determines the consciousness .¹⁵

After Marx's death two schools of thought emerged. The first understood ideology as the totality of all forms of social consciousness, while the second signified the political ideas connected with the interest of a particular class. These two views of ideology are not at variance with each other. Eventually however, three different thesis of ideology evolved. First, that ideas develop from material condition and reflect those conditions from which they arise. Second, that ideology is dependent on the determining economic base, which is the mode of production and that transformations in the latter will show up as transformations in the former, as corresponding changes. Third that the ruling class has a set of ideas that attain the status of "ruling ideas".¹⁶

i) The Debate

Selvy Thiruchandran gives an interesting account of the debate on the concept of ideology. The main debate of the concept of ideology centers round the correspondence theory, which argues for the reflection and reproduction of the base in superstructure. This theory explains the relationship of the base and the superstructure in terms of similarities in position, value and function of the economic base with the superstructure. There is now some consensus among the Marxists and the Neo-Marxists that this is reductionism of ideology to the economy factor. This view gains further validity when we analyse gender relations. The fact that women are subjected to oppressive socio-religious ideology under different modes of production is a significant factor which questions any theoretical model which sees ideology as totally determined by the mode of production. An understanding of ideology, which sees all varieties of ideology as reflections of the economic base

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

does not explain the creation of the gender ideology. Working class exploitation is conceptually and fundamentally different from gender oppression of the female sex. However the influence of the mode of production on the production of ideology cannot be denied altogether.¹⁷

Althusser sees ideology as relatively autonomous, determined by the economic base only in the last instance. He slides into functionalism, when he insists that ideology reproduces capitalist social relations according to the requirement of the systems. Moreover, Althusser emphasizes only the illusionary representation of the ideas and loss sight of the counter ideologies that have arisen as opposing ideas to dominant ideologies from time to time in history. However, Althusser's concept of the ideological state apparatuses and "internalisation" gave meaningful leverage for the debate on ideology. Feminists have shown how oppressive ideas have become internalised in the consciousness of men and women and how they have come to accept them as "given" and 'normal'. On the other hand, Althusser has to be contested when he poses ideology as an absolute opposite of science. Science is given complete autonomy without any social determinants. Science does not stand by itself above or apart from the socio-economic conditions. Socio-economic conditions determine its discovery, use and misuse and in that sense it is not value neutral. An ideology is considered negative or positive by its use or misuse or through the process of its operationalisation and not by itself alone. The ideological use and misuse made of science are too much in evidence in our contemporary life. The use of science in India to abort the unborn female foetus (amniocentesis) is a case in point where science is not value neutral. The ideology of female worthlessness in a social context has determined the use of science in this respect.¹⁸

Althusser's view compares unfavourably with Gramsci who is of the view that "ideas organise human masses and create a terrain on

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

which men move, acquire consciousness of the position struggle etc.,”¹⁹ In this contention, there is room for oppositional ideology, which, in some case has shaped human history with positive results. Gramsci makes a significant contribution to the understanding of ideology. From Gramsci’s theory one can draw a few insights to understand the operationalisation of ideology and how it is accepted and sustained. He dismisses the claims that ideology is “false consciousness” and that it is merely a system of ideas. He treats ideology as “conceptions of the world that manifest in art, law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life”.²⁰ He considers them as operating realities which possess efficacy. Hence, ideology is present in all activities, and actions are organized by ideology. However, ideology is not one uniform set of conceptions. The higher level of abstraction is called philosophy and the lower levels called by Gramsci “common sense”. They are in effect the communal expressions of a social bloc. Common sense and philosophy are both organic ideologies, which organise the human masses.²¹

Gramsci further argues that, ideological practices have a material base and an institutional base. The organic ideologies are elaborated and spread by the intellectuals who effect “moral and intellectual reforms” and those reforms become hegemonic. Hegemony then, is the domination of a class not by force but by extension beyond its narrow corporative interest, thereby creating a moral and intellectual leadership interacting with a number of allies. Hegemonic ideology is spread through a hegemonic apparatus, such as the schools, churches, the media, which are referred to as the “ideological structure” of the dominant class.²²

Hegemony, the institutional nature of ideology, the moral and intellectual leadership and ideological structure are useful concepts which will be used to analyse the ideological implications of gender

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid, Pp.5-6

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

subordination. However, the class factor, mentioned here as that of dominant class, still creates some ambiguity, as women's subordination is not class specific, but cuts across all classes of women. Mouffe offers a reasonably valid explanation of this concept. He emphasises Gramsci's view. He argues that according to Gramsci ideas are not class specific, or reducible to class interests. The intellectual and moral leadership exercised by the hegemonic class on its allies is effected through "a pedagogic process". It is not an imposition from above by force.²³ The articulating process of the hegemonic class is called the hegemonic principle. The hegemonic principle sustains the ideology till such a time as transformations occurs. The transformation take place by another hegemonic system and through a struggle between two hegemonic principles.

This discussion could be summed up drawing the following conclusions which will form the basis of our analysis in this research. Ideology as a brief system expressed through a variety of channels from religion to the media and which contains a wide range of cultural practices, is not determined totally by the mode of production. Ideology is partially autonomous from the base, in the sense that the base does not solely determine the ideology as is argued in the correspondence theory, but the base can certainly have its influence on the creation or construction of certain specific ideologies.²⁴

In Thiruchandran's view ideology contributes effectively and helps to determine all actions and is, in that sense, an operating reality. It is also important to recognize that ideology operates in a power network. It is difficult to discern the locus of how the power works since the power is diffuse. Foucault's studies of the regimes of power / knowledge have had a profound impact on the way theorists have come to view power. Foucault identifies a non economic form of power which is closely related to epistemic concerns and subjectivity:

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hand, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is embodied and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate through its thread: they are always in a position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application. The ideology of a gender regime is an important mode of this power network. This helps us to understand that ideologies are not necessarily class specific. The hegemony of a class (or caste) through moral and intellectual leadership helps to spread and sustain the ideology through the hegemonic principle. The hegemony is not necessarily imposed by others by force, but may be effected peacefully through a pedagogic process through consent and the organisational role of intellectuals. Moreover, as the intellectuals are constituted through power, the exercise of power can occur through a process of self-discipline. The exercise of power is implicated in the mechanisms and procedures for producing knowledge itself. Gender ideology is a form of power. ²⁵

III GENDER IDEOLOGY

The concept of ideology for feminist discourse is relevant considering the fact that male dominance is justified and legitimised through institutions like the family ,church and the state. Feminism itself is an ideology, an oppositional ideology to patriarchy and its use . The concept of patriarchy and its use has been extensively debated by feminists Rowbotham. This has led to a specificity in its use. Selvy Thiruchandran uses patriarchy to mean male supremacy in the social arrangements . In the sense of a rule denoting male :supremacy in the social organisations it implies various kinds of dominance and control by men on women. The dominance and control of the males are operationalised through many devices such as patrilineal descent, patrilocality, control of women's sexuality, ownership, inheritance of property, denial of education, political and religious participation. Some feminists working within the disciplines of history [Lerner, Leacock, Riley] and Anthropology [Ortner, MacCormack] have argued for

²⁵ Ibid

universal patriarchy cross culturally and trans-historically. In trying to find out why women are oppressed and subordinated and how the mechanisms of such oppression are constructed, others have formulated various theories.²⁶

Zillah Einstien refers to patriarchy as an ideology and sees a difference between the real situation of women and patriarchal ideology. Ideologically women are defined between the real situation of women defined as mothers in terms of their being mothers only, while women forming a substantial section of the labor force are still not defined as workers. They may be defined as “working mothers.”-the emphasis being on mothers. The social definition of a women as a mother enables her to be hired at lower wages because of her “defined sexual inferiority” . Hence the “ideology of patriarchy” which has defined women thus legitimises lower wages for women. A woman’s activity is defined by the social relations of the society at a given moment. The ideology of patriarchy defines it, protects it and maintains it. Juliet Mitchell’s recourse to psychoanalysis to understand male dominance has led her to come up with the idea of an inevitable “cultural revolution”. She argues that ideological analysis should not be subjected to economic analysis. Though the two spheres have become mingled, success depends not on “amalgamation but on specification”. The two are autonomous areas (economic mode of capitalism and the ideological mode of patriarchy) and need to be recognised as such. To emphasize, the ideological construction of femininity, she says, “It is not only in the ideology of their roles as mothers and procreators but above all in the very psychology of femininity that women bear witness to the patriarchal definition of human society”. So, she is emphatic that the overthrow of capitalist economy , in itself, would not lead to a transformation of patriarchal ideology which has a certain amount of autonomy. A socialist economy is not the end of patriarchy, so what is needed is a cultural revolution –a general ideological change. Hence Juliet Mitchell is also arguing for a patriarchal ideology distinguishing it from a patriarchal

²⁶ Ibid P.7

organisation. In this process the meaning of patriarchy as a kinship system has been extended to patriarchy as an ideology.²⁷

The patriarchal system as such has not been seen by the feminists only in its functions of male dominance in a structure of relations. The moment the symbolic meanings of it are extended to other socio-political and socio-economic structures other than the family, it ceases to be only a system, but acquires the characteristics of an ideology. Structure here means the way part of a system are ordered according to the nature of the relation among these parts. The Capitalists draw from the ideology of patriarchy to discriminate women in respect of wages and to assign them low skilled repetitive works. This is done on the assumption that femininity equals less labour power and women's wages are supplementary (Elson and Pearson).²⁸

The mode of production, it could be argued, has no direct, overt, or a strictly corresponding relevance on the production of gender ideology. In most cases gender ideology, is a social construction based on the biological sex differences. However, socio-economic conditions have an influence as determinants in either reconstructing or modifying some specific gender ideological operations though essentially they are pre-determined biologically. The super structural gender ideology in this process is not given complete autonomy from the base.²⁹

As much as gender ascribed qualities are perceived as different, as superior and inferior, as powerful and weak, as active and passive, they are false, due to lack of rationality. As long as they are followed in day-to-day real lives and much as these assumptions are accepted and used as a part of common sense, law and philosophy, they become realities in their effects. Common sense, philosophy, law and religion have their force of legitimisation for different people at different levels and at different times. The common sense gender ideology has manifested itself

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid, P.8

²⁹ Ibid

in the form of folk stories and proverbs. Parallels to this can also be seen in the philosophy. In the Tamil society a series of proverbs can be cited which are quoted often by unlettered peasants and others. "A woman's intellect is inferior" (or secondary) is one such proverb, ("pen puti pin puti"). Men as husbands, fathers and brothers often use these to ridicule women. In Saiva Siddhanta philosophy of Tamil Hindus the omnipotent, omnipresent God is called 'pati' (lord) who is a male. The ignorant illusive, bonded souls are called 'pasu' (animals). Their relationship is always within a metaphor of husband-wife relationship. In the social relationship the husband / lover is the 'pati' and the wife's devotion and fidelity are called the 'bhakti' with a divine connotation similar to the piety of the mortal soul to the lord. 'Pati bhakti' is an inexhaustible theme in common sense conversations and in the literary forms such as short stories, novels and films. This is merely an example to show how gender ideology is an essential element in the Tamil social formation. Hence, the concept of gender ideology is used here to denote the otherness created for women through a series of social constructions which are based on the biological sex differences. The dichotomous social definitions mentioned above as appropriate gender behaviour patterns, are but examples of gender ideology.³⁰

IV HISTORICAL DYNAMICS

The idea that gender relations have a history is more than a century old. Its early formulations in best 19th century style revolved around the problem of "origins". The concept or "origins" implies that something is already formed, though not fully developed in its earliest appearance and that what follows is the unfolding of a nature already settled.³¹

Of the origin theories, that dot the landscape, by far the most influential has been Friedrich Engels "Origin of Family, Private Property and the State" which appeared in 1884. Engel's view of primitive social

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ R.W. Connel, Gender and Power (Stanford University Press, 1987) P. 144

structure was in its day , a reasonable piece of armchair research. It was based mainly on Greek and Roman literary sources enlivened by little early ethnography. It was not state of the art prehistory even then. The Assyrian civilization had been revealed a generation before, the Egyptian hieroglyphics had been deciphered in 1820 and while Engel's wrote, major excavations were showing the outlines of a yet more ancient civilization in Sumer. In the decade that followed, Engel's limited sources were overwhelmed by an explosion of archaeological information. In the Mediterranean region, which his main sources dealt with, archaeology brought to light the Minoan, Mycenaean, Hittite and Etruscan cultures, to mention only the most spectacular ones.³²

Of course, Engels is more than a father of an obsolete essay. With the founding father's texts canonical for orthodox Marxists, his origin has inevitably become the focus of argument, over Marxist explanation of women's oppression now. Opponents of Marxism have found it easy to carry on the combat by inventing an alternative prehistory. As Homeric warriors battled for possession of a hero's corpse wherever the hero fell, struggle has raged over the true origins of patriarchy without much thought about the choice of the battle field. The most bizarre result was a completely speculative debate about whether there was a primitive matriarchy, a prehistoric world ruled by women and if so, how it was overthrown by men. Thus Lionel Tiger assumed a completely speculative theory of evolution which found the origins of patriarchy in paleolithic hunting - the master pattern of human species.³³

Alongside the mythography of the origin, there is a hybrid literature that presents itself as a scientific search for origins; the participants include Kathleen Gough, Raayna Reiter, and Maurice Godelier. Its basis is an attempt to synthesize data from archaeology with contemporary studies of the behaviour of apes and monkeys and the ethnography of smallscale societies, preferably hunter and gatherers . The latter two are supposed to cast light by analogy of what things were

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

like in early human evolution. Clara Burton's critique of the literature is apt. The analogical evidence fails to establish anything significant about the remote past and the origin argument establishes absolutely nothing about the present . Reiter's paper, "The Search for Origins" perhaps the most interesting in literature shows the stress by falling apart into two quite incompatible arguments. One is, a sketch of major transition in world history of gender relations- a novel and important exercise, but this is framed by the quite spurious claims that knowing the origin of gender hierarchy gives the strategic clue to how it may be abolished now.

The origin literature's assumption of homogeneity of history is important as a mechanism of ideology. As a basis of theory it is less compelling. It either denies a historical change or allows just one model of change, the natural unfolding of a fixed logic. This is incompatible with the view that social structures are constituted by practice . It is inconsistent with any conception of internal contradictions in gender relations since they must give rise to historical discontinuities.³⁴ We must also reject the conventional history of "sex roles both of which are based on a similar premise of homogeneity. The history is the story of how these expressions modulate under different circumstances; changing religious ideas heavier or lighter censorship and so forth.

Probably the first instance of modern day gender consciousness can be traced back to this incident. In 1984, the British government's programme of closure of a coal pit provoked a national strike by miner workers, one of the bitterest industrial confrontation in recent times. As the struggle got under way with mine leaders and National Coal Board, shaping up in best macho style, the media ran stories about how miner's wives were opposed to the strike. Since industrial disputes in mining area are very much a community affair, these claims provoked a good deal of anger. Some miner's wives organized a demonstration to show their support for the strike, and to the surprise of the mine workers,

³⁴ Ibid, P.146

union as well as the government, a solidarity movement among women developed quite rapidly on a national scale.³⁵

One of the initiating groups from the town of Barnsley brought out a booklet about their experience called "Women against Pit Closures". Its main theme was how the women of the district are a part of the class solidarity of the miners. It conveys a strong sense that now the women have taken to public action, gained a political voice and among other things, have been harassed by police. Things could never be the same in mining town again; relation between men and women changed decisively. That new possibilities have opened and old patterns closed off is exactly what the historicity of gender relation is all about. ³⁶

Thus the historicity of gender defined, is not a completely abstract concept. Change is produced by human agency. Conversely all practices occur in specific settings and have a particular place in sequence of events. The idea of historicity implies a concrete history, some of whose features are the form of life constituted in them, including sexual and political life. This history is not homogeneous. As Juliet Mitchell emphasized, the different structures of relationships may develop in different rhythms and come in contradictions. Real social struggles do not have predictable or standard outcomes and sometimes change the conditions that give rise to them. There is a long term historical dynamics of practice and structural transformation.³⁷

The study of historical dynamics of gender relation is still in early days, but it is clear that its shape is nothing like the smooth unfolding of a predetermined logic. Gender history is lumpy. There are moments of transition, when the conditions of practice alter fast, there are periods of more or less steady shift in a given direction; and there are periods when a particular balance of forces is stabilized.³⁸ The concrete focus of this history, as distinct from the abstract definition of subject matter and

³⁵ Ibid, P. 141

³⁶ Ibid, P.144

³⁷ Ibid, P. 149

³⁸ Ibid

scope, is the composition of the gender order, of a given time, and place and the collective projects, that compose it. A history of formation of groups, categories and of the type of personalities, motives capacities drawn upon in sexual politics is required to make sense of these projects.

V IDEOLOGICAL PROCESSES

Gender relations involve the structuring of social practices around sex and sexuality. The commonest process in sexual ideology involves collapsing that structure, merging the elements into one by 'naturalizing' social practices.

The interpretation of gender relations as natural facts is extraordinarily widespread. Sexual division of labor are constantly interpreted this way Cockburn, for instance, notes how women actually had done so. In discussions of division of labor in child care women's natural desire to mother children is almost always taken for granted. The profoundly political character of the process of naturalization becomes apparent when quite opposite social relations are naturalized in different times and places.³⁹

For instance, women were treated as naturally frail in European polite culture in 18th and 19th centuries though naturally tough in most peasant cultures. At times the mechanism of naturalization is used as an argument for social change. For instance, suffrage movements argument, that the realm of politics needed an injection of women's natural qualities of compassion and purity. Contemporary eco-feminism is very close to this. Nevertheless, the main effect of naturalization is conservative, progressive use of its risk being incorporated. To interpret social relations as natural is fundamentally to suppress their historicity. Naturalization isn't a naive mistake about what biological science can and cannot explain. At a collective level, it is a highly motivated ideological practice which constantly overrides the biological facts.

³⁹ Ibid, P. 245

Nature is appealed for justice more, than for explanations to be able to justify, nature itself must be got in order – simplified, schematized and moralized.

VI CULTURAL DYNAMICS

The historicity of sexual ideology is seen not only in details like the content of heroism, but in organisation on the largest scale. In pre-capitalist and early modern Europe sexual ideology was organised as part of religious worldview. Earlier the issues of sexual politics were framed as moral questions, to be decided by appeal to revelation or the priestly authority. The massive modern secularization of European culture occurred in sexual ideology as much as elsewhere. The production of a natural science of sexuality and a social science of gender were theoretical faces of this development.

Recognising the importance of cultural policies within the sphere of gender raises the reverse questions of the impact of gender relation and sexual ideology on culture in general. There is every reason to agree with feminist cultural criticism that this impact is both powerful and largely unacknowledged. The naturalization of gender has extended to making of the culture itself. Until recently, it has not been a question why most playwrights, physicists or newspaper editors were men. It is still not a question in majority of theatres, physics departments, media and corporate offices.⁴⁰

The view that the sexual politics is the structural basis of culture in general – that for instance our culture is patriarchal before it is anything else is another matter. The overall analysis suggests that this view is wrong atleast as a transhistorical generalisation. The scope of gender relation is historically variable and their power to determine cultural process in general must be variable too.⁴¹ But a more limited strategic claim may be right. There are likely to be historical movements

⁴⁰ Ibid, P. 250

⁴¹ Ibid

where possibilities of general change in consciousness and culture, depend more crucially on the dynamics of gender relations than on any other social force.

VII POLITICAL PRACTICE

The scope of sexual politics:-

In ordinary speech 'politics' is a narrow and faintly disreputable term meaning elections parliaments , president and party antagonism 'Politician' can be a term of abuse, political label for distrust.⁴²

In what follows, politics is assumed to be neither bad nor good, but simply an essential part of social life and a very widespread one. The same kind of processes occur in companies, voluntary organizations and in stateless societies as occur in and around the state: Contests for power, mechanisms of succession, debates over policy continue. R.D. Laings, in 'The Politics of Experience', marked another discovery made in cultural politics of the 1960's. When Kate Millet characterized politics as power structured relationship arrangements whereby one group of persons controlled by another, by applying the idea to the relation between men and women, defined as 'sexual politics'. The term startled many people but her thought followed a well marked path. Millets definition now appears too narrow, given the range, of overt social conflicts about sex and gender over the last two decades. It is worth trying to get these conflicts in some sort of order to arrive at a definition of the scope of sexual politics.⁴³

First of all there is a political process centered on the state. Its most visible moment has been attempts to commit major states to guarantees of equality for women, such as Equal Rights Amendment in US and UN declaration of International Decade for Women. Of course sexual politics also includes the counter mobilization that scupperd the equal rights amendment thus undermined UN's policy. For instance, the

⁴² Ibid, P. 259

⁴³ Ibid

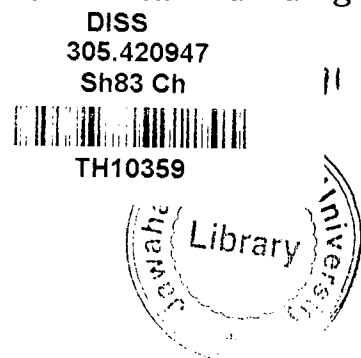
repression of women in Pakistan and Iran. Attempts to introduce equal opportunity policies have contested the sexual division of labor in the state and provoked widespread, if muted resistance. Issues of access have been fought out in political party, notable in attempts to get more women endorsed as a candidate. Issues of resource allocation have been opened with the creation of women's units in the bureaucracy and specific welfare programmes.⁴⁴

Overlapping all this is a politics of workplaces and markets. Campaigns to breakdown prohibitions on women's employment or restrictions in promotion continue. In 1985 for instance women's exclusion from the steelworks in Wollongong was declared unlawful. The content of schooling and other areas of cultural work has become a focus of struggle. The new feminism sparked the rewriting of sexist text books and attempts to remove discriminatory materials from curricula and libraries.

The politics of families has a public face. Official campaigns to increase or to limit the number of children are familiar with the catholic church's intransigence or contraception a curious counterpoint to rising concern with world over-population. The politics of contraception raises the question of control over sexuality. Some of the bitterest conflicts of the last 15 years have concerned abortion with right wing mobilization in defence of the unborn child.⁴⁵

Finally the movement addressing these issues have a politics of their own presence. The new feminism was divided early between liberal and radical currents with, radical feminism in turn dividing between socialist and cultural feminism.

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⁴⁴ Ibid, P. 260
⁴⁵ Ibid

VIII FEMINISM

A variety of movements in feminism means that calling one self a feminist can mean many things. In general, members of the following categories of feminism believe in the listed policies; however as with any diverse movement, there are disagreements within each group and overlap between others. This list is meant to illustrate the diversity of feminist thought and belief.

Defining various kinds of feminism is a tricky proposition. The diversity of comment with most of the kinds presented here should alerts us to the dangers and difficulties in trying to "define" feminism. Since feminism itself resists all kinds of definitions by its very existence and aims, it is more accurate to say that there are all kinds of "flavors" and these flavors are mixed up whichever way. However, we can identify four major strands of feminism, Cultural, Radical, Socialist and Postmodern.

i) **Feminism : Radical**

Provides the bulwark of theoretical thought in feminism. Radical feminism provides an important foundation for the rest of "feminist flavors". Seen by many as the "undesirable" element of feminism, radical feminism is actually the breeding ground for many of the ideas arising from feminism; ideas which get shaped and pounded out in various ways by other (but not all) branches of feminism. Radical feminism was the cutting edge of feminist theory from approximately 1967-1975. It is no longer as universally accepted as it was then, nor does it provide a foundation for what may be called cultural feminism. In addition, radical feminism is not and has never been related to the Maoist-feminist group Radical Women. This term refers to the feminist movement that sprung out of the civil rights and peace movements in 1967-1968. The reason this group gets the "radical" label is that they view the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. This is a movement intent on social change, change of rather revolutionary

proportions. Ironically, this get-to-the-roots movement is the most rootless variety of feminism. This was part of its strength and part of its weakness. It was always dynamic, always dealing with factions, and always full of ideas. Its influence has been felt in all the other varieties listed here, as well as in society at large. ⁴⁶

To C.T. Moore, radical feminism is centered on the necessity to question gender roles. That is why current "gender politics" questions are identified as radical feminist issues. Radical feminism questions "why women must adopt certain roles based on their biology, just as it questions why men adopt certain other roles based on theirs" Radical feminism attempts to draw lines between biologically- determined behavior and culturally-determined behavior in order to free both men and women, as much as possible from their previous narrow gender roles. Radical feminist theory is to a large extent incompatible with cultural feminism. The reason is that the societal forces it deals with seem so great in magnitude that they make it impossible to identify any innate masculine or feminine attributes except those which are results of the biological attributes. ⁴⁷

Radical Feminism is in a sense redundant, as all varieties of feminism are radical, and all of them work for fundamental social and political change. Usually the term is associated with a particular set of ideas and political practices. It assets out in typologies of feminism that define different versions in contrast with each other, emphasizing disagreements rather than areas of agreement. However, what the ideas and practices of radical feminism are has been fiercely debated, as proponents and critics frequently see its defining features very differently.

In general, its proponents have associated radical feminism with an analysis of the links between the micropolitics of everyday life and the macropolitical analysis of capitalist patriarchy. Seeing the explanatory

⁴⁶ <http://www.friesian.com/feminism.htm>

⁴⁷ Ibid

link here as men's oppressive behaviours, by which men's stereotypical characterisations are enforced on women. Its critics, in contrast, have associated radical feminism variously with : a) cultural feminism, the notion that women are essentially-biologically, morally, emotionally, behaviorally-different from and better than men), and thus with women's culture as a kind of universalism; b) lesbian separatism; and also c) psychological explanations of women's subordination based on their essential characteristics of men.⁴⁸

Much of the debate and counter debate here has arisen because of a focus on typologies rather than what feminism "on the ground" is actually like. This in turn is because the typologies operate as simple academic construction of "types of feminism" that divide up the feminist ideas and assign them to different and fixed groupings. The most usual typologies is radical, marxist-socialist, and liberal feminism; only the relatively complex typologies even mention lesbian and black feminism. However, it is interesting to note that very little comparable counter critique of radical feminism can be read as there is a concerted attempt to discredit one variant of feminism by others, based more on misunderstanding than, perhaps, on fundamental disagreement.⁴⁹

As always with feminist ideas, radical feminist thinking and analysis produced, over a period of thirty years cannot and should not be reduced to the writings of a few, whose works are taken to stand on behalf of this position. Indeed, radical feminism has provided a major critique of this basically male mainstream approach, of creating elite groups of feminists who are seen theorizing on behalf of the rest. Some of the key ideas associated with radical feminism across a very broad spectrum of political practices and writing have been identified as follows:

⁴⁸ See International Encyclopedia of Global Women's Issues and Knowledge (New York, London : Routledge, 2000), Vol 2, Pp. 809-810

⁴⁹ Ibid

a) The unity of theory and practice.

This insists that “theorizing must not be seen as separate from thinking and behaving in everyday life; indeed, that feminist theorizing must begin with everyday and should center its analysis there, “where women are”. This is radical feminism defined as “praxis”, that is, enactment of “small regulations” in the here - and - now. Gail Chester has described this by arguing that “our theory is that practicing our practice is our theory”. This is an approach that situates theory, not as a special expertise “owned” by only a few, but instead as an everyday practice that underpins everybody’s thinking and behavior. Thus this precept of radical feminist thinking threatens the conventional hierarchical division between theorists and their followers, thereby challenging divisions of power within academia.⁵⁰

b) The centrality of “the personal is the political”.

This is not a form of psychological or any other kind of reductionism, but rather the bringing together of micropolitical and macropolitical analysis and action, along with the recognition that “the personal” is central to understanding the dynamics of women’s subordination. Chester describes this as follows : “to bring revolutionary change within the realm of the possible is one of the most important attitudes I have learnt from radical feminism..... The small advances I have contributed will have made life better for some people, and most importantly, myself.” This constitutes a very different idea of social change, one that perceives a continuum between changing macropolitical systems and structures and the small changes that can be effected in everyday life.

c) The importance of women’s oppression.

This views that oppression – the use of force and the threat of force - is central to the maintenance of male supremacy, rather than only women’s inequality (in relation to civil and legal rights) or

⁵⁰ Ibid

exploitation of women (in relation to economic profiteering). Here the critique of phallogentrism has been crucial. Male use of force, rather than any supposedly “internalized” psychological characteristics or roles, constrains, many of the possibilities in women’s lives. The emphasis on sexual and other forms of male violence also links these to sexism and heterosexism, although there has often been fierce resistance to linking male violence and heterosexuality. In the 1990s, large amount of research and theory about violence towards women and children showed that this has been one of the most influential of radical feminist ideas.⁵¹

d) The fundamental nature of women’s subordination:

Women’s subordination is seen as fundamental, in the sense, that other oppressions are “engendered” as their basis for gender, is not only a “binary” opposition between masculinities and feminities, but also a world view that specifies and justifies a wide range of social relations, hierarchies, and social injustices. For example, racism and heterosexism positions nonwhites and non-heterosexuals as “other” relative to a gendered, white and masculinist subject, who is seen not only as “constituting the norm” but also as possessing the only fully human characteristics. It was on such grounds that early varieties of lesbian feminism, theorised about the links between the oppression of gay men and that of lesbian women, before more fundamental differences between gay men and lesbian feminist women were recognised. This centrality of gender to structures of thinking, as much as to, forms of categorization has perhaps paradoxically, been taken up and reworked within Lacanian influenced ideas, about the structures of language. While newer labels exist to categorize –and divide– feminism (including poststructuralist, deconstructionist, and even post-feminist), the basic ideas represented in these concepts of radical feminist analysis are still fundamental to current debate. Thus the notion of epistemology, speaking positions, and the politics of location are the heirs of radical feminist, theorizing about the relationship between theory and practice; thinking about difference, and political changes that can be associated

⁵¹ Ibid

with radical feminist ideas about “the personal is the political”; theorising about the social construction of sexualities and masculinities is prefigured in the radical feminist analysis of the forms of male violence; and questioning binary ways of thinking, including thinking about gender, and theorising about the links between women’s oppression and all other forms of oppression, are to be found in radical feminist analysis of the basis of women’s subordination.

In practice typologies are not a good guide to feminist ideas or to feminists’ lives. “On the ground,” feminists have taken ideas drawn from many “types” of feminism as well as from elsewhere, as over time women’s ideas shift and change along with the political practices associated with them. Thus, for instance, Robin Morgan’s (1978) chronicle, moves from Leninism through Maoism to Marxist feminism to Radical feminism; and, other feminists “journey” through feminist ideas may not take this route, it is none the less true that people’s ideas and political analysis change overtime as these are used and modified in practical circumstances. One result is that its critics are likely to share many of the ideas and analysis associated with radical feminism, even while fiercely disallowing the label- and also of course vice versa. This is because over time variants on some of the most fundamental ideas associated with radical feminism have come to be taken for granted; these include the need to move beyond binary conceptualizations of the public and private, the importance of organisation against sexual violence, acceptance of lesbianism, the “gendering” of the other”, and recognition of the role of “race” and sexuality marking gender. Another result is that the ideas and practices of “radical feminism” have been subject to considerable change over past twenty to thirty years; however, this has occurred with all variants of feminist thought, most dramatically with Marxist -socialist feminism since the changes in Eastern Europe.⁵²

⁵² Ibid

ii) CULTURAL FEMINISM

When radical feminism died out as a movement, Cultural feminism got rolling. In fact, many of them, were the same people who moved from former to the latter. They carried the name "radical feminism" with them, and some cultural feminists still use that name. However the difference between the two is quite striking: whereas radical feminism was a movement to transform society, cultural feminism retreated to vanguardism, working instead to build a women's culture. Some of this effort has had some social benefit: rape crisis centers, for example; and of course many cultural feminists have been active in social issues (but as individuals, not as part of a movement).

Cultural feminist can sometimes come up with notions, that sound disturbing, Victorian and non-progressive: that women are inherently (biologically) "kinder and gentler" than men and so on. Therefore if all leaders were women the interesting argument goes we wouldn't have wars., though, cultural feminism attempts to heighten respect for what is traditionally considered women's work. This is an important parallel activity in recognizing that traditionally male activities are not necessarily as important as we think.⁵³

C.T. Moore has often associated this type of statement [inherently kinder and gentler] with Separatist Feminists, which seems that women are *inherently* kinder and gentler, so why associate them with men? Cultural feminists claim that women are 'trained' to be kinder and gentler.

As various 1960s movements for social change fell apart or got co-opted, people got pessimistic about the very possibility of social change. Many of them turned their attention to building alternatives, so that if they couldn't change the dominant society, they could avoid it as much as possible. That, in a nutshell, is what the shift from radical feminism

⁵³ Ibid

to cultural feminism was about. These alternative-building efforts were accompanied with reasons explaining (perhaps justifying) the abandonment of working for social change. Cultural feminism's justification was biological determinism. . So notions that women are "inherently kinder and gentler" are one of the foundations of cultural feminism, and remain a major part of it. A similar concept held by some cultural feminists is that while various sex differences might not be biologically determined, they are still so thoroughly ingrained as to be intractable. There is no inherent connection between alternative-building and ideologies of biological determinism.⁵⁴

There are some minor strands of feminism also :

a) **Amazon Feminism**

Amazon Feminism is dedicated to the image of the 'female hero' in fiction and in fact, as it is expressed in art and literature, in the physiques and feats of female athletes, and in sexual values and practices. Amazon feminism is concerned about physical equality and is opposed to gender role stereotypes and discrimination against women based on assumptions that women are supposed to be, look or behave as if they are passive, weak and physically helpless. Amazon feminism rejects the idea that certain characteristics or interests are inherently masculine (or feminine), and upholds and explores a vision of heroic womanhood. Thus Amazon feminism advocates such as feminine strength, athletes, martial artists, soldiers, etc. ⁵⁵

b) **Anarcho-Feminism**

Anarcho feminism was never a huge movement, especially in the United States, It is mentioned mostly because of the influential work of Emma Goldman, who used anarchism to craft radical feminism that was (alas!) far ahead of her time. Radical feminism expended a lot of energy

⁵⁴ <http://www.friesian.com/feminism.htm>

⁵⁵ Ibid

dealing with a basis from which to critique society without falling into Marxist pleas for socialist revolution. It also expended a lot of energy trying to reach across racial and class lines. Goldman had succeeded in both. Radical feminist Alix Schulman realized this, but not in time to save her movement. ⁵⁶

c) **Eco-Feminism**

This branch of feminism is much more spiritual than political or theoretical in nature. It may or may not be wrapped up with Goddess worship and vegetarianism. Its basic tenet is that a patriarchal society will exploit its resources without regard to long term consequences, as a direct result of the attitudes fostered in a patriarchal /hierarchical society. Parallels are often drawn between society's treatment of the environment, animals, or resources and its treatment of women. In resisting patriarchal culture, eco-feminists feel that they are also resisting plundering and destroying the earth and vice-versa. This is actually socially-conscious environmentalism with a tiny smattering of the radical and cultural feminist observation that exploitation of women and exploitation of the earth have some astonishing parallels. The rest of "eco-feminism" turns out to be a variations in socialism. The Green movements of Europe have done a good job of formulating (if not implementing) an environmentally aware feminism; and while Green movements were not originally considered a part of eco-feminism, they are now recognized as a vital component. ⁵⁷

d) **Lesbianism**

There are a couple of points to make here. First is that lesbianism is not necessarily a 'de facto' part of feminism. While it is true that merely being a lesbian is a direct contravention of "traditional" concepts of womanhood, lesbians themselves hold a wide variety of opinions on the subject of feminism. On the other hand, lesbianism has sometimes

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Ibid

been made into a political point by women "becoming" lesbian in order to fully reject men. However, it is never accurate to characterise all feminists as lesbians nor all lesbians as feminists. One should also note that homophobia is at present among feminists as it is in any other segment of society. Lesbianism and feminism, for all their common points and joint interests, are two very different groups.⁵⁸

e) **Liberal Feminism**

The variety of feminism that works within the structure of mainstream society to integrate women into that structure. Its roots stretch back to the social contract theory of government instituted during the American Revolution. Abigail Adams and Mary Wollstonecraft were there from the start, proposing equality for women. As is often the case with liberals, they slog along inside the system, getting little done amongst the compromises until some radical movement shows up and pulls those compromises left of center. This is how it operated in the days of the suffragist movement and again with the emergence of the radical feminists.⁵⁹

f) **Moderate Feminism**

This branch of feminism tends to be populated by younger women or other women who have not directly experienced discrimination. They are closely affiliated with liberal feminism, but tend to question the need for further effort, and do not think that Radical feminism is any longer viable⁶⁰

g) **Separatists**

Popularly and wrongly depicted as Lesbians, these are the feminists who advocate separation from men; sometimes total,

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid

sometimes partial. Women who organize women-only events are often unfairly dubbed separatist. Separatists are sometimes literal, sometimes figurative. The core idea is that "separating" (by various means) from men enables women to see themselves in a different context. Many feminists, whether or not separatist, think this is a necessary "first step", by which they mean a temporary separation for personal growth, not a permanent one.⁶¹

There is sometimes some overlap between separatist and cultural feminists. It is equally inaccurate to consider all Lesbians as separatist; while it is true that they do not interact with men for sexual fulfillment, it is not true that they therefore automatically shun all interaction with men. And, conversely, it is equally inaccurate to consider all separatists Lesbians. Additionally, lesbian feminism may be considered a category distinct from separatist feminism. Lesbian feminism puts more emphasis on lesbianism -- active bonding with women -- than separatism does, in its emphasis on removing bonds with men.⁶²

iii) Marxist and Socialist Feminism

Marxism recognizes that women are oppressed, and attributes the oppression to the capitalist/private property system. Thus they insist that the only way to end the oppression of women is to overthrow the capitalist system. Socialist feminism is the result of Marxism meeting radical feminism. Jaggar and Rothenberg point out significant differences between socialist feminism and Marxism. Echols offers a description of socialist feminism as a marriage between Marxism and radical feminism, with Marxism the dominant partner. Marxists and socialists often call themselves "radical," but they use the term to refer to a completely different "root" of society: the economic system.

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid

iv) Feminism : Postmodern

Postmodern feminism was assumed to be a contradiction in terms, as recently as the early 1980's: by 1990's, however, the notion was at the forefront of serious debates within feminist theory. Jean-Francois Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition, translated into English in 1984, seemed to lay the foundations for this development in the history of ideas. Lyotard started with an assumption that the metanarrative or critique of the Enlightenment-the belief, arising in the eighteenth century, in the capacity of reason to free human beings from servitude to internal and external forces of irrationality- was now exhausted, and that history could no longer be seen as continuous progress tending towards a final condition of absolute justice and equality. The commitment of post-Enlightenment political thinkers to the instrumental uses of science and technology in the cause of social justice and to the pursuit of objective knowledge as the foundation of social progress was deemed to be no longer viable or, indeed, even desirable. For example, from a postmodern perspective there can no longer be belief in nature, history, spirit, or pure reason as universal principles that transcend local and contingent conditions. What follows from this is that gender, like class or race or ethnicity, can no longer be regarded as an essential or even stable category, nor can it be used cross-culturally to explain the practices of human societies. Formerly conceived by feminists as the necessary "other" constructed through the universalist but actually exclusivist and masculinist claims of Enlightenment discourse, the category "women" must now itself be regarded as a repressive enactment of metaphysical authority, coming to stand for all that is excluded by the Enlightenment understanding of rationality. Therefore. It is simply no longer legitimate to seize the category as the ground for a metanarrative of political practice or social ethics, even of a revisionary or emancipatory nature.⁶³

⁶³ See International Encyclopedia, n.48, P. 807

Hence the continued adherence to metanarratives of gender must necessarily blind feminist theorists to the ethnoheterocentric oppressive perspectivism lurking in all essentialist claims about the nature of woman or of feminine experience. Thus any claim to be using the category “women” as a universal one is either blind to or deliberately screening the particularity or difference that is the historical experience of femininity in the world. Moreover, Lyotard’s argument implied that any recourse to transhistorical structures as a means of explaining political oppression would simply reenact those forms of oppression in reverse. For example, political communities founded on the solidarity of shared experience might exist legitimately only in local, provisional, and attenuated forms. The feminist commitment to “difference”, furthermore, must entail the deconstruction of feminist difference itself as the next logical step in its development. It would seem impossible for any one constellation of identity to represent or speak for any other. Indeed, the very notion of representative democracy might now be viewed as the theft of another’s voice, position or (decentered) subjectivity.⁶⁴

IX LIBERATION MOVEMENTS : BIRTH AND TRANSFORMATION

The articulation of interest in women’s liberation movement differs from the articulation in working class feminism in a number of ways. Its main feature has been the construction of a collective project. Whose theme is the generalization of women’s struggles across different settings of relationships and areas of life. It arose on a much narrower social base but achieved an intensity of commitment and degree of self-consciousness unparalleled in sexual politics.

The impulse behind the earliest women’s liberation group was the contradiction between the radical democracy professed by the men of the ‘NewLeft’ and their actual exclusion and exploitation on women. The pursuit of personal freedom and attempts to build a radical self highlighted the question of emotional relations and personality which were shortly to become central concern of women’s liberation

⁶⁴ Ibid

consciousness-raising groups. The movement has survived on a material base which working class feminism does not have, the incomes of professional women (financing journals films, conferences women's houses etc.) access to the state for funding of women in women services and the unpaid labor of women without young children.

The work of activists in first half a dozen years created not only campaign against injustices but also a political resource. The collective project was materialised and to some extent institutionalized in a definite way. First and most important was the allegiance of some thousands on women in each of major cities of rich capitalist countries. Allegiance meant practices like civil rights group turning out for demonstration coming to meeting, and sometimes reading and subscribing to feminist publications. It also meant loyalty to the movement.

The second dimension of the resource was a network of institutions and enterprises based on feminist ideas or catering for a feminist clientele. In a few years feminist publishing houses art galleries rock bands, clinics, schools and courses, rape crisis centers, business legal practices, women centers, news letters magazines, theatre companies and campaign groups of many kinds grew all over the world.

Third less tangible but also important was the growing credibility of feminist ideas and of movement as a representative of women's interest; credibility both among women outside the movement and among men. Ideas spread despite the lack of mass organisation.⁶⁵

X CONCLUSION

Achieving gender equality is a difficult task, but one that must be addressed at all levels. The lack of understanding of what gender equality really means is perhaps the greatest hindrance. The simplistic

⁶⁵ Connel, n.31, P. 144

interpretation is that equality means treating people in the same way and thus applying existing policies and practices in the same way. Equal treatment of persons in unequal situations will simply perpetuate inequalities. The challenge is how to identify barriers and change institutional cultures so as to create a level playing field for equal opportunities for women and men. This is different from simply integrating women into existing policies and practices, as it requires an approach based on gender mainstreaming or assessing the implications for both women and men. Gender therefore is not a women's issue but an issue that must be tackled by both men and women together.

However, once gender sensitive policies and strategies are in place, there is no assurance that organizationally much less individual behavioral change will be forthcoming. For despite the fact that formal legislation, regulations and policies are not discriminatory and, therefore, seem to provide equal opportunity, there are still other invisible barriers which bar women from fully participating in decision-making. Achieving gender equality will involve redefining power relationships, overcoming non-legal barriers to equality, and confronting gender stereotypes. Recent analysis of progress has also identified a number of other issues indicating that actions taken to date remain insufficient.

Despite the emerging focus on issues of masculinity and gender identities, traditional gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards women continue to pose a barrier to gender equality. The growing political rhetoric in support of gender equality has not matched the policies and programmes to make this a reality.



CHAPTER 2

ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOVIET POLITICS

The political history of Soviet Union, after the October Socialist Revolution of 1917, is the story of an unprecedented experiment to transform radically social relations. The first decrees of the Soviet state of 1917 and the Soviet Constitution of 1918, for the first time in the history of Russia, declared equal rights for men and women, equal opportunities in employment, remuneration and promotion and equal pay for equal work regardless of the sex, equal opportunities in social and political activities and so on.¹¹

The proclamation of legal equality was in itself a great achievement. However, the road from law to its practical implementation was not simple. Lenin made this point in one of his speeches in 1920: "equality before law is not necessarily equality in fact" ². The acknowledgement of the rights of women was nevertheless of great revolutionary significance, for it enabled women to begin to overcome many obstacles, prior to their enjoyment of electoral rights : obstacles such as widespread illiteracy, tradition which prohibited women from engaging in any activities outside the family circle and so on.

Great efforts were needed at the state level to eliminate illiteracy in order to involve women in social life and to overcome reactionary traditions in order. With every new election campaign, they tried to increase women's participation in political life and in the process of state management. As a result impressive progress had been made in the Soviet Union, in the post-1917 period (if compared with statistics obtainable from the most industrially developed countries).

¹ Marietta Stephanians, "Women, State and Politics : The Soviet Experience" in S.Jay Klienberg ed., Retrieving Women's History (UNESCO: Berg Publisher, 1988), Pp. 241-253

² Ibid

In this chapter, we shall examine the official stand on 'woman's question' during the Soviet period, the policies followed by Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. How far were they successful in solving the 'woman's question'. What kind of political space women had enjoyed in Soviet Union? These are few questions to be answered in analyzing the role of women in Soviet politics. As this would provide a background in better assessment of changing role of women in Russian politics in the subsequent chapters.

I BACKGROUND

In the Czarist Russia, women had been subjected to suppression, as elsewhere in Europe and a small group of feminists emerged out of intelligentsia in the 1860's. Their main demand was for education but most of them had to be satisfied with foreign study. Abroad, they were radicalized by Russian exiles like Bakunin. At home there was a dearth of civil rights and bourgeoisie as a class was incipient. Thus feminism lacked the institutional support it relied on elsewhere. Many women joined the revolutionaries, inspired by Fourier's vision, exhilarated by a Nihilist tradition of sexual freedom and supported by revolutionary heroes like Chernyshevsky. The Socialist Revolutionaries attracted many women to their ranks, Vera Zasulich among them. Until 1905 both sexes shared lack of rights equally. A modest feminist movement emerged following male enfranchisement but it remained tiny, squeezed between the more powerful revolutionary and reactionary forces. However, industrialization finally produced an embryonic proletariat and with the commencement of the 20th century, a social democratic party also emerged. It was inspired ideologically by Bebel and Zetkin, and found a leading spokesperson in Alexandra Kollontai. During her travels abroad Kollontai met Zetkin, Luxemburg and Lenin. She corresponded with Bebel and contributed to *Die Gleichheit*.³

³ Diana H. Coole, Women in Political Theory : From Ancient Misogyny to Contemporary Feminism, (Sussex : Wheatsheaf Book Ltd., 1988), Pp. 220-221

It was women who helped to initiate the Revolution in February 1917, when they took to streets in search of bread, and in celebration of International Women's day. The resulting Provisional Government granted them full civil rights, but it was the Bolsheviks who wooed female supporters most successfully, agitating in factories and speaking to women via the journal Rabotnitsa.⁴ Only after October, however, did Kollontai persuade the Bolsheviks that a women's organization was necessary.

From October 1917 until 1923, a select group of women held prominent positions in the Party; Kollontai was the most active of them. Already a member of the Central Committee, with the Bolsheviks seizure of power, she was Commissar of Public Welfare from October 1917 to March 1918, then, the director of Zhenotdel (women's Department) (1920-1). This section was established in 1919 as part of the Central Committee with the responsibility of women's liberation and their revolution from below. The task of Zhenotdel was to integrate women into larger political community through its programmes, and also heighten consciousness of women as women, to encourage them to take active part in their own liberation. As Commissar, Kollontai introduced immediate measures to simplify marriage and divorce, and to provide for pregnant women and new mothers. In Zhenotdel she confronted the overwhelming problems of women's situation and the patriarchal attitudes governing it. Field-workers had faced immense hardship in their journey to farflung parts of the union and found extremely reactionary practices and attitudes towards women in peasant and Muslim household. She had the tough task of consciousness-raising among them. The Zhenotdel also provided extensive practical help, from child-care, food distribution and housing provision to public health, anti-prostitution and propoganda campaigns.⁵

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

Following the Revolution of 1917, the Bolshevik-controlled government, demolished the old social framework and erected a new state structure based on its own ideology. Some of the government's political and social economic reforms concerned women. According to the Constitution of 1918 and laws enacted at that time, women were given equal rights with men in political, social, economic, and family matters.⁶ By themselves, these measures were clearly progressive and showed promises for expanding women's horizons.

Even though the party altered some aspects of the traditional position of women, it was not about to abandon its leadership of the women's movement. After all, a struggle for power involving armed opposition continued against the Bolsheviks until 1922. Other political parties offering alternatives in search for new concept of social life might also have gained women's support, The Bolsheviks, tried to widen their popular support, therefore made rhetorical efforts to recruit women. Male leaders of the party claimed, however, that women's oppression by men at home and at work was not as important as the opportunity to participate in the building of a brave new world.

II MARXISM-LENINISM AND THE "WOMAN'S QUESTION"

The position of Marxism on the problem of discrimination against women provided the ideological basis for Bolshevik political activity concerning women. The problem of inequality of women resulting in their exploitation and the need for their liberation and empowerment was recognised by all the leading Socialist thinkers of the nineteenth century. Among the early Socialists Charles Fourier was the most ardent advocate of Women's liberation and equality of sexes. In a well known passage he wrote:

⁶ Ibid

The change in a historical epoch can always be determined by the progress of women towards freedom, because in the relation of woman to man, of the weak to strong, the victory of human nature over brutality is most evident, The degree of emancipation of women is the natural measure of general emancipation. ⁷

Marx cited this formulation with approval in his work, The Holy Family. He transformed them through their integration into a philosophical critique of human history. Besides an abstract recognition of the indignities suffered by women in modern society, the early works of Marx and Engels expressed concern over the sufferings of proletarian women as also over the disintegration of the proletarian family. They also referred to the theme of prostitution. In his work The Condition of the Working Class in England, Engels analyzed these themes at length.⁸

It must be said to the credit of Marx and Engels that they were far advanced in their concern with the oppression of women, at a time when in the middle of the nineteenth century many took women's inferiority to men for granted. In their later works Marx and Engels focussed their attention more and more on what they considered to be the principal key to the understanding of the capitalist society-its class structure. Everything including the oppression of women and the relationship between the sexes within and outside the family was explained in terms of its functional relationship to class structure and class struggle. In their work, The German Ideology, Marx and Engels tried to interpret sexual differences as an instance of the division of labor. ⁹

Engels asserted that the earliest women's societies were matriarchies in which women were held in high esteem. Matriarchy prevailed in a communistic propertyless community where equality, sexual freedom, self respect and respect for others were the general trades of society.¹⁰ In short, Engels seems to favour matriarchy as it

⁷ See International encyclopaedia of global women's issues and knowledge (New York, London : Routledge, 2000), vol.3, Pp.1308-1310

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

corresponds to a more humane way of life. Examining the view of Marx and Engels for the liberation of women, one is likely to find a “similar mixture of vague sympathy and unwillingness to deal with the problem intensively”. Engels favoured legal and political equality for women, but pointed out that achievement of such equality would not liberate them from their proletarian status within the family. To attain true liberation it was necessary that women participate fully and equally in social production.¹¹

Bebel goes a bit further than Engels in providing more details on speculation about liberation of women from domestic chores and about their increasing participation in political and cultural life, and in his argument about the increasing non-functional nature of the family. He also goes beyond Engels in suggesting the need for mobilizing women for their self liberation. He wrote: “women must not wait for men to help them out of this condition, just as workers do not wait for help from the bourgeoisie”

Bebel argued that women’s liberation must be the work of women themselves. Bebel did not offer anything precise on the exact role of women within the proletarian movement.¹²

This problem was tackled by Clara Zetkin in Germany and Alexandra Kollontai in Russia. Kollontai’s thoughts on the ‘women’s question’ can be usefully divided into two interrelated sections. In the first, she attempts to integrate the problems of sexuality and morality into a Marxist framework. In the second, she deals more specifically, and often practically, with the particular relations between men and women, women and children, family and state.

Adhering to the views of Marx and Engels, Lenin developed theoretical propositions concerning women and led the drive to give

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Geeta Singh, Soviet Women : A study in Role Dilemma under Socialism (unpublished Phd. Thesis, J.N.U., 1994), Pp.10-11

practical effect to the solution of women's question for the socialist construction of society. He considered the work of women in the capitalist factories to be a progressive phenomenon for it took them outside the narrow confines of the family and kitchen, aroused their class consciousness and drew them into the struggle of the proletariat. Lenin said that the "work at the factories broadens their outlook, makes them more cultural and independent and help them to break the shackles of patriarchal life."¹³

Thus the Marxist theory linked the solution of the question of women's rights with class struggle of the working class for revolutionary transformation and socialism. Revolutionary Marxism stresses that only in a society where there is no private ownership of the means of production and no exploitation of one class by another and in which the social equality of all people has been achieved, will women really become emancipated and be able to participate in all spheres of economic, political and social life.

The 'woman's question' as fundamentally interpreted by Marxism-Leninism, is the struggle for genuine emancipation of women, is an alienable part of the general struggle for the socialist transformation of the society. It regards the transition from household work to socially productive labour as one of the most essential conditions for the social emancipation of women and all round development of her personality. This involves, on the one hand, the need to draw women into social production and, on the other, to free them from unproductive domestic work which serves as an impediment to the growth of women's personality. Women perform a special social function by not only participating in socially productive labor with men but also play a special role as procreators.

Under capitalism an acute conflict exists between women's professional labour and her maternal functions. This contradiction can

¹³ V.I. Lenin, On the Emancipation of Women (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1977), P.9

be resolved under socialist society which recognizes maternity as the woman's most important social function and solves the problem of involving women in socially productive labor without encroaching on her maternal functions. In Lenin's view, the state and society must shoulder the responsibility for creating conditions which liberate women from generally unproductive domestic labour. Lenin further declared that, it was impossible to solve the problem of the complete social equality of women or to convert them into active participants in the building of the new society without involving them in state administration and without developing their social and political activities. He insisted that "working women must take an increasing part in the administration of socialised enterprises and in the administration of the state".¹⁴

Marxism is relevant to women because of its general analysis of the dynamics of oppression, based on material foundations in the development of human society, as a historical process. Women undergo material forms of oppression which take particular form under different modes of production. The criticism of capitalism itself offers an approach for the analysis of women's role in the economy.

The main points put forward in the works of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin and others can be summed up as follows:-

First, discrimination against women was considered merely as one instance of the socio-economic oppression faced by all members of society. It was class, not gender that brought about women's oppression. Overcoming socio-economic discrimination against women, therefore, necessarily entailed the revolutionary transformation of society through class struggle. Once the socialist revolution succeeded and the new society was built, there would no longer be social grounds for oppression and exploitation of women.

Second, for the social condition to change, it would be necessary for women not only to enjoy political and civil rights equal to those of

¹⁴ V.I. Lenin, Collected Works (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1965), Vol. 30, .43

men but also to be economically independent from men. Women could obtain their independence by working for pay outside the home.

Third, because the traditional family headed by male served as a stronghold of patriarchy and because exacting the domestic labour from women was the most efficient means of oppressing them, it was deemed necessary to make into a social responsibility such activities as child rearing. The system of relationship associated with marriage and the family would also eventually be liberalized under socialism. The framing of this problem played a prominent part in the women's movement, both before and after the revolution of 1917.¹⁵

The Bolshevik ideologues had proclaimed the development of an independent feminist movement and women's struggle for human rights. A "purely bourgeois whim" serving only to distract the female masses from the real struggle for socialism, thus driving a wedge between feminism and the women workers movement that was to last for almost a century. In fact after 1917 the feminists attempted to single out specific features of women's position within the traditional patriarchal structure. Within the USSR, the Communist party and the state, denied the objective development of specific female social interests, thereby depriving the women's movement of its *raison d'être*. The class approach to discrimination against women led to the absorption of the Women Worker's Movement into the general proletarian movement. As a result, the aims of the former were subsumed by the ends of the latter, and the mission of female emancipation became subordinated to the more global political tasks of accomplishing a revolution. The movement to liberate women was labeled the "female issue".¹⁶ However, the Bolsheviks, trying to widen their popular support made rhetorical efforts to recruit women into their party cadre. Main leaders of the party claimed, however, that women's oppression by men at home and at work was not as important as the opportunity to participate in the building of a brave new world.

¹⁵ Olga A Voronina , "Soviet Women and Politics : on the Brink of Change" in Barabara J. Nelson and Nazma Chaudhry eds., Women and Politics Worldwide (Oxford University Press, 1997), Pp. 723-737

¹⁶ Ibid

III POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND THE ZHENOTDEL

Inculcation of cultural values and norms, in support of new women roles through Soviet legislative programme of emancipation, expressed a larger attempt to create a new political community, involving an effort to incorporate the mobilization of women as a larger strategy for socialist development. A variety of measure in the early Soviet legislation intended to prove juridical foundation for the independence of women. These were geared as a larger goal to the destruction of religious, economic and family ties binding women to traditional social structures and inhibiting their direct and unmediated participation in the larger political and economic spheres. The creation of a new political community depended ultimately on a major campaign launched by the Bolsheviks for the political mobilization of women. In the first few years of the Soviet power, Lenin realized the need for an active liberation of women in life as well as society. In September 1919, he declared that “the emancipation of working women is a matter of the working women themselves.” Echoing the same Inessa Armand contended: “If the emancipation of women is unthinkable without communism, then communism is unthinkable without the full emancipation of women”.¹⁷

The organization of women and the articulation of new conceptions and implications in the legislative program of emancipation became the special task of Zhenotdel (Zhenskii otdel), a device set up in 1919 for giving a meaning to the “social revolution from below”.¹⁸ The task of organizing work among women was exclusively left in the hands of Bolshevik women themselves, because most of the Bolsheviks judged women’s emancipation to be an issue of a lesser importance subsumed under the task of bringing about revolution.

¹⁷ Singh, n.12, Pp. 125-126

¹⁸ Richard Stites, The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia :Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism 1860-1930 (Princeton,1978), P.329

Lenin considered women instrumental in executing the tasks of revolution. In a conversation with Clara Zetkin in 1920, he expressed his unqualified support to them, by pointing out the reasons of the meager participation of women in the party and its past policy of rejecting separate bodies for women among the masses of women. Reinforcing Kollantai's argument about the need of separate organization for women, and separating himself from the narrow confines of the party views, Lenin insisted that :

the party must have organs – working groups, commissions, committee, sections ... with the specific purpose of rousing the broad masses of women, bringing them into contact with the party and keeping them under its influence. What he was advocating, he explained, was not “bourgeois feminism” but a practical revolutionary expediency. ¹⁹

The first Petrograd Conference of working women was officially convened by the Bolsheviks after the October overturn in mid November 1917. Five hundred delegates representing 80,000 women from factories, workshops, trade unions and party organizations attended it. The conference was called specifically for the purpose of mobilizing support for the Bolsheviks in the elections to the Constituent Assembly. The question of organization concerning the creation of women's groups in the party committees during the second session of the conference did not produce substantial results. Stalin in an open letter to Pravda²⁰ wrote that the revolutionary solidarity of the conference had been ruined by the disagreement on the organizational question. A year later, on 16 November 1918, the Bolshevik Party convened the first All Russia Congress of Working Women. It was organized by a commission which included Inessa Armand, Alexandra Kollantai, Kalvdia Nikolaeva and Yokov Sverdlov (Secretary of the Bolshevik Party) who went agitating to the provinces to arrange for the local elections of delegates.

In the Congress, there gathered 1,147 women, including workers and peasant women from distant regions of the country. The programme presented to the Congress was impressive, meant to win the support of

¹⁹ Singh, n.12, P. 127

²⁰ Ibid

women for Soviet government and trade union to combat domestic slavery, a double standard of morality, to establish communal living accommodation in order to release woman from household drudgery; to protect women labour and maternity; to end prostitution, and to refashion women as members of future communist society. The main speeches in the Congress were delivered by Kollantai and Armand. Lenin's appearance was a sensation. His speech included the endorsement of the measures already taken by the government to improve women's conditions and an appeal to play a more active political role: " There can be no socialist revolution unless very many working women take a big part in it."²¹ The 1918 Congress proved to be an open manifestation of the fact that some Bolshevik leaders actively supported the cause of liberation. This led to the creation of Commissions for Agitation and Propoganda among working women.

The establishment of women's commission was approved by the Eighth Party Congress in March 1919. During the Congress Kollantai elaborated on the special methods of political work among women. She explained, that since women were politically backward, the efforts of party would be futile to recruit them on the basis of general political appeal. She further argued that it was women's oppression which led to their lack of involvement in political life. The cares and concerns of the family and the household, in her opinion robbed them of their time and energy and thus prevented them from participating in broader political and social pursuits. Kollantai proposed, replacing of the individual household with communal facilities for eating, laundry, material and child care in order to liberate women in their everyday lives She said :

we have to conduct a struggle with the conditions which are oppressing woman, to emancipate her as house wife, as a mother and this is the best approach towards women- this is agitation not only by words but also by the deed. ²²

This principle of political organization, which became known as 'agitation by the deed', was the distinctive feature of the activities of the Bolshevik women's organization in this early period.

²¹ Lenin., n.14, P.180

²² Singh n.12, P.128

In September 1919, the Bolshevik Central Committee gave a higher status to the Commission for Agitation and Propoganda among Working Women by reorganizing it into the “Women’s Section or Department” (Zhenotdel), part of the Central Committee Secretariat under Inessa Armand. Armand and her staff in Moscow made appointment and established a network of local Zhenotdels attached it to the party committees at every level. These local bodies were staffed by party members and unpaid volunteers known as “woman organizers”. Bolshevik women leaders with their own particular responsibilities and interest, such as V.P. Lebedeva (maternity), N.K. Krupskaya (education) and Mariya Ulyanova (journalism) interlocked their activities with those of Zhenotdel.²³ The Bolshevik women’s movement thus extended even beyond the national network of Zhenotdely. Inessa Armand drew up a list of guiding principles for the Zhenotdel which was submitted to the first International Conference of Women Communist, which took place in July 1920 at Moscow. The problems to be confronted were enormous. The total number of women in party in 1920 were only 45,297 or 7.4 percent of all members.²³ Thus Zhenotdely attempted to overcome the shortage of women in party members by aiming to mobilize them to join the Bolshevik Party . Women played a minimal public role in rural areas- particularly in Muslim region as female seclusion was practised there. Hence to reach such women and inform them of the rights and duties conferred upon them by the Soviet government, Zhenotdel had to create new associational forms capable of penetrating the traditional milieu. The ultimate objective of communication was to encourage women’s participation in political affairs and to develop a growing pool of experienced female cadres for party and Government work. Accordingly, the conferences of worker and peasant woman or Delegate Assemblies were devised to facilitate the political education, training and recruitment of women. The meetings were modelled on the lines of the Soviets. Elections were held for women workers and peasants to select

²³ Coole, n.3, Pp.226-7

²³ T.H.Rig by, Communist Party Membership in the USSR, 1917-1967 (Princeton University Press, 1968), P.36

delegates from their midst, some particularly promising women who would spend a period, with pay as interns (*praktikanty*) in various government departments. The election itself was a step towards raising consciousness: “when the gray, backward, non-party woman elects her representative, she feels she has accomplished an act of politics”,²⁴ wrote Kollantai.

The delegates would attend meetings and courses to a variety of state party, trade unions, co-operative societies and would help in organization of public services bodies. Delegates also served in the people’s courts, sometimes in the capacity of judges for a short tenure of two to three months. After the completion of her tenure the delegate would then report back to the Zhenotdel and her own constituency about her sojourn in impractical politics. This system of delegate reporting was basically geared to control and improve the quality of administration as well as training of women in public responsibilities.

The delegate meeting system played an important role in raising consciousness of many a “backward” women and integrating them into a larger political community through its programs and exposing them to the realities of administrative life. The number of women actively involved rose as high as 58,000²⁵ women by late 1923. Further Zhenotdel made contacts with a wider circle of women, through the network of party journals. These journals became the vehicle of propoganda among the literate women. A growing number of periodicals were specifically designed for the network of party journalist, and similarly for the network of workers and peasant correspondent, throughout the 1920s. Krupskaya’s Kommunistka was the theoretical journal launched to serve as the Zhenotdel organ. Rabotnitsa, a pre-war journal for women workers, was revived to link the zhenotdel leadership to its female constituency.²⁶

²⁴ Singh n.12, P.133

²⁵ Ibid, P.134

²⁶ Ibid, P.136

Nonetheless, the slow expansion of new values and opportunities during the 1920's was evident from the widening circulation of the Zhenotdel journals with print order of 30,000 for Kommunistka in 1921; the expanded activities of Delegate Assemblies; the slow rising rates of female participation in elections and the increasing number of women elected as deputies to local Soviets. By 1926, 18 percent of the deputies to city Soviets and 9 percent of those in rural Soviets were women. A large number of women remained out of the local political process and were passive when they were elected. The proportion of women in the Party rose to 12 percent by 1927.²⁷ The new cadres were increasingly worker and peasant women of non-Russian nationalities- in contrast to the female membership of the Party at an earlier stage of its development. A small number of women were also appointed to responsible positions in the state and party apparatus although their functions remained in many mores, more than real.

Although, it is not easy to evaluate the effects of zhenotdels on women, it is evident that groups spread the party norms and standards, forced Marxist-leninist ideology upon the female masses, and exerted ideological control over women. Yet, the early leaders of the Zhenotdel system (Inessa Armand, 1919-20; Alexandra Kollontai, 1920-22; Sophia Smidovich, 1922-24)²⁸ were sincerely carried away by the revolutionary romanticism of marxism-leninism and by their belief in the need to liberate female workers from the patriarchal family institutions that opposed them. Their fervour brought energy to the activities of the zhenotdels.

IV STALIN: "THE FEMALE ISSUE IS SOLVED"

As soon as Joseph Stalin became the First General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1922, the totalitarian system began to take

²⁷ Jessica Smith, Women in Soviet Russia (New York : Vanguard Press, 1928), p.228-232

²⁸ . Voronina, n. 15, P. 727

shape. All political parties and public organizations were abolished, with the exception of the Communist Party, and all dissent therein was prohibited. The Soviets came increasingly under party control until at last they were nothing more than nominal entities that executed every party decision. The party itself went through significant changes. The extermination of any unorthodox thought became the prevailing feature of political life and brought about a series of disastrous purges intended to destroy those whom Stalin decreed enemies of the people.

As for women, the old official opinion that they had been liberated by the October Revolution persisted. Stalinist propoganda averred that woman had been given the opportunity "to stand cheek by jowl with her husband, father, or brother in the struggle for a new life."²⁹ From this viewpoint of Stalinist ideology, women had also gained one more guarantee of their equality with men: Stalin's policy of industrialization and collectivization provided extra jobs for women outside home and opportunity to them to work on equal terms with men.

As Soviet society developed under Stalin, women's opportunity to participate in non-domestic labor was transformed into duty to work in state-owned enterprises. From the 1930's onwards, women were considered only from a functional point of view: they were valued as "the great army of labor," as the colossal reserve of workforce"³⁰ thus the state policy concerning women became openly utilitarian. Women were considered no more than a resource for the reproduction of workforce. In the propoganda, this approach towards women was presented as the final solution of the female issue in USSR and became the pretext for abolition of zhenotdels. Under the Soviet variety of patriarchy the ever increasing exploitation of women was called equality.

²⁹ Ibid, Pp. 728-732

³⁰ Ibid

V THE POLITICAL THAW OF KHRUSHCHEV

The policies of Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin's successor in power from 1953 to 1964, were motivated primarily by his desire to de-Stalinize society, and to revitalize the Communist party and the Soviets. To accomplish this, new forces were brought into action, and new actors appeared on the political stage. Yet even as the question of the political activity of various social strata came to life again after Stalin, it became clear that women hardly participated in politics. In 1956 women were 19.7 percent of party members and only 4.1 percent of the Central Committee (10 of the 244 members). Until 1957 there were no women in the Politburo and in the Council of Ministers.³¹ These facts did not go unnoticed by Khrushchev. In his famous speech to the 20th Party Congress in 1956, a speech devoted to criticism of Stalinism as well as to an analysis of the party's functioning, he drew attention to women's marginal role in the work of the party and the Soviets. "It should not be overlooked that many party and state organs put women forward for leadership posts with timidity. Very few women hold leading posts in the party and the soviets." After long years of propaganda extolling the supposed triumph of the state in the solution of the female issue in the USSR, Khrushchev's statement sounded somewhat promising.

In 1956 the state created the Soviet Women's Committee (SWC), a non-governmental public organization whose mission was to raise the level of women's labor and social activity. In reality, it was soon busy doing something else: disseminating to other countries lies about the successful Soviet solution of the female issue and fighting bourgeois feminism. The problems that truly bothered Soviet women were of so little concern to this 'public' organization, that a policeman standing at front of the SWC'S magnificent mansion, had orders to admit only the "chosen ones".

³¹ Ibid

In spite of such window dressings of socialism as the SWC, some criticism concerning the position of women were allowed. At the 22nd Party Congress in 1961, for instance, it was stated that:

remnants of inequality in the position of women in everyday life must be completely eliminated. Conditions must be created for the harmonious combination of motherhood with a more active participation of women in the labor force, society, science, and the arts ³²

Consequently, during the years of Khrushchev's rule family law was once again liberalized with the lifting of the bans on abortion and divorce.

The political role of women remained much the same. In 1961 women had virtually the same low levels of representation in party and state organizations as they had in 1956. Only 19.5 percent of the party's membership was female. The percentages of women in the Central Committee and in the Supreme Soviet were 33 and 28.0, respectively. Under Khrushchev, however, the phrase "inequality in the position of women" was used in party materials and some acknowledgement of the phenomenon was thereby legalized.³³ As a result, discussion of the female issue became theoretically possible. But society was not ready for such a discourse. In the powerful outburst of social activity by the intelligentsia during the "shestidesyatnichestvo" (the movement of the 1960s), there was no place for a discussion of women's position.

VI THE EPOCH OF BREZHNEV

Under Brezhnev's administration women, as fifty one percent of the work force, were critical to the economy but were also expected to bear more children This double burden was discussed in the party and in scholarly literature. The debate elicited the unwilling admission that certain hardships and "nonantagonistic"³⁴ contradictions existed in the position of women and that in fact the female issue had not been

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

altogether resolved. Almost no one, however, addressed the question of women's equality in all spheres of life, because the equality problem had become less and less popular in discussions of the female issue. The main emphasis was instead on how to combine women's dual roles as workers and mothers and how the party could help women. The utilitarian approach of the Stalin era was thus revived. At the 25th Party Congress in 1976 the party stressed "its duty to continually protect women, to improve their position as workers, mothers, childrearers, and housewives." At every party congress, thereafter, it became a tradition to emphasize certain hardships faced by women as mothers and workers and to issue endless resolutions about improving conditions at workplace and in home. No one, however, including the party-state machine, rushed to carry out these resolutions.

As for women's participation in political activities, the party's attitude was both ambiguous and traditional. The official propoganda never denied the importance of their participation as an aspect of sexual equality, but it stressed that the real degree of their participation depended on the level of development of the general social structure, on economic conditions, and on residual attitudes that still lurked in some people's minds. Unwilling to admit that Soviet society and its power structures were not prepared for women in posts of political leadership, the party justified women's absence by citing their extreme economic burden as producers and reproducers and their political passivity. Moreover, the party assumed no responsibility for the socioeconomic practices that created women's 'double burden' and denied any connection between the totalitarianism of the state and political apathy among women. On the contrary, the official propoganda called attention to the "untiring care" and efforts of the party and the government to draw women into sociopolitical activities. The much talked-about 33 percent of females in the Supreme Soviet was a proof of its caring.

Any reasonable person, however, could easily comprehend that the strictly observed quota for women in the tame and passive Supreme

Soviet (as it was under Brezhnev) fell far short of proving women's participation in managing state affairs. Besides, the party and the Soviets artificially preserved the quota by filling it at every election. Other more telling statistics testified to women's absence from the middle and top levels of the state structures. Between 1917 and 1967 only 77 of the 2,100 individuals representing the upper political elite of the Soviet Union were women—that is 3.7 percent. The figures for the middle level of the state-political hierarchy were much the same: only 109 of the 2,500 or 4.4 percent were women.

The party hierarchy was similarly dominated by men during Brezhnev's 18-year rule. Although 25 percent of party members were women, no women sat on the Politburo, and only one on the Central Committee. Women held no leading posts in regional party organizations and only 4 percent of the top offices in district organizations, women held about one-third of the leading posts.

But the scarcity of women among the political elite was not the only problem. Equally important, the women within the political structures did not speak on behalf of the female population. They served merely as symbols for the ideological myth of the Soviet political system, wherein the rights of all social groups and strata were supposedly safeguarded by quotas for those groups in politics and in the management of state affairs. Although women were physically present in state structures, their plenary powers were nominal. All decision-making was carried out in the deepest recess of the nomenklatura machine (the party's system for controlling appointments to important positions), not in the representative institutions.

The continued absence of a women's mass movement in the country undoubtedly contributed to this situation. The officially approved SWC continued to carry out its propaganda functions and engaged in contacts with foreign women's organizations, but just those

untouched by the “sin” of feminism. Nevertheless, in 1979-and for the first time since the 1920s – an independent religious – feminist group called Maria sprang up in Leningrad. By the end of that year, the group managed to issue an almanac entitled Woman and Russia by the “samizdat” route of self –publication. Members of the group, like Tatiana Goricheva, Natalia Malakhovskaya, Tatiana Mamonova, and Julia Voznesenskaya, had a view of women’s position that differed significantly from the official one. They protested against the exploitation of the women in the Soviet Union, against the suppression of their personalities and the humiliation of their dignity, against the inhuman conditions in hospitals where abortions were carried out, and against the ideological totalitarianism in the public education system. Through the almanac, they were also the first in the country (preceding Andrei Sakharov and other dissidents) to condemn the Afghan war as unjust. Shortly after the group appeared, its members were arrested by the KGB and were either deported or imprisoned. Copies of their book were confiscated.³⁵

Such was the way of the Brezhnev administration to point out demagogically that the political activity of the women should increase, yet to trample down the young shoot of an independent women’s movement, to willingly recognize the double economic burden of women but do nothing about it.

VII POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AT THE CENTRAL LEVEL

The picture of under representation of women in higher political positions is not much different. Women were noticeable by their absence from the apex of power in party and government institutions such as the Central Committee of the CPSU, where they ministered 8 percent in the last years of rule, or the important Council of Ministers, where there were generally no women at all. Only at the local party did women become slightly visible. Jerry F. Hough’s much quoted conclusion that

³⁵ Ibid, Pp.231-32

the party was characterized by a 'gross overrepresentation of males' was very apt. There has only been one full female member of the politburo, of the Central Committee Ekaterina Furtseva (1957-60) who survived just four years in power in mid and late 1960's. The percentage of women in the central committee was just 3.81 percent in 1981.³⁶ What is noteworthy is that it did not increase during the period of USSR's existence. At the lower level, women's representation in the in the local Soviets was almost equal to men. Even at the level of the Supreme Soviet women constituted one-third of the members which compared favorably with all other national legislatures. Soviet women were also well represented in the trade unions. Women made up a quarter of the party membership at primary level. Their committee representation was commensurate with their strength in the party membership and remained so upto the district committee level. More significantly women's share on all the party committees was on the increase which made participation of women in politics, somewhat justified. Genia Browning, who has made a special study of political participation of women in the Soviet Union, has reached the conclusion that participation patterns of women in the CPSU have a close resemblance with situation in other industrial societies. The figure of 4.63³⁷ percent in 1986 at the level of the Central Committee of the Party was roughly similar to the share of women to the governments of United Kingdom and United States. The low percentage of women in the party membership (27.4 percent in 1983) has been blamed for their under representation in higher positions in the Party as well as other social organizations and industrial, agricultural and cultural spheres. Party membership which provided greater prospects for career advancement in non-party bodies was seen as the primary cause of lower percentage of women in higher positions even in such institutions as Soviets and the trade unions where women had a fairly large participation. This is shown in table below:

³⁶ Singh, n.12, P.230

³⁷ Genia R. Browning, Women in Politics in USSR : Consciousness Raising and Soviet Women's Groups (Sussex : Wheat Sheaf Books, 1987), P.21

Table : 2.1

WOMEN AS PERCENTAGE OF SOVIET DEPUTIES		
Local	50.3 %	1985
Union Republics	36%	1985
Supreme Soviet	33%	1984
Presidium	11%	1980
WOMEN AS PERCENTAGE IN TRADE UNIONS		
Membership	55.0%	1985
Local Committee	66.4%	1985
Central Council	35.8%	1985

Source : Geeta Sigh, *Soviet Women : A study in Role Dilemma under Socialism* (unpublished Phd. Thesis, J.N.U., 1997), Pp.232

It is the party leadership that wheted nominations to higher positions in both the Soviets and the trade Unions. As Genia Browning observes: "whatever planning exists, and whatever progress women make, is ultimately controlled by the men 'gatekeepers' of the nomenklatura". A one party state that USSR was, the positions of leadership in the party determined the level of participation of women in other social organisations and political institutions. This is the reason why only three women, E.A.Furtseva and A. Biryukova(1988-90) and Galina Semenova(1990-1) could make it to the top party positions of politburo member and secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU respectively.³⁸

Women's presence was most marked in the hierarchical system of the Soviets. Due to the fixed quotas of representation, they made up about 33 percent of the USSR Supreme Soviet, 36 percent of Republican

³⁸ Mary Buckley, "Women and Public Life" in Stephen White, Alex Pravda and Zvi Gitleman eds., *Developments in Russian Politics* (London : Mc Millan Press, 1997), P.191

level Supreme Soviets and 50 percent of local Soviets. Since the Soviets, however, were not the important arenas of decision-making, there was a sharp inverse relationship between women and power.³⁹

The explanation offered for the inadequate representation of women at higher level was that their preoccupation with the family and home allowed them less time for socio-political activities than men. The traditional attitudes towards women were also partly to be blamed. In some cases female political consciousness, which fell behind that of men was also held accountable for the prevailing situation. The double burden of home and work responsibilities which could be alleviated by improved facilities, needed a reasonably long enough period of time to make its impact felt. The policy to change male attitudes remained confined to official condemnation of sexual discrimination and occasional campaigns appealing to men, to help women more and more at home and for sharing parental responsibilities. But the implicit assumption remained unchanged, that women have the main responsibility of children and home. The task of raising political consciousness initially develops from individual awareness of problems being socially caused and the best place for this to take place was the production point. It was believed that the trade union consciousness could develop to class consciousness and eventually political consciousness with party membership. The complexity of the situation lay in the fact that while, Soviet political practice acknowledged the need to differentiate the sexes, this differentiation was recognized only in limited terms. As Genia Browning rightly observes: "Consciousness is not perceived as lived experience according to sex, but primarily to class."⁴⁰

In the early years, it was recognized that women's political and social consciousness could be raised with the support of other women. As already pointed out women's department of the party, the Zhenotdel,

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Singh, n.12, P.234

was set up to achieve this goal. It achieved a lot but was disbanded by 1930 on the official ground that it was no longer required since women had already attained equality with men. However, beginning with the 1960s it was realised this was not the case. It was only thanks to the liberal policy of Khrushchev that the idea of women's only organization was revived as one of the means of raising their political consciousness. To achieve Khrushchev's plan for communism by the 1980's it was necessary to mobilize women in production. The "Zhenskie Sovety" (women's councils) known as "Zhensovety" were established throughout the Soviet Union.

The movement to set up "Zhensovety" was also part of the larger policy of developing participatory democracy through management of social activities. The "Zhensovety" was described as independent organization whose activists used their own initiative and was spread throughout Soviet Union. The aim of "Zhensovety" was to achieve a wide involvement of women in productive life. In co-operation with the trade unions committee, "Zhensovety" organized courses to raise women's qualifications and encouraging their participation in socialist competition. Through organization of public meetings, they better informed public on questions of national and international politics, on contemporary literature and arts as well as child care and housework. The "Zhensovety" were quite successfully mobilizing women around the socio-economic decisions of the Party and the state. This meant, in Soviet terms, the level of women's political consciousness had indeed been raised.

So far as consciousness raising in a feminist sense is concerned, the "Zhensovety" have been far from success. Of course, in some areas, these organisations did act as a form of pressure group, yet their potential for feminist consciousness was curtailed by the Party's undisputed say on all social and economic matters. The low status of "Zhensovety" was indicative of low priority attached to women's issues. Gail Lapidus viewed "Zhensovety" as bodies which enshrined "women's

work” in the economy. The activities of the “Zhensovety” were conducted within the framework of political culture of the Communist Party. As such it failed in achieving the aim of raising women’s consciousness, as also in contributing to advancement in the formal political structure. Biologism remained deeply entrenched in the Soviet society. The Soviet authorities having admitted that equality was yet to be achieved, were in need of a plausible explanation, which was found in biologism. The role of motherhood as distinct from parenthood found place in article 35 of the 1977 Constitution of the USSR . It was predominantly men who decided whether women – only group were desirable, and if they were, on what terms.? In the party the male – led elites decided on the tasks and methods of the “Zhensovety”. Thus it is difficult to ignore Jancar’s contention that Soviet women had no space to develop an autonomous sex specific consciousness despite the existence of the “Zhensovety”.⁴¹

VIII CONCLUSION :

The leader of the 1917 Revolution may have taken their philosophical bearings from Marx and Engels, and Lenin may have expressed interest in the plight of women’s domestic work, but concerns about women and the family were not central issues to most Bolsheviks. The challenge of liberalism to Russian patriarchal institutions and attitudes, however, forced revolutionaries to pay closer attention to the incorporation of women into the state. The well known and lively debate about the ways in which to increase women’s political participation, improve their status vis-à-vis traditional institutions, and achieve sexual equality came to be known as the ‘women question’. With the establishment of zhenotdel in the Communist Party, Bolshevik activists hoped that women’s interest would be represented and other women inspired to take up the cause of the new communist state. As a consequence, a series of laws on marriage, abortion, and property lifted restrictions on women’s rights.

⁴¹ Singh, n.12, Pp.238-40

With the accession to power of Josef Stalin, the discussion shifted dramatically and feminist views were silenced entirely. Stalin eliminated the zhenotdel in 1930, declaring the women question 'solved'. As replacement for the zhenotdel, "zhensovety" were established in the agitation and propaganda departments of the Communist party. The mission of these short-lived organizations was simply to rededicate women to Stalin's economic programme. Women's position in Soviet society was re-examined, in limited fashion, in the Khrushchev era, prompted by the recognition that women had not assumed positions of political and economic leadership at a level comparable to men. In response, the Khrushchev regime created the "zhensovety"; the goals of these councils were not generated by their members, however, but by the party or government organization with which they were associated. Furthermore, there was no attempt to overturn the Stalinist assertion that the woman question had been solved. Indeed, it was not until the Khrushchev era that the woman question was officially reopened, allowing the state to more candidly attack the problems of a faltering economy that demanded women's participation in the labour force and the demographic predicament of decreasing Russian birth rates. Although reopened, the woman question was again being addressed in terms dictated by the policy needs of the state.

However, it is no exaggeration to state that, emancipation of women had nowhere been so rapidly and effectively promoted as in the former Soviet Union. Socialism had given women full legal equality, guaranteeing them full social and economic rights and privileges thus, integrated them into mainstream life. Therefore, a number of classic measures had been adopted to secure women's emancipation in Soviet Union. Emancipation in this context came to mean two things: the mobilisation of women into the labour force; and the lifting traditional social constraints and injustices, thereby enabling them to take part in the effort to develop their societies. The socialist state was to facilitate their dual functions (maternal function and role in production) by supplying adequate childcare facilities and provisions for paid maternity

leave. But in the realm of politics, they were grossly under-represented and had no decision making power. A study of women's political functions in the party reveals that women were most openly recruited for positions involving either indoctrination or "consumer welfare services", but were virtually denied access to positions relating to national security or foreign relation. This could be because women's interest was weakly articulated in the political system and among other things women's organisations were weak. All the policies had been subservient to the totalitarian nature of the Soviet state where state had been the main mechanism of discrimination against women and not men.



CHAPTER 3

IMPACT OF POST-SOVIET POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION ON WOMEN

It would be difficult to overemphasize the depth of the crisis which has afflicted the Russian Federation and the former Soviet republics from 1985 onwards, intensifying in early post-Soviet era. This period, which has witnessed the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the fall of Communism, a troubled transition to a more pluralistic political system and a market economy akin to early capitalism, has been interpreted as the 'second Russian revolution' This chapter will provide an overview of the main implications of the deep divisions in societies of Russia on women during the perestroika and post-perestroika periods, concentrating on certain key issues such as changing role of women in politics, and their representation in various centers of power within the Russian federation.

According to Rosalind Marsh, under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, women have possessed even less power in mainstream politics than in early periods of Soviet history. Some Russian feminists have called the system 'male democracy' or a 'men's club'.¹

The party leader, who took power in 1985 and who initiated major political and economic forms, Mikhail Gorbachev, expressed his views on the female issue in two statements. In the first statement, made at the 27th Party Congress of the CPSU in 1986, he asserted that it was necessary to revive the "zhensoviets" (women's council). He was unwilling to let the Soviet tradition of party leadership slip over the women's movement. The second appeared in his book The Meaning of

¹ Rosalind Marsh, "Women in Contemporary Russia and the Former Soviet Union", in Rick Wilford and Robert L. Miller eds., Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: the Politics of Transition (New York : Routledge, 1998), P. 98

My Life: Perestroika,² where he wrote that women's "truly feminine predestination should be returned to women completely." Both statements have been echoed in state policy making.

By 1987 the government had created 240,000 "zhensoviets" across the country, most of which were attached to the party committees of industrial enterprises. The Soviet Working Committee (SWC) assumed the role of organizational center and issued its "Regulations concerning the "Zhensoviets," which declared that the organization would "unite all Soviet women... for the good of the cause of Communist development" and "work under the leadership of the CPSU".³

Thus, the women's organizations created under perestroika were placed under party control, and their activities completely regulated. This did not mean that the party continually meddled in the affairs of the "zhensoviets" or that the Central Committee strictly supervised every step the SWC took. Yet by establishing the "zhensoviets" as part of the official political sphere and by assuming leadership over them, the party achieved its goal of transforming them from what could have become a real political force into a nominal one. The party's success was complete, for the overwhelming majority of the "zhensoviets" proved utterly ineffective and went out of business quite peacefully. The SWC lingered on, pretending to be active, to be a principal center of women's movements and to speak on behalf of Soviet women. In reality, even before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the (Soviet Women's Committee) SWC had almost no support among the public. These developments can be better understood if we can understand the contemporary socio-economic and political context.

2 Olga A. Voronina, "Soviet Women and Politics on the Brink of Change". in Barbara J. Nelson and Nazma Chawdhary, eds., Women and Politics World Wide (Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1997), P. 732

3 Ibid

I THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL CONTEXT FOR WOMEN

Under Gorbachev, the state subsidies for women workers were cut in the declining economic situation, and strapped enterprises began to view women as less desirable workers. Despite laws against sexual discrimination, enterprises found ways to dismiss women workers. In the process of privatization, state enterprises have offered an opportunity to start up again as if they were new business, and to reduce their own costs, many have closed down sectors that are disproportionately staffed by women or have opened again with a new all male-labour force. Defense industries had been downsizing in the process of conversion had fired women in disproportionate numbers. Other state enterprises also reduced their staff by firing women for whom they could not find 'appropriate work' According to official statistics, as of January 1993 women constituted 71.9⁴ percent of the unemployed, Substantial number of these women were well educated and experienced engineers and technicians in their late thirties and forties.

Despite the need to ameliorate the economic plight of women as independent, politically significant wage earners but as traditional wives, mothers and supporters of the state. Within the Russian Supreme Soviet and the new parliament little attention has been paid to women on economy; the more persistent refrain has been about the crisis of the Russian family – the birth rate stood lower than any time since world war II. The child mortality rates have increased, and politicians have returned to a powerful pro-natal ideology.

Still perestroika and glasnost did pave the way for a broader – based dialogue about women and women's equality in the Soviet and Russian society. The new democratic efforts made possible a women's

⁴ Linda Racioppi and Ko. Sullivan See, "Organizing Women before and after the Fall: Women's Politics in the Soviet Union and after the Fall" in Bonnie G. Smith ed. Global Feminism since 1945 (London : Routledge, 2000) , Pp. 212

activism that is not directed by the party or the state but by women themselves. Shut out of the protected quota system, women have increasingly become aware of their truly marginal status and have responded to it.

II GORBACHEV AND PERESTROIKA

Under Gorbachev glasnost brought criticism of the state of affairs in Russia in 1988. Journalists, such as, Larisa Kuznetsova spoke about 'our flourishing patriarchy' and asked probing questions, such as why did only five women delegates at the 19th Party Conference make speeches when there were a total of 1,258 delegates? She believed 'we are elbowing women out of leading positions. The philosopher Olga Voronina argued that 'men have created the world for themselves' and pointed out that Lenin had understood the importance of 'mass struggle' against the pettiness of housework. She questioned, why did so few men do housework in partnership with their spouses? Even Zoya Pukhova, then chairing the Soviet Women's Committee, launched a strong criticism at the differential upward mobility of men and women at work and in the party. She asked, if 29 percent of party members were women, why did they make up only 7 percent of party secretaries in regional and territorial committees? ⁵

As a number of times earlier, the bulk of these criticisms fell on deaf ears or were greeted by the unthinking smirks of Russian patriarchal males. Renowned worldwide for their highly traditional attitudes, and for many Western women a relic of earlier centuries, Russian men were slow to change. Gorbachev, however, despite being much criticized for the statements in his book 'Perestroika', in which he referred to women being able to return to their 'purely womanly mission', also had some radical words to say about them which have been unfairly overlooked by his critics.

⁵ Mary Buckley, "Women and Public Life" in Stephen White, Alex Pravda and Zvigileman eds., Development in Russian Politics (London : McMillan Press, 1997), p. 191

At the 19th Party Conference in 1988 Gorbachev announced that the women's movement was just 'formal' or 'at a standstill'. He regretted that 'women's opinions were not duly reckoned with' and that 'women are not duly represented in governing bodies'. The 'woman question' he admitted, was far from solved, and there were still daily cares that made it difficult for women to enjoy the rights to which they were entitled. He concluded that 'the door should be wide open for them to governing bodies at all level.'⁶ It was three months later that he appointed Biryukova to candidate membership of the Politburo.

However, during Gorbachev's tenure, the attitude of the CPSU toward the promotion of women to high political posts was a direct proof of its continued patriarchal stance. Among the 100 People's Deputies of the USSR elected from the Communist Party, only 11 were women. Although in 1990 women accounted for 30 percent of the party, they made up just 6 percent of the Central Committee. Not until 1990 was a woman, Galina Semenova,⁷ appointed to the Politburo. Even then, she held the typically female office of chairperson of the Central Committee on the Status of Women.

III YELTSIN'S PERIOD

Yeltsin and his government have made some attempts to incorporate women's issues into their political programme. At the end of 1992, he established a fifteen-strong 'Group of Gender Expertise'⁸ within the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, with the aim of helping Russian parliamentarians and legislators to create laws which would take into account the specific interests of both the sexes. This objective was significant, because all Russian laws had previously been non-gender-specific.

⁶ Maxine Molyneux, "The Woman Question in the Age of Communism's" in Mary Evans ed., The Woman Question, (New Delhi : Sage Publication, 1994), Pp.304-5

⁷ Voronina, n.2, P.732

⁸ Ibid, P. 101

The treatment of women as a resource for the production and reproduction, rather than as independent individuals who should enjoy all human rights, became even more apparent during the early years of perestroika and democratization. All the measures supposedly meant to improve the position of women, which were discussed and passed between 1986 and 1991, were really aimed at strengthening the traditional female role in the family. By pursuing a policy of privileges, of various pensions and allowances, the state sought to keep women in position of social invalids and political outsiders. Stressing the "protection"⁹ of women as mother, the state's program said nothing about measures for incorporating women into the decision-making levels of political structures or for protecting them from unemployment.

Meanwhile the women's employment continued to follow the traditional Soviet pattern. In the "male" spheres, women were usually hired for hard, monotonous, and unprestigious jobs that were poorly paid. Wage and prestige was also low in the so-called female professions. "Female" jobs, for example, paid an average of 30 percent less than "male" jobs. At the same time according to Z. A. Khotina at the Center for the Gender Studies, unemployment rates for women was three to five times higher than those of men. It is a fact that when post-Communist governments and new power structures are formed, women seemed to fade out of the picture. Of the few women in Yeltsin's government, Galina Starovoitova, the adviser on nationality issues, was dismissed in 1992, and Ella Pamfilova, the Minister of Social Protection, resigned in January 1994, because she was not liked by Prime Minister Chernomyrdin.¹⁰

Members of the 'Women of Russia' movement claimed that they have been successful in influencing government policy, especially through Ekaterina Lakhova, a long-time associate of Yeltsin from Sverdlovsk, who in 1992, was appointed chair of the Commission for Women, Family and Demography attached to President Yeltsin's office.

⁹ Voronina, n.2, P.733

¹⁰ Ibid

According to a Russian feminist, she played a 'relatively positive' role. However, others might take a less optimistic view point. Undoubtedly Yeltsin's female political advisers have achieved some success in obtaining the reconsideration of new labour and family laws which would have made women unprofitable employees. Perhaps their greatest achievement to date, has been to contribute to the campaigns against the draft law. 'For the Protection of the family, Motherhood, Fatherhood and Children', which was re-examined and in 1993, on the grounds that it violated the norms of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the European Commission of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. This could be partially ascribed to the combined influence exerted by Lakhova, other members of the 'Group of Gender Expertise' who later joined the 'Women of Russia' political movement, and liberal feminists associated with the Moscow Gender Center. A more important factor, might have been the unstable political situation of 1993.¹¹

Yeltsin's female political advisers also helped to formulate the new family code, signed by the president on 1 March 1996. This law, despite the great opposition it aroused from some male activists, did not include many revolutionary provisions, although it does contain certain new regulations about divorce, alimony adoption and guardianship. It also introduces the possibility of concluding pre-nuptial agreements, which may be of significant value to housewives abandoned by their "New Russia" husbands. In general, however, women's political advisers in post-communist Russia have been obliged to play a predominantly defensive role rather than acting positively to initiate new policy on women's issues.

IV WOMEN AND THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

The Federal Assembly, the legislature of the Russian Government, was a bicameral body: the Federation Council (the upper house) and the

¹¹ Buckley, n.4, P.199

State Duma (the popular assembly).¹² Under the old regime quotas were reserved for women, and they comprised from one-third of the total deputies (in national) to one-half (in local) soviets; one third of the deputies elected to the eleventh convocation of the USSR Supreme Soviet (1984-89) were women, but the partial removal of quotas as per 1988 electoral laws led the proportion elected to the USSR Congress of People Deputies (CPD) in March 1989 to fall to 15.7 percent. With the complete abolition of quotas in March 1990 elections to the Russian Congress the proportion fell to just 5.5¹³ percent. Male members accounted for 95 per cent of the seats in the Congress, and women constituted only five per cent of the seats, this in a country where women comprised more than half of the population. The next relatively free multi-party election in 1993 witnessed women's comeback in legislative representation, as women organized themselves to increase their numbers. As a result, that year women constituted 13.5 per cent of the members of the State Duma (i.e., 60 women MPs), and five per cent of the representatives in the Federation Council. While this representation was still low, it was nevertheless significantly higher than it had been in 1990. Indeed, women's representation had almost doubled over the previous election.¹⁴

i) Women MPs and the Women's Movement

The majority of women deputies had recognized the importance of co-operating with the women's movement and of networking with women's organizations. Evidence of this could be seen in the following:

- The Council of Experts of the Committee on Women, Family and Youth Affairs was established. This Council includes representation of many women's non-governmental groups and organizations, and its objective is the implementation of the gender dimension in legislation prepared by the State Duma.

¹² <http://www.idea.int/women/parl/studies2a.htm>

¹³ Richard Sakwa, Russian Politics and Society (London and New York : Routledge, 1996), P.267

¹⁴ www., n. 12

- It has consultative functions and its members work on a volunteer basis. During 1996 the relationships between the State Duma and women's organizations and groups were actively developed: five hearings were held on women's issues that year. As a result the Council of Experts approved "the conception of legislative activity to ensure equal rights and equal opportunities for women".¹⁵ The conception is based on the assumption that women's rights are an inalienable part of basic human rights.
- Women's involvement in the political, economic, social and cultural life at the federal, regional and international levels should become a major goal of state policy towards improving the status of women in the Russian Federation.
- Many women MPs have been the leaders or representatives of the regional affiliations of the Russian Women's Union, created by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation just after the 1995 State Duma election. Two MP's, E. Lakhova, a co-leader of the Russian women's political bloc, "Women of Russia", and a former leader of the Women's faction in the previous State Duma, created a new bloc "Women's Movement of Russia" and initiated a women's coalition, the participants of which signed "the Charter of Women's Solidarity".
- The Communist Faction - one of the leading forces in the Russian Parliament undertook efforts to create the women deputy's group, including more than 30 women MPs from different factions. However, some women MPs are still keeping their distance from the women's movement. Thus, there were at least three initiatives within the Russian parliament for creating workable relations and links with women's groups outside the legislative body.
- However, Women MPs have been divided along political, party and ideological lines. As a result, the absence of mutual efforts and co-ordination of activities among women's organizations and women MPs

¹⁵ Ibid

inside as well as outside parliament weakens the position of women in the parliament.

Having underlined the role of women MP's and reason for their weakness, let us evaluate their influence on the legislative process.

ii) Women's Influence on the Legislative Process

Russian women have been facing barriers in promoting women's equal participation within the State Duma. In 1995, there were three centers of power that had an impact on the legislative process: the parliamentary factions and the deputy's group; the committees; and the Council of the State Duma (and the plenary session). The principal decisions were made at the level of a parliamentary faction.(eg. Our Home is Russia faction, Yabloko faction, Liberal Democratic Party of Russia faction) There were five factions and one deputy's group, but there was not a single woman MP among their leaders.

The Committee level was also very important because this was where the details of legislation was drawn up. There were 27 committees in the State Duma, but only two of them were headed by women: the Committee on Women, Family, and Youth Affairs and the Committee on Ecological Protection. These committees, in line with similar situations elsewhere, were not supposed to be prestigious and powerful.¹⁶ In other words, they did not provide access to influence on politics, the economy or the budget. Compromise was arranged in the Council of the State Duma, which included the faction and group leadership, the Committee chairpersons, and the Speaker and Vice-Speakers of the House. The State Duma consisted of 40 deputies, but only three were women (7.5 per cent). Thus, there was no true partnership between women and men in decision-making within the Russian State Duma.

The traditional managerial structure, oriented mainly towards men, did not reflect the balance of public forces; the new roles adopted

¹⁶ Ibid

by men and women; and women's abilities to impact on society, government and family. In other words, it does not ensure the proper social basis for the development and democratization of society. As MP N. Krivelskaya said:

It is necessary to increase the number of women in the State Duma in order to make the atmosphere in our Parliament healthier, to create a civilized dialogue, and to look for a path to resolve problems. We need to increase the number of women not only in the Russian Parliament, but also at all levels and in all sectors of government. This step will help men to learn how to notice the presence of women, to listen to them and to take women's voice into consideration, for the purpose of breaking down the currently largely decorative women's representation in the parliament.¹⁷

Women's representation in the legislative bodies of the state was similarly poor. Although procedures for the 1989 election were for the first time more or less democratic, women did not do well. Only 352 of the 2,250 People's Deputies elected were women i.e. 15.7 percent. Within the Supreme Soviet only 18.5 percent of the deputies were women. In addition, all the top offices in the Supreme Soviet continued to be held by men. In the cabinet there were no women. The situation in the government of the republics was much the same. Thus, under perestroika women were still completely absent from all level of decision making and power, even though they made up 53 percent of the work force.¹⁸

a) The Duma Elections of December 1995

In the 1995 parliamentary elections, only four political parties crossed the five per cent threshold making them eligible to be allocated seats from the proportional representation lists. There were 276 public organizations that could have participated in the election race, but only 43 of them managed to pass through the first stage of the electoral system. The four party winners were elected by only 50.5 per cent of the popular vote and received double the number of seats than would have been distributed had it been a strictly proportional member party-list system.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Voronina, n.2, Pp.732-3

¹⁹ www., n.12

Table : 3.1

Representation in the 1995 State Duma				
BLOC	TOTAL	MEN	WOMEN	WOMEN %
Communist Party	157	141	17	10.82
Our Home is Russia	55	51	4	7.27
Liberal Democratic Party	51	50	1	1.96
Yabloko	45	39	6	13.33
Independents	77	67	10	12.98
Others	65	58	7	10.8
Total	450	406	44	9.77

Source: Rossiskay Gazeta, (Central Electrol Commission Report, N5-N7, 1995), 6 Jan 1996 in <http://www.Idea.Int/women/parl/studies2a.htm>.

Only 28 women elected from party-lists and nominated by bloc or parties for single-member districts in the State Duma. This number constituted 6.2 per cent of all the seats in the State Duma (450 seats). In other words, the fact that there is a majority of women MPs in the Russian Parliament is due to the party-lists. Thirty-one women were elected from the single mandate district (the total number of seats is 225) or 13.78 per cent of all deputies from this kind of district. The

largest absolute number of women, 17 members, is from the Communist Party (that is 10.82 per cent of the total number of Communists). The largest percentage of women is 13.3 per cent from the "Yabloko" (which has a total of 45 women). "Women of Russia", one of the 18 parties not gaining party-list seats, was a slim 2.3 per cent lower in votes than "Yabloko", which had obtained 31 party-list seats.²⁰

The 1995 elections resulted in decline in the women's representation to 9.8 percent or 44 deputies in the State Duma. This was largely due to the failure of the political bloc "Women of Russia" to overcome the five per cent threshold of the party-list vote. Nevertheless, through its campaign, "Women of Russia" substantially helped to legitimize a place for women in the new nation's politics. As a result of this bloc, other parties were forced to nominate women higher on their lists, and to include women for single-member seats in 1993 and 1995. Further, despite the fact that the proportion of women in the State Duma decreased in the last election, they still constituted almost twice the percentage of deputies as they did in 1990.²¹

A new low in women's representation in Russian politics occurred in December 1995, in the election of new Duma. The "Women of Russia" movement failed to clear the 5 percent barrier to representation in the Duma through the list system (their final result was 4.62 percent of the vote). The reduced fortunes of 'Women of Russia' in the 1995 election may demonstrate some disillusionment among Russian women, with the movement's marginality and ineffectiveness among Russian women (and also, perhaps, their initial support for the intervention in Chechnya in 1994).²² It might also reflect the fact that by 1995 their programme had become virtually indistinguishable from that of other moderate nationalist movements.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Marsh, n.1, P. 100

Another factor was the considerable success achieved by other male dominated parties in incorporating women into their movements. Several other parties (the Communist Choice', 'Power to the People', and 'Yabloko') competed with 'Women of Russia' by including a women among their top three candidates (an important position, because the ballot papers list only the first three names for each slate). Thus, ostensibly, women were playing a larger part in these elections than they had done in the past, but this advantage was more apparent than real, since women had a low representation in most Party lists, than real, , ranging from 5.8 percent in Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party to 20.6 percent in Ryzhkov's 'Power to the People' (a minor party which gained little support in the elections) with 13.4 percent in Chernomyrdin's centrist party 'Our Home is Russia'.²³

After elections the only parties which cleared 5 percent barrier were allowed to chair Duma committees. As a result, in the years 1996-97 there were only two women chairing Duma committee : Alvetina Aparina (Russian Federation Communist Party) chairs the Committee of Women's Affairs, and Tamara Zlotnikova (democratic 'Yabloko' bloc) chairs the Committee of ecology. By mid-1997 there was only one woman minister in Yeltsin's government : Tatiana Dmitrieva, Minister of Health (appointed in August 1996 and reappointed in March 1997 reshuffle).²⁴

b) The Presidential Elections of June/July 1996

A similar picture emerged in the presidential elections of 1996. Of the seventy-eight people originally nominated as 'candidate for the presidency' in January 1996, there were only four women, just one of whom, Galina Starovoitova, reached the second ballot by receiving one million signatures endorsing her candidacy. However, in May 1996, the Supreme Court upheld the Central Electoral Commissions' decision not

23 Ibid

24 Ibid

to register Starovoitova as a candidate for the post of president, since they claimed that 283,315 signatures on her registration documents 'had been falsified'. Eventually, therefore, no woman candidate stood in the presidential election.²⁵

The results of these (above mentioned) elections can be better assessed if we can understand women's electoral behaviour in Russia.

iii) WOMEN'S ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR

Indirect data of sociological surveys lead to the conclusion that for some women a more promising path was one that has demonstrated its vitality and viability based on the experience of feminism: the development of political engagement and the establishment of a civil position on the part of women through their participation in activity of mixed-gender political parties.

But the majority of the female population, as mentioned earlier, has been cut off from political parties of all orientations²⁶. Women who remain determined to participate in social activity belong to voluntary associations, movements, and unions. The once unified women's movement of the USSR disintegrated into a multitude of associations-up to three hundred-that had no overt political orientation but were cultural, charitable, commercial, entrepreneurial, economic, informational, educational, professional, religious, and recreational. Each of these associations had its own orientation, its principles of conduct, its intellectual values, and a broad range of goals and tasks. There were no generally recognized leaders in these fragmented movements. Women's associations and alliances lacked ties among themselves and most were alienated from power and politics. As a result the social engagement of Russian women had become depoliticized and multi electoral.

25 Ibid

26 See G.G. Sillaste, "Sociogender Relation in the Period of Social Transformation in Russia", Sociological Research, Jan-Feb 1995, Vol.3, P. 41

a) The female electorate, women leaders, and the female elite

Upto the beginning of perestroika in 1985, sociologists did not single out the female electorate as a special group among the electoral body of the country in order to study it specifically. The first works devoted to the specific features of the female electorate appeared in connection with major campaigns: the election of the Russian president; the Russia wide referendum in April 1993; the elections to the Federal assembly and the referendum on the new constitution.

There had been almost ten million more female voters than male in Russia. For politicians of all stripes and hues without exception, it was the numerical size of the female electorate that was its attractive feature. But it was not easy to draw women, to one's own side. A recurrent finding of our surveys is that no trace remains of the sweet euphoria of those comparatively recent years when women believed in a quick procession into the "kingdom" of freedom, democracy, and real equality with men, as well as material well-being. In August 1993, as per study conducted by the Russian Center for Public Opinion, research showed, an improvement in living conditions, was forecasted by only 43 percent, while 33.2 percent of respondents (men and women) expected conditions to worsen. ²⁷

Three non-governmental organizations-the Association of Women Entrepreneurs, the Alliance of Women of Russia, and the Alliance of Women of the Naval Fleet-united in November 1993 into a single electoral bloc (political movement) called Women of Russia, for the purpose of defending the Interests of the female population in the campaign for elections to the Federal Assembly. This was the first time (apart from elections to the Constituent Assembly in 1917, when the League for the Equality of Women and the Women's Alliance for Aid to

²⁷ Ibid

the Motherland participated in the electoral battle) that a women's organization independently presented and promoted its own candidates for deputies to the country's supreme legislative body.²⁸

However, the attitude of female public opinion towards the Women of Russia movement was contradictory. For example, in Moscow 45 percent of the female experts surveyed by the scientific collection of GALSI fully agreed that women's electoral associations should participate independently in election campaigns and not fuse with other parties, thereby losing their identity; 29 percent doubted that such a step was advisable, and 17 percent considered it mistaken. Women's opinions cover a wide range of views. This reflects the accelerating process of social demarcation of women, where the majority lived in poverty or on the borderline of poverty, while only 3 percent of surveyed female urbanites considered themselves highly paid and only 0.3 percent regarded themselves as rich.²⁹

We can distinguish several models³⁰ of female electoral behavior in terms of the stratification of women by social, political, and professional criteria:-

The first model is a *political-conformist*. It was followed by the majority of female voters who, as a rule, are not interested in the programmes of political parties or the forecasts of political scientists and sociologists. These women were not attracted by active political engagement. They condemned confrontations among parties and ideas, desiring order and stability at any price; they supported the presidential regime in Russia. The socio-psychological foundation of this electoral model is political conformism.

The second model is a *politically oriented* model. This is the single feature uniting a group of Russian women that was very diverse in its

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

makeup and contradictory in its political sympathies. Thus, according to data from a survey of young Moscow women ("Women and Elections," November 1993), 28 percent of those surveyed intended to vote for the Women of Russia candidate, 21 percent intended to vote for Russia's choice candidates, 8 percent each intended to vote for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and the Socialist Party of Working People, 7 percent intended to vote for the Civic Union, 6 percent intended to vote for the Economic Freedom Party, 4 percent for the Democratic Party of Russia, and so on. Young working-age women voters, between 30 and 40, and women over retirement age predominated among this segment of the female electorate.

The third model involves *indifferent behavior* at elections. Because of its disinterested approach toward politics and leaders, this group functioned as a reserve for all parties and electoral blocs regardless of their political orientations.

The fourth model involves *absenteeism*. This model was followed by women, who declined to participate in voting. Female absenteeism in Russia in the post-perestroika period was a mass phenomenon. According to working hypothesis, twenty million women did not participate in the referendum in 1993. Absentee behaviour was based on sharp decrease in the level of social optimism and on a psychological feature of the female character, fatalism, which condemned one to passivity and inaction.

One of the reasons for the diversity of models of female electoral behavior was the lack of confidence of female voters in political leaders. Russian women's notion of a leader have been traditionally associated with a "strong" male –strong willed, decisive, and imposing person. Studies by the scientific team GALSI has shown that Russian women at all levels, from the center to local areas, support an authoritarian style of leadership more than men do, since such leadership personified "firm

government,” “order” and “protection of the weak”. It was mainly a charismatic type of leader to whom exclusive personal qualities were ascribed who enjoyed the support of female electorate in Russia. Liberal behaviour on the part of a leader who was ready to compromise was often equated in female consciousness with indecisiveness, lack of will, and weakness.

V WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTIES AND MOVEMENTS

Until the post-communist period there was no unanimity among women activists, on the issues about whether they should form political parties, or simply act as interest groups lobbying the government. At the second Dubna Forum of November 1992, many Russian women expressed a reluctance to participate in the patriarchal power structures, while others argued that, unless women sought power, their political influence would remain so weak that women's issues (such as female unemployment, rape, contraception and abortion) would either be kept off political agendas or, at best be accorded low priority.³¹ Therefore after Yeltsin's suspension of parliament, “Women of Russia” political movement was formed with the intention of fighting elections and of defending women's interest in the Duma, since they believed that no one else would.

Thus women had become active in the new political parties, public movements, and organization that emerged in 1990. They made up 30 percent of the membership in such groups as the Memorial, the Greens, the Transnational Party, the Christian Democratic Union of Russia, and the Dark Blue Movement for Human Ecology and 50 percent of the membership in the Committee of Social Protection. In other words, women were choosing to participate in parties and organizations that fought to establish justice and that stood for the protection of human life and the environment and for nonviolent social transformation.

³¹ Marsh, n.1, P.99

However, these new democratic movements either remained silent about the problems of women or demanded protection for women as mothers and “maintainers of the hearth.” They stressed that the upbringing of the next generation is the honourable civic duty of woman as mother. The programmes of only three political movements- the Estonian Popular Front, the Latvian Popular Front, and the Committee for the Liberation of Russia- contained demand for women’s equality. But even these groups lacked specific plans for attaining this goal. Nor were any of them willing to follow the principle of proportional representation of women and men at the decision-making levels of their organizations. The new democrats were quite content to use women in the old conservative way- simply as performers of minor tasks.³²

O.A.Voronina has mentioned the somewhat unusual phenomenon of an “inter-ethnic coordination center” called ‘Woman’, which was created by an engineer, Evgeni Pilshchikov. The main task of this center was to carry out a special programme that included training of female presidential candidate and running her election campaigns. Pilshchikov was convinced that certain “peculiar features” inherent in the feminine psyche were likely to create a new type of president capable of stabilizing the political situation and consolidating society. This supposedly stable society would be based on the principles of national harmony, the preservation of family, and the renewal of the Union. Although the idea of the woman president might have been politically attractive, women were reluctant to support this project because of its mechanist and, in the long run, masculinist nature. The candidate’s training, according to Pilshchikov, would be conducted by “learned men.” Pilshchikov did not truly address women’s interests in the programme in the least.³³

Although, women continued to be excluded from big politics, certain changes in the public spheres inspired hope, particularly the development of non-official (i.e. independent of the state and party) public organizations of women. The Soviet scholar Valentina

³² Voronina, n.2, Pp. 733-4

Konstantinova, of the Center for gender studies, distinguishes three such kind of organizations;: democratic feminist and conservative. Among the organizations pressing for democracy were the Committee of the Soldier's Mothers, which stood for the depolitization of the military and the introduction of an alternative, nonmilitary national service; the Interregional political Club, in the town of Zhukovsky (in the Moscow region); the Committee for Equal Opportunities; the Independent Female Democratic Initiative, whose Russian acronym, NEZHDI, could be translated as "don't wait"; and the magazine Female Reading, established in St. Petersburg by Olga Lipovskaya. Organizations that focused on feminist issues were the Free Association of Feminist Organizations (SAFO) and the League for Liberation from Societal (public) Stereotypes (LOTUS), a group of women scientists and scholars who were pushing for the development of women's, gender, and feminist studies in Russian science and at the same time had been working, generally to draw more women into the struggle for equal rights. Conservatively oriented women's organizations were represented by the SWC and the Union of Women of Russia also by the renamed network of "zhensoviets". Besides these, there were women's movement called the 'Socialist Future of Our Children' and various women's religious groups.³⁴

Frequently, women's organizations (even those working on similar problems) were separated from, and knew little about each other. To overcome their isolation of LOTUS and SAFO together with research workers from the Center for Gender Studies, organized the First Independent Women's Forum in March 1990. The conference took place in Dubna (near Moscow) under the slogan "Democracy minus women is not democracy."³⁵ The main concept was a roll call of women's organization-an inspection of the forces as they were. Representatives of fortyeight women's organizations from different regions of the country took part. The female press, as well as female researchers, also attended

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

it, as did women who had not yet joined an organization but who felt the urgent need to fight for their rights. Approximately 200 women participated and discussed such issues as women and politics, problems of an independent women's movement, women and the free market economy, women as entrepreneurs, discrimination against women in the patriarchal culture, and violence against women. They hoped that the work at the forum would help to consolidate and develop an independent women's movement in the country through information network and continued collaboration.³⁶

Results of a survey of female public opinion, concluded that four percent of the respondents participated in the work of various party organizations or offered these organizations their support, in 1993 no more than 2-3 percent of the female respondents were in various parties and 85-87 percent declared that they "did not want to join any party."³⁷ Mass female consciousness also did not accept the idea of the existence or the creation of independent women's parties, although they had already been formed under various names: Political Equality, The Search for Radical Female Initiative, The Unified Party of Women, The Radical Party, Women of Sovereign Russia. None of these parties had many members, nor did they have national political leaders who enjoyed popularity throughout the country and the trust of the female population.

VI SHORTCOMINGS

It was now clear that democratization process in Russia had not entailed gains for women of political voice, since the balance had shifted even further to male dominance of the arenas of formal politics. Russia in crisis had become even more inhospitable to the political participation of women than the former Soviet Union for a number of reasons.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Sillaste, n.25, P.41

First, the elimination of official quotas for woman had reduced both the number of women who stood for election and those who got elected into parliament.

Second, the majority of women continue to have a negative attitude towards mainstream politics, which they saw as a 'man's world'. They chose to concentrate on other, local activities which they perceived as more immediate and valuable. They doubt the efficacy of mainstream political activity, and in any case have no time for political involvement ; others remain sceptical about the value of a separate women's party.

Third, economic crisis and nationalist propoganda have driven many women back into home; the overwhelming preoccupation of most women has simply been to survive and support their families.

Finally, many women have become disillusioned with the marginalization and powerlessness of small minority of women who had managed to achieve some representation in the national arena.

These were the reasons why women were not more prominent in mainstream politics, but two important factors were the persistent belief, that 'politics is a man's world'. The fact that women had other priorities, not least the daily struggle to feed their families. One commonly articulated belief in Russia was that people would not vote for women. Women were still much more acceptable as behind-the-scene organizers, while men carried out frequently less demanding public duties.

VII CONCLUSION

Russia needs a new, professional and highly qualified parliament, in which women would recognized as equals and are allowed to express their needs for themselves, in order to build democracy in the country.

Women MP's were asked, what they themselves think about the means and ways to increase their representation and their influence within the Russian Parliament. Many of them said that, it was necessary to assist women with campaign funding and other resources. Quotas

and leadership training were also seen as key points in promoting women to the elected body. In addition, many stressed the importance of financially supporting organizations working to increase the number of political candidates who specifically support policies that advance the status of women and girls. Experienced, professionalism, a strong character and an active position were among the key factors affecting women MP's influence on the legislative process within the parliament.

The criticism of the present electoral system began before approving the election law in 1995 and remains the ongoing concern on some basic issues. Among the main issues there is the problem of the five per cent threshold. Only four of the 43 electoral associations/blocs on the ballot could overcome the five per cent level, and were in the Russian Parliament. Their real representation of the society was limited in the sense of votes, because the number of votes won by these four groups was comparable with the number of those obtained by the other groups taken together. The five per cent threshold, intended to inhibit the proliferation of parties, has not worked in Russia. Rather, it has brought about a gross disproportion in the 1995 Duma.³⁸ A remedy may well include the complete removal of the threshold, as in Iceland, or a smaller minimum percentage, such as the three per cent in Sweden.

Parties were making a mistake by not taking into account the electorate of women and not taking women's issues into consideration. Unfortunately, the issue of under-representation of women in the parliament was not properly covered by mass media, thus reflecting, and advancing, the lack of public awareness about women's role and issues. Indeed, most Russian women accept their subordinate role. The level of gender consciousness remains relatively low. Nevertheless, there were signs of the beginning of change with many women's grassroots groups being formed throughout the country to work for women's rights.

³⁸ Buckley, n.4, Pp. 201-2

It should be pointed out that, greater the presidential authority over legislative matters, greater the conflict with parliament and more the instability of the political system. It is indeed true that the Russian electoral system was still far from perfect or ideal. More could be done to reform this system. It nevertheless works and it was being developed along democratic principles and in a progressive direction. The development of the electoral system in Russia on a democratic basis in terms of involving women into elected bodies would depend on the ability of the democratic forces to mobilize people to develop civil society in general. The level of activity and participation of women themselves in the political process; and the level of consolidation of the women's movement and its ability to suggest proper strategy and tactics to promote women in decision-making roles and to get women's issues on the national political agenda. Russia needs a new, professional and highly qualified parliament, in which women would be recognized as equals and allowed to express their needs for themselves, in order to build democracy in the country.

Affirmative measures should be taken to assure representation that reflects the full diversity of Russians, with the target of a "gender balanced" legislative body. In compliance with the legislation of the Russian Federation, women and men have equal access to government service and to participation in international activities. As stated in the Constitution of the Russian Federation, men and women enjoy equal rights and freedoms and equal opportunities for their implementation. However, women were grossly under-represented in the upper echelons of state leadership. These constitutional rights have been more declarative than actual, due to the underdevelopment and inefficiency of the implementation measures.

As for women leaders, a considerable portion of the female population was critical of such an idea. Hence, training and proposing women as candidates encountered not only objective but even more subjective difficulties in Russia. Women's lack of confidence in their own

strength, a favourable reception for views inspired, and intolerance of simple competition. These factors explained, why an authoritarian style of leadership fostered by an administrative command system predominated among women.

To sum up, in the 1990s, women in Russia found their automatic right to paid work and to fixed percentages of political representation taken away. They have seen their savings lose value, their pensions become grossly inadequate and the prices of certain product unaffordable. They saw the rights of past either taken away, eroded or under threat in the future. Some new political opportunities were open to women in this unstable and insecure economic setting. Yet top political positions were still held by men, notwithstanding some clear exceptions. Women also hesitated to put themselves forward. Still perestroika and glasnost paved the way for a broad based dialogue about women and women's equality in Soviet and Russian society. The new democratic efforts made possible women's activism that was directed not by the party or the State but by women themselves.



CHAPTER 4

DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN

With the introduction of Gorbachev's new policies in the late 1980s, making freedom of speech and association a possibility, women's question came into focus in the Soviet Union. Until then it had been considered as being solved. Henceforth, political opportunities for organizing social movements and protest in Russia have changed dramatically over the course of the last decade. Women have taken advantage of their new found freedom, resulting in formation of hundreds of new groups and organizations.

Many of these groups had been consciously responding to the decline in women's status, and trying to pressurize the Russian state to ensure a non discriminatory labour sphere and somehow reincorporate women's voice into political decision making. Since late 1980s women had been losing faith in the will of male politicians and media figure to consider their problems. When the reduction of quotas for women's representation in parliament halved the number of women elected to the USSR Congress of People Deputies in March 1989,¹ many Soviet women finally realized that they could not depend on the state to act on their behalf, but they need to work on their own to improve their condition.

"Democracy without women is no democracy"², was the slogan of emerging women's movement since 1991. We need to see whether this claim was heard by the state and main political forces? Did the women's movement manage to change the traditional attitudes towards women, which were so widely spread at the beginning of changes in Russia? Did the movement contribute to the victory of the woman's block in the elections to Russian Parliament in 1993? What were the new strategies

¹ Rosalind Marsh, "Women in Contemporary Russia and the Former Soviet Union" in Rick Wilford and Robert L. Miller eds., Women and Nationalism : The Politics of Transition (New York : Routledge, 1998), Pp. 87-119

of the independent women's movement? What was the status of feminism in Russia? What were the political opportunity structure for women's movement organization in Russia since the beginning of Perestroika? These are some of the issues to be addressed in this chapter.

The women's movement is a part of the process of modernization. In order to understand the particular characteristics of the Russian road to women's emancipation, it is important to define the relationship between the traditionalist and modernizing spheres in society as a whole, to trace the historical roots of these opposing trends, and to interpret the motives behind the present social behavior of Russian women. In any society, including those in the West, different levels of modernization coexist in different structures and spheres. Traditionalist and modernizing structures may exist side by side, as also overlap and collide.³ The configuration of conflict of this type determines the nature and image of the women's movement in individual countries, regions and cultures.

The problem of gender differentiation did, however, generate three main forms of women's political activity. The first was the development of numerous local associations and pressure groups which campaigned for various measures or focused on particular issues. Brutal conditions for conscripts and the horrors of the Chechen war stimulated Lyubov Lyumar's 'Soldiers,' Mothers of Russia and similar organizations. The second form was the involvement of the existing women's organizations to try to turn them from bureaucratic structures of Soviet power into genuinely responsive organizations not only for women but also of women. The third was the attempt to create genuinely independent new structures. One of these was the Center of Gender Studies of the

² Anastasia Posadkaya, "Women's Movement in Post-Socialist Russia" in Perspectives on Women's Movements Cross Nationality. Sponsored by Women's Program Forum : Ford Foundation (Amherst :1994), P.1

³ Larissa Lissytukina, "Emancipation Without Feminism : The Historical and Socio-Cultural Context of the Women's Movement in Russia," in Sue Bridger ed., Women and Political Change : Perspectives from East-Central Europe, Selected papers from the Congress, Central and Eastern European Studies (Warsaw,1995), Pp.168-169.

Academy of Science, established in early 1990 and directed by Anastasiya Posadskaya, which analyzed demographic and social problems of women in Russia and acted as a link between Russian and Western feminists. However, despite the direct threat posed by marketization to women (in economic, social and identity terms), there was no upsurge of a politicized women's movement in Russia. Posadskaya noted that the state policies were still designed for women and not programmes of women themselves.⁴

As in other spheres, the question remain, whether the modernization of Soviet women would necessarily repeat Western patterns, or whether Russian modernity might differ in significant ways from that prevalent in the West. 'Why should sexual identity become gender identity?' This question was often raised in Russian women's own consciousness for their own interests in the three spheres mentioned work, motherhood, family and as individuals or part of a feminine community. In refusing to adopt Western criteria of feminism, had they in some way internalized their own subjection, or was their refusal to adopt western ways of thinking a reflection of a deeper cultural difference between Russia and the west? So we have to assess the pattern which Russian women's movement was to follow. Next, the emergence of a women's movement and development of civil society in Russia has to be seen in the context of changes in Russia's political opportunity structure.

I CHANGES IN RUSSIA'S POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

Political opportunity structure is a multi-dimensional concept enabling us to analyze some of the reasons for social movements success or failure. According to a definition compiled by Dough Mcadam, political opportunity structure includes four elements : ⁵

⁴ Richard, Sakwa, Russian Politics and Society (London, New York : Routledge, 1996), Pp. 267-68.

⁵ Valerie Sperling, "Gender Politics and the State during Russia's Transition Period" in Vicky Randall and Georgian Waylen's, Gender Politics and the State (New York : Routledge, 1998), P. 144

- the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system;
- the stability and instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergrid a polity;
- the presence or absence of elite allies
- the state's capacity and propensity for repression.

Analysis of the shifts in the political opportunity structure for any given social movement reveals a multi-faceted and changing relationship between that movement and the state. Openings in the state might have facilitated social movement activity and expansion; likewise, pressure on the state from social movements could give rise to further openness or to crack downs which would lead to state retrenchment.

In this section, four areas of changes in political opportunity structure for the Russian women's movement, with respect to Russia's transition period (beginning in late 1980's and continuing upto the present day) will be illustrated. First we will examine the decrease in state repression and shifts in the degree of openness of the institutionalized political system with emphasis on changes in Soviet Women's Committee (a part of the Soviet institutionalized political system directly relevant to the nascent independent women's movement). This chapter then examines the changes in women's political representation, and the appearance of allies in position of power as revealed by their discourse and action.

i) Declining repression and increasing openness in the institutionalized political system: glasnost and perestroika

Changes in the political opportunity structure made possible the public emergence and spread of women's groups in the late 1980's and early 1990's. With the advent of glasnost and perestroika, the repressive

character of the Soviet state declined substantially. No longer were independent women's organizations persecuted as the Almanac group had been.

Until the late 1980's there was only one women's organization legally operating in the USSR : the communist party-run Soviet Women's Committee. But, by the early 1990's, there were hundreds of women's organizations functioning in Russia, ranging from politically innocuous women's charity groups to advocacy groups demanding equal treatment of women in politics and in the labor force, and overtly lesbian groups organizing for rights and visibility.

As evident by the broad spectrum of women's groups emerging at that time, there was and remained no agreement as to what constituted the set of "women's"⁶ most pressing issues. These ranged from consciousness raising, to women's participation in political decision-making, to improving women's economic status, and ensuring state financial support for families and children. Women's interest and priorities varied considerably in Russia as in any other country, depending on women's financial well being, age, and a host of other factors. All of these 'women's' issues, however, from raising women's status in the defence industry to the importance of reviewing Russian legislation for its potential impact on women, broke into the public realm during the early 1990's.

Perestroika in addition to expanding the permissible limits, also initiated explicit legal changes in the political system that further made possible the blossoming of women's groups. It became feasible to register social organizations and thus to acquire organizational bank accounts. Glasnost also provided an opportunity to alter the 'universe of political discourse' to put women's issues on the agenda in a more public and contested way. Soviet women took advantage of this in March 1991, at the first Independent Women's Forum. The first nationwide conference of

⁶ Ibid, Pp. 145-46

women's groups was autonomous of the state. There, for the first time, the issue of violence against women was raised on a national scale, and the fact that women were being left out of the so-called democratisation process, was emphasized. In order to understand how these changes developed, we must take a short side trip into the history of the Soviet women's movement's origins. ⁷

II A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Early Soviet history is hardly devoid of dedicated women activists. After the 1917 revolution, Alexandra Kollontai and other female Bolsheviks conducted organizational work among women, with the dual intent of mobilizing female support for the new Soviet regime, and ridding society of its "backward" manifestations that helped to keep women subordinated to men. In 1919, their efforts crystallized in the creation of the Zhenotdel-the Women's Department of the Communist Party's Central Committee Secretariat. Local women's department were established and Zhenotdel agitators travelled throughout the country carrying the message of women's liberation, meetings with women in factories, villages, and local bath houses. From the inception, the Zhenotdel met with opposition even from within the party: some feared that women's concerns would compete with workers concerns.⁸ In 1930 Stalin decreed that women in Soviet Union were free, equal and emancipated having been liberated by the revolution. His Politburo promptly disbanded the Zhenotdel. Although there was a quota of 33 percent, for women in Supreme Soviet, which functioned as a rubber stamp legislature, women were few and far between in Communist bodies that in fact ran the country. Communist rhetoric about equality between men and women was declarative, not reflective of reality. ⁹

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Gail Lapidus, Women in Soviet Society : Equality, Development and Social Change (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1978), ch. 1

⁹ Valerie Sperling : Organising Women in Contemporary Russia : Engendering Transition (Cambridge University Press, 1999), Pp.16-17

By late 1960's Soviet policy debates had began to reflect awareness of these problems. The 1970's brought increasing debates over gender roles and sexual equality. Within the Soviet Policy Community, social scientists argued, women were having difficulty "combining participation in the work force and in political life with domestic labor". Yet as Mary Buckley persuasively argues, the goal of these debates was to address the effects of women's double burden on economic productivity and the future supply of labour, and not to encourage "women's self determination" per se.

Under Soviet rule the formation of any organization independent of the Soviet party state was strictly forbidden. Only state run organization like the Soviet Women's Committee which was designed to mobilize the population to carry out party goals, rather than to address women's concerns, was tolerated. With perestroika, however, the Soviet Women's Committee did begin to turn its attention towards a national agenda. This was partly due to expanded political opportunities and responsibilities and to the recognition of the increasingly difficult position of women in Soviet society. In the early 1990's a vast number of women's self help groups and employment training organizations had been trying to bridge the gap that the collapse of centrally planned welfare state had left behind. In early 1991 the government of Russian republic passed its own law on the formation and registration of autonomous organizations. Women's organization took advantage of the new laws and registered in increasing numbers. SAFO, and the Free Association of Feminist Organizations which later changed its name to FALTA- the Feminist Alternatives, claimed to be the first openly feminist organizations to have been officially registered.¹⁰

The first major opportunity for networking among women's groups, independent of the state in former Soviet Union arose in March 1991 at

¹⁰ Ibid

a national conference called the First Independent Women's Forum which was followed by a second forum in late 1992. Both were held in Dubna, a town in the outskirts of Moscow. The forum represented new opportunities for contact between activists from feminist identified organizations and those from the economically oriented groups. Out of the two forums emerged a network of activists and women's organizations operating independently of the state, called the Independent Women's Forum (IWF), which maintained an aura of independence and radicalism. In 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Women's Committee (SWC) disappeared and was replaced in Russia by the Union of Russia's Women (URW). The URW was an umbrella network including numerous smaller women's council as well as independent, pragmatically oriented women's organizations operating under its aegis. Using their organizational infrastructure and contacts with women. They managed to elect twenty one women all over the country, [Fedulova was one of their candidates, who won a seat, and was subsequently named deputy speaker of the Duma.] The other network was a joint operation between women's organization in United States and the former Soviet Union [mostly in Russia], called the US-NIS Consortium and established in 1994. Despite conflicts and disagreements, as of 1995 all were to varying degrees involved in politics, and all asserted their independence from the state. The flowering of women's organization in a country where non state organizations had been illegal until the mid- 1980's is remarkable, both for its speed and its extent.¹¹

III TYPES OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN RUSSIA

What kind of women's organization now populate the growing Russian women's movement? What are their primary concerns? What issues do they focus on, and what are their goals? These are some of the questions to be addressed.

¹¹ Ibid, Pp. 20-21

Given the decline in women's economic status during the early 1990's it comes as no surprise that a significant number of groups are concerned primarily with employment issues. These include women's job training programmes, often in conjunction with a local branch of the Federal employment services, such as Ivanov's Center for the Social Support of Women and Families, or Moscow Center of Social support for Women [operating under URW]. Other groups including the Association of Women's entrepreneurs,¹² seek to provide jobs for women by promoting and developing women's entrepreneurship. Main groups representing this subcategory is the association, 'Conversion and Women'. Also present are a large number of mutual support groups for mothers in a variety of categories. Belonging to this group are large organizations like the 'International Association of Russian Women's Mothers', who raised money to send to sick children from across the former Soviet Union to Italy for health care and rest.

Other type of support groups were professional women in various fields, including; SANTA [for women in law and enforcement]; Women with a university education [RAUW]; the Association of Women Journalists and the association of Women [Film and Theatre] Directors. The last few years have seen the development of women's crisis services, including hotlines for victims of rape and domestic violence in nearly every major Russian city [eg. the "Sisters" Rape Crisis Center]. Consciousness raising organizations such as the feminist co- counseling group, Feminist Alternative[FALTA], and Klub Garmoniia [Club Harmony], and the monthly lecture groups that invite people to speak about their research on women, such as Klub F-1[First Feminist Club], also operate in the capital.¹³

¹² Gail Lapidus : Women in Soviet Society : Equality, Development and Social Change (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978), Pp.26-27

¹³ Ibid

Other women's groups are associated with political parties. These include 'Women for Social Democracy', whose goals include involving more women in political decision making, and uniting "women on the basis of social-democratic values," and the hardline 'Communist Congress of Soviet Women'. Finally, a few women's groups, 'Equality and Peace' and research centers like the Moscow Center for Gender Studies-MCGS and network organizations [the aforementioned Women's League, the Information Center of the Independent Women's Forum, and the Union of Russia's Women]¹⁴ include specialists on women's issues. They lobby the state officials and conduct advocacy work on women's issues, as well as providing information and networking opportunities to women's organizations across Russia by holding seminars and national conferences.

i) Center for Gender Studies

Among the most direct and consistent critics of the legacy and central role of the Soviet Women's Committee has been the Center for Gender Studies at the institute of the Socio-Economic Study of Population of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. It was founded in April 1990, as the first center for women's studies and research in the country and as a research center of the academy, is among the most prestigious organizations in Russia. The center receives funding from the state as well as international feminist funding organizations. As Anastasia Posadaskaya, director of the Center, puts it, "Women were constantly told by our propaganda that they are emancipated and have reached the highest levels of society. Now these women are told that their real place was at the home, that they will be given a pension from a very early age because the economy does not need their inefficient labour. So at a personal level this was a terrible frustration; this was confusing."¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Linda Racioppi and Katherine O' Sullivan See, "Organising Women Before and After the Fall : Women's Politics in the Soviet Union and Post- Soviet Russia" in Bonnie G. Smith ed., Global Feminism since 1945 (London : Routledge, 2000), P..220

Hence the Center for Gender studies has seen itself as playing both an interpretive and activist role, in which the bases of women's economic and political powerlessness were described, theorized and challenged. In part because of its many international contacts and in part because of its very focus. The Center for Gender Studies has been central in the efforts to conceptualize and articulate the distinctive meanings of feminism for Russian women. Among its most prominent activities, the Center was responsible for the organization of the first and second Dubna Conferences in March 1991 and November 1992., which were highly successful. Posadaskaya¹⁶ believe that Russia badly need a coherent women's movement and that such events and organizations were necessary or there would be 'no orientation, no possibility to know what's going on'. "Women are afraid of organization", however, "they don't want it, but now they are starting to see it as a resource, if it is non-hierarchical, and if all centers are equal and decide things equally"

ii) GAIA

Another organization attests to the problem of dichotomizing the women's movement into state sponsored/independent motif. Although GAIA Women's Center is an independent organization, it began in 1990 with state-sponsored association, and both of its founders are well connected through their academic positions at the USA-Canada Institute of the Russian academy of Sciences. The GAIA organization initially concentrated its resources and energies on several projects designed to directly help women in their daily lives and to empower women to ease transition from Communism. Those who founded GAIA share an interpretation of Russia as a deeply patriarchal and authoritarian society. Their goal is to empower women to become autonomous, self-confident and have strong voices in order to advance democracy, build a civil society, and dismantle patriarchal values and practices in Russia. They believe that empowerment can be realized only through women's active participation in grassroot economic, social, and political projects.

¹⁶ Ibid

Like the Center for Gender Studies and UWR, etc. the GAIA, attempted to cultivate relations with the Western feminists and women's organizations for several reasons such as to provide material support to help share experiences of organizing and mobilizing material support; to keep westerners informed about the status of women and about policies and laws affecting women in Russia so that they might help promote women's rights among Russian policy makers. More recently GAIA has been in the fore front of efforts to develop a political network to lobby the state on behalf of women. Government representatives were invited to attend and participate in the September conference, and indeed a number of government official including the then Vice President Rutskoi did so. GAIA took a leadership role in an initiative to create a network among women's organizations in Russia, the Women's League.¹⁷

iii) Association of Small Towns

The Association of Small Towns stand in sharp contrast to the organization discussed earlier. This organization results from the vision of a single woman, Tatiana Tsertsvadze. She points out that there are a lot of wood workers, artisans and people who want to preserve their traditions of their villages where there is an absence of criminals and an openness to hearing ideas and suggestions, and hence people with great initiatives and ideas. She also developed similar programs for redevelopment among similarly sized towns outside Moscow. These towns then joined together to form the Association of Small Towns. Although, not conceived as a woman's project, the Association and its supporters have been exclusively women. Although, indirectly engaged into politics, Tsertsvadze nonetheless understands her work as part of building a Russian women's movement. She attended Dubna I and a business training workshop sponsored by the Center for Gender

¹⁷ Ibid, P. 222

Studies. She has sustained links with members of GAIA and has been still working to extend international contacts. What she shares with other activists is a sense that if Russian society is to be reformed and rebuilt, women must be central to that process, as she recognizes that women have secondary position in public life in Russia today.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ibid, Pp.223-224

Table : 4.1

Women's Groups by Type and Specific Issue Focus	
Specific Focus	Names of Groups (Moscow -based unless otherwise noted)
Advocacy	
Discrimination Issues	Equality and peace: Inform Center of the IWF; URW; Women's League; Women for Social Democracy; Dzhenklub; MCGS; Association "Women and Development"; Center for Issues of Women, Family, and Gender Studies, at the Youth Institute
Pragmatic Welfare Issues	Cheboksary city zhensovet; Chuvash republic zhensovet; City Union of Women (Ivanovo); Single-Parent Families Committee (Ivanova); KlubDelovia Zhenshchina (Ivanovo); Women's Liberal Fund; Congress of Soviet Women
Self Help and Support	
Job Training	URW; Center for Social Support of Women and Families (Ivanovo); Urals Association of Women
For professionals	Arts: Sofia; Tvorchestvo; MOLLI; Association of women (Film and Theatre) Directors. Law enforcement : SANTA. Defense industry : Conversion and Women. Women with a university education: Association of University Women; Association of University Women (Chuvash branch)
For Women as mothers	Tolko Mamy; Committee of Single Parent Families (Ivanovo), Committee of Multi-Child Family (Ivanovo)
For Families and Children	Committee of Soldiers' Mothers; Association of Russian Women Mothers; Preobrazhenie; Society "Women of Presnia"
Consulting and advice for Women	Cheboksary city zhensovet; Chuvash republic zhensovet; City Union of Women (Ivanovo); Committee of Single-Parent Families (Ivanovo); Women's Liberal Fund; SANTA ; Center for Women's Initiatives

Consciousness-raising	
Groups	Feminist Alternative; Klub Garmonia
Lectures	Preobrazhenie; Klub F-I
Societal	Association of Women Journalists; Feminist Orientation Center; Association "Women and Development"; Dzenklub
Anti-violence against women	
	"Sisters" Rape Crisis Center; Moscow Crisis Center for Women
Publishing	
	Moscow Center for Gender Studies; Petersburg Center for Gender Issues; Inform Center of the IWF; Archive-Database-Library project; Preobrazhenie; Center for Women's Initiatives

Source : Valerie Sperling, *Organising Women in Contemporary Russia : Engendering Transition* (Cambridge University Press 1999), P.31-32

IV) WOMENS POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The past several years have brought considerable fluctuations in the levels of women's representation in national politics, particularly in the legislative branch (the paucity of women in Russia's executive branch remains relatively constant).

Women regularly attained one-third of the seats in the Supreme Soviets of pre-Gorbachev days, though the women chosen tended to represent the "masses" of workers and peasants, rather than being powerful political individuals in their own right (while the male representatives were party leaders, cabinet ministers, renowned academic leaders and so forth). Moreover, real decision making power had never been vested in the Supreme Soviet but, rather, in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, here less than 5

percent of the deputies were women.

The elimination of the communist parties, power monopoly and the introduction of increasingly free elections, altered the political opportunity structure for women's movement and other social activists. In 1989, semi free elections to the Soviet Congress of People Deputies (CPD) were held, with a significant number of seats reserved for the communist party trade unions, and other official organizations. These included the Soviet Women's Committee (SWC) at the time still under the aegis of the party. Women won 15.7 percent of the seats, largely due to the seventy five seats reserved for the SWC. In 1990, when quotas for seats were lifted, the proportion of female deputies elected to the Russian Federation Congress of People Deputies (CPD) dropped to only 5.4 percent.¹⁹ The declining representation of women in Parliament elected in the final years of the Soviet State further decreased women's access to possession of political power.

After the collapse of USSR in December 1991, and later destruction of Russia's own parliament at Yelstin's order (in October 1993) led to free elections to the new Federal Assembly, held in Russia in December 1993. Women won 9 seats in the legislature's upper house - the Federation Council - and sixty in the lower house called the Duma. Women's presence in the federal assembly thus reached a total of 11.4 percent, more than doubling the percentage of women that were in Russian CPD. Approximately 1/3 of women's seats in the Duma were won by the bloc Women of Russia (WOR), which organized very quickly in the two months preceding the elections. The rest of women's seats were won from a few other parties and from single mandate district. To the extent that the 1993 elections increased women's political representation in the parliament, and there by potentially improved the political opportunity structure for women, this was due to the success of WOR. The success was ephemeral. In the elections of December 1995,

¹⁹ Sperling, n.5, P.151

WOR failed to clear the 5 percent barrier required for representation in the parliament. The number of women in the Duma had dropped to 46 i.e. only 10 percent. The opening in the political opportunity structure (as reflected by legislative representation) was closing anew. Between 1989 and 1995, the emergence of WOR constituted perhaps the best chance for the women's movement to gain a political ally in the legislative branch of the government.²⁰ Women's dismal performance in the 1995 elections and their limited presence on influential posts and decision making bodies proves that political fate of women had been sealed by 1995 and a very strong women's movement was required to change the scenario in favour of women.

V) GROWTH OF THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The deteriorating situation of women's lives in Russia has been met by a surge in the women's movement nationwide. Current estimates put the number of organizations working on women's issues in Russia at 400.²¹ These groups represent a variety of interests and intentions. Coalitions such as the Independent Women's Forum, which unites over eighty regional women's organizations, and the Moscow-based Russian Consortium, which includes over seventy women's organizations, use their combined resources and strength to lobby the Duma for legislation on women's issues, provide educational programmes on women's human rights, and assist women in training for the new labour market. Some organizations, such as 'Lubava' in Kaluga, provide free legal services for women in employment termination suits and others, such as Soldiers' Mothers, which lobbied to end the war in Chechnya, advocate for more general political causes.²² Still others, such as the Centers for Gender Studies in Moscow and St. Petersburg, engage in scholarly research on women's issues and sought to provide intellectual underpinnings for policy proposals.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ "The Signing of the Charter of Women's Solidarity Took Place at the Parliamentary Center on March 4," *Agenstvo Sotsialnoi Informatsii* [Agency for Social Information, March 6, 1997]

²² "Neither Jobs Nor Justice: State Discrimination Against Women in Russia, A Human Rights Watch Short Report", *Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Project*, vol. 7, no. 5, March 1995

The women's movement in Russia has gained significant strength since the first Independent Women's Forum was held in 1991. Russian women's groups' participation in the United Nations Fourth World Conference on the Status of Women, in Beijing, provides an illustrative example of this rise in the women's movement. Much to the shock of the government of the Russian Federation, over 200 women leaders of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from Russia attended the NGO Forum of the Beijing conference. The Russian government, which had not anticipated any Russian NGO participation, had not arranged for Russian to be one of the official languages of the forum. Instead, the women leaders raised their own funds and hired eleven interpreters to work at the conference. Since the NGO Forum, the Russian government has begun to take the women's movement more seriously, inviting NGO leaders to parliamentary hearings, appointing them to the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, and accepting a Charter of Women's Solidarity signed by many of the country's most powerful national women's NGOs.²³

Also attending the forum in Beijing were the leaders of the newly founded, grassroots women's crisis centers of Russia. A phenomenon of the last four years, there are now fourteen crisis centers throughout Russia that provide services such as hotlines, individual counseling, emergency shelters, and legal aid. Underfunded and understaffed, these centers provide the only services available to rape victims and battered women. Registered officially as non-governmental organizations under Russian law, the first eleven crisis centers banded together in 1994 to create the Russian Association of Crisis Centers for Women (RAACW). The RAACW has documented the magnitude and response to violence

²³ "The Signing of the Charter..." *Agenstvo*. The charter calls for unity among women's organizations and creates a mechanism for the exchange of information on the organizations' activities, problems, and initiatives, no. 21

against women in a report distributed at the NGO Forum.²⁴ In addition, the RACCW actively encourages regional women's groups to build crisis centers locally: its network, for example, has helped to write and distribute 5,000 copies of the Youth Institute's Center for Women, Family and Gender Studies book, How to Start and Manage a Women's Crisis Center.²⁵

Crisis center activists have also mobilized to address the extreme underreporting of rape and domestic violence. After learning from their clients that the police often refused to take women's complaints, members of the RACCW initiated efforts to train the police to handle cases of violence against women more effectively. In March 1996, at the invitation of the RACCW, the European Network of Police women sent a delegation of Dutch sexual violence experts, including police officers, a forensic doctor, and a crisis center director, to Moscow, Murmansk, and St. Petersburg to train Russian women police officers. The delegation provided seminars jointly for police and crisis center workers in order to build trust, expertise, and greater cooperation between these institutions. With the hope that other regions of Russia would adopt its model, the RACCW has also initiated a local pilot project in Nizhni Novgorod, 300 miles east of Moscow, to address the problem of underreporting and violence against women. This project includes training local law enforcement officials, drafting regional legislation against domestic violence, and developing crisis centers in Nizhni Novgorod.²⁶

Beyond its support of grassroots efforts to provide services for victims of violence, create crisis centers, and train police officers, the women's movement has also put tremendous pressure on the local and federal governments of the Russian Federation to deal with the issue of

²⁴ "Report for the Non-Governmental Forum of the United Nation's Fourth World Conference on the Status of Women" in Russian Association of Crisis Centers for Women : Research, Education and Advocacy Project, 1995

²⁵ The book was edited by Tatiana Zabelina and Yevgenia Israelyan.

²⁶ Nadezhda Ilina, "V Peterburge ne khuzhe, chem v Norvegii" (It is Not Worse in St. Petersburg than in Norway), Nezavisimaya Gazeta, February 20, 1997, P. 6.

violence against women. Some progress has been made at the local level. The city government of St. Petersburg and the local administration in Langepas, a small Siberian city, for example, have funded the creation of Russia's first shelters for battered women. These victories, however, came only after local activists lobbied for years to persuade local authorities to fund the projects. When activist Marina Aristova first asked the St. Petersburg city government for support in creating Women's Home, the first Russian shelter for women she was advised to find foreign sponsors; instead she lobbied for three years and eventually secured from the city an abandoned kindergarten to remodel. The shelter now has built its capacity to sixty women and children.²⁷

Less progress has been made at the federal level, despite the sustained efforts over the past two years by the Independent Women's Forum and the Russian Consortium to lobby the federal government to pass legislation, and develop serious policy initiatives to combat violence against women. As this report documents, the Russian government has generally demonstrated a record of inaction and inertia in response to the serious problem of violence against women. It has failed, for example, to pass a national domestic violence law, or to take even minimal steps in revising the legal code to remove biases against women. In other words, as this report makes clear, the government of the Russian Federation has failed to live up to its promises, made nationally and internationally, and its obligations to ensure and protect the rights of women.

VI) FEMINISM IN RUSSIA

Whereas discrimination can be an impetus to organizing, in order for people to come together in collective action intended to counter that discrimination, they need some type of ideology to link them with one another, an ideology that frames their experience as a collective one, and motivates them to take to action. In women's movement, this role is

²⁷ Ibid.

often played by “feminism”²⁸ an ideology (or range of ideologies) that, at base, views women as oppressed group, one that deserves equal rights and treatment.

The lack of influence of feminism in contemporary Russia reflects traditional gender divisions in Russian society and prevailing essentialist views of women. Feminist groups represent only one of a multitude of alternative perspectives on the current crisis, and one which finds little acceptance in Russian society and has minimal political impact.

Political theorists have generally established that the greatest obstacles to women’s liberation movements are to be found under military or extreme authoritarian regimes and in predominantly Islamic political systems (as has been acknowledged by some Russian women migrants to Russia from Central Asia). Consistent with this theory, Russian women were, as might be expected, more favorably disposed to feminism than women from Chechnya, the Caucasus and Central Asia; yet there is a persistent reluctance among many Russian women to adopt the ‘feminist’ label, since it appears to conflict with their deepest traditional beliefs.²⁹

In particular, many women in Russia have been suspicious of Western feministki who, in their opinion, have an easy life and cannot possibly understand their problems. There could be number of possible reasons why Russian women have so little sympathy for western-style feminism? The general conservatism and misogyny of Soviet society inherited from the Stalin and Brezhnev eras, traditional communist hostility to ‘bourgeois’ feminism : the stereotypes of women presented in the media, which make Russian women feel, that to be a feminist inevitably means that they will ‘lose their femininity’ and cease to be attractive to men; the fact that Russian women were tired of ideological slogans about ‘equal rights’ which meant in practice that they were

²⁸ Sperling, n. 9, Pp. 59-64

²⁹ Ibid

obliged both to work full time for negligible pay and to shoulder the bulk of the domestic chores; and, finally, the fact that Russian women simply did not know what feminism is, since western feminist ideas have been consistently misrepresented in the Soviet and post-Soviet media. Thus we have the answer that Russian feminism did not follow western patterns. In the post-communist period 'feminism'³⁰ has been constructed as intimately linked with discredited Soviet socialism, as a Western import alien to the true interests of Russian society.

In the post-communist Russia feminist ideas have had to develop against a background of increasingly anti-feminist ideology. Current media discourse in Russia displays not only nationalist tendencies. But also many patriarchal sentiments released by the rejection of socialism, far surpassing the 'backlash' against feminism in the West. A few Russian feminists have attempted to challenge the backlash, including Olga Voronina, who frankly regard Russian propoganda in favour of self-sacrificing womanhood as 'a demagogic cover for the prevailing utilitarian, consumerist and disdainful attitude towards women'. However, many post-Soviet women in attempting to analyse their socialist heritage, were led either to reject it completely, or to feel nostalgia for the past. Due to the experience of having their culture stripped away by the state, Russian women were often attracted by the premodern in contrast with post-modernist critiques of society in the West.³¹

Even Russian feminist groups preferred to locate their ideals in the family, and generally attempt to avoid western style separatism, which was totally opposed to traditional collectivism of Russian culture. Many Russian women, even those active in women's organizations, were closer to pre-feminist views in the West during the 1950s or to the recent revisionist position of Betty Friedan and Jean Bethke Elshtain. 'Family

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Marsh, n. 1, Pp. 108-109

feminism' was perhaps an apt term for the majority of grassroots women's groups in contemporary Russia.

The emphasis on women's caring nurturing, peace-making activities among some feminist in the West has been echoed consciously or unconsciously, by many Russian women. Disturbed by the impact of rapid change in society' they saw the need of women as a whole to be central, rather than marginal to the process that would determine the future well-being of their communities.³² A positive view of women's qualities is typical of statements by the 'Women of Russia' movement which claim that women in politics would be somehow 'different,' more moral and worthy of trust. They reaffirm the value of mothering and family, seeking to transfer their caring qualities into the public domain. This message was explicitly spelt out in their electoral platform prior to the December 1993 elections which emphasized 'feminine self understanding and opposition to 'the sexual objectification of women'. The negative side of such idealization is that, as we have seen women's mission as saviour of the nation, their important role in moral education and national survival, has frequently been emphasized in nationalist and patriarchal discourse, which has claimed to speak in the name of women. Alexander Rutskoi, for example, has declared 'survival of the motherland' to be the purpose of women's movement.³³ Many post-Soviet women have, evinced more interest in supporting pressure groups, either on health and family problems, or on global issues, such as peace, the environment and human rights than in seeking to wield power in the male dominated political structures. To a great extent, such views were linked to mother's desire to create a better future for their children.

Some women's group emphasized women's special role as activists. The idealistic manifesto of the Moscow Rape Crisis Center, 'Sisters' proclaims: 'We are building a society free of violence'. The Soldiers and Mothers organizations, which emerged as an ad-hoc single

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

issue women's groups, focusing on the effect of military service on their sons, initially in Afghanistan, and subsequently in Chechnya, have played a positive role in the resolution of military conflicts. Under Perestroika they succeeded in achieving the benefits for Afghan veterans and in investigating into the mysterious deaths of soldiers in non-combat service, particularly from various extreme forms of bullying; and more recently, they contributed to the climate of opinion which persuaded Yeltsin to agree to end conscription altogether.³⁴ These achievements, albeit relatively modest, have been greater than those of most women's organizations.

VII) INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES

International influences (or the "international opportunity structure") refers to the ways in which events individuals and trends outside a given country can influence the emergence and development of a social movement within it. Russian women's activists in many cases, for example, have been influenced by Western feminism through direct exposure to feminist literature, travel to Western countries, and / or encounters with Western feminist visiting Russia. The international opportunity structure also includes the financing of indigenous movement by foreign government, foundation of the complex dynamics such funding can create. Naturally, countries are "embedded" in global society to differing degrees (dependent on local or internal, rather than internal or external, political conditions). This suggests that local circumstances play the deciding role in creating opportunity for change, and that those opportunities do not stem entirely from the international political and social system. These local conditions can radically and dramatically change, altering the access to transnational ideas. This occurred, for instance, at the end of 1980s in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, where the Iron Curtain that had defiantly kept world society at bay for decades finally crumbled under Gorbachev's glasnost

³⁴ Ibid

policy, allowing for the transnational diffusion of ideas into new territory.³⁵

There is no doubt that international diffusion of ideas about women's role and feminism has played a key role in shaping the contemporary Russian women's movement. The transnational diffusion of money, however, has been equally important. Other international factors affecting the Russian women's movement include: international lending agencies, economic policies, which indirectly motivated some Russian women's groups formation, the role of international bureaucracies like the UN and ILO whose policies legitimate Russian women's groups demands to some extent in the eyes of Russian state officials; and finally the role of individual foreigners in creating coalitions within the Russian women's movement as well as serving as mediator between some Russian women's groups and the state. However, Russia's dual political and economic transition, away from a totalitarian polity and command economy, in combination with the legacy of its political history and various international influences, has had significant repercussions for the form of its contemporary women's movement.

VIII WOMEN'S ACTIVISM IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

However, two major concerns emerged from analysis of organization of women's activism; the importance of historical legacy of the Soviet state, and the competition for scarce resources- human organizational, financial, domestic and international. Both concerns are an important part of the context and process of movement building in Russia.

The unique historical legacy of the Soviet state, however, cuts two ways. First, there is a distrust of the state apparatus that runs deep in virtually all women activists interviewed by K.Sullivan and L.Raccioppi. This distrust extends to organizations such as the former Soviet Women's Committee, which served as the state's mouthpiece on women's

³⁵ See Sperling, n.9, Pp. 51-53

issues and helped to promulgate the myth of sexual equality in the Soviet Union. There is also a recognition that the state has been (and will be) there, until others are created to supplement and/or replace it. This has been chiefly responsible for addressing and solving the issues, including the rights of women. Given that there have been no private sector institutions to turn to, there has been and continues to be a reliance on the state as a problem solver. The ambivalent attitude towards the state has important consequences for the development of the women's movement in Russia. The acute social upheaval wrought by the transition has also created a range of scarcities extreme even for Russia. These scarcities, combined with the ambivalence about how to use the state as a resource, affect the development of effective and coherent political mobilization.³⁶

i) Legacy of the Soviet State

Elvira Novikova, a scholar and a consultant to the Central Committee during perestroika, speaks eloquently of the legacy of the Soviet state for women's activism. She argues that, "foreign feminists.....need to listen to us attentively. The central question for her is, "who am I? Can I realize my potential? Am I an object of the state? Am I being manipulated by the state?" Only in this way can we tell whether the situation of women has been changed."³⁷ These concerns about the historical legacy of state manipulation of women's politics are more evident when we examine the position of the Union of Women of Russia. The new generation of women and feminist activities is sometimes quite suspicious of the Union of Women of Russia regardless of its current activities of membership. The degree of suspicion was evident in the development of the Independent Women's Democratic Initiative, NEZHDI (Do not wait), which was launched at a meeting in July 1990 and held its first forum in Dubna on 29-31 May 1991. Its statement on the social and political tasks for women contained a

³⁶ Racioppi, n. 15, P. 225

³⁷ Ibid, Pp. 227-28

powerful attack on prominent women in the former party and state apparatuses (and so, implicitly, on the Soviet Women's Committee) "Puppet women" in respective organs of power and "iron ladies" in the director's chair., women elected by no one but appointed by one or other state institution, obedient to the will of the bosses and always ready to carry any directive issued to them, thus has a negative image been created of the woman director, the woman political leader.' A representative of the Soviet Women's Committee was present at the forum but apparently played no role in its development or its activities.³⁸

Fedulova emphasized that the task of the Soviet Women's Committee is to change the policy of the state towards women and not to oppose other organizations, clubs, trade unions, or associations should they not wish to work with the Soviet Women's Committee. Since the formation of the Union of Women of Russia, this once-powerful committee has faced numerous external challenges to its survival. As a private organization it has had meager state funding, and its tenancy in its own building must now be paid for. One-third of the permanent staff has been fired due to lack of funding, and continued activities such as job training workshops rely very heavily on international support and funding. From our perspective, this is not an organization to be discounted. Indeed, the electoral victory of the Women's Bloc attests to the significance of Fedulova and the Union of Women of Russia.³⁹

First, because of its prominence, it is the organization to which ordinary women were most likely to turn to during the crisis generated by the transition. Despite staff cutbacks fiscal contingencies of enormous impact, this organization has continued to offer workshops for job training; to provide information, referrals, and other support for unemployed woman; serve as a watchdog over political developments; and to sustain important connections with international women's organizations and the United Nations.

³⁸ Ibid, Pp. 228-229

³⁹ Ibid

Second it is engaged in activities that empower women and appears committed to challenging the state actions that would undermine efforts at such empowerment. In this sense as it was able to make its historical connections to the state, the Union of Women of Russia was among the most influential organizations articulating women's concerns.

Nevertheless lingering suspicion about the role of Soviet Women's Committee in the old regime prevented it from standing at the forefront of the emerging women's movement. Building trust between them and the new reformers would take time. However, everyone recognized that the state remained a powerful influence in Russian society and that women must bring their own resources to bear in affecting its policies to benefit women. There were certainly organizations and women activists who had been lobbying the government to create and modify policies. Furthermore, local groups had discovered that, they must learn to work with the government to achieve their goals and survive. The Association of Small Towns collaboration with the local council of Venev is a good example of a women's group finding ways to enlist the cooperation of local authorities. Furthermore the elections of 1993 proved that women were capable of organizing and mobilizing to elect women candidates into office. As Fedulova has asserted, "If we don't influence politics our interest will be defeated Now it is men who make politics; they can't take into consideration the aspects of women."⁴⁰

The historical legacy then is a double edged sword for the building of a women's movement in Russia. Although groups that are identified too closely with the old regime and the state might be considered suspect by newer groups of activists, the historical legacy also compels a certain coherence, and women activists seem to have clear understanding of the necessity of women's influencing government in the transition.

⁴⁰ Ibid

ii) Resource Scarcity

Problems related to competition for scarce resources, most obviously financial, but also human and organizational compound these complexities. In former times the Soviet Women's Committee, as the official women's organization in the country, received considerable support from the state. Now the Union of Women of Russia and the other fledgling organizations that were either institutionally based (e.g. The center for Gender Studies) or free-standing (e.g. the Association of Small Towns) had to finance themselves through donations, grants, contracts, or other money-making ventures. New Organizations like GAIA, the Association of Small Towns, and some zhensovety faced difficulty in finding any space at all for their activities. Even the Union of Women of Russia, located in Pushkin's residence in central Moscow, has leased the space formerly provided to it by the state. The dire economic circumstances in Russia mean that women's groups are to some extent competing among themselves for resources.⁴¹

There is evidence of some competition for human and organizational resources as well. As the unhappiness with Dubna II brought to light, access to foreigners was motivated not simply by a desire to acquire externally generated financial support but also by an interest in acquiring information, expertise, and, to some extent political visibility both at home and abroad. Furthermore, as organization developed and sought greater influence, particularly on public-policy making at the national level, grassroots support and affiliation with the local groups become more essential. Thus, some at the Union of Women of Russia have charged that at Dubna II, the Center for Gender studies was attempting to pilfer the unions' extensive network of women's organizations in Russia.

⁴¹ Ibid

To a certain extent, these larger organizations might be seen as victims of their success, especially given concern about accumulated and centralized power in any organization. National and local groups have attended to find bases for collaboration. These initiatives and recent efforts by a range of organizations to develop an informational exchange network illustrates the possibilities for mutually beneficial co-operation from the Union of Women of Russia. It should not be surprising that competition for scarce resources, for political influence, and for visibility have tended to favour the larger, better established women's organizations such as the Center for Gender Studies and the Union of Women of Russia, or that some small organization fear domination by them.

IX CONCLUSION

In the ten-year period of reforms in Russia, the women's movement has had some significant success. Isolation has been overcome as many diverse women's organizations have sprung up at the grass-roots level and direct contact has been made with the international women's movement. The totalitarian mythology of sexual equality has been broken down, gender studies center have been set up in Moscow and other major cities. Of course, there has been the most visible and at the same time the most controversial phenomenon – the rise and fall of the 'Women of Russia' bloc representing Russian women in the State Duma. The works of Western feminists have been translated and published in Russia, whilst many literary journals have published major analytical articles, translations and essays on women's issues - if only once a year, linked to the old Communist tradition of celebrating International Women's Day. A department of Women's Studies has been set up at Moscow State University and a collection of documents on the history of the Russian and Soviet women's movements edited by Svetlana Aivazova provides for the first time an academic basis for the study of Russian women's movement in historical perspective. But this is only one side of the coin. There is another side of the coin, which is

no less eloquent and which might perhaps do more to determine the final outcome of the women's movement in Russia.

There is no doubt that the political and economic transition period in Russia created conditions enabling the contemporary women's movement to emerge. But even as groups and organizations emerged, voicing their objections to the status quo and making their demands for change, another obstacle came to light. Not only had the political sphere been dominated by the Soviet Party state for decades, but so had been the economic realm. Centralized planning of the economy, enforced membership in the state-run trade unions, and mass participation in the faux "civic" organizations sponsored by the party, left the new activists population in the early 1990's unprepared for fund raising and the other economic concomitants of grassroot social movement organization. Moreover, Russia's centralized and inefficient communications infrastructure was weak; access to photocopiers and sometimes even telephones was difficult for social movement groups. Direct mail was an impossibility. In essence, Russia lacked the economic infrastructure necessary to support a civil society, even as political conditions for its emergence were being created. Given such circumstances, the potential for Russian women's organization to expand their mobilizational base through members outreach was, therefore, not a priority. Elements of the economic opportunity structure thus contributed to the apparent paradoxes of Russian women's movement organizing.

To sum up, the current political opportunity structure for Russia's women's movement has been thoroughly transformed from that in the pre Gorbachev era Soviet Union. Perhaps the most fundamental change has been the legalization of NGO's, many of which have adopted some responsibilities for defending citizens material interests, and also defining social groups' identities- perhaps a first step in building a civil society. Yet, it was not simply that the political transition (from a more to less repressive polity) had paved way for feminist groups to speak out. The political transition had also allowed for increased exposure to

Western ideas and international documents which, in turn, provided a new standard for Russian state behavior where women's equal rights and opportunities were concerned. Armed with international agreements, activists demanded actions beyond mere hypocritical pronouncements of equality by state officials. Under pressure, the increasingly open Russian state began to render more honest accounts of women's status to the international community, and became slightly more receptive to influence by women's groups. However, actual power held by these organizations is quite limited. Still the evidence to date provides few grounds for optimism, as the women's movement in Russia has been experiencing a transition to the new stage: from the amateur political activism of few enthusiasts to the integration and institutionalization.



CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

Hegel invented, and Marx made popular, a way of schematizing history in which there is an origin, a dialectic of necessary stages and a culmination, the ethical state and the classless society. It is tempting to schematize history of gender relations the same way. Thus the story of primitive matriarchy, disrupted by men who seized power and set up a patriarchal society, has now matured a feminist revolution in turn. Or the idea that the social subordination of women flowed from their place in biological reproduction was a technical necessity. As earlier, the fertility was high, productivity low and life was short but now this concept has been abolished because technological changes has freed women from the need to spend their lives around babies and they have gradually unshackled themselves to enter into mainstream economy, politics and society.

In such thinking the present moment is one of culmination or perhaps the dark before the dawn, and previous history was a kind of preparation for the present. Interim oppression and injustices may have been nasty but they were in some sense historically necessary; they allowed the maturing of the good society in the end. Indeed quite a lot of nastiness in the present may also be justified to allow the good society to emerge from the womb of history.

This chapter has been dealt in two sections. The first part gives the probable answer to the issues raised in our first chapter, i.e. universal problem of gender inequality. It enlists certain strategies for establishing gender equality, and also gives concluding notes on the world to which a social theory of gender might lead to. The second section deals with Russia in specificity, i.e. with respect to role of women in politics and what seems to be their future in Russia.

I STRATEGIES:

The recent history of sexual politics offers two general strategies, which might be called intensive and extensive. Over the last two decades there have been attempts to construct, household, sexual relations and the social networks involved in radical politics, to be based on thoroughgoing equality. This is often difficult in a mixed household given men's greater earning capacity in a gendered structured labour market. First, the best that can be achieved is some guarantee of an economic 'floor' for women, for instance by having property in a wife's name rather than husband's. Second, it involves the reorganization of relations between children and adults, in the teeth of a vast array of institutional and cultural arrangements that presuppose all early child care to be done by women. Third, it involves a reworking of sexual character and sexuality, on the run, often in the context of attachments to third parties and terrible doubts about loyalty and personal worth. It is no wonder that a large section of population have abandoned this attempt and those who stick to it might be reluctant to talk about it. Therefore it is also important to find ways of expressing the positive side of gender equality : the generation of energy, the joys of being with children the pleasure of love between equals, etc.

There have been attempts to create 'liberated zones' which literally means a physical space. A common demand of feminist groups and institutions has been a room for women. Refuges, rape crisis centers and women's centers have often operated on the principle of keeping all men out. More generally, however, a liberated zone is a social 'space' a particular institution or a network of relationship or simply a group of people, where a degree of sex equality has been achieved, heterosexism eliminated or counter-sexist practice sustained.

The problems of sustaining such a 'zone' have something in common with the problem of other enclaves. They require a constant expenditure of energy to keep up. When it is a question of a radical

departure from common social practice, as a serious effort at sex equality, the energy level required is fairly high. People get tired of constant meetings, monitoring and mutual criticism. Egalitarian practices constantly confront hierarchical intrusion from outside the zone. One thing which is often overlooked is 'cleaning' the liberated zones as it tends to be grubby.

Offsetting these costs are three kinds of gains. Bases are established for politics of wider scope. Marches and rallies, for instance, do not just happen; there have to be people who get on the phone and spread the word, people who paint banners and provide places to store them. Next liberated zone can generate energy by giving a taste of the social world to come, what Sheila Rowbotham has called prefigurative politics in Beyond the Fragments. The sense of sharing in collective households and liberated zones are real experiences that do matter in showing that the goal of establishment of gender equality are practical ones.

Finally there is the personal dimension. Radical politics often presuppose superhuman energy and result in burn out or presuppose superhuman virtue and result in disillusion. Critics of feminism rejoice in claiming that feminists with power behave as crassly as patriarchal men; and of course some do. The main resource of radical politics are its activists. Political practice can be personally demanding, wearing and damaging to a high degree. Moreover, there is an established notion that daily confrontation with sexist businessmen or bureaucrats is no life for thin skinned. Therefore, we need to find ways of conserving the human resources and repairing the damage so that a large number of women can join politics without any hesitation.

The issue is common to all radicalism, but sexual politics has a unique personal dimension. Breaking down the gender system means, to some extent, tearing down what is most constitutive of one's own

emotions, and occupying strange and ill-explained places in social space. The oldest jibe against feminist is that they have been trying to turn women into men and men into women. In one sense this is right; reform of the division of labour must mean women doing things that are conventionally masculine. Yet 'role-reversal' of the kind has often been advocated in early seventies, has proved inadequate as a strategy. Feminism has attempted not just for tactical reason, to hold on to qualities and practices traditionally thought feminine too. Thus the movement has found itself weaving, across the conventional gender boundaries of sexual character and the division of labour.

The public side of sexual politics in the last two decades has mainly been a patchwork of campaigns. Local movements and alliance developed around particular issues: setting up a health center, demonstrating on some special day, organizing lobbying at parliament house and so on. Each grouping was liable to disband as soon as some resolutions of the particular matter was reached. However, there have been attempts to set up permanent formal organizations such as Center for Gender Studies in Russia, the National Organization of Women in USA, are among the most successful. Both of them have provided a framework for alliance in the context of pressure-group politics, for law reform and like purposes. Across the wider spectrum of sexual politics however, permanent organization has been uncharacteristic. The continuity of women's liberation is mainly due to overlapping members of many different campaigns, networks and due to endless internal talk rather than to formal structure.

In the liberal capitalist countries this kind of politics could continue indefinitely as there is enough tolerance and intermittent support for radical politics and women's movement to the extent that it could sustain a feminist and gay political pressure at the level of pressure group politics. But to pursue the projects of transforming gender order, sometimes more formidable is required. This is a question of putting together radical majorities in sexual politics, and keeping them together for a considerable period of time. This has been an old

aspiration, though one, from which there is a leading tendency of feminist policies towards retreat. Majorities matter, if the process of social change is to come under conscious human control. However, majorities have to be constructed against the ruling powers, around a radical program of equality, for which we need a clear understanding of the social dynamics that might make it possible.

In a gender order where men are advantaged and women are disadvantaged, major structural reforms are, on the face of it against men's interest. With the consideration of women, who gain wealth, prestige or other advantages through their marriage or kin relation or through applying an emphasized femininity, there would seem to be a permanent majority for patriarchy. For two reasons this calculation is not conclusive. First, interests are relational as well as egocentric. A father, for instance has an interest defined by the advantages of men, but also has an interest in the welfare of his children, and half of all children are girls. The practices that articulate interests may be organized around these relations rather than around gender category. The crisis of sexual division of labour in child care invites this. Second even egocentric interests are liable to be ambiguous or divided. The men's movement literature was wrong in thinking that, men had the same interest in liberation as women but was right in pointing to feminisms cost and unease with hegemonic masculinities, a fairly widespread experience. The crisis tendencies in structures of power and cathexis are likely to increase such internal division of interest.

Whether the gender order's tendencies towards crisis have gone far enough to provide a basis for majorities committed to major structural reform, is perhaps the key strategic question radical politics faces now. It involves in some sense, a combination of intensive and extensive strategies; the former to define directions and feasibility, the latter to provide the muscle. That kind of combination has not so far been realized. Tendencies towards it seem stronger in relation to the sexual division of labour than elsewhere: one thinks of the 'family wage'

concept, the crisis of child care and changing views about fathering, the inability of the liberal politics of equal opposition to deal with mass youth unemployment. Yet the main energies of movement's radicalism are focussed elsewhere. If radical majorities are then materialized it is not just a matter of the masses flocking to the banners already embroidered and raised. Some painful reorientation of present radicalism will also have to happen.

i) Concluding Notes On The World To Which A Social Theory Of Gender Might Lead:

For the ultimate goal of transformation of gender relations. There are two logical means. One is the abolition of gender, the other is the reconstitution of new bases. Along the first track some bold spirits have proposed the abolition of sexual reproduction. However, the gender order is not and never has been immanent in biology. Rather it represents a particular historical response to human reproductive biology. It is possible to make other collective responses. Attempting to abolish biological sex is certainly one among them. But this would not be a liberating transcendence of nature, because our existing gender order is not given in nature. It would be a collective mutilation that would certainly reduce the diversity of human experience and very possibly reinforce existing structures of power .

If the abolition of gender is a worthwhile goal then, the abolition of gender as a social structure is the issue. Its abolition would be logically a matter of disconnecting those fields. This implies no denigration denial of biological differences; equally no celebration of it. Differences between sexes would be simply a complementarity of function in reproduction not a cosmic division or a social fate. There would be no reason for it to structure character, so femininity and masculinity would depart.

This is easy to say but little difficult to achieve, even in narrow

settings. Equality is an absolute concept. It allows of no qualification however well intentioned. Equality would be wholly unrealistic as a criterion for practice if it required complete equality to be an immediately achievable state. A strong concept of equality, can however be, a practical criterion without being compromised, if it is taken as a direction of movement which is never given up. That is, the equality criterion of all practices is that they produce more equality than the conditions they started from, with no intention of stopping at the conditions produced. In that sense deconstructing gender is a feasible ethical program. Deconstruction implies that the biology of sex would become of minimal presence in social life. The standard argument against the abolition of gender, like the traditional argument against the abolition of class, is that it would result in sameness. The logical consequence of deconstruction is open-ended variety.

The cost of abolition of gender, then is not sameness, but the loss of certain kinds of structures. A judgement of this conception of liberation turns on, whether gender structures have any value. What would be our loss if they went down the jungle hole of history? It has to be said that a great deal of our cultures energy and beauty as well as barbarism has been created through and around gender relations. Much of the fine texture of everyday life from the feel of our own bodies, through the lore of running a household, to popular songs and everyday humour, are predicated on gender. Our eroticism and our imagination seem to be both limited and fuelled by gender. To discard the whole pattern does seem to imply a way of life that would be seriously impoverished by comparison with the one we know. At best it would be so different from the world of our experience that we can hardly know whether it would be desirable or not.

Yet the constraints that produces this experience and richness of culture, also produces massive inequalities, bitter oppressions violence and potential disaster. These are the reasons for the critiques of gender. Thus the question arises whether the cultural energy could be

disconnected from the structure of inequality i.e. gender should not be abolished but reconstituted in various forms.

This implies restructuring than deconstructing, it presupposes that elements of gender orders can be reshuffled in some sense. It implies a process at the collective level like what Piaget calls 'assimilation' in psychology of intelligence, in which the existing materials of a sexist culture are taken up and made over to new purposes. Playing with gender is not unknown at present. Elements of sexual character, gender practice or sexual ideology are often disconnected and recombined for enjoyment, erotic, tension subversion or convenience. Mass fashion began playing with gender recombination in the 1930s and more vigorously in 'unisex' styles of the 1960s. In a different vein the Soviets creation of women cosmonauts as media figure is also a game with femininity/masculinity and sexual division of labour played for a political effect.

However, the implication of restructuring is more than the reshuffling of existing practices and symbols. When the relation between cultural elements change, new conditions for practice are created and new patterns of practice become possible.. What would be lost in the restructuring conception of liberation, which is the necessary connection of elements of gender relation to institutionalized inequality on one side and biological difference on the other. The depth of this change should not be underestimated. It would be a fundamental departure from a key condition of our present culture, which might be summarized as the sense that gender is fatality.

At present, this sense runs through every area of gender practice, penetrating imagination and action alike. The naturalization of gender is basic mechanism of sexual ideology. A sense of psychological fatality of gender is expressed in the doctrine of sexual character.

Given this a society that eliminated sex inequality by the recomposition of gender must have a different structure of feeling. Much of the cultural inheritance will then only be recoverable as history by a shift back into alien frames of thought. Not wholly alien, of course, there will still be love, hatred, jealousy and divided loyalties to keep life interesting. But they will be experienced as personal projects rather than as fatality. This may mean they have less cultural power. The sense of fatality is not a passive consciousness but a lever on experience and action, a generator of tragedy and exhilaration. If it narrows the world, it also makes parts of it more intense.

At that cost a recomposed human society will gain a degree of equality never yet achieved, and an enormous enrichment of its cultural resources. This enrichment is worth spelling out.

- There are more players in the game. The equal opportunity argument that sex discrimination wastes human resources is, with all its limitations, correct and can be extended far beyond the issue of employment.
- The free reworking of gender relations which are at present strongly constrained, and psychologies and cultural patterns at present strongly stylized, geometrically increases the possibilities of experience and invention.
- Perhaps most important the emotional dimension of life that are opened up for exploration in a sexually equal society are more complex than those of our own society because of greater possibilities of creation in diversity
- These possibilities though argued here on the basis of change in the structure of gender relations, have other presuppositions. Notably they presuppose a move towards a society free of class and racial inequalities, and a world free of imperialism and the obscene inequalities of global living standards that we have today.

The analysis rejects both the idea that gender is the basis of

oppression from which these other spring, so sexual politics must take priority, and the idea that gender inequalities are secondary, so sexual politics can be sidelined while the main event proceeds. The main event the historic struggle for human equality which is now also a struggle for human survival is a complex of these constituents. Global inequality is a composite structure in the sense of gender on a larger scale.

This implies that the constituents react on each other. It is therefore not possible to accept these arguments, which seem increasingly popular with radical intellectuals, that fragment radical politics into a plurality of struggles in different sites with no systematic connection to each other. These arguments reflect a well justified discontent with attempts, for instance by orthodox Marxism, to hegemonize other groups campaigns and social struggles. But they leave us with no way of making rational choices of strategy based on concepts like crisis tendencies. Movements for social change need strategies if their priorities are not to be set for them by the opportunity.

It is possible to imagine a society with sex equality in which other kinds of inequality are far from dead. One thinks of the guardians in Plato's Republic or the aristocracy and bureaucracy of Ursula LeGuina, The Left Hand of Darkness. Conversely there are socialist Utopias with a highly conventional idea of the naturalness of sexual character, like Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward. The connections between structures of inequality is not a logical connection. The connection is empirical and practical. As a matter of fact, the core institution of contemporary structure of gender power cannot be torn down without a class politics, because those institutions fuse gender and class domination. As a matter of practice, equality is difficult to contain, the origins of modern feminist radicalism can be found in the 'New Left'. This shows that the historic association between socialism and feminism, however tense and ragged it has been, expresses a basic truth about global structure of inequality that social forces might dismantle it.

There are other conceivable futures that are a great deal less attractive. A recomposition of gender might well be undertaken as part of an authoritarian politics. The current development of birth technology points in that direction. A recomposition of gender that realizes the possibilities discussed, constructing an egalitarian form of life, is only a historical possibility and not a necessary future. If it is to happen, then in practice the projects in which we undertake recomposition must be a part of politics that addresses opposition in all its forms that sets no limits to principles of human equality. In undertaking that, we would be shifting the internal limits to our collective ability to shape a future i.e. physically and environmentally safe rich in experience and historically open.

II RUSSIA: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE (ROLE OF WOMEN IN POLITICS)

Russian women during the Soviet era, for over 70 years had formally enjoyed rights equal to those of men in all spheres of life but have still remained political outsiders till date. The reasons are deeply rooted in the practice of how the female issue has been framed and is being solved from Soviet period to the present day. Soviet dedication to women's liberation and their active involvement into politics vacillated according to the economic needs and national objectives of the state.

After 1917, certain political and ideological factors in the country gave rise to a specific type of patriarchal society that lasted for years, where the main mechanism of discrimination against women in politics and society was not men but the totalitarian state as a whole. The change in repository of power (from men to state machine) also necessitated changes in traditional patriarchal structures. To dominate women and the female principle more completely and make more functional use of women's productive and reproductive resources, the patriarchal totalitarian Soviet state had to "clear" one obstacle out of its

way-man, who had until then been in sole command of woman. In other words, the state had to destroy the legitimacy of man's power over woman, his juridical and economic rights over her, and to make a formal proclamation of their equal rights in a state based on right or law. Naturally, such confiscation by the state of individual men's right over women, far from reducing patriarchal principles in the social order, actually strengthened them by raising them to the level of macropolitics. In the totalitarian Soviet state, against a backdrop of formally proclaimed equal rights, the masculinist paradigm was not only preserved but actually strengthened in public mind. This was accompanied by suppression of and aggression against everything associated with feminine. In the context of the traditional gender culture (also called patriarchal), the dominant masculine principle is perceived as polar with respect to the suppressed feminine one.

Thus in the Soviet state, few women rose to top political post or key decision making body. Women were noticeable by their absence from the apex of power in party and government institution. Only at the local level of the party did women become visible. However, their presence had been most marked in the hierarchical system of the Soviet. Since the Soviets however were not the important arenas of decision making there was a sharp inverse relationship between women and power.

Under Gorbachev, glasnost brought criticism of this state of affairs. The political reforms initiated by Gorbachev had two immediate consequences for women's political activity – an overall drop in number of women in official political organs, and the emergence of less institutional forms of political participation, such as social initiatives and women's groups. The 1988 electoral law, which introduced the partial elimination of quotas, brought a substantial decrease in the number of women elected to national and local offices in the 1989 election. Women deputies to Supreme Soviet were reduced by almost half; women accounted for only 3 to 7 percent of representatives to republican and local Soviets. This outcome suggests that, not only were

women less likely to stand as candidates for public office but they were not seen as attractive candidates because of their gender.

Thus, women's participation in the legislative activity was even more limited than in politics. After the tragic events of October 1993, leading to the abolition of organs of Soviet power at the center and in the localities, women lost whatever little opportunities existed for them in decision making. For an entire historical period these organs had promoted thousands and thousands of women activists to position of leadership at all levels. Women accounted for 9.3 percent in the Moscow Soviet during perestroika days, while in the post-perestroika period women are represented in the leadership of only 28 of the 88 regions in the Russian Federation, not in primary roles but mainly as deputies of the heads of administration on social questions. There were mainly two women in many members of the government of the Russian Federation: the minister of social protection of the population and the head of the federal migration services of Russia.

In the December 1993 elections, women had won nine (5 percent) of the seats in the upper house-The Federation Council-and sixty (13 percent) of the lower house, the Duma. The total women representation in Russian Parliament, thus was 11.4 percent. The 1993 elections more than doubled representation for women compared to 1990 and women of Russia (WOR) bloc had failed to clear the 5 percent barrier requirement for representation in the parliament. None of the administrative heads of Russian territories, or mayors of major cities were woman. Only in November 1996 a woman was elected to head the little-known Koriak Autonomous Okrug of Kamchatka. Women have been the main victims of the political transformation in Russia. They have been deprived of any political gains, their status has sharply declined and there are widespread discrimination against women in all spheres of life.

However, it would be misleading to suggest that women were simply passive victims of the transformation. The political opportunity

structure for Russia's women's movement has been thoroughly transformed from that in the pre-Gorbachev era Soviet Union. Perhaps the most fundamental change had been the legalization of NGO's

Opportunities for women to participate in rich socio-political life of post Communist Russia, in the new political parties, trade unions, business life, protest movement and human rights groups increased for them, as much as for any one else. Thus there is no doubt that qualitatively women played an important part in the democratic movement but the actual power held by these organizations was quite limited. Russia's women activists today are struggling with the economic and political powerlessness, as activists today are struggling with economic and political powerlessness, as they strive to improve women's position in society and define their identities- not as state sees them fit, but as citizens, with equal rights and equal opportunities in social, economic, and political life.

Women have lost reasonably in the political sphere and in concept of their place and role in society. The rapid displacement of women from politics and the spread of a patriarchal ideology were to decisive extent a result of abolition of quota and weakness of women's movement. The official women's organisations rapidly lost their prestige under the new condition because they had been part of the prior state system. The principal answer of women to the new challenges was the rapid development of the independent women's movement in Russia, which has concentrated by and large on narrow social issues (child care, family policy, benefits for women, etc.). The women's movement has stepped up the activity of governments to improve the status of women. Thus despite the capitalist invasion in all walks of Russian life and policies determined by market mechanism, the presence of research institutes, economic networks and consciousness raising feminist groups provides some hope that women will be able to combat the negative consequences of Russia's transformation.



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