

**POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN  
IN CENTRAL ASIA,  
1991-2000**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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2005**

**Dedicated to**  
***Adivasi* and *Dalit* women of my country**  
**and to**  
**their struggle.....**



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## DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN CENTRAL ASIA, 1991-2000" submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

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## CERTIFICATE

We recommend that dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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## **Acknowledgement**

The discourse on development ought to be stressed on 'human development'. Human development requires gender equality and for gender equality, women empowerment is necessary. Thus, Women issues are important and need to be addressed properly.

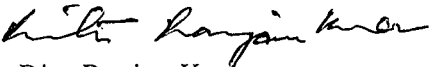
In the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, women's status is marginalized. In fact, there is deterioration of the status of women which was established by the former Soviet government. Women's empowerment in the Central Asian region is necessary for the women's development and so for human development. Women's political empowerment is one of the aspects of women empowerment. This dissertation is on political empowerment of women in Central Asia for the period 1991 to 2000.

Writing on women issue appeared very introspective and as a matter of contemporary relevance and importance. I got help and suggestions from many persons while writing my dissertation. I thank my supervisor DR Phool Badan for the careful guidance he provided me for my dissertation. I also thank Ms Usha K B for her useful suggestions in preparing framework for my dissertation.

Ms Ani provided her help to me and her views and opinion were quite beneficial for my research. I thank her for always being cooperative in providing her precious help to me.

I was benefited by the useful discussions with Sudhir jee and Uday on my research topic. I express gratitude to them. Shishu and Ravi helped me in collecting material for the research work and I thank them for that. I also acknowledge the support of Rohit and Mohit.

Lastly but importantly, I mention about my younger sister Guria who indirectly made me aware of the problems of women which they face. I am grateful to her for being a source of inspiration to me.

  
Ritu Ranjan Kumar

## **Abbreviations**

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<b>ADB</b>	<b>Asian Development Bank</b>
<b>CCPR</b>	<b>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</b>
<b>CEDAW</b>	<b>Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women</b>
<b>CESCR</b>	<b>International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights</b>
<b>FWCW</b>	<b>Fourth World Conference on Women</b>
<b>GDI</b>	<b>Gender-related Development Index</b>
<b>GEM</b>	<b>Gender Empowerment Measure</b>
<b>HDR</b>	<b>Human Development Report</b>
<b>IPU</b>	<b>Inter Parliamentary Union</b>
<b>MDG</b>	<b>Millennium Development Goal</b>
<b>NGO</b>	<b>Non Governmental Organization</b>
<b>UDHR</b>	<b>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</b>
<b>UNDP</b>	<b>United Nations Development Programme</b>

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# Chapter: 1

## Introduction

Women's rights are considered as important and necessary as human rights and with the process of globalization, this concept has got global importance. These rights have become so important that governments worldwide are actively trying to ensure and protect them. Human Rights Watch World Report 2002 says that one of the greatest challenges of governments in 2001 was to make respect for women's rights a more permanent and central part of the international human rights agenda.

In the developed countries, women have shown their eligibility and capability in every sphere of life and have proved their importance for social development and modernization. On the other hand, in most of the developing and underdeveloped countries, women are underrepresented in political, economic and social institutions at every level viz. local, national and international. This fact not only shows backward status of women, but is also responsible for that.

In any country or society, the main reason of women's unsatisfactory status is due to denial of opportunities to them which keeps women at disadvantageous positions. This is a unique characteristic of any male dominated patriarchal society to treat women as less skillful and capable than men and assign them traditional work only. Traditional stereotype image of women makes women vulnerable to discrimination and ill treatment in every sphere and at all levels and so women are restricted to homely affairs and do not get opportunity easily, for desired profession and education. The discrimination starts at personal position and goes up to public position and that is why women remain underrepresented in political, social and economic institutions at all levels.



Women's status in family and society is very much based on and affected by traditional and cultural stereotyping of women and thus women are victims of gender discrimination. The **Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, in its preamble accepts that extensive discrimination against women continues to exist. Apart from the gender discrimination; Women suffer from other form of discrimination also. Gender discrimination and all other forms of discrimination, in particular racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance continue to cause threat to women's enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms<sup>1</sup>.

Globalization has given another dimension to women's advancement and empowerment. Nevertheless the process of globalization has brought good opportunity for women's advancement; its negative impact on women's status is also considerable. The impact of globalization is widespread i.e. its impact is not only on political and economical life but also on social and cultural life.

Governments have adopted policies of liberalization and privatization in economic sector to adjust their respective national economy to meet the demands of globalization. Global capitalism is much more concerned with expanding the domain of market relations than with, say, establishing democracy, expanding elementary education, or enhancing the social opportunities of society's underdogs.<sup>2</sup> So, undoubtedly there are potential challenges from the process of globalization.

The first world Conference on the status of women was convened in Mexico City to coincide with the 1975 International Women's Year, observed

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Ad hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty- third special session of the General Assembly*, Supplement No. 3 (A/S-23/10/Rev.1) United Nations, New York 2000, p.16

<sup>2</sup> Amartya Sen, "How to Judge Globalism," *The American Prospect*, available online: <<http://www.prospect.org/print/V13/1/html>>

to remind the international community that discrimination against women continued to be a persistent problem in much of the world.<sup>3</sup> On the urge of the first Conference, General Assembly of the United Nations declared the decade 1976-1985 for women.<sup>4</sup> The second world conference on the status of women was held in Copenhagen in 1980 and the third Conference on the status of women was convened in Nairobi in 1985. Many referred to the Nairobi Conference as the “birth of global feminism”.<sup>5</sup>

In modern times, gender development has become an important aspect of human development. The 1995 **Human Development Report (HDR)** says that “human development is endangered unless it is engendered.” The first Human Development Report (1990) developed the concept of human development and its measurement.<sup>6</sup> The **HDRs of UNDP** use human development approach of human well- being which ‘offers a capability based approach to gender equity in development that is a departure from traditions focused on income and growth’.<sup>7</sup> **Human Development Report** focuses on four different capabilities: to lead a long and healthy life, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for decent standard of living and to participate in the life of the community’.<sup>8</sup>

There are many economists (neoliberals; believe in utility maximization as important approach for human well- being) who are of the opinion that national income is a good indicator of human well-being. But this is

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Public Information, “Women 2000” *Encounter* (New Delhi), vol. 3, no.5, September- October 2000, p.90

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> *Human Development Report 1995* (UNDP, 1995), p. 23

<sup>7</sup> Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, “ The human development paradigm: operationalizing Sen’s ideas on capabilities”, *Feminist Economics* (London) , 9(2-3), 2003, p. 306

<sup>8</sup> *Human Development report 2004* (UNDP, 2004), p.127

also a fact that human outcomes such as democratic participation in decision-making or equal rights for men and women do not depend on incomes.<sup>9</sup> The **1995 HDR** says:

*The concept of human development has struck a responsive cord. It reinforces the belief that people should participate in the development process and benefit from it. It reiterates that concerted efforts can make a difference in the quality of life. It establishes alternatives to conventional wisdom. Going beyond stabilization and, economic growth, this broader vision of development has significantly influenced the development policy debates and dialogues, both nationally and internationally.<sup>10</sup>*

In 1995 **HDR**, a tool for measuring gender empowerment was developed which is known as the **Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)**. The **GEM** is a composite index measuring gender inequality in three basic dimensions of empowerment- economic participation and decision making, political empowerment and decision making and power over economic resources.<sup>11</sup> The **GEM** has been used widely in advocating women's empowerment, for example, in debates over reserving seats for women in parliament.<sup>12</sup>

**Human Development Report 1995** informs 'in most countries, industrial or developing, women are not yet allowed into the corridors of economic and political power'. At governmental level, women's participation in ministries, parliaments and executive bodies at national, sub-national and local

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.127

<sup>10</sup> *Human Development Report*, n. 6, p.117

<sup>11</sup> *Human Development report*, n. 8, p.270

<sup>12</sup> Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, n. 7, pp. 309-310

level reflects women's political status and it needs to be empowered as women's status in politics is not satisfactory.

In one of the goals set by the UN in the preamble to the Charter of the UN is the reaffirmation of 'faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women'. So equality of rights of men and women is a basic principle of the UN. The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** states that everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his/her country. But fact is that women are largely underrepresented at most levels of government especially in ministerial and other executive bodies, and have made little progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies or in achieving the target endorsed by the **Economic and Social Council** of having 30 per cent women in positions at decision making levels by 1995.<sup>13</sup>

The **Beijing Platform for Action** was adopted by the governments at the 1995 **Fourth World Conference on Women** for achieving the advancement and empowerment of women. The mission statement of the **Platform for Action** says:

*Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centred sustainable development.*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Women in Power and Decision-making", *FWCW Platform for Action*, available online: <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/decision.htm>>

<sup>14</sup> *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, United Nations (A/ CONF. 177/20 ), available online: <[www.un.org/csa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/off/a--20.en](http://www.un.org/csa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/off/a--20.en)>

Twelve critical areas of priority actions were identified by the **Beijing Platform for Action**.<sup>15</sup> The twelve critical areas of priority actions are:

- i) The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women;
- ii) Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training;
- iii) Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to health care and related services;
- iv) Violence against women;
- v) The effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation;
- vi) Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources;
- vii) Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels;
- viii) Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women;
- ix) Lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women;

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

- x) Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media;
- xi) Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment; and
- xii) Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child.

The objective of the **Platform for Action**, which is in full conformity with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the **United Nations** and international law, is the empowerment of all women.<sup>16</sup> About political empowerment of women, the **Beijing Platform for Action** says 'women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interest to be taken into account.'<sup>17</sup>

**Human Development Report 2003** argues human development and the **Millennium Development Goals** share a common motivation and vital commitment to promoting human well-being.<sup>18</sup> The **Millennium Development Goals**, agreed by 189 countries at the UN in September 2000, establish promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. In the **Millennium Development Goals**, it has been accepted that women's equal participation with men in power and decision-making is part of their fundamental right to participate in political life, and at the core of gender equality and empowerment.

The third goal of the **Millennium Development Goals** is to promote gender equality and empower women. The fourth target of the Goals is to

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<sup>16</sup> *Report of the Ad hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly*, n. 1, p.6

<sup>17</sup> "Women in Power and Decision-making", n. 13

<sup>18</sup> *Human Development Report*, n. 8, p. 132

eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015. For promoting gender equality and empowering women, four indicators used in the **Millennium Development Goals** are as follow:

- Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education
- Ratio of literate female to males of 15 to 24 year olds
- Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector
- Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament

It is important worth noting here that **MDGs** are time bound and measurable goals and so nations have defined time period to achieve these goals.

Marxists and radical groups believe that the reason why women have been systematically excluded from the political arena is because of the false distinction that has been made and sustained by patriarchy between the public and the private worlds.<sup>19</sup> Liberal feminists and mainstream political analysts understand gender divisions less in terms of structural oppression and more in terms of an unequal distribution of rights and opportunities that prevents the full participation of women in the 'public' realm.<sup>20</sup>

Gender refers to distinction between males and females in terms of their social role and status.<sup>21</sup> Women's unequal status relative to men is denoted by gender inequality. Political empowerment of women is very strong requirement and an important component of gender empowerment for achieving the goal of gender equality. It has been found that political gender equality in the form of

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<sup>19</sup> Iain Mclean & Alistair McMillan (eds.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* (New Delhi, 2004) ,p.220

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Heywood, *Key concepts in politics* (London, 2000), p.204

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

female representation in parliament is associated with lower levels of personal integrity rights abuse by state agents.<sup>22</sup> The percentage of women in parliament has a benign effect on state human rights behavior directly as well as in interaction with the level of institutional democracy.<sup>23</sup>

Women's political participation is important from the point of raising women's voice in policy making institutions and processes. Women's presence in government; in ministerial, legislative and executive body, will ensure pro women and gender sensitive political decisions and policies.

Non governmental organizations (NGOs) play very important role in stipulating women's grievances, supporting and strengthening women's cause and developing women leadership. NGOs can also protect legal right of women and can effectively enhance women's political and legal status. Since NGOs can work at grass root level, they can play effective role in empowering women from poor and weaker sections of society. In fact NGOs provide an alternative to women for developing and establishing women leadership and activism

So far as political empowerment of women in Central Asia is concerned; it has not taken place in the region. Political empowerment of women is one of the major challenges in the post- Soviet Central Asia. In the new political and economic atmosphere, women have been affected adversely. The women are facing discrimination and inequality at all levels. Nevertheless, the Soviet system brought important changes in women's status in Central Asia; it could not bring changes in gender roles as men heads of household and actors in public space and women as caregivers, homemakers and mothers. Also during the Soviet period, no independent political organization and real political power could happen to develop.

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<sup>22</sup> Erik Melander, "Political Gender Equality" *Journal of Peace Research* (Oslo), vol. 42, no.2, March 2005, p.163

<sup>23</sup> Ibid



The political transition in the CARs has resulted in the rise of authoritarian politics. To sustain the control over power, authoritarian and repressive regimes do not care for violation of Human Rights and behave undemocratically. Undemocratic nature of the regimes in the region jeopardizes the democratization of the republics' politics and the repressive political regimes in the region certainly hinder and encroach women's political participation in the region.

The Central Asian leaderships have chosen to promote state managed cultural revivalism. This cultural revivalism is in fact revival of pre-Soviet traditional and religious values. As discussed earlier, stereotype image of women is quite hazardous for women's educational and professional progress and the rise of pre-Soviet cultural and traditional values has emboldened this problem in Central Asia.

✓ All the Central Asian Republics have moved from centrally controlled planned economy of the Soviet period to market economy after 1991. After the independence, the republics refrained from continuing the social welfare schemes run by the governments and state policy for gender empowerment. Also, due to the lack of their professional qualifications and gendered biasness, women are prone to lose their economic status in the new politico-economic situation in Central Asia. This led to the deterioration of women's economic status in Central Asia in the post-Soviet period. Women are facing job problems, unemployment and poverty. The economic backwardness results in less participation in public and political life of the region. In another words we can say that poor economic status of women is one of the main reasons of poor political status in Central Asia.

Thus negative aspects of the Soviet legacy, globalization and political transition have served as disempowering factors for gender equity in Central Asia. There is increase in disparity among women based on education, employment, and economic, political and social status. The rural-urban divide and

disproportionate development of various ethnic groups also form an important basis for disparity among women in Central Asia.

Keeping in mind changes in the Central Asian region, it's not wrong to say that the issue of gender empowerment in Central Asia has taken almost a new starting point. Acceptance of democratic politics and market oriented economy gives gender issues new dimensions and that is different from the Soviet approach towards gender issues. But this is also a fact that the Soviet legacy is very important factor while discussing gender empowerment in Central Asia. As all the republics have chosen Constitutional and democratic form of governance; the very success of democracy demands inclusion of women in power and politics who are underrepresented in these institutions.

To make women empowerment a reality in Central Asia following things are necessarily required:

- getting more women into leadership positions;
- developing an effective and responsible women electorate;
- by carrying out reforms that facilitate cultural change to effect social attitudinal change favorably to women and their contributions to society.

And to meet these requirements, following approaches can be suggested:

- supporting women's empowerment by legal interventions and provisions;
- changing political culture in favor of women's participation;
- organizing women's political parties and movements;
- by civil society and grass root activism.

Considering the fundamental value of freedom essential to international relations in the twenty-first century, the United Nations Millennium Declaration says that ‘men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice. Democratic and participatory governance based on the will of the people best assures these rights’.<sup>24</sup>

↪ All the republics have signed and ratified the **Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, the **Beijing Platform for Action** and aim at achieving the **Millennium Development Goals**. The acceptance of a common model of sustainable development based on the **Millennium Development Goals** of ensuring equality and empowerment and ratification of the **CEDAW** and the **Beijing Platform for Action**, has made it mandatory to government to facilitate women’s empowerment and equality.

↪ Women’s participation in politics makes the democracy vibrant and humane. In the Central Asian Republics, the democratic form of governance is newer and in its initial phase. Any attempt to keep women away from political power would be against the human development process in the region. Political empowerment of women in Central Asia is prerequisite for successful democracy peaceful and stable society.

As such the following chapter is related to the *Women’s’ political participation in Central Asia*. Central Asian women were given political rights by the erstwhile Soviet government and this was the first time when women in Central Asia got the right. After the independence, changes in Central Asia have affected women in negative way. There have been remarkable changes in the status and empowerment of women after the independence of Central Asian republics as compared to the women’s status and empowerment during the Soviet period in the region. This chapter deals with a comparative study of women’s

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<sup>24</sup> *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, (A/RES/55/2), September 18, 2000, United Nations

political empowerment during the Soviet period and after the independence of the Central Asian republics.

In Central Asia, women's issues have got attention and to enhance political empowerment of the women, governments and civil societies have come forward. Due to internal and external demand and pressure, the Central Asian leaders have supported the political empowerment of women. NGOs have very important and effective role in strengthening the political status and empowerment. The third chapter deals with *Political empowerment of women in Central Asia* which sheds light on the government and civil society initiative for political empowerment of women in Central Asia.

There is gap between *de jure* and *de facto* women's political empowerment in Central Asia. This gap is due to many factors hindering political empowerment of women in the region which includes the repressive nature of the political regimes, rise of pre-Soviet cultural values, poverty and deteriorating economic status of women, family burden on women and women's stereotyping etc. These factors have negatively put impact on political empowerment of women and it's important to find out actual political empowerment of women. The fourth chapter focuses on *Assessing political empowerment of women in Central Asia* in an attempt has been made to find out and analyzes the gap between the policy and practice.

The last chapter is *Conclusion* which gives conclusion based on study and analysis of present political situation in Central Asia and women's position in the region.

## Chapter 2

### Women's political participation in Central Asia

In January 1924, the Turkestan SSR was broken up and over a short period of time five separate republics came into existence- the Uzbek, Turcoman, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Tajik Socialist Republics.<sup>1</sup> Central Asia was divided into five Soviet Republics according to ethnic or linguistic lines; separate republics were established for the Uzbeks, Tazhiks, Turkmen, Kirgiz and Kazakhs ethnic groups.

Prior to the October revolution of 1917, Central Asia was economically poor and industrially underdeveloped where standards of sanitation and diet were low. As a result life expectancy was minimal and infant mortality high and majority of people were illiterate.<sup>2</sup> All the republics were strongly Islamic and practiced *Sunni* tradition of Islam.<sup>3</sup> Society in the region was traditional and patriarchal where women's status was not satisfactory.

The socialist revolution took place in October 1917. After the revolution the Communists initiated the process of women's emancipation and empowerment after the Bolshevik revolution. They believed that 'the proletariat

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia, Islam or Nationalism* (Karachi, 1994), p.32

<sup>2</sup> Albert Szymanski, *Human Rights in the Soviet Union* (London, 1984), pp.33-69

<sup>3</sup> 98 percent of Central Asia's Muslims are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi School of law; see Ghoncheh Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia: a potent force or a misconception?" *Central Asian Survey* (Oxford), vol. 20, no. 1, 2001, p. 67

cannot achieve complete liberty until it has won complete liberty for women'.<sup>4</sup> After the revolution the Party initiated a Communist women's movement, aiming to stimulate the actual transformation of relationship, to undermine the traditional attitudes of men and women, to mobilize women in the national effort to reconstruct the country after the destruction wrought by the civil war, and to construct a socialist society.<sup>5</sup> Women were given equal rights without any discrimination. The socialist state legislatively established equal rights for women and men to elect and to be elected to all bodies of power and to hold any posts in state and economic agencies.

The strongest impact of the Communist women's movement and of Party and state policy dedicated to the liberation of women was upon the traditionally Islamic areas, where the oppression of women was greatest.<sup>6</sup> The process of women emancipation was initiated during the Soviet period.

### **Women's emancipation and empowerment during the Soviet period**

Before the Bolshevik revolution the social norms in the region was based on feudal, cultural, traditional customs and religious values. The Soviet rule was opposed to religious plank for the social life in Central Asia and to suppress the role of religion in the social life, it promoted the social transformation in the region. The social transformation was indeed a process of intensive modernization which naturally targeted women's emancipation from the pre-Soviet oppressive practices. So at this juncture the religion came in confrontation with the Soviet led emancipation of women in particular and modernization of Central Asian society in general.

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<sup>4</sup> N. Lenin , *To The Working Women, On Participation of The People in Government* (Moscow,1979), p. 217

<sup>5</sup>Albert Szymanski, n. 2, p. 105

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

The Bolsheviks, for the first time emancipated women from the cultural and traditional oppressions and thus women could get opportunity for profession and education. It was an ideological basis of Communism to establish an egalitarian society without any gender based discrimination. The communists focused on women empowerment so as to establish an egalitarian society with equal rights of men and women. For the first time the complete economic, political and sexual equality of women was put on the historic agenda.<sup>7</sup>

Describing the programme of the Communist party of Russia (adopted at the eighth party congress, held 18 to 23 March 1919), Bukharin had said 'simply for the reason that the Soviet power is the workers' power, it has been able completely and in all spheres of life to effect for the first time in the world the entire abolition of the last traces of the inequality of women in the spheres of conjugal and family rights'.<sup>8</sup>

Soviet Central Asia, which was traditionally Islamic area, experienced the potential impact of the Communist women's movement and of Party and state policy dedicated to the liberation of women<sup>9</sup>. Traditional Islamic values did not allow Central Asian women to participate in public life. Needless to say that women's personal life was also very much influenced and affected by the traditional values. During the Soviet period women in the region were in fact encouraged and supported by the Soviet regime to work outside and not restrict themselves to domestic affairs only.

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<sup>7</sup> Jen Pickard, "Women in the Soviet Union", available online:  
<[www.newyouth.com/archives/theory/women/women\\_in\\_soviet\\_union](http://www.newyouth.com/archives/theory/women/women_in_soviet_union)>

<sup>8</sup> N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism* (England, 1969), p.437

<sup>9</sup> Albert Szymanski, n. 2, p. 105

In 1922 women were 22 per cent of the workforce but within ten years this figure had grown to 32 per cent.<sup>10</sup> Between 1922 and 1937 out of 4 million new workers 82 per cent were women.<sup>11</sup> Women participation also in the non agriculture sectors increased and. Thus, the Soviet government gradually moved to achieve the goal of women's economic independence. The following table shows percentage of women workers and office employers in some important branches of the national economy.

Percentage of women workers and office employers

Table a1

Branch	1928	1940	1960	1973
Industry	24	39	47	51
Agriculture	24	30	41	45
Education and Culture	55	59	70	73
Science and scientific services	40	42	42	48
Administration	19	34	51	63

Source: *CDSP*, vol. xxvii, no. 2, 1975, p. 9

In the Soviet system, equality between men and women was sought for achieving the dream of 'freeing of labor'.<sup>12</sup> The Soviet policy of 'freeing of labor' put its potential impact on the prevailing status of women and many reforms were brought about. Women as equal halve of the proletariat, enjoyed equality in all departments of life: in marriage, in the family, in political affairs, etc.<sup>13</sup>

From 1921 to 1927, fundamental institutions like the *waqfs* (properties in mortmain), the canon (*shari'at*) and customary (*'adat*) law, and

<sup>10</sup> Jen Pickard, n. 7

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Albert Szymanski, n. 2, p. 227

<sup>13</sup> Ibid



religious teaching were liquidated.<sup>14</sup> In 1927, the traditional Islamic courts were divested of all authority including their ability to adjudicate in family matters; traditionally, two female witnesses were considered the equivalent of one male in such courts.<sup>15</sup>

A new set of codes and civil tribunals replaced the traditional Sharia- based tribunals which had previously regulated family life; equality before the law of all citizens, regardless of ethnic or national origin, sex or social status, was proclaimed; women were given the right to vote and access to all position of power (Art. 64 of the Soviet Constitution of 1918); and from 1921 onwards, religious marriage, *Kalym* (bride price), and polygamy were prohibited, while the legal age for marriage was fixed at 16 (instead of 9) for girls and 18 (instead of 16) for boys.<sup>16</sup>

The *hujum*, or offensive against the traditional and patriarchal practices, which were oppressive to women was launched in 1927. The main objective of *hujum* was to emancipate women by attacking the old traditional life style and the wearing the veil became the principal target of the *hujum*.<sup>17</sup> Veiling of women, which was regarded as 'mobile prison house' was targeted. Many women came out of veil and by the end of Second World War veiled women became increasingly rare sight.

Women were dependent on their husbands and even if in the cases when they were tortured and ill-treated by their husbands, they did not dare to divorce them. The Soviet government paid attention to the women's childbearing role and special maternity laws were introduced banning long hours and night

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<sup>14</sup> Nick Megoran, "Theorizing gender, ethnicity and the nation- state in Central Asia", *Central Asian Survey* (Oxford), vol. 18, no. 1, 1999, p. 42

<sup>15</sup> Albert Szymanski, no. 2, p.105

<sup>16</sup> Habiba Fathi, "Otimes: the unknown women clerics of Central Asian Islam", *Central Asian Survey* (Oxford), vol. 16, no. 1, 1997, p.28

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29

work and establishing paid leave at childbirth, family allowances and child-care centres.<sup>18</sup> Abortion was legalized in 1920, divorce was simplified and civil registration of marriage was introduced. Civil marriage was favored in stead of religious marriage to secularize the marriages during the Soviet period.<sup>19</sup>

The ideological impact on family structure during the Soviet period put potential impact on the status of women in the Central Asian region. Women were emancipated from the unnecessary and unwanted family burdens and were able to participate in the public life. Women were encouraged to study and work and day care services and kindergartens were introduced to reduce the domestic burden on women so that they could get opportunity for their profession. With the encouragement and support from the government, women could easily participate in public life.

The Soviet government was of the opinion that 'if women could work outside the home while domestic work and child care were socialized, their oppression would be eliminated and Communist societies would bring equality between men and women'.<sup>20</sup> Lenin, in his speech 'The task of the working women's movement in the Soviet republic' had said:

*Owing to her work in the house, the woman is still in a difficult position. To effect her complete emancipation and make her the equal of the man it is necessary for the national economy to be socialized and for women to participate in common*

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<sup>18</sup> Ana Muñoz and Alan Woods, "Marxism and the emancipation of women", available online: <[www.marxist.com/Theory/marxism\\_and\\_women.html](http://www.marxist.com/Theory/marxism_and_women.html)>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Manijeh Sabi, "The impact of economic and political transformation on women: the case of Azerbaijan", *Central Asian Survey* (Oxford), vol. 18, no. 1, 1999, p. 112

*productive labour. Then women will occupy the same position as men.*<sup>21</sup>

In the USSR the most radical change in women's traditional household responsibilities had been effected by the socialization of child care, primarily in the form of day-care centers for families in which both parents worked.<sup>22</sup> Under the Soviet system the percentage of women in workforce (workers and office employees) increased fairly and women's economic condition became better. Better Economic conditions and relaxation in family burdens gave women opportunity to participate in public life and hence in politics too women made their presence. Also, those women who had divorced their husbands were in a position to live their lives properly by taking up job.

The data available for the period 1928-1973 shows that the percentage of women as workers and office employees increased remarkably. The following table shows the percentage of women workers and office employees in the region during the Soviet period.

**Women workers and office employees**

Table a2

Republic	1928	1940	1960	1973
Kazakhstan	15	30	38	40
Kyrgyzstan	11	29	41	48
Tajikistan	7	29	37	38
Turkmenistan	25	36	36	40
Uzbekistan	18	31	39	42

Source: *CDSP*, vol. xxvii, no. 2, 1975, p. 9

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<sup>21</sup> Speech Delivered at the Fourth Moscow City Conference of Non-Party Working Women, September 23, 1919, see Lenin, *On Participation of the People in Government* (Moscow, 1979), p. 193

<sup>22</sup> Albert Szymanski, n. 2, p. 108

Women were given political rights which were ensured by the first constitution of the USSR adopted in 1918. The women were given right to vote and to stand for elections. It is important to note that very few countries had provision for political rights for women. **Table a3** reflects the years in which women in the region got the right to vote and to contest election.

Political right of women

Table a3

Republic	to vote	to stand for election
Kazakhstan	1924	1924
Kyrgyzstan	1918	1918
Tajikistan	1924	1924
Turkmenistan	1927	1927
Uzbekistan	1938	1938

Source: Human Development Report, 2004



Central Asian republics are predominant Muslim countries and if these are compared with the other Muslim countries of the middle east then it is found that women in Central Asia got political rights far before than these nearby Muslim countries. Women got political rights to vote and contest elections in 1963 in Islamic republic of Iran, in 1956 in Egypt, in 1930s in Turkey and in 1947 in Pakistan. In the Countries like United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia women's right to vote and participate in the elections is not recognized.<sup>23</sup> The percentage of women in work force and education was better than even some developed countries of the world.

A quota system existed during the Soviet period to ensure women representation in politics and decision making institutions. That quota system

<sup>23</sup> Human Development Report 2004, (UNDP, 2004), pp. 234-237

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empowered women in the Soviet Central Asia. Nevertheless, in the Soviet Union, political empowerment at this juncture was achieved by appointing women in political sphere and women's political participation was superficial, a positive gender outlook got impetus in the society<sup>24</sup>. Women's percentage in local soviets was appreciable. The following data give breakdown of the Deputies elected to local Soviets by the republics.

**The Deputies elected to local Soviets**

**Table a4**

Republic	Deputies	Women	% of total
Kazakhstan	88,950	42,227	47.5
Kyrgyzstan	120,690	57,186	47.4
Tajikistan	25,898	12,406	47.9
Turkmenistan	23,366	10,901	46.7
Uzbekistan	21,118	9,461	44.8

Source: *CDSP*, vol. xxvii, no. 25, 1975, p. 13

During the Soviet period women did make progress in various areas and their status in some areas was even far better than the international standards. The changed image of "Eastern" women, who during the soviet regime enjoyed far more freedom when compared to neighboring Muslim countries, was one of the principal trump cards of the Soviet propaganda.<sup>25</sup>

## **Women in independent Central Asia**

Regarding Central Asia this is generally accepted that the Soviet state was opposed to the cultural and religious freedom but it supported the gender

<sup>24</sup> Manijeh Sabi, n. 20, p. 117

<sup>25</sup> Dr. Dono Abdurazakova, "Gender, Issues in Central Asia: A Challenge for Development?", available online: <[www.newscentralasia.com/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=906](http://www.newscentralasia.com/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=906)>

equality. But after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a complete reverse phenomenon is observed in Central Asia. Now there is freedom of culture and religion but there is also an enhanced gender-disparity.

Women's status in Central Asia has deteriorated as compared to that of during the Soviet period and in the independent central Asia, the status of women is not satisfactory as compared to that of during the Soviet period. During the Soviet period women were supported by the state policies towards women. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the independent republics of Central Asia do proclaim women's right by incorporating Constitutional and legal provisions but there exists many women disempowering factors.

While discussing status of women in Central Asia, the Soviet legacy of women empowerment in the region can not be ignored. Achievements made during the Soviet period in the area of women empowerment is being eroded in the independent Central Asia. Even though women are marginalized in the Central Asian Republics there status is better in many fields as compared to the neighboring Muslim countries. Table a5 gives **Gender Related Development Index**<sup>26</sup> (GDI) rank of the republics among the 144 countries ranked in the Human Development Report 2004.

**Gender Related Development Index (GDI) rank of  
Central Asian Republics**

Table a5

Republic	Gender Related Development Index(GDI) rank
Kazakhstan	63
Kyrgyzstan	-
Tajikistan	93
Turkmenistan	67
Uzbekistan	85

**Source: Human Development Report 2004, p.220**

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<sup>26</sup> Gender Related Development Index (GDI) is a composite index measuring average achievement in the three basic dimensions captured in the human development index-a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living-adjusted to account for inequalities between men and women.

These data can be compared with the GDI rank of Kuwait (42), Turkey (70), Saudi Arabia (72), Islamic Republic of Iran (82), and Egypt (99). Here one should not forget the progress made during the Soviet period in the area of women empowerment and Soviet legacy of women's betterment in the fields of education, health care etc. while assessing their position in Gender Related Development Index (GDI).

The rises of the pre soviet religious and cultural values, authoritarian politics, and increase in widespread poverty are some important factors that have affected the women adversely. It is reported that female slavery (sharoo), prostitution, trafficking in women, rapes, gang rapes, murders, bride kidnapping, sexual and domestic violence and extreme poverty have increased in the region.

Due to elimination of daycare services the women are required to look after their children and homes. The number of women in education and workforce has dropped. While assessing women's position in Central Asia it is important to describe the disempowering factors like cultural revival, authoritarian politics and fragile economic situation in the region after the independence.

### **Cultural Revival**

Cultural revival in Central Asia means revival of pre Soviet Cultural values which is in fact Islamic cultural values. The influence of Islam on women was very dominant on women before Soviet rule in Central Asia. In rural areas the religious influence on women was even stronger. During the Soviet period also women in Central Asia remained under religious influence at large. This was observed that the root cause for the relatively large influence of Islam on Central Asian women was the fact that fewer of them were employed outside the

home. Thus a large percentage of those not employed in production were mothers with many children.<sup>27</sup>

Gorbachev's dual policy of *perestroika* and *glasnost* facilitated the process of religious and cultural awakening in Central Asia. Gorbachev had not anticipated this outcome because during the first years of his leadership, *perestroika* and *glasnost* encompassed neither Central Asia nor Islam.<sup>28</sup>

A potential changeover was proposed in Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* and this is reflected in his speech to 28<sup>th</sup> CPSU:

*The Stalinist model of socialism is being replaced by a civil society of free people. The political system is being radically transformed; genuine democracy is being established, with free elections, a multiparty system and human rights; and real people's power is being revived.*<sup>29</sup>

( A new course, "The Ethics and Psychology of Family Life" was introduced into the school curriculum and shown on television which was designed to reinforce the traditional role of women in the family.<sup>30</sup> Teachers were urged to "train and train again, girls to be girls and boys to be boys."<sup>31</sup> )

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<sup>27</sup> A Tursuscov, "Atheism and Culture", *Pravda*, January 16, 1987, pp.2-3, *CDSP*, vol. XXXIX, no. 3, 1987, p. 8

<sup>28</sup> Ghoncheh Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia: a potent force or a misconception?" *Central Asian Survey* (Oxford), p. 66

<sup>29</sup> Text of Gorbachev's keynote speech to 28<sup>th</sup> CPSU, *Pravda*, July 3, 1990, pp. 2-4, *CDSP*, vol. XLII, no. 27, 1990, p. 2

<sup>30</sup> Jen Pickard, "Women in the Soviet Union" available online:  
<[www.newyouth.com/archives/theory/women/women\\_in\\_soviet\\_union.asp](http://www.newyouth.com/archives/theory/women/women_in_soviet_union.asp)>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid



Out of the resultants of the process *perestroika* and *glasnost* religious fundamentalism was one of the most important phenomena in the region. When Central Asia entered into the mainstream of national awakening to join the process of separatism under *perestroika*, Islam became the centre of attraction and a real rallying point for cultural and political unity.<sup>32</sup> So after the independence of the region, national awakening and religious and cultural revival came hand in hand with each other.

As already discussed earlier, the pre Soviet culture in the region was opposed to women's development. Cultural stereotyping of women has eroded the women's status in every sphere of life. Increase in religious marriages instead of civil marriages, has led to the early marriages of women. According to a report, 'A girl with an elementary- school education, calm and quiet' was sold for the highest price so to speak.<sup>33</sup> The decrease in women's political participation is also due to early marriages and subsequent involvement of women in domestic affairs. Women are expected to be 'good wives' and made to bear domestic violence.<sup>34</sup>

Women's participation in education and profession has declined in the region due to strengthening of traditional stereotyping of women. Thus cultural revivalism in Central Asia which indeed is a revival of religion has undermined the role of women in public life by restricting women to homely affairs only and has discouraged women's participation in politics.

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<sup>32</sup> P.L. Dash, "Ethno-Nationalism in Uzbekistan", in K. Warikoo (ed); *Central Asia: Emerging New Order* (New Delhi, 1995), pp. 101-102

<sup>33</sup> K Berdyev, "There are Customs and Then There are Customs", *Pravda*, October 12, 1985, p.3, *CDSF*, vol. XXXVII, no. 41, 1985, p. 26

<sup>34</sup> The case of Uzbekistan has been discussed in Human Rights watch world report. See *Human Rights watch world report 2002*, p. 546

The Central Asian leaders who came to power in the region were erstwhile Communist leaders who after the independence choose to strengthen their position by showing their distance from the former Communist ideology of the Soviet system. In fact 'they have to develop Islamic credential in order to reinforce their legitimacy, but on the other, they have no intention of allowing Islamic activism to challenge their own position.<sup>35</sup>

This is observed that the Central Asian leadership is opposed to rise of fundamentalism or religious extremism on the one hand and on the other hand the leaders have allowed culture and religion to make national identities in Central Asia. The exercise of nation building in Central Asia which uses cultural revivalism and is supported by the leaders of the region has put negative impact on women.

### **Authoritarian Politics**

Authoritarian nature of political systems in Central Asia has also been hurdle to political empowerment of women in the region as it is undemocratic in nature. Opposition leaders, political parties and political activists get harassed by the authoritarian regimes of the region and there are arrest reports of many political leaders and activists who try to raise their voice against the undemocratic moves of the authoritarian regimes.

In subsequent years, Kazakh president Nazarbayev orchestrated a series of political maneuvers that eliminated all possible challenge to his power and Kazakh political parties have limited role to play as most decisions are taken by the president and his entourage.<sup>36</sup> The electoral system in Kazakhstan contains

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<sup>35</sup> Ghoncheh Tazmini, n. 3, p.70

<sup>36</sup> R. Hrair Dekmejian and Hovann H. Simonian, *Troubled Waters: The Geopolitics of the Caspian Region* ( London, 2001), pp. 52-55

no incentives for political parties to involve women in politics or assign them to public positions.<sup>37</sup>

Kyrgyzstan was termed as most democratic countries among the Central Asian republics and former president of the republic Akayev had once called his republic an 'island of democracy in Central Asia'. In view of the 2000 presidential election in Kyrgyzstan, it was opinion of the Western countries and media that Kyrgyzstan was heading down the road to authoritarianism, following the trail blazed by other Central Asian leaders.<sup>38</sup> In Kyrgyzstan there is one women's party, the Democratic party- which was registered in 1996, and this is the only party which has included gender related issues in its agenda.<sup>39</sup>

In Tajikistan, none of the current six political parties include issues of gender policy in their programs, apart from the party "Justice and Development" (whose activities were phased down by the Supreme Court on the eve of the parliamentary elections on the basis of allegations).<sup>40</sup>

All political parties active in Uzbekistan mention problem or issues related to improving the status of women, maternity and childhood, and upholding family life in their platform, yet these are vaguely formulated and are not emphasized by the parties themselves.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> "Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women's Right in Central And South-Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States", *IHF report*, available online: <[www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1464](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1464)>

<sup>38</sup> Yury Chernogayev, Asel Otorbayeva, "Election in Kyrgyzstan", *Kommersant*, March 16, 2000, p.11, *CDPSP*, vol.52, no. 11(2000), p. 19

<sup>39</sup> "Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women's Right in Central And South-Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States", *IHF report*, available online: <[www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1465](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1465)>

<sup>40</sup> "Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women's Right in Central And South-Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States", *IHF report*, available online: <[www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1475](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1475)>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

There have been many reports of widespread violation of human rights in Central Asia by the Central Asian leaders to consolidate their hegemony over power in the region. These include arrest of opposition leaders, banning of political parties and press censorship. So the Authoritarian regimes hinder the vibrant growth of democracy in the region by not allowing opposition political alternatives to become active and participate freely in Central Asian politics.

## **Market Economy**

From the early nineties onwards the market economy has got strong footholds in many parts of the world. Also the fall of communism in the USSR and East European countries gave easy way to the market economy in various part of the world. To compete in global markets and attract capital, the new model enjoined governments to maintain low inflation, reduce production costs, cut corporate taxes and labor costs, limit subsidies, privatize land public corporations, and liberalize markets and these changes whatever their economic merits, have had profound social and political implications.<sup>42</sup>

After the independence the shift from centrally planned and command economy to market economy has presented another challenge to the republic in the economic affairs. Adoption of the market economy with acceptance of the concepts of liberalization and privatization in the economy was complete an opposite economic model to that of the Soviet model. All the republics were exposed to severe economic crisis after the collapse of the Soviet system.

In the new economic atmosphere certainly women are to face severe problems of employment and other economic benefits. Nevertheless the

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<sup>42</sup> Richard Sandbrook & David Romano, "Globalisation, Extremism and Violence in poor countries" *Third World Quarterly* (Carfax Publishing), vol. 25, no. 6, 2004, p. 1010

market economy gives opportunity to everyone but many reports suggest that women are less preferred than men in the region as they are considered less skillful and capable than men. Staff and labor cut process initiated after adoption of the new economic policy has also affected women badly.

### **Assessment of the women empowerment**

Undoubtedly the Soviet rule had provided opportunities to Central Asian women to make progress by allowing them to study and work outside home in the region but there were certain limitations due to which women's problems could not get proper handling and women's position in the region remained gender biased.

Too much importance was given to economic well being of women and their emancipation was considered mainly freeing of labor force. The other components- turning household work into social labor, fostering new relations between the sexes, creating a new division of labor in the household- were neglected which inevitably led to a double burden for women, and actually intensified patriarchal relations.<sup>43</sup> It was observed that 'wives and mothers were excessively burdened with domestic matters' which was 'the main source of the continuing real inequality of women in everyday life and in the family'.<sup>44</sup>

The impact of increase in poverty and unemployment in the new economic atmosphere has had very serious impact on women's economic status in the region. Under the influence of the economic crisis, women had to take active part and become breadwinners for the family.

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<sup>43</sup> N. Zakharova, A Posadskaya and N Rimashevskaya, "How We are Resolving the Women's Question", *Kommunist*, no. 4, March, 1989, pp. 56-65, *CDSF*, vol. XLI, no. 19, 1989, p. 23

<sup>44</sup> E Novikova, "Towards Burden", *Pravda*, June 9, 1984, p.3, *CDSF*, vol. XXXVI, no.23, 1984, p. 5

In the new economic atmosphere women are first to lose their jobs as compared to men. Poverty and unemployment direct women to engage in prostitution and illegal human and drug trafficking for earnings so that they could look after themselves and their families. At this place it is important to note that the Soviet time day care services which provided freedom from domestic works to women has been abandoned by the republics. Thus enhanced responsibility and unavoidable burden on women has eroded the women's participation in politics.

Keeping in mind changes in Central Asia, it appears that women's political participation in the region is facing problems. The Soviet system did support women's political empowerment in the region and women could make progress during that period. The Soviet policies were not consistent in promoting women but current situation gives even more reasons for concern.<sup>45</sup>

Now, after the independence of the Central Asian republics women's political empowerment has taken a new start and this becomes evident keeping in mind changes and their impact on women in the region

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<sup>45</sup> Dr. Dono Abdurazakova, n. 25

## Chapter 3

### Political empowerment of women in Central Asia

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and subsequent independence of the Central Asian republics brought many potential changes in the region of which adoption of liberal democracy and market economy are quite important as these changes put direct impact on the peoples' life. New Constitutions have been adopted and many new legal provisions have been made to carry out democratic governance in the region.

Needless to say that the new Constitutional and legal arrangements are in accordance with and to fulfill the demand of liberal democratic governance in Central Asia but this is also true that traditional social values in the region does not fit suitably with the modern Western concept like democracy and representative government which have been accepted by the Central Asian republics after the Soviet collapse. In fact there was never a democratic form of governance in the region.

In this era of Information and Communication, the domestic affair of any country is very easily and quickly exposed to the international community. So this is also an important reason why the Central Asian governments give care and attention to maintain proper governance in their respective countries as they intend to avoid the international criticism. This is also true for the Central Asian Republics where the state machineries keenly try not to be criticized in international forums for their domestic affairs. Also all the republics are member of the UN and of various other international organizations and agencies and this keeps the republics' domestic (humanitarian) affair under constant international scrutiny.

As political shape of the region is concerned, the republics have shown their desire to follow international norms of human rights with political, economic, social and cultural freedom.

Women's political empowerment very much depends on their socio-economic status. In the case of Central Asian republics, it is important to observe women's social and economic conditions while evaluating their political empowerment. Women are socially and economically marginalized in the republics. Women have been given Constitutional and legal protection for their social, economic and political rights in the Central Asian republics. The Central Asian governments have signed the important international Covenants which emphasize on social, cultural, economical and political rights.

All the Central Asian republics have signed the **CCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)** and **CESCR (International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights)** which are related to political, social and economic upliftment of women. As signatories to these Covenants, the republics are obliged to respect and protect these rights. The following table informs about the year of signing of **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** by the Central Asian republics.

#### International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Table b1

Republic	Year of signing of the <b>CCPR</b>
Kazakhstan	02 December 2003
Kyrgyzstan	07 October 1994
Tajikistan	04 April 1999
Turkmenistan	01 August 1997
Uzbekistan	28 December 1995

Source: <[www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a\\_ccpr.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ccpr.htm)>



The next table gives information about the year of signing of **International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights** by the Central Asian republics.

**International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights**

**Table b2**

Republic	Year of signing of the <b>CECR</b>
Kazakhstan	02 December 2000
Kyrgyzstan	07 January 1995
Tajikistan	04 April 1999
Turkmenistan	01 August 1997
Uzbekistan	28 December 1995

Source: < [www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a\\_ceschr.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ceschr.htm) >

Article 3 of the **CCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)**<sup>1</sup> says: ‘The State Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth in the present Covenant’.

It has been said in Article 3 of the **CESCR (International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights)**<sup>2</sup> that ‘the State Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the present Covenant’.

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entry into force 23 March 1976, in accordance with Article 49. This Covenant is monitored by the **Human Rights Committee**, details is available on <[www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a\\_ccpr.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ccpr.htm)>

<sup>2</sup> Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entry into force 3 January 1976, in accordance with Article 27. This Covenant is monitored by the **Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**, details available on <[www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a\\_ceschr.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ceschr.htm)>

Barring Kazakhstan all the republics have ratified these Conventions.<sup>3</sup>

Article 1 of the **Convention on the Political Rights of Women**<sup>4</sup> says: ‘Women shall be entitled to vote in all elections on equal terms with men, without any discrimination’. Article 2 of the Convention says: ‘Women shall be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination’. And also Article 3 of the Convention says: ‘Women shall be entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public function, established by national law, on equal terms with men without any discrimination’. The following table gives the details about position of the republic vis-à-vis the Convention on the Political Rights of Women.

**Convention on the Political Rights of Women**

**Table b3**

Republic	Convention on the Political Rights of Women
Kazakhstan	-----
Kyrgyzstan	Acceded / 10 Feb. 1997
Tajikistan	Acceded / 7 June 1999
Turkmenistan	-----
Uzbekistan	Acceded / 29 Sep. 1997

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Reports and Documents” No. 35, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva, 1999, p.19

All the republics of the region remained behind the ‘iron curtain’ of the Soviet rule as part of the former Soviet Union. After disintegration the Soviet Union all the Central Asian republics have established liberal democratic form of political system. Undoubtedly the new form of governance in the region is quiet new to the people of the republics and there are many who find democracy and

<sup>3</sup> see *Human Development Report 2004* (UNDP, 2004), p.239

<sup>4</sup> opened for signature and ratification by General Assembly resolution 640(VII) of 20 December 1952, entry into force 7 July 1954, in accordance with Article VI, online available: <[www.unhchr.ch/html/man3/b/22.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/man3/b/22.htm)>

Central Asian culture conflicting to each other as many views in liberal democracy oppose cultural views and values in the region, for example, women are given equal status in democracy whereas culture in Central Asia follows patriarchal norms.

The concern to empower women in Central Asia is also reflected by the corresponding state policies as incorporated in the respective constitution and other laws of the republics. Central Asian Republics, after the independence, adopted presidential form of democracy and new Constitutions were adopted in the region. The new Constitution of the Central Asian republics addresses the concept of gender equality and all the republics have supported the concept of gender equality by their respective state policies. The Constitutional provisions for women's right and gender equality recognize women's equal status in the Central Asian society.

## **Constitutional provisions**

the Kazakh Constitution says that '(1) Everyone is equal before the law and courts; (2) No one can be subjected to any discrimination on the grounds of social background, office and property status, sex, race, nationality, language, relation to religion, convictions. place of residence, or any other circumstances'.<sup>5</sup>

The Constitution of the Kyrgyz republic recognizes and guarantees 'the basic rights and liberties of human beings' and ensures everyone's equality before the law and in court.<sup>6</sup> The Kyrgyz Constitution says that no one may be discriminated against.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Article 14 of the Kazakh Constitution.

<sup>6</sup> "Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women's Right in Central And South-Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States", *IHF report*, available online: <[www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1465](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1465)>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

The Tajik Constitution says that ‘men and women have the same rights’<sup>8</sup>, and ‘polygamy is prohibited’<sup>9</sup>.

The Turkmen Constitution says that ‘men and women in Turkmenistan have equal civil-rights.’<sup>10</sup>

The Uzbek Constitution says that ‘women and men have equal rights’<sup>11</sup>, ‘women’s organizations are form of social association’<sup>12</sup>, and ‘all citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan have the same rights and freedoms and are equal before the law regardless of difference in gender’.<sup>13</sup>

## **Legal Provisions**

In the new Criminal code of Kazakhstan (1 January 1998) the violation of any citizen’s right to equality (Article 141), including gender based discrimination, shall be punished either by detention for up to three months or imprisonment for up to one year, or a maximum fine of 100 monthly salaries.<sup>14</sup> There are no restrictions in the country’s legislation for women’s access to civil service and electoral legislation ensures equal opportunities for all citizens to be

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<sup>8</sup> Article 17 of the Tajik Constitution.

<sup>9</sup> Article 33 of the Tajik Constitution.

<sup>10</sup> Article 18 of the Turkmen Constitution.

<sup>11</sup> Article 46 of the Constitution of Uzbekistan.

<sup>12</sup> Article 56 of the Constitution of Uzbekistan.

<sup>13</sup> Article 18 of the Constitution of Uzbekistan.

<sup>14</sup> “ Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women’s Right in Central And South-Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States”, *IHF report*, available online: [www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1464](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1464)

nominated for presidential and parliamentary elections as well as for *Maslikhats* and local administrative bodies.<sup>15</sup>

Kyrgyzstan adopted a new Election code in April 1999. Article 3 of the new Election code of Kyrgyzstan states that citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic who have reached the age of 18 have the right to vote and, after the reaching the age provided for by the Constitution, may be elected to Parliament and local government.<sup>16</sup> According to Article 22 of the Family Code, women and men have equal rights; they are equal when they set up a family and they do not need official permission from their families in order to marry.<sup>17</sup>

Article 7 of the labor code of Tajikistan forbids any differentiation, including on the basis of sex, in terms of admissibility of preference, refusal in hiring proceeded.<sup>18</sup> Article 4 of the 1999 Law on Elections to the *Madjilisi Oli* (Parliament) of the Republic of Tajikistan stipulates that “All citizens upon reaching the 18 have the right to vote regardless of social or property status, political views, race and nationality, sex, language, education religion or type and nature of businesses”<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> see *The National Action plan on Improving the Status of Women in the Republic of Kazakhstan*, available online <[www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/country/national/natplans.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/country/national/natplans.htm)>

<sup>16</sup> “ Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women’s Right in Central And South-Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States”, *IHF report*, available online: <[www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1465](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1465)>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> “ Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women’s Right in Central And South-Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States”, *IHF report*, available online: <[www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1475](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1475)>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

A law that came into force in Turkmenistan in 1998 drastically cut maternity leave allowances and child benefit.<sup>20</sup> This has led to the degradation in the economic status of women and thereby rises in economic hardships among women in Turkmenistan. This has certainly brought challenge and problem to women empowerment and so political empowerment of women in Turkmenistan is discouraged.

Apart from the Constitution, 'the right of women to vote and to be elected on equal conditions with men, without discrimination of any kind, to all institution established by law for which public elections are required is also set out under article 1 and 2 of the law on Presidential election, article 3 of the law on election to the Oliy Majlis, article 3 of the law on elections to regional, district and town and city Soviets of People's Deputies and article 2 of the law on referenda in the Republic of Uzbekistan',<sup>21</sup>.

The Labor Code of Uzbekistan (1995) does not permit discrimination on the grounds of age, sex, ethnic origin, language, social background, marital status, or number of children.<sup>22</sup> The government of Uzbekistan passed a new Family code (1998) to bring the existing family law into compliance with the **CEDAW** and the **Beijing Platform for Action** which Uzbekistan is a signatory to.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women's Right in Central And South-Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States", *IHF report*, available online: <[www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1477](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1477)>

<sup>21</sup> Consideration of report submitted by state parties under article 18 of the CEDAW, CEDAW/C/UZB/1, 2 February 2000, p. 32

<sup>22</sup> Wendy Mee, *Women in the Republic of Uzbekistan* (Manila, 2001), p.8

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

In Uzbekistan, equality of rights of men and women is ensured not only by the Main Law, but also by Labor, Civil, Family, Criminal, Civil Procedural, Criminal Procedural and other codes.<sup>24</sup>

Uzbekistan's Family Code includes explicit guarantees of women's equality before the law, in article 2 on the "Equality of men and women in family relations" and in article 3, on "Citizens equality in family relations".<sup>25</sup> According to a 1995 presidential decree, the chairwoman of the national Women's Committee serves as deputy prime minister, and regional representatives of the committee at the provincial, district and municipal level function as deputies to the appointed governors of these territories, the *Khokim*.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, legally women have been given equal status with men in Central Asia in many walks of the life but in practice implementation of the legal rights are overshadowed by the various factors like stereotyping of women, male dominance in power positions and women's absence from it, increase in domestic burden on women, the rise of poverty among women, etc.

## **The CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action**

**The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women** or the **CEDAW** is also known as 'The Treaty for the Rights of Women'. This convention was adopted by the UN on December 18, 1979. Article 7 of the **CEDAW** says:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and

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<sup>24</sup> *Report on the status of women in Uzbekistan*. (ADB, 1999), p.29

<sup>25</sup> "Sacrificing women to save the family: Domestic violence in Uzbekistan", *Human Rights Watch Report*, vol. 13, no. 4 (D), July 2001, p.9

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*

public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

(a) to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all public elected bodies;

(b) to participate in the formulation of government policy and implementation and thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

(c) To participate in non- governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.<sup>27</sup>

The CEDAW calls for governments to remove all discriminatory barriers against women in all fields, in particular the political, social, economic and cultural fields.

The **Fourth World Conference on Women** was held in Beijing (China) from 4-15 September 1995. The mission statement of the **FWCW** says that '**The Beijing Platform for Action** is an agenda for women's empowerment'. The declaration very rightly says that 'women may be discouraged from seeking political office by discriminatory attitudes and practices, family and child care responsibilities, and the high cost of seeking and holding public office'.<sup>28</sup> This fact is very much applied to the Central Asian Republics where increased in poverty and consolidation of cultural stereotyping of women has put more

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<sup>27</sup> *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, available online: <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>>

<sup>28</sup> *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, United Nations (A/ CONF. 177/20 ). available online: <[www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/off/a--20.en](http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/off/a--20.en)>



domestic burden on women. Also enhanced corruption in politics and administration has put barrier to women's political empowerment in the region.

The **Platform for Action** says that 'in addressing the inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision- making at all levels, Governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively.'<sup>29</sup> It further says that 'women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved'<sup>30</sup>.

In the Beijing declaration 12 critical areas of concern have been identified and for each critical area of concern, the problem is diagnosed and strategic objectives are proposed with concrete actions to be taken by various actors in order to achieve those objectives.

The two **Strategic objectives**<sup>31</sup> are as follow

1. Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision- making.
2. Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> "Women in Power and Decision-making", *FWCW Platform for Action*, available online: <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/decision.htm>>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

The **CEDAW** and the **Beijing Platform for action** signed by the various states give way to women empowerment measures to be developed the country level. At the millennium **UN** summit, the head of the states adopted the **UN** millennium declaration. In this declaration it has been resolved by the leaders: 'to strive for the full protection and promotion in all our countries of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all' and 'to work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in our countries'.<sup>32</sup>

All the republics have signed and ratified the **CEDAW**. The years in which the **CEDAW** was ratified by the individual Central Asian republic has been given in the table b4 given below.

**Year of ratification of the CEDAW**

**Table b4**

Republic	Year of ratification by the CARs
Tajikistan	1993
Kyrgyzstan	1997
Kazakhstan	1998
Uzbekistan	1995
Turkmenistan	1997

**Source: Human Development Report 2004**

To meet the requirements of the **CEDAW**, National Action Plan has been adopted by countries that have signed and ratified the **CEDAW**.

<sup>32</sup> Resolution adopted by the General assembly, *United Nations Millennium Declaration* (A/RES/55/2), September 18, 2000, p. 7

## **National Action Plan**

The government of Kazakhstan has approved the **National Action plan on Improving the Status of Women in the Republic of Kazakhstan** (Resolution no. 999) in July 1999<sup>33</sup>. The two **Goals and Objectives** of the Action plan and **Concrete Activities** for those are as follow:

1. Ensuring women's equal access to power, creating enabling environment for their advancement to decision-making level. For this **Concrete Activities** are: to adopt efficient measures on women's capacity building for their participation on a merit- based basis in competitions for vacant positions in civil service, to conduct research on the quota for women participation in representative, executive bodies and in political parties and to prepare an annual report to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on women's political participation in all branches of power at the republican and local levels.

2. To strengthen enabling environment for women's political, economic and social participation and **Concrete Activities** for this include: To conduct mass training on women's political participation on how to run for office, public speaking, etc, to promote the establishment of headquarters, parliamentary caucuses and public associations to support women-candidates and to organize publishing of books, brochures, manuals for woman politicians, as well as reference materials about women leaders.

Kyrgyzstan's national plan of action for 1997-2000 which is the **Ayalzat national program** was adopted to carry out the decisions of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The **Ayalzat national program** says about 'women's participation in decision-making at the political,

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<sup>33</sup> for 'National Action plan on Improving the Status of Women in the Republic of Kazakhstan' see "National Plan of Action and Strategies", online available: <[www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/country/national/natplans.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/country/national/natplans.htm)>

legislative and executive levels<sup>34</sup>. For achieving women's equal participation in decision making process, the Ayalzat national program has long term and short term objectives. The long term objectives are:

- (1) Establishing a gender-balanced pool of candidates to fill administrative and diplomatic posts and
- (2) Achieving the target endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council of having 30 per cent of women in positions at decision-making levels.

The short time objectives are:

- (1) Developing and implementing programmes to overcome traditional attitudes and negative stereotypes, and training women to take part in political life and electoral campaigns,
- (2) Establishing a political leadership school for women and
- (3) Taking women's interests into account in the granting of credit, land, and so on.

The Tajik government has developed a National Plan of Action for the advancement of women based on the recommendation of the delegation which attended the UN Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing in October 1995. **The National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women, 1998-2005** of Tajikistan was adopted on September 10, 1998.<sup>35</sup> Under the Theme Women's Right the **Goals** are to provide and protect women's right and to ensure equal

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<sup>34</sup> for Kyrgyzstan's national plan of action 'Ayalzat national program' see "National Plan of Action and Strategies", online available: [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/country/national/natplans.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/country/national/natplans.htm)

<sup>35</sup> Jane Falkingham, *Women and Gender Relations in Tajikistan* (Manila, 2000), pp. 113-114

rights and opportunities for women in all areas of political and economic life. For the first goal, the **Implementation Mechanism** includes:

- (1) Ratification of international laws concerning women's right,
- (2) Revision of existing legislation to reflect resolutions of international conventions,
- (3) Review of legislation on gender,
- (4) Improvement of the mechanism to control legal application to avoid violation of women's rights,
- (5) Compilation of information and analytical materials on women's conditions in the labor market.<sup>36</sup>

The **Implementation Mechanism** for the second goal is to complete implementation of the laws of the Republic of Tajikistan.<sup>37</sup>

In order to create conditions for women to leadership positions and preparing women to perform as government officials the **National Action Platform for the Improvement of Women's Status in Uzbekistan** finds it necessary to

- (1) Amend the Government Service Act and regulations within ministries and agencies so that they encourage greater gender equity;

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

(2) Amend Legislative acts to protect women's rights and interests in line with international conventions and agreements;

(3) Compile and implement a program on women's preparation for assuming responsibilities within government management structures and ensure equal access to decision-making position at all levels of administration;

(4) With the help of government institutions, NGOs and mass media, enhance legal awareness among women; and

(5) Legislate equal opportunities and introduce a quota system to enable women to be elected to the Parliament of Uzbekistan and other government bodies.<sup>38</sup>

It has been observed that there has been lack of sincerity and effectiveness in the process of the implementation of the Nation Action Plans in the region. In fact, in most of the CIS countries, National Action Plans to follow up Beijing commitments have been placed in the lowest rank of national priorities and these Action Plans were often not supported by sufficient human and financial resources.<sup>39</sup>

## **NGO and grassroots movements**

The break-up of the Soviet Union and creation of new States, encouraged and assisted by the international community to introduce democratic values in their respective political system, helped underline the important role

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<sup>38</sup> Wendy Mee, n. 22, pp. 60-61

<sup>39</sup> "Achievements and Challenges in Linking the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, Convention on the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Millennium Development Goals", *United Nations Development Fund for Women for CIS report*, Baku, Azerbaijan, 7-11 Feb. 2005, p.2

played by active non- governmental organization in the democratization process as potential intermediaries between the population and decision-makers.<sup>40</sup> In the new political and economic atmosphere in Central Asian region the importance and necessity of NGOs and grassroots movements has becomes evident.

The grassroots organizations generally try to decentralize decision making and introduce what activist in the Civil Right Movement and New Left groups of the 1960s in the United States and elsewhere called “participatory democracy.”<sup>41</sup> The slogan of the Third World Conference on Women, held in 1985 in Nairobi, Kenya, “to think globally but organize locally,” might be called the motto of such human rights-oriented grassroots movements of women.<sup>42</sup> In the Kyrgyz republic where the NGO movement is stronger as compared to the other republics, it has been found that the number of people involved in the activities of NGO is much higher than in the system of public administration.<sup>43</sup>

Article 7 of the CEDAW says about women’s right to participate in non- governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country. So women’s participation in NGOs has been accepted as an important tool for women empowerment. As far as political empowerment of women is concerned, NGOs provide opportunity to develop and strengthen leadership among women by engaging women in decision making processes.

In Central Asia, Uzbekistan was the first country to adopt a new law related to NGOs in April 1999. Now NGOs are working in every Central Asian republic. An estimated number of NGOs in the region is given below:

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<sup>40</sup> “NGOs in the Caucasus and Central Asia: Development and Co- operation with the OSCE”, *OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, October 2000*, Background Paper 2000/1, p.8

<sup>41</sup> Temma Kaplan, “Women Rights as Human Rights: Women as Agents of Social Change”, in Marjorie Agosin(ed) *Women, Gender and Human Rights: A Global Perspective* (Jaipur. 2003) p. 195

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> *Kyrgyzstan National Human development Report 2000*. (Bishkek), p.56

Estimated no. of NGOs in the region

Table b5

Republic	Estimated number of NGO	Women NGOs	% of women NGOs
Kazakhstan	814	71	8.7
Kyrgyzstan	2456	236	9.6
Tajikistan	592	45	7.6
Turkmenistan	152	31	20.3
Uzbekistan	549	41	7.4

Source: <www.cango.net>

Nevertheless NGOs' functioning in the region is in its initial phase, NGOs in the region have done appreciable job. Especially in raising human rights issues and violence against women has been addressed by the NGOs.

Women have found an alternative voice in the political life of Central Asia through their activity in NGOs. NGOs also raise women issues proactively and demand immediate attention and care, for example 'NGOs in Uzbekistan attempted to provide hotlines and services to victims of domestic violence, but their resources were limited, and their services rarely reached beyond urban areas'<sup>44</sup>.

Active participation of women in Kyrgyzstan contributes significantly to their growing role in the country's life.<sup>45</sup> Most NGOs in the region are founded and run by women. The NGO movement is strong in Uzbekistan. Barring Turkmenistan, the number of NGOs in Central Asia has increased rapidly.

<sup>44</sup> *Human Rights Watch World Report 2002*, (Helsinki), p.546

<sup>45</sup> *The Kyrgyz Republic Millennium Development Goals Report*, ( Bishkek, 2003), p.22



International organizations and NGOs are actively working for the betterment of the women of the region. International organizations working in Central Asia have played a major role in the development of NGOs in the region. The development of NGOs in the region shows another dimension of women's leadership and political participation.

## Chapter 4

### Assessing political empowerment

Needless to say that the political culture that has emerged after the Soviet disintegration is not in accordance with the democratic process in Central Asia. Even though, it would be too early to say that the political system in the region is not heading towards democracy as practice of Western liberal democracy is a newer in the region as compared to other parts of the world. At all fronts viz. political, social, economical etc. there have been changes and it has put potential impact on the process of democratization in the region. With the changes in the region, it has become important to ensure women justice, rights and good governance as women are the main victims of the transition in the region.

After the independence the Central Asian Republics took some steps to incorporate women into politics but these remained mainly at policy level and realization of these steps could not place in an effective manner. The impact of the transition period on women has been severe and keeping this in mind, measures were taken to strengthen women's position in the society e.g. women Committee has been set up and is given power to formulate and carry out women development programs. The Governments have adopted Plan of Action for women empowerment. By the presidential decree years 1996 and 1999 were made "Year of Women" in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan respectively to show commitment to women well being. Though this may appear cosmetic gesture, this does have importance in the field of women empowerment.

According to the international gender standard women should comprise at least 30% of the staff in every organization or institution. In Central Asia, women are not represented according to the international standard in various

power and policy making organizations and institutions. Women are discriminated in appointment and election to different posts.

Parliamentary democracy depends on periodic election of representatives of the people and there have been two elections in the region after the independence till 2000. There are reports of manipulation in the elections and the process of democratization in Central Asia is still very much hindered by many drawbacks in the election process in the region. Media is also seemed not concerned with women issues and no emphatic approach of media is observed for the purpose raising issue of women empowerment. Theoretically media is free but practically media is under the influence of administration.

Political parties usually do not criticize government and its policies and if they do so they are banned or dismantled by the authoritarian regimes of the region. The role of political parties in Central Asian politics is less expressive due to which political parties in the region hardly campaign for any popular demand. Similar is the case of media in the region. There are many drawbacks in the rules relating political parties and mass media due to which they do not ensure free and fair elections.

## **Election and Political Parties**

Political parties play very crucial role in promoting equal participation in politics. They not only put demand coming from the citizens before government but also develop leadership and political cadres among people. This is a fact that women are less represented in political parties at all levels of hierarchy. The **Beijing Platform for Action** reports that 'the traditional working patterns of many political parties and government structures continue to be barriers to women's participation in public life'<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> see *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, United Nations (A/ CONF. 177/20 ), available online:  
<[www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/off/a--20.en](http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/off/a--20.en)>

The electorate system in Central Asia is theoretically based on multi-party system. Political parties in the Central Asian republics are male dominated and so for this reason gender issues are not priority for the political parties. Women are not preferred as candidates in elections and this fact is observed when political parties field their candidates who are predominantly males.

Within political parties also women are not given importance and appropriate representation. There is absence of quota and incentive for providing women better opportunity to participate in politics. This is worth noting that quotas and incentives belong to the special measures recognized internationally for women's proper participation in politics.

The December 1995 elections of Kazakhstan were the first since the adoption of a new parliamentary structure in an August referendum. The 1994 elections had been declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of Kazakhstan as they were not based on the Constitutional principle of one person one vote.<sup>2</sup>

During the October 1999 Parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan several parties fielded men-only candidates' lists.<sup>3</sup> In the election, it was observed that 'organizational structure of political parties in Kazakhstan is not significant' and 'the absence of effective political party structures is a key factor in the political environment in Kazakhstan'.<sup>4</sup> In the course of active involvement of

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<sup>2</sup> "Nations in Transit", available online:  
<[www.unpan.org/autoretrieve/content.asp?content=country%20profiles](http://www.unpan.org/autoretrieve/content.asp?content=country%20profiles)>

<sup>3</sup> "Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women's Right in Central And South- Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States", *IHF report*, available online:  
<[www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1464](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1464)>

<sup>4</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan, Parliamentary Election-10 & 24 October 1999, *OSCE/ODIHR Final Report*, p.8

women's group in the 1999 electoral process, the first women's party was born—the Political Alliance of Women's Organization<sup>5</sup>.

Women are significantly underrepresented in political parties of Kazakhstan. The demand for quota system for the incorporation of women in politics has not got welcome response in the republic:

Second parliamentary elections in independent Kyrgyzstan took place on February 2000. Fifteen Political parties qualified for this election. In those elections 'opposition parties and candidates faced a number of obstacles during the campaign, which resulted in unequal conditions between contestants'<sup>6</sup>. Statistics on share of women in political parties is not available.

The **Democratic Party of Women**<sup>7</sup> which took part in the elections in Kyrgyzstan is considered pro-presidential political party. Only this party includes gender related issues. The Democratic Party is a women's party which was registered in 1996 and after 2000 elections the party got 2 seats in the parliament.

Six political parties and a number of independent candidates took part in the 27 February 2000 election to the Parliament (*Majilisi Namoyandagon*) of the republic of Tajikistan. Women did not hold any leading position in these political parties and apart from the party "Justice and Development" none of the political parties included policy of gender equality.

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<sup>5</sup> "Global Database of Quotas for Women", available online:  
<[www.quotaproject.org/displayCountry.cfm?CountryCode=KZ](http://www.quotaproject.org/displayCountry.cfm?CountryCode=KZ)>

<sup>6</sup> Kyrgyz Republic Parliamentary Election 20 February 2000, Statements of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, *OSCE Election Observation Mission*, p.1

<sup>7</sup> The Women's Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (Demokraticheskaya zhenshchin Kyrgyzstan) is an all women's party; see Online:  
<[www.quotaproject.org/displayCountry.cfm?CountryCode=KG](http://www.quotaproject.org/displayCountry.cfm?CountryCode=KG)>

Sufficient data about the Turkmen elections are not available. Foreign observers were not permitted to monitor December 1994 legislative elections of Turkmenistan. In April 1999, Niyazov said he would not permit the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe or international observers to monitor parliamentary elections scheduled for December 1999.<sup>8</sup>

Political parties in Uzbekistan show tendency of supporting administration and thus not acting as instrument to raise public voice. This has certainly brought challenges for raising women issues in political arena. An OSCE/ODIHR (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/ Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) report about election of deputies to the **Oliy Majlis** (December 1999) says 'All five registered political parties supported the state administration and offered no alternative to voters'.<sup>9</sup> Also women's presence in political parties that have contested election is very low. It has been estimated that on average, there are 1.4 women per party faction.<sup>10</sup>

## **Women in Parliament**

The Percentage of women in the parliament is one of the most important indicators to assess political empowerment of women in a country. To promote gender equality and empower women, this indicator has been recognized in the Millennium Development Goals. In Sweden, after September 1998 elections the number of women in the parliament was as high as 42.7% i.e. 149 out of the 349 seats were held by the women. On the other hand there were countries like UAE and Kuwait where the percentage of women in the national parliament was zero.

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<sup>8</sup> "Nations in Transit", n. 2

<sup>9</sup> Republic of Uzbekistan, Parliamentary Election-5 & 19 December 1999, *OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Assessment Mission, Final Report*, p.8

<sup>10</sup> Wendy Mee, *Women in the Republic of Uzbekistan* (Manila, 2001), p.13

The quota system during the Soviet rule ensured appreciable number of women in the Soviets at different stages. After disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian republics abolished the quota system in the region and this led to potential decline in the number of women in the respective parliaments. Barring some exceptions, there is no quota system in the independent republics to ensure women's political empowerment. A summary of the status of the various quotas in the region is given in the following table.

The republics do not give women Constitutional Quota for national parliament. Election law quota or regulation in the region is provided only in Uzbekistan.<sup>11</sup> Political party quota for electoral candidate is given only in the Kyrgyz Republic.<sup>12</sup>

All the Central Asian republics have adopted presidential form of democracy. The Supreme Soviet of the Soviet period has been supplanted by the parliament in the republics. The Turkmen and Uzbek parliaments are of single-chamber whereas the Kazakh, Kyrgyz and the Tajik parliaments are of two-chambers. After independence first legislative elections took place in the republics in mid nineties. The results of the first elections showed women's marginalized political status in Central Asian republics.

Barring Turkmenistan women were substantially less elected in the republics after the first legislative elections. In Turkmenistan the percentage of women elected was 18%. The following table gives percentage of women in parliaments of the Central Asian republics.

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<sup>11</sup> see "Global Database of Quotas for Women", online available: <[www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org)>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

**% of Women in Parliamentary Seats**

**Table e1**

Republic	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Kazakhstan	13	13	13	10	10
Kyrgyzstan	1	1	1	1	2
Tajikistan	3	3	3	3	15
Turkmenistan	18	18	18	26	26
Uzbekistan	6	6	6	7	7

Source: Inter Parliamentary Union, [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

The number of women in the Kazakh Parliament decreased from 11.3% in 1995 to 9.6% in 1996.<sup>13</sup> The Kazakh parliament has had 10.4% women in *Mazhilis* (lower house) and 12.8% women in *Senate* (upper house) after October 1999 and September 1999 elections respectively.

In the Kyrgyz parliament, women are 2.3% in *El Okuldor Palatasy* (lower house) and 8.8% in *Myizam Chygaru Palatasy* (upper house) after the February 2000 elections.

In Tajikistan, after the March 2000 elections, women are 12.1% in *Majlisi Milliy* (lower house) and after the February 2000 elections, 15% in *Majlisi Manoyandogan* (upper house).

In Turkmenistan, after the December 1999 elections, women are 26% in *Mejlis*. The percentage of women in the parliament in Turkmenistan has been always high as compared to the percentage of women in other republics' parliaments.

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<sup>13</sup> "Nations in Transit", n. 2



Women accounted for 35% of number in the Supreme Soviet of Uzbek SSR. By contrast they accounted for only 7% of parliamentarians in the *Oily Majlis* in 2000.

Table c2 gives the number of women in the Central Asian republics' parliament after the first elections after the independence.

Women in Parliament, 1995

Table c2

Republic	Elections	Total Elected	No. of Women
Kazakhstan	December 1995	67	9
Kyrgyzstan	February 1995	70	1
Tajikistan	February 1995	181	5
Turkmenistan	December 1994	50	9
Uzbekistan	December 1994	250	15

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, <[www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)>

In the republics the second legislative elections after the independence took place in mid nineties. Women were 13.4% in the Kazakh parliament before October 1999 elections and after the elections women constituted 10.4% in the parliament. In Kyrgyzstan, increase in the number of women in parliament was from 1.4% to 2.3% and in the Tajik parliament this increase was from 2.8% to 15%. In the Turkmen assembly the percentage of women increased from 18% to 26%. Similar increase in the Uzbek parliament occurred from 6% to 7.2%. This analysis shows that, barring Tajikistan and somehow Turkmenistan, women's percentage has been constant in the national parliaments in Central Asia.

The data given in the following table gives the number of women elected to the parliaments after the second parliamentary elections. These data

have been graphically represented in Figure 1. Seats held by men women are represented in percentage.

### Women in Parliament, 2000

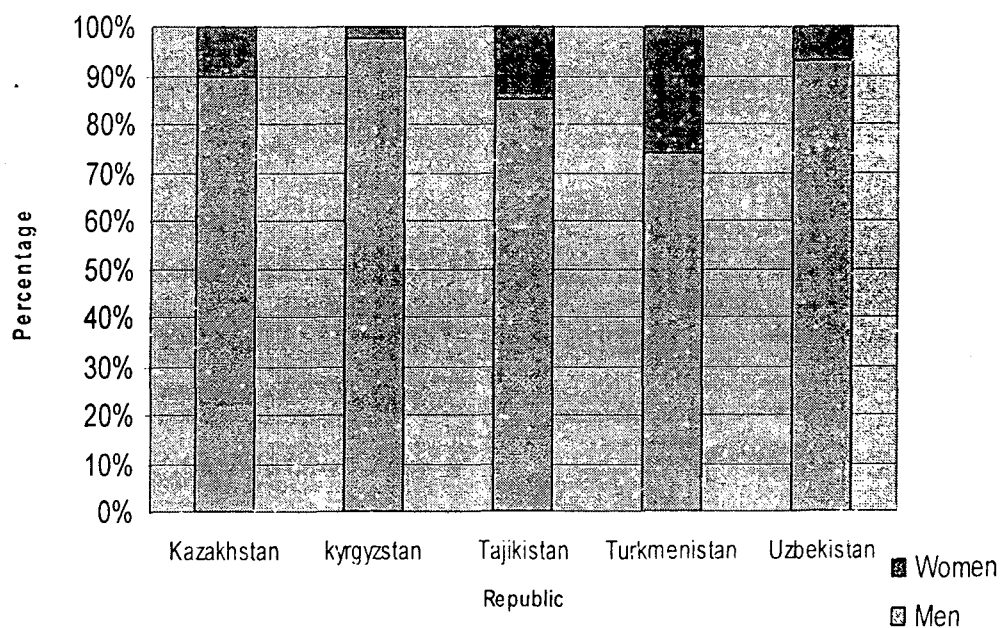
Table c3

Republic	Elections	Total Elected	No. of Women
Kazakhstan	October 1999	77	8
Kyrgyzstan	February 2000	43	1
Tajikistan	February 2000	60	9
Turkmenistan	December 1999	50	13
Uzbekistan	December 1999	250	18

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, <www.ipu.org>

Figure 1

### Gender composition in Central Asian Parliaments, 2000



Data given by the Inter-Parliamentary Union is shown in the following table to make comparison of the percentage of women in the parliament in selected countries.

In the initial years of independence, the neighboring Muslim countries of the republics tried to make influence in the region projecting themselves as model the republics should. Keeping in mind this fact, it would be interesting to compare women's positions in these Muslim countries with that in the Central Asian Republics.

**Women in neighboring countries' parliament, 2000**

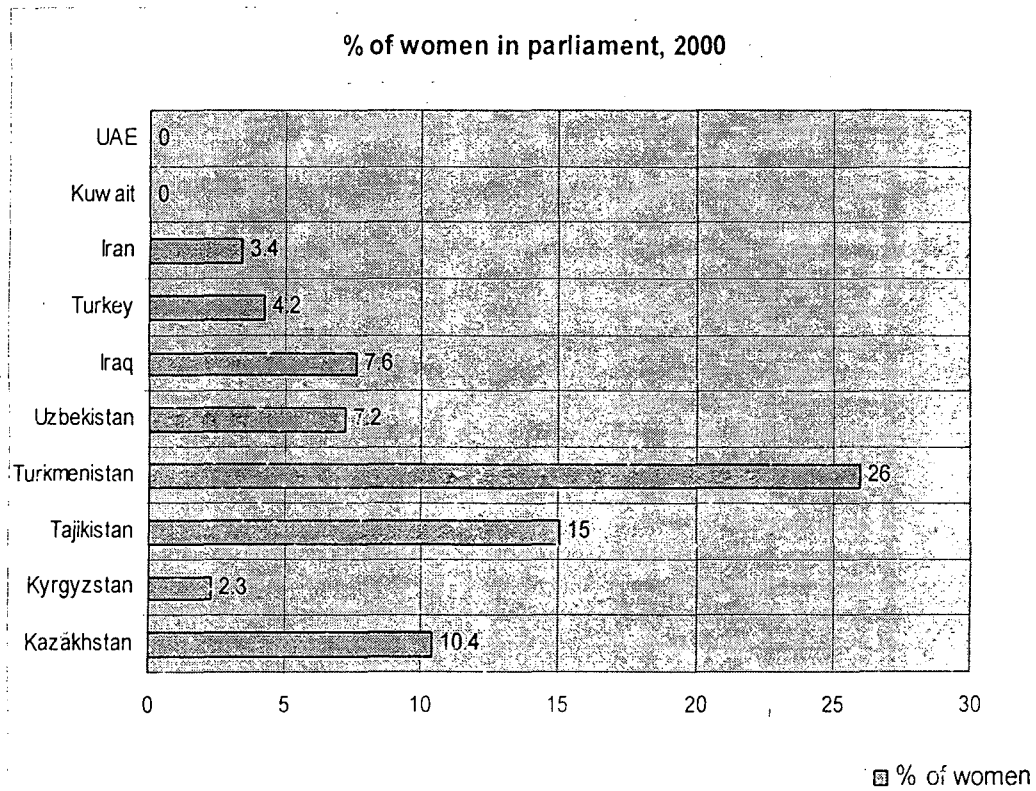
**Table c4**

Country	Seats	No. of women	Percentage of women
Kazakhstan	77	8	10.4
Kyrgyzstan	43	1	2.3
Tajikistan	60	9	15
Turkmenistan	50	13	26
Uzbekistan	250	18	7.2
Iraq	250	19	7.6
Turkey	550	23	4.2
Islamic republic of Iran	290	10	3.4
Kuwait	65	0	0
United Arab Emirates	40	0	0

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, <[www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)>

Above data has been graphically represented in figure 2. The Graph shows women's position better in the case of the Central Asian Republics as compared with the other countries. It would be right to say that this betterment is attributed to the Soviet legacy.

Figure 2



## Women in Government

For establishing an egalitarian society and ensuring a vibrant and successful democracy, women should be allocated appropriate posts in government. Also women should not be undermined while allocating the posts and so their appointment should not be limited to low profile post only. As compared to the Soviet time, women's presence in government in all Central Asian Republics has significantly declined. It would be very interesting to quote H. E. Mrs. Aitkul B. Samakova, Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan who reported women's under representation of Kazakh women in politics:

*Women are underrepresented in all levels of decision-making. For example, in the Parliament, out of 116 members, only 13 (11 %) are women. Among ministers, I*

*am the only one female. In the state bodies of executive power, among top decision-makers, there are only 7-8% of women. There are few women in the decision-making positions even in traditionally female spheres of public life.<sup>14</sup>*

Women's presence in the executive body of the government in Central Asia is not satisfactory. The portfolios of women in the executive in August 1999 are given in table c4. This table certainly indicates under representation of women in the executive.

**Women in government**

**Table c5**

Republic	Portfolio held by women
Kazakhstan	1. Minister of Labor/ Employment* 2. Minister of Social Affairs*
Kyrgyzstan	1. Minister of Justice 2. Deputy Minister of Social Affairs
Tajikistan	1. Deputy Prime Minister 2. Minister of Education
Turkmenistan	1. Deputy Prime Minister* 2. Minister of Education 3. Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry
Uzbekistan	1. Deputy Prime Minister

\* Complex portfolio which encompasses more than one ministry.

Source: Reports and Documents" No. 35, Inter- Parliamentary Union, Geneva, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Statement By H. E. Mrs. Aitkul B. Samakova, Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Chairperson of the National Commission on Family and Women's Affair under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, to the 23<sup>rd</sup> special session of the UNGA "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" New York, June 8, 2000.

Data available for the years 1995 and 2000 show that the women held less than 10% of the total ministerial posts in the Central Asian Republics. The following table gives the percentage of ministerial posts held by women.

Percentage of women in government

Table c6

Republic	Ministerial post held by women (in percentage)	
	1995	2000
Kazakhstan	6	5
Kyrgyzstan	0	4
Tajikistan	3	6
Turkmenistan	3	4
Uzbekistan	3	3

Source: <[www.genderstats/worldbank.org](http://www.genderstats/worldbank.org)>

## Media

The media, as a pillar of democracy can play very important and crucial role in promoting women's right. The Plan of Action adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) says that the media can help to instil among the public the idea that women's participation in political life is an essential part of democracy.<sup>15</sup> FWCW Platform for Action very rightly states:

*Women have demonstrated considerable leadership in community and informal organizations, as well as in public office. However, socialization and negative stereotyping of women and men, including stereotyping through the media, reinforces the tendency for political decision-making to remain the domain of men.<sup>16</sup>*

<sup>15</sup> Participation of women in public life, Series "Reports and Documents" No. 35, Inter-Parliamentary Union- Geneva 1999 ,p.61

<sup>16</sup> "Women in Power and Decision-making", *FWCW Platform for Action*, available online: <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/dccision.htm>>

Media as powerful tool can be very successfully utilized to develop public attention towards women issues. The role of media in raising women issues would depend on two major things, firstly free, independent and impartial media and secondly presence of women in media.

There are about 50% women working in the Kazakh media as journalists but many of them they do not hold important posts. The president of the largest Kazakhstan television and radio company *Khabar* is a woman.<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that the woman is Dariga Nazarbayeb, president's daughter and she along with her husband owns a vast majority of media.<sup>18</sup>

In the main state newspaper of Kyrgyzstan women are comprised of 44.2%. Women are 40% leaders in departments and 34.1% journalists in the Kyrgyz republic.<sup>19</sup>

In the Tajik media, almost half of the total number of journalists is of women.<sup>20</sup> There are no women directors or owners in the mass media.<sup>21</sup>

There are many women in the Turkmen republic who work in media and most of them work as journalist. In Turkmenistan, 90% of journalists in Russian- language media are women and in Turkmen- language media, women

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<sup>17</sup> Human Rights in the OSCE Region: The Balkans, the Caucasus, Europe, Central Asia and North America Report 2002, *IHF report*, 2002-05-28, available online: [www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=458](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=458)

<sup>18</sup> *IHF report*, n. 3

<sup>19</sup> Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women's Right in Central And South- Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States, *IHF report*, available online: [www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1465](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1465)

<sup>20</sup> Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women's Right in Central And South- Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States, *IHF report*, available online: [www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1475](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1475)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*

journalists are comprise of 10%.<sup>22</sup> In the state news agency senior editor is a woman. The editors of the women's magazine *Gurbansoltan-eje* and the magazine Financial Report are women.

Very few women in Uzbekistan are having senior positions in the mass media and about 3% of all editors are women.<sup>23</sup>

So, women's presence in the mass media is largely at journalist and reporter level. Women in Central Asia are having position as editor, director or owner in limited numbers.

### **Other Areas**

In Kazakhstan, there are 5 women deputy oblast akims, 2 women are ambassadors. The Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan is led by a woman. In various sectors of economy 74500 women hold leadership positions.<sup>24</sup>

The percentage of women administrators and managers in the Kyrgyz republic is given in the following table:

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<sup>22</sup> "Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women's Right in Central And South-Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States", *IHF report*, available online: <[www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1477](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1477)>

<sup>23</sup> "Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women's Right in Central And South-Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States", *IHF report*, available online: <[www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1479](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1479)>

<sup>24</sup> "The National Action plan on Improving the Status of Women in the Republic of Kazakhstan", available online: <[www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/country/national/natplans.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/country/national/natplans.htm)>



**Women administrators and managers in Kyrgyzstan**

**Table c7**

Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
% of women	35	36	36	35	32	36	32	39

**Source: National Human Development Report, Kyrgyz Republic, 2001**

The number of women working at the lowest levels of management is relatively high, up to 70% with only very few representative at the highest levels of power.<sup>25</sup>

According to an estimate, in Turkmenistan, in 1998, 39% of total people engaged in administrative or government bodies were women.<sup>26</sup> More than 60 women were occupying posts as Head of office within the Parliament, government, judicial bodies, diplomatic service, commercial enterprises, healthcare, social security and media.<sup>27</sup>

The percentage of women in labor force in Uzbekistan as percentage of the total labor force is given in the following table:

**Percentage of women in workforce in Uzbekistan**

**Table c8**

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
% of women	42.6	42.7	42.5	43.1	44.2

**Source: National Human Development Report, Uzbekistan, 2000**

<sup>25</sup> *Kyrgyzstan Human Development Report 2000* (Bishkek), p. 41

<sup>26</sup> see *Development of Gender Statistics in Turkmenistan, Conference on European Statisticians*, Statistical Commission and Economic Commission for Europe, Working Paper No. 16.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*

In the banking sector women constitute 30-40 % of the operating staff, although most banks are managed by men.<sup>28</sup> One sector where women are well represented and constitute almost 50 % is the judiciary, including the Supreme Court.<sup>29</sup>

## **Women and NGO movement**

In a short period of time the work and success of NGOs in the region is noticeable in the area of women empowerment. Many leading, managerial and decision making posts of NGOs are held by women. Activities of NGOs run by women include many areas of concern viz. in the field of women rights, violence against women, women's socio- economic condition, education, health, etc.

On 24-26 June 2000 on Issik-kul lake in Kyrgyzstan the meeting of the representatives of women's Non Governmental Organizations from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Byelorussia, Moldova, Russia, Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan took place with technical and financial support of **UNIFEM (UN Women's Development Fund)**. The assembly's main goals included; at national level:

- To promote women's interest in political, economic and social life of the society;
- To strengthen the potential of women's movement;
- To develop cooperation of women's NGOs and government structures.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Women 2000- An Investigation into the Status of Women's Right in Central And South- Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States, *IHF report*, available online: [www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=1477](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=1477)

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> "The assembly of CIS women's NGOs", available online: [www.cango.net.kg/archive/october-26-00/a0001.asp](http://www.cango.net.kg/archive/october-26-00/a0001.asp)

The number of NGOs in Kazakhstan has grown from 500 in the early 1990s to more than 700 in 1996-97. Amounting to over 100, women's NGOs are very active in the area of political advancement of women and they have registered their first political party "Political Alliance of Women's Organizations".<sup>31</sup>

Women groups in Kyrgyz republic are more active than the women groups in other Central Asian Republics. Out of the 2456 NGOs in the republic of Kyrgyzstan, 236 NGOs are women NGOs (see Chapter 3 table b5).

In Tajikistan the law on Non Governmental Organization requires all NGOs to register with the Ministry of justice. According to data released by Ministry of Justice of Tajikistan there are about 600 registered NGOs (although not all were active) of which 60 are women's organization, accounting for 10 percent of the total number.<sup>32</sup>

Conditions for working of NGO sector are poor in Turkmenistan. It has been found that the Turkmen government has not encouraged emergence of NGOs in the country. To define status, rights and responsibilities of NGOs, it has been found necessary to adopt the law on NGOs in the Turkmen republic.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, the Central Asian Republics have supported gender equality by their respective state policies, political and economic transition in Central Asia has adversely affected women in the region. The decline in the women's participation in politics after the independence is due to several factors

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<sup>31</sup> Statement By H. E. Mrs. Aitkul B. Samakova, n. 14

<sup>32</sup> Jane Falkingham, *Women and Gender Relations in Tajikistan* (Manila, 2000) p.28

<sup>33</sup> *Development of Gender Statistics in Turkmenistan*, n. 26

which include abolition of the quota system, stereotype image of women, economic and educational backwardness of women etc.

Now, once again the quota system is being discussed to ensure women's political empowerment. The Coalition "Women's Electoral Initiative" was established in Kazakhstan in autumn 1998, which includes 20 women's organizations.<sup>34</sup> In August 1999, the Coalition sent a memorandum to all registered political parties calling for them to include at least 5% of women candidates in their party lists for the parliamentary elections.<sup>35</sup>

In Tajikistan, women nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), parliamentarians and representatives of political parties hold a meeting in early 2000 and came out with a recommendation that a quota system should be reintroduced to ensure at least some formal representation of women in state structures.<sup>36</sup>

In Uzbekistan the position of Deputy Prime Minister of Women's Affairs has been established by a presidential decree for monitoring and enhancing women's participation in public life.<sup>37</sup> The Women's committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan which was established in 1991 has helped to direct and sustain the Government's commitment to the status of women over the past decade.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "Global Database of Quotas for Women", available online:  
<[www.quotaproject.org/displayCountry.cfm?CountryCode=KZ](http://www.quotaproject.org/displayCountry.cfm?CountryCode=KZ)>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Jane Falkingham, n. 32, p.27

<sup>37</sup> Mahbuba Ergasheva, Uzbekistan, Expert Group Meeting on Regional Implementation and Monitoring of the Beijing Platform of Action and the Outcome of the third Special Session of the General Assembly relating to Women 2002, 2-4 December 2002, Bangkok, p.2

<sup>38</sup> Wendy Mee, *Women in the Republic of Uzbekistan* (Manila, 2001) p.10.

## **Chapter: 5**

### **Conclusion**

In Central Asian Republics, historically women have not been involved in politics in effective manner so as to propagate women's issues and to put their demands at policy making and implementing institutions. During the pre-Soviet period women were not enjoying their political rights. But after the Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviet government provided an opportunity to Central Asian women to liberate themselves from the oppressive traditional and cultural dominance and to make progress without any gender based discrimination. Women got political rights during the Soviet period for the first time and made progress in every field of life. But after the independence of the Central Asian Republics in 1991, the status of women in the republics is observed to be has deteriorated. A decline of the status of women has occurred and they are marginalized in all sphere of life.

This is true that democracy and culture in Central Asia do not fit with each other. The Central Asian republics have chosen to follow liberal democracy in political sphere and one can very easily observe the rift between democratic and cultural values. Since democracy is comparatively newer in the region, one can argue that it is too early to speculate appropriate women empowerment in politics in the region. But what is astonishing is that deterioration in the status of women which was established by the former Soviet rule. The very success of the democracy lies in the inclusion of various groups of the society. Inclusion of women in politics is necessary for the success of democracy in the region.

Political empowerment in the independent Central Asia republics is needed because women are underrepresented in various political and decision-making institutions in the region. Women are less represented in political institutions than the internationally accepted standard for women's political empowerment. Women's presence in policy making and implementing institutions is urgent for gender empowerment in various areas; locally, nationally and internationally. Political empowerment of women is necessary for strengthening women's rights which in turn attains human development.

There are many obstacles to women's political empowerment in the Central Asian republics. The rise of traditional cultural values based on patriarchal norms, restriction of women mainly to homely affairs, women's dependence on men, stereotyped image of women etc. are appear to be main causes behind the less participation of women in politics in Central Asia.

The impact of traditional cultural values on the status of women has been severe and quite detrimental to women empowerment in Central Asia. During the Soviet period, women used to get the state support against traditional and patriarchal practices. But after the independence, revival of Islam is taking place. The traditional people of the region are trying to reinforce the traditional values in the society. These traditional values and customs are against the empowerment of the women in the region. The conservative and fundamentalist forces have also got stronghold in the region. These forces are also barrier to the empowerment of women in Central Asia.

In the independent Central Asia, early marriages, polygamy etc are once again becoming stronger. Women loose their freedom due to these factors. Also women do not have property rights i.e. right to inherit property. In the absence of economic security, a woman can not think of participating in political activities. Thus, early marriages, polygamy and dependence of women on men for their economic well being put negative impact on women's political participation.

During the Soviet period there were day care centres but after independence of Central Asian republics these day care centres were closed down by the government of the respective republics. Today, women have no benefit of day care services provided by the government to look after family works. In absence of day care services women are bound to serve children and family and look after domestic works. Apart from bearing the family burden, women are also serving as earning members of the family due to increase in poverty level among households in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This dual responsibility does not permit women to participate in political activities.

Women are bound to earn for family and at the same time they are facing the problem of losing jobs due to the problems of transitional economy of the Republics. Considering women as less skillful and less capable, they are not given job easily. In the private sector women are less preferred than men and those women who are already employed are under the threat of job cuts. There is wage difference between those of men and women for similar work. Thus, due to economic problems women are forced to engage in prostitution, drug trafficking etc. To engage women in political activities, women's economic status should be satisfactory. Unless and until economic problems of women is solved it is not suitable to think of women's political empowerment.

At societal level, women face stereotyped attitude of the society towards them. Women's participation in public life is not welcomed and is discouraged. This is one of the reasons why women rights have not become an issue in mainstream politics of the region. Political parties in the region do not care to raise gender related demands and thus do not make them an issue. Women are absent from the key positions in political parties and organizations. In mainstream political life women issues need to be incorporated and addressed properly.

During the Soviet period there was a system which provided women an opportunity for their political empowerment. But after 1991 the quota

system was abolished in the region. In Central Asia, political empowerment of women can be enhanced by various quotas; introducing quota system at political party level, quota in government bodies and institutions, giving women the incentives to participate in political activities, elevating the standard of women's educational and professional status and so on. It should be noted that demand for quota is becoming stronger in the region.

Incorporation of women in different policy making at various levels is also necessary for the women's political empowerment. Discrimination in appointing women to various decision making entities should be stopped. For this it is very important for women to get rid of stereotyped image of them. The governments need to spread knowledge about women's right in the region for the acceptance of the rights. Also a socio-cultural movement is needed for establishing egalitarian society without any gender discrimination in Central Asia. The governments and civil societies should cooperate to achieve political empowerment of the women.

NGOs in the region have played significant role in empowering women politically. On the one hand they provide social, economic, educational, legal and health related awareness and support and on the other hand they develop women leadership and cadres with political awareness. In the days to come, it is hoped that NGO would have more effective involvement in women empowerment in the region.

The Central Asian republics have allowed NGO and civil society to work for the society in general and women in particular. International organizations working in Central Asia have played a major role in the development of NGOs in the region. Women have found an alternative voice in the political life of Central Asia through their activity in NGOs. Most NGOs in the region are founded and run by women. The NGO movement is strong in Uzbekistan. Barring Turkmenistan, the number of NGOs in Central Asia has increased rapidly. It is required to make rules and legislation related to NGOs in a



manner so that the work of NGOs could be more comprehensive and focused for women's development

The Soviet rule could not establish realistic gender equality in the region. After the disintegration of Soviet Union gender difference in the region has once again become prevalent. The failure of the Soviet rule in establishing pragmatic gender equality lies in the fact that it gave too much importance to economic status of women and women's position in society, family were neglected. Independent Central Asian Republics have to learn lesson from this fact and they should act to empower women in a comprehensive manner.

Political empowerment of women in Central Asia is not an issue of exclusive nature. It depends on various factors, viz. women's status in the family and society, there socio-economic conditions, there educational status, there ability to take decisions, etc. Rules of the republics should strengthen women's status in various fields and provide women incentives and opportunity for their political empowerment in Central Asia.

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