

**Role of Women in Soviet Politics :
A Study of the Changes Under Perestroika (1985—90)**

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

USHA K. B.

**CENTRE FOR SOVIET & EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067, INDIA**

1991



जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI - 110067

Centre for Soviet & East European Studies
School of International Studies

18. 07. 1991

DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled
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Changes under Perestroika (1985-'90)" which is
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of the degree of Master of Philosophy is her
own work and may be placed before the
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not been submitted for the award of any other
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Prof. Zafar Imam

Chairman

Dr. Tulsiram

Supervisor

P r e f a c e

The status of women is a pointer to understand any society. Women's political participation is a deciding factor that in turn determines the status of women in society. The proposed study offers an analysis of the role of women in politics in the Soviet Union. Soviet Union is the first country which took constitutional measures for gender equality. But the limitations of actual gains in this field are more clear in the sphere of politics than elsewhere, especially in the higher echelons of power.

The emancipation of women was one of the important aims of the Great October Revolution of 1917. After the revolution the Soviet authorities had taken many steps in this regard. But despite all efforts the women's question remains basically unresolved.

The official ideology of the Soviet Union (Marxism-Leninism) is strictly against gender discrimination and women's oppression. According to Marxist theory, the social progress can be precisely measured by the social status

of their fair sex. Because of this official state ideology being favourable to women and the constitutional measures adopted by the USSR for the emancipation of women, the present study, which looks into the political participation of Soviet women becomes all the more important when compared to a study of women's representation in other political systems. Especially, Lenin, Krushchev and Gorbachev took special initiatives to bring women into politics of power. Under Perestroika programme of Gorbachev the women's question has got an important place and Gorbachev is particularly interested in solving all the problems of women - familial, economic, social, political etc. He is also interested in bringing women into big politics and he started taking steps in this regard.

In this study many important questions have to be answered. Is it possible for Gorbachev to draw more women into positions of political power? Does the election of women to the top party positions of authority or government power effect real change? Could the programmes of Gorbachev change the political position of women? What is today the relevance of Lenin's idea that without the complete equality of women there can be no genuine socialism?

The first chapter introduces the Marxist approach on women's question. It discusses mainly the ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin and other Marxists. This Marxist approach on women's question becomes an important element here, because in Soviet Union every policy is based on the official ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

After presenting a general Marxist perception on the women's question in the first chapter, the position of women in Soviet politics will be discussed in a historical manner in the second chapter. It would also search for the reasons behind the poor representation of women in big politics. Women's position in the family and their exclusive role of household work are also looked into.

The third chapter discusses the emergence of Perestroika and its ideology regarding the role of women in politics. It also discusses what Gorbachev mentioned in the 27th Congress regarding women and the significance of his reference to women's organisations. The fourth chapter deals in detail the impact of Perestroika on the political positions of women in order to gauge the status of Soviet women. The changes until the 28th Congress of the CPSU are analysed in this chapter.

The conclusion provides a comparative search into the pre-Perestroika and Perestroika periods. It also sums up an appreciation of Gorbachev's steps to alleviate the problems of Soviet women. The conclusion also assesses the failure of women's political participation in Soviet Union in producing enough women leaders.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Tuladram, for his encouragement, able guidance and the friendly co-operation that greatly helped me in completing my dissertation.

I am also grateful to Dr. Devender Kaushik who encouraged me by giving some necessary materials and suggestions for the study. I express my indebtedness to the whole faculty under Prof. Zafar Imam for its leniency in granting me the medical leave without which I could not have technically continued my research.

I am grateful to Sugathan, Thangavelu, P.D. Singh, Bala, Chandra Bhan and Shaji for the help I got in many ways for the completion of this dissertation.

16. 07. 1991

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Chapter One

Marxist Approach to Women's Question

Chapter One

Marxist Approach to Women's Question

The oppression of the female sex is an age old and ongoing phenomenon. The pre-revolutionary Russia was not an exception to this kind of oppression. After the October Revolution, conscious and continuous efforts were made in Soviet Union to alleviate the problems of women. Still there were ups and downs in this process. And nor can we say today that the Soviet women form an emancipated section. Our study is necessitated by this fact. In the present study we are taking up only one of the problem areas, i.e., the political participation of Soviet women. A discussion of the Marxist approach to the women's question is a must while studying the Soviet women's political participation because Marxism-Leninism remained the official ideology of the Soviet Union.

While looking for a general Marxist approach to women's question, we find that differences exist among the theoreticians and practitioners alike on the issues of the origin, nature and solution of women's oppression. Rather than developing a detailed discussion of the differences, we would try here to discuss and integrate the views of

Marx, Engels, Lenin and others in order to come to a general description of the Marxist approach to the women's question. In this pursuit, first, an espousal of what Marx, Engels and Lenin have to say on women's question will be given, based mainly on their works; and secondly, it will be argued that the bourgeois feminist view that Marxism does not give importance to the factor of patriarchy in understanding the women's oppression is unfounded.

We find that the main thrust of the Marxian¹ theory regarding the origin of the oppression of women is that the subjugation of women developed only after the economic surplus began to emerge, private property was accumulated and classes and state began to originate. Frederick Engels could evolve a Marxist theoretical framework to the origin of women's oppression with the publication of his well-known book The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State in 1884.

Marx and Engels were very much concerned about the oppression of women in the then society. Impressed by the writings of Charles Fourier, once Marx quoted him:

The transformation of a historical era can always be determined by the condition of the progress of women toward liberty, because it is here, in the

1. The terms 'Marxian' and 'Marxist' are used synonymously throughout this chapter.

relation of women to men, the weak to the strong, that the victory of human nature over brutality appears most evident. The degree of the female emancipation is the natural measure of general emancipation.

The humiliation of female sex is an essential characteristic of civilisation as well as barbarism, only with the difference that civilised order raises every vice which barbarism practices in a simple manner to a formation of existence that is composite, ambiguous, deceptive and hypocritical. Nobody is hit more profoundly than the man by being condemned to keep women in slavery.²

While agreeing with Fourier, Marx, and Engels had to say in addition that the existence of capitalist system formed the prime cause of the inequality and oppression of women. They identified and analysed the social and economic bases of inequality and oppression of women. They linked this with the class division and class oppression in society in general. In a capitalist society, where class division is existing, the process of production and reproduction are interrelated. So the nature of the unit of

2. Alfred G. Meyer, "Marxism and Women's Movement", Dorothy Atkinson, et al., eds., Women in Russia (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978), p. 86. Also see, Jonathan Beecher and Richard Bienvenu, eds., The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier (Boston, 1971), pp. 195-6.

reproduction in this society, i.e., the family, gets transformed according to the changes in the process of production and the relations of production. Thus, here, the interrelation between the class struggle and the struggle against the oppression of women was properly identified.

In Capital, Marx made occasional references to the miseries of women workers. In their analysis of capitalism Marx and Engels argued that where capitalism exists men will retain their privileges over women. Even where political liberty exists, since workers are in conditions of poverty and wage slavery, women will be in a position of double slavery. Marx wrote in Capital about the plight of women, that "in the industries girls and women work through the night with the males".³ And "these females employed with men hardly distinguished from them in their dress, and begrimed with dirt and smoke, are exposed to the deterioration of character arising from on the loss of self-respect, which can hardly fail to follow from their unfeminine occupation."⁴

3. Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 246.

4. Ibid.

Marx and Engels see family as the first place of the oppression of women. In the Manifesto of the Communist Party, they wrote:

The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production. He hears that the instrument of production are to be exploited in common, and naturally can come to no other conclusion than that the lot of being common to all will likewise fall to the women.

He has not even a suspicion that the real point aimed at is to do away with the status of women as were instrument of production.⁵

Marx acknowledges that the distribution of labour and its products is unequal within the family because the man has control over the woman and children, and can do what he wishes with their labour and reproductive power. Regarding the imposition of labour role Marx wrote in German Ideology:

The division of labour offers us the first example for the fact that man's own act becomes an alien power opposed to him as long as man remains in natural society, that is, as long as a split exists between the particular and the common interest, and as long as the activity is not voluntarily, but naturally divided. For as soon as labour

5. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), p. 70.

is distributed, each person has a particular, exclusive area of activity which is imposed on him and from which he cannot escape.⁶

Women were also forced to bear the brunt of such an alien imposition of role. They got the household jobs of cooking, child rearing and housekeeping at home, and, the so-called feminine jobs outdoor. Engels traced the roots of this unequal division of labour in his classic work on the origin of family, private property and the state.⁷

Based on the arguments made by Morgan, Engels formulated this theory which traces the origin of women's oppression in the economic system. Morgan argued that in early human societies women were not oppressed and these societies were classless in which men and women contributed equally to the social production. Engels traced the historical roots of women's inequality to the patriarchal character of the family. According to him, through patriarchal family,

6. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The German Ideology", in Lloyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, eds., Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), p. 424.

7. Engels has based his book The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State on the assertions of the American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan. Engels could find that Morgan's book Ancient Society contained his and Marx's materialist view of history and analysis of primitive society. Thus Engels took up a serious detailed study picking up the points left by Marx by way of a synopsis and critical notes on Morgan's book.

men could perpetuate their dominance over women by way of their possession of private property.

Engels argued that before private property came into being the wealth was owned by the gens which were matriarchal. According to this gentile system, the inheritance⁸ of property was through the mother's own blood relatives, and children could not inherit from father as he was from another gen. Even in the case of the death of father, the property was not inherited by his own children. When the wealth increased, it gave a dominant position to men than women in the family, and this inspired man to overthrow the traditional order in favour of his children. This took place through a simple decree. On this Engels wrote:

The overthrow of the mother right was the world historic defeat of the female sex. The man seized the reins in the house also, the woman was degraded, enthralled; the slave of man's lust, a mere instrument of breeding children. This lowered the position of women.⁹

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8. Ownership is considered different from inheritance, as the former is private and not collective.
 9. Frederick Engels, "The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State", Selected Works, Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 233.

Engels assumed that labour had always been divided on the basis of sex and the household labour was always imposed on women. He also argued that female slavery and exploitation appears with the monogamous family. He wrote:

The modern individual family is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of women; and modern society is a mass composed solely of individual families as its molecules. Today, in the great majority of cases, the man has to be the earner, the breadwinner of the family, at least among the propertied classes, and this gives him a dominating position which requires no special legal privileges. In the family, he represents the bourgeois; the wife represents proletariat .¹⁰

Engels supported steps for equal rights for female before law and equal participation in politics. In a letter to the wife of a friend, Engels wrote that under socialism these would be guaranteed: "when we come to power, women shall not only vote but also run for office and make speeches."¹¹

As capitalist system is profit motivated system, exploitation is also an inalienable part of the system. In the capitalist system, the work of the housewife is not

10. Ibid. p. 247.

11. Alfred G. Meyer, N. 2 , p. 93.

recognised and it is unpaid. In the capitalist system, the employer pays to the worker from his pocket, but the labour need not adequately be remunerated. Thus the profit of the capitalists increased with the exploitation of male and female workers. In a capitalist system, the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, makes women to work for low pay to meet their primary requirements.

The writings of Marx and Engels give emphasis to economic arrangements as decisive to the emancipation of women. Marx and Engels insisted that economic independence alone could provide the basis for full gender equality. They argued that the only way to liberate women is to involve them in the labour. According to them, liberating women from the handicraft production of household is a precondition for emancipation of women.¹²

Marx said that after revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat would be established. He argued that in the

12. Temma Kaplan, "A Marxist Analysis of Women and Capitalism", Jane S. Jaquette, ed., Women in Politics (London : John Wiley & Sons, 1974), p. 264.

society where dictatorship of the proletariat exists everyone will be treated equally irrespective of race, sex, etc. Engels also predicted that when the private ownership of the means of production ends and public ownership comes into existence, there would be complete equality of both the genders. He wrote in a letter to Gertrud Guillaume Schack in Beuthen that "real equality of women and men can become a fact only when the exploitation of either by capital has been abolished and private housework has been transformed into a public industry."¹³

Clara Zetkin argued that without a revolutionary struggle of the proletariat there could be no real and total emancipation of women; without the participation of women, capitalism could not be smashed and there could not emerge a new socialist order.¹⁴

13. Engels to Gertrud Guillaume Schack in Beuthen about July 5, 1885, Selected Correspondence (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p. 364.

14. Clara Zetkin, Movements for the Emancipation of Women, Vijay K. Chhabra and Madhu Sahni, trans., Vijay Singh, ed., (Delhi: Kamgar Prakashan, 1988), p. 33.

Marx and Engels argued that in the bourgeois family, the emotional ties are distorted in order to serve the economic interests. They argued that the abolition of private property would permit the development of genuinely egalitarian relationship between the sexes based on emotional gratification.¹⁵

The Marxian views insist on a political strategy which gives priority to the liberation of women rather than subordinating it wholly to the achievement of more general political objectives. Marxists argued that the entrance of women into labour force will help them to overcome the individualism, narrowness of vision and petty productive activity of housewives.¹⁶

Taking up Marxist ideas into consideration Lenin argued for creating an environment in which women will be truly free. He advocates that "in order to achieve the complete emancipation of women and to make them really equal with =

15. Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, "Modernisation Theory and Sex Roles in Critical Perspective: The Case of Soviet Union", Jane S. Jaquette, ed., Women in Politics (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1974), p. 250.

16. Ibid. p. 264.

men, we must have social economy, and the participation of women in general productive labour."¹⁷

Lenin tried to give practical effect to the solution of women's question in Soviet Union. But there has been considerable discrepancy between the regulations in force and its practical application, and this is continuing even today.¹⁸

Lenin said that it is impossible to bring the full equality of women or to convert them into the actual participants for the building up of a new society without involving them in the state administration and without developing their social and political activities. Lenin said in an address to working women:

Equality before law is not necessarily equality in fact. We want the working women to be equal of the working man not only before the law, but in actual fact. For this working women must take an increasing part in the administration of socialised enterprises and in the

17. Michael Paul Sacks, "The Place of Women", Jerry G. Pankhurst and Michael Paul Sacks, eds., Contemporary Soviet Society (New York: Prager, 1980), p. 229.

18. This point will be taken up in the subsequent chapters.

administration of the state. By taking part in administration, women will learn quickly and will catch up with the men.¹⁹

The point that Lenin was making clear is that the political participation is the most important factor in women's liberation. Lenin declared that one of the important objectives of Bolshevism and the October Revolution was drawing the people oppressed under capitalism into politics. In the same vein, Lenin addressed the international working women's day in 4 March 1921:

You cannot draw the masses into politics, without drawing in the women as well. For, under capitalism the female half of the human race is doubly oppressed. The working women and peasant women are oppressed by the capital, but over and above that, even in the most democratic of the bourgeois republics, they remain firstly deprived of some rights because the law does not give them equality with men.²⁰

Under the leadership of Lenin, the First Communist International also asserted a similar position. It resolved

19. V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 30 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), p. 371.

20. V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 32 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), p. 161.

that it

can fulfil the tasks before it and ensure that final victory of the world proletariat and the complete abolition of the capitalist system only with the help of the closely interlinked collective struggle of men and women of the working class. The dictatorship of the proletariat can only be realised and assured through the alert and active participation of the working class women.²¹

Lenin tried to develop and concretize a Marxist approach on the women's question in the conditions of imperialism stage. His fundamental thesis on women's question is that the struggle for genuine emancipation of women is an inevitable part of the general struggle for the socialist transformation of the society.²² Lenin had the view that without the full equality of women, there can be no full socialism.

Lenin also asserted that the domestic work kept the woman as downtrodden. He specified the unproductive overburden of the domestic work in a speech delivered at the IVth Moscow city Conference of non-party working women on

21. Clara Zetkin, N.14 , p. 32.

22. V.N. Nikolayeva Tereshkova, "Women's Role in Contemporary Soviet Life", Soviet Review (Delhi), Vol. XII, 3 July 1975, p. 33.

23 September 1919:

Owing to her work in the house the woman is still in a difficult position... even where women have full rights, they still remain downtrodden because, all housework is left to them. In most cases the housework is unproductive, the most barbarous, the most arduous work a woman can do. It is exceptionally petty and does not include anything that would in any way promote the development of women.²³

To sum up, the Marxian theory on the oppression of women suggest that the prime causes of inequality and oppression are the conditions prevailing in economic system, e.g., the existence of private property, existence of class structure, inequality in the distribution of surplus etc. Engels argued that the division of labour on the basis of sex, the overthrow of matriarchy by patriarchy, the coming into existence of private property and state etc. originated the oppression of women. Marx also admits the natural division of labour in the family.

Lenin is an advocate of the ideas of Marx and Engels and tried to concretise their dreams. Marx and Engels argued that when there is a society in which public

23. V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 30, op.cit., p. 43.

ownership of the means of production comes into existence, all the discriminations on the basis of sex will come to an end and then there will be complete equality of genders.

There are differences among other theoreticians and feminists in understanding the Marxist theory on women. Charmie Guettel has pointed out the limitations of the Marxist contribution to women's question as that "just as Marx and Engels had no theoretical work on racism, a phenomenon that has become a central brake on progress in the working class movement in the stage of imperialism, so did they lack a developed critique of sexism under capitalism."²⁴ Guettel accepts that though the Marxist class analysis of society still provides us with the best tool for analysing both the forms of oppression, the particular analysis concerning women is very "underdeveloped".²⁵ But such

24. Alfred G. Meyer, *op.cit.*, pp. 95-6. Also see Charmie Guettel, Marxism and Feminism (Toronto: 1974).

25. *Ibid.*

a demand of a well developed and specialised analysis on a single question, i.e., the women's question is not justified as this never was the single concern of the founders of Marxism. And also a comprehensive explanation in advance, anticipating the possible full future of the movement would be ahistorical and hence unwarranted.

A similar kind of criticism is there on the question of patriarchy. Some feminists alleged that Marxism fails to analyse patriarchy adequately and Marxists analyse women's oppression in connection with the history of the changes in the mode of production. But as we have seen, Engels' work on the origin of family traces the origin of patriarchy also. It is true that Engels connects this issue with the issue of the stages of production relations. For Marxists, both class and patriarchy are historical; as they have origins they would have deaths too. For that matter, even family, family as a form of production relation, is historical. An integral Marxian view on women's question is definitely a combination of the factors of patriarchy and class domination. The allegation is actually misplaced. On the other, we can say that the views of a section of feminists expressed in their overplaying of the elements of patriarchy and the underplaying of the question of class

struggle is not only inadequate but also incorrect.

There are thinkers who argued that the nature itself dictates the inferior social status of women and they believe that nature determines the inequality of the sexes.²⁶ This view is partly true, and this partial fact is used more as a pretext to continue the subjugation of women.

The inconveniences caused by the biology of the female body is taken as a reason for the oppression of women and domination by the men. It is the biological characteristics of the human body which determined the man-woman division in human society. This biological factor, like the child bearing task of the female body, creates an unfavourable condition for women. In a class divided society, these physical and biological differences are used for oppression instead of being accepted and respected. The biological and physical differences cannot be used as a premise to justify any social inequality. Because of the same premise, family as a biological and physical unit of society cannot be questioned also.

26. Ellen Carroll et al., Feminist Scholarship: Kindling in the Group of Academe (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 102.

If we take the real experience of the Soviet Union, we can see that for the full establishment of socialism, only mere economic restructuring will not help, but consciousness among the people is also very important. In this sense, we can say that emancipation of women in the Soviet Union had to be achieved by strictly following the ideals of Marxism-Leninism. Though in the Soviet Union, the public ownership of the means of production came into existence and remained so for a period, the gender equality could not be materialised as the founders of scientific socialism wished.

After the revolution also the gender discrimination prevailed in Soviet Union, both inside and outside the families. Immediately after the establishment of the first proletarian state, Lenin started to take up positive steps for the emancipation of women. But all efforts remained without much effect. In the political front, very few women came to hold good offices in the upper echelons of power.

We would try to present a historical picture of the status of women in Soviet Union, especially the political aspect of it on the eve of Perestroika, in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

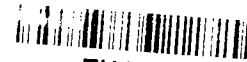
Women's Status in Soviet Politics
on the Eve of Perestroika

Chapter Two

Women's Status in Soviet Politics on the Eve of Perestroika

In general, the representation of women among the Soviet political elite remains very low. Regardless of the official ideology (Marxism-Leninism) which declares gender inequality as socially irrelevant, the male domination in the political realm continues to exist. This is despite the fact that the Soviet Union is the first country that proclaimed gender equality through constitutional measures. The first decrees adopted by the Soviet state fully equalised women with men in political, civil, economic, educational and material rights. But somehow or the other the presence of women in the high echelons of political power structure or, to use the terminology of Gorbachev, in the 'big politics', remained insignificant in Soviet Union, when compared with even the developing countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

This chapter tries to explain briefly the status of women in Soviet politics, their representation in the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) which is the highest body of political power, and the legal and



legislative measures devised in their favour during the period prior to Perestroika. As the CPSU is the apex political body, the representation of women in the CPSU and its central bodies like Politburo and Central Committee determines their status in politics.

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The power position that women hold in a political system is one of the major determining factors of the status of women. In a country like Soviet Union, where the official doctrine considers the gender discrimination and inequality as historically outdated and irrelevant and where only one party has been remaining at the helm of affairs the leadership positions enjoyed by women in the party itself is very important. Besides, depicting the representation of women, we would also try to explain in this chapter the 'nomenklatura'¹ and its failure to follow the principle of sexual equality. A visit into the situation

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1. The nomenklatura is an elaborate system of executive appointment established in the early 1920s when the Bolsheviks urgently needed to recruit and place politically reliable individuals in executive posts in all sectors of the society. Since then the nomenklatura has been the single most important mechanism for ensuring the central party control throughout the Soviet system by keeping a very tight grip on appointments at all levels of the administrative hierarchy.

The nomenklatura consists of two lists: one, of the positions to which the body concerned holds the right of appointment and two, of the candidates approved for promotion of these posts. All major institutions have their own nomenklaturas, but, not surprisingly, it is the communist party that holds the key nomenklatura which controls and binds all others (see, The Tauris Soviet Directory - The Elite of the USSR Today (London: IB Tauris & Co. Ltd. Publishers, 1989) p. XIV).

prevailing before Perestroika is a must to grasp the changes that took place under it.

Constitutional guarantees

The USSR is credited with the distinct position on women's question as it has constitutionally extended to them full political equality with men in all respects. After the October Revolution, the Bolshevik government became the first in history which tried to liberate women. One of the aims of revolution was also the emancipation of women. The October Socialist Revolution envisaged full and equal participation of women in productive labour and the socialisation of household tasks as well. After the consolidation of power the Soviet government initiated necessary legal measures for the realisation of these aims.

The Soviet constitution gave legislative affirmation to the equal rights of men and women. It also provided for the creation of new opportunities for the sexes to achieve social equality and for evolving suitable ways to combine the occupational, domestic and material roles of women.

With the aims of teaching women workers and peasants about the state administration and to awaken their interest in this work, a decree was promulgated in April 1922 by

the Council of Peoples Commissars on assigning to women probationary work in the Soviets. With this act the Soviet government could legalise practical steps to involve women in state activity.²

In its pursuit of emancipating women, the Soviet government could sense the potential in the creative force of millions of working women which had been suppressed for centuries, and directed this mighty energy into the building of communism.³

The Article 34 of the Soviet constitution provides equal rights to women with men. Article 3 provides equal franchise.⁴ Article 53 of the constitution proclaims that "spouses are fully equal in family relations".⁵

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3. Y.D. Yemelyanova, "The Social and Political Activity of Soviet Women", Y.Z. Damilova et al, eds., Soviet Women (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p. 43.
 3. Vera Bilshai, The Status of Women in the Soviet Union (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1957), p. 5.
 4. Soviet Legislation on Women's Rights: Collections and Normative Acts (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1978), pp. 28-29.
 5. Terry L. Gampson and Richard Sheldon, eds. Soviet Society and Culture: Essay in the Honour of Vera S. Dunham (London: Westview Press, 1988), p. 50.

Women are granted equal pay for equal work. Likewise, women enjoyed with men an 8 hour work day. They were banned from night work, overtime and underground labour. But, notwithstanding all these, there was a wide discrepancy between the legislations in force and its practical application.

Party considered family code as an important step towards sexual equality, because the abolition of 'bourgeois family' was seen as an essential pre-requisite for the construction of socialist society. Therefore, immediately after the Revolution, civil marriage and free divorce were introduced and abortion was legalised⁶ through the first family code of 1918.

Since some aspects of the 1918 code needed reform another family law was framed in 1926. This law recognised "common law" marriage and simplified divorce in order to make the registered marriage more attractive.

6. Susan Bridger, Women in the Soviet Countryside: Women's Roles in Rural Development in the Soviet Union (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 11.

In the thirties, there was a slight shift in the Soviet attitude towards family. In June 1936, family law was amended for 'combating light-minded attitude towards the family and family obligations'. It prohibited abortion except on the most serious medical grounds.⁷ Divorce became difficult and expensive to obtain. A distinction was made between legitimate and illegitimate children. The family was officially rehabilitated and labelled socialist and the emancipation of women was declared achieved.

The loss of men in the Second World War and the post-war industry severely disrupted patterns of family life. Therefore, the government formed the family law of 1944 with the aim of encouraging births. This law ceased to recognise common law marriage, tightened up divorce procedures and no longer permitted women with unregistered marriages to claim maintenance for their children.⁸

7. Ibid. p. 15.

8. Ibid. p. 17.

After Stalin's death in 1953, divorce and abortion again became obtainable. Eventhough the official line on women question remained the same until the mid 1960s, after that this problem became an agenda in the programme of government because of the decreasing birth rate. In 1968, abortion was fully legalised once again.⁹

After the revolution, the women's Bureau (Zhenotdel)* was established in 1919 for the purpose of conducting propaganda and agitation among working women. This tried to bring women into the revolutionary process and foster their equality in public and private life. But during the 1920s its importance declined and in 1929 this organisation was abolished as a result of Stalin's understanding that women's problems were solved.

Eventhough women's participation was a policy being encouraged during the post-revolutionary period, the abolition of 'Zhenotdel' made it more or less a paper policy.

* Women's Department of the CPSU.

9. Barbera Alpein Engel, "Women in Russia and the Soviet Union", Sign, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1987, p. 788.

But Krushchev recognised the fact that there is a discrepancy between the legislations and their practical applications and this encouraged open criticisms. Even the party rank and file raised sharp criticisms on this. During that period there was only one woman secretary in the Central Committee and some ministers.¹⁰

In the early 1960s, the 'Zhensovety' (Women's Organisation) was resurrected. But they functioned in the relatively neglected areas of informal politics. They operated usually at the local level with the objective to raise women's political consciousness, their main work being child care, health care etc. The Zhensovety work could not bring women into political power, but instead it reinforced the existing division of labour by gender.¹¹

In the Soviet Union women got so many advantages after the revolution. Soviet women enjoy educational and

10. Genia K. Browning, Women and Politics in the USSR: Consciousness Raising and Soviet Women's Groups (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 37.

11. Barbara Alpein Engel, N. 9, p. 791.

employment opportunities. They are getting protection from the risky jobs according to the law. They get one full year maternity leave. Their retirement age is five years earlier than men. Even though they hold so many advantages and benefits, their day to day life remains hard.

According to the law, women have the right to hold political offices. But in reality they are not represented in these offices adequately, especially in the higher echelons of power. We shall come to the reasons behind such a state of affairs afterwards.

The sexual discrimination in favour of men is actually a major factor in politics affecting the very status of women in the society. So here we would discuss briefly the political participation of women in the Soviet Union from the time of Lenin to that of Gorbachev.

After the 1917 revolution, the Soviet government brought so many measures to promote the creative activity of women - economically, politically, socially etc. During Lenin's period, by an Act in April 1921, Soviet

government had taken practical steps to ensure the participation of women in state activity. This had stimulated women's political activity. Party started political education among women. A special department for women (Zhenotdel) was set up in the party. However, women were elected mainly to local Soviets. There were no women in the Politburo during this period. But the party membership among women was increasing. By the beginning of 1922 about 7.8 per cent of women became members of the party. These steps could initiate far reaching results on the issue of women's participation in politics and administration. Statistics about the membership of women in the party shows that it had been continuously increasing (see Table below).

Party Membership (1924-'26)¹²

<u>Year</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1924	38,501	8.6
1925	76,494	10.3
1926	128,807	12.8

Though Lenin could take steps to bring more women into politics, he could not elevate them into the upper rungs

12. Y.D. Yemelyanova, No.2 , p. 58.

of the political ladder. Political leadership of women remained more in the local and regional levels.

During Stalin's period also women could not come to occupy the higher positions. Stalin was more concerned about economic development and state security. He tried to bring more women into the labour force than into politics. He abolished Zhenotdel in 1929, and the campaigns and political structures run by and for women came to be less concerned with female interests. Instead, women were organised to meet the economic goals set for the nation by the party.

During the War period women proved that they could render service no less better than the men. And because of this opportunity, sometimes, ministerial representation of women was better during Stalin than at certain periods under Krushchev.¹³

13. Genia K. Browning, N. 10 , p. 37.

In Krushchev's time, one woman could come in the Politburo as a candidate member. Though women's participation was encouraged during the post-revolutionary period, the abolition of 'Zhenotdel' made it a paper policy. But Krushchev recognised the discrepancy between legislation and practice. Even from the party cadres severe criticisms were voiced. For example, one delegate in a speech in 1958 said:

In our oblast* conferences we always advocate and record as a decision, that the obkom** of the party must engage in training and involve women in leadership work. But the decisions are not fulfilled. We now have one woman Secretary of the CC and some ministers. A short while ago the situation was as follows. There were women on the obkom buro, there was woman secretary of the Obkom, women were heads and assistant heads of the party departments and there were four ministers. But what is the situation now? There is not one woman on the buro of the obkom, there are neither secretaries, nor heads of departments, nor assistant heads. Women who are now in leading party work were mainly nominated in the war or early post-war years. But, where the nominations now? One, two, that's all. Ask

* District or Province.

** Party District Committee

yourselves, if women in the war years were able to take the place of men in difficult responsibilities, if they were able to cope with the difficult areas of work in the first post-war years, then why can't they do so now?¹⁴

During Krushchev's time, the women's department was resurrected and its main objective was to raise political consciousness among women.

Brezhnev enhanced the role of the party in the Soviet society, thus continuing a trend set by Krushchev. A determined effort was made to enroll more female members; in 1976 about one quarter of the party members were women.¹⁵

After Krushchev, it was only Gorbachev who revived the question of women's entry in a big way into big politics. At the 27th Congress he referred to the need for wider participation of women in the decision making on

14. Ibid.

15. Martin Macauley, The Soviet Union Since 1917 (London: Longman, 1981), p. 218.

major issues of public life and social life. But there is a serious contradiction, when the policies seem to be shifting towards an even greater emphasis on Soviet women as mothers in order to counteract the rapidly dropping birth rates. The status of women in Gorbachev's period will be later discussed in the coming chapters.

Though a substantial number of women have their presence in the primary party organisation and in the party at the local and regional levels, their presence in the upper echelons of power - in party or state - is a poor low. In spite of a number of revolutionary women activists in the 1910s and '20s the party represented less than 10 per cent women among party members by 1922. The Central Committee of 1917 had three women members among thirty-one¹⁶ - a nine per cent. Before Gorbachev only one woman could climb to the level of Politburo - Yakaterina Furtseva in the late 1950s, who served only 3 years in it and that

16. This information is controversial as many books other than that of Baradat claim that the maximum CC representation was never beyond 4.63 per cent. See Genia K. Browning, No. 10, p. 30.

too as a candidate member. On an average, only about 4 per cent of the membership of the CCs have been women.¹⁷ The following table also shows the scanty presence of women in CC who held party positions.

List of Female CC Members who held Party Positions During 18-26th Congress of the CPSU.18

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date of CC</u>
Furtseva. E.A.	1952- 71
Ivashchenko.D.I.	1956- 61
Kol'china. O.P.	1961- 81
Lykova. L.P.	1952- 81
Dement'eva. R.F.	1966- 81
Kruglova. A.M.	1966- 81
Andreevna. N.A.	1956
Ivanova. T.G.	1981
Eliseeva. V.G.	1971- 76
Poberei. M.T.	1966- 76
Khara. I.G.	1981

17. Leon P. Baradat, Soviet Political Society (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1989), pp. 354-5.

18. Genia K. Browning, N.10, p. 30.

Against this backdrop of low participation in the big politics, women are fairly represented in the primary party organisations. Women's membership in party is only 25 per cent, despite their 50 per cent presence in the population. Though they are not given fair and enough chance to take up senior and responsible posts of power, they recorded a linear and steady growth in their representation in the USSR Supreme Soviet. This is certainly a great achievement. The table below shows the growth of women's share in the deputies of the USSR Supreme Soviet until 1984.

Share of Women in the Deputies of the
USSR Supreme Soviet 19

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of Women Deputies</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1937	189	16.5
1952	348	25.8
1958	366	27
1962	390	27
1966	425	28
1970	463	31

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19. Y.D. Yemelyanova, N. 2 , p. 62 and Ninel Maslova and Elvira Novikova, "Women and Politics: Trends and Prospects", Social Sciences, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1988,p.78.

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of Women Deputies</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1974	475	31.3
1979	487	32.5
1984	492	33

In 1988, under the leadership of Gorbachev, women constituted over 50 per cent in the local governments and in the Soviets of Peoples Deputies. Though this trend is fairly good, Soviet women have to enter into the higher echelons of Soviet power also. Otherwise, the marked lack of participation by women in the upper half of political hierarchies would only help the male dominated political leadership to execute power at the expense of women.

The why and how of such low participation of Soviet women in politics has to be looked into. We shall take this issue partly in this chapter itself.

There are various and interlinked causes behind the poor showing of women in the power politics. The attitudes on the question of labour division and the role assignments to the female gender are the basic reasons, while

the nomenclatura system of appointments also have a negative role to play. We shall start from the structural and manifest reasons and go beyond these to the actual reasons.

The vanguard role of the CPSU and the existing 'nomenclatura'²⁰ system could not do anything substantial against the subordination of women in political hierarchy. In the Soviet constitution the vanguard role of the party is specifically mentioned. It says: "The leading and guiding force of Soviet society and the nucleus of its political system, of all the state organisations and public organisations is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union."²¹

Thus politics is put in command and its symbol, the CPSU, dominates the scene. Nomenclatura is a concrete manifestation of this politics in command. This system has been the most important mechanism to ensure central party

20. See N. 1. In other words, nomenclatura is party lists for appointments in military, government, schools, farms, plant and other institutions that can be held only by people who are cleared by the party.

21. Mikhail Effimov APN Comments on the USSR Constitution (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency, 1979), p. 2.

control throughout the Soviet system by keeping a very tight grip on appointments at all levels of the administrative hierarchies. Women are usually recruited in the occupations and regions where the party control is not taken significant. This is putting women on a stagnant track. By this, their chances of further progress in the political hierarchy get quite weakened. By all expectations nomenklatura should have helped woman also. But it did not happen.

Party membership is the precondition for much of the earlier advancement in non-party bodies. It can be said that the party membership also makes status. In her Women in the USSR, Tatarinova wrote, that to be a party member is a great honour.²² As this is true, the low membership of women, their low presence in the Central Committee and its Secretariat and their minute presence in the Politburo make clear that women are consciously or unconsciously viewed as second class citizens with a status lower than that of men. The lower number of women in the party results in the inequality among men and women in the political sphere. In such a situation additional nomenklatura ways and means

22. N. Tatarinova, Women in the USSR (Moscow: Novosti, 1968) , p. 45.

would only strengthen this inequality. If this is so structurally, what are the reasons behind such a structure, such a practice? Let us pursue our search.

The attitudes and traditions in Soviet society are also not very drastically different from those in any other country. In the Soviet Union, as we have seen, though the policy level attitude of the state is more inclined in favour of women, the social level practices cannot be said to have fundamentally changed. This is because of the fact that it is difficult to have a social change than to effect a political change. The former is a question of base where real changes take place only in the long run, while the latter is the arena of superstructure where changes are relatively less difficult when compared to changes in real social structure. India's caste ridden society is an example to understand this fact. While India is politically a democracy (though controversy exists in this assessment), Indian society is not yet democratised; caste and other undemocratic divisions rule the roost. A contrast between the polity and society, of course of a different kind, exists in the Soviet Union also in the case of women. The progressive and revolutionary initiatives in the

political sphere do not get materialised because of the structurally inherent backwardness in the society. This is what happened in the case of Soviet women also. Let us see this.

Wife beating is still rampant. There exists a proverb in Russia which acknowledges the love of husband expressed in wifebeating. This masochist saying goes: "if he doesn't beat you, he doesn't love you." Wife beating coupled with alcoholism proved to be dangerous. This has resulted in social maladies like absenteeism, poor work and murder. And nowadays alcoholism among women has also increased, resulting in an increase in child-beating by drunken mothers.²³

A growing divorce rate, a decreasing birth rate, unattended children, the growing juvenile delinquency etc. remind the Soviet women that she is predestined by nature to be a mother and a housekeeper, as is argued by the demographers, sociologists and publicists. The lack of consciousness and the backward attitude towards politics among women also led to their low political status. They have a backward mentality of considering statesmanship and politics as a

23. Leon P. Baradat, N. 17, p.364. For solving this, Soviet authorities have opened clinics specialised in alcoholism among women.

man's business. Many women are having the view that the primary duty of a woman is to be a mother and a wife.²⁴

A Soviet feminist, Eketerina Alexandra, states:

Here is a society that had proclaimed as its goal the extrication of women from the narrow confines of the family and the inclusion of the women in all forms of public activity... And yet, in this very society among these very women, a patriarchal order and its psychology thrive.²⁵

In fact, the above observation of Alexandrova itself points out the connection between the attitude and psychology on the one hand and the patriarchal order and gender role on the other. Thus the attitudes take one to the root cause of gender discrimination existing in the role assignment.

In all gender discriminating societies, gender is introduced into the labour. We get male labour and female

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24. Ellen Carnaghan and Donna Bahry, "Political Attitudes and Gender Gaps in USSR", Comparative Politics, July 1990, p. 382. Also see Eketerina Alexandrova, "Why Soviet Women Want to Get Married?", Tatyana Mamanova, ed., Women in Russia: Feminist Writings from the Soviet Union (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), pp. 32-3.
25. Daniel Nelson, "Women in Local Communist Politics in Romania and Poland", Sharon Wolehik and Alfred G. Meyer, eds. Women, State and Party in Eastern Europe (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), pp. 163-4.

labour. Certain jobs are feminine, and certain others are meant for men. In Soviet Union, women are not generally considered fit for business etc. If women are recruited in the so-called male spheres of employment they are used for physically heavy, monotonous routine work, in low paid and non-prestigious jobs. In the so-called feminine jobs, women in the USSR hold the lower level posts. For example, in the Soviet medicine, supposed to be primarily a feminine profession, most of the senior posts are held by men.

The burden of domestic chores is an important reason for Soviet women's inequality. Women do all the work at home after working a full day in clinic, shop, office, factory, field etc. Mechanisation of housework is very little in Soviet Union. This is mainly because of the little effort and resources from state to ease women's burden. The childcare facilities for pre-schoolers are inadequate and the mothers are forced to seek other methods for caring their children. The desperation and misery of women can be seen in this remark by a Russian school teacher: "From dawn until night time I am cleaning, washing diapers, waiting in line to buy the simplest things.

I have no place to escape, no time for friends. I am bored and exhausted."²⁶

On account of the double burden, women's political participation in Soviet Union is generally low, particularly in rural areas. As political gatherings take place outside working hours, that is, mainly in the evenings, women do not get chance to actively involve in political activities. They have to do the shopping, cooking, and housekeeping after their work in farms or in factories. All reports admit that, due to the burden of household responsibilities, women cannot compete with men on commitment in political activities. The result is that they are even more under-represented in political decision-making bodies.²⁷

If the level of education, position in family, economic and political participation etc. are taken as the main pointers to the women's status in society, one can say

26. Leon P. Baradat, N. 17, p. 357. Also see Peter Osnos, "Soviet Marriages: The Burden is Heavy", Los Angeles Times, October 29, 1976.

27. Maria Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour (London: Zed Books, 1986), p. 180.

that in the field of education Soviet women have achieved greatly, but in the political field, their position is not so sound. As we have analysed, the root cause of women's less participation in big politics lies in the society as a whole. Still stronger political initiatives are needed for women to improve their share in politics. In the next chapters we shall have an overall appreciation of such initiatives under Perestroika.

Chapter Three

Emergence of Perestroika and the Political Role
of Women till the 27th Congress of the CPSU (1985-86)

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The Soviet constitution provides equal rights to men and women. As we have seen, this remained more formal than real. The USSR had been formulating laws and legislations and taking organisational steps in order to realise equal status for women with men in all spheres of life. But, some way or other, all the soviet leaders since 1930s except Gorbachev thought that women's problems were solved in a basic manner though minor issues might be still remaining which needed only secondary attention. In the process of finding, recognising and declaring the structural crisis that Soviet Union has been facing, Gorbachev found that the Soviet women were not nearer to any equality with men.

So Gorbachev promised to do something to improve the status of women. He has time and again shown concern about the marked lack of proportionate presence of women in the high echelons of power and politics in the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev has taken bold initiatives in introducing earth shaking reforms which equally invited praise and

condemnation from all quarters of the globe. We will be primarily looking into the magnitude of changes that the women's issue has undergone under Perestroika initiatives. Without a briefing on the general question of Perestroika and the related ideology transformations, we will not be in a position to understand what Perestroika has to offer on the question of women. Again, political participation of women is just one issue within the general question of women. So first and foremost, we shall have an overview of the ideology of Perestroika including its context and emergence in general, and the ideology of Perestroika on the women's question in particular. This aspect of this chapter naturally necessitates a coverage of the whole period of Perestroika until 1986. In addition to this, we will refer to the steps taken until and in the 27th Congress of the CPSU in this chapter itself.

Perestroika

Restructuring (Perestroika), openness (Glasnost) and new thinking are the three related slogans that catalysed a series of fundamental changes in the Soviet Union, and the unprecedented political upsurges in East Europe. The

seeds of change were sown by Gorbachev as early as 1984. Gorbachev's programmatic speech at an ideology meet on 10th December 1984 is generally considered to mark the beginning of his reform policy.¹ In April 1985, the CPSU had a series of meetings and the decisions taken there had opened up steps for restructuring the Soviet society, stagnant since long.

The whole reform was introduced in parts and the approach was highly tactical, cautious and defensive in the beginning. Because what Gorbachev had to face was the strong dogmatic party ethos strengthened by long traditions of around 3/4th of a century. The advantage of the image of being radical has, from the very beginning, gone to Gorbachev and his followers; they became 'radicals', and the diehards of the party were disadvantageously considered 'conservatives' in the media. The initial piecemeal approach helped Gorbachev in keeping up friends, and in not antagonising those who had genuine doubts over such rethinking on the existing system. Once the changes were initiated, the process itself

1. Boris Meissner, "New Thinking and Soviet Foreign Policy", Aussen Politik (Hamburg) II Quarter 1989, Vol. 40, p. 103.

took a momentum of its own, making the initiators and resisters to run for adjustments and arrangements to either complete the transformation in a least painful and most manageable way or to save the system as such. In a long term sense, everyone would accept that Gorbachev became successful in what he wanted to do.

There are various explanations and interpretations on this domestic Perestroika. One stream of thinking takes him as a genuine reformer aiming to make USSR into a modern industrial power. For this he is effecting the necessary restructuring process. Naturally the result is to become a bourgeois democracy. So in essence this is a capitalist option with a distinct camouflage. They also take this as a right option.² There are others who take him as a socialist trying to restructure the existing stagnant economy into an enlivened dynamic lever for genuine socialist progress. They accept that partial ideological changes are needed in successfully introducing a greater element of market mechanism into the economy. Among this latter section, some take these

2. W. Bruce Weinad, "Soviet New Thinking and US Foreign Policy", World Affairs (Washington D.C.), Fall 1988, Vol. 151, No. 2, p. 60.

measures as just a temporary tactical retreat for preparation to go ahead with stronger conviction. They take this more or less similar to Lenin's NEP measures in the 1920s.³

Some analyse the introduction of market mechanism as a strategic weapon, and they aim to integrate the concepts of socialism with the components of market because, they think, it is not necessary that market is exclusively a bourgeois structure. On a different strain they rightly argue that the bourgeois thinking that market is a necessary and exclusive part of bourgeois system and democracy, would not be strengthened if the scientific socialists do not leave this weapon of democracy and market just to solely belong to the capitalist structure. A revolutionary snatching back of these related instruments of democracy and market is a must to fortify the proletarian democracy and for the further advance of socialism.

There are others who think that Gorbachev is just a betrayer of socialism and he is aiming at compromises with imperialism. He is taken a sell-out to imperialism by the Marxist-Leninists of the classical brand.

3. For NEP, see Alfred G. Meyer, Communism (New York: Random House 1963), pp. 72-77.

Some explain the whole process of Perestroika by Gorbachev as basically a result of his adhoc measures to some way or other save the Soviet Union from its stagnant, dying economy and polity. They consider that Gorbachev does not have any master plan behind his actions, he is only trying, in a pragmatic, adhoc and issue-based manner, various approaches - some even inconsistent with some others - expecting that he would be able to press the right combination of buttons that might put the economy in right shape.⁴

Whatever might be the differences in assessing it, the impact of Perestroika reforms is taken by each and all as of far reaching. The fundamental changes begun with Perestroika are again taken either as a complete break or as betraying a continuity. Zafar Imam on the other hand combines both aspects of continuity and change while analysing the genesis of the party programmes.⁵

The emergence of Perestroika is to change the authoritarian bureaucratic system into one of humane, democratic socialism. This cannot be but a revolutionary change. After the initial cautious approach, Gorbachev soon started taking

4. W. Bruce Weinad, N.2, p. 60.

5. Zafar Imam, "The Genesis of the CPSU Programme", in Zafar Imam, ed., Restructuring Soviet Society (New Delhi: Panchsheel Publishers, 1987), p. 25.

an active posture expressing the need for an overhauling of the society. This all-round nature of reform is clearly expressed in his address to the Party activists in Khabarovsk on 31 July 1986 during his visit to the Soviet Far East:

The question today is of transformation on no less a scale. The current restructuring embraces not only the economy, but all aspects of public life - social relations, the political system, the spiritual and ideological sphere, and the style and methods of Party work, and of all our cadres. Restructuring is a word laden with meaning. I would equate the word 'restructuring' with the word revolution. Our transformations and the reforms mapped out in the decisions of the April Plenum of the Party Central Committee and its 27th Congress are a revolution in the entire system of social relations, in the hearts and minds of the people, in the psychology and understanding of the modern period and above all of the tasks engendered by rapid scientific and technical progress.⁶

So, as Gorbachev has rightly said, restructuring is a revolution. Each and every arena of society is shaken by Perestroika. Let us not go into details of this. But at the same time one structural aspect that is all pervading is worth pointing out. This is the aspect of democracy. In his speech on the ideology of renewal for revolutionary restructuring at the Plenary meeting of the CC of CPSU on 18 February 1988,

6. Baren Ray, "Restructuring Under the New Programme", in No. 5, p. 138.

Gorbachev made this point very clear: He spoke:

Democratisation, comrades, is the main thing. This is the decisive means of achieving the aims of Perestroika. Democratisation accords with the very essence of the Leninist concept of socialism. It enables our society to attain the ideas for which the October Revolution was made. There must be a clear understanding in the entire Party that it is only through democratisation that the human factor can be given full play in the profound transformation of all aspects of the life of society, in the real processes of management and self-management. It is only through democratisation and glasnost that deep rooted apathy can be ended and a strong impetus can be given to the social and political activity of the working people. It is only through conscious and interested participation of the working people in all the affairs of society that the attainment of the humanistic aims of socialism is possible.⁷

The democratisation aspect is projected here because bringing women into areas where they are not properly represented is also an instance of democratisation process. The democratisation is also behind the renewed emphasis on the women's question.

Ideology of Perestroika on Women's Question

The nationwide discussion on the rethinking about their past that the Party conducted in 1985 made the Soviet

7. Mikhail Gorbachev, The Ideology of Renewal for Revolutionary Restructuring (Moscow: Novosti, 1988), pp. 17-18.

leaders think about building up a new society by applying Marxist approach to the current reality. People from all sections of the society including women took part in this discussion, and thus the problems of women also got unravelled before the public. Gorbachev has grasped the fact that in every sphere of life, women have been continuously discriminated.

It might be an incidental fact that a woman's contribution has helped the Perestroika initiation. One author traces the roots of Perestroika way back in 1965.⁸ Tatyana Zaslavakaya, then a young economist, happened to be a member of the 'think tank' centred in Siberia which led a series of open discussions on politics, linguistics, history, economics, and specifically on the relation between heavy and consumer industries. In 1982, Tatyana met Gorbachev who was in the process of building his own political base. He consulted Tatyana on various proposals. In an anonymous memorandum in April, 1983, Tatyana analysed the problems of the Soviet Union, specifically its economic policies at the root

8. Krishna Ahooja-Patel, "Contribution of a Woman to Perestroika", Mainstream, Annual Number, 27 October 1990, pp. 117-8.

of widespread frustration throughout the country. In a widely but clandestinely distributed seminar paper of hers, she raised two sensitive ideas then. One, that political centralisation was acting as a brake on total output and production, and, two, that workers were becoming just cogs in a large bureaucratic machinery. Tatyana's paper was first published in the western press in 1984 and later read by the PB members of the CPSU. Many of her economic ideas were found similar to what Gorbachev had written earlier.⁹

Tatyana did not limit her analysis to the questions of politics and economy. She linked her ideas with the question of women and economy. She has pointed out that like in any capitalist or mixed economies, in the USSR also, women form the majority of the workers accounting for majority of the less skilled and less paid jobs. She talked of the inequality between men and women within the family and outside it as the major reason for the lower status of women.¹⁰

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

Because of the double workload, both inside and outside the family, women prefer only one of this, i.e., the household work as is shown in many opinion polls in Soviet Union.¹¹ Gorbachev is encouraging this attitude of women on the one hand and at the same time trying to bring them in responsible positions of administration and politics on the other.

The involvement of women in the socio-political activities were insufficient. Working men are more actively involved in public life than working women. Likewise, the share of women managers, particularly in the higher positions of the national economy are insufficient. Therefore, Gorbachev said, it was necessary to open the way for women to enter management positions.¹² So also, Gorbachev is very much interested to bring women into big politics. He found that more and more active participation of women in the economic, cultural and public life is a must for the whole country.

In his historic work Perestroika, Gorbachev reviews the paradoxical situation arising out of the familial and the social

11. Ibid.

12. Ninel Maslova and Elvira Novikova, "Women and Politics: Trends and Prospects", Social Sciences, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1988, p. 80.

double work imposed on women. However, his emphasis lies in bringing women back to family. He observes:

The extent of women's emancipation is often viewed as a yardstick to be used in judging the social and political level of a society. The Soviet state put an end to the discrimination against women so typical of tsarist Russia with determination and without compromise. Women gained a legally-guaranteed social status equal with men. We are proud of what the Soviet government has given women: the same right to work as men, equal pay for equal work, and social security. Women have been given every opportunity to get an education, to have a career, and to participate in social and political activities. Without the contribution and selfless work of women, we would not have built a new society nor won the war against fascism.

But over the years of our difficult and heroic history, we failed to pay attention to women's specific rights and needs arising from their role as mother and home-maker, and their indispensable educational function as regards children. Engaged in scientific research, working on construction sites, in production and in the services, and involved in creative activities women no longer have enough time to perform their every day duties at home - housework, the upbringing of children and the creation of good family atmosphere. We have discovered that many of our problems - in children's and young people's behaviour, in our morals, culture, and in production - are partially caused by the weakening of family ties and slack attitude towards family responsibilities. This is a paradoxical result of our sincere and politically justified desire to make women equal with men in everything. Now, in the course of Perestroika, we have begun to overcome this shortcoming. That is why we are now holding heated debates in the press, in public organisations, at work and at

home, about the question of what we should do to make it possible for women to return to their purely womanly mission.¹³

Within this aim of a return to the womanly mission for women, Gorbachev has taken steps designed to improve the working and life conditions of women. He has initiated an anti-alcohol campaign and taken steps against drug abuse. The strenuous and hazardous jobs in which women are involved, Gorbachev thinks, have to be given back to men. Gorbachev argues that, in a situation of war where the USSR lost many men, women were forced to fill these men's places.¹⁴

This two edged job of bringing women back to family and forward into politics as well at the same time seems to be a Herculean, if not paradoxical task. The fact and fiction behind his claim of following Lenin's teaching do need analysis.¹⁵

13. Mikhail Gorbachev, Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World (London: Fontana/Collins, 1987), p. 117.

14. Ibid.

15. See conclusion of this dissertation.

With the aims of bringing more women into socio-political activities, Gorbachev took initiatives to set up women's councils throughout the country. The All Union Conference on Women held in Moscow in January 1987 decided that the women's councils would operate under the Soviet Women's Committee for awakening and activating the Soviet women into a politically conscious section. But the kind of consciousness and awareness disseminated is a centrally decided idea of bringing women back to household duties. In that case, the question that how far the Soviet leadership would be able to bring women into politics in something yet to be seen.

After initiating Perestroika, the CPSU had two important Congresses - the 27th in 1986 and the 28th in 1990. Both these Congresses have taken important decisions on the question of women. These steps until 1990 would be covered in the rest of the dissertation.

27th Congress of the CPSU and the Question of the Role of Women in Politics

The 27th Congress is one of the most historical Congresses, ever held after the 20th Congress of the CPSU. This Congress witnessed the Gorbachevian policies for a radical change in the entire Soviet society. He decided to restructure the political, economic and social spheres of society.

In this Congress the problems of women, especially the low level participation of women in the political process, became an important agenda of the party programme.

The 27th Congress of the CPSU clearly referred to the need for wider participation of women into the decision making on major issues of public and social life. At the 27th Party Congress, Gorbachev referred to Soviet women's committee as a means of helping women to resolve their social problems.

According to Gorbachev further democratisation and Perestroika is not possible without the increased and active role of women. He said that the success of Perestroika needs the commitment of women in all the reform efforts, and he hopes that the role of women in the society will steadily grow. As the economic reforms, self-financing, the introduction of advanced technologies etc. call for stable, highly qualified and promising specialists, the January Plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the CPSU in 1987 raised also the question of promoting women to administrative posts.

In the 19th All Union Conference in June 1988, while reviewing the aspect of implementation of decisions taken at the 27th Congress of the CPSU, Gorbachev said that, "We proclaimed equal rights for women and men, gave women equal

access to nearly all trades and professions, fixed equal pay or equal work and guaranteed other rights for women".¹⁶

But again it has turned out that, there are still stumbling blocks largely preventing women from enjoying their rights fully. Women are not duly represented in governing bodies.¹⁷

A resolution "On Progress in Implementing the Decisions of the 27th CPSU Congress and the Tasks of Promoting Perestroika" adopted at this conference emphasised:

The conference stresses the need for greater efforts to solve problems concerning the interests of women. Women should be widely represented in the leading bodies at all levels. It is essentially to enhance their role in society and in political activities, to protect the prestige and rights of mothers, to provide the necessary conditions for exercising their duties and to display greater care for young families.¹⁸

After the 27th Congress of the CPSU, Gorbachev appointed Alexandra P. Biryukova as an alternative/non voting member of the Politburo as a beginning step to bring women into

16. John Iams, "Soviet Women Have Equal Rights with Men-Almost", Bangkok Post (Bangkok), 6 January, 1989.

17. Ibid.

18. Mikhail Gorbachev, N. 13, p. 277.

the higher levels of power. But at the same time, Gorbachev is aware of the limitations of just confining to the organisational steps. He said:

Perestroika has put all these questions pointedly before us. A women's mass organisation has been set up, or revived, to be more precise. But this is only an organisational aspect, important as that it is.¹⁹

As he has thought, what is more important is that "door must be open wide for them to governing bodies at all levels".²⁰ If Gorbachev cannot change the words into action, the women's question would remain unresolved. It seems that the USSR had a good start on this mission of improving the women's status, if one takes the commitment of 27th Congress at the face value. The Political Report of the CC, CPSU to the 27th Congress declared:

Securing living and working conditions for women that would enable them to successfully combine their maternal duties with active involvement in labour and public activity is a pre-requisite for solving many family problems. In the 12th five year plan period we are planning to extend the practice of letting women work a shorter day or week, or to work at home.²¹

19. John Iams, No. 16.

20. Ibid.

21. Year Book - USSR '87 (Moscow: Novosti, 1987), p. 165.

On the whole, one can say that, in the 27th Congress, Gorbachev initiated organisational steps to improve the women's situation, measures to decrease the workload of women at work places, and a political move to recruit and promote more women in politics and administration.

Chapter Four

Impact of Perestroika on the Role of
Women in Soviet Politics (1987-90)

Chapter Four

Impact of Perestroika on the Role of Women in Soviet Politics (1987-90)

The 27th Congress of the CPSU was a hallmark of reforms. As seen earlier, on the women's front also, it took bold initiatives. The gesture to revive women's council as back as 1985 was again discussed and formally ratified in 1986 (27th Congress). By the time of 1987 January All Union Conference on Women, the concepts of women's council got fully legitimised under the Soviet Women's Committee, a part and parcel of the CPSU. As the 19th All Union Conference (1988) was dealt with in the previous chapter basically because this formed part of the follow up of 27th Congress, the deliberations of the 28th Congress (1990) only would be considered here. This chapter would briefly deal also with the 1989 elections in order to assess women's strength in the results. An analysis of the 1989 election results have led many to have free and frank acceptance of the problems, and also it might have played a role in seeing Gorbachev once again emphasise the women's question in 28th Congress. The nature of the boom in activities centred around women's issues would also be analysed as part of the impact of Perestroika.

Women in 1989 Elections

In 1984, Supreme Soviet had 33 per cent of its deputies from women. In 1988, under Gorbachev, women constituted over 50 per cent in the Soviets at the local level.¹ The women's representation at the Supreme Soviet fell by more than half in 1989 elections. Now, women make up only 15.6 per cent of the people's deputies of the USSR, 5.4 per cent of the deputies to Russian Federation and 35 per cent in autonomous republics and local Soviets in Russia.²

After this election, but before the election to local Soviets, the Soviet Women's Committee devoted one of its plenary sessions to review the elections. Meanwhile the Institute of State and Law's Centre for Political Research and the Centre for the Study of Public Opinion conducted a study on 1989 elections. It showed that the women candidates fell into a group that voters found undesirable. This undesirable group included senior officials, people in administrative apparatuses, members of co-operatives, elderly

1. Ninel Maslova and Elvira Novikova, "Women and Politics: Trends and Prospects", Social Sciences, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1988, p. 78.

2. Socialism: Theory and Practice (Moscow: Novosti), 8(205), 1990, p. 31.

people and people with high incomes.³ One evident factor here is a wrong selection of candidates. It is clear that majority of the voters are not in support of the bureaucrats connected with administration and co-operatives, elders with old and conservative ideas, and the rich who might have had corrupt past aided by the nomenklatura. But, the question of right selection is only one part of the story. The question why more women than men got defeated still remains.

In an interview, Alevtina Fedulova, Vice Chairperson of the Soviet Women's Committee, has pointed out the conflicting Soviet mind, i.e., the transitional mind of the people, behind the women's defeat. She said:

Women's defeat in the last elections is a real attitude towards women in our society as a whole. On the one hand, the road to the highest echelons of power is not closed to them, but on the other hand, society is not yet ready to give women the opportunity to hold a place in government commensurate with their share of population, the extent of their participation in social production and their level of education.⁴

3. Alevtina Fedulova, "Fair Sex: Their Chances of Becoming Deputies" (Interview conducted by T. Khudyakova, *Izvestia*, Dec. 30, 1989), Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. XLI, No. 52, January 24, 1990, p. 32.

4. Ibid.

Fedulova expressed two attitudes behind the dismal performance by women candidates. One is the stereotyped image imposed on women that "a woman's calling is home and children". Another is that women have two jobs to do - one at home and one at work. This workload forces women often to choose the family work.⁵

Apart from these, there are other organisational slacknesses also. Though women's councils have the right to nominate candidates, they could not take this as an obligation and thereby full advantage of it. Even women's councils were not prepared to work under the new conditions and failed to consider the changed political situation and the public mood. As a result, in some areas, they did not even nominate a single women candidate. First, in terms of numbers, there were far fewer women among the candidates than men. Second, whenever a woman ran against a man, voters preferred the man and this shows how the voters think in terms of stereotypes. Third, women, as a rule, were short on oratorical skill, confidence in their strength, and convictions concerning the merits and

5. Ibid., pp. 32-33.

demerits of their programmes. At times they were not even bold enough. As a confirmation, Fedulova feels that not a single woman who though had unfairly lost an election appealed to the Central Election Commission for recount.⁶

In the elections to RSFSR Supreme Soviet in 1990, women's councils proposed their own candidates and supported candidates whose platforms promoted restructuring and contained constructive proposals, including ones that have to do with women's problems.⁷ Even then, the results were not favourable to women. In another interview on these electoral battles, Fedulova has confessed that they could not even offer a fight except in very few cases. She said:

In this case we did not fight but went with the stream, as usual. One can speak of disenchantment, for the election returns pointed up the real place of women in society. It turned out we have played up their role. At the same time, however, there were women who won a convincing victory in the election competition with men: Evdokin Gayer, Bayan Iskakova, Klara Hallik and many others.⁸

6. Ibid., p. 33.

7. Ibid.

8. Alevtina Fedulova, "Parliamentary Work: Are Women Equal to the Challenge" (Interviewed by A. Solovyov), Socialism: Theory and Practice (Moscow: Novosti), 8(205), August 1990.

In the last elections, women themselves preferred to vote for men. Galina, the lone PB member, had conveyed what women had in mind: "They said they voted for men because men have more time to devote themselves to problems. They think that women have no time and that a woman would work as little as possible, so she could run home to spend some time with her child."⁹

One after-effect of this election is that there emerged a new thinking to go for the right to specific quotas to women in Parliament. Fedulova argues for this:

... I am convinced that in the current situation, if we truly want to give women a greater role in society, to give them a real opportunity to manage state affairs on an equal footing with men, a quota system would be justified and even necessary. World experience shows us that quotas are fully consistent with democratic principles, particularly at pivotal and transitional stages of a society's development.¹⁰

A similar voice demanding quotas for women was raised by a conference jointly organised by Soviet Women's Committee and some people planning to float a women's political party.

9. Wendy Sloane, "Woman's Place is in.... the Politburo", Moscow Magazine, Vol. 7, No. 11, Nov., 1990, p. 40.

10. Alevtina Fedulova, N. 3, p. 33.

This declared its aims as to prepare women for political battle, cultivate leaders from their ranks, help them advance up the social ladder and give them chance to occupy top posts of power. One method of achieving this objective is to secure guaranteed quotas for women in elected organisations and top bodies of power. Parliament and political parties have to set aside a guaranteed number of seats for women, and the proponents of this view call this as 'feminisation of politics'.¹¹

28th Congress of the CPSU and the Women's Question

One of the important issues debated and resolved upon in the proceedings of the 28th Congress (July 2-13, 1990) was the women's question. The policy statement of the 28th Congress resolved that the Party stands for "ruling out any discrimination on ethnic, political or religious grounds, and also on the grounds of age and sex".¹² The Party proposed

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11. Tatyana Khudyakova, "Women Enter Politics" (Izvestia, Oct. 2, 1990), Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. XLII, No. 42, Nov. 21, 1990, p. 23.
 12. Documents and Materials: 28th Congress of CPSU, July 2-13, 1990 (Moscow: Novosti, 1990), pp. 81-82.

"to take sweeping measures to improve women's living and working conditions, to give them the right to a shorter working day, to work in accordance with a convenient schedule, to increase the length of maternity leave, and to provide additional leave for mothers with many children, and single mothers".¹³

Apart from taking important decisions aimed at improving the living and working conditions of women, this Congress, particularly Gorbachev himself, has once again raised concern over the low political representation of women. In the initial stages of Perestroika, he was harping on both the issues of bringing women back to the familial mission and bringing them forward into big politics. In emphasis, there was slight change in this Congress as far as the issue is concerned. In 28th Congress, Gorbachev concentrated on the question of politicising the women. The 1989 election results provoked him to do so. His speech was clearly expressing this concern. He spoke:

The Party's attitude to women also requires radical thinking. We have to admit that the women's question is among the most burning issues facing us.

13. Ibid., pp. 82-83.

Despite all the slogans, of which there have been more than enough since 27th Congress of the CPSU, the working and living conditions of women require considerable attention and radical improvement. This is one of the key issues. And something that especially cannot be tolerated is the fact that women are taking miniscule part in political life. I think, we should be ashamed of ourselves, seeing that women are taking an active part in big politics in many countries. And just take a look at this assembly - how many women are there among the delegates?... And how many of them are to be found in our government? We have neglected this matter to such an extent that the latest attempts have had next to no effect on the situation. Perhaps we should take real steps right now at this Congress to have women represented in the Central Committee, on the Politburo, and in the Central Committee Secretariat. We should, perhaps, set up a department for work among women when reorganising CPSU Central Committee at the present stage. I think women support this idea,...

There is no doubt that the strengthening of women's organisations will be a new phenomenon resulting from the democratisation of society. We should welcome and support this process in every way. It is a matter of honour for men (this is how the question of men's honour is put) to do the most to ease the situation of women, though much can be done by women themselves if they succeed in organising themselves.¹⁴

Immediately after the 28th Congress, Gorbachev appointed Galina Valadimerova Semyonova as a full member of Politburo of the CPSU. This is for the first time in the history of the CPSU that it gets a woman as full PB member.

14. Ibid., p. 46.

Women's Councils and Soviet Women's Committee

Gorbachev is the guiding spirit behind women getting themselves organised. In 28th Congress also, he made clear the importance of this aspect of organising. Women's councils were restored since 1985 on a wide scale.

2,40,000 women's councils emerged within months of Gorbachev's voicing the idea of reviving this forgotten form of women's movement in the post revolutionary years.¹⁵ The women's councils operate under the Soviet Women's Committees which are in turn a part of the CPSU. Some of these councils and committees are instrumental in developing feminist groups and rearing exponents of an independent political party for women. Women's councils proposed their own candidates in the last 1989 and '90 elections to the Soviets.

The women's bodies, especially the women's councils, work more in the realm of informal politics than in direct politics. They are busy coping with routine tasks like organising food orders at work, improving the working conditions of women, struggling for housing, sometimes coming up

15. "Women's Movement must not be Reduced to Women's Councils", Moscow News Weekly, No. 29, July 8-16, 1989, p. 12.

with ecological initiatives, but mostly duplicating the functions of other public organisations like trade unions etc. Sometimes, they even visit homes to try to persuade husbands not to drink and children to perform better at schools.¹⁶

After the 28th Congress, the Soviet Women's Committee has begun an important undertaking. It had meetings with representatives of political parties in the hope of understanding what priority their programmes give to women's issues. But the result so far is depressing. The proposed commission on the women's movement promised by the communist party is not so far created. The Liberal Democratic party plans to send all women home, and until that happens, it is requesting that the members of the Party be included in delegations that go abroad under the auspices of the Soviet Women's Committee. A representative of the Democratic Party of Russia said outrightly that their priority is to come to power, and then only can they sort things out.¹⁷

16. Ibid.

17. Tatyana Khudyakova, N. 11, p. 23.

A new public organisation named Russian Women's Union also has come up now. This is officially proclaimed through a founding conference held in 22-23 November this year in Moscow.¹⁸

The Union is a voluntary association of regional women's councils and various official and unofficial public organisations. The programme of action announced by the new organisation looks quite impressive and includes a number of suggestions whose implementation will help to change women's lot for the better. The plans include conscious efforts to achieve legal recognition of the social significance of parenthood and women's domestic labour, and action in defense of children's rights. Another declared goal is to achieve civil harmony and peace among the peoples of the republic and the country.¹⁹

Boris Yeltsin spoke in the founding conference of Russian Women's Union. Like Gorbachev, Yeltsin is also

18. Tatyana Khudyakova, "Russian Women's Union" (Izvestia, Nov. 25, 1990), Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. XLII, No. 47, Dec. 1990, p. 24.

19. Ibid.

interested in bringing women into politics. He has agreed to a proposal to submit for discussion by the republic's parliament the question of having a quota for women in Russia's supreme legislative body, and the question of promoting women to posts in the government.²⁰

General Impact of Perestroika on the Woman's Question

After the initiation of Perestroika in the USSR, there is a boom in the emergence of women's groups. There emerged innumerable women's circles, clubs, societies and associations. Attempts to form women's political party are also reported. For example, in Leningrad such a party has already appeared, and in Perm one is in progress. A political club headed by public affairs writer Larisa Kuznetsova and political scientists Tatyana Iranova has proclaimed the existence of one such in Moscow.²¹

After Perestroika, The USSR Academy of Sciences have started a Centre for Gender Studies within the Institute for Socio-Economic Studies of Population. Dr. Anastasia,

20. Ibid., p. 25.

21. Tatyana Khudyakova, N. 11, p. 23.

Posadskaya, Deputy Director of the new Centre explained that the centre would have been an impossibility without perestroika.²²

When the process of Perestroika in Soviets started by the decisions made in April, 1985, the Soviet President Gorbachev was very clear about the improvement of women's status being an integral part of active social polity. The important programme planned for this includes an effective system of professional training and upgrading female personnel, an elaboration of a special programme of training women for leading posts and the subsidising of special scientific elaboration etc.

After the implementation of Perestroika, the personal dissatisfaction of women with their situation is far more articulated than ever before. This is a better development. The awareness of women of their bad situation and a freedom to articulate it and rebel against the conditions responsible to the sorry state of affairs etc. would only help the

22. Catherine E. Rudder, "Soviets Sanction Gender Studies", PS: Political Science and Politics, December, 1990.

society in the long run, though it can create temporary crises.

The burden of domestic chores is an important reason for Soviet women's inequality. This also explains why women do not want to come to politics. Barulina, the Deputy Chairperson of the Soviet Women's Committee, says that it is very difficult to manage the housework and a minister's job. She says, "at home a woman minister must be a housekeeper, a mother, a wife - she must wash the dishes, make lunch, clean the apartments, iron, do the laundry."²³

Now look at the current state of women's problem. A study conducted at the national level by the Committee on Women's Affairs and Family, Maternity and Childhood Protection of the USSR Supreme Soviet made it clear that the women's position in society, despite their contribution to the social production, is much worse. According to the study, about half of the labour force in the country are women, and 90 per cent of women who are able to work,

23. "Soviet Women Say They are Bypassed by Reforms", Tehran Times, 22 September, 1988.

are engaged in the national economy. Though the Soviet women have got the highest educational level in the world and though they comprise 60 per cent of all higher education specialists in the country, they are socially rated below men.

In the Soviet Union, there is a good section of women who are doing labour-intensive work. And their working conditions are very bad, flouting the labour protection facilities in the country. Women have to do night shifts - two or three times, and in some industries, six times more than men. Eventhough women could attain equal education with men, because of the double burden they could not professionally improve. That is why they represent only 10 per cent of high quality specialists while men represent 40 per cent, and women hold only 7 per cent of managerial jobs while men hold 48 per cent.²⁴ This is the case in politics too.

The women are complaining that because of the lack of free time they are not even getting time to spend with their children. According to Valentina Matvienko,

24. Sofia Startseva interviews Valentina Matvienko, "Women in Society: The Right to Choose", Soviet Union, no. 5(482), 1990, p. 6.

Chairperson of the Committee of Women's Affairs, Family, Maternity and Childbirth Protection, the average woman has only 24 minutes a day to devote wholly to her child.

As part of the transition to the market economy, there arose a food crisis in the Soviet Union. Because of the food crisis, the woman got the additional duty of spending the entire evenings in queues before the shops to collect daily essentials, thereby extending their working day by hours.

Women have assumed increasingly important positions in Soviet society, but only few. Now there are women thinking that it is time to seek political office. Larisa Kuznetsova wrote in New Times that the women's voice is properly heard only in the Kitchen; Soviet women's vital economic role is not accompanied by any significant political clout.²⁵

This political clout is what women need and this is what Gorbachev is also trying to envisage in his political and developmental steps. With the democratisation efforts, the

25. N. 10. Tehran Times carried an article about the views of Kuznetsova who writes in New Times.

reality of women's inequality and its manifestation in political realm has come out in the open. The positive impact of Perestroika is that it has enabled the women and the whole society to recognise the facts as facts, and imparted the political drive to come out of such an undesirable situation.

C o n c l u s i o n

Conclusion

According to the theory of Marxism-Leninism, once capitalism and the private ownership of the means of production are replaced by socialism and public ownership of the means of production, there would be complete equality of the sexes. One of the important aims of revolution was also this. But even after the Great October Revolution, women did not completely get freed from oppression and humiliation. However, it is true that the Soviet government has done many things for improving the status of women and for their emancipation.

During the 1920s, Soviet policy actively encouraged the emancipation of women from family obligations and bringing them into politics. There was special women's department in the party aiming to promote women's active participation in politics and economy. But during the 1930s and 1940s, there was a change towards more restrictive policies that were intended to strengthen families and increase the birth rate. Eventhough Soviet women did not give up primary roles as child bearers, house keepers and wives, a constant demand for labour in the rapidly industrialising society and a shortage of males in the force provided opportunities for women also in the

so-called male occupations. During Stalin's period, he encouraged more women to engage in labour. He declared the women question solved in the 1930s and abolished the women's department from the party.

But, Krushchev, finding that there are still unsolved problems among women, resurrected the women's council in 1960s. He encouraged the political participation of women and appointed one woman candidate member to the Politburo - the apex body of the party. And now, under democratisation programme, Gorbachev is trying to bring more women into political power and he has already started steps in this regard.

Though women are less represented in party politics, women's participation was better in the lower level bodies, though they have got less responsible positions. At the same time, one can see that since 1920s, the membership of women in the party was steadily increasing.

The household burden made it difficult for women to engage actively in socio-political activities. When they get employment, this burden increases, and they have to cope with the double burden of doing unpaid work in the house and low paid work in the industry. Women were recruited generally in the low paid and unskilled jobs. And they were used for physically heavy manual work also. Even in the so-called feminine

jobs, the top positions were not given to women.

Because of the lack of free time, women are not able to attend the political gatherings after work; after work they have to do shopping, cooking etc. for which men never volunteer. And some unlucky women have to face wife-beating also from drunken husbands. Among the women's 'natural' roles are both motherhood and child rearing. The Soviet view is that, this endows women with unique personal qualities like sensitivity, delicacy and capacity for nurturing. These harmonising qualities can also influence the worker outside. So, Gorbachev is trying to have a rational blend of these familial and social potential of women.

Though women's councils operate in the society with the objective of raising women's political consciousness, it also did not help to lessen the gender based division of labour. They are mainly operating in the informal political areas.

Though women entered into work force, that did not give them emancipation; instead, they had to struggle hard to manage the work outside and in the family. Women got less time even to look after their children and consequently this created problems like alcoholism, juvenile delinquency etc.

When Gorbachev came to power, he had to face a society that was stagnant economically, socially and politically. In this background Gorbachev wanted to come out of the problems and he found Perestroika as a treatment. From the discussions held all over the country as part of Perestroika and glasnost, Gorbachev could understand that women are not in a position of equality with men. Therefore, he decided to do something for the betterment of the plight of women in every field. He has shown particular interest to bring more women into political activities especially in the politics of power. After the 27th Congress he appointed Alexandra P. Biryukova as a candidate member of the Politburo.

Though he made it clear that women should come to the politics of power, his policies seem to be contrary to his call at the outset. He said women should come to their actual feminine role as mothers, housewives etc. He might have thought that only women can prevent the social problems like decreasing birth rate, unattended children, alcoholism etc. Therefore, after the 27th Congress, the policies he has taken were intended to lessen the working hours, to give more benefits for mothers with children etc. He tried for the overall betterment of the position of women - their standard of living and working conditions.

The women's councils are expected to raise the political consciousness among women. But they engaged more in social activities than in political activities. Gorbachev gave the women's committees the right to introduce the problems of women before the administration, after understanding their problems by consulting with the women's councils which are directly working among women.

In the political front, the intentions of Gorbachev got defeated. 1989 elections gave a shocking revelation that women are slowly withdrawing from politics. The percentage of women elected to the Congress of Peoples Deputies fell to less than half. And it was mainly the result of women's belief that they won't get enough time at home, if they take politically responsible jobs. This situation has led Gorbachev to give once again a renewed emphasis on politics. He did this in 28th Congress.

In the 28th Congress of the CPSU, along with stressing the measures for the betterment of life and work conditions, he encouraged and appealed to women to come to the politics of power. He appointed Galina Semenova as a full member of the Politburo and appointed more women in the Central Committee than before.

Lenin believed that socialism is impossible without the equal participation of women in politics as well as economy. If Gorbachev's positions during Perestroika are taken in their totality, then he is closer to Lenin. Gorbachev's policies of democratisation could regenerate an active interest on the women's question. We can expect that more women would come to politics, if his policies do not remain only in paper, if the considerable discrepancy between the regulations in force and their practical application is reduced.

We cannot fully assume that inadequacies in socialist theory is a source of the problem, because it seems Marxism does not reduce the creative capacities of women and their human powers to motherhood. Instead, Marx, Engels, Lenin, and other theoreticians of Marxism said that women's occupational work was a condition for their genuine social emancipation. Marx clearly mentioned that the social status of women is a measuring rod for social progress. Gorbachev is trying to apply these principles in accordance with the current reality.

As the activities of women's councils could not change the neglect of women in power politics, one can conclude that the continued existence of male domination in the power structure is an important problem. So it seems, in the Soviet case, that some of the aspects of the gender differences

are difficult to be changed soon. But, if real change has to come in the nature of power, women must participate in the politics of power. Here, the intentions of Perestroika are very clear. The effect of Perestroika has not yet reached in this sphere in a sound way. But, everything is pointing to this direction.

A p p e n d i c e s

APPENDIX - I Career Patterns of Female Members of the Central Committee (full and candidate) known to have held party position: 18-26th Congress, CPSU

Name	Date on CC	Post
Furtseva, E.A.	1952-71	1950-4 2nd sec. gorkom Moscow 1954-7 1st sec. gorkom Moscow 1956-60 sec. CC 1956-7 candid. presidium(Politburo) 1957-61 full presidium.
Ivashchenko, O.I.	1956 C 1961 F	1954-65 sec. CC Ukraine CP.
Kol'china, O.P.	1961-81C	1947-60 1st sec. gorkom-Krasnoiya Gorka 1960-3 2nd sec. obkom-Moscow 1964-7 sec. obkom-Moscow
Lykova, L.P.	1952-76C 1976-81F 1981	1955 2nd sec. obkom Ivanovo 1958-61 2nd sec. obkom Smolensk 1961-7 RSFSR Ministry of Social Security Dep.chair RSFSR CoMinist. Chair Anti-Alcoholism committee.
Dement'eva R.F.	1966-76C 1976-81F	1960-80 sec. Moscow gorkom. 1981 2nd sec. Moscow gorkom.
Kruglova, A.M.	1966-71A 1976-81F	1963-8 sec. gorkom Leningrad 1968-74 sec. obkom Leningrad. 1974 chair presidium USSR. Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. 1974-5 USSR Dep. Min. of Culture.
Andreevna N.A.	1956 C	1956 1st sec. raikom Bauman(M) 1960 Party control committee

(Contd.)

Appendix-I (Contd.)

Name	Date on CC	Post
Ivanova, T.G.	1981C	1981 1st sec. raikom Kalinin(M)
Eliseeva N.G.	1971A 1976F	1968-74 1st sec. raikom Nevsky(L) 1974 Dep. chair Leningrad City Soviet exec. committee
Poberei, M.T.	1966-76C	1st sec. raikom Leninsk (Volograd obl.)
Khmara, I.G.	1981C	1981 1st sec. raikom Slagominska (Krasnodar krai)

Key:

A auditing commission
 C candidate member
 F full member
 M Moscow
 L Leningrad

Source: Genia K. Browning, Women and Politics in the USSR: Consciousness Raising and Soviet Women's Groups, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).

APPENDIX - II

Female Members of the Central Committee, CPSU 1986

Name	Date CAC	Elected Cand.	full	Post Date	Post
BIRYUKOVA Aleksandra Pavlovna	1929	1971	1976	1986	Secretary, Presidium, All Union Council of Trade Unions; Secretariat, CC CPSU
CHERKASHINA Valentina Nikolaevna	1976		1986		Spinner, Volgograd oblast, RSFSR
ERSHOVA Neli Mikhailovna		1981	1986		Adjuster, machine building plant, RSFSR
GOLUBEVA Mari Arkhipova		1981	1986		Brigade leader, milking machine operator, sovokhoz, Biisk raion, Altai Krai, RSFSR
GOLUBEVA Valentina Nikolaevna			1981		Weaver, Ivanovo worseed combine, Ivanovo oblast', RSFSR
GROMOVA Mariya Sergeevna			1986		Milking machine operator, Sovkhoz, Leninskii, raion, Moscow oblast'
KARPOVA Evdokiya Fedorovna		1966	1976		Deputy Chair, Council of Ministers, USSR
KRUGLOVA Zinaida Mikhailovna	1966		1976	1963-8 1968-74 1974 1974-5	Secretary Leningrad gorkom; Secretary Leningrad Obkom Chair, Presidium, Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship & Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries; USSR Deputy Minister of Culture.

APPENDIX- II (Contd.)

Name	Date CAC	Elected Card.	Full.	Post Date.	Post.
NIKOLAEVA-TERESHKOVA Valentina Vladimirovna			1971		Chair, Soviet Women's Committee, member of Presidium, USSR Supreme Soviet.
PEREVERZEVA Nina Vasil'evna		1981	1986		Team leader, Kolkhoz, Peschanokorskoe raion, Rostov oblast', RSFSR.
PLETNEVA Valentina Nikolaevna			1986		Weaver, Kostrana flax combine, RSFSR; member of Presidium, AUCCTU
SHEVCHENKO Valentina Semenovna			1986		Chair, Presidium, Ukrainian SSR, Supreme Soviet
UDALAYA Raisa Sitant'evna	1981		1986		Riveter, Novosibirsk Aviation Plant, RSFSR.

Source: Genia K. Browning, Women and Politics in the USSR:
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