

**"WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA:
PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS (1986-1994)"**

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TO MY PARENTS
FOR THEIR LOVE AND AFFECTION



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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the Dissertation entitled "**Women's Movement in Russia: Prospects and Problems (1986-1994)**" submitted by Ms. Rashmi Das in partial fulfilment for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy, has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University. To the best of our knowledge this is a bonafide work.

We recommend that this Dissertation be placed before the examiner for evaluation.

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PREFACE

Russian women have often been considered the most liberated, strengthened by the legal equality they have enjoyed since 1920. Yet this formal equality was not evidenced in Soviet women's life. This systematic inequality is apparent when one considers in the Soviet period, the position of women in occupational, educational and political arenas. As such the women's cause and movement suffered, thwarted sometimes by state institutions as in earlier days of socialism and more often by the fanatical adherence to stereotypes. It is in this content that this study seeks to answer what Perestroika and its offshoot democratisation has meant for women in the economic, political and social arenas.

While, in the years preceding the Perestroika period the social goal was drawing women into socialised production the new thinking emphasised the role of women as mothers and homemakers. It earlier it was how to relieve the double burden of work and family on women, since Perestroika the agenda is to counter the neo-conservatism which has spokesmen among liberal economic reformers, religious revivalists and nationalist forces.

The first chapter deals with the theoretical construct of the feminist movement and seeks to trace the history of women's movement in Russia.

In the second chapter an attempt is made to present the social and economic concerns and issues of the women. It also seeks to probe what Perestroika has spelt for the women, their positions in the workforce and the problems they confront therein.

The third chapter focusses on the attempts of women to carve out a political role in an atmosphere of male democracy.

The fourth chapter is a commentary on the state of the movement itself, the societal impact of the emerging values and the resultant influence on the women's movement.

In the concluding chapter an attempt is made to assess the overall development of the movement. The central focus is on the interrelationships between political, social and economic roles. This macro-scenario is closely linked to the micro situation where the individual must have full autonomy to make decisions on family size and where women must be helped to become decision-makers.

I am deeply thankful to my supervisor Dr. Ajay Patnaik whose co-operation and valuable advice has made this work possible. I am also indebted to my friend Afroza Yasmin who helped me with research material and otherwise. My thanks also to my friends and family for believing in me.

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CHAPTER I
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT
IN RUSSIA

INTRODUCTION

The feminist movement from the beginning has been committed to the achievement for women of full legal, political, social, economic and educational equality with men. Early European feminists included Olympe de Gouges, who wrote, *The Declaration of the Rights of Women*¹ (1789) and Mary Wollstonecraft whose *Vindication of the Rights of Women*² (1792) was extraordinarily radical and far-sighted. In the US, a women's movement led by Elizabeth Lady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony (mid-nineteenth century) began the long struggle for women's suffrage, and finally achieved it in 1920. The first nation to give women the vote was New Zealand (1893), followed by Australia (1903). In England the suffragettes led by Emily Pankhurst, went to extreme lengths to make their case. The active role taken by women on the home front during World War I was decisive in making the breakthrough in Britain in 1920 and 1928. While liberalism was evolving an ideological

1 Ryan, Barbara, *Feminism and Women's Movement: Dynamics of Change in Social Movement, Ideology and Activism* (New York, 1992), p.10.

2 *ibid.*

framework to co-opt the aspirations of women in Russia, Lenin and his comrades were busy in wiping out the older Shibboleths of Tsarist autocracy. The Marxist precepts were sought to be actualised in state organisation, economy, and in inculcating a socialist way of living. Women's equality was written into the constitution of 1920.³ The liberal and the Marxist approaches to the women's question form an interesting study. Liberal thinkers who advocated reform of institutions in all spheres on the basis of utility were not too keen to extend it to women. The greatest number either excluded women or was based on the view that the submission of women was their greatest happiness. However there was one important exception, J.S.Mill.

Mill in his book, *The Subjection of Women* held "It is totally out of keeping with modern times, to have ascribed statuses; human beings are no longer born to their place in life, individual choice is our model now."⁴ He challenged the existing social system based on the legal subordination of women which was 'one of the chief hindrances to human improvement and ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect

3 Porter, Cathy, *Women in Revolutionary Russia* (Cambridge, 1987), p.15.

4 Kumari Jayawardena, "Liberalism and the Women's Movement", in *Feminism in Europe - Liberal and Socialist Strategies, 1789-1919, A Lecture Series, Part I* (The Hague, 1983), p.83.

equality admitting no power or privilege on the one side nor disability on the other.⁵ But for all his notions of equal status, Mill's views were limited by his class position, since he was speaking of middle-class women. Moreover in spite of his argument against ascribed roles, he accepted the traditional roles ascribed to men and women in the family, an institution which he considered to be essential for humanity. Nevertheless, Mill was consistent in that while arguing on the positive effects of liberty on human development and personality and the harmful consequences of the lack of liberty he was able to apply these values to women and to appreciate some of the realities of women's subjection:

What in unenlightened societies, colour, race, religion, or in the case of a conquered country, nationality are to some men, sex is to all women; a peremptory⁶ exclusion from all honourable occupations.⁶

Women social reformers and Liberals agitated for rights of the women of their class and their campaigns were on specific issues to be tackled within the framework of capitalism. Agitation was on single issues, such as the right to education, property rights, birth control, and the suffrage. Once these rights were granted, the movements inevitably subsided though they generated much heat and militancy in their heyday.

5 ibid.

6 Akin, Susan, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, 1977), p.230.

The lessons to be drawn from liberal-inspired struggles were clear. The reformists in launching democratic struggles were faced with the usual "liberal dilemma - namely that in espousing liberal rights as universal"⁷ they were opening the door for working peoples and the oppressed, to take up such issues which the liberals then opposed. Moreover, there is an ambiguity to liberal ideas which are acted out in the framework of status quo and therefore have a basic conservative bias. It is an illusion to think that one can agitate for liberty and equality in a situation where these rights cannot be granted to masses, but may be conceded only to a small segment of the population. Liberal demands thus create a "false consciousness"⁸ since people often genuinely believe that they are agitating for liberal causes without being aware of the class interests that are thereby served.

The liberal feminist stance has been referred to in feminist discourse as the argument for equality. Women should simply be included in all aspects of public life regardless of the injustices, inequalities and economic and racial hierarchies upon which liberal capitalism rests. By refusing to acknowledge that there may be politically significant

7 Kumarri Jayawardena, n.1, p.101.

8 *ibid.*

differences between men and women, it tacitly advocates the "superwomen syndrome".⁹

Liberalism is "essentialist"¹⁰ dividing body from mind, overhauling the role of mind in defining human nature while denying the importance of bodies. It is this denial of any connection between mind and body that leads liberalism to assume too many similarities between men and women.

Marxism in contrast avoids the rationalist-essentialist limitation; however, it also denies that any significant differences between men and women exist. Because Marxists believe that economic relation is the ultimate determinant of consciousness and that the only significant conflict in the modern world is one between capitalist and proletarian classes, gender is an entirely secondary element in Marxist theory. Whether one is a man or woman matters far less than whether one is a proletarian or a capitalist.

Ironically, there are many similarities between substance of Marxist and liberal feminism. Marxism on its own, in reducing all human consciousness to class consciousness actually resembles liberal feminist rationalism in its assumption, that no significant differences exist between men

9 Ring, Jenniefer, *Modern Political Theory and Contemporary Feminism - A Dialectical Analysis* (New York, 1991), p.8.

10 *ibid*, p.11

and women: in the market place such differences are entirely observed by more important class differences.

Marx and Engels, extended the method of dialectical and historical materialism in dealing with the question of women's emancipation. Marx took over the dialectical method from Hegel and developed it further. Its main principle is, everything gives rise to its own contradictions over time. The two contradictions called thesis and anti-thesis struggle against each other until a new synthesis is evolved. Whereas Hegel considered ideas as the main movers of history, Marx and Engels argued that the real, material and historical struggle between thesis and antithesis is the one between different classes and that contradiction between the development of productive forces at a given historical moment and the relations of production, namely property relations, is true moving force of history.

Marx considered it as a part of the revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie that it "has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal idyllic relations"¹¹ and that "it has torn away from the family the veil of sentimentality and reduced the family relation to a mere money relation."¹² It is the capitalist production process itself which destroys, according

11 Marx, Karl and Freidrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto in: Selected Works*, Vol.1 (London, 1950), p.111.

12

to them, the age-old differences between men and women as both are turned into instruments of production.

However, Marx contends that in spite of all the horrors, the inhuman treatment and exploitation of women and children, by capital, the very fact that capital driven by its profit motive, draws women out of the domestic sphere into social production, i.e., into factory work, creates the pre-conditions for their liberation.

Marx and Engels predicted, that the modern bourgeoisie, itself a product of a series of revolutions against feudal relations of production, would develop the forces of production to such an extent that they would tend to break apart the conditions of bourgeois property. The abolition of private property, it was held, would also lead to an abolition of the bourgeois, monogamous family.

Fredrich Engels wrote an important work on the origin and evolution of family, titled *The Origin of the Family: Private Property and the State*.¹³ He combined an evolutionary approach with Marxian theory, arguing that as the mode of production changed, so did the family.

During the early stages of human evolution, Engels believed that the forces of production were communally owned and the family as such did not exist. In Engels opinion there

13 Andreyer, I.L. *Engels's 'The Origin of the Family: Private Property and the State* (Moscow, 1985), p.5.

existed "a primitive stage at which promiscuous intercourse prevailed within a tribe, so that every women belonged equally to every man and similarly every man to every woman."¹⁴ He believed this stage to correspond to the "period of transition from animality to humanity."¹⁵ He also provided a material explanation of the advance of animality to humanity: "So weaponless an animal as the creature that was becoming man could survive in small numbers and also in isolation, with the single pair as the highest form of gregariousness"¹⁶ but "for evolution out of the animal stage, for the accomplishment of the greatest advance known to nature, an additional element was needed: the replacement of the individual's inadequate power of defence by the united strength of the horde."¹⁷ This imperative led to what Engels calls "group-marriage"¹⁸ - the first stage in the historical evolution of marital family relations. The emphasis shifted from the instinct of propagation and satisfaction of sexual needs which is the main aim uniting animals in the animal world to the provision of varied food for the offspring and also for the individuals of

14 Engels, F., *The Origin of the Family: Private Property and the State* (London, 1972), p.212.

15 *ibid*, p.215.

16 Andreyev, n.13, p.65.

17 *ibid*.

18 Engels, F., n.14, p.218.

the opposite sex with the help of implement based activity. Thus curious combination of the sphere of production of the means of subsistence and the sphere of the production of man himself, may be viewed as the "genetic trace"¹⁹ of a society which existed at the lower stage of savagery and which is lost at the threshold of history.

The problem of the origin of family is treated in Engels book as the genesis of monogamy. This process, noted Engels, is based not on the abstract exclusiveness of sexual love, which is the product of a long and contradictory historical development, but on the formation of private property and the state. In Marxist scheme, the juridical screen of marriage, of formally equal partners, barely conceals the hypocrisy and openly commercial nature of actual marital and family relations and sexual relations in general. "The modern individual family" says Engels "is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of the women."²⁰

As in the sphere of factory production, so also in the sphere of the family, within the bourgeois society the prerequisites for the impending overthrow were taking shape, and the proletariat - the class destined to overthrow it - was emerging. In proletarian families, unlike bourgeois families

19 Andreyev, n.13, p.74.

20 F.Engels, n.14, p.227.

formal monogamy, according to Engels was acquiring for the first time the features of genuine equality and reciprocity between the sexes based on love. The question of marital family relations based on love among the proletariat is treated with particular force and optimism. It is freed from bourgeois cynicism and hypocrisy, from the ugly perversions caused by the distorted relations of property which materialise everything including even intimate relations. With the abolition of private property, the foundations of classical monogamy are removed, for it is for safeguarding property and inheritance that monogamy and male domination were established. "The woman regains" says Engels "the right of separation. In short the proletarian marriage is monogamous in the etymological sense of the word, but by no means in the historical sense."²¹

Such was Engel's vision of the dawn of a new era in the position of women in society. He accords great importance to the role of large-scale industry, since it transfers women from the house to the labour-market, and makes her often the breadwinner of the family. In this Engels sees the end of the last remnants of male domination in a proletarian home.

Differences between men and women have been viewed in a varied manner in the building of feminist theory.

21 *ibid*, p.245.

The problem of sexual difference is central to any kind of feminist politics on theory, since the very reason why women as a social group are oppressed is that they differ from men. The question is what that difference consists in, how far it extends, and how it is constructed in relation to power. It is man who has been the subject of discourse whether in the field of theory, morality or politics. And the gender of God, the guardian of every subject and discourse, is always paternal and masculine in the West. For women, there remain the so-called minor art-forms: cooking, knitting, sewing and embroidery and in exceptional cases, poetry, painting and music. "Women may be capable of education" says Hegel "but they are not made for the more advanced sciences, for philosophy and certain forms of artistic production which require universality. Women may have ideas, taste and elegance, but they do not have the ideal. The difference between men and women is like that between animals and plants: men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants, because they are more of a placid unfolding the principle of which is the undetermined unity of feeling. When women hold the helm of government, the state is at once in jeopardy, because women regulate their actions not by the demands of universality, but by arbitrary inclinations and opinions. Women are educated by living rather than by

acquiring knowledge while man attains his position only through the conquest of thought and by much technical exertion."²²

This writing of the female as inferior, as a being without reason just like the colonial belief of the negro or the savage as a being without reason evoked strong reaction specially in the modern times. Of special impact have been the views of the French feminist school who have attacked the assumed centrality of male. The modern discovery of individual which accompanied the rise of liberalism, assumes that the individual is male, an epistemological problem identified by Simone de Beauvoir in "The Second Sex".²³

Indeed, there are many women doctors, engineers, lawyers and other professionals, yet the names of those who are famous are few when compared with their male counterparts. Is there something about women which consigns them to mediocrity as the anti-feminist tirade seems to imply? It would be pertinent to look into the causes in a little more detail. First of all, women are tied down by various forms of domestic drudgery. They have a variety of things to worry about: they are obliged to concern themselves with things other than their careers, they have to divide their time between their professions and

22 Michèle Le Doeuff, "Women and Philosophy", in Toril Moi (ed.), *French Feminist Thought - A Reader* (Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987), p.189.

23 Ring Jennifer, n.9, p.8.

domestic lives. Consequently they are reluctant to launch into anything that is too engaging and thus their profession takes a back-seat. Incredible faith in themselves and exacting personal standards of professional excellence contends de Beauvoir, is characteristic of only five or six figures in each century. This is particularly true, she says, in the field of literary and artistic creativity. In order to reveal the world to others, one must be able to see the world, and in order to do so one must attain a certain distance from it. This space is not allowed to women in society which traditionally instills in her the belief that she is a "relative and secondary being."²⁴ Thus it would seem in certain respects, the greatest disability of a woman is her sex, as Stendhall has put it. "Every genius born a woman is lost to humanity."²⁵

And yet in spite of all the encumbrances the women's movement has made great strides. The protracted struggle for equality has led to the legal recognition of this principle in most countries. The constitution of women's studies as a separate academic discipline and the publication of enormous literature on feminist thought is another indicator of the importance given to this field of study. The recent years have

24 Simone de Beauvoir, "Women and Creativity", in Toril Moi (ed.), *French Feminist Thought - A Reader* (Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987), p.25.

25 *ibid*, p.18.

seen the active involvement of non-governmental organisations, the UN and its allied agencies to inform public opinion on the women's issue through social summitry. This has also afforded the women's movement with an opportunity to reflect on the movement from below.

The development of women's movement in Russia makes an interesting study. Tsarist autocracy and Greek orthodox church had helped in entrenching patriarchy. The hearth and the family were held as haloed institutions and the role of women was emphasised as nurturers. When on the European continent democracy was making great strides, Russia was still a medieval country, divided between Serfs and the free, and wedded to the Tsarist precepts of autonomy, nationalism, and religious orthodoxy.

The peasant woman's life was particularly hard. Often mistreated, exhausted by endless pregnancies and work in fields, she was regarded as barely human and her labour was considered unproductive. The teachings of the church reinforced the low regard for women through out Russian society. It made divorce impossible, associating women with numerous vices and sins and encouraged the image of husbands and fathers, as agents of imperial and religious authority.

Examination of Russian society, reveals a kind of symbiotic relationship between reform and women's movement. The circumstance that gave rise to a fledging feminist movement

in Russia included Russia's defeat in the Crimean war; the death of oppressive Nicholas I, and the relaxation of censorship under his successor Alexander II: an impressive array of reform measures ranging from the emancipation of serfs to the establishment of local elective assemblies (*zemstovos*). On the eve of this reform era, the Tsarist government deployed a small contingent of nurses in the Crimean war, a break with the traditional women's place. Women were slowly escaping family despotism.

Marx argued that the capitalist system degraded all human relationships and brought special hardships for women. But despite everything, he said women's entry into the workforce was a positive step, for only when women and men came out on strike together, would the strike movement be strong.

The revolutionaries in Russia, were the only people to pay serious attention to women's working conditions. They did so in the first issue of their new paper *Iskara* which came out in 1900 and which spoke to the men and women working in Russia's factories. Nadezhda Krupskaya,²⁶ a Social Democrat (and Lenin's wife) wrote and helped to smuggle a booklet called "The Women Worker" into the factories. The docility of women was

26 Cathy Porter, *Women in Revolutionary Russia* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.14.

ebbing away. The first issue of "Rabotnitsa"²⁷ appeared in St.Petersburg on International Women's Day 1914.

The Bolsheviks' success in October 1917, gave people new hope. For millions, the revolution was a time of tremendous optimism and energy. The Bolsheviks now had to persuade women, that they had their interests at heart. Indeed one of the first laws, passed by the new government, on 20 December 1917, was a new marriage decree. But mere laws could not change age-old prejudices against women. Alexandra Kollontai²⁸ the only woman in the government held that Bolsheviks were too poor and too accustomed to overlooking women, to do any more than make them men's equals in law. The women themselves, she maintained, must fight for their full equality, by organizing their own groups in the factories, unions and Soviets deciding what laws they needed to protect them and then ensuring that these laws were worth more than the paper they were written on. The *zhenotdel* (women's council) now had to persuade the government to consider women's needs, after the victory. As a result of its activities in November 1920, Russia became the first country in the world to give women the right to free abortions in state hospitals.

27 *ibid*, p.18.

28 *ibid*, p.38.

But despite all these progressive laws, the changing of family life was a deeply painful process, especially for women, and the government never did enough to ensure that the new society worked in their interests. Women's new confidence and energy was continually being obstructed by men determined to hold on to their old powers; politics remained largely a man's world.

Stalin and his associates had a particularly apathetic attitude to women, while most men in the government according to Konkordia Somoilava²⁹ tended to dismiss women's work as "beneath their dignity".

In the severe climate of the late 1920s, when Soviet Russia geared itself up for its immense industrialisation programme, and in the three decades that followed, people were imprisoned and killed on the slightest suspicion of working against the government. Differences of opinion were banned and censored, women's movement was silenced and lost its autonomy.

During the relatively brief Khrushchev years, the silence began to thaw, befitting the policy of democratisation. But it was not until Brezhnev's claim that the USSR was in a state of developed socialism that problems in women's lives could be officially recognised. In a context of labour shortages and falling birthrates in the late 1960s and early 1970s

29 *ibid*, p.44.

demographers and socialists engaged in a lively debate about the significance of female "double burden".³⁰ From his study of the USSR, David Lane states "The position of women in society is more equal to that of men, than in capitalist states, but within the family much of women's traditional underprivilege remains."³¹ As evidence Lane points out, that women had steadily increased their share of the labour market. In 1922, they made up "22 percent of the labour-force, by 1973 51 percent."³² Despite the fact that over half the labour force was female women were still primarily responsible for housework and child care. In his work on the Soviet family Mark G. Field argues that entry of women into the labour force has done little to change their domestic roles. He states that husband "zealous of their masculinity"³³ gave their wives little assistance around the home. Field concludes that, "As long it is not possible for the state to undertake the complete care of a child for every woman who wishes it to do so, the

30 Buckley, Mary, ed., *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.2.

31 Lane, D, *Politics and Society in the USSR* (London, 1970), p.327.

32 Lane, D., *The Socialist Industrial State* (London, 1976), p.224.

33 Field, Mark, "Workers (and Mothers): Soviet Women Today", in D.R.Brown (ed.), *Women in Soviet Union* (New York, 1968), p.125.

blueprint outlined by Engels for the complete emancipation of women will have to remain just that."³⁴

Lane too concedes that there is considerable "male domination"³⁵ in the Soviet Union. In Lane's words "collective ownership of the means of production is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for female liberation."³⁶ He argues that cultural attitudes though influenced by economic changes, are not simply shaped by them. To some extent, culture has an "independent effect"³⁷ on behaviour. Lane concludes that "thousands of years of history of the subjection of women influence attitudes which men learn and while communist governments may significantly alter the institutional arrangements of society, it is much more difficult to change attitudes to get women accepted in authority roles on the same basis as men."³⁸

By analysing the published sources, it becomes clear, that though, there are no structural limitations on the employment of women, they are not equally represented in all industries. They make up over "half the employees in communication, housing

34 *ibid*, p.126.

35 Lane, D., n.31, p.328.

36 *ibid*.

37 *ibid*.

38 *ibid*, p.328.

and domestic service, in health, physical culture, social insurance and in education and culture", less than quarter of employees in transport and forestry."³⁹

Women in Soviet labour force, are unequally represented in positions of responsibility and authority. Figures published in 1969, show that although 30 percent of engineers are women, they make up only 6 percent of chief engineers, and 20 percent of foreman in factories.⁴⁰ In 1973, women made up 47 percent of the membership of local soviets, 35 percent (1971), of the elected members of the supreme Soviets of the union republics, the governing bodies of various republics which made up the Soviet Union.⁴¹ However the number of women on the powerful central governing bodies were small. In 1974, they made up only 1 percent of the Council of Ministers of the USSR.⁴² A similar picture emerged from the power structure of the Communist Party. Although a quarter of the Party members were women in 1974, they were sparsely represented on its central governing bodies. Only "4 percent of the members of the

39 Lane, D., n.32, p.221.

40 *ibid.*

41 *ibid.*

42 *ibid*, p.222.

Central Committee were female, and there were no women in the Politbureau,"⁴³ the main policy making body.⁴⁴

Although women's economic and social roles came onto the agenda particularly their relevance to production and reproduction, many issues remained untouched. Not until the adoption of Glasnost particularly after 1987, did a range of 'issues' enter the media and were debated upon. Instead of the older discourse of the social good, increasing legitimacy began to be given to sexual difference and place of women at home and outside. Empty shelves and shortages of basic goods, growing redundancy of unskilled workers, bulk of whom are women, etc., present the women's movement with a different agenda.



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43 ibid.

44 ibid.

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Table 1

Women in the Paid Labour Force Sector, 1989

| | No. ('000) | % of total female labour force | Women as % of relevant labour force |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Total in paid labour. | 67,997 | 100 | 48 |
| Industry, transport and communication, construction. | 24,934 | 37 | 38 |
| Agriculture and forestry | 10,139 | 15 | 39 |
| Trade, catering material, technical supply and sales | 7,666 | 11 | 73 |
| Health, physical culture social services, education, culture, and science education | 18,321 | 27 | 73 |

Source: Judith Shapiro, "The Industrial Labour Force", in Berckley, Mary, ed., *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (London, 1993), p.16.

One of the important points which appears to be clear from the above table is that Soviet women, are no longer a majority of the labour force, as they still were in 1979, but now constitute 48 percent. Another emergent trend is that women

are shifting out of industry and manual work in preference for the service sector.

The process of Perestroika involved a slimming down of the labour force. As American analyst of the Soviet economy Ed Hewitt, put it, "perestroika is a very polite phrase for firing a lot of people and closing a lot of enterprises".⁴⁵ Thus there was an evident fear, one that turned out to be true that there would not be enough jobs or the right kind of jobs to redeploy everyone. Along side the cuts affecting the women workers, the patriarchs repeat the call for the emancipation of women from the double burden, by returning them to home. Few have the interest of women at heart. Rather they talk about the good of something called society which does not take too kindly to over-emancipated shrew.

It is in this context that socially two trends are becoming important. One is the tradition of patriarchy being reinforced by the values advocated by the orthodox church. The other is the movement away from collectivism and cognizance of a society of independent individuals, with individual rights, acquiring familiarity with legal and political structure of democracy.

Democratisation under Gorbachev and after has not brought a proliferation of lively female parliamentarians defending

45 Berckley, Mary, ed., n.30, p.14.

women's interests, but it has given women the political space to form women only groups (independent of the larger political groups), a freedom denied to them for seventy years. Empowerment of women in terms of freedom of choice is a phrase which is being resounded and reverberated at the women's forums. The traditional *zhensovet* (women's council) has undergone transformation so much as values of autonomy and independence are being incorporated, to make it more responsive.

The state of the women's movement is different from previous decades. Motivation of the movement is provided by the women only group instead of official directives. As much it can be presumed, that the movement will not be encumbered by the imperative of confirming with governmental pronouncements. Women only groups with various dispositions are making their mark while some have gone green there are still others like "VERA" which are concerned with social problems brought about by unemployment.⁴⁶

Politically, the women of Russia Party with its 21 deputies assumes importance. even if their numerical strength is not impressive in a 450 member Duma, their presence ensures that through their debates and discussions, they would focus attention on governmental policy regarding women.

46 Solomea Pavlychko, "Between Feminism and Nationalism: New Women's Groups in the Ukraine", in Mary Berkley, ed., *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.84.

This would inform public opinion as well as aggregate women's interests. The activities of women's groups in political, social and economic arena become important at a time when Russia is going through convulsive changes. An oft expressed fear is that will gender as a category be subsumed in the nationalist revivalist movement. Much however depends on the policy and programmes of government, the activities of the feminist groups, the reception and prejudices of a society which has known both collective ownership of the means of production along with its officially touted equality and continues old traditions of patriarchy.

The subsequent chapters will help to give a better insight of the social, economic and political problems, confronting Russian society in general and women in particular, and help evolve some understanding regarding the nature of the women's movement in Russia during the period under study.

CHAPTER II
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES AND RUSSIAN WOMEN

The Marxist analysis of sexual inequality can be paraphrased as follows: Women's inferior status under capitalism, is a consequence of their dependence upon men within the context of the bourgeois family. This, in turn, derives its *raison d'être*, from the existence of private property. The implication is thus clear. The abolition of the private property will lead to far reaching changes in the nature of the family; it will lead to the emergence of women from the confines of the domestic hearth, to their assumption of the full range of political, economic and social roles. The socialist revolution, then will result in the eradication of sexual inequality and exploitation of women by men, just as it will result in the elimination of class inequality and exploitation of workers by the owners of property.

This analysis found in the Communist Manifesto of 1848 and elaborated in Engel's "The Origin of the Family" in 1884 was based upon the realisation that the family, the structure of family relationships far from being immutable, from being determined by biological necessity was a social institution. Like other social institutions it was susceptible to change in response to change in economic relationships. With the development of capitalism, the family became a social vehicle

for the accumulation, preservation and inter-generational transmission of property. This in turn involved the introduction of monogamy; it implied the subjection of women to men. "The development of machine based industry had two further consequences for the nature of family relationships. The enormous expansion in productive capital, and its concentration in the hands of a few families, emphasised the property aspects of marriage among the bourgeoisie. It underlined the loveless nature of bourgeois marriage, and condemned the wives and daughters of the middle-class to a life of circumscribed and sterile idleness. On the other hand, by simplifying the tasks involved in productive labour by reducing the demands, they made upon the physical strength of those engaged in operations, a whole range of new employments was opened up to women and even children."¹ Industrialisation, guided by acquisitive spirit of capitalism had the effect of destroying family life for the vast majority of population, of emasculating men and dehumanising women.

It was contended, that with the vanishing of capital will lead to the emergence of new kind of family relations. The urban intelligentsia, and among certain sections of the working class a measure of intellectual ferment was witnessed, a pre-occupation with new forms of family management, even with

1 Maculey Alastair, *Women's Work and Wages in the Soviet Union* (London, 1981), p.4.

sexual liberation. A number of "more or less utopian"² vision of the Communist future were produced, in which the state assumed the parents' responsibilities for the care and upbringing of children and in which men and women were free to form liaisons guided only by infatuation, romantic love, or the transitory urges of sexual desire. Although some of the advocates of the new 'communist' family urged, that a start should be made immediately in the transformation of personal relationships, and social responsibilities, there is little to suggest, that these calls for action evoked any widespread response among the population at large.

The adoption of central planning and the commitment to forced industrialisation resulted in changes in the nature of the Soviet conception of sexual equality. The role of the family was strengthened in two respects. It, rather than the state's social security system, became the 'provider of last resort',³ in law as well as in practice. It also became the locus for the care and upbringing of children and the provision of consumer services - a function which it had been performing even in the pre-revolutionary days. The state's role was one of providing assistance. The state geared itself, for providing conditions which would help realise women's rights.

2 ibid, p.6.

3 ibid, p.7.

This was sought to be done by enshrining in the constitution of 1936, and later even in the Brezhnev constitution, the right to work, payment for labour, to rest, social insurance and education, state protection of the interests of mother and child, state assistance to single mothers, and those with many children, by providing for women, maternity leave with financial support, and intensive network of maternity homes, day nurseries and kindergartens.

The Soviet strategy for achieving equality between the sexes involved the greatest possible expansion in female employment, and the provision of equality of opportunity, in the choice of occupations. The popular image of the employed woman in the Soviet Union, reflected two possibly inconsistent components. On the one hand, there was the belief that women had successfully penetrated all the male occupational preserves, that sex was no barrier to the able and ambitious girl wishing to pursue any career not positively harmful to her health. This was the world of smiling female tractor drivers, of women enterprise managers of control engineers: it was the world of Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space. This belief was fostered by many Soviet publications and by such books as *Soviet Women*.⁴

4 W.Mandel, *Soviet Women* (New York, 1975), p.200.

On the other hand, there was the belief, that Soviet women were still largely excluded from positions of power and influence in their society, that they were confined to menial or physically exacting jobs demanding little education or training. This was the world of women street-cleaners, construction workers, agricultural labourers, the world of waitresses, cooks and shop-girls. This belief was fostered by the accounts of many western journalists, the writings of western academics and increasingly by the works of Soviet sociologists concerned with the position of women in the USSR.

If one were to look at female participation in employment, complete picture cannot be provided by looking at mere numbers, it also calls for a critical evaluation of the nature of employment.

"Modern Industry" it was stressed in the report of the Central Committee of the CPSU to the Twenty-Fifth Party Congress, "imposes ever greater demands not only on machines and technology but most of all on the workers, on those who create the machines and operate that technology. Specialized knowledge and high levels of occupational training and general culture are becoming essential to the successful work of ever greater segments of the work force."⁵

5 A.E.Kathiar and S Ia Turchaninova, "The Educational and Occupational Skill Level of Industrial Workers", in Gail W.Lapidus, ed., *Women, Work and Family* (M.E.Sharp Inc., 1982), p.69.

In other words, higher skills were not only essential for the national economy and industrial production in particular, but they were also of prime importance for the development of man, and for his personal improvement. From this perspective, the task of raising the skill levels of women workers assumes tremendous economic and socio-political importance.

An extensive reliance on female labour was a central feature of the Soviet pattern of industrialisation for several decades, with important consequences for virtually every aspect of economic and social life.

The studies⁶ of Gail W.Lapidus conducted in the seventies point out to the fact, that women were employed in low-skilled or semi-skilled jobs. Moreover the occupations that were regarded as women's work, in the market economies were overwhelmingly female in the USSR as well. There was a greater prevalence among men of occupations, that require industrial training and the acquisition of skills. In the white collar professions too jobs, that are regarded as women's work elsewhere were done by women in the Soviet Union. A high proportion of women were also engaged in routine clerical work. For men, on the other hand, management functions seemed more important.

6 G.W.Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society* (Berkeley, California, 1978), pp.119-36.

Lapidus points to the low occupational levels as well. Picking up machine-building plants as an instance, it is pointed out that, women were predominantly employed in the mass trades, such as assembler, sorter and other jobs. Thus for women engaged in industry, conditions of work were often found to be unpleasant, monotonous and one which frequently involved considerable physical effort.

However it would be improper to paint such a bleak picture. There was more to female employment than taking on jobs which typified traditional caring roles. Over the years, women did make inroads into areas which demanded managerial directions, but one cannot deny the fact that they were markedly under represented. Both the character of occupations of women during the Soviet period and the changes that took thereafter imply the existence of extensive "occupational segregation"⁷ between the sexes. And this in turn was consistent with substantial earnings disparities.

Occupational segregation was also noticeable in Soviet agriculture. Women were confined to manual work in the fields, that demand considerable physical strength and promises little financial reward. Although women have come to play an increasingly important role as technical specialists (agronomists, zoo-technicians), they are still largely

7 Maculey, A., *Women's Work and Wages in the Soviet Union* (London, 1981), p.77.

excluded, from positions of managerial authority where they might exercise control over men. Moreover agriculture in virtually all countries is subject to seasonal variations in its demand for labour. In Russia too women experience greater seasonal fluctuations, in their employment than do men.

In industrial societies the relationship between changes in women's economic roles and changes in the structure and functions of the family, has attracted growing attention from social scientists and policy makers alike. The scope and pattern of female employment, it is increasingly recognised exert a critical influence on many other aspects of economic and social behaviour.

Beginning in the mid-60s the ritual self-congratulations began to give way to serious shortcomings and ultimately of contradictions in Soviet everyday life. A growing array of scholarly studies to which female economists, sociologists, and demographers were important contributors, began to document in some detail the low level of skill, mobility and income of women workers, the heavy and conflicting demands of their dual roles and the harmful effects of poor working conditions, and inadequate social services, on the health and well being of working mothers and their families. Rising divorce rates and declining birth rates provoked particular concern challenging as they did the comfortable assumption that under "developed

socialism"⁸ economic progress and social stability went hand in hand. It also brought into question the efficacy of protective legislation for women. The widespread employment of women upon which the Soviet drive for sexual equality was based, entailed social legislation. It came by way of benefits for pregnant women, nursing mothers, pre-school child care facilities etc.

The shortcomings in Soviet protective legislation and the social welfare system combined with the failure of Soviet authorities to develop the availability of consumer services to a level that would permit women to combine the roles of housewife and worker without strain, resulted in a substantial overload on working women. In addition the failure of men as husbands, sons, and fathers to make compensating adjustments in their behaviour affected women's performance both as workers and mothers.

The communists while grudgingly admitting the contradictions in society, were still in charge of the destiny of Soviet land. For the world they were still the beholders of the precepts of equality and classless society. And then came the spring of 1985, the spotlight shifted to one man, whose actions were to change the future course of his country. Gorbachev's leadership analysed the crisis in Soviet society as

8 Gail Lapidus, *Women, Work and Family in the Soviet Union* (New York, 1982), p.11.

stemming from stagnation and destructiveness which in turn was the result of a political system imposed from above.⁹ The key to a progressive Soviet society required a radical political change it was held. This was done through the twin programmes of Glasnost and Perestroika.

Perestroika, meant, "technical retooling of the national economy on a large scale, organizational changes in the management structure of the major national economic sectors."¹⁰ While taking cognizance of the important role played by centralized planning, it was also realised that beyond a stage centralized arrangements act as a braking mechanism. The need was to evolve an arrangement, which would 'combine' centralization and local initiative and in which both components would play their maximum positive role.¹¹ The command method of economic management, which is operationalised through "obligatory production quotas or in the form of state orders"¹² was sought to be changed by making over a shift to enterprises which were self financed and regulated by market forces. The role of the market along with its pricing

9 Seweryn Bialer, ed., *Politics, Society and Nationality - Inside Gorbachev's Russia* (London, 1989), p.12.

10 Ajay Patnaik, *Perestroika and Women Labour Force in Soviet Central Asia* (Delhi, 1989), p.141.

11 *ibid.*

12 *ibid*, p.144.

mechanism was viewed with a different perspective. The practice of artificially maintaining low prices was dispensed with, and sharp cuts were effected, in state subsidies as these were viewed, as a drag on the state exchequer.

These notions far removed from orthodox Marxism was resisted at first by the official guardians of ideology. Gorbachev's own catchwords were, *Perestroika* (reconstruction or restructuring) *uskorenie* (acceleration). *Glasnost* (openness) and *demokratizatsiya* (democratisation).¹³ The idea of acceleration meant in effect, "getting the country moving again",¹⁴ following the economic stagnation of later Brezhnev years. Official and unofficial channels were activated to help engender the acceptance of the new economic mechanisms which entailed the closing of uneconomic factories and a much greater emphasis on quality, which could mean several years of low quantitative growth.

Economic change appears to have had a considerable impact on the lives of women in USSR. The impact of *Perestroika* on women in industrial labour force becomes important because industrial labour is the centre of gravity of Soviet women's

13 Archie Brown, "Ideology and Political Culture" in Seweryn Baiter, ed., *Politics, Society and Nationality Inside Gorbachev's Russia*, p.7.

14 *ibid.*

paid labour and the need for radical reform of industry was at the heart of Perestroika.

With the advent of cost-accounting and self-financing in Soviet enterprises, women bore the brunt of blatantly discriminatory practices in redeployment and redundancy. The increased leave provisions and entitlement to part-time work became a contributory factor in this phenomenon, making women appear a costly and troublesome sector of the work force. Where the workforce was predominantly female young mothers became the target of cost-cutting exercises. To prevent unjust sacking of women, it was suggested that committees should ensure that there were no unjust sacking of women.¹⁵ However, sceptics doubted the efficacy of law governance and not without reason.

Despite the fact that 92 percent¹⁶ of the women are either working or studying, despite the fact that nearly half of workers and employees have been women and about 44 percent¹⁷ have been collective farmers, the structure of their occupational activity spontaneously reproduces the stereotype

15 Judith Shapiro, "The Industrial Labour Force", in Mary Brekley, ed., *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.28.

16 O.A.Voronina, "Women in a 'Man's Society", in *Soviet Sociology* (New York), vol.28, no.2, March-April 1989, p.29.

17 *ibid.*

of women's place. If women are recruited into the male spheres, they are used for physically heavy, monotonous routine work in low-paid and non-prestigious jobs. The female occupations were formed by transposing traditionally female chores in family to the macro-level. The vast majority being employed in trade, hotel and restaurant, industry, public health, social welfare, cultural services. An analogous situation is prevalent in industry. Women predominate in the light and food industry, the pharmaceutical industry, the textile, and clothing industry in which work is often heavy, and conditions deleterious to health and prestige.

As regards the prospects of job promotion, men continue to be in commanding positions. Studies¹⁸ have pointed out that in industrial associations 12 percent managers are women, 12 percent of chief engineers and deputies, 14 percent of shop chiefs and deputies are women. In the realm of education, it was pointed out that in the school year 1984-85,¹⁹ though 75 percent of all teachers were women, they made 35 percent of secondary school principles. In the field of science, the sector most advanced of the nation's economy, half of those employed are women. However, statistics reveal that 40 percent of scientific associates are women, 28 percent of candidates of

18 O.A.Voronina, "Women in a Man's Society", in *Soviet Sociology*, vol.28, no.2, 1989, pp.30-31.

19 *ibid.*

science, 14 percent of doctors of science, and only 1 percent of professors, academicians and corresponding members.²⁰ Studies have also pointed out that women tend to go in for hazardous job for more pay and short working hours. M.Ia Sonin pointing to the wage disparity between men and women maintains that "average wage in the female occupations is lower than the average wage for the country as a whole."²¹ N.M.Rimashevskaiia²² holds similarly, that women on the average receive one-third less than men. Whether the sectors where women are employed are low paid or whether they are low paid, because women are employed is a chicken and an egg kind of a question.

The success of social legislation, it must be remembered depends on the willing co-operation of people. A mere enunciation of noble principles does not ensure its fulfilment. Women often let themselves be guided by the dictum of being two steps behind the man. Fed on for centuries, on notions of inferiority and sinfulness, it is easy to convince women to confirm to three "Ks - Kinder, Kiiche, Kinche (Children, kitchen and church)."²³ This docile acceptance of authority

20 ibid.

21 ibid.

22 ibid.

23 ibid.

and stations in life decreed by men, in the domestic sphere translates itself even in the arena of professional work. An oft repeated argument advanced to prop up the notion, that women are incapable of achieving male standards of performance in work is: women during periods of maternity loose out on work hours and therefore tend to lag behind professionally.

The working conditions of women have been used as a backdrop to stress the need to emancipate women from double burden and return them to home. The leading social scientist and people's Deputy Tatiana Zaslavskaia contends that the high rate of employment of women in social production is unjustified. It has had a negative effect both on the birth rate and on the upbringing of children. In the towns and now sometimes the villages as well the one child family is becoming the prevalent model, which does not ensure that population reproduces itself.²⁴

Soviet scholars in early seventies had also argued, that labour-force participation was too high, an argument put forward from a pro-natalist point of view.²⁵ Few had the interests of women or even people in mind, rather they talked of the good of something called society which needed a higher birth rate.

24 Judith Shapino, "The Industrial Labour Force", in Mary Burkley, ed., n.15, pp.21-22.

25 *ibid.*

Since Perestroika, the impact of unemployment is, in effect being cushioned by fostering the notion that home is the only right and proper place for women with children to be. The most disturbing aspect of the 'back to the home' lobby is the consequence of its argument at a time of economic change. Already women with young children are experiencing difficulty in finding work. It is necessary at this juncture to develop and implement an integral social policy. A policy which would ensure every woman the possibility of making her own choice of life career involving either a parallel or sequential combination of work and motherhood, only motherhood or only work.

The liberalization of attitudes towards sex has not been limited to the provision of information. The lifting of taboos has led to a growing use of nudity and semi-nudity, in the official media and the arts. In the overwhelming majority of cases, it is predictably the female body which is on display. The use of female nudity to entertain, titillate and sell products so familiar to the Western public is increasingly in evidence in Russia.²⁶

Some writers have suggested that the fascination with nudity, erotica and beauty contests merely reflects the moving

26 Sue Bridger, "Young Women and Perestroika", in Linda Edmondson, ed., *Women and Society in Russia and Soviet Union* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.186.

of the pendulum after the years of prudishness and enforced silence on sex. In due course, the argument runs, people will become bored and look once more for genuine artistry than cheap thrills. Unfortunately, as the rather longer experience of the West has shown, waiting for boredom to set in as a means of combating the sexual exploitation, may mean a very long wait indeed.

As the move to the market becomes more widespread, women with young children are in the danger of being forced back into the home, whether or not their husbands' salary and behaviour can provide adequate support. And if there is no husband, the economic consequence may be grim indeed. Living on benefits, even equivalent to the minimum wage in a period of price inflation and shortages, is likely to be extremely uncomfortable.

Where considerable labour shortages have developed, they are in sectors which have become unattractive to women, notably in agriculture.²⁷ Those who had moved to the city to escape farm work and rural isolation are now being asked to go back to the very conditions they rejected not so long ago. Much inevitably, will depend on the conditions in the cities. If the economic crisis deepens as expected, galloping inflation,

27 Sue Bridger, "Women and Agricultural Reform", in Buckley, ed., *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.51-53.

chronic and persistent food shortages, unemployment and a hopelessly inadequate benefits system may well make a return to the land appear a very welcome prospect. For single mothers, in particular, the prospect of work, however hard, the opportunity to grow food for their children, and a far greater potential for re-marriage than the city can offer, may come as a considerable relief. It is perhaps not too fanciful to suggest that psychological factors may play a decisive role, rediscovering rural roots and retreating into the family may appear highly desirable in a period of economic chaos, political uncertainty and increasing social tension. Providing the food, the cities so desperately need may eventually bring a new generation of rural women, the status and dignity they have lacked for so long. In the short term as with so many of the other problems there are no easy answers.

To promote employment opportunities and reduce or prevent poverty, recovery of output and job creation are essential. The World Bank in its 1994,²⁸ has highlighted the importance of social protection. A poverty assessment work was initiated in 1994 in Russia. This would facilitate targeting of social benefits to the neediest and development of policies aimed at poverty reduction. The Bank's activities are geared to prevent deterioration of social service sector work was carried out

28 The World Bank Annual Report, 1994, Washington, pp.101-6.

especially in the health sector in Russia. In the same fiscal year, a *Women in Development Fund* was established in the Bank's Europe and Central Asia regional office to support work in new areas of inquiry of gender and transition.

The growing ills of society which have generated moral panics, are seen increasingly to arise from a break-up of the family, whose last resort and greatest resource have been the women on whom all caring depends. Since Russian women, affected by the second World War have been everything - wage earners, household workers and continuous care givers for so many decades, the spectre of their being less than that creates fear and outrage in the hearts of men, resulting in a media debates whose parameters seem to define women's significance more often than women's choice.

CHAPTER III

RUSSIAN WOMEN - THE POLITICAL CHALLENGE

Malcolm B. Hamilton defines ideology as "a system of collectively held normative and reportedly factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social relationships and arrangements, and/or aimed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct which its proponents seek to promote, realise, pursue or maintain."¹ Ideologies are to be found in all states not just communist ones. But Soviet ideology, fits particularly well with this emphasis, on a system of ideas and beliefs and on advocacy of a particular pattern of social relationships and of political conduct. The erstwhile Soviet Union acknowledged officially the ideology, Marxism-Leninism and devoted vast resources to its promotion.

It could be argued that the absence in Marx's and Lenin's works of a place for the idea of legitimate conflict and political competition in a socialist system was particularly important for later Soviet developments. A.J.Polan in his condemnation of Leninist authoritarianism on an analysis of "The State and Revolution" holds that "The State and Revolution" put a concept of the state that was already in August 1917, monolithic, authoritarian, single-willed and

1 Malcolm B.Hamilton, "The Elements of the Concept of Ideology", *Political Studies*, vol.35, no.1 (March 1987), pp.18-38.

uncheckable."² Without going into the details of the ideology, suffice it to say, that there was an enormous reinforcement of the most dogmatic strands in the doctrine under Stalin, which circumscribed all argument and offered a single doctrinaire line on virtually every theoretical issue. Mikhail Gorbachev, in his speech to the January 1987 Plenum of the Central Committee, viewed some of the country's problems as stemming from the schematic and dogmatic approach to theory that not only became the norm under Stalin but which as Gorbachev noted left its impress on social sciences which can be felt to this day.³

Gorbachev observed that "the theoretical concepts of socialism" had remained "in many respects at the levels of 1930s-1940s,"⁴ when the task facing society were entirely different from those it faced in the recent years. Those were the years in which "vigorous debates and creative ideas disappeared from theory and social sciences, while authoritarian evaluations and opinions became unquestionable truths that could only be commented upon."⁵ Furthermore, "the

2 Archie Brown, "Ideology and Political Culture", in Bialer, ed., *Politics, Society and Nationality - Inside Gorbachev's Russia* (London, 1989), p.4.

3 *ibid.*

4 *ibid.*

5 *ibid.*

social structure of society was portrayed schematically, as having no contradictions or dynamism deriving from the multifarious interests of its strata and groups."⁶

Political thought as an activity resumed after Stalin's death and was given great impetus by Nikita Khrushchev's so called secret speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. However, criticism of the status quo was couched in a careful language and confined to the pages of small circulation academic journals and specialist books. Yet it cannot be denied that some of the intellectual groundwork for the openness of Soviet economy, society, and political system was laid in Khrushchev's time. In the mid-eighties came the recognition, that changes had occurred in the socialist society, from the top echelons of power. Perestroika was perceived as an urgent necessity where delaying would have aggravated serious social, economic and political crisis. The country, as Gorbachev put it, began to lose momentum. A kind of "breaking mechanism" affecting economic and social development had set in. Gorbachev further noted that political flirtation and mass distribution of awards, titles, and bonus often replaced genuine concern for the people.⁷ Attempts were

6 *ibid.*

7 Mikhail Gorbachev, "Perestroika - New Thinking for Our Country and the World (William Collins and Sons Co., Ltd., 1987), p.17.

made to cover lack of discipline and responsibility with pompous campaigns and undertakings and celebrations of numerous anniversaries centrally and locally. The real problems were couched in a world of "feigned prosperity".⁸ The policy of restructuring maintained Gorbachev put everything into its place it affirmed social justice for all, equal rights for all, one law for all one kind of discipline and high responsibility for each. Perestroika in a word attempted to raise the level of social responsibility and expectation.⁹

Democratisation and its offshoot openness about public affairs was an important idiom of restructuring programme. This was *Glasnost*. It was praised as a sharp weapon of Perestroika which helped people to understand their past and present and objectively to assess the situation in the country. "People should know," held Gorbachev, "what is good and what is bad in order to multiply the good and combat the bad."¹⁰

Perhaps the most far-reaching feature of the reformist programme was the shift from the notion of a "single truth"¹¹ to a recognition of the legitimacy and indeed the necessity of

8 *ibid*, p.22.

9 *ibid*, p.75.

10 *ibid*.

11 Lapidus W.Gail, "State and Society Toward the Emergence of Civil Society in the Soviet Union", in Bialer, ed., *Politics, Society and Nationality Inside Gorbachev's Russia* (Boulder, 1989), p.132.

divergent opinions. The entire Leninist conception of a vanguard party was premised on the need for Party tutelage over backward masses. Although post-Stalin era was marked by a considerable broadening of the boundaries of permissible discussion on a wide range of issues. Gorbachev's call for "socialist pluralism",¹² his insistence that open discussion was a pre-requisite of scientific progress as well as of cultural vitality and extended from technical to political issues, directly challenged the traditional claims of Party ideology.

The notion of socialist pluralism acknowledged the diversity of groups and interests as well as of ideas. The underlying assumption of the socialist pluralism was clearly expressed in Gorbachev's address on the seventieth anniversary of the October revolution when he declared, "we start from the fact that socialism is a security of growing diversity in opinions, relations, and activities of people."¹³ This view of Soviet society also prompted Gorbachev's explicit call for fundamental reassessment of socialist ideology. At the January 1987 Central Committee Plenum, he criticized what he called the "schematic and dogmatic approach"¹⁴ to Party ideology that had

12 ibid.

13 ibid.

14 ibid.

prevailed in the past. He attacked the persistence of theoretical concepts that remained at the level of the 1930s and 1940s, while the country's needs had fundamentally changed. He deplored the disappearance of vigorous debates and creative ideas and the absolutizing of particular authors and points of view that, Gorbachev implied, ought to have been treated as contingent and context dependent. Above all, he explicitly repudiated portrayals of Soviet social structure that denied the presence of contradictions and therefore social dynamism, rather than presenting Russian society as embodying diverse interests.

The case for Glasnost and its intimate connection to the prospects for reform was most eloquently put in *Pravada* by Tatyana Zaslavskaya, the reformist sociologist: "If we continue to keep from the people information about the conditions under which they live, say the degree of environmental pollution, the number of industrial accidents, or the extent of crime, we cannot expect them to assume a more active role in economic or in political life. People will trust and support you only if you trust them. Glasnost was therefore perceived as indispensable for genuine feedback and for creating a mechanism for two-way communication between government and society."¹⁵ It arose from the recognition of the fact that the pretention

¹⁵ *ibid.*

of infallibility was not necessary for commanding popular allegiance and support. Indeed greater publicity for shortcomings and problems - whether the shoddy construction of nuclear power plants, or the state of economy, or the discontent of the nationalities or the spread of drug addiction, pornography - is an indispensable precondition for successfully addressing them. Even military and security affairs, traditionally forbidden territory were opened, however tentatively to public discussion and criticism.

Glasnost also reflected a recognition by the Soviet leadership of the maturity of Soviet population and a partial repudiation of the patronizing notion that only a small elite can be entrusted with truth. The call for greater openness in place of secrecy for realism rather than varnishing, was thus a movement toward the normalization of Soviet public life and the potential emergence of a public sphere.

This new approach was of enormous significance as a point of departure for the management of social and political affairs. By explicitly acknowledging the presence of conflicting interests, rather than obscuring and suppressing them, it not only initiated a programme towards legitimation of diversity, it created the necessary foundation for developing mechanisms for conflict management. It even acknowledged the need for political expression of diverse views, although not of politically autonomous expression.

Indeed, the proliferation of informal groups and unofficial organisations concerned with a broad array of cultural, social and political issues was the most dramatic new departure on Russian political landscape.

The revolutionary leaders who proclaimed the establishment of the new Soviet state in October 1917, promised a radical social transformation to bring about the full equality of women in economic, political and family life. Their efforts to draw women into new economic and political roles, to redefine the relationship between family and larger society and above all to alter deeply rooted cultural values, attitudes and behaviour represent the earliest and perhaps the most far-reaching attempt ever undertaken to transform the status and role of women.

On the second anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin proudly announced. "In the course of two years of Soviet power in one of the most backward countries in Europe more had been done to emancipate women to make her equal of the 'strong sex' than has been done during the past one hundred and thirty years by all advanced enlightened democratic Republics of the world taken together.¹⁶

To spearhead this movement was the special task of the *Zhenotdel* a department of the Communist Party for work among

16 Atikson, Dallin and Lapidus, eds., *Women in Russia* (The Harvester Press, 1978), p.119.

women. The *zhenotdel* achieved much, but was disbanded in 1930 on the grounds that it was no longer needed - women had acquired equality, therefore, no longer represented a distinct social category with separate needs. It was not until Khrushchev's wind of change that it could be admitted that this was no so. The aims of the *zhensoveti* also marked their difference from other organisations by being more specifically political. Their aim was to raise women's political activity and teach them political skills in the context of raising women's general political consciousness. Whilst it is true that *zhenotdel* had been formally attached to the CPSU, it had two special features. One was that it was women only, the other was its 'network of delegatki'¹⁷ who worked collectively with women throughout the USSR. The *zhensoveti* referred to as the 'spiritual heirs'¹⁸ of the *zhenotdel* and its delegatki were local organisations widespread throughout the USSR and involved thousands of Soviet women, via elected committees. The relationship with the party however ensured its control. The Soviet experience served to indicate to the women elsewhere that broadening political parameters and bringing women into public activity even in equal numbers to men, can be contained

17 Genia K. Browning, *Women and Politics in the USSR - Consciousness Raising and Soviet Women's Groups* (Wheatsheat Books Ltd., 1987), p.54.

18 *ibid*, p.55.

within the existing traditional model of power, a power which is male and which continues to limit and omit women. It is not sufficient for women to be in politics. They have to be in politics of power, both to participate as women and to change the very nature of that power which serves to preclude women. Individual women in positions of power are unlikely to challenge the male hegemony without a support network of women who are gender-conscious, autonomous from men.

The meagre representation of women in positions of responsibility and status despite of women participation in labour force and public affairs has been pointed out by many writers including Soviet commentators.¹⁹

In politics as in economic life, the higher the level of authority, the fewer the women one finds. Moreover, the inadequate development of the service sector despite the regime's investment in extensive public child-care facilities and limited production of consumer durables, meant that the heavy burden of domestic chores fell disproportionately upon the shoulders of women. New economic and political roles were superimposed upon the traditional family responsibilities to create a palpable double burden that is detrimental to women's health, welfare and opportunities for self-realisation.

19 Linda Edmondson, ed., *Women and Society in Russia and Soviet Union* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.225.

Because of the almost complete exclusion of women from the major policy making centres, problems continued and solutions were offered from the perspective and indeed biases of a male dominated leadership. That this had happened contrary to the long standing tenet of official doctrine of equality, has been brought out by studies of Barbara Jencar and Gail Lapidus.²⁰

The social activity of the zhensovety was guided by the imperative of helping women in their role as mothers so that they could work well. Pre-school provision in particular was acknowledged to be severely inadequate both in quality and quantity. In fact sources point out to the difficulties faced by women to get adequate child care facilities. Zhensovety activity on parenting, re-education of men, and their work on children and adolescents, took place within the concept of the family. The family as the 'cell' of society was considered functional to its orderly well-being.

In his report to the 27th Congress, Gorbachev spoke of the need for consolidating the family, and highlighted the role of social organisations in this process. "We have to structure the practical work of governmental bodies and mass organisations so that it would in every possible way help to consolidate the family and its foundations."²¹

20 Atikson, Dalin, Lapidus, n.16, p.334.

21 Butterfield and Sedaitis, eds., *Perestroika from Below* (Boulder, 1991), p.91.

The proposal at the 27th Congress of the CPSU to reactivate the zhensovety had three main effects. Firstly, the zhensovety came under the umbrella of Soviet women's committee for the first time in history. The second effect was the allocation of seventy-five seats for the zhensovety on the Congress of People's Deputies. The third effect was to extend the number of zhensovety and reactivate existing ones.

Yet, as has been pointed out by many scholars, the problems confronting women were too extensive to be resolved by the zhensovety alone. Activists complained that the zhensovety was a 'social organisation without purse'.²² Tainted with officialdom of the past, it evoked sharp reactions in the era of Glasnost.

Furthermore women's voices contended that their problems cannot wait until the economic crisis is overcome, but must be confronted immediately. As Vasilieva has pointed out, it is women who are in the front line of crisis, it is women who will be the first to be dismissed from their jobs, it is women who stand in queues to feed their families. It is these voices which were rejecting the zhensovety as 'old forms' which were not attracting women because they were too bureaucratic. In the view of feminists like Valentina Konstantinova, the

22 Genia Browning, "The Zhenrovety Revisited", in Buckley, ed., *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (Cambridge, 1992), p.102.

zhensoveti were 'distributors of food',²³ not raisers of consciousness. The perceived irrelevance and rejection of zhensoveti was, in part, a rationale for the variety of alternative women's groups now emerging.

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 discrimination against women and created a legally guaranteed status equal with men. But over the years, the leadership failed to pay attention to women's specific rights and needs arising from their role as home - makers and professionals.

Quite predictably, a host of issues concerning women entered after Perestroika and were debated upon freely. Difficult and dangerous working conditions, prostitution and the treatment of abortion and childbirth have all come under scrutiny. Policy on women, however was characterized by a renewed commitment to programmes instituted during the period of stagnation. Legislative change on benefits, leave and the provision of part time work was designed to assist women to spend more time with their children and to promote further strengthening of the family, a process that began under Brezhnev.

23 *ibid*, p.98.

The approach of Glasnost, however has not been homogenous across issues in content and pace. Some topics such as economic efficiency, competition and bureaucratization were officially approved targets, since the object of Perestroika was to challenge them and to transform economic decision-making, whereas other topics even if legitimate were of much lower official salience. This was especially so from 1985 to 1987. After Gorbachev's strong call for reform at the central committee plenum in January 1987 and his attack on opponents of change, the parameters of the women's movement noticeably broadened. They widened still further after political reform was stepped up by the 19th Party conference. Glasnost visibly increased its strength in 1987 and 1988, because the regime permitted it and individuals responded to the opportunities provided by political relaxation. Thereafter came attacks on patriarchy and regrets that women were absent from top decision-making posts.

Separate women's interests did not exist except in so far as women in the 1920s were more politically backward than men, and so needed special organisations to mobilize them into politics in order to eradicate the temporary difference. The *zhenotdel* and its networks of delegates meetings and women's clubs served this purpose. Similarly, women's lower rate of participation in politics and economics, regretted in 1956 by

Khrushchev merely highlighted their "differential needs"²⁴ which required special social organisations. The Zhensoveti as tame "helpers of the CPSU"²⁵ was created to address them.

The absence of women from the politburo, secretariat, council of ministers was officially dismissed as insignificant. After Glasnost, women began voicing the opinion that male policy makers overlook many women's issues and the women politicians are needed not just to promote women's issues but to incorporate different values into politics. However, there was a sharp decline in the number of women in the supreme Soviet after the elections of March 1989 from 33.3 percent to 15.6 percent.²⁶ This prompted the November 1989 Plenum of the Soviet Women's Committee to ask why women candidates were not being put forward. Concern about women's low profile in politics expressed by female academics and women's groups, and journalists. Pointing out to the shrinkage of women representatives as one goes up the ladder O.A.Voronina in an article points out that in the year 1985, half deputies of territorial, regional, provisional, district, municipal village and rural Soviets were women. 40 percent in Supreme Soviets of autonomous republics, 36 percent in the Supreme Soviets of

24 Linda Edmondson, n.19, p.215.

25 *ibid.*

26 *ibid.*, p.217.

Union republics and 33 percent among the deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the erstwhile USSR.²⁷

Men's upward mobility in the party was more successful than women's. Larisa Kuznetsova in piercing journalism noted in 1988 that "when we want to take part in decision-making we are just 'ladies'. Otherwise how is it that our women-workers - 51 percent of the total employed - do not produce professional politicians or stateswoman?" She added, "the entire top echelon is male while women basically follow their orders: they are yes-women."²⁸

These criticisms were all warranted. They were not, however, allowed to be voiced bluntly before glasnost. Khrushchev had noted the low political mobility of women at the 20th Party Congress in 1956 and Gorbachev had regretted it too at the 27th Congress in 1986, at the January Plenum of Central Committee in 1987, and at the 19th Party Conference in 1988. But for most of the history of the Soviet state ideology and journalism loudly praised thousands of Soviet women engaged in politics, equal with men. Rarely were comparative statistics cited, indicating with precision the huge gap between sexes in politics. The picture in high politics was rather bleak but

27 O.A.Voronina, "Women in a Man's Society", *Soviet Sociology*, vol.28, no.2 (M.E.Sharp, N.Y.), March-April 1989, pp.32-35.

28 Butterfield and Sedaitis, n.21, p.81.

never vigorously contested. Instead, ideology trumpeted the high percentage of women on the Soviets, in comparison with Western parliaments and suggested that male politicians defended women's rights anyway since the USSR was a socialist society.

Democratisation under Gorbachev, did not bring a proliferation of lively female parliamentarians defending women's interests but it gave women the political space to form women only groups independent of the control of any party mechanism. Much debate has been taking place since on how best women's organisations can promote, sustain, and support female deputies.

With the disintegration of Soviet Union, and the formation of CIS, Boris Yelstin came to the helm of affairs in Russia. Taking cognizance of the fundamental changes in Russia Yelstin argued for the adoption of his draft constitution in December 1993. Russia is changing he said, but the new Russia is forced to live by old laws.²⁹ The constitution which provides for a strong Presidency was directed by the imperative of peace, maintained the protagonists.

Close on heels, followed the elections various parties especially the ones touted as the dominant ones like Russia's Choice accorded economic issues top priority. Zhrinovsky's

29 *Summary of World Broadcast*, 11 December 1993.

Liberal Democratic Party, a throwback to conservatism argued for a greater role of Russia in the former Soviet space. In such an electoral atmosphere a party called the *Women of Russia* came with a somewhat different agenda.

Alevtin Fedulova of the *Women of Russia* said that it was not affiliated with any other organisation and that it had the strength and determination to defend the ideas and policies it believed in. She called on the female population saying that they represented half of the electorate and by voting for the *Women of Russia* could influence the future of their country and children.³⁰

There are pragmatic political reasons for insisting on the possibility of thinking about women as some kind of a group. When a woman is claiming to represent women she does not necessarily foster group solidarity but she aims to politicize gender structures that would condition her position. Fedulova further contended that in the past although women had been represented in the Parliament "they were some kind of decoration", they were just the background.³¹ *Women of Russia for Russia* was the slogan of the movement. It advocated a state governed by law. Combating corruption, adopting new judicial reforms, social protection, eliminating discrepancies

30 *ibid*, 13 December 1993.

31 *ibid*, 1 December 1993.

in wages and bringing up children were on the movement's agenda.

The final results of elections (23 December 1993), to the state Duma by federal list showed that the *Women of Russia* had polled 8.1 percent of the votes and obtained 21 seats.³²

The issue however cannot be decided by the percent of votes polled or seats obtained by women or by parties professing to uphold issues important to women. The issue can be tackled by a definitive plan of action and policies which are women oriented. In the present scenario the major parties in Russia are busy tackling the problems confronting the economy and containing the disintegrative tendencies which have been escalating ever since the Commonwealth of Independent states was formed. To that extent the seemingly less important concerns of women will be relegated to the backstage. However, *Women of Russia* with its elected deputies is a stern reminder to the policy-makers that the women's specific interests cannot be neglected.

32 . *ibid*, 23 December 1993.

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN'S MOVEMENT - THE ISSUE OF LEADERSHIP

A social movement has been defined as a group of people with a purpose, which will bring about change and whose influence is 'spreading in opposition to the established order in which it originated'.¹ A significant amount of power 'can be mobilised outside the power structure of a society', which can exert surprising pressure on that power structure.² Social movements are characterized by spontaneity, evolving structure and widespread changes in values and attitudes. As Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Kilian note, movements are born as "members of a public who share a common position, supplement their informal person to person discussion with organization to promote their convictions more effectively and to insure more sustained activity."³

Labelling a movement a "women's movement" implies several defining attributes. They include call for women's equality, an emphasis on women as individuals, and as citizens or women as members of the proletariat, organized protest activity, according priority to women's problems, and women working for

1 Rowland Robyn, ed., *Women Who do and Women Who Don't Join the Women's Movement* (Routledge, 1984), p.3.

2 *ibid.*

3 Freeman, Jo, *The Politics of Women's Liberation* (New York, 1975), p.47.

women.⁴ Women's movements proceed from the principle that women have a lower status in society, that women are discriminated against socially, economically, politically and that discrimination is unjustified and must be changed.

Historian William H. Chafe contends, that certain conditions provide a fertile setting for the rise of women's movements. They are as follows: a social atmosphere conducive to reform, a cogent point of view around which to organize, and a positive response by substantial numbers of women, to the call to end discrimination. In addition there is a need for catalyst, an event or events that turn the women's question into a burning issue.⁵

Social scientists point out that gender consciousness contains four essential elements. These include a collective orientation towards the desirability of change in the status of women, individual's discontent with status of their social category, an erosion of faith in traditional justifications for disparities in treatment, and a sense of sisterhood, of strong bonds among women, based on shared values and interests.⁶

4 Carol Nechemias, "The Prospects for a Soviet Women's Movement: Opportunities and Obstacles", in Jim Butterfield and Judith B. Sedaitis, eds., *Perestroika From Below* (Boulder, 1991), p.75.

5 William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Economic, Social and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (Oxford University Press, 1978), p.227.

6 Carol Nechemias, n.4, p.76.

There are however identities that often supercede gender. These may be the standing of particular ethnic groups or classes that shape the destiny of all group members including women.

Among the many voices of feminism, major traditions stand out. One of these is the liberal reformist feminism, which emphasizes viewing women first as citizens, or as individuals, free to develop their personalities and to choose from a wide array of life options. This view rejects traditional assumptions that women should be assigned and confined to certain roles because they are women. Socialist feminism, on the other hand, categorizes women in terms of class membership, thus as in the case of liberal reformist feminism, woman's primary identity is subsumed within a gender free-category. From a theoretical point of view Marxist-Leninist approach of liberating women stressed three points - drawing women into labour force, turning household work into social labour and creating a new division of labour within the household, though the later two points were largely neglected in practice.⁷ Women were called upon as workers to show solidarity with their proletarian brothers in a struggle to achieve a new and more just social order. It was not until Khrushchev's wind of

7 ibid, p.74.

change that it could be admitted that all was not well and women's needs had to be taken care of.

Social organisations came into prominence under Khrushchev. To distinguish itself from the Stalin era, the new leadership proposed greater public involvement. "Participatory Democracy" highlighted at the twenty-first Party Congress became one of the key themes.⁸ "The Congress notes that in contemporary conditions the main aim is to draw all citizens into participation on the supervision of productive and cultural construction in the management of social activities."⁹ The idea of self-government was embedded in the concept of participation. The social organisations were thereby considered as political. The *zhenotdel* with its organization at the local level called *zhensovet* aimed to raise political consciousness. However the *zhensovet* were not autonomous consciousness raising groups. They worked under the control of the CPSU. The *zhensovet* were presented with general guidelines for their work by the party officials, who addressed the women's congresses. It was to be expected, that the promotion of women - only groups would present Soviet theorists with a dilemma. On the one hand, it was deemed

8 Genia K. Browning, *Women and Politics in the USSR: Consciousness Raising and Soviet Women' Groups* (Wheatsheaf Books Ltd., 1987), p.49.

9 *ibid*, pp.49-50.

necessary to treat women as a separate category. On the other, the removal of class conflict, was supposed to have created the structural base needed for sexual equality. In an attempt to avoid this potential dilemma, women's participation in 'social' organisations was interpreted by some as an expression of their equality, rather than the means of realising equality. It was often reiterated by the officialdom that one of the decisive conditions of the existence of full equal rights for women was apparent in their wide involvement in socially useful work. This ignored the frequent references, by the *zhensovety* to their task of developing those skills which women lacked compared to men. Thus the efficacy of the *zhensovety* was reduced, argued the critics, since the party was not attaching sufficient importance to their work.

This was a serious problem indeed as under the Soviet rule the *zhensovety* was the legitimate organisation, speaking for women on economic and political issues. There were attempts to set up independent organisations, like the women's club *Mariia* in the years 1979-82. Their efforts suffered a swift demise, however as KGB took action to halt these activities through a campaign of arrests and imprisonments."¹⁰

Glasnost afforded greater salience to women's issues and thus renewed the debate. Gorbachev himself in addressing the

10 Carol Nechemias, n.4, p.75.

special all Union Party Conference held in the summer of 1988, asserted that Perestroika includes a re-examination of women's issues. "It has been claimed" said Gorbachev "more than once that we have solved this problem once and for all. Indeed we have proclaimed equality of rights for women and men, ensured equal access to almost all occupations, established identical pay for equal work, and guaranteed other women's rights. All this is true. But things have worked out in such a way that along with their undisputed gains, women still have concerns that to this day in many ways inhibit them from making full use of their rights."¹¹ Echoing similar sentiments the then Soviet Premier, Nikolai Ryzkov noted in 1989 on the occasion of International Women's Day "for many years, we believed in our country that all women's questions had been solved, but a deeper analysis and glasnost have revealed very many unfinished questions."¹² The Soviet leadership was thus partially responsible for injecting women's issues into the reform ferment. A typical example of organisation formed from above was the *zhensovet* being transformed from an official *nomenklatura* organisation to one geared to social and political activity. The *zhensovet* was brought under the supervision of Soviet Women's Committee. But women in

11 *ibid*, p.78.

12 *ibid*.

independent groups criticised it as a conservative organisations, as a product of communist past and as attempting to maintain its monolithic grip over fresh women's groups.

The official policy too was not beyond reproach. In addressing the status of women in Soviet society, it is pointed out that in the short run it placed the heavy burdens on women and in the long run it was likely to reinforce patterns of inequality. Gorbachev's 'new thinking' about women and family under perestroika is indicative of this fact...." 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, women no longer have enough time to perform their everyday duties at home - homework, the upbringing of children and the creation of a 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 attitudes to 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 holding heated debates, about the question of what we should do to make it possible for women to return to their purely womanly

mission."¹³ One Russian scholar Elvira Novikona described the government in Russia as a 'maleocracy'. As Nomkova points out, this elite group of men does not consider the needs and interests of women.¹⁴ Indeed the needs of women have always been subverted to the needs of the state. Hence, when the state had a shortage of labour in 1950s because of Stalin's purges and World War II, it encouraged women to enter the work force. And when the state its interests lay in emphasizing motherhood, it was viewed as the primary societal function of women. Demographic studies have pointed out that the Slavic population though in a majority, it was experiencing a low birth rate in comparison with that in the Muslim areas. The desire to increase the birth rate to rectify what it perceived to be a demographic imbalance prompted the state's blatantly sexist policy of 'biologism'.¹⁵

In view of the economic crisis in the wake of Perestroika and transition to a market economy after the fall of the Soviet Union, there is a renewed emphasis on efficiency and productivity, which would likely displace 20 percent of the

13 Gorbachev, Mikhail, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York, 1987), p.117.

14 Laurie Essiq and Taliana Mamonova in "Perestroika for Women", in Jim Butterfield and Judith B.Sedaitis, eds., *Perestroika from Below* (Boulder, 1991), p.108.

15 *ibid.*

workers in industry.¹⁶ Considering that women's double burden already allows them less energy than men to improve their skill, as well as the special considerations in the workplace favouring men, these displaced workers would most likely be women. This facet of the economic crisis i.e., the problem of unemployment could easily be resolved by encouraging women to leave the job market.

The formation of new groups outside the structure of women's councils is taking place along professional interests, humanitarian concerns, nationalism and a more general concern with the improvement of women. The professional groups that have been formed in Moscow include an international press club of women journalists, whose purpose is to enhance, women's role and prestige in international journalism, a women's film-makers' union and women writers' clubs and incipient association of women engineers and women scientists.¹⁷ These organizations may play an important role in the struggle to achieve greater opportunity for women within particular professions.

Of great significance for the evolution of feminist consciousness is the formation by a group of Moscow women

16 Laurie Essiq, n.14.

17 *ibid*, p.110.

scholars of LOTOS¹⁸ (the League for Society's Liberation from stereotypes). One key figure of this organization is Olga Voronina who has played an important role in its formation. The goal of the organisation is to debunk hackneyed formulas that obstruct the development of women's movement in the Soviet Union. This becomes important, for the Russian tradition contains an extremely patriarchal religion (Orthodox Christianity) which fosters not only notions of women's impurity but also of their inferiority to men. Such attitudes are manifest in popular Russian culture. For instance, a folk wisdom says that a "chicken is not a bird, a woman is not a person".¹⁹ Obviously such conservative cultural context props up policies stressing traditional roles for women. There are many groups that are organised to protect women from unemployment. Such is the concern for example of an organisation called VERA in Leningrad.²⁰

Political organisations constitute another large subgroup. The *United Women's Party* based in Leningrad, was registered in October 1990.²¹ Its goal is a total change of

18 Carol Nechemias, n.-----, p.90.

19 Laurie Essiq, n.14, p.105.

20 Olga Liposiskaia, "New Women's Organisation", in Mary Buckley, ed., *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.75.

21 Mary Buckley, ed., *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.74.

politics and society, but does not explain how this will come about. It recognizes that discrimination against women existed in the USSR, but its programme does not make clear how to tackle this. Its programme is a mixture of universal humanitarian ideas and outcries concerning discrimination against women. It argues that women should be equally represented in institutions of power, but how this should, or could happen is not indicated. The idea of uniting all women in one political party expressed by its leader Vera Kurilchenko in slogans like 'all grains of female intellect should be brought together seems to find few supporters among women.²²

The Women's Party of Sovereign Russia seems to be more effective and less demagogic. Its members desire to stay independent of other male-dominated political organisations. This creates a basis for a future feminist movement.

The Committee of Soldiers Mothers is more specific. It is a women's organisation, initially formed in Moscow and Leningrad in 1989 by mothers of veterans who fought in Afghanistan. They came together to provide war invalids, usually young and severely injured men, with some kind of social security.

22 *ibid*, p.75.

Of special importance is the *Women of Russia*" which polled 8.1 percent of the votes in the elections of December 1993 to the state Duma and has 21 deputies.²³ This opened a new era for the women's movement in Russia. As a party professing to gear its activities for the betterment of women, it would be discharging its activities without being controlled by some other apparatus. Thus one could hope that unlike the *zhensovety*, it would not be circumscribed by governmental control. Through its debates in Parliament it draws attention to the issues important for women. In this connection, it has been arguing repeatedly for increasing social protection, the need for eliminating wage discrepancies and child care through a network of improved pre-school care centres. It is too early to assess its impact. Given the nature of problems in Russia, like the economic crisis, nationalist uprisings such problems tend to be neglected. The parties with impressive victories are more concerned with highlighting problems of economy and security. In the meantime, there seems to be nothing more happening beyond official pronouncements of concern, regarding the problems faced by women. Thus although women have been given the political space to air their views and articulate their demands, the deteriorating economic conditions render them largely ineffectual.

23 *Summary of World Broadcast*, 23 December 1993.

The first group that called itself 'feminist' was SAFO²⁴ - the Free Association of Feminist organisation. The group issued a declaration which describes the position of women in the USSR, as one of discrimination and suggests ways of changing this predicament. The main activity of the group is CONSCIOUSNESS-raising, based on the system of Re-evaluation co-counselling advocated by the American Harvey Jackins. This is a form of person to person communication, aimed at bringing out human distress. It eventually helps individuals to realise better their creative and intellectual capacities. the basic idea of co-counselling is that every human being is genuinely talented and capable of being creative. However, in the course of growing up behaviour patterns develop which are based on early distress and bad personal encounters. The group is gradually extending and new sections are being organised.

The New Feminist Forum - "Beauty will save the world" is another organisation. Its fifteen members are located in six cities of Russia. While calling themselves feminist they seek harmony and salvation of the world in the maternal idea of a woman.²⁵ It is an idea about matriarchy. Their ideological point is that women are close to nature and essentially

24 *ibid.*

25 Mary Buckley, n.21, p.78.

'better' than men so they should rule the world. The general idea is that men destroyed the world and women will save it.²⁶

There are still other women's groups which are preoccupied with cultural activities. There are still others which are based on conservative and patriarchal values. One anti-feminist group in Leningrad is called *Rossia* (Russia). It is a part of a conservative (nationalistic) movement called the *Spiritual Rebirth of Russia*. According to their programme, a woman is first of all a mother and a wife and she is responsible for the spiritual education of children and men. Her femineity is a necessary trait, needed for spiritual revival. Part of their programme is the 'restoration of the Russian Home' which means some kind of traditional community.²⁷ Most of their ideas are characteristic of the Russian nationalist movement. In fact the growth of such organisations strengthens an oft repeated fear that powerful national movements will subsume women's organizations.

There is enough dissatisfaction among women with their lives and their place in society. New organizational networks are developing, including some with the explicit goal of fostering a women's movement and battling stereotypes about

26 . ibid.

27 . ibid, p.77.

"women's place". The influx of new images of other realities from outside world assists in their cause.

Intensely political decades generally have provided women with opportunity to witness the struggle of others to free themselves from oppression, a process that often has led them to confront oppression in their own lives. Moreover, women's participation in other progressive movements has encouraged the acquisition of leadership and organizational skills or at the very least, their exposure to organizational, tactical and ideological models that can be harnessed to women's purposes.

Compared to the Western history of the last wave of women's liberation movement, Soviet reality lacked a so called civil society - a society that consists of independent individuals who are aware of their individual rights, who are familiar with the legal and political concepts and structures of democracy and who are capable of organising themselves. So women's liberation in the West enjoyed a much more suitable and propitious starting point. For a large scale and mass women's movement to start in Russia some kind of impetus or a stimulus is needed. It might be an anti-abortion campaign or a law that would seriously affect woman's position. Since the fall of the Soviet system more opportunities have unfolded to give a new orientation to women's movement in Russia.

The foundation for a women's movement has already been laid. On the positive side, the current reform includes

greater emphasis on individual personality. Movement away from collectivism and collective labels encourages views of men and women as unique persons who possess the right to fulfil their potential. In addition, a talented potential leadership consisting largely of academics, researchers, journalists and politicians has armed itself with facts and well-developed philosophy. Like their nineteenth and early twentieth century predecessors, these women are largely drawn from the intelligentsia, especially from careers that readily combine with activism on behalf of women's rights. By advocating the creation of social conditions supportive of choice, these feminists promise to bridge diverse constituencies - women frustrated because they cannot stay at home as well as women frustrated by limited professional opportunities. New organizational networks are developing including some with the explicit goal of fostering a women's movement and battling stereotypes about "women's place". The influx of new images of other realities from the outside world assists in this cause. If the trend continues, it is clear that with time, Russian women will become increasingly sophisticated in voicing their demands to the state.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Perestroika and Glasnost have brought fresh issues and problems before the women's movement as well as initiated discussions on topics, which were treated in the heyday of socialism as non-topics. It would, however, be erroneous to assume that female activism was initiated by Perestroika. In fact Russia has a long history of female activism.

In the revolutionary situation of 1917 and after, debates took place around a host of issues, although lines stiffened after 1925. The meaning of socialism for women's liberation and what the latter meant for the former were among the topics discussed, in the ebullient 1920s.

Under Stalin a rigid ideological straitjacket, declared, that the woman's question was solved. No more analysis was necessary since women were now emancipated and equal with men. During the relatively brief Khrushchev years, the silence began to thaw, befitting the policy of democratisation.

Official recognition of the women's question, was also forthcoming during the Brezhnev period. However it was only with Perestroika - that debates were generated and action taken to revamp the women's council (*zhensovety*) to answer the needs of the time. Democratisation under Gorbachev and after provided women the political space to articulate their demands.

Reform also led to the emergence of an enormous range of women's groups. These groups represent heterogeneous interests while some women groups wish to promote religion, others consider themselves political, while there are fewer still who would like to be called social.

Democratisation in the Russian society and its offshoot nationalist development and political decentralisation posed questions about the relationship between nationalism and feminism. It has been evidenced that powerful national movements have subsumed women's organisations drawing them to particular national goals. The women's question has thus been shelved aside and opportunities presented by the question has been seized by men for more conventional political agendas. As a result, it will be the men who will be deciding on the "women's question".

A patriarchal tradition prescribes women's role and place in society. Most publications on the women's question are influenced by gender-role stereotypes. Against this backdrop barbara Heldt contends that the iconisation of the woman appears to be growing infused with the patriarchal myth of the pure nature and abstract goodness of women often symbolising the nation.¹ This in turn is generating the strong myth that Mother Russia will keep Soviet women attached to the family.

1 Buckley, Mary, ed., *perestroika and Soviet Women* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

This is a very serious part of Russian culture - communal activity and community ties are very strong. And despite the fact that divorce rate is increasing, the importance of private sphere is still there. This means that most feminine activity, and the development of feminist idea will be located in the family. There will be much less emphasis than in west on separatism and division between the sexes, much more desire, to find compromises in the realm of family. This does not necessarily mean, that women will neglect the political and social sphere, but only that their active participation will be deferred, till the time they recognise that nobody except they themselves can solve their problems. These problems are universal women's issues globally shared by all such as sexual harassment, professional discrimination and the masculinist tradition of objectifying women - all these problems have to find their solution in their particular Russian way.

The social and political disabilities are buttressed by similar disabilities in the economic sphere. Structural change in an economy where women constitute 51 percent of the industrial labour force and 40 percent of agricultural workers was bound to have an effect on women workers. There is an overwhelming consensus that the brunt of unemployment and undesired allocation to less attractive work would have to be borne by women. T.Zaslavaskaya and N.Rimashivskaya have pointed out that economic changes market reforms entailing

rolling back of the state would lead to a fall in the welfare functions of the state, the brunt of which would be borne by women.² Admittedly, the heavy burden placed on women's shoulders do bar them from taking an active public role. This is one of the important factors which militates against the emergence of a women's movement.

However, in spite of the problems, encumberances and disabilities faced by women, women-only groups are growing from strength to strength in Russia. Whilst it is true that they have not acquired strategic powers to effect decision making, they have, however, succeeded in making society take cognizance of their activities. And so the Russian women's movement continues to inch forward in spite of economic imbalances, political turmoil, nationalist resurgences of a divisive nature etc. Though their claims to success are not great, they have sufficient reasons to be optimistic.

2 Zailubovskaia, E.V., "Women Equality: Inside View", in Soviet Review, pp.35-39.

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