

Equality of Men and Women: Obligations and Reality

By Marfua Tohtahodjaeva, Uzbekistan

The more traditional part of the society, first of all the national intelligentsia, is defeating the supporters of gender equality. This tendency can be followed in a number of big publications popular among the different layers of the Uzbek society, which often print articles urging women to come back to the family, give up any public or professional career. Among these media there are state, independent and partisan publications like *Uzbekiston Adabiyati va Sanyati*, *Hurriyat*, *Oila va Jamiyat*, *Turkiston*, *Vatan*, *Uzbekiston Ovozi*, *Halk Suzi* and others.

The Uzbek language media often views the public life, including relations between the sexes, from the viewpoint of traditional and religious concepts. As a rule, the authors of articles or programs try to advocate for the control over the “weak sex”, or teach it how to live.

For example, the newspaper *Oila va Jamiyat* (The Family and the Society) publishes letters from its female readers about the domestic violence, but the comments from the paper always blame women. In its 40th issue, the paper had published a commentary-response to a letter under the title “You Should Have Not Married an Unmarried Man.” The letter was from a single mother who married a man who had not been married before. His parents were against the marriage and enjoyed it when their son beat his wife. The answer of a female journalist-Basira Said Ali condemns the women and justifies the violence against her.

It is worth looking at some of the titles in that publication: “Patience and Persistence is Our Duty”, “I Did Not Get Your Prayers”, “Don’t Use the Word ‘Divorce’ for Any Reason”, “Be Patient”, “She Always Refused the Match Makers”, “Don’t Let the Man Cry”. Histories are given a moral evaluation, even if all these cases are based on the violation of the rights of women.

When one of the readers - a “second wife” dared to ask about her rights, the paper did not ask a lawyer for comments, but instead contacted a representative of the Spiritual Union of Muslims of Uzbekistan, who thoroughly explained the conditions under which a man can have a second wife. Just for information, the Uzbek law prohibits polygamy....and those marriages are in fact extramarital affairs. Some man allow themselves to marry a second wife in a Muslim religious ceremony.

Failing to properly address violations of women’s rights, the media in fact refuses to protect their honor, dignity, health and sometimes even their lives. Instead of strengthening the rule of law, the media strengthens the norms of the Islamic law-the Sharia.

Among other things, such a situation in the society has encouraged the paper *Hurriyat* to print an article written by its correspondent I. Shamuradov under the title “Women and Thoughts” (#127 – 128, 1999).

Excerpts: “Women intimidate men differently—they attempt a suicide. The fatal outcome of these “attempts” is 3-4 times lower as compared to man. Only one attempt in ten leads to death.”

“As the stubborn history shows, the influence of women on historical processes is insignificant. Even the most famous ones are known not for their virtue, but for their sins, like Cleopatra greedy for pleasures, cruel and dominant Turkan-Hatun, who was one of the reasons of destruction of the state of Horesmshahs by Genghiz Khan, or silly and greedy queen Anna Ioanovna, who sold Alaska for nothing to buy a diamond.”

“Women by nature are liars (men possess strength, women possess slyness), but despite their tricks they fail to gain trust. People prefer to deal with men. Because of this inborn falsity women can not become real leaders.”

“Thus, it is obvious that no woman can become a great leader, and those who try to raise their daughter as a person useful for the society make a great mistake. Women have another fate and another great aim—to deliver and raise children. This is the only thing a woman can do better than a man. She is the mother of the great ones on the Earth !”

The majority of the media in Uzbekistan avoid issues like, human rights, freedom of speech, liberal values, gender equality, and are biased towards a traditional society, cultivating conservatism, stagnation and depression.

Women experience prohibitive stereotypes, like a control of what they can wear. Publications like *Fidokor*, *Turkiston*, *Oyla va Jamiyat* and even *Halk Suzi*, print letters of furious aksakals (the village elders) condemning modern dresses of young girls (yes, girls).

One poetess wrote in the October 10 issue of “*Halk Sizi*”: “How do you, the modern intelligentsia, dress your daughters at her wedding? The costume of which nationality do you choose? A piece of French costume covers the head, the dress itself is English, and the face is open in a Russian style. Hence, the spirits of our ancestors are angry, and this ruins the family happiness of your children!”

The topic of the national vs European dress code is discussed on the national TV and the news program *Ahborot* as a very important topic for the life of the Uzbek society. But the media do not urge man to dress traditionally, and thus discriminate against women justifying the existing control over her behavior, actions and choice.

The media of Uzbekistan continues to present articles, TV and radio programs regularly and persistently advocating for traditional stereotypes of women as a second class citizens, supporting the Sharia norms of behavior.