

Women in the Social Sphere of Society (1920-1939)

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Abstract

This article examines the transformation of the social status and public participation of Uzbek women during the early Soviet period, focusing on their integration into education, production, and sociopolitical life. Drawing on historical sources, archival data, and statistical indicators, the study analyzes the policies implemented by the Soviet government to promote women's emancipation and expand their role in society. Particular attention is given to the activities of women's departments, the establishment of educational institutions such as Inpros, and the increasing involvement of women in industrial and agricultural labor from the 1920s onward. The article highlights the growing political engagement of women, their participation in local governance, and the emergence of an educated female intelligentsia. In addition, the research sheds light on the sociocultural challenges that accompanied these transformations, emphasizing the tension between traditional norms and new Soviet policies aimed at reshaping gender roles.

Keywords: Uzbek women; emancipation; Soviet period; gender policy; Inpros; women's departments; labor participation; collectivization; industrialization; female intelligentsia.

Introduction

Throughout history, the issue of women in the social sphere has held significant importance in many fields, including the role and social status of women in the development of society. The issue of Uzbek women has been reflected in the works of R. Aminova, V. Bilshai, S. Lyubimova [1; 32], Z. Rakhimbabaeva, H. Suleimanova, H. Shukurova, Z. Ibragimova, R. Madrakhimova, and many others, as well as in numerous magazine and newspaper articles. In these works, the authors comprehensively address the transformations that took place in the social and spiritual lives of Uzbek women during the Soviet era, highlighting the guiding and organizational role of the Communist Party in the emancipation of women and their inclusion in public life at all stages of socialist construction. However, due to their focus on general issues related to the struggle for women's emancipation across the republic, these studies failed to consider many specific questions requiring special and comprehensive investigation.

The struggle for the emancipation of Uzbek women required unique forms and methods of party work, as well as a sober and comprehensive consideration of local conditions. It was necessary to recognize that women's emergence from seclusion and their participation in public life on an equal footing with men involved not only the disruption of a millennia-old way of living but also the violation of religious norms that regulated all aspects of personal and public life among the Uzbek people [2; 6]. Women's departments (departments for female workers and peasant farmers within party committees) and delegate assemblies led by communist women provided significant assistance in working with women during those years. By the end of 1920, 45 women's departments of the Turkestan Republic had united nearly 25,000 women, including about 16,000 representatives of local nationalities [3; 4].

In addition, the Uzbek Women's Institute of Education (Inpros) was established in the 1920/21 academic year, building upon the one-year courses organized in April 1919 in Tashkent. Inpros had a four-year curriculum, and students from the one-year courses were transferred there to continue their studies. Its first class graduated in October 1923. The graduation of the first Uzbek female teachers marked a major cultural event in the life of the peoples of Turkestan [4; 438].

Between 1918 and 1920, Uzbek women were primarily employed in spinning, weaving, and sericulture. Their widespread involvement in production began in 1924. To this end, significant benefits were introduced for women: preference was given to women when applying for jobs, apprenticeship programs were established at all production sites, and women were given priority in housing allocation [2; 7]. The resolutions and decisions of the congresses of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan (Tashkent, 1957, p. 125) indicate that, in accordance with the decisions of the 2nd Congress of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan (November 1925), trade union organizations were tasked with increasing the percentage of women in vocational courses, improving the living conditions of female workers through the organization of nurseries, kindergartens, and canteens, and intensifying the promotion of women to Soviet and trade union work. The success of trade union organizations in achieving these goals is evidenced by the fact that between 1925 and 1928, the number of female trade union members increased from 17,885 to 35,782—more than doubling—and representing 17.2% of all trade union members in Uzbekistan. By the end of 1925, the Kushchi union had 155,956 members. By the end of the first five-year plan, 861,200 women had joined collective farms, accounting for approximately 52% of the republic's adult female population and over 75% of rural women [2; 8].

An analysis of statistical indicators of female labor in large-scale industry suggests that the rate of growth of female labor in production was higher than the growth rate of the working class overall. If the number of industrial workers on January 1, 1924, is taken as 100%, then by January 1, 1929, the number of workers had increased by 81.0%, while the number of female workers during the same period had risen by 100.2%. The share of female labor in production between 1926 and 1928 averaged 28.8%, with slight fluctuations from year to year [7; 13–14].

Women's increased social activity was reflected in their participation in the 1930-1931 election campaign. A total of 345,649 women—35.7% of all women in the republic—attended rural campaign meetings. Of these, 40,274 delivered speeches, 243 were elected as village council chairpersons, and two as district executive committee chairpersons. As of October 1, 1931, 129,530 women were working on collective farms in 42 districts of the Uzbek SSR. The participation of Uzbek women in all spheres of life, as noted by the 7th Congress of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan

(June 1937), led to significant achievements in the struggle for their de facto emancipation: the creation of an industrial cadre of Uzbek women and other local nationalities, the active involvement of female collective farmers in building collective farms and harvesting cotton, and the rise in the cultural level of women. By the late 1930s, the range of industries employing female labor had expanded, and women began to be employed in heavy industry, regardless of physiological considerations.

By 1939, Uzbekistan's intellectual potential the intelligentsia had grown both quantitatively and qualitatively. This was an entirely new social stratum. Its numbers had increased 6.3-fold compared to 1926, reaching 108,000 by 1939. By this time, the republic's intelligentsia could already be divided into the following major groups: administrative, technical, scientific, creative, judicial, educational, healthcare, and mass cultural workers.

The composition of the intelligentsia (by primary occupation) in Uzbekistan in 1926 and 1939 was as follows [8; 214]:

TABLE 1.

	Total (1926 r)	Including women	Total (1939 r)	Including women
Administrative staff	7370	614	32770	2973
Judicial officials	643	20	1966	268
Engineers	454	8	3569	423
Veterinarians	63	5	744	71
Doctors and dentists	909	397	3151	1807
University professors	303	60	3093	852
School teachers	4533	1524	44245	11971
Journalists and editors	237	14	1308	173
Artists	623	146	6389	1698

In this respect, their growth can be determined, as well as the fundamental changes that have occurred in women's social life over a long period of time.

Conclusion

The emancipation of Uzbek women in the early Soviet era was a complex and multi-stage process shaped by political, social, and cultural reforms. Historical and statistical evidence demonstrates that between the 1920s and 1930s, women's access to education expanded dramatically, especially through institutions such as Inpros, which produced the first generation of Uzbek female teachers. The women's departments operating under party committees also played a critical role in mobilizing women, guiding their integration into public life, and promoting their participation in political and social initiatives.

Industrial development and collectivization significantly increased women's involvement in both urban and rural labor sectors. By the late 1930s, women were not only active in textile and

agricultural work but also employed in heavy industry, marking a major shift in traditional gender roles. Their growing participation in political processes - demonstrated by their election to village councils and district executive committees - illustrated their rising influence in governance.

By 1939, the formation of a sizeable and diverse female intelligentsia further underscored the profound social changes underway. Despite the significant progress achieved, the emancipation process also faced resistance rooted in longstanding religious and cultural traditions. Nevertheless, the reforms of the Soviet era fundamentally reshaped the position of women in Uzbekistan, establishing the foundation for their broader participation in economic, political, and cultural spheres.

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