

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Views on Gender Equality in Central Asia

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## Abstract

The article analyzes socio-philosophical views on gender equality that emerged during the historical periods of the development of Central Asian statehood. The article also studies the fact that the early stages of human civilization, including the civilization of our country, were associated with women's governance. At the same time, the changing social status and distinctive role of Central Asian women in ancient, medieval and modern periods are scientifically analyzed.

## KEY WORDS

Woman, social status, Central Asia, socio-philosophical thought, culture of society, civilization, matriarchy, patriarchy, ancient period, Eastern Renaissance, women's issue, family issue, spiritual heritage, upbringing of children, marital relations, customs and traditions, women's perfection, Timurid princesses, Eastern woman, Jadidism, perfection of the future generation, social activity.

## INTRODUCTION

The article analyzes the socio-philosophical views on gender equality that were formed during the historical periods of the development of statehood in Central Asia. The article also examines how the early stages of human civilization, including the civilization of our country, were connected with women's rule. At the same time, a scientific analysis was conducted of the changing social status and unique role of Central Asian women in antiquity, the Middle Ages and the modern era.

Since the emergence of human society, issues such as woman and her social status in society, her place in the family and her role in the upbringing of the future generation have been considered one of the main objects of study not only of the state, but also of great thinkers. Regardless of the fact that in the culture of different peoples women were viewed as "the weaker sex" and "helpless" due to the characteristics bestowed by nature, they have been regarded as a spiritually, legally and economically active social group. This is because in all states, ensuring social stability and prosperity and preserving the future of the nation have been determined by

the attitude toward women in society.

It is known from the stages of the historical development of society that women have had their own place in all periods of progress. This is because many historical sources provide information that women, along with men, actively participated in the administration of the state and society. In particular, in the history of the development of Central Asian socio-philosophical thought, special attention was paid to the issue of the status of women in the works of our great ancestors such as Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Amir Temur, Alisher Navoi, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, Abdulla Avloni and Abdurauf Fitrat. Among medieval Eastern thinkers, Farabi in his work "The City of Virtuous People," Abu Ali ibn Sina in his works "Ethics" and "Household Management," Abu Rayhan Beruni in his works "India" and "Monuments of Past Generations," and Mahmud Kashgari in his work "Devonu Lughotit Turk" specifically emphasized the distinctive Eastern national characteristics of women. In addition, these works also highlight that Eastern women are beings who raise noble

people serving the development of society.

A great deal of information has been provided that women were the founders of the culture and civilization of society and that the many-thousand-year history of humanity was connected with matriarchy, that is, women's rule. Therefore, in the Central Asian region as well, women were highly honored in the early period of the formation of society [1]. Abu Rayhan Beruni provides very valuable information about the high status of women in this early period in his work "Monuments of Past Generations." He emphasizes that in ancient times there was a holiday called "Ruzi Isfandarmuz" (the fifth day of February), dedicated to women. "Ruzi Isfandarmuz" expressed meanings such as "woman" and "reflection" and denoted the name of an angel who represented a beautiful and honorable woman, the embodiment of good deeds and a wife loving toward her husband. Beruni writes: "...in past times, this month and day belonged to the lives of women, and men would give them gifts" [2]. Later, with the advent of the patriarchal period and the emergence of the state, as the status of the man, that is, the father, increased in society, this holiday was abolished; however, despite this process, women preserved their position in the family. One of the main reasons for this was that, since the peoples living in the Central Asian region mainly lived through agriculture and animal husbandry, women's labor acquired great importance. This is because women carried out agricultural work together with household duties, without separating them from each other.

In the period of the Eastern Renaissance, that is, more precisely, in the IX–XII centuries, the issues of women and the family were also reflected in the spiritual heritage of philosopher-scholars who lived and worked in Central Asia, and these issues have not lost their significance in terms of their socio-philosophical essence even today. For example, in such works of Abu Ali Ibn Sina as "Tadbir al-Manazil," "Danishnama," "Risala-i Ishq," "The Canon of Medicine," and "Household Management," it is stated that relations between husband and wife should be built on the basis of equality, solidarity and mutual respect. In them, the opinion is expressed that "...a woman is a good, worthy life partner and the best successor and helper in the upbringing of children," as well as about the role of women in the formation of personal spirituality. In his work "Household Management," Ibn Sina was among the first to pay attention to the issues of child upbringing and the role of women in it. Also, in this work,

taking into account the importance of women's place in the family and society, he developed a number of criteria for her to be virtuous: 1) a woman should be educated; 2) she should be faithful to religion; 3) she should be modest and bashful; 4) naturally brave and patient; 5) loving toward her husband; 6) not slandering her husband behind his back; 7) loyalty; 8) purity; 9) thinking about giving birth to a child and his upbringing; 10) not being talkative and garrulous; 11) obeying her husband; 12) being truthful, modest and perceptive; 13) never staining her honor; 14) being careful with her husband and treating him with due respect; 15) knowing her duties and obligations well; 16) being able to use household things properly and economically; 17) achieving the elimination of her husband's shortcomings through her behavior and good qualities [3]. In his treatise, the scholar writes: "a woman must be a worthy and faithful companion to her husband in life." It is evident that in Ibn Sina's works, the important place of women's status in family-marriage and family life, in relations between husband and wife, is substantiated [4].

Abu Nasr Farabi, one of the philosopher-scholars who lived and worked in Central Asia and who is recognized in the world as the Second Teacher, spoke separately in his works about abandoning unnecessary customs encountered in family and social life and about ways of achieving happiness. For example, according to his view, leaders, regardless of whether they are men or women, "must also change the past that embodies bad habits. Otherwise, if the requirements of the past are followed and its mood is preserved, there will be no ease, change or growth in life." Or: "On the path to achieving happiness, whatever helps — knowledge, morality, profession and craft — must be preserved and strengthened, and whatever is harmful must be attempted to be turned into something useful" [5]. Farabi considered women's perfection, as a result of their social activity, to be the basis of society's prosperity and stability. He also left such wise sayings as "knowledge must be given together with good behavior," and "just as the maturity of a tree is measured by its fruit, the fact that women possess qualities characteristic of a perfect person is embodied in their morality and manners."

It is known from the thousand-year history of our country that honoring women and showing them respect is a characteristic feature of our people and has risen to the level of an Eastern value. In particular, during the period of Amir Temur, which is considered the highest stage of Uzbek statehood, the status of women was also high, and trust, respect and devotion

toward women found their expression in the kingdom. This is clearly evidenced by the thoughts left by Sahibkiran Amir Temur in his "Tuzukot," where he wrote that he "...treated women as warmly as possible" [6].

During the period of Amir Temur and the Timurids, the role of women in the development of state administration, science and culture was incomparable. This is because during this period women were not only honored, but their advice was also widely used in governing the state. As a result of respect for women during this period, Timurid princesses such as Bibkhanim (1341–1408), Gavharshodbegim, the wife of Shahrukh Mirza (1377–1447), (1379–1457), Khonzodabegim, the eldest daughter of Umar Sheikh Mirza (1456–1494), (1478–1544), Gulbadanbegim, the daughter of Babur Shah (1483–1530), (1523–1603), Aurangzeb Alamgir (1618–1707), Zebunnisabegim (1639–1702) and others emerged, leaving their names in the unforgettable history of our people with their courage and perseverance, intelligence, labor and creative potential, and their love in the upbringing of great children [7]. These Timurid princesses always served their Homeland, state, people and family with devotion. They clearly manifested themselves in such spheres as governing the state, forming the education system, raising children, developing science, and especially developing women's education. They also left an indelible mark in the history of Central Asia as talented politicians, orators, mature scholars and poets.

In the works of Alisher Navoi, one of the thinkers of Central Asia, dedicated to glorifying women and strengthening the spiritual perfection embodied in their image, it is specifically emphasized that "there are many women on earth who have become famous in the world for their intelligence, courage and wisdom, beautiful appearance, prudence and patience, kindness and loyalty" [8]. It is known that in almost all the epics of Alisher Navoi, who is considered a thinker and poet, the image of women is depicted as literate, educated, wise and intelligent. For example, the literary images created by the poet, such as Layli, Dilorom, Shirin and Mehinbonu, are clear evidence of our opinion. In particular, Alisher Navoi approaches the image of Mehinbonu in his epic "Farhad and Shirin" with special affection. This is because Mehinbonu is a just ruler, an enlightened woman and values knowledge. The ten girls brought up in her palace grow up to become wonderful people in science and craft. Many such examples can be cited in the work of the poet Alisher Navoi. For

example, in the chapter "On Marriage and Women" in the first part of Alisher Navoi's work "Mahbub ul-Qulub," he speaks about the role of women in the family. In his works, Alisher Navoi recognizes the beauty, creativity, high position of women in the family and their social role in society and says: "A good wife is the prosperity and happiness of the family. The cleanliness of the house is from her, and the peace and tranquility of the head of the household are from her. If she is beautiful, she is the joy of the heart; if she is pleasant in manner, she is nourishment for the soul" [9]. In his work "Layli and Majnun," he mentions the pure love of Layli and Majnun and that they can be an example not only in love, but also in loyalty and devotion, modesty and prudence, manners and respect. In many works created by Alisher Navoi, he also praises women and describes their characteristics in the image of Shirin in the work "Farhad and Shirin." He portrays the image of Shirin as a miraculous, courageous and wise girl in the folk epic, as well as an extremely beautiful, morally perfect, true heroine of genuine human love. Shirin embodies the image of a modest, bashful, prudent and faithful Eastern woman. For Shirin, not royal power or royal lineage, but true humanity was important. Shirin is also devoted to a person who possesses the highest human qualities, and that noble person was Farhad. Navoi assessed the image of Shirin as follows: "Shirin had long since gone beyond individuality and had become an image, a symbol of beauty, loyalty, intellect and will, the embodiment of the people's idea and dream about water, crossing all limits and boundaries" [10].

At the end of the XIX century and the beginning of the XX century, the representatives of Jadidism, that is, the national-enlightenment movement that emerged in Central Asia as an objective social necessity, such as M. Behbudi, A. Fitrat, A. Avloni, A. Cholpon and others, included in their programs the issue of women's full participation in socio-political and economic processes with equal rights [11]. This is because during this period the lack of rights of women, especially the determination of relations between opposite sexes through the norms of Sharia, led to the complete isolation of women from society. In this regard, special attention was paid to the issue of the status of women of this period in the works of the Jadid enlightener Abdurauf Fitrat. In his work "The Family," he writes: "In our country, women live facing countless humiliations and sufferings at every moment. We Turkestanis think that our women are outside the circle of humanity and do not treat these poor women as we treat human beings. In many cases, our hearts ache for the condition of animals. But

our compassion does not reach the miserable state of women. We do not consider our women worthy of mercy, deserving of justice and entitled to compassion... In conclusion, the most important causes of our misfortune and backwardness lie precisely in this" [12]. If we draw a conclusion from these reflections of A. Fitrat, stability and development prevail only in a society where women are honored and protected in every respect.

Another major representative of the Jadid movement, Abdulla Avloni, writes in his work "Turkiy Gulistan or Morality": "Modesty is a light that illuminates the heart, and a person is always in need of the radiance of this spiritual light... The curtain of chastity and the veil of conscience is modesty" [13]. It would not be an exaggeration to say that today the time has come to implement these ideas. This is because woman is the educator of the nation. The higher her spiritual world is, the more mature the perfection of the future generation will be. At this point, we can say that the level of knowledge of a woman and mother who is unenlightened, who has forgotten reading books, and who is occupied only with household concerns will be accordingly limited. Today, the development and prospects of New Uzbekistan require young people to be comprehensively mature, that is, to master computer and information-communication systems perfectly, to know several foreign languages, and to be intelligent in every respect. The main goal of the present period is precisely aimed at glorifying human interests and dignity, and within it special attention is also being paid to the gender equality of women, who are the educators of the nation.

If we analyze the above-mentioned ideas, in the long historical development of the Central Asian states, women not only participated in the socio-cultural life of society, but also formed a distinctive spirituality and culture. This is because, if we study philosophical, historical, literary and other sources that existed from the most ancient times to the modern period, it is confirmed in them that women's activity is of great importance in the formation of the spirituality and enlightenment of society. Also, as a conclusion, it should be emphasized that some biased attitudes encountered in the territories of Central Asia regarding the issue of women, in terms of their historical roots and socio-political essence, are similar to the current state of attitudes toward women in the countries of the world. Therefore, today the issue of women's social activity is becoming not only regional but also global in essence. Any global problem can be solved only with the help

of efforts between international organizations and states. In particular, all actions aimed at solving this problem are also reflected in international scientific conferences, events and round-table discussions. In order to find a solution to this issue, all leading scholars of the world, including philosophers, lawyers, political scientists, economists, orientologists and historians, must unite. They must put forward the necessity of a systematic analysis of gender equality, social activity, legal literacy, changes in women's worldview, the expansion of their rights and opportunities, ensuring women's employment, political leadership, education, and directions of women's migration, and must firmly continue practical work aimed at fundamentally increasing the role of women in all spheres of society.

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