

THE EVOLUTION OF THE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL STATUS OF UZBEK GIRLS IN THE MEMOIRS OF FOREIGN TRAVELERS AND AMBASSADORS (14TH – EARLY 20TH CENTURIES): AN ETHNOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study provides a historical-ethnological analysis of the evolution of the socio-legal status, gender socialization, and upbringing of women and girls in traditional Uzbek society, based on the memoirs of foreign travelers, ambassadors, and military personnel who visited the region from the 14th to the early 20th centuries. The methodological framework is based on the cultural-ecological approach, the dichotomy of cultures, and the critical-hermeneutic analysis of historical sources. The findings indicate that the social status of women did not evolve linearly but underwent a complex regressive transformation from the social openness and nomadic egalitarianism of the Middle Ages to the strict spatial segregation “isolation” of 19th-century oasis life. The article deconstructs Eurocentric and Orientalist stereotypes found in foreign chronicles, proving that the “isolation” institution was not merely a prison of disenfranchisement, but an independent, autonomous micro-society equipped with alternative cognitive education, systemic property immunity dowry and mahr, and local-hierarchical authority. Ultimately, the study concludes that even within a closed spatial system, women retained their status as active social subjects with their own life strategies, rather than remaining passive objects.

Keywords: Gender socialization, historical ethnology, institution, cultural dichotomy, critique of Eurocentrism, decolonial discourse, women’s status, social anthropology.

Introduction

The study of the socio-legal status of women, gender socialization, and girls' upbringing in Central Asia, in particular in traditional Uzbek society, is one of the fundamental problems of modern historical ethnology and social anthropology. This issue is valued not only as a narrowly understood pedagogical process, but also as a complex mechanism that determines the cultural and historical image of society, intergenerational values, and the evolutionary transformation of traditional social structures. In the objective reconstruction of historical processes, the memoirs and diaries of foreign tourists, mission representatives, ambassadors, and military personnel who visited the region from the 14th to the early 20th centuries serve as an important empirical source. In particular, the writings of Western writers from the mid-19th century provide valuable information in restoring the traditional model of female socialization in the Uzbek family [3:276, 10:99]. However, a critical-ethnological study of these sources from the prism of Eurocentrism is one of the main requirements of today's science.

The main goal of this study is to conduct a deep analysis of foreign sources of the indicated period from a historical and anthropological perspective. The main attention is paid to the syncretism of ancient sedentary and nomadic cultures in the socialization of girls. Also, the central tasks of the study are to approach the institution of the family not as a closed space, but as a unique socio-economic, psychological and intellectual space for women, to reveal the ontological roots and objective laws of social evolution that occurred between periods.

Methods

The methodological basis of the study is based on the principles of historical-ethnological and comparative-typological analysis. In studying the process of women's socialization and girls' upbringing in Uzbek society, the cultural-ecological approach, the influence of the oasis and steppe landscape on social behavior and gender roles, and the concepts of the mutual synthesis of cultures, i.e. sedentary and nomadic lifestyles, were effectively used.

The empirical object of the study and the foreign sources that formed the evidence base were studied, divided into two large thematic groups according to chronological evolution and conceptual approach:

Medieval observations. In reconstructing the traditional social structure of the region, the role of girls in society, and the foundations of early gender relations, the works of the Arab traveler Ibn Battuta [1:58] and the Castilian ambassador Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo [2:171-174] were used as objects of diachronic analysis. 19th century - early 20th century. The main materials, which provide a detailed and synchronous account of the upbringing of girls in the Uzbek family, the transmission of values, the “inner” life and the socio-legal status of women, were taken from the observations of Western and Russian researchers and diplomats and processed anthropologically. This group includes the works and travelogues of such authors as A. Burns [3:276], J. McGahn [7:55], Y. Skyler [10:99, 11:43], W. Baker [5:212], E. O'Donovan [6:232], J. Curzon [8:176], A. Mikin [9, 12], O. Olufsen [4:15] and S. Becker [16:183].

Results

In the course of historical-ethnographic and hermeneutic analysis of foreign sources and observations, the following main conceptual results were formed regarding the socialization of girls and the evolution of gender status in traditional Uzbek society.

The Arab traveler Ibn Battuta notes that in the Turkic communities of Khorezm, women enjoyed a higher level of social respect than men, were independently engaged in commerce and had economic income [1:58]. The Spanish ambassador Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, describing the gender landscape in the Temurid palace, ethnographically documented the open participation of women, led by Malika Saraymulkkhanim, in official receptions and banquets, on an equal footing with men, sometimes hierarchically higher, [2:171-174]. During this period, women's socialization was mainly determined by the nomadic Turkic freedom as an inviolable value.

By the 19th century, women's education had been divided into two distinct anthropological models, depending on the living conditions and ecosystem:

A. Burns and O. Olufsen note that girls in Bukhara and Khiva wore black turbans and silver nose rings [3:276, 4:15]. This was an institutional mechanism that ensured women's indoor living in urban environments.

W. Baker, E. O'Donovan and J. McGahan describe Turkmen and Kyrgyz girls walking around with their faces uncovered, engaging in heavy physical labor such

as weaving, and engaging in social interaction without hindrance [5:212, 6:232, 7:15].

J. Curzon and A. Meakin's memoirs record that Uzbek girls up to 9-10 years old played openly on the street with boys, with their hair sticking out of their skullcaps [8:176], and after puberty they were suddenly transferred "inside" [9]. Also, the "rag dolls" game described by Y. Skyler [10:99] and the "Love Chase" tradition [11:43] were not just entertainment. They served as a physical and ritual modeling of a kind of autonomous right to choose a future life partner.

Eurocentric stereotypes that "Uzbek girls are illiterate" that developed among the Russian military were refuted by A. Meakin and Y. Skyler [12:87, 13:127]. Meakin, in his analysis of the atinoyi schools in Kokand and Samarkand, notes the singing of dostans by girls on winter evenings and the fact that a 14-year-old girl would sit at home and copy books in Arabic script and sell them in the market [14:101-102]. This confirms that the house was not just a prison, but a center of intellectual socialization.

Ethnographic details in the correspondence of J. McGahan, E. O'Donovan, and Y. Skyler show that the "kalin" money was not a purchase money given to the father of the bride, but was capital that was directly converted into the girl's property (dowry). The fact that the girl's dowry was always formed in the form of a new hut [11:43] or heavy silver coins [6:232] served as social insurance in traditional society.

Social conditions at the beginning of the 20th century. Against the backdrop of social crises, the standards for raising girls began to deteriorate. A. Meakin sharply criticizes the practice of marrying off girls aged 9-12 as a tragedy that causes infant mortality [15:97]. S. Becker argues that by the 1920s, a "girl tax" was being levied on people to fill the khan's harem [16:183].

Discussion

Generalization of empirical evidence from foreign sources on the basis of historical and ethnological methodology allows us to reconsider a number of scientific stereotypes formed regarding the socialization of girls in traditional Uzbek society:

Regressive evolution of socio-gender norms. It has been confirmed that historically the social status of girls and women has a regressive, rather than linear, nature. The image of an open-minded, economically and politically

autonomous woman reflected in medieval sources [1:58, 2:171-174] was replaced by a strict recluse and “internal” isolation in oasis societies by the 19th century [3:276, 4:15]. This leads to an important ontological conclusion: absolute patriarchy is not the “primordial genetic code” of the people. On the contrary, this gender closure is a socio-historical product of socio-political stagnation in subsequent centuries, a specific regional form of urbanization, and fanaticism. Critique of Orientalist discourse. Western tourists and military personnel of the 19th century made a serious methodological mistake by assessing the reality of Central Asia through the prism of Eurocentric moral criteria. They misinterpreted the domestic system as a space of absolute lawlessness. However, A. Meakin’s system of “schools of the tyrant” [12:87] and E. O’Donovan’s notes on “jewelry-capital” the inviolable personal property of women [6:232] completely refute this colonial stereotype. Although the “domestic” was a closed territory, women there retained the status of full and powerful subjects within this parallel micro-society of their own.

Conclusion

The study of foreign sources, free from colonial stereotypes and based on a deep spiritual-historical analysis, shows that the social role of women and the upbringing of girls in traditional Uzbek society have not been fixed in stone from time immemorial. On the contrary, this process has undergone serious degenerative changes from the equality and social openness inherent in the nomadic life of the Middle Ages to the isolation of women from society in the oasis life of the 19th century and religious views. At the same time, the system of isolation, mistakenly assessed by researchers with a Western approach as a place of absolute lawlessness, was considered an independent microcosm where women were provided with alternative intellectual and educational education, financial independence, and hierarchical management within the household. Thus, even within this closed space, women were able to maintain the status of active individuals with their own strong life goals, rather than helpless, subordinate victims.

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