CHAPTER 5

STATUS AND ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHANGING SOCIETY

POSITION OF WOMEN BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

The position of women folk in the Manchu era was almost identical to those of the traditional societies elsewhere. The genre discrimination was order of the day and as a matter of fact the women were considered and treated as an article of perishable commodity and thrown out like stale item of food.

Her position was that of a chattel. Religion, which in case of Mongolia was Yellow sect of Buddhism and scornful chauvinistic attitude of the men folk towards the weaker section of the society had deprived them of their freedom of thought and of course of their rights. It has been rightly observed by Howorth\(^1\), "she was middle aged at 30, old and wrinkled at 40 and at 50 or when she became a widow, she shaves her head and set up as a family monk. A women works hard and is harshly treated. Her place is next to the door and the felt she sleeps on is the thinnest and poorest. She takes little care of herself and little care is bestowed on her. She is born, married, bears some children, does her work and dies. She belonged to the oppressed and down trodden class. Her rights and freedom was curbed. For her to read and write was a sin. She was treated like a domestic slave and was sold in order to pay the debts. If the husband was punished for some crime, she was also punished without committing anything wrong. Religious prejudice weighed her down. was forcibly married and seldom respected. Such state of affairs continued throughout the Manchurian era. It appeared that there will be no end of their exploitation but on account of 1921 communist revolution.

POSITION OF WOMEN AFTER THE REVOLUTION

The socio-economic exploitation and family oppression was brought to an end by the revolution of 1921. The first constitution of Mongolian Peoples Republic adopted in 1924. established the women's equal rights with men in education and employment. She became a full fledged and active member of the society. In 1924, the

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\(^1\) Howorth, Henry. H History of the Mongols p 42
women organization committee was founded, which promoted the wide participation of women in political, social and labor activity. With the expansion of industry and service sector, more jobs became available, many of which were taken by women. In seeking work they were partly driven by material considerations and partly by the fact that in socialist society labor was main criterion of a person's worth. All this made women independent, enhanced their self-assuredness and increased their role in the society. Participation in social life greatly changed their outlook and their way of life and thinking. Professionally they became more knowledgeable and skillful, more active in public life and more politically aware. Their role in the society and in the family changed. Mother and child protection laws ensured that women are not disrupted in their work as, deputies in the ministries, as doctors, engineers, writers, workers and industrial workers. Government took many measures to build a large work force. Abortion was illegal although not uncommon, and contraceptives were mostly unavailable. Total fertility rates reached 7.53 in early 1970 and population growth rate peaked in few years. These steps were taken to ensure large families were recommended. Efforts were made to provide the many maternity homes with qualified medical personnel, free medical care and meals. Mothers with large families were awarded the order of, Mothers Glory of the first and second class, which entitled them to annual cash or free stay in a rest house for a period of 14-21 days. The upbringing of children was the common task of both parents. All the family members shared the house hold chores.

More than half of the population engaged in national productive labor were women. The establishment of cooperative movements in rural areas and gave a lot of help to women and freed them from the burden of much work, in the urban areas also many and kindergartens looked after the interests of mother and child, thereby giving women further chance to utilize her time in useful work in a comfortable way.

Rights of women to work, to rest, to educate, to equal pay was guaranteed. Sixty years ago a women could not dream of taking up a profession. During the socialist regime the majority of women constituted the work force. During the 1930's enormous gains were made by and for women. 16 women ministers, deputy ministers and agency heads, 35% of judges were women, 50% of the peoples assessors in loweraming courts were women. 40 women headed cooperatives, 14 women out of 35 were in the Khural in 1940. On

1 The 60th anniversary of Peoples Mongolia p 101
2 Mongolia, No2, 1972
3 Socialist Mongolia p 100, 1981
an equal footing with men, one finds majority of women working as herds, in factories, state farms, agriculture association and in other enterprises. With the development of economy and culture, women have acquired higher merited worker of science, culture and arts.

Co-education became normal practice. The pedagogical principles are the same, from the kindergarten up, for both boys and girls.

Educational achievements were impressive for both boys and girls. In 1923 Mongolia's first secondary school had only five female students, five years later it has 558 of them. Education of women were emphasized and their participation in politics and decision making was encouraged. In 1931 about 40% of school enrollment were female and out of 600 people elected to local bodies 30% were women, two of these aimag governors. By 1969, 76 percent of all women were literate and by 1989 the literacy rate for the entire population, male and female, had risen to 86%. In the field of higher education the enrollment of women constitute more than three quarters. While women account for just under half of the Mongolia's workhorse, they dominate in the banking, health and educational sector. They also predominate in several sub sectors, notably communication, trade, technology, utility service, public canteens and insurance. They held such posts as ministers, chairpersons, secretary of party organizations and deputies of great people's Khural. Thus the professional qualification gap between men and women, narrowed significantly.

COLLAPSE OF SOCIALIST STRUCTURE AND POSITION OF WOMEN

The same women who were called glories mothers and who constituted over half of the labor productivity, were almost ignored in all spheres of country's life, and are relegated to very ordinary status, at times even worse than that of the pre-revolutionary days. Although the new constitution, which was formed after the collapse of the socialist regime, gave women equal rights but these laws are not implemented, advancing the only excuse that of financial restraints. In the political sphere there were only three women parliamentarians among the 76 male members in 1995. The women who dominated the various fields of economy has no say in the decision making of the country. In the educational, health and banking sector also they have lost the jobs and they have been pushed away from the political and social life of the country through early retirement. In 1990 subsidies were withdrawn and many economic entities has to manage without it, so many people preferred to survive by reducing the number of staff. As a result number of pensioners increased four fold. From 1990-1994 several majors were introduced to change the basic pension scale but as the prices and tariffs on consumer commodities, basic goods and all types of public services rose, the condition remained as before. In 1995
another resolution was passed under which resolution No.104 and 105 with which pension allowance scope was increased but it was applied to veterans over 70 years old, creating unfavorable conditions for old women who retired on privileged terms because they were mothers of many children. Retired people both men and women are not able to even pay the apartment rents as it is less than what they pay for rent, which under the socialist period was almost free, as good work meant a good apartment. But now neither the salaries nor the pension is enough to settle the bills, so many women has started visiting countryside, where they think can survive. Women with large families cannot live in apartments as it has become very expensive, if ever they get one, as the construction section has come to a stand still after USSR, ceased to invest.

Discrimination on the genre basis is quite acute and male oriented and headed institutions squarely refuse the deserving female job seekers any place in their establishments, with the result, among the women unemployment increased up to 52 % since 1992. Due to the unemployment they have been pushed to flash trade. On inquiry it was revealing to know that most of the sex workers enjoyed the trade as a source to quick buck without any hard labor and investment probably, being fresh in the trade, are not aware of the state of affairs when customers lose interest in them due to old age or infirmity. Infections of V.D. UTT, and above all aids is very frequent among the sex workers and hence not enough years to work in the trade.

This kind of business was altogether missing during the socialist rule, and it has come as a legacy of free market economy and transparency of the globalization. The external forces are instrumental in the growth of flesh trade and pornography. The high five star hotels in general have call girls to serve the clients and mostly the foreigners. Some prestigious hotels have become heavens for street girls, seeking richer foreign customers from whom they can earn US 80-200 dollars a night and some times go only for US 10 dollars. Transparency, open society, and ascendance of the prostitution, demand for under age boys and girls is posing a threat to the health of nation, as reported, the aids and other sexually transmitted deices are on increase quite alarmingly. Women who were rewarded to have lot of children before are now in most difficult situation and present system penalizes them, as they are much proven to the poverty. Abortion was legalized in 1989, which stepped up the incidence. In 1991 the number of abortion reached its peak with 31,217, so dose the number of divorces; in 1986-92 the rate increased by one third, but is now back to the level of 1985. There were 2,243 cases in 1990 and about 6,000 in the first quarter of 1993. In the socialist system state supported these divorced
families. Single women life has become very difficult as there is no adequate support to give education to the children and are kept in the house to help in domestic work especially in rural areas. Pensions are not enough to feed the family and there are no adequate support to give education to the children. Violence, alcoholism in the domestic life has increased to such an extent that children leave the house and start street life. Crime rate increased dramatically. Many people including women are concerned about the issue and fear that it may become a key factor to instability and disorder of the society. Health condition has also deteriorated due to the lack of routine health care and absence of medicine and healthy diet. Under the socialist period agriculture farms and cooperatives were responsible for the health check-ups and they were looking after the maternity hostels and such institutions. But 50% of these hostels are closed down and remaining some are in the hands of local administration who complain of having no resources to maintain them. The maternal mortality has increased due to the lack of medical staff and transportation. At times of delivery, in times, women just give birth at their homes. From 1985-1990, the maternal mortality rate increased to 140 per 100,000 and 144 and 205 per 100,000. [1] In rural areas the percentage of unattended births are increasing and incidence of abortion has also given rise to maternal mortality. Due to the lack of contraceptives, abortion is considered a means of avoiding having babies. The quality and care of the doctors are also below standard. Many good doctors have left and taken jobs in business fields. Mortality rate is also high among the school dropouts and low literacy mothers and unemployed mothers.

Nutrition system is also getting worse day by day. Under the socialist system, food security was provided by the agricultural and herder collectives, so nutrition problem was not existing. But now the condition is different especially in rural areas and most affected are children and old people and pregnant women. Iron deficiency anemia in pregnant women is considered to be as high as 40%. The mothers with poor nutrition give birth to low weight, which is increasing, from 1988-1992, from 3.4% of all births to 4.5% in 1990, and 6% in 1992. Weight for age, height for age, and weight for height, is not better due to the lack of nutrition. According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, a third of the Mongolian population now lives below the nutritional starvation levels. Although in urban areas stores are full of commodities but are very expensive and the purchasing power of the society has decreased. Daily commodities have become very expensive, so for single women life has become very difficult. No pension is given to the single women and widows if the husband dies outside their place of work. Widows are not in a position to buy daily commodities and they cannot work full time as there is nobody to look after the...
children as day care centres and child care and school system has collapsed. There are some institutions but are no use to poor families.

The condition of rural women is much worse than their counterparts urban women. In pre-Revolutionary period Khot-ail «a group of 3-4 families» used to share the tending of live stock turn by turn and made the daily products together, thus there was not much load of work. During the socialist period agricultural farm or Negdels were responsible for the live stock but now work load of rural women has increased and they have to work for several hours. As Barbara Skapa mentions in her article, "In the rural areas prior to privatization, women worked primarily in single species collective units as dairy maids or as herders. But privatized herds are always mixed, which requires more tending and processing of animal products requires additional family labour. For this reason it is estimated that rural women now labor several hours more per day than men. They still have to take charge of the cooking, cleaning and seeing to the children, the elderly and the infirm.

The diversified herds demand much labor with herding, attending weak and sick animals, milking, collecting water and dung or wood for fuel, making felt for ger, trading goods and traveling to aimag or sum centres. The single headed families keep small number of herds due to the lack of manpower. While all the herders face the risk of sever winter or other condition that may wipe out many animals, female single headed households are more vulnerable to such conditions and may have to sell off their indispensable stock in order to buy goods which they can not make by themselves, when they deplete their animal resources, they may eventually have to move back to their natal house, but if they prefer to stay back in their own gers they have to work for the richer families or sink into the poverty which common Mongols think is self created.

Nevertheless, it appears to be only a transitional phase, and is essential as the market economy demands capital, enterprise and above all expertise in the financial institutions. Obviously the main causality is the women folk in such circumstances, but they have not given in. The Mongol women folk has left behind the hibernation period and are now again actively engaged in economic activities. The NGO's in association with the local NGO's have stepped in to alleviate the statues of women folk and bring them back on the pedestal which they were standing upon. They are making use of their expertise whatsoever it was in their new endeavors mainly in the small scale trade and commerce.

1 Skapa, B. and I. A Benwell Mongolia in Transition pp 135-146
2 Bruun, O. Ibid p 65-69
Mongolian business women's federation was established in 1992, under whose guidance many women enterprises emerged and they utilized their experience in various fields of business. And some of them have succeeded in establishing their own business.

Some of those who worked previously in state run canteens became, at first, street peddlers of baked items. There are many Mukhlag «small convenience stores» run by both men and women, even children in Ulaanbaatar. Many women entered in private sector as, canteen operators, restaurant owners. a lady who was interpreter in academy of science, she started her own restaurant serving Indian food and has now 6 other members as staff. Another women who was working as a kindergarten teacher established her garment business and is now exporting to USA, she has more than 20 staff members, all young women. A dentist opened a private dental clinic with the help of a small loan from special credit line for women former state truck mechanic, out of work, received a loan and put herself and her brothers to work on repairing trucks and now she has a registered business and is looking for a tire supplier and a larger workshop. Another woman along with her husband started business of used cars from Japan. Some outstanding: women did wonderful job by not only getting herself a job, but employed all other women co-workers in her factory which she established with a small loan under a UNIFEM credit scheme project. She started her business at home by making sausages to peddle in the street, she could do it as she has experience of making sausages in her meat factory where she was working during the socialist period. Within six months she obtained loan and soon repaid it with an additional contribution to the fund so that more women could profit. A year later she leased production space, hired 14 employees from the factory where she once worked and obtained quality, imported equipment from Germany, which she financed through another loan. The experience of the UNIFEM project, the only one targeted specifically at the newly unemployed with children, was very favorable and indicated that there is scope for replication on a large scale. Also women in the country side benefited: group leading operations were designed by the project and could be used for women in isolated areas where outreach and monitoring costs are high. The personal commitment of the banking staff, the NGO staff and the volunteers act as an invisible power of women's cooperation and consciousness. There has been an extraordinary effort to encourage women of Mongolia. The NGO visit clients in their gers or apartments who go on foot or by bus, and contact elderly women to start their own manufacturing
units. as alternate sources and make use of new varieties of raw materials¹.

**WOMEN’S NGOs**

During these seven eight years women are not indolent but emerged with many ideas and activities. They have created a network which helps to promote their interests. Many came into existence in *Ulaanbaatar* which are registered with the ministry of justice. The effective associations at the moment are Mongolia women’s Federation, Ms. *Gerelsuren* as its president. In socialist period it was a state organization but now is working as NGO with diminished state resources but with the support of foreign donor countries.². Besides the registered groups there are many more emerging associations but could not compete the market force, and as such get devolved.

Apart from these organizations there are many other organizations such as Federation of Mongolian Democratic women’s Association, Mongolian Business Women’s Federation, Women for social progress, Lawyer Women’s Association, Liberal Women’s Brain Pool, Mongolian Consultative Committee, Women Information and Research Centre and Women against Violence which are active in the field.

These organizations have a broad agenda including, equal rights, access to work, housing and credit, women legal issues, employment generation and vocational training crisis intervention, health care for mothers and infants, promotions of the women’s movements and establishment of an independent database. These issues are source of the deterioration of status of women in Mongolia during the economic crisis. In addition, indifference of the government towards the elevation of the economic status of the women has been alarming the women organization. In Mongol Messenger it was reported that Mrs. *Ider*, the chancellor of the supreme court, who is also working for the liquidation of discrimination against women said. “Women in political sphere needs to be enhanced. Despite the fact that there was lot of educated, intelligent, talented women working for the advancement to management the other strong sex was not interested in sharing the power. Women is a great power which could be used in the development of the country”. The deterioration of women’s status has economic, social and political dimension, in the absence of


²Here it is worth to mention that Japanese NGOs had also stepped in the trey to alleviate poverty among the women folk of Mongolia One of the NGO in discussion found that the women folk has the desire to participate in the economic activities of the country. In proper encouragement and financial and material help is provided the Ishikawa-Mongol 21st century women’s club is in a major way contributing to the welfare of the Mongolian womenfolk.
a clear government policy or machinery for the women. These NGOs has demanded the active participation in the political, social and economic life of the country. Priority should be given to the women's problems and basic civil rights and freedom should be given.

These NGOs with the assistance of different international women's organizations and with the financial assistance of Australia has established a centre for the victims of different kind of violence has been operational for quite sometime, where they provide medical as well as moral support to such destitute. The violence in the family on women and children has become order of these days, and mostly people prefer to hide such shameful acts sometimes for reputation sake and sometimes simply not knowing it as a crime.

With the initiative of the women's democratic movement and single mother society, a centre was founded to support and help the girl students and single mothers in securing employment at times, when they are free from lessons.

This year women all over Mongolia united to form a coalition of women's organization in preparation for parliamentary elections, as they consider politicos as an only effective way to solve their problems. Mongolian Women's Federation appealed to the public to support female candidates. According to these organizations in 300 Sums and 22 state district administrative centres there is not even a single women.

According to the statistics female make up 50.4% of the country's population, represent 43 % of all highly educated people, 70 % of lawyers, 36.8 % of state employees in education, health, trade and financial sectors.

During the socialist period, when economy was centrally planned, unemployment and unemployed were unknown words for Mongols. Due to the unemployment living condition is deteriorating, distress for tomorrow and social instability have increased the rate of suicide among young Mongols and family conflicts due to unemployment are cause of the 61.1 % with female suicide compared with 32.6 % with male. Two thirds of all the unemployed are women. The National Poverty Alleviation Programme along with donor countries and UN, The Asian Development Bank and Japanese TASMS are trying to create jobs.

UNICEF and NGOs from United States, Japan and Australia implemented 6 projects with which thousands of women in the rural and urban areas will receive soft loans, grant aid and free machines and technology so they can produce garments, grow vegetables which can become one of the source of their income. Such projects will
help alleviate property and address some of the problems confronting women.

Government of Mongolia is also trying to solve the problems of women with the help and assistance of different international organizations who are ready to invest in this field. A National programme on women's issues for the period up to 2020, was discussed by the congress Labour Minister E. Gombojav said that by 2000 government will make every effort to decrease the poverty and death rate of the mothers giving birth to 50%. From 2000-2010 priority will be given to the economic growth and social development of women. From 2010-2020 formation of democrat society giving women political and economic status will be considered. Foreign and domestic financial funding will be used by the women for progress sub fund and the poverty alleviation programme.

A mediating service to support students and single mothers was formed in Ulaanbaatar at the initiative of the women's democracy movement and the single mother society. the centre aims to help youth and single mothers to secure employment at times when they are free of lessons.

Conclusions drawn on the basis of data for a short span of a couple of years can be lacunae, but on the face, it appears the transition has been heavily weighing upon the women folk and children especially. But, the speed and interest shown by the genera itself with the help of other international agencies is quite gratifying and with the stabilization the women folk is bound to play a positive role in political and economic activities more effectively than during the days of regimentation.

According to statistics, females make up 50.4% of the country's population, represent 43% of all highly educated people, 70% of lawyers, 36.8% of state employees in education, health trade and financial sectors. There is not one female among the 300 sum heads and 22 state district administrative areas of Ulaanbaatar. With severe cuts in social programs and falling social security networks, women children and elderly are hit most by economic difficulties. Seeing politics as an effective way to solve their problems women across the country united to form a coalition of women's organization in preparation for parliamentary election. there are 26 candidates on the list of 313 competing for office. The oldest organization, the Mongolian Women's Federation applied to the public to support female candidate.

The chancellor of the supreme court, Mrs. Ider who is working for the liquidation of discrimination against women, said, women in political sphere needs to be enhanced. Despite the fact that there was
lot of educated, intelligent talented women working for the advancement to management, the other strong sex was not interested in sharing the power. Women is a great power which could be used in the development of the country.