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From Progress to Equality: the Evolution of Gender Policies in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: Gender equality is considered the equality of women and men in society, while in active life, each segment has equal opportunities for women and girls as well as men. This has been one of the key directions of politics until now because gender equality is one of the most important aspects of every democratic state and society. Therefore, providing gender equality among the citizens entering each democratic society is highly important. The article examines the rights and freedoms of women, focusing on the issue of gender equality in society, exploring policies aimed at ensuring the rights and freedoms of all women throughout society, their achievements, and their importance.

Keywords: gender equality, strategy, parliament, gene fund, family, development, justice, initiative, discrimination.

Introduction

Initially, the concept of gender equality, which will give a more comprehensive definition to itself, signifies the equal rights and opportunities of women and men in all areas of society, including economy, politics, education, culture, law, science and sports. If we look at ancient culture, women were only seen as "mother" and "wife". Therefore, until the 20th century, women were predominantly viewed as homemakers, caregivers, and symbols of beauty and aesthetics. Women's right to education and participation in government and society faced many obstacles. This situation especially distorts the psychology and worldview of women in strict societies with rigid boundaries.

However, new movements in the field of human rights have brought about a transformation in the social-political life by empowering women as equal members in society. Initially demonstrated by European women, later women from Africa, Asia and Latin America are also following their paths. However, some traditional Islamic values in authoritarian states may impose restrictions on gender equality. Because the stereotype that a woman in Islam should always be inferior to a man is still preserved due to misinterpretation. The true meaning of this belief is actually that a woman is a miracle and it is the duty of a man to protect her, show respect and esteem her while providing her with all-round support and even education. In Islam, a woman is honored and considered highly valuable. But nowadays women are not like those until the 20th century.

Experimental Research (or methods)

In researching gender equality policy in Uzbekistan, analysis and synthesis, complex integration, systematic-functional integration, content analysis, retrospective analysis, dialectical, and synergistic scientific knowledge methods were used.

Results and Discussion

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Women's struggle for their rights makes the concept of equality in society a priority issue on the agenda. In the same situation, the laureate of the Nobel Prize in physics, Maria Skladovskaya Curie, was able to prove that the intellectual potential of women and men is equal and does not differ from each other. "..the term "gender" was raised by women's rights defenders. In their works, more attention is paid to the analysis of stereotypes and the place of women in the distribution of social roles. All aspects of social relations were studied, even down to the methodological differences in the approaches of male and female researchers."[1] "In Great Britain and Scandinavian countries, women won the right to participate in local government and the right to vote in parliament" [2].

In this way, women from different corners of the world also began to achieve significant successes. In 1893, women in New Zealand gained equal voting rights with men. Similarly, Australia in 1902, Finland in 1906, and finally Norway in 1913 granted women the right to vote.

Those who support gender equality believe that this concept not only ensures equality between men and women in relationships but also changes all social relationships. Therefore, it paves the way for humanity to a new system of social relations.

Some scientists have already conducted certain researches on the issues of women and their desires and values, thereby trying to understand a woman and to determine how she can rise in society. One such scientist is L.L. Ribtsova analyzed various studies and formed a set of basic values of women according to the typology of values. "This set of values consists of the following 14 core value hierarchies:

1. Health as a supreme value.
2. Ensuring children's education and future.
3. Well-being - income, housing, orderly life.
4. Family.
5. Work is a means of earning income, as determining the meaning of life.
6. Love - for children, family, spouse.
7. Effective reconciliation of family and work.
8. Education.
9. Economic independence, individuality.
10. Willingness to help loved ones at one's own expense.
11. Travel, the desire to see and learn new things.
12. Professional (Professional) career.
13. Self-improvement.
14. Appearances: Fashion and Makeup."[3]

Currently, experiences in the field of gender equality have shaped strategic initiatives. Throughout history, we have seen that the role of women has been crucial in the lives of celebrities, state officials, and prominent figures.

As an example of such initiatives, if we take Uzbekistan's announcement of the "Development Strategy" in 2022, issues related to women are also being addressed. Particularly, in the fourth priority direction of the strategy which is "Just Social Policy", attention is paid to various gender-related issues:

- Creating equal rights and opportunities for women and men in social and political life;

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- Ensuring gender equality in economic development, entrepreneurship, and protection of rights as migrants, providing fair and quality education;
- Protecting women and girls from violence, preventing human trafficking;
- Providing social protection for all, ensuring a healthy lifestyle;
- Developing national gender statistics, taking into account gender issues in planning and budgeting;
- Broadening the recruitment of women for ensuring a safe ecological environment and increasing public awareness on gender issues through mass media and other means.

The mechanisms and approaches to ensure gender equality in all areas where such initiatives are being implemented and planned are becoming increasingly visible. The main purpose of these efforts is to strengthen the role and position of women in society, promote attention and solidarity, and ensure their rights and benefits. As can be seen, initiatives aimed at ensuring social justice are yielding quite positive results, attracting global attention and admiration. Efforts to ensure gender equality worldwide, enhance the status of women in society, and promote positive changes are having a positive impact.

International organizations, especially those affiliated with the United Nations in member states, emphasize the importance of ensuring gender equality between women and men, fully implementing national obligations on this issue, achieving development goals, and contributing to the advancement of UN initiatives. To ensure effective economic growth in a country, creating institutional mechanisms that guarantee equal opportunities for women and men across all spheres of state and societal life is essential.

Gender equality issues have found their reflection in several international documents. For example, the Rio de Janeiro Declaration on Environment and Development (1992), the Cairo Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Beijing Conference on Women's Status (1995), and the Istanbul Conference on Human Settlements (1996).

“Promoting gender equality in society is not an easy process; it involves not only debates based on the concept of 'gender equality' but also stereotypical discussions focusing solely on protecting women's rights. On the other hand, it requires implementing normative legal provisions that embody gender equality being applied in practice as well as introducing specific new mechanisms and initiatives. This includes establishing new forms of monitoring, analysis tasks along with implementing gender statistics, gender expertise, gender audit methods…”[4]

Currently, the concept of "positive discrimination" is being used in conjunction with the concept of gender equality. If we were to give a definition to this concept, positive discrimination is a method used to achieve gender equality in education and in the field of science, involving providing special opportunities and quotas to small groups. For example, in Uzbekistan, there is a shortage of women in fields such as engineering, medicine, and computer science. This shortage calls for an increase in the number of women in these fields. To address this issue, encouraging more women to study in these areas and creating special opportunities and new quotas for them is considered positive discrimination.

Similarly, one of the trends that can be observed globally today is the feminization of international labor migration. This trend is particularly significant in professions that do not require heavy physical labor, especially as service sectors continue to develop and progress. Scholars such as Anderson, Fitzakelia, and Lutz have conducted research on this issue and have evaluated it as being economically beneficial for the development of international labor migration involving women. “According to

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empirical research results, 84% of respondents emphasized the importance of women's labor migration for their lives and careers, while 62.4% highlighted the positive impact of this process on recipient countries and regions."[5]

In reality, strategic interventions are not only important for women's social and political roles but also for their health considerations. This is because a healthy generation depends on society's well-being. The role of healthy individuals in creating a healthy future is significant. Empowering women to bring a healthy generation into society plays an important role in nurturing them holistically under state protection and support from all sides.

As further evidence of the changing role and increasing political rights of women in society, it is possible to see the addition of titles such as Senator, Deputy, Minister, Deputy Minister, entrepreneur, director, governor, scholar and other similar names in addition to women's names. "...considering women as an active and innovative part of society capable of ensuring the implementation of the basic directions of social development from one side and from another side providing opportunities for their development may be considered."[6]

In the "Uzbekistan – 2030" strategy adopted on September 11, 2023, the following measures have been outlined to strengthen the system of supporting women and girls, ensuring their rights and legal interests, enhancing their social, economic and political activities and ensuring gender equality:

- Continuation of gender equality policy by increasing female representation in leadership positions by 30% through promoting women's social-political activities.
- Creating a non-discriminatory environment in society towards women and girls, ensuring their rights and legal interests.
- Establishing a transparent mechanism for working with the "Women's Register" to ensure community oversight over these matters.

Such measures being implemented through adopted laws, decrees and decisions serve to ensure gender equality and address issues in this area.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion it can be stated that world experience also shows that when the interests of women are aligned with those of society as a whole, it is more effective. Ensuring gender equality is a process that requires reform in governance. To fully implement this, policies related to gender equality should take a prominent place in the annual state program. Therefore, all possibilities are available for implementing fair gender policies at every stage and we need to actively work towards this goal.

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