



## Gender Research in the Aftermath of the Soviet Union: Western Viewpoints and Cultural Variations

Ulfat Shaheen

Ms Scholar Department of Pace and Conflit the University of Peshawar at-

[ulfat67@gmail.com](mailto:ulfat67@gmail.com)

### Abstarct

The seven years of gender studies study and teaching experience that I have amassed in modern Russia serve as the foundation for this work. In the early 1990s, the concepts of gender, feminism, and women's subjectivity were initially introduced to the Russian government and the general population. The adoption of Western concepts and theories has been a significant contributor to the progress that has been made in the field of gender studies in Russia. An examination of the development of gender studies is presented in this essay, which takes place against the backdrop of the "Russia – West" dichotomy in Russian gender studies. This article takes a look at the evolution of gender studies over the course of the previous decade, taking into account the various theoretical perspectives that have emerged as well as the changes that have occurred in the milieu.

**Keywords:** Gender studies, the "Russia vs. the West" dichotomy, and theoretical methods to gender study are all things that are talked about.

### INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the past seven years, our group has been engaged in the process of doing substantial gender studies research and other educational projects within the Russian environment. We have been primarily concerned with the environment in Russia. The purpose of this study is to conduct an analysis of a number of patterns that found in this particular field. For the first time, the Russian people were exposed to the notions of gender, feminism, and women's subjectivity, which are the primary concepts of gender study. This occurred at the beginning of the 1990s. Ideas that were drawn from Western feminist discourse served as the basis for the field of gender research. A significant contribution to the development of gender studies as a field of



study in Russia can be attributed to the entrance of Western ideas and theories. To begin, let us take a moment to briefly examine the development of gender studies over the course of the past ten years. The following step will be the presentation of a concise summary of the contextual variables that have been supported by academic studies, including our own. After that, we will concentrate on the theoretical perspectives that the separation between Russia and the West directly led to the growth of in the field of gender studies in Russia. These positions were introduced as a direct result of the division.

#### **THE HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTION IN RUSSIA THAT STUDIES Gender**

At the beginning of the 1990s, a significant turning point occurred for the emerging academic field of women's and gender studies in Russia. The article "How the Women's Question Was Resolved" written by Posadskaja, Rimashevskaya, and Zakharova and published in *Kommunist* in 1989 was notable because it was the first to address issues that were related to gender (Posadskaja, Rimashevskaya, Zakharova). This is the consensus that people have reached all throughout the world. When it was established in 1990, the Institute of Social and Economic Problems, which is a part of the highly regarded Russian Academy of Sciences, was the first institution of its type to concentrate on the investigation of gender-related issues. A number of cities, including Saratov, Tver, Omsk, Ulianovsk, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ivanovo, and Saramara, were able to successfully construct research and educational institutes during the course of ten years. With that being said, many instructional approaches were embraced by colleges that were either recently founded or have been there for a long time. The information was also distributed through the use of summer schools and courses that were abridged. Through the course of history, the majority of funding for creative research and educational projects has been provided by foundations established in Western countries.

This domain involves research and instruction in a variety of subjects, including philology, history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology, among others. It is essential to recognize that political science, in general, demonstrates a rather low level of sensitivity to the gender perspective. (Sperling, 1999; Racioppi and O'Sullivan, 1997; Konstantinova, 1996, etc.) The majority of the academics who have



made significant contributions to this field have generally published their work in the English language. Even though there has been a lot of emphasis paid to study on women's political participation in the academic world, this remains the case.

The field of gender studies has experienced enormous expansion and diversity, despite the fact that it is still considered to be on the periphery of the academic world. The field of gender and women's studies has become a recognized academic discipline in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union. At the same time that they provide a place for inclusive conversation, these studies encourage participation on topics that have not been investigated before. This new development has made it easier for traditionally underrepresented groups to have their voices heard and has contributed to the de-stigmatization of sensitive topics such as violence, racism, abortion, reproduction, and sexuality.

For the purpose of ensuring that new social science projects are compatible with the existing institutional structure, professionals in the field have developed techniques. Beginning in the late 1990s and continuing into the present day, there has been a considerable growth in the number of conferences and publications. This development was accompanied by the proliferation of magazines that published specific issues pertaining to gender studies. Additionally, there was a discernible rise in the editing of handbooks, readers, textbooks, and anthologies of translated. When it comes to institutionalizing gender studies, academics employ not just one but two distinct approaches: "autonomization" and "integration." In the beginning, the primary focus will be on the establishment of independent educational projects, specialized journals, conference subjects that are relevant to gender, and specialized networks. In the context of broader educational and research programs, the term "integration" refers to the intentional incorporation of other relevant fields of study in addition to sociology, history, and psychology. Attending professional conferences and publishing research results in famous academic journals are essential components of this methodology (Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2001; Klecina, 2002). These are both regular elements of this strategy.



## HOW UNIQUE THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT IS AND HOW GENDER ORDER WORKS

The development of gender research in Russia is taking place within a specific social and cultural institution. As a result of the long-lasting repercussions of the Soviet gender hierarchy, society is currently responding to these negative effects. Some examples of this include the "crisis of masculinity" or "failed masculinity," the significant position of women in society, the gender accord surrounding the concept of the "working mother," and the supposed restoration of gender inequities during the time of the Soviet Union. A strong public support for the mother's role over the father's role was also sought in the official declaration regarding the woman's question and the emancipation of the Soviet Union. This statement demanded that gender equality be achieved through universal suffrage as well as equal economic and social involvement. The maternal social aid program that was financed by the state and the mandatory "working mother" gender contract both contributed to an increase in the social status of women. It was as a consequence of this that social and economic disparities were reduced, and women were increasingly active in a variety of facets of day-to-day life.

As a result of our research into the crisis of masculinity, we have discovered that the liberal rhetoric of the late Soviet era maintained that men were inferior to women in terms of demographics, mental health, and physical qualities. When women in the Soviet Union were granted their freedom, it was believed that this would have negative implications, such as males becoming more feminine and females becoming more macho. Both men and women, according to Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2002), are in agreement with the criticism. A relatively small number of Russian women are of the opinion that their social standing is unfair in comparison to that of men. In most cases, the source of women's deprivation is not gender bias or economic dependence on men; rather, it is difficulties in maintaining a healthy work-life balance that are experienced by working mothers. There is a consensus among a large number of people regarding the interpretation of empirical facts. Academics in the field of gender studies need to be aware of this information, particularly those who compare and contrast women in the Soviet Union with women in the United States



and western Europe. Through the establishment of a "etacratic" social contract and a gender hierarchy, the organizations of the party state were responsible for shaping, controlling, and encouraging Soviet femininity.

Another interpretation of the Soviet gender system places an emphasis on patriarchal features of state socialist society. This interpretation makes use of the feminist concept of "patriarchy." There is a connection between patriarchy and topics such as the devaluation of the female body, militarization, the division of labor in the workplace, and bureaucratic structures that are dominated by men. From this point of view, both males and the state are considered to be patriarchal entities that are abusive against women.

During the time of the Soviet Union, "equality" for women meant that they were required to perform full-time jobs both within and outside the home. The so-called "glass ceiling" had an effect on women who held jobs outside the households. During the time of patriarchal civilizations, women earned thirty percent less than males would have. It was more challenging for women to get high-ranking positions because there was a disparity between the qualifications possess by males and women. There was also a decrease in the status of women-dominated professions as a result of segregation of labor. It was at the same time that the discrimination was referred to as the "socialist emancipation" of women, which resulted in the establishment of a negative link between Soviet "state feminism" and feminism respectively.

According to a significant number of Russian historians, post-Soviet gender relations have been characterized by a tendency to keep women out of politics, lucrative work, and wealthy business initiatives. This tendency has been seen in a number of different contexts. According to Posadskaja (1993), the current gender system might be characterized as the "revival of the patriarchy." The term "male democracy" is another moniker for the political revolution that took place in Russia. Posadskaja is of the opinion that democratic change does not guarantee the protection of women's rights. The impact that democratic administration has had on the civil rights of women is currently being demonstrated by new laws. There is a disparity in the standing of men and women. The most significant concerns are the work-life balance, the



coherence of society, and gender standards. In the case of Working Mother, the organizational structure has completely disintegrated. The state's efforts to encourage motherhood in the Soviet Union are proving to be less successful.

The majority of experts are of the opinion that the women's movement and gender studies are in a precarious position. The essentialism that is founded on biological determinism, gender stereotypes, and the victimization of women are all believed to be supported by this environment. In public discourse, women are often represented as being victims of economic and political upheaval within their communities. In general, they are shown as single mothers who are having difficulty coping and do not have any social support. In addition, women are regarded as agents of change since they are the ones that establish new identities that are representative of different types of femininity. Users of these new identities are typically liberated from the constraints of socialist freedom and labor that is enforced by the state. As a post-communist society begins to take shape, women are placing a greater emphasis on the importance of their families and husbands. Additionally, new opportunities have become available, such as the opportunity to pursue a variety of professional paths and to enter firms that were previously inaccessible. There are several instances in which the requirement of providing for one's family and children can make economic independence appear to be a burden.

The traditional gender roles that are prevalent in society present gender studies with a number of methodological obstacles. It has been brought to the attention of academics that depictions of gender disparities in the media are significantly lacking. In the Russian public discourse, feminism is not supported by the cultural milieu that is conducive to the growth of gender studies. The search for theoretical frameworks that are appropriate for gender studies is a challenging endeavor.

#### **HOW THE FIELD HAS GROWN THEORETICALLY**

Gender studies is seen to have had two breakthroughs in the middle of the 1990s. Even though these two have somewhat different opinions on the complexities of gender roles in a society, they have both contributed greatly to the study of interpretive frameworks. One may follow each of these disparate ideas back to its



own special origin.

The first part is on feminist grassroots groups operating in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union. This study has mostly concentrated on the disparities in treatment that women experience in society. Furthermore considered have been the particular experiences of women with unfairness, hierarchical structures, and discrimination. As its fundamental theoretical framework, this study uses Western feminist thought. Liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, postmodernist, and other academically studied viewpoints are among the many that make up Western feminist philosophy. The main objective has been to investigate and examine critically both the situation of women and men as well as their common experiences in Soviet and post-Soviet society. The purpose of doing this is to progress gender equality. Part of its objective, the movement has repositioned itself as an analytical feminist philosophy. The second tendency is related to the "official" segment of the Russian women's movement, which has promoted social protection principles all along the movement's existence. The people who support this point of view never utilize words or concepts connected to patriarchy, gender inequity, or feminism. Conversely, a great deal of attention is paid to the many responsibilities that women perform in many spheres of society. The feminist movement and women's studies are based on the principle of gender roles. This movement is obviously related to the Soviet Union's legacy, which included studies of sex roles, social issues faced by women, psychology, family sociology, and demographic analysis.

Recall that the area of gender and women's studies is always looking for new theoretical frameworks. Interaction between the two groups increased during the end of the 1990s when the formerly tight division between the two prominent trends and the educational orientations associated with each of them was noticeably relaxed. Though there is still considerable wiggle area in its meaning, the term "gender" has spread in the social sciences. This term has been employed in the work of scholars who identify as either feminists or nonfeminists. Many different points of view about the mechanics of intersexuality have been included into the definition of the term. Gender roles include the hierarchical structure between members of different genders. Particularly, this structure relates to the dynamics and exchanges that take place in



relationships between men and women. Furthermore, the idea of gender roles also includes the notion of distinct and enhancing duties that are assigned to men and women in the community. It is also sometimes substituted for the word "women." Though the concepts of "gender" and "gender studies" marked a break from this, the Soviet Union had a long history of studying different sex roles. Using these instruments, they expressed a wish to create novel ideas on the development of gender hierarchies, the validity of gender-based authority, the social construction of personal identities, and the expansion of such identities. The recognition of "Western theory" as the main source of information in the current context confirmed the credibility of the field. Still, there is a sociological residue from Soviet times, especially in fields like the study of family relations and sexuality. Still, there is some latitude for interpretation in relation to the subject under issue.

Gender studies in Russia mostly takes its cues from a wide range of Western theories and thoughts. One of the most crucial fields of study in Russian gender studies is the question of whether these ideas and concepts apply elsewhere and how best to use them. Gender studies is examined in the framework of intellectual globalization and the historical effects of Western imperialism, claims Oushakin (2000). The question at hand is whether it is more crucial to give global trends in current or postmodern development priority or to emphasize uniquely Russian characteristics and the "gender cause." Only lately has the discipline of gender studies started to look into the difference between "domestic" and "international" points of view in connection to Russia's surroundings. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that this particular topic hasn't received much attention. Using the real research methods and intellectual frameworks established by that school of thought, academics clarify their relationship to Western feminist theory.

Scholars like Voronina and Klimenkova (1992) and Voronina (2001) have tried to clarify the basic ideas and lines of reasoning that support Western feminism and gender studies through their study of the logic of the social sciences. This scholarly effort aims to clarify the genesis of these studies as a critical viewpoint on mainstream ideology and to emphasize the role that these studies play as a mirror of the widespread gender discrimination that is prevalent in Western culture. We have





chosen to go down this path in order to investigate the many Western perspectives present in the subject of gender studies via the prism of social theory. During our discussion, we cover the Marxist viewpoint, the social and structural constructivist viewpoints, postmodernism, feminist theory, and the sex-role approach within the functionalist-structural theory. Since the women's movement influenced the development of feminist frameworks for comprehending gender dynamics and modifications to traditional social theory, this study also reconstructs social and cultural differences within the gender hierarchy. Furthermore covered in this research is the women's movement.

This approach has bearing on the general discursive climate in the field of Russian social sciences. Discourse openness has been observed to have increased noticeably throughout the last ten years. Inside this particular discursive framework, the legacy of Russia and the Soviet Union and the emergence of Western classical and post-classical discourses coincide. This convergence is there inside this specific discursive framework. There was a process that the several schools of Western social theory underwent that might be broadly referred to as "translation". Criticism often took precedence over the first-proposed theoretical foundation during this period. The phenomena known in Russia at first as "pluralism," "eclecticism," or "fragmentation of theory" was associated with the logical nature of social science. In those days, these words were used interchangeably. Social theory has hardly benefited from the gender studies and feminist theory's, for the most part, confinement to a narrow discourse domain. Even so, they are capable of questioning the established conventions. To consider are, for example, culture and the range of sociocultural settings. Mainly, the study looks into gender politics and the ubiquitous manifestations of gendered behavior. Much academic study has been done on the construction of gender and gender identity in the media, in different text genres (such biographies), in different institutions (such political parties, science, and the family), and in connection to social issues (such abortions and violence). Among the relevant research subjects raised are discrimination, violence against women, sexual harassment, minority rights, and the experiences of disabled women. What is seen to be the conventional wisdom on gender issues in relation to these subjects is mostly influenced by the Western



worldview.

Moreover, Russian gender studies show a keen interest in the so-called "women's agenda," which sprang from the national women's movement. Academic researchers put forth great effort to address a range of socioeconomic issues. These issues include, among others, women's reproductive autonomy, protective legislation, the marginalization of women in the public realm, unemployment following the communist era, and women's hazardous involvement in small-scale enterprises and illicit marketplaces. An often mentioned aspect of the analysis of these socioeconomic issues is the trend of the "feminization" of poverty and long-term unemployment. This is done to highlight the disproportionate impact of these societal issues on women. Enormous empirical research has been done to look into and discover solutions to prevent these risks.

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