

WOMEN OF MONGOLIA: PAST AND PRESENT

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Өгүүллийн товч утга: Монголын эмэгтэйчүүдийн нийгэмд эзлэх байр суурь үе үеийн онцлогоос шалтгаалан, янз бүрээр илэрч тайван агаад, эх хүний хувьд тэдэнд өгөх нийгмийн үнэлэмж Азийн бусад ард түмэнтэй харьцуулбал нилээд өндөр байжээ. Уламжлалт болон өнөөгийн нийгэмд монгол эмэгтэйчүүдийн үндсэн үүрэг үр хүүхдээ өсгөн хүмүүжүүлэх төдийгөөр хязгаарлагдсангүй нийгмийг соён гэгээрүүлэх, материал баялгийг бүтээлцэх, төр-олон нийтийн байгуулагч цэргийн үйлд биечлэн оролцох зэргээр хүндтэй байр эзэлж байдаг.

Түлхүүр үг: эмэгтэйчүүд, ээж, хатад, сурган хүмүүжүүлэгч, соён гэгээрүүлэгч, нийгмийн баялгийг бүтээгч, улс төрийн зүтгэлтэн.

There many prominent men famous by their heroic deeds who contributed much to the historical development of Mongolia. But also there are many women were born in our country who had played not less role. The great deeds and efforts of numerous beautiful women whose names been engraved in the history of Mongolia still been remembered till our days. Historical chronicles mentioned that they were patriotic and smart, humane and honest as well as full of respect of the wisdom and teaching of elders.

For Mongolians with nature wide as steppe and with genuine aspiration to the freedom, social status of women was quite high. Although the women in nomadic society were outside of the political system and their influence on decision making was limited only to the household level, there was ancient tradition to take into consideration the opinions of some wise queens.

There are many chronicles mentioned that ancient queens were influential partners of their aristocratic husbands and this fact had strong impact on concept of women's role in Mongolian society at the later periods of the history.

According to the ancient tradition, the eldest queen of the previous khagan was given the full power of the Empire and ruled for certain period before the new khagan was enthroned. First Queen who ruled the Mongolian Empire was Durgunu and she fiercely struggled to overcome the internal confrontation among the noblemen of the Golden Kin while the Queen of Tului khagan, Sorkhogtani has been invited to assemblies and gatherings of noblemen and was one of the high influential and most reputable figures among the Golden Kin. French envoy Guillame Rubrouck wrote: "Among Queens of Tatars most famous is the Khagan's mother - Queen Sorkhogtani" while Rashid Ad Din mentioned that "Sorkhogtani was the best among women of the whole world by her genuine talents and abilities". By the recommendation and advice of the wise Minister Chingai, the Queen of Guyug khagan - Ogul Haimish - was in charge of the state power for certain period and became very famous for her deeds. Another prominent Queens such as Burte, and Khubilai's Queen Wise Chimbai were trustful supporters of great khagans in ruling over the huge Empire.

The eldest Queen of Dayan khagan - Mandukhai - was a very famous figure in the Mongolian history as a safeguard of the state governance and unity of Mongolians, who overcame the mutual fight among local feudals and ensured the continuation of the Golden Dynasty.

Beautiful Mongolian mothers not only delivered and bred up the brave, strong and smart warriors, but as history evidences, they also directly been involved in state and military affairs. Rashid Ad Din proudly mentioned in this "Annals" about the daughter of Khaidu - "Khotol tsagaan princess" Ayurug who became well known for her heroism and active participation of military campaigns.

The Chinese envoy Man Hun wrote in his "Complete annals of the Mongol Tatars" about the Chinggis Khagan's daughter Alaha begi who had the title of the "princess governing the state": "Every day Alaha begi was reading the books, she was surrounded with several thousand women; in case of any war and struggle she solves the problem by herself". This is evidence that she was as well educated as skilled in military art.

Another prominent lady - Mandukhai Queen was fighting to the strengthening the unity of Mongolia being "well armed, combed up her hairs and taking with herself the good Dayan khagan in the coach". The history does not forget that Any Queen was beside the Galdan boshigtu and sacrificed her life fighting against the foreign invaders for the independence of Mongolians.

All these show that queens and other distinguished ladies of Mongolia have created the background for the success of men in a field of state or military affairs. It is not mere a chance that "Secret history of Mongols" underlined the link between the support of women and the success of men:

"When, oh, my Great Lord,
You were unifying the country
With strong effort and struggle
Your beloved mother-queen
Was suffering as you do".

Therefore, the role and efforts of these ladies were highly appreciated and distinguished by such a titles as "state queen", "eldest queen", "mother of the khagan", "good queen", "wise queen", "smart queen", "taikhu", "beiji", "Begi" (the heads of tribes also were called begi).

Since the beginning of 20th century, the political status of Mongolian women was cardinally changed and their dependence from men became to an end. The first Constitution of Mongolia adopted in 1924 proclaimed that: "All citizens of the country, without distinction as man or woman, shall enjoy the equal rights". Since 1926 the legal environment for reinforcing the political rights of women as well as their right to work was set up.

Since 1921, the Government pursued the policy of active participation of women in political affairs and set up the goal to increase the share of women Parliament Members up to 25 per cent. In a result of this policy, according to the data of 1931, 30 per cent of members of the local administration were women. This is the highest indicator and since that time women started to be elected in "State Baga Khural"- Parliament of that time. The share of women working in such high positions as Ministers, Heads of Departments in various Government institutions as well as within political or non-governmental organizations has been increased continuously.

In 1990-ies, when democratization process had started, the most Mongolian women, despite of their high educational attainment, remained as "passive" group with regard to the development of the state policy, being burdened by double or sometimes even triple responsibilities. Although, women actively been involved in the process of reformation and became "the most active and dynamic force" of the civil society. The representation of women in political or decision-making bodies has been increasing constantly.

Today, the goal to enhance the women representation in legislative bodies up to 30 per cent, was set up at the international level. In the beginning of 1990-ies the participation of women in Mongolian Parliament was 23 per cent, and this indicator declined in 1992 to 3.9 percent. Today this share is about 10 per cent.

- Though the share of women in high Government positions is quite low, it is remarkable success that the number of women in middle administrative level has been increasing.

As for the juridical bodies, it is a good indicator that 70 per cent of local and 50 per cent of city judges are women.

Today the non-government organizations (NGO-s) have been playing an important role in protecting the rights and expressing the views and opinions of women, in enhancing their participation in social and political life of the country. There are more than 10 women NGO-s have been working in Mongolia.

All above mentioned show, that there is still needed to increase the leadership of women and their representation at political decision making level.

The social status of Mongolian women has undergone the evolution over the various periods of the history.

In comparison with neighboring countries, the image of Mongolian women mainly was expressed not as being humble and passive, but as "enlightened khutugtu".

But, we should say, that within patriarchal society as Mongolia, except the distinguished queens, princesses and other high position ladies, other women did not been allowed to participate in decision making at the macro level. Life of ordinary women was devoted to the family and relatives, and their most important social role was the to give the birth to the children and bred them up. From another side, role of women in herdsman's family, evaluation of their role as mother from the whole society was quite high in comparison with other Asian countries.

As in all other countries the main traditional role of women in Mongolia was delivering the children, teaching them and breeding up as great khagans, warriors, scholars, government officials and just ordinary citizens.

As ancient legend says, the wise teaching of Alun Goa queen, who stressed the importance of unity and the negative effect of disorder and intestine, was very popular among the Mongols during their long historical path. The "Secret history of Mongols" proudly mentioned that the sons of Esukhei Baatar, bred up by their mother - Oelun mother - became the great heroes and warriors:

"... Sons bred up by fair mother Oelun

Grew up as the state ministers

Sons bred up by beautiful mother Oelun

Grew up as prominent ministers

Sons bred up by mother Oelun

Grew up as brave ministers and

Reached the perfect power".

The Queen of Tului khagan - mother of three Mongolian khagans (Munkhe, Khubilai and Hulagu) Sorkhochtani was often been mentioned in various historical chronicles and she founded in Bukhara the school for 1000 pupils named as "Centre of knowledge". Later this school was called as "Queen's school". Other distinguished lady- the mother of Khalkha's Tsogtu Taiji - the queen Chintaikhal - also established the school in her palace to "teach the boys and girls". All these and many other facts evidenced that women played an important role in teaching and educating the people, in spreading the knowledge among the population.

Since ancient time till the present days Mongolian women were and are the "enlightening force" in the society. If famous Alun Goa queen left for us her teaching on importance of unity and brotherhood, the Chinggis khagan's daughter Alaha Begi was well educated enough to read every day and was as well skilled in war arts while the Sorkhochtani queen respected all religions and favored as Muslim so other religions and have been admired by her vassals.

Beautiful and thoughtful Chimbai queen considered that Buddhist religion and teaching of Kon Fu Tsi will be very useful for great khagans in their future deeds to rule over the country and played an important role in intellectual life of the Mongols.

Queen Chintaikhal together with his son established big educational and cultural center in their residence and run there such activities as teaching, translating, studying, writing and printing the religious books. The Mother Queen of the Nation - Dondogdulam - had collected many incredible cultural and art works in her palace. We could conclude here, that many queens and other prominent ladies were envoys of the cultural revival of Mongols.

Other important role of Mongolian women was the participation in creating the material wealth. The main legal act of the Mongolian Empire: "Ikh Zasag" says: "When men will fight, women took the field together with them, are obliged to do all the work which usually done by men". This is the evidence that women were responsible for all work in their household during the absence of husbands. The Chinggis khagans "Bileg" also set the social and family responsibilities of women, saying that: "the man is not the sun which show up here and there. When husband goes out for hunting or fighting, the wife should keep order in her household and show the comfort of her home to guests ... if she will follow this rule, the authority of her husband will be high, his deeds will succeed and he will be respected among the people. The husband will be judged by the appearance of his home..." This actually means that behind the successful man usually stands the faithful women, supporter of her husband.

It is very interesting that, in spite of fact that, the rights of women in ancient Mongolian society were quite limited, some legal acts contain provisions protecting these rights. For example, "Ikh zasag" has such provisions as:

- "If women shall visit the noblemen and ask to extricate her or her relatives from punishment for certain criminal affairs, she should be respected and some minor punishments are ceased".
- Insulting of women should be punished.
- Then woman is sitting on the mattress in her designated place to the left from the fireplace, nobody has the right to touch that woman etc.

The "Law of Altan khan" (1540-1580) has number of provisions such as:

- if somebody will touch the married woman and torn out her clothes, guilty person should be fined by horse, cow
- if parents will marry their daughter in improper ways, they should be fined by nine nines
- raping the virgins should be punished
- actions entailed the abortion of pregnant woman should be fined by nines taking into account the months of the lost baby. These provisions demonstrate that Mongolians have a good tradition of protecting the women from violence and inhuman treatment¹.

In the beginning of 20th century Mongolia has followed the USSR and choose the path of the socialism. Since that time from underdeveloped nomadic country Mongolia has developed into urbanized and industrialized modern country with planned economy system. A lot of political, economic and social changes have been made during these years. In a result of such reforms, the role of women in social and economic life of the country was fundamentally changed too.

The national democratic revolution of 1921 and the Constitution of 1924 proclaimed the equal rights for women, since the 1925 the engagement was officially prohibited and since the 1923 the civil rights of women to work, learn and participate in political activities were enhanced. These measures were important steps towards overcoming the old rigid traditions and rules and giving the full rights to women.

¹ Another article was written on issues related with legal provisions and some traditions concerning the women.

During the socialist time the Government pursued the policy of encouraging the birth, considering the population growth as an important matter of the national security. All expenses for the health and education sector, in particular for child care facilities were born by the state budget. This facilitated the burden of women and their role in the society has been increased considerably. Though from some point of view it was a progress, the number of responsibilities on the shoulders of women such as working as breadwinners, taking care for children and doing household works were burdening them.

Since the 1990-ies much attention has been paid to address such issues as policy toward the women, their rights and freedom, employment, eliminating the discriminative provisions from the legislation, gender equality etc. The tendency of studying in educational institutions of middle or higher level and being employed in almost all sectors of the economy, which was typical for the women during the socialist period, is still been observed nowadays.

It is considered that the equal rights in the employment have been provided if share of women is 45-55 per cent in whole employment of the population. As for the Mongolian women, this level has not been reached yet, due to increase of unemployment during the transition to the market economy system. Recently, the employment of women started to increase. Women still play dominant role in such occupations as teachers, doctors and employees of service sectors. Certainly, this is one of the prominent achievements of our women. We could also mentioned here many and many women working in a fields of arts and culture, those names are well known to the public.

The educational level of women is continuously increasing, and the enrollment of girls in secondary schools enhanced from 80.9 per cent in 1998 up to 95 per cent in year 2002. As for the girls studying in universities and institutes, their share increased in 2002 up to 70 per cent while in 1998 it was 62.3 per cent. There are signs that this tendency shall be maintained in near future.

75 per cent of the population with secondary education are women. At the end of 1990-ies 43 per cent of doctors of science, 31 per cent of economists, 80 per cent of doctors, 70 per cent of lawyers were women. These figures are very high indicators.

Mongolia today has a completely different picture in comparison with old times, we could say that our society "breaths with women".

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