

# Women's Religiosity as a Factor in the Persistence of Religious Traditions: Kazakhstan, the XX Century

G. E. Nadirova, B. Zh. Aktaulova

**Abstract**—The main question of the research is - how did the Kazakhs manage to keep their religious thinking in the period of active propaganda of Soviet atheism, for seventy years of struggle against religion with the involvement of the scientific worldview as the primary means of proving the absence of the divine nature and materiality of the world?

Our hypothesis is that In case of Kazakhstan the conservative female religious consciousness seems to have been a factor that helped to preserve the “everyday” religiousness of Kazakhs, which was far from deep theological contents of Islam, but able to revive in a short time after the decennia of proclaimed atheism.

**Keywords**—Woman, Religious thinking, Kazakhstan, Soviet ideology, Rituals, Family.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE main question of the research is - how did the Kazakhs manage to keep their religious thinking in the period of active propaganda of Soviet atheism, for seventy years of struggle against religion with the involvement of the scientific worldview as the primary means of proving the absence of the divine nature and materiality of the world?

Thus, the object of our study is the religious thinking as a form of social consciousness.

The subject of the study is the religious thinking of Kazakh women in the Soviet period.

The purpose of the study is to identify the role of the Kazakh women in the persistence of the religious consciousness in Kazakhstan.

To achieve this goal we should perform the following objectives:

- To consider the structure of women's religious thinking, its system of values and functions;
- To show the internal and external factors that influenced the formation of the religious thinking of the Kazakh women;
- To show aspects of its impact on social, cultural and spiritual processes of the Kazakh society.

The methodological basis of the study is a socio-historical approach which allows us to investigate the religious consciousness of the Kazakh women through the prism of

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types of social development and historical conditions. Our hypothesis is that in case of Kazakhstan the conservative female religious consciousness seems to have been a factor that helped to preserve the “everyday” religiousness of Kazakhs, which was far from deep theological contents of Islam, but able to revive in a short time after the decennia of proclaimed atheism.

## II. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

A small group of specialists in different fields of work - from psychologists to social philosophers concerned with women's religiosity as a subject of special study. It should be noted that elements of this approach can be traced back to the Soviet historiography of the period. However, the presence of a number of works of this period devoted to the relationships between women and religion, didn't determine their diversity, because the very religious studies discourse was ideologically unified. The leading idea of all studies was a statement about the gradual eradication of religion in a socialist society, and we see, that it is absolutely not fit to the present situation.

At the same time, Soviet researchers have noted the problem that women are much more likely than men to attend church, made up the so-called sectarian communities and are subject to the so called superstitions - the belief in sorcery, divination, fortune telling, signs, destiny, prophetic dreams, evil eye, and the like. It is obvious that mythological thinking was present in the female population of the country, despite the developed system of public atheistic education. At the same time women's faith in the magical power of rites, which also confirms the thesis of the mythological female attitude to religion was observed and increased: Absolutely magical character is marked by the authors and the belief that religion brings happiness in family life - makes a marriage stronger, and children healthier and happier.

Religion was regarded as due to the oppressed position of women in socio-economic terms, as well as the presence of actual inequality in the home and in the workplace. Coupled with the frustration on a personal level it all together should bring forth the general feeling of inferiority, inability to self-expression, which provoked disadvantages of atheistic education, pushing for an appeal to religion.

Religion is a complex phenomenon at all times (even in the period of "militant atheism" XX c. in the USSR) held in a person's life one of the main places. Religion has always been a special form of awareness of the world, including a set of

moral norms and behaviors, rituals, religious activities and bringing people into the organization.

Representatives of the Soviet ideological system were clearly aware of the failure in the fight against religion and provided theoretical justification to the phenomenon. Here are two quotes from the typical atheistic monograph of Soviet period:

*“Although the influence of religion under socialism decreases religiosity among some people still persists. The consciousness of some Soviet people keeps up the socialist reality. This is particularly evident in the area of religion, for religious consciousness is more remote from the economic basis and changes more slowly than the political and legal views. Forces of habit, tradition of previous generations are clearly seen in a religion that keeps stock of known concepts inherited from past eras.*

*Conservation of religiosity among different population groups is determined by a complex of reasons, conditions, and factors. Reasons for the persistence of religion should be above all in underdeveloped practices, social relations and knowledge of the part of the Soviet people. At the present stage of development of socialist society, the attitude of some people to each other and to nature is not always harmonious in full. There are people who do not participate in the industrial, social and political activities, unrelated or only slightly related to the socialist groups that do not have sufficient knowledge and culture. Saving religiosity is associated with the presence of differences between mental and physical labor, between town and country, with the remnants of the old way of life”.*

What is interesting - the special role of women in preserving the religious community has also attracted the attention of atheist ideology, and there was special explanation:

*“The remains of the old way of life particularly affect women. It is known that the majority of believers (80%) are women.*

*Housekeeping requires intensive and manual women labor, unproductive and monotonous. Many married women are forced to deal exclusively with homework. This causes a backlog of women in education, training, social activity. The lack of housewives relationships with employees, non-participation in the production and social activities, helps to preserve the environment in their religious survivals.” [1]*

According to the results of the international opinion poll held by Gallup Institute in 2007, almost in any community, irrespective of its belief, women are more religious than men. This has been true from long ago: historical data provide the evidences of gender differences in religiousness for the whole human history. There are various theories to explain this phenomenon. According to some of them, women had been originally socialized to be courteous and obedient, thus more open to embracing and practicing religion. Others think that women's religiousness is a by-effect of avoiding risks: praying and participating in rituals are seen as precautionary measures.

Now the situation has changed. Religiosity is often referred to as an inherent property of the person, traced from the early

stages of civilization. In our opinion, two major trends, two approaches to this phenomenon have developed in the social sciences. One is the result of the active deployment of psychology as a discipline relevant to the industrial and post-industrial societies. The focus therefore is on the psychological characteristics of the individual females in conjunction with the processes of social adaptation. Within the limits of this approach a religious phenomenon obeys the specifics of the human psyche and to some extent regarded as a derivative. We suppose that the religion as a phenomenon has arisen and existed in the application of a number of ontological individual and sociological characteristics of the person.

Therefore, a more preferred aspect of the holistic perception of the phenomenon is a phenomenological approach with elements of gender analysis. There are some works, which describe these principles of analysis. They are - "Gender, Culture, Religion" by N. M. Gabrieljan [2], "Women's religiosity: gender stereotypes, models of behavior and communication aspects" by L. A. Pautova [3], "Religious orientation of young Russians (age and gender aspects of the problem)," by T. I. Varzanova [4].

In some ways, these texts inherit the traditions of the Soviet historiography, as based on rationally explicable reasons for the existence of women's specific way of relating to the sacred, and again in the psychological basis: "The high level of women's religiosity is due to the predominance in the minds of women of some qualities such as intuition, imagery, emotion, making them more susceptible to religion, revealing the sublime world of divine beings and phenomena, the sacred stories, full of wonders.

Additional information about the problems associated with the study of women's religiosity and its display options can be found in the Internet, although to a small extent.

Such social cataclysms as famine, collectivization, political repressions under Stalin, and the wars - caused greatest losses and it was male population, which suffered. Women performed the transmission of religious and family traditions and rituals under such conditions.

Generations of people who grew up in the Soviet period associate their earliest religious education with female family members: mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, because women spent more time at home and with children. For most of the Muslims the belief in Allah is expressed through a series of religious rituals and articulation of religious formulas. In Kazakhstan, for the most part of the Islamic population the introduction to the basic religious education including the learning of formulas, rituals and traditional stock of oral stories, was implemented by mothers and grandmothers.

According to L. Braslavskiy, this type of “everyday Islam” is the most stable: “A Muslim can easily choose to move away from Islamic ideology or religious worldview under the influence of education, life experience, changes in social contexts or other reasons, but would hardly change his or her habits. In most cases, “religiousness” of a Muslim is expressed

just through following the everyday rituals, without religious exaltation.” [5]

How did women influence the society? Obviously, it was possible through the family, raising children. This is confirmed by studies carried out by our colleagues in other countries.

In the course of sociological studies of religion Ukrainian scientists have found that upbringing in a religious family had a decisive influence on the religiosity of 82.7% of members of religious communities and ex-believers. It is in the area of family ordinary religious beliefs, attitudes and actions are stored and played.

Not only moral precepts, but also their behavior in everyday life, everyday habits (washing, regular prayer, fasting month) became practically reflexes that are part and parcel of not only the orthodox Muslim woman, but her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The most important psychosocial factor in the maintenance and reproduction of religiosity is the ability of religions to meet the need for communication and self-expression of the individual. The complex reasons for the reproduction of religiosity have a large proportion of both social and psychological reasons. These are the feelings, moods and emotions that contribute to the treatment of human religion. They are, first of all - lasting negative emotional state of the person, fear, despair, grief, misery, loneliness, etc. It is also a direct influence of religious beliefs on the feelings and sentiments of people.

Fear of the disease, for children, relatives, friends, of the "divine punishment", natural disasters, support and enliven religiosity in different forms.

The reason for long negative emotional states, we believe, may be hiding in the history of our people over the past twentieth century - an extremely turbulent and eventful history, affecting to a greater or lesser extent every Kazakh family.

Recall a brief overview of the major events of the period. The crimes of the Stalinist era: massive repression, terror, deportation of peoples. Repressions include not only the creation of camps and executions, but also social experiments, during which millions of people died. One of the unopened pages of Kazakh history is the "struggle of the Party and the Soviet state against their own people," the transformation of Kazakhstan in the solid concentration camp. The first representatives of the Kazakh intelligentsia - A. Bokeyhanov, A. Baitursynov, Sh. Kудayberdiev, M. Dulatov were accused of "nationalism", and persecuted. Not only public, government officials and academics were subjected to repressions, but also ordinary citizens of the Soviet state. 101 thousand Kazakhs were sent to the Gulag, more than 27 thousand were shot [6].

The fate of the immigrants of 1935 was very hard. Their individual families were falling into the international environment, dissolved in it and lost identity. Some of them came to Kazakhstan. In 1937 102 thousand Poles was deported to Kazakhstan, in 1944, over half a million Chechens, Ingush, Karachai, Balkar, Kalmyk, Crimean Tatars.

At the turn of 20-30 years "great crisis" ruthlessly broke rural structure, preparing the future problems of society. It was pointed out that the population should be moved to sedentary settled life by force. Violation of the principle of voluntariness and the elementary laws were widespread from the very beginning. In the course of carrying out the policy of "dispossession" more than 60,000 have been declared Bays, and their property was confiscated and more than 40,000 were dispossessed, and the rest fled, abandoning their property.

In the spring of 1930 riots began, which covered almost all areas of Central Asia and the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. The peasants without possibility of resistance went away from their homes and migrated. Despite the wide geographical scope space, riots and unrest of the peasantry in the 1929-31 years could not change the course of events and policies of the official authorities in the villages. One of the main reasons for this was the opposition of town and country. However, the repressive measures the rebels led to the resignation rest of the peasantry.

The implementation of anti-scientific and antihuman decisions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan has led to a sharp reduction in cattle livestock from 40 million to 4 million and spawned a massive famine of Kazakh population, and the death of its great part and migration the large number of people out of the country. This migration was caused by despair, hunger, poverty, the complete destruction of public and the economic foundations of life. According to the first census in 1926 the number of Kazakh population in the republic was about 3 628 000 people. But after 12 years, the 1939 census recorded decline in 1 321 of thousands of people, that is a decrease of 36.7%. In 1932 it dropped to 2,493,500 people, and emigrated during this period from Kazakhstan's 1.3 million people. Mortality and migration mobility in this period were high among all groups of Kazakhstan population- Russians, Ukrainians, Uyghur, Dungan, but these figures among the Kazakhs were much higher, because the nomads traditionally had no skills of agricultural labor. During the collectivization Kazakhs lost 2,100 thousand, which accounted for 42% of the Kazakh population, plus the millions of people moving outside the country [7].

According to witnesses, they were ill-adapted to the plant foods as for centuries the main food of yesterday's nomads were meat products. The flow of Kazakh refugees reached out to the surrounding areas of neighboring republics and states. Refugees from the western regions of Kazakhstan began to go to Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Karakalpakstan, the southern and eastern regions - to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China, the northern and central areas to Kuibyshev, Chelyabinsk, Kurgan, Tyumen Oblast and Altai Krai of the Russian Federation, to Mongolia. Steppes turned into a deserted space.

This leaving inflicted great damage to the indigenous population. The fourth part of the population, i.e. 1 030 000 people migrated outside the country during the years of famine. Of these 616 thousands of people migrated forever, 414,000 people subsequently returned to Kazakhstan.

During World War II (1941-1945) Kazakhstan was a part of a unified military camp. The mobilization of human and economic resources of Kazakhstan aimed to repel the enemy; about 220 factories were evacuated to the territory of Kazakhstan in 1941-1942. Military industry developed in Kazakhstan, there were 460 plants, factories for military use. Some military units were formed there. And after the war, numerous experiments with agriculture began: Consolidation of state farms, the ban on breeding animals in private ownership, ban on market relations, and start of virgin and fallow lands development. This experiment had tragic environmental, economic and demographic consequences. Natural pastures were destroyed, the erosion of topsoil began. The situation in livestock worsened dramatically.

Strengthening of totalitarianism led to repression of national culture. Kazakh writers, historians, intellectuals rightly accused of nationalism, their works were declared "politically harmful." Mukhtar Auezov, E. Bekmahanov, Kanysh Satpayev, some others were expelled from the Academy of Sciences and denounced as bourgeois nationalists and even sentenced to 25 years hard labor. In 1948, the nuclear test site, located at the junction of three provinces (Semipalatinsk, Pavlodar, Karaganda region) was created [8].

The unresolved social problems caused discontent among the population, leading to a confrontation between the workers and the authorities in Temirtau in 1959. Informal network of "Jas Tulpar" created by Kazakh youth studying at Moscow universities in the 1960s (Organizers and active members - M Auezov, Kadyrzhanov A., B. Taizhanov), "Tayshubar" in Semipalatinsk, etc. have been eliminated. In June 1979 the government's decision on the establishment of the German autonomy within Kazakhstan also led to a widespread discontent and so-called "events in Tselinograd." The instability in the social and cultural life of the country was accompanied by the manifestation of the ecological crisis as a sharp shrinking of the Aral Sea, and the effects of nuclear explosions at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. In the Gorbachev period there was an event which dramatically changed the political life of the country - leaving the political arena D. A. Kunaev, the former head of the republic during a quarter of a century (1962-1986) and coming to power of G. V. Kolbin (1986-1990). This event was the cause of the December demonstrations, organized by young people in 1986 in Alma-Ata, which required the actual implementation of the stated democratic principles of Perestroika. According to official reports, as a result of these events, the 2-3 people were dead, 1,700 people received head injuries and two people were sentenced to death. "However, according to unofficial data repeatedly confirmed the death toll could be up to two hundred. There are mass graves in the country," - the experts say. Many historians believe that it was from this event began the collapse of the Soviet Union.

All of these tragic events, of course, had a major impact on the consciousness of the Kazakh people, and in particular its women's section. It turns out that there was not a single quiet and psychologically and socially sustainable decade in the history of Kazakhstan. In the lifetime of one generation tragic

historical events occurred and "shaken" society several times, leaving the souls of people feeling fear the inexorable system, despair, grief from the loss of loved ones, anxious wait for the next series of misfortunes. Political and social transformation was leading to a crisis of spirituality and the break-up of the system of moral values. The only element of stability and moral guide for women remained their religion, religious consciousness, transmitted from generation to generation, each time re-righting the "destroyed" world, faith in people and humanistic system of relations.

Thanks largely to women in the Soviet period, the life within communities, a system of family and social relations still built by Muslim standards, is perceived more as a "customary law". Perhaps that is why they are in the minds of the people identified with the ancient ethnic traditions. During the Soviet period, many of the Muslim past traditions and rituals has evolved as national and religious holidays (Eid ul-Fitr, Eid al-Adha) were realized as folk. The same can be said about family rituals and ceremonies (birth, marriage, and funeral). At the same time, many ancient, typical folk festivals (related to economic activity, seasonal and other, for example, nauryz) often been forgotten. A woman examines the value and meaning of religion, especially in terms of its impact on the life of home, family, clan. At the same time, women's religiosity continually demonstrates the close link between the traditional and faith, for a woman tradition is filled with a sense of inner content, but the most important moment in the observance of traditions is their instrumental role in the integration and well-being of the family. A woman receives and transmits traditionalism and ritualism at her home and family [9].

For women, faith and religion - it's more of a certain pattern of behavior and life in general. This circuit is filled by the presence of certain complex rituals, rules, and the most important thing for a woman - to fit into these rules. For a woman, it is important to feel part of the whole, to be "adopted" and "to be among" so commitment ceremonies and traditions becomes a kind of tool to help women establish equal relations with relatives, to be a full member of the clan, and more - of the people in whole.

So, for a woman there is an identification of the right to call herself a believer with the performance of certain religious behavior.

After a long period of total and militant atheism, the main achievement of the period of the 90-ies of the XX century and the first decade of this century can be considered openly voiced in public opinion understanding that religion wrongly regarded as a manifestation of "darkness," "ignorance," "bigotry," that it also acts as the source of culture, education and morality. There was the desire to give an objective assessment of the role of religion in the world, in society, in the historical progress. Thanks to the efforts of many researchers it has been possible to obtain materials describing the religious consciousness among different peoples throughout their historical existence, to establish general and specific features, to identify specific trends in religious consciousness.

### III. CONCLUSION

Concluding the analysis of the problem of formation of the Kazakh women religious consciousness in the Soviet era, we have come to the following conclusions.

1. Religious thinking is the result of religious activities and the collection of faith, moral standards, and special perception of the world in accordance with the rituals adopted by a religious organization. The religious consciousness is one of the forms of social consciousness, which reflects the need for a personal faith and the essence of the individual.
2. Religious consciousness is the source and regulator of morality in society. Religion cannot be equated with purely external, ritual manifestations.
3. Religious thinking - is not only a commitment to the kind of system of dogmas, but also special state of mind, an act of faith and religious feelings, the specifically human emotional qualities.
4. The system of spiritual values, formed a religious tradition and etched in the memory of many generations, is a natural source of religious consciousness, which accumulates the national identity of the people, traditions, morals, moral and spiritual imperatives.
5. The religious consciousness of Kazakh women is caused by several factors: external and internal. Among the external: the complex historical situation, a change of values and priorities in a short historical period, the dominance of atheistic consciousness, the rapid development of science and technology in the twentieth century.
6. The lower level of socialization, especially in the first half of the twentieth century brought the Kazakh woman outside the scope of indoctrination work, industry, Soviet institutions or of higher education system.
7. Internal factors influence the development of the religious consciousness is specific female psyche and world. Among the permanent property-specific features such as a women's religious conservatism, emotional, imaginative thinking, the Kazakh mentality, etc.
8. "Acquired" properties of religious consciousness shaped by historical implications of various social processes.
9. One of fundamental characteristics of the religious consciousness of women - conservative - is a guarantor of the traditional system of spiritual orientation of society, and as the woman is the guardian of the hearth, family, moral and national traditions, so far, passing the spiritual and religious experiences, the national consciousness, she transmits and reproduces them in children - the future generation of citizens.
10. The religious consciousness of Kazakh women of the twentieth century, as a specific, distinctive spiritual space has become a guarantor against alien, immoral and non-spiritual ideologies on the one hand, and the guarantor of the Islamic tradition - on the other. And though they mostly do not have a deep knowledge of canonical and solid conscious faith, but their concerns and efforts increased generation of Kazakhstan, who immediately

after Kazakhstan's independence restored in its entirety dogmas of faith and the spiritual truths of Islam.

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