

History of Russian Women: The Historical Overview of the Images and Roles of Women in Old and Modern Russia

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Abstract : The status of Russian women has changed dramatically over the course of Russian history and under different leadership and economic, political, and social conditions. The perception of women, their submissive roles, and low social status cause gender conflict that affects society: demographical issues, increased numbers of divorces, alcoholism, drug abuse, and crime. Despite the fact that around the world women are becoming more independent, protected by law, and play more important roles in society, Russian women are still dependent on men financially, socially, and psychologically. This paper critically explores the experience of Russian women over the course of over a thousand year of Russian history and how the position and image of women changed in Russian Empire, Soviet and post-Soviet Russia and what role women play in contemporary Russia. This paper is a result of deep examination of historical and religious literature, mass media, internet sources, and documents. This analysis shows that throughout history, the role and image of women in society have repeatedly varied depending on ideological and social conditions. In particular, the history of Russian women may be divided into five main periods. The first was the period of paganism, when almost all areas of life were open for women and when women were almost equal in social roles with men. During the second period, starting with the beginning of the Mongol invasion in the 13th century, the position of women was diminishing due to social transformation to the patriarchal society in which women started playing subordinate role in family and society. The third period - the period from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries - is a period of the total seclusion of Russian women from each part of social life. The fourth, Soviet period started after the Revolution of 1917. During that time, the position of women was drastically changed due to the transformation of traditional gender roles under the Bolshevik government. Woman's role was seen as worker-mothers who had a double duty: a worker and a mother. The final period began after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The restructuring (Perestroika) and post-Restructuring periods have had contradictory consequences and tremendous impact on Russian society. The image of women as partners and equal to men, which was promoted during the Soviet regime, has been replaced with the traditional functionalist views on family and the role of women, in which men and women have different but supposedly complementary roles. Modern Russia, despite publicly stating its commitment to equal rights, during last two decades has been reverting to an older social model with its emphasis on traditional gender roles, patriarchal ideas of dominant masculinity, and adverse attitudes to women, which are further supported and reinforced by the reviving Russian Orthodox Church. As demonstrated in this review, Russian women have never possessed the same rights as men and have always been subordinate to men. During all period of Russian history, patriarchal ideology maintained and reinforced in Russian society has always subjected women to manipulation, oppression, and victimization and portrayed women as not a 'full human being'.

Keywords : women, Russia, patriarchy, religion, Russian Orthodox Church

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