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# UZBEKISTAN WOMEN'S EDITIONS: A CITADEL OF TRADITIONALISM

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*Traditional views on social roles of man and woman where the woman is fully responsible for children's upbringing and family preservation predominate in Uzbekistan's mass media.*

*Oila Va Jamiyat* (Family and Society), the newspaper of the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan demonstrates its intention to reduce the woman's role to only exercising family duties and even to just selecting her clothes. Thus, on March 27, the newspaper published an article entitled "Son-in-law Should Be Respected" containing admonitions to parents on how to educate and dress their daughter and what homage should be rendered to a son-in-law. An article published in this newspaper's fifth edition reports that, in medieval Europe one used to cut off the hair of licentious women. "Why become like them?" the author asks.

## **HAIR-DRESSING APPROACH**

The *Saodat* women's magazine also discusses the hair-dressing theme: a respected poetess reproaches elderly women for cutting their hair very short, like men. Probably it is better to use chignons or switches! The article mentions that men love long hair. *Oila Va Jamiyat* (no. 2 of January 16) published a woman-reader's letter entitled 'A Woman Who Has Abased a Man Will Be Abased.' It was in reply to the newspaper's article of the previous year reporting on a certain Khamida who had abased her husband to tears. "When I read that article I couldn't suppress my wrath", the reader writes. "Such Khamidas will be damned, they will become blind!.. A woman who's failed to retain her first husband will never retain the second one, she's ill-bred", the letter runs.

## **DIVORCED WOMEN CONDEMNED**

Condemnations and insults towards divorced women are to be read in every issue of the newspaper. The authors do not analyze why women decide to divorce. However, this is always a hard choice for women with children. Most often they decide to divorce due to home violence which endangers them and their children's health and, sometimes, life itself. Yet, the newspaper of the Women's Committee, instead of discussing ways to prevent violence, prefers to lay all the blame for family troubles on women who have battled, been insulted and admonished for the lack of patience. However, there are materials of a different type. The same *Oila Va Jamiyat* has published an article 'Who Needs a Sick Wife' speaking about a disabled woman. Her husband deserted the family with five children and married another woman. Now the woman tries to provide for her family by undertaking work within her powers. It is quite normal for the author that her former husband has married another woman, but he should be condemned for providing no support for his first family's children.

## **NO INVESTIGATIONS**

The newspaper provides a lot of information on how difficult it is for women to live now: on gender relations, violence, ignorance and the public consciousness situation. However, this information does not become a topic for journalists' comments and investigations. The newspaper's women journalists demonstrate a traditionalist stance and do not associate the facts described in readers' letters with the women's rights situation. There are cases of advocating ignorance and superstitions; e.g. *Oila Va Jamyat*'s fifth issue published an article entitled 'Blessing Has Helped' wherein the author reports of her prophetic dream that has become true and of her pilgrimage to a holy sheikh. Blessed by the sheikh, she now does her work within two hours instead of four as beforehand.

## **TRADITION NOT DISCUSSED**

Such examples are innumerable. Nevertheless, one should not assess *Oila Va Jamyat* as one-sided because it has high scores for regularly publishing stories depicting the life of traditional society which largely involves home violence. It stems from the traditional inequality of genders, but the articles do not discuss this. In 1995, Uzbekistan signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the late January 2001 session of the Committee of this organization heard Uzbekistan's report on how the republic had practically implemented the Convention provisions. The Committee recommended to use mass media actively in enforcing the social role of a woman, not just as mother and wife, but, first and foremost, as a personality. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan's print and electronic media give preference to those articles which consider a woman's social role in the light of Uzbek traditional modes.