



THE ROLE OF KARAKALPAK WOMEN IN FAMILY AND SOCIETY: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND HISTIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS (20th CENTURY – EARLY 21st CENTURY)

Abdiev Jenisbay Genjebaevich

Nukus State Technical University

Assistant Lecturer at the Department of Social and Humanitarian Sciences

Toremuratova Aysuliw Kalbay kyzy

Nukus State Technical University

Trainee lecturer at the Department of Social and Humanitarian Sciences

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20557506>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 24th May 2026

Accepted: 30th May 2026

Online: 31st May 2026

KEYWORDS

Karakalpak women, family, society, gender policy, historiography, social transformation.

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the historical development of the role of Karakalpak women in the family and society from the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, alongside the historiographical aspects of this issue. Changes in the social status and labor activity of women during the Soviet period, as well as the development of gender policy and the expansion of women's economic activity during the years of independence, are illuminated on a scientific basis. Furthermore, the scientific views of local researchers on the subject are critically analyzed.

Introduction.

Women play a vital role in the social, economic, and spiritual development of any society. In traditional societies, the role of women was often passive, primarily confined to the family, domestic life, and household chores.

In modern society, new opportunities have been created for women to realize their social potential; they are successfully fulfilling roles as leaders, organizers, and politicians. In the history of Karakalpak society, women have also evolved as key agents responsible for family upbringing, the preservation of national values, and the maintenance of social stability.

Main Part.

The earliest information regarding the issue of Karakalpak women can be found in the works of 19th-century travelers and ethnographers. These accounts provided general observations about women's lifestyles, family dynamics, and social standing.

In the early 20th century, the institution of family and marriage became a distinct field of study within Soviet ethnography. The family systems and social status of women among Central Asian peoples, including the Karakalpaks, were extensively researched.

Beginning in the 1920s, the women's issue in Karakalpakstan was studied through both ideological and



scientific lenses. During this period, materials of a promotional and propagandistic nature predominated.

Subsequently, researchers such as R. Kalbaeva, B. Ketebaeva, A. Bekimbetov, and S. Abaev examined the women's issue from various dimensions. The research of B. Ketebaeva stands out for its deep analysis of women's integration into social labor during the Soviet era. Meanwhile, Ya.A. Abdullaeva is recognized as a pivotal researcher who comprehensively studied the problem within its historical dynamics.

Following the establishment of Soviet power, a systematic policy aimed at altering the social status of women was implemented in Karakalpakstan. This process can be conventionally divided into three stages:

1. The phase of legal reforms;
2. The phase of educational and cultural transformations;
3. The phase of integration into industrial and agricultural production.

During the first stage, the legal status of women was fundamentally altered. Laws enacted against the bride price (*qalin*), early marriage, and polygamy strengthened the legal position of women within the family. Through these measures, women were officially recognized as equal subjects to men.

In the second stage, major changes occurred within the education system. Policies aimed at enrolling girls in schools, increasing literacy rates, and training female educators were intensified. This significantly broadened women's horizons, lifting them out of the confines of traditional domestic roles.

During the third stage, women were widely integrated into the labor market. The proportion of women working in agriculture, medicine, education, and culture increased dramatically. According to data provided by B. Ketebaeva, by the mid-Soviet period, women constituted a critical share of the workforce in collective (*kolkhoz*) and state (*sovkhoz*) farms.

However, this transformation was double-edged. While women actively participated in production, the responsibilities of housekeeping and child-rearing remained primarily on their shoulders. Consequently, this gave rise to the phenomenon known as the "double burden."

During the Soviet era, the institution of the family in Karakalpakstan underwent significant modifications. This process manifested in two main directions:

Structural changes;

The redistribution of social roles.

Structurally, large patriarchal extended families gradually shifted toward nuclear families. Urbanization, migration, and shifting economic relations accelerated this transition.

In terms of social roles, the scope of a woman's influence expanded. While in traditional society a woman was limited to domestic chores and child rearing, during the Soviet period she transformed into an economically active agent.

At the same time, state policy sought to preserve the family as the "basic unit of society." Therefore, women were expected to meet high social standards both as workers and as mothers. This duality sparked a role



conflict among women, tearing them between:

- High activity in production, and
- Traditional responsibilities within the family.

As a result, women were forced to navigate their lives between “two distinct social spheres.”

After 1991, a new socio-political environment emerged in Uzbekistan and Karakalpakstan. Ensuring gender equality became a priority direction of state policy. During the years of independence, the social activity of women in the political system, education, science, and the activities of public organizations grew significantly.

Women began participating in state governance and local councils (*Kengashes*). Concurrently, their active engagement in resolving social issues grew through women's committees and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Nevertheless, certain social challenges persisted during this period. Particularly in rural areas, traditional viewpoints and economic hardships continued to limit opportunities for women. Therefore, rather than characterizing the independence period as an era of “complete equality,” it is more accurate to view it as an “era of expanding opportunities.”

Economic independence is one of the most critical factors determining a woman's status. During the years of independence, women's entrepreneurship began to take shape in Karakalpakstan. With the development of small businesses and the private sector, women broke into fields such as:

- Trade and consumer services;

- Agriculture (farming);
- Handicrafts;
- Domestic and hospitality services.

The microcredit system served as a primary driver encouraging female entrepreneurship. Loans provided by international organizations offered crucial opportunities, particularly for rural women.

However, research indicates that female entrepreneurs faced a series of systemic obstacles:

- A shortage of economic and business knowledge;
- Limited access to information regarding marketing and market infrastructure;
- Weak skills in managing credit funds effectively;
- Low levels of legal literacy.

In some instances, these deficiencies led to project inefficiencies. On a positive note, a strong trend emerged where the striving for economic independence among women intensified, gradually elevating their overall social status.

Conclusion. The role of Karakalpak women in the family and society has consistently evolved under the influence of socio-political, economic, and cultural factors across different historical stages. Historically, within traditional society, women functioned primarily within the domestic sphere—rearing children, managing the household, and preserving national traditions—while their participation in public life remained restricted.

By the Soviet era, radical societal transformations substantially altered the social status of women. Women were broadly integrated into the labor market,



educational opportunities expanded, and the legal framework for their participation in state and public governance was established. Consequently, they ceased to be defined solely by domestic roles, becoming active social agents in production, education, medicine, and culture. This shift amplified women's economic and cultural impact, elevating their social mobilization to a new level.

During the years of independence, these processes were enriched with new substance. The state implemented a targeted gender equality policy, adopting a series of legislative acts aimed at expanding women's rights and opportunities. Women have increasingly asserted themselves in entrepreneurship, political life, civil service, and the non-governmental

sector. Additionally, enhanced social protection mechanisms have supported their economic stability.

Yet, despite these positive trends, certain objective and subjective challenges remain. The persistence of patriarchal attitudes in certain segments of society—particularly in rural communities—continues to hinder women's economic empowerment. Furthermore, issues such as unemployment, gaps in professional vocational training, and underdeveloped social infrastructure present obstacles to women fully realizing their potential.

In this regard, analyzing the role of Karakalpak women in the family and society not only clarifies their historical evolution but also helps uncover the deep interconnections defining modern social processes.

References:

1. Kalbaeva, R. *Zhenshchiny Sovetskoy Karakalpakii v kommunisticheskom stroitelstve* [Women of Soviet Karakalpakstan in Communist Construction]. Nukus, 1972.
2. Ketebaeva, B.K. *Quyashli Qaraqalpaqstan xayallari-qizlari* [Women and Girls of Sunny Karakalpakstan]. Nukus, 1975.
3. Abdullaeva, Ya. A. *Qoraqalpog'iston xotin-qizlari. Kecha va bugun. XIX asrning oxiri – XX asr* [Women of Karakalpakstan. Yesterday and Today. End of the 19th Century – 20th Century]. Tashkent, 2004.
4. Seydametova, G. "Zhenshchina v povsednevnoy zhizni Karakalpakstana v 1960 godakh" [Woman in the Everyday Life of Karakalpakstan in the 1960s]. *Materials of the Republican Scientific-Theoretical Conference "The Role of Women in the Development of Science, Art, and Culture of Karakalpakstan"*, 2020.
5. Allamuratova, S. "Sotsializatsiya zhenshchin Karakalpakstana i ikh aktivizatsiya v obshchestvennoy deyatelnosti" [Socialization of Karakalpakstan Women and Their Activation in Public Activity]. *Vestnik KGU im. Berdakha*, No. 2, 2023.
6. Seydametova, G.U., Toremuratova, A.K. "Rol Karakalpakskoy zhenshchiny v semye i obshchestve: istoriografiya problemy" [The Role of the Karakalpak Woman in the Family and Society: Historiography of the Problem]. *Khorezm Mamun Academy Bulletin*, No. 3, 2024.