

Preface

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Preface

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Over the past 20 years Mongolia has changed and made considerable progress. Thinking and values of Mongolian people have revolutionized. Democracy and a market economy have brought new opportunities. Government is keen and shows considerable interest to reduce the poverty level of its people, and has succeeded to a great extent. It has launched several projects for the protection and development of women, to help them stand on their own feet and become active members in the nation-building process. Government launched projects proved a healthy option and more and more Mongol women took to them. Women not only started ventures in Mongolia but with the easing of travel and transit facilities, they could move to contiguous countries and let their ventures grow through interaction and cross border activities. With the passage of time, Mongol women found favorable exposure that has gradually helped them to change their life style.

On the political front, their dream is also coming close to reality. Mongolian Government passed new election law in 2011, which introduced the proportional representation of women and includes 20 percent of women candidates on each party list. In the recent election held on June 28th 2012, women regained their political presence in parliament. Nine women who have been very active in promoting the women's issues were elected as parliament members. These women have already started making a noticeable impact on certain issues. They formed a non-official caucus to work for the betterment of society, and particularly women and children. For that they need a considerable budget. The huge foreign investments could be utilized for this purpose.

Mining and construction are bringing a lot of foreign investment. These sectors are the noticeable taxpayers. They are creating many jobs, and living standards are improving with the increasing GDP. Disparities still exist, which limits the capacity of women to participate and benefit from the development. Economic development alone cannot help to uplift the women, unless and until the institutional environment is created. Overall, the Mongolian government is trying to redistribute the coming wealth equally to the population of three million.

The ten women we interviewed all made tremendous efforts to reach to their current positions. Each of them highly appreciated the freedom of speech and thought that democracy and market economy brought them. Recognizing the importance of this they availed the new opportunity to explore, which was unthinkable during the socialist period. Qualities showed by all the ten women are

their independence and vision about their role in society and how their jobs and work can benefit the public and country. They are playing the role of mother, a wife and above all as an individual they all appreciate the freedom of movement in a democratic environment. All were of the opinion that the Socialist era was very organized. All agreed that they need the “чимхүүр” tweezers to organize society in modern times. Although they come from diverse backgrounds, they all share a common purpose: working towards the betterment and development of Mongolia, the country to which they belong.

Sanjasuren Oyun came to power after the murder of her brother Sanjaasuren Zorig. She shares a story like that of other female leaders in Asia. In India, Sonia Gandhi is continuing the legacy of Congress after the assassination of Rajive Gandhi. Late Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan was elected after the murder of her father. Khaleda Zai, Sheikh Hassina of Bangladesh or Corazon C. Aquino of Philippines, share the dynastic background when elected in democratic system, after the assassinations of their husbands.¹⁾ These women definitely have made a difference.

Margaret Alva of India says, “you are doing two full-time careers, unlike the men and yet we women are always told we are the weaker sex.”²⁾

Tanaka Makiko, Former Foreign Minister of Japan, once said, Prime Minister Mr. Koizumi asks me to step ahead and change government policies. So, I start walking but somebody is stepping on my skirt, I cannot move and to my surprise, it is the PM himself.³⁾

Dr.Vidya Veravdekar, Joint Director of Symbiosis University India in an interview with Delhi Times, 2006, stated, “I have never felt that my gender has ever adversely affected my chair, to the contrary, I think women are multifaceted and can cope with stress better than men. Our communication and public relation skills are superior and I have not at any time thought that I would be better at my job if I were a man! ”

Recently we see a change especially in the educational sector. The percentage of girl students in higher education is more than boys whether it is Mongolia, India or Japan. Dr. Nyamdawaa Former Ambassador to India is concerned about this imbalance.

Agvaanluvsan Undraa as a nuclear expert praises the old system for its social welfare and work atmosphere for women. At the same time she is very optimistic about the future of Mongolia. As a nuclear expert, she is of the opinion that this sector will help Mongolia in a big way. Ms. Magwann Beliget is of the opinion that socialist government achieved impressive educational results. Free and compulsory education for both boys and girls was a cornerstone for such results, and was needed to give people equal and universal access to the basic needs of life.

Senden Enkhee and Ishdorj Saihana also believe that democracy brought them

freedom of thought and speech. Freedom of movement, which was not possible during their youth, has now given them opportunities to visit different countries and explore more. Enkhee insisted that knowing not much about the foreign lands force young people depend on brokers, which sometimes brings nothing but a hard life in abroad. She mentions that there have been many cases where young girls were killed or made to work as prostitutes. So in her opinion, before leaving ones own country, one must know the background of the destination country. Dr. Khulan is an expert in good governance, believes that Mongols are still in a process of transition. To get rid of corruption at the government level is very hard in her opinion. National actress N. Savvda acknowledges the fruits of democracy, but also suggests that the personal character of an individual determines how he/she contributes to society, regardless of the surrounding political system. Dr. Altantoya and Dr. Otganbayar are both experts in the health sector. They spoke in detail about emerging health issues and new challenges in the present system. Lack of experience of how health systems work in a democratic environment has made it difficult for management to comprehend the situation sometimes. Otganbayar concluded her talk by saying “Санан нь сохор бол нүд нь сохор” (if your brain is blind your eyes become blind automatically), therefore, in any system what is most needed, is to keep your brain open to learn and accept.

The examples of these ten women illustrate the process of Mongol women taking to professional life after the disruption of Mongol society during the post-Soviet period. We have tried to relate the successful transition to the phenomenon of self-employment and the building of new social structures within the parameters of a democratic and free economy. Through these interviews, we can see tremendous diversity from high-profile politicians, businesswomen, and professionals in the health sector and culture, to a leader of women’s organizations. The authors have investigated the factors and influence that have contributed to the development of women who have and still are contributing to their own development and the development of Mongolia. This study could be a roadmap for women in other societies struggling for improvement in life style, economic stability, and political participation.

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Notes

- 1) M. R. Thompson, Female Leadership of Democratic Transitions in Asia, *Pacific Affairs* 75(4), 2002, pp. 535-555.
- 2) Elisabeth Bumiller, *May you be the mother of Hundred sons, A journey among the women of India*, published in India by penguin books India, 1990, p. 165.
- 3) HNK News, August 9, 2002.