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On the face of it the phenomenon of Muslim feminism appears completely unexplainable. While in fact, as a social life trend it has existed for quite a long time, i.e. for more than a century. Knowledge of present-day “specialists” in gender issues’ sphere is quite limited. We have to admit that issues, which women had been fighting for a hundred years ago, have not lost their topicality even today; it is proved by Sagit Faizov’s research “A Movement of Muslim-women in Russia for women’s rights in 1917: pages of history”.

How it all started

For the first time the female issue was raised in December 1849 in Beyrouth at a public session of the Syrian scientific society. In his report a notable Arab educator Butrus alBustani (1819-1883) claimed that enslavement of women was the main reason of the Arab nation retardation. The tradition of women’s rights and social status’ doctrinal interpretation through the prism of Koran was introduced in the end of the 19th century by Arab lawyer and publicist Kassim Amin; he founded upon works of a theologian Mukhammedin Abdo. Kassim Amin declared the necessity of restoring legal rights to women in their families, of polygyny abolishment, recognition of woman’s right to seek a divorce, as well as the right of education and getting a profession. In the second half of the 19th century female theme became ingrained in Arab belletristic literature, first of all in Syrian and Persian literature. In 1910 a series of articles of the Iraqi poet Djamilah Sidki az-Zakhavi was published in the Cairo newspaper “Al-Muyad”, in those articles he made more resolute and theological interpretation of woman’s rights and status. Djamilah az-Zakhavi brought up an issue of women’s equalization in inheritance and divorce matters, in testimonial evidence process, equalization of wife’s right to demand strict monogamy and the right to take yashmak off. He deemed it necessary to implement measures for educating women and enhance their social role. Reaction of conservative Iraqi society was so violent, that it caused massed protest demonstration in Baghdad; many people insisted on author’s execution; clerical periodical publications accused him of undermining foundations of faith. In the beginning of the 20th century for the first time “female issue” made itself known in public documents of revolutionary-democratic and socialist movements, government declarations in the East. In particular, at the turn of 1910-1911 Parisian section of the Ottoman socialist party set a requirement about full equalization of male and female rights in its program. “The main law” of revolutionary Iran, developed in 1906-1907, declared equal protection of the law for all individuals regardless of gender and material position, nevertheless it did not grant electoral rights to women. At the time women of the East started joining nationwide and anti-colonial movements. Origination of the feminist movement took place in the years of democratic revolution of 1905-1907. Women’s newspapers and magazines were published, women’ club was established in the capital. On January 20, 1907 women’s gathering was held in Teheran, where 10 requirements were made, in particular they included such points as opening

women's schools, luxury reduction, abolition of burdensome dowry, etc. In 1919 Egyptian women took part in armed insurrection against British colonialists. The problem of steppe women's rights deprivation (on a par with beauty and ability to compete with men) was reflected in poetry of the great Kazakh akyn Akhan-sere (1843-1913). Alongside with Akhan-sere, formation of pro-feministic ideology was realized in works and through vital activities of poetesses Almazhan Azamatkyzy and Sara Tastanbekkyzy. The idea of Kazakh and Kirghiz women's emancipation received political and publicistic approval thanks to Alikhan Bukeykhanov, Akhmet Baytursynov, Myrzhakyp Dulatov and other people who shared their views in the period of 1905-1917. In 1917 a group of women's rights advocates expanded, the most outstanding new figures of that group were journalist and politician Kolbay Tugussov and public figure Akkagaz Doszhanova. First Russian revolution initiated emergence of woman's publicism. Articles, pamphlets, poems, letters and communiqués became a regular occurrence on newspaper pages. "Shura" journal (1908-1917), "Vakyt" and "Kazakh" newspapers (1908-1917), which had been issued in Orenburg, as well as Kazan satirical journals "Yashen" (1908-1909), "Yalt-yol" (1910-1918) and the Tiflis "Molla Nasreddin", the Crimean newspaper "Terdidjiman", and Troitsk Kazakh journal "Aykap" (1909-1915) kept on publishing feature stories, short stories, readers' letters, feuilletons and poems, dedicated to female issue. "Kazan mukhbire" and "El islah" (1907-1909) newspapers opened special women's columns, which introduced letters addressed to editorial office to readers. Innovatory influence in the sphere of female education manifested itself in Turkestan. In 1908 a school for girls was established in Kopal. Altogether, by 1910 no less than 89 schools of different types using new methodology had been functioning in Turkestan. All those innovations made it possible for many women to obtain higher, specialized secondary and secondary education; all of them knew Russian and one or several Oriental languages (alongside with their native language), there were women who knew European languages and studied at European universities. Three generations separate present-day 20 years old Muslim women from their peer-grandmothers, who had united in order to take hijab off, eliminate seclusion, polygyny, purchase and sale of women, and to claim equality between men and women. Muslim women have changed. Generation inspired by fresh breath of the February Revolution could know that together with hijab Muslim woman would be compelled to hide Koran. They could not foresee that the right of choice between atheism and faith would be unavailable for seventy years. Their own experience of the contemporary Muslim woman's essential qualities' perception remains topical up to this day.

She was among the first

In the beginning of the 20th century many of our fellow countrywomen were in the feminist movement ranks, for instance Gulsum Asfendiyarova (a sibling of Sanzhar Asfendiyarov who was an active politician of the Alash Orda) and Akkagaz Doszhanova. They were the first Kazakh women who obtained higher medical education and became certified doctors. Akkagaz was born in Turgay

region of Orenburg Governorate; she became an orphan at early age, so her elder brother Sagyndyk became her guardian. At first he sent her to Tatar school in Orenburg, later she started studying at women's gymnasium; there she had classes together with Gulayim Baygurina-Balgyrbayeva, Rakhima Gabdilkalikyzy, and Magripa Koyaydarova. Subsequently Akkagaz entered higher women's courses (Women's higher education institution) in Moscow where she chose medicine faculty. She completed her education in Tashkent, having graduated from the faculty of medicine of the Turkestan State University. By resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the Turkestan republic dated December 14, 1922, a scholarship in the name of A.Doszhanova was instituted in the university. From recollections of Alim Girey Yershin, Akkagaz's spouse I arrived to Tashkent in December 1918 together with other seminarians to finish our studies in Turkestan normal school as Aktuybinsk School where we had studied before, was closed because of the civil war. In 1919 V. Kuybyshev spent 3-4 months in Tashkent in official capacity of Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (b) in Middle Asia, by his order all gubernatorial and prince's dwelling and country houses were turned into orphan asylums for homeless children, boarding schools and orphanages. All inventories of CC famine relief were given to these child care institutions as well. Akkagaz was appointed a pediatrician and sent to work in Tashkent. During ten years of her medical and pedagogical practice (from 1921 until 1930) dozens of thousands pupils passed through her hands, as annually only in Tashkent 3000 students graduated from 17 boarding schools, let alone there were asylums and orphanages and there were other cities alongside with Tashkent. Akkagaz Doszhanova was talented both in the capacity of pediatrician and educator. She spoke fluent Russian, Kazakh, and Tatar languages. In 1930-31 Akkagaz with family moved to Alma-Ata, where she worked in one of state hospitals. Later Akkagaz moved to Chimkent with her husband and son, but her health became worse and on January 21, 1932 she passed away. She lived only 39 years.

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At a meeting dedicated to memory of Akkagaz Doszhanova her son Shakhbaz Alimgireyevich Yershin, a famous scientist, presented his latest scientific work which he dedicated to his mother's memory.

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