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GENDER-BASED UPBRINGING IN KALMYK FAMILY

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Abstract

In the traditional Kalmyk family, where the main occupation was cattle breeding, a woman had a lower status than a man, keeping the way of living constrained by customs and traditions, and limited locally moving only within borders of her 'camp'. Parenting style towards children in a traditional Kalmyk family was of a pronounced gender-based nature. According to the Family Code of Russia, in the modern Russian family the equal rights between spouses are to be legalized. The position of a woman in a Kalmyk family has changed: she has become an independent personality, who at the equal extent contributes to the economic well-being of a family, and her social functions and duties have been expanded. The occupation of men either has changed: Kalmyks have mastered new professions that are not related to cattle breeding, and due to the economic independence of a woman, men lose the leadership in a family, although it is formally supported by women. The traditional features of a Kalmyk family are also leveled in relation to genders equality and democratic tendencies happening in the social life. Despite the changes, the stereotypes regarding to parenting style in a Kalmyk family are still gender-based. A boy, as before, grows up with awareness of his function as a protector, earner, breadwinner, successor of a clan, and a girl is a house keeper, educator, and mother. We challenge to observe the persistence of gender-based stereotypes in the modern reality that has been changed since the past times.

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1. Introduction

Knowledge concerning the historical features as descriptors of a family is very important in studying the personality nature because the moral-value system and settings is developing within a family. What sort of person a child will be? What morality he or she will take? All these aspects are attributed by a family. The family is responsible for personality formation and development, for the value system as itself.

2. Problem Statement

According to some observations of contemporaries, until the beginning of the 20th century, the Kalmyks still had ‘non-separated’ large families, which consisted of parents (father and mother), children (families of sons) and grandchildren. However, the predominant form was the nuclear form of a family. The literature review on a Kalmyk family, including some reports of ethnographic commissions which conducted the research among the Kalmyks, as well as, the travelers' notes and missionaries (Bühler, 1846; Dubrova, 1998; Zhitetsky, 1893; Nebolsin, 1852; Prospererelev, 1912) suggests that the traditional Kalmyk family represents: a) a small-size family, b) a family headed by a man, c) a family with patriarchal principles implying unconditional submission to a man, d) a family based on the principles of honoring elders and men, e) a family of nomadic style (from the point of lifestyle), g) cattle breeding (from the point of economic activity, h) labor-based in terms of work organization and leisure, and) a family with many children. Since, it is the family that lays the basic moral and ethical principles of a person, forms the personality, then, the relevance of the research is in revealing the issue about children education and upbringing in a family.

3. Research Questions

The family is a place where a child is mastering some housekeeping and communicative skills, getting aware of social behavior norms and traditions. The Kalmyk family is patriarchal one in terms of father’s dominance, the gender factor to be studied is becoming very interesting in relation to children upbringing and educating, in personality shaping that reflects a typical representative of the Kalmyk society, based on multi-century experience of the ethnic group. The ancestors of the modern Kalmyks settled down the Russian territories, having come from the Central Asia, 400 years ago. During this time, nomadic pastoralists moved to sedentary life, mastered new activities. In this regard, it is of scientific interest to study how these changes affected family relationships and whether they affected the gender principle of family-based education.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the gender-based aspect that presents up to now in terms of upbringing in the Kalmyk family. The global changes happening in the Kalmyk society, to which we refer some changes connected with housing activities and life style, can not go beyond the family relations concerning all family members. In this vein, the relevant aspect to study is to follow to what extent the global changes influence the traditional gender-based approach in upbringing children in the Kalmyk family.

5. Research Methods

When studying the topic, we used the historic-comparative method: the Kalmyk family as a social institution is considered in the historical retro-spectrum. To understand better the historical basics of the Kalmyk family, its organization and gender-based factor in educating and upbringing, we reviewed the data about Mongolian family that has some similarities with the Kalmyk one, because these two nations are united with the housing activities (extensive pastoralism), nomadic lifestyle; moreover, they are closely related (blood-based) people, who 400 years ago shared the territory of living – The Central Asian World.

6. Findings

The relations in the Kalmyk family were based on the traditional patriarchal principles: a man is the head of a family; the woman's role is a role of procreator, a house keeper who, apart house doings, takes care of children. The life of all members in the Kalmyk family was regulated: each person, including children, had certain responsibilities that determined the contribution of each to the well-being of a family as a whole. In the nomadic economy, the male and female activities were strictly separated. A man was in charge of the material economy (livestock keeping, food supply), a woman – house holding and supporting microclimate in a family. In addition, a family parenting/upbringing was based on the gender principle and labour activities. In accordance with this, from childhood, under the guidance of a father, a boy joined the activities, male-natured, and a girl, under the guidance of a mother, joined the women's duties.

Historically, the head of a family is the eldest man, usually the father. If he lost his ability to work, then, the family leadership passed to the eldest son, who ran the farm and represented the interests of a family in the society. All other family members, including a mother, recognized his supremacy, submitted to him as head of the family and unquestioningly carried out his orders.

The head of the family represented the family in the society, resolved the main issues related to economic and social activities, house holding and family life organizational questions. Under his leadership, the male part of the family was engaged in cattle breeding, the material side of the family life.

Patriarchal customs and traditions largely “enslaved” a woman, limited her freedom enabling her to move in quite limited space, primarily a house. If a man is working outside the house, taking care of cattle, harvesting fodder for the cattle, digging the wells, building rooms for the cattle, then, a woman mostly is working without leaving the nomad camp. A woman had a lower status than a man, whereas, a girl was also restricted in moving around the locality. In addition to the usual cooking and cleaning, the main work of a housekeeper was milking cows and sheep, which came up to 8 times a day, and preparing from this milk some home-made milk products.

Raising the Kalmyk children was based on labor. Children were included into the family work early. At the same time, the labor activity of adults, built with consideration of the gender factor, acted as a model for the labor education of children. For example, from about 4-5 years old girls helped their mothers in house holding: they first cleaned a house, then, gradually began to look after livestock, under the guidance of the mother they milked cows and made milk products afterwards. A girl took over the housekeeping skills from her mother, and a boy took over the male skills in dealing with animals, etc. from his father. In a family, a boy was instilled the skills associated with the role of a ‘breadwinner’ protector, earner, whereas,

a girl was a would-be housekeeper and a mother. Since the age of 3 years old, a boy learned riding, at 5-6 years old he was already a full-fledged helper for his parents and other relatives: he grazed and fed the cattle, accompanied the adults in hunting. By the age of 12, the boy was already a skilled rider. Mongolian children, like their Kalmyk peers, learn riding a horse since childhood. 'At first, children ride a horse without a saddle, then, with a saddle, gradually they master the art to deal with unbroken foals and untrained horses. Riding a horse develops muscles, fosters patience, physical courage combined with spiritual courage, which helps to overcome any obstacles (Sukhbat, 2009). Since the age of 13, the Mongols can ride a horse on their own, including far distances, for example, going for hunting or accompanying herds of sheep and horses in remote pastures. Boys from early childhood were taught to shoot a bow. It developed agility, vigilance, speed and endurance (Chuluunbat, 2011). Constant contact with animals contributed to development of value relation to them.

The Kalmyks treat a girl in a parental home as a temporary member of the family, since after marriage, according to the custom, she becomes a member of her husband's family. Knowing the difficulties she will meet in a new family, in her own house a girl is treated with great tenderness and care (Dushan, 1976). In a new family, all the hard work of housekeeping will be shifted to a 'daughter in law'; therefore, the time of childhood and girlhood is also the time to acquire work skills. Under the leadership of the mother and grandmother, a girl acquires the skills and abilities of 'female labor'. Older women of the family lay the character traits that a girl would need to live in a new family after marriage: patience, modesty, respect, and reverence. Traditionally, "by the time to be married, a would-be bride was fully trained on how to keep a house, with firm understanding the duties of a wife and a mother" (Mukayeva, 1999, p. 112). A girl was instilled the skill of responsiveness, the ability "to understand at a glance the mood of a husband and act accordingly. Girls were taught that rudeness is incompatible with femininity; brought up to be prudent, cautious. They were said that she is destined to become a woman, to give a new life and protect herself that means that she, by this, will protect the future; to be polite, respectful" (Chuluunbat, 2010, p.1).

In the Kalmyk family, children were brought up in the spirit of respect and unquestioning obedience to parents and elders. The customs dictated: to keep yourself with the elders correctly, not to interfere when they are speaking; you should not afford to behave freely with the elders, you should not smoke at their presence, you should not sit down without asking the permission to do it.

In the works of Mongolian authors, much attention is paid to the basics of traditional education. So, Daud and Nārguy (1999) write that when raising a child, the Mongols adhered to certain rules corresponding to the age periods. They come down to the following: at the age under 5, make a child rise as a khan (you should try to keep your mind, language and body completely clean); at the age of 5 to 11 – take him along with you like a shadow (parents teach their children home care, etc.); at the age of 11 to 16 - teach how to be independent; since the age of 16, become a friend to your child. An important role in upbringing is given to the national sports, which provide such moral qualities as love for nature, kindness, respect to an opponent, tolerance, respect to all around, as well as patriotism and pride for their people. As a result, a person is able not only to survive in harsh climatic conditions, but also live in harmony with surrounding nature and people (Chuluunbat, 2010). What has been said above can be attributed to the Kalmyks: similarities in the family structure, upbringing principles, and the main type of economic activity determine general trends describing the parenting style and family education among the Mongolians and Kalmyks.

The harsh living conditions, the lack of medical care led to high child mortality, despite the high birth rate. Therefore, nomads treated children with much love and care, believing that [бичкн күүкд – бурхн мем] ‘small children are like Gods’. The people pay great attention to the intellectual and mental health of a child even before the birth; therefore, they very carefully treat a pregnant woman. For example, it is strictly forbidden to frighten a pregnant woman, to burden her with hard work, to make her unhappy; you cannot cross the road to a pregnant woman, swear in her presence or raise a voice. Even the elderly give way to a pregnant woman, saying: ‘Come on, daughter, you are two’ (Ernun, 1980).

Although the nomads treat all children with great tenderness, nevertheless, the status of a boy is highly appreciated in the society from the birth. A boy is a welcome child for parents. Historically, the preference of a boy was due to the fact that, according to the custom, it was a boy who was endowed with a high mission to be the successor/proctuator of the father's family: [эр киистә күн эркиин нер дуудх] ‘boy - the successor of the father’s name’. The birth of a boy and a girl was perceived differently: if a boy was born, the [kibitka’s] (house) floors were covered down, so that the boy’s life and his path would be related to the family; when a girl was born, the [kibitka’s] floors lifted up. This means that the time would come and the girl would get married and leave the parental house.

In the atmosphere of his own significance a boy is raised since his very childhood. In relation to boys’ upbringing the goal is set up - to bring up a real man - [йоста залу күн]. This is achieved in accordance with the commandments of the father: development of skills, abilities, qualities that according to the ethno-stereotype, a man must possess in order to realize himself as a person, citizen, family man. Similarly, the Mongolian “system of for boys education implies mastering the ability to look after animals that requires accuracy, endurance, ingenuity” (Chuluunbat, 2010, p. 3).

In the Kalmyk family, a boy is raised by his father, and a daughter by a mother. Mongolian scholars also write about the gender aspect in upbringing of children: “The Mongolian approach to upbringing boys and girls is different. A big role in raising a future ‘real Mongolian man’ is played by the father, for a girl, the mother” (Chuluunbat, 2010, p. 3). The main tutors of a boy are the senior family members along the male branch: father, grandfather, elder brothers, male-gender relatives. They lay the best qualities of men - the rules of behavior in different life situations, labor and communication skills. At the same time, it is fair to note that the personality of a father plays a crucial role in the whole process of a boy’s upbringing. Education under the leadership of the most authoritative person in the eyes of children has a crucial role in the development of boy’s character. The authority of a father not only enhances the boy’s activity, stimulates the conscientious, responsible execution of errands, but lays the foundation of personality, life values, and guidelines for the future man’s communicative behavior.

A large role is assigned to a mother, who by her personal example of righteous behavior, high moral values, lays the moral and ethical qualities in her children. The main mission of a mother is to lay in children the industriousness and the moral and ethical foundations of personality. A mother brings up masculinity in a boy, lays in her son the features of a defender. The femininity of a mother encourages a son to become courageous and is one of the conditions to form generosity, tolerance, responsibility, and respect to woman (Mukayeva, 2003). A boy develops the ability to make decisions independently, to be a leader, when necessary, to strictly obey the discipline and requirements of the elder, which is especially important in military conditions. It lays down such traits as generosity, condescension to the weak, as the proverb

testifies: [сээнд бичэ зүгүд, мууд бичэ дажр] - do not be humbled facing the strong, do raise the nose facing the weak. The Kalmyks strive to instill in children, especially in boys, self-esteem. Even in a situation requiring punishment, parents avoid conviction, so that a child 'does not lose face'. It is assumed that, due to the lack of life experience, a child may make a mistake and the task of the parents is to explain it, to teach them to overcome difficulties, and not to allow them to repeat it in future life. A boy has the ability to keep a promise, which is especially valued by the people, because holding the word means not to lose face, not to drop dignity. This trait refers to the qualities of a real man. It is interpreted in a number of proverbs, for example: [теесн мөрн тер һазртан күрхлэ сэн, тиигнэв гисн залу тер үгдэн күрхлэ сэн] – 'well, it is good when a horse gets to the final point, as well as it is good when a man keeps his word'. Do not drop the dignity, honor, increase the glory of the family - these values are promoted in the Kalmyk family. Children since their childhood know their ancestry to the seventh generation, glorious representatives of the genus. They understand that it is impossible to damage the reputation of a family. All this forms in children and particularly in boys, as a continuer of the family, the thought of belonging to a certain community.

According to the Family Code of the Russian Federation, in the modern Russian family equal rights between spouses are legalized. In the Kalmyk family, the gender-based role distribution does not exist anymore, to the same extent as it was several decades ago. The things have changed. This mainly refers to a woman who has mastered non-traditional for women professions implying performing men duties and roles. Now a woman can work far beyond the house walls and her labour is a contributor not only to benefit and well-being of her family but to the whole society. She contributes to the family budget, which makes her an independent economic figure, independent upon her husband, equal to him, and in many families a woman is becoming superior to her husband in terms of finances. The occupation of men has changed: the Kalmyks have mastered new professions that are not related to cattle breeding, and due to the economic independence of a woman, men lose the leadership in the family, although it is formally supported by women. The traditional features of the Kalmyk family are also leveled due to the social and cultural changes in the modern society.

These social changes are also reflected in the attitude towards children: more often in families we observe an equal attitude towards girls and boys education. However, a gender stereotype is still evident in upbringing style of the Kalmyks. A boy, as before, grows up with the awareness of his role as a defender, breadwinner and family supplier, a continuer of the family clan; whereas, a girl is a keeper of the house, an educator and a mother. It is important that such a stereotype is supported by mothers themselves, who have inspired their sons with carrying a special status since childhood. So, we can conclude that we are lucky witnesses who are observing 'the power of survival' of the gender stereotypes in the modern and changed reality.

7. Conclusion

Raising children in a traditional Kalmyk family carried a pronounced gender-based nature. A boy was brought up by his father, who taught him the male labor skills and laid down the masculinity in character and behavior. A daughter was raised by a mother, who laid in her some feminine traits of behavior, character and instilled some female labor skills related to housekeeping and raising children. In the modern

Kalmyk family, equality of women and men is observed both in the society and in the family. However, despite the social changes in the Kalmyk family in their approaches to upbringing children, the gender-based stereotype is still in use. A boy has a higher status than a girl; he is brought up with the awareness of his great mission as a continuer of the father's family, whereas, a girl is regarded as a temporary family member, whose main role is reduced to a house keeper and a mother. Thus, we have to state the power of survival towards the gender stereotypes in the modern Kalmyk family.

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