CHAPTER 3
THE TJIKS RESIST

Traditions Taken for Granted

From Ahmad Donish of Bukhara\(^1\) (1827-1897) comes one of the few extant Tajik sources on life as viewed from inside. The following are some of his opinions on marriage:

One day, one of my bachelor friends came to me for guidance on married life. I told him that the reason most marital relations are bad is because women are not naturally loving and submissive to their husbands. You will understand what I mean, I said, if I describe a typical marriage:

For the first month after marriage the husband is happy. His house is well tended and a tasty dinner awaits him every evening. He is happy with his wife's and his mother-in-law's care. He regrets his bachelor days and tries to convince everyone he meets that they should get married. During this month his wife shows herself elegant, obliging, attentive, modest, submissive and enthusiastic about family life.

In the second month her relatives begin to call and ask if she is being given all the expensive things husbands are supposed to give their wives. She immediately becomes discontented and demanding. During the first month she has used her family resources to adorn the house and provide food. But now she expects this to come from her husband. When he comes home at night he no longer smells food cooking. Instead his wife says that she has been waiting for him to bring home provisions for her. He has to rush off to get them and after this they start to argue about what he should provide for his wife and the home.

In the fourth month his wife, who is fearful of being no better than those socially beneath her, expresses her discontent that her husband's appurtenances are not more expensive and exclusive. This worries the poor husband so much he is unable even to think, for the carping of his wife cannot be dismissed by any intellectual arguments and however much you try to convince her, she only voices objections. The only thing to do is to keep silent and obey.

In the fifth month the wife forces him very much against his will to give her permission to go to the baths. She returns in a bad mood and says: 'How terrible is my misfortune, why did they marry me to you? At the baths I saw the wife of so-and-so, the daughter of such-and-such. She had ten women with her; servants brought her three dishes of sweetmeats, drinks, and caskets of soap and

\(^1\)Donish was a Bukharan and the most important Central-Asian scholar of his day. He made three journeys to Russia on behalf of the Emirs of Bukhara, and wrote about what he saw there as well as on Tajik history. The passage above is taken from his book *Navodir al-Vaqoye* - 'Singular Events' (1876). Although I have the whole book in the original Tajik the old-fashioned grammar and vocabulary are beyond my ability to decipher. Luckily the book has been excerpted in a Russian translation in Donish (1960) and my paraphrase has been translated from this (pp. 180 ff). The emphasis in this translation is mine.
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perfumes. And this other woman was wearing such a beautiful dress and had such great jewellery. And there was I in the corner like a beggar with nobody paying me the slightest attention. None of the women paid the slightest attention to me. Such reproaches deeply wound the heart of the unhappy husband.

If every day you spend 1,000 dinars on your wife's whims, but in the evening disagree with her over a trifle, all that you did for her appears to be forgotten and she will say 'What have I received from you other than abuse and reproaches? Other husbands do much more for their wives.'

The intentions of men when they enter into marriage are varied. Some marry for pleasure and sensual enjoyment, others for riches, for children, from religious obedience, or to put their house in order. However, these desires are all of the flesh and sensuality. After marriage they are not realised. On the contrary, men gain the exact opposite of what they had been seeking.

For example, the man with an excess of property and objects of luxury seeks pleasure and enjoyment in marriage. Having acquired a wife he sees that with her he has acquired bitterness and trouble, and his former merriment has flown out of the window. The reason for this is that prosperous people usually look for wives from high-ranking and wealthy families and never think about their character and the nobility or lowliness of their souls.

If the woman is also rich then however high her husband's position, her imagination will look higher. Thus, his pleasure will be poisoned and he will lose all his previous joy and peace.

The man who married from cupidity and for riches imagines that if he pleases his wife she will give him all her wealth. This fool does not see that it is preferable for his wife if instead of infringing on her wealth her husband allows her to live off him, keeping servants for her, and every day bringing her new clothes. When such a woman marries she reasons as follows: - 'let my husband worry about my upkeep, then my wealth will remain intact. Or let him trade using my resources then I will get the profit, my capital will not be diminished, and I will be dependent on no-one.' Now, if her husband has any hopes for her wealth and expects services from her, or hopes to get any profit at all from her affairs, he becomes her enemy. There are very few men who receive benefit from the wealth of their wives. There are various reasons for this, including the fact that such a wife will dominate her husband.

The man who marries for the sake of children sees that his relatives have wonderful children. He thinks - 'If I marry and my son inherits my good qualities he may become governor of the town or the Ibn Sino of our times.' But when he marries his son turns out a good-for-nothing, a rogue, and an effete shirker.

Purification and piety are sought in marriage by men sunk in debauchery. Such men think: 'all my vices come from my being a bachelor. If I marry a woman who will fulfil all my desires then I will no longer sin against decency'. However, after marriage minor debauchery turns into major and these men find themselves strong enough to sin in ways which previously they were scarcely bold enough for.

The man who marries for a second time, so that his children should be looked after and his home well cared for, sees after marriage his home in disorder and his children wandering round dirty and in a worse state than before. But the husband's
heart is constantly turned towards his children and he cannot give all his love to his second wife. Therefore she does not become fond of his children and does not care for them as she should.

Noting his wife’s lack of care the husband may tell her - 'I married you so you would look after my children'. After hearing this, if his wife has no children of her own she will spitefully squander her husband’s resources. If she has children she will save up his property for them like a miser. As a result, her husband’s financial and domestic affairs are perpetually in disarray and he is constantly upset.

At the end of my peroration my friend said: You have described marriage very thoroughly and it is clear it can be very unpleasant. But tell me where one should seek a wife. Describe the rules for couples to follow to reach harmony and balance in their married life.

I replied: 'The most important condition is that the married man should not have a mother, or if he has, then she should live far away from his wife. If his mother lives with his family, it is necessary to make separate domestic arrangements for her. If his mother and his wife share a home the husband will have problems between them. It is vital that his wife and his mother should see each other not more than twice a month or once a week and that the meetings should be of short duration so that they have no opportunity to get to know each other’s characters, for one of the main causes of marital disharmony and ultimate disorder in family life is for each of the two to make claims on the husband.

His mother’s claims are based on the following - 'You see', she says, 'my son was just a wretched lump of flesh, I gave all my strength to raise him. For many years I did not rest either night or day, I shed so many bitter tears while raising him, I ran so many times terror-stricken into the streets and bazaars in search of him, fearing that something bad had happened to him. The only recompense for all the good I have done him will be for him to grant me leave to organise all his affairs, and not to dare even to drink a glass of water without my advice and approval.'

The wife’s claims are as follows: 'I became this man’s wife, his slave and his servant; I abandoned my parents, took leave of all my people and gave myself totally over to this new life. The only way I could benefit from this submission to him would be for him to give me the keys to all his affairs, and all his income.'

The claims of these two women are diametrically opposed and this is the reason for their enmity. If you understand this you will realise that all discord arises from it. However, since a wife’s love for her husband does not come from nature, for the reasons discussed above, but a mother’s love for her son is in the blood, his wife is unlikely to take on herself all those affairs that his mother gave all her strength to carry out alone.

So his wife does not do things as well as his mother did and this becomes a constant source of aggravation between the two of them. Things become so bad that the husband does not want to go on living. He looks forward to the time when the Lord will be ready to relieve him by taking the life of one, two, or even all three of them. However, it is his wife who has right on her side. She has more rights than his mother and her needs should be satisfied first. For example, if her husband can only afford to buy three non, two of these should go to his wife and one to his mother.
The second condition for a good marriage is that the man should have a settled and constant yearly income of between 500 and 1000 dirhem. Otherwise he will have many problems or he will have to choose a woman of substance and degrade himself by asking her for money, or else become his wife's slave, thus exchanging roles with her.

The husband should have his own home so he does not have to live in his wife's place, since this will cause him to have to obey her. She will ask - 'Who are you? A homeless beggar. It is only thanks to me that you have managed to get a home and property. What claim do you have to power and to being a real man?' Even if she doesn't say this aloud it can be read in her face.

It is also essential that the married man be pleasant looking. A deformed man should marry a wife who is equally deformed. If an ugly man marries a beautiful woman this is degrading for him. There will be problems in the home and his wife will constantly be dreaming of handsome men.

As to the conditions that are necessary to observe in the choice of a wife, the first of these is that she be of noble descent. For innate nobility is the basis of modesty and goodness, patience in domestic affairs, obedience to her husband, endurance when he is irritated, and willingness to stay at home. Low birth, on the other hand, is the cause of a woman's wanting to go out in the street, lack of obedience and gratitude, discontent with her husband's shortcomings and lack of willingness to take care of him, of her being much too demanding and refusing to submit to her husband.

The second condition is that the wife should have no relatives, neither father nor mother, nor brothers, although perhaps a considerate, and obliging sister would be a good thing. If problems arise between the spouses so that the husband starts to avoid his wife, beat her, or limit her access to his resources then her relatives will always interfere on her behalf.

It is essential that a wife have no mother, or that, if she has one, she should stay with her own husband's family and not move in with her son-in-law, since many problems in the home come from the meddling of the wife's mother. If she does not have a husband of her own then whenever she meets her daughter she will be likely to set her against her husband. - 'Take care that your husband does not have too many clothes. Don't show him all your things in case he sells them or even brings in another wife. Do not allow him to sleep away from home, nor to set up a mistress. Forbid him to go to other people's houses, that only leads to misfortune. He will invite guests back and that will be a waste of good money and you won't be able to save anything, or he will abandon you and you will be left with nothing. Save up and put money away against that day, because you cannot count on the love of husbands; there is no truth or integrity in their affection.'

Another condition is that the wife should be very poor and have had a hard life. This is important since it will make her obedient and calm; she will be contented and grateful for all that her husband does. She will be affectionate, good and tender since he has saved her from poverty and brought her to a good position and sufficiency. A woman who grew up with plenty will only be content if she marries into a richer family. If she marries someone poorer she will be unhappy and reproachful. Also it is
not beneficial to a man for his wife to be wealthier than he, for she will then dominate him.

If both mothers-in-law have their own husbands, property, and other children then the son-in-law will not have problems with them. But if they do not, they will give him horrendous problems. They will disturb family harmony with their intrigues and spiteful gossip.

The final condition is that a husband should realise that his wife has a soul, just as he himself does, and that she considers herself the equal of a man. It is only circumstances that have made her weak and degraded.

A major advantage of family life is that all the work of the household is taken care of by the wife. For this reason a good wife should be a helpmeet and a friend. At home a husband should be as merry as a child, but rule as a man. He should come home with a smile and leave silently. Also he should punish all crimes against customs and laws.

A husband should handle his wife with skill. He should be patient and restrained and know how to control his anger. He should be moderate in all things and not assume anything negative about her without good reason. A husband should never eat anything tasty on his own and if he does, then it should be in secret. At least once a week he should give his family sweetmeats. If there are no guests then he should eat with the other members of the household. The most important thing is that whatever he spends on food he gets honourably, for there is no greater crime than to feed one's family from ill-gotten gains. A husband should reveal his wife's secrets to no one, nor tell anyone why he divorced her.

These are a man's duties to his wife.

A wife's duties to her husband are that she should never say anything but good about him, that she should conceal his weaknesses, and not tell anyone about the small things that make up their relationship. She should continually strive for the realisation of his wishes and joy, should not betray him in regard to his possessions, and should be good and compassionate.

She should be content with what her husband has and what he can obtain and not demand more. She should put the interests of her husband over those of her own family. And always keep herself neat, as is proper in intimate relations. Any work which should be performed she should do herself and not put on to others. She should not be proud of her riches and beauty in front of her husband, she should not speak out ungratefully when good has been done, and should never ask him - 'What have I received from you?' She should not start constant arguments, nor demand a divorce unless she is compelled to.

I have drawn the reader's attention to certain passages in this text that I find especially significant. In the first place, it should be kept in mind that Donish and most probably also the friend he is addressing, came from the monied upper classes. This is important for one thing because it determines the range of women available for consideration as marriage partners. In the second place there is evidence to show men in this social class frequently divorced their wives (cf. Harris 1996a) and this clearly colours Donish' assessment of men's relationships with their wives and mothers. He clearly believes that relationships established through blood are stronger and more lasting than those gained through marriage, hardly surprising if
marriage is usually arranged and divorce easy to obtain. Despite this, Donish urges men to
give their wives preferential treatment over their mothers. This may be in part because he
feels the maternal relationship is too strong for it easily to be broken while the result of
treating one's wife badly is likely to carry negative consequences if she decides to leave.

It is interesting that among the positive feminine gender attributes mentioned by Donish is
a woman's willingness to stay at home, something he obviously prizes very highly. The
implication here is that the choice of whether to go outside the home lies in a woman's own
hands, even if her husband's express permission is required for each occasion. Moreover, he
suggests that not all women are likely easily to agree to obey their husbands. It is further
interesting to note that Donish considers an important masculine trait to be the responsibility
for ensuring that the family respect the customs and laws, the latter presumably being those of
the shari'ah, which was effectively the legal code of the Bukharan Emirate.

Most of the passages I have emphasised here deal with Donish' fear that women might get
the better of their husbands. He makes it very plain that this fear is deep-seated and that it is
not easy to live up to being a real man. Much of his advice has to do with helping men avoid
what he obviously sees as the highly negative outcome of being dominated by their wives.
Although he condemns male violence and the forcible suppression of women, believing they
should be considered to be human beings, it is clear that Donish believes that harmony can be
reached only when the man is dominant, and that this is the way things are supposed to be.
Women should know their place and their husbands should keep them in it if they can,
however difficult this may be.

Thus, the whole tenor of this passage shows that Donish believes that women can be very
powerful, so much so that their husbands may be no match for them. Donish clearly finds this
very threatening to the fragile masculine gender identity. This may mean that he makes
women into a sort of bogeyman, a lot stronger and more intimidating than they really are, so
that it is possible that he exaggerates the extent to which they are able to stand up to their
husbands. However, the testimony of the Russian Nazaroff (cf. chapter 2), a man not directly
threatened by the power of Tajik women, agrees with Donish' assessment of women's power.

When contrasted with life today there are some things about the Donish piece that appear
very curious. It is particularly striking that he appears to suggest that a young wife can
dominate her husband's mother or at least that she is able to take up a position of real power
vis-à-vis her mother-in-law. This would be unthinkable in Tajikistan nowadays, where
generation is most important in determining right of domination. On the other hand many of
the things the wife says to the husband, especially about money and prestige, frequently
remind me of Jumbul's confrontations with Rustam (cf chapters 5-7).

Both Donish and Nazaroff (cf. chapter 2) comment rather negatively on the fact that
women would squirrel away for the future all the money and other resources that they could
get hold of. In view of the frequent divorces and high mortality rates I should have thought
that these women were very sensibly making the best provision they could for their own
future in a very uncertain world, providing themselves a prudent hedge against possible future
poverty as divorcees or widows and taking control of their own lives.

The Donish passage also provides interesting information about female mobility. After
five months of marriage the wife asks for permission to go to the baths. That she gains this,
albeit with difficulty, before she can have given birth to her first child, already goes against
custom. Later on the mother explains how she has gone running out into the street in search
of her son, even as far as the bazaar. Surely if her husband had been present to ask for permission he would have gone in search of the boy himself? Therefore, it would seem that it was possible on occasion for a woman to leave home without permission, at least for someone married long enough to have a son old enough to run off like that.

Veiling is not mentioned once in this passage. However, although Donish is clearly in favour of female seclusion, he does not appear fanatical about it. In fact, weighing this passage against later writing or the accounts of foreigners in the region at the time one sees how very much Donish the Tajik takes his own customs for granted. He mentions that it is necessary to obey them but never stresses them in any way. After all why should he? Nobody was in any way disputing them.

Traditions made Conscious

Here are some views of Western travellers before the Revolution on their encounters with veiled women, in what is now the Tajik-language area of Uzbekistan:

At the silk counters are a few ladies, formless in their all-enclosing cloaks, the long black veils falling like a great ink stain.... Through little windows sewed jealously in the veiling, or around its perilous edge, their unseen eyes peer at the soft tissues of strange designs, and their low, controlled voices urge a zestful bargain... The very close concealment of women's faces seems here to be proportioned, when compared with fashion in other Mussulman cities, to the reputation for superior sanctity so long enjoyed by Bokhara (Crosby 1905: 6).

A few of the ladies of Bokhara walk in the streets. All are veiled with a black hair-cloth. The difficulty of seeing through it makes the fair one stare at every one. Here, however, no one must speak to them (Burnes 1839: II237).

One evening when I was returning to our caravanserai just after dark, I met several women walking along with their veils thrown back over their foreheads. "They are permitted to do that," explained my companion, "when it is too dark for their features to be distinguished." I once asked ... if young girls did not find the heavy veil very irksome when they first began to wear it, to which he replied that that depended much on the character of the individual. "If a girl is inclined to be a coquette... or wishes to be thought grown-up, she is so anxious to wear the veil that she sometimes begins too soon; but if she is childish and simple she puts off the evil day as long as possible" (Meakin 1903: 129-30).

Meyendorff, who visited the region in 1820, more than a century before hujum, corroborates the relatively relaxed attitudes to veiling:

In the streets the women wear a long cloak, the sleeves being tied behind their backs and a black veil which completely hides their faces. They cannot well see through them, and whenever we passed them, they slyly lifted up a corner. The wives of the Tajiks also found a great delight in showing us their beautiful black eyes. They would go up on the roof especially for the purpose of staring at us. Here, less perceived by the Bokharians, we had opportunities of admiring handsome women, with black eyes
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full of fire, and splendid teeth, and a very pretty complexion. Bokharian surveillance soon put a stop to this worldliness; the women were prevented from ascending the roofs, and we were thus deprived of the pleasure of witnessing a scene which had often given a great relish to our appetites (Meyendorff 1870: 63).

While the men clearly do not encourage their wives to show their faces in public nevertheless the women somehow manage to do so and do not seem to be so cowed that they cannot find occasion to transgress the rule on veiling, at least for the sake of looking at the interesting foreigners. Veiling appears to be accepted calmly, in a relaxed manner, as an integral part of life that no one makes much fuss over. Once the Bolsheviks had drawn people’s attention to veiling, however, everyone began to regard it differently. Even the Western travellers saw it as having a different significance from those who had visited the region before the Revolution. No longer merely a quaint custom or something that is a potential nuisance or limiting, the veil’s wearers have become disfigured, dehumanised. Indeed, it seems as if, instead of the veil being a garment women assume, as in the previous quotations, it is as if the veil had now become the active partner, swallowing up the woman, converting her into a mere object. Contrast the above with the following:

On the floor of the station waiting room are four women in chedras and their husband. The women sit motionless, their bodies lost in the shapeless mauve and grey and dirty white paranjas, their faces completely invisible behind the black chedras ... it is difficult to think of those four bundles as human beings. I saw the veiled women, shapeless inhuman bundles in the flowing robe of the paranjas, reaching over their heads and their feet, their faces completely hidden behind the black chedras (Mannin 1936: 272, 286).

In Tashkent the veiled women, in the stiff, unbroken lines of their ‘paranjas’, looked like silhouetted upright coffins, with some package or basket balanced on every head. It is nonsense to call them veils: trellis-work is far more to the point, so dark and rigid is the horsehair which scarifies the tips of their noses... they resembled grey and mauve heaps squatting on the floor of a cart (Maillart 1935: 150).

A woman dressed in a paranja... looks like a ghost, a walking dark-room, ... a formless, repulsive silhouette (Halle 1938: 104).

Before the Revolution there were women who unveiled, but on the whole no woman who was concerned with her own and her family’s good name could have dared to do so:

Usually when outside of the house all respectable women wear a heavy black veil. women of loose character ... are always unveiled. ... It is perhaps unfortunate that the unveiling of the women has begun with that class, because now no respectable woman dares to go unveiled’ (Schuyler 1876: I-124).
I came across an unveiled female beggar, seated in the very middle of the narrow street, as though she were determined to be trodden upon. She is, of course, a woman who has no character to lose (Meakin 1903: 105).

For a Sart woman to appear in the streets without parandja and chachvan would be the greatest disgrace, equivalent to admitting herself to be a lost creature, and no self-respecting Sart woman would dream of doing such a thing. For this reason the question of unveiling the native women is by no means so simple as it sounds to Europeans, profoundly affecting the psychology of the Sarts .... the Bolsheviks recruited Communists among the Sart women of a certain profession, armed them (Nazaroff 1993: 50), dressed them in semi-military men's uniforms and sent them into the native houses to preach the emancipation of women, the first step towards it being the uncovering of their faces. The Mussulman woman saw in all this a great personal insult, and very soon afterwards it was discovered that these "preachers of freedom" had been quietly cut to pieces in spite of the fact that they, as Communists, had been allowed to carry and use revolvers (Nazaroff 1980: 26).

Those women who went about unveiled were prostitutes, beggars, and lepers. What 'respectable' woman would want to be classed with them? One would imagine it was preferable to most women to wear the veil and be accepted, than not to and to appear an outcast. Of course, men's behaviour supported this. By deliberately treating unveiled women as prostitutes, they strongly encouraged them to resume their veils (cf. chapter 2).

The tensions around local customs are now very visible:

'This treacherous and horrid Government deprives its subjects of the right to be masters of their wives and property: the ZAGS (registry office) compels the wives of the dechkans to bare those parts of the body (face and hands) which it is, according to the Shariat, strictly forbidden a woman to display before other men... The Bolsheviks are responsible for the undermining of the honor of women in Russian Turkestan. It is their doing that women go unveiled and are thereby converted into prostitutes. (Proclamation of Ibrahim Beg in Rakowska-Harmstone 1970: 296-298).

Where women's honour is undermined, so is the honour of the rest of the community. If women held out against resuming their veils, therefore, they would have to take the consequences of this. Local men seem to have colluded in showing these women just how negative such consequences could be, Soviet officials no less than the rest. The latter might work for the enemy but this was just through expediency and to the benefit of the local community as a whole, as it gave them support from within the enemy camp. But when women joined the enemy, this entailed their making significant changes in their gender performances, which was not just shaming for their families but a serious threat to local culture. It was clearly men's duty to do their best to prevent this happening.

It must have been a confusing time for men as well as women. On the one hand their masculine identities were under attack from all sides, both from the Bolsheviks and their own womenfolk. On the other, for those working closely with unveiled women at least, it must have seemed like a wonderful opportunity for intimate contacts with women neither their wives or
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prostitutes, unlike anything they had ever before experienced. The ensuing problems and the resulting distrust of members of the opposite sex by both sides is well illustrated by the story of Hoziyat Markulanova, a Tajik woman high up in the zhenotdel at the beginning of the 1930's:

I had been forced into marriage as a child, so after the Bolsheviks came I ran away to them. They sent me to school and afterwards I married a man who was kind to me, but to whom I was not especially attracted. Then I was sent to work in Tashkent where I met all kinds of men, some of them very brilliant. They all made passes of one kind or another, or at least lewd remarks.

At first I was completely unarmored against this and could not understand what was going on. It was only later that I realised that the men were treating me as a harlot.

Good and 'emancipated' communists as they supposedly were they had not rid themselves of the attitude installed in them since childhood that any woman uncovering her face in the presence of strange men must have loose morals and so they almost as a reflex assume that freedom of manner which men allow themselves in presence of women of 'questionable character'. A woman is helpless in her relations with the opposite sex. Not having been trained since childhood to meet men, she has not built up the particular defences that she needs if she is to meet men freely, on an equal basis.

So, in her work she mixes with them without being emotionally prepared to ward off their equivocal remarks and persistent advances. Whenever she is in a mixed group, the atmosphere becomes charged - passion, jealousy, fear - much more so than you probably find among European men and women. The woman here needs a good deal of discipline and balance, particularly when her habitual defences have been surrendered and no new ones have as yet been erected.

In my own case this resulted in tragedy. Meeting men was to me a novel and thrilling experience. A compliment or an embrace was a grand experience. I lost my head. My husband was relatively tolerant, but in the end he got jealous and even beat me. We just could not cope with all the new freedom. Later, when I began to understand the true nature of most of the compliments and the advances, I suffered doubly. I started to be hurt and insulted. Are these comrades? Are these Communists? I began to lose respect, I began to detest some of the best and most heroic fighters in our ranks but this did not put things right between me and my husband. (paraphrased from Kunitz 1935: 298-299).

Markulanova was a victim of the political struggles between local men and the Bolsheviks. Her story demonstrates that in Ibrahim Beg's quotation given above, he was speaking for his countrymen in general, not just putting forward his own point of view. For him veiling is clearly of paramount importance. It is a key element in female gender performance and crucial for male/female relations. By the time he is writing the battle over male control has moved to a different locus from Donish's time. It has gone beyond the male/female conflict that is the focus of Donish passage, to become an integral part of the political struggle against Bolshevism, where Tajik men and women should be lined up on the same side. Control has become a political symbol, with veiling the symbol of this symbol.

One can imagine very much the same sort of discussions going on in Central Asian households of the time as in the homes of many minority groups today struggling against
cultural invasion, with men arguing that their womenfolk must put aside their gender concerns until the battle against the outsiders has been won. In Central Asia this would have been reinforced by moral and religious concerns as well as by the lack of a discourse on women’s liberation within the local community itself. The man’s position would have been further reinforced by his assured right to kill any of his womenfolk who dared abandon the veil.

Through the Bolsheviks’ interventions Central-Asian customs had become self-conscious. Donish was not trying to make a point of the rightness of his traditions versus any others. In fact, he was not stating a position in regard to customs at all. Rather, these customs were so taken for granted that they did not need to be stated, nor was it necessary to prove that they were positive and transgressions against them should be punished. He just assumed they were natural and eternal - what Bourdieu refers to as doxa (Bourdieu 1977: 168) - and must be obeyed.

Once the Bolsheviks called these customs into question they entered discourse and could never again be taken for granted. Once something is ’named’ it becomes delineated, takes on a specific form and so loses flexibility. It has now assumed an almost material existence, ready to be defended against attack. This is the result of the Bolsheviks’ forcing the Central Asians to become aware of their customs. It was tantamount to supplying them with a ready-made weapon of resistance. What happened, as Foucault suggests, was that by making laws to prohibit these customs a discourse had developed which produced the very opposite effect (1990: 101-2).

Traditions as Political Weapon

In the 1920’s intensified Soviet pressures on local leaders and against traditional ways of life only served to strengthen internal group solidarity. In some parts of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan men swore a special oath not to betray any member of their group to the Soviets. Anyone who did so was severely punished. Soviet collaborators were also persecuted by their local communities. All over Central Asia nomus was invoked more strongly than ever before, and anyone breaking it was expelled from their kinship groups (Massell 1974: 80-81). The result was that traditions relating to family honour, very largely dependent on female behaviour, were particularly strengthened.

The Bolsheviks regulated their socialist state by use of institutions originally developed to keep control within capitalist societies (Foucault 1980a: 101). Since the Soviet government owned all the formal trappings of state power - control of the police, courts, hospitals, lunatic asylums, schools, the media, etc. - any opposition had to occur at a different level.

The Central Asians had defended themselves by means of two potentially strong weapons of their own. The first was religion. Although the religious leaders split into factions and were unable to unite against Bolshevism they fought against it individually. One of the ways they did so was to start rumour campaigns, suggesting all sorts of negative consequences of disturbing the performance of correct gender identities. For instance, if women did not stop unveiling the world would come to an end. At that point wives would disobey their husbands and lose their respect for men, along with their patience and self-control, while poor men would be deprived of their forbearance and love for their richer kin (Massell 1974: 277-280). If subordinates ceased to perform their gender correctly and, as the previous chapter explains, wealth was an important factor in pre-revolutionary gender performance, this would directly impinge on the
gender identities of elite males, which are dependent on control, not just over females and economic resources, but also over subordinate males, including those lower down the social scale. It must, therefore, truly have felt to these men as if the end of the world were nigh. Such is the effect of being forced abruptly to abandon the regulatory norms that had been in effect seemingly from the beginning of time.

The second weapon was the greater stress laid on preserving family honour. Kinship groups became stronger, more aware of threats to their honour, and more ready to defend them. This reinforced the mullahs' campaign. Even those poor men referred to above, who had started to respond to some of the Sovietisation policies, turned against them when their gender identities came under attack. Thus, in some ways the hujam campaign had the opposite effect of that intended. It united a previously not particularly united (male) community (Massell 1964: 284).

In the beginning of the 1930's when Bosworth Goldman travelled in Central Asia he noted that the majority of women still wore veils (Goldman 1934: 171). However, by the end of the decade, once more and more girls were attending schools, and increasing numbers of women were working in factories and other formal jobs, access to which was only possible for unveiled women, increasing numbers removed their veils. When this reached a critical mass, to go unveiled became acceptable and the onslaughts on unveiled women's honour stopped, except in a few of the most religious villages. At this point men tacitly agreed to treat unveiled women as chaste, since there were so many of them that a high proportion of families was affected.

Meanwhile, women's quarters were retained in traditional homes and the proscription on men and women mixing socially and especially on having any sort of sexual contact remained as strong as ever. Women were required to behave circumspectly and, outside the classroom or workplace, to have no contact with members of the opposite sex. The onus for keeping the rules was on women, who were always the ones to receive the blame for any infringements, while, to this day men, at least in urban areas, have continued to try hard to tempt other men's womenfolk to transgress, seducing any who can be persuaded to be in the least bit responsive to them. The result is, as Markulanova's story shows, that women have had to be constantly on their guard.

The customs attacked by the Soviet government as particularly responsible for preventing women from reaching equality with men - seclusion and veiling, the payment of kalyum, polygyny, and forced and underage marriage - were all practices that permitted the control of women and of youth by adult men, and were therefore strongly related to gender performance and the preservation of male and family honour or nomus (cf. chapter 4).

None of these practices was totally abandoned. On the contrary a great deal of ingenuity was used to keep them going secretly, although child marriage at least had virtually disappeared before the recent civil war. This was very possibly in great part because improved mortality rates meant that it no longer seemed imperative to marry children as young as possible in order for them to have time to procreate. There was an emphasis on preserving gender performance as close as possible to what it had been before the Revolution. If men could no longer control women by means of seclusion and economic dependence, they would have to find other ways of doing so. As increasing numbers of women received education, went out to work, and even took on prestigious posts where they had male underlings, it became all the more vital to ensure that they performed their correct gender identities at home.

Once the material symbols of feminine gender had been abandoned new ways of expressing appropriate Tajik femininity had to be contrived. Most essential was for women to be seen to
be submissive to their husbands. This was the more difficult to ensure, now that the material symbols of seclusion and veiling had been removed. Nowadays the symbol of women's willingness to comply with her husbands' dictates is no longer for her to wear a veil and remain at home all the time as it was in the past (cf. Meakin 1903: 116). Today female gender performance has had to make up for the lack of a tangible mask by the assumption of a notional one (cf. chapter 1). Their submissive gestures have had to become larger and more obvious now they not only do not wear veils, but go out into public life and mix with men. Such gestures include women metaphorically bowing their heads and verbally acknowledging their husbands’ rights over them: 'It is a rule with us Tajiks that we have to obey our husbands. These are our laws', said one woman in Dushanbe. Such acknowledgements have now almost assumed the stature of a ritual. They make the woman’s position clear and state that she has accepted that it is her duty to perform her gender according to custom. Only someone determined to betray her people and refuse to behave like a Tajik would not acknowledge her duty to maintain such a position.

The gradual substitution of the 'mask' for the veil could not happen overnight. Only very slowly did the whole way of social conduct represented by veiling give way to that represented by gender masks. In other words here is a prime example of how when norms are varied a substantial number of reiterations of any single variation is required to produce a sufficient sediment to make the variation appear like tradition (cf. Butler 1990: 140).

Another part of the new gender performance is for women to acknowledge their husbands’ right to control their mobility, despite the freedom of movement granted them under Soviet law. Fathers, and later on husbands, have to give their daughters/wives explicit permission to attend school, college or university, or to go out to work. Once this is granted, and it is far from automatic, it is accepted that girls or women could leave the house for those specific purposes only. Permission still has to be sought, and obtained, for them to leave the house for any other purpose and at any other time.

Many a schoolgirl in Dushanbe said to me that she did not know whether she would be permitted by her future husband and, by implication, his family, to study and/or work. She could only wait and see. However, already before anyone had even been chosen for her, she was announcing her acceptance of his right to dictate to her. Until the end of her life Karomat’s mother never left the house without telling her husband where she was going and when she would return. Karomat tried never to walk to work and back on her own. Well into her 60’s she tried to arrange always to walk in company. It was only after she retired that she started going places by herself.

Their womenfolk’s maintenance of the old ways has allowed the men the freedom to walk the streets alongside the Russians, and to pretend to at least some similarity of behaviour with them, while at the same time preserving their Tajik way of life at home. This has allowed them not only to partake of the material benefits of high professional and political position but some degree of psychological acceptance, in that it has helped to prevent their being derided by the Russians as backward.

Although in Tajikistan they were never able to manipulate the Soviet system with quite the same enterprise and on quite the same scale as in Uzbekistan (Lubin 1984), many Tajiks nevertheless squeezed considerable perks out of it, especially those in positions of power. They managed to make the best of both worlds. In public they were able to give the appearance of having accepted the 'modern' Russo-Soviet identity while at the same time, behind the scenes,
quietly preserving their Tajik masculine identity as positively as possible. At the same time in private they lived in ways that challenged the whole concept of the Soviet state, trying their level best to preserve the cultural purity of their womenfolk.

Conclusion

Resisting Sovietisation and refusal to abandon traditions thus became synonymous. What happened in Tajikistan goes to prove Foucault’s contention that bringing something into discourse can harden hitherto relatively fluid customs (1990: 101-2). Moreover, it shows how removing the symbols of female submission is not all positive for women. The gains they have made in regard to such things as the end of formal seclusion, education, and jobs, have been offset by the fact of female subordination having become more strongly rigidified and institutionalised.

What started out in the 1920’s as kinship group solidarity to prevent Soviet penetration eventually became a settled way of life. Despite the destruction of the former elite classes, resistance to Soviet cultural penetration continued to the very end, especially in Tajikistan, which was perhaps the least Sovietised of all Union republics. The chief tool of this resistance was the maintenance of masculine and feminine gender norms as near as possible to the ideals of the pre-revolutionary period. In other words, the material changes were compensated for by changes in the details of masculine and feminine gender performances, which left the principles of masculine control and feminine virginity/chastity virtually untouched despite the lack of material underpinnings.

Revolt by military means had failed with the basmachi defeat. The only defence left was the turning back of the Soviets’ own discourse upon them by making a bulwark of the traditions. But this very weapon that allowed the Tajik people to resist the Bolsheviks and remain unconquered within their own cultural boundaries despite their position as colonised subjects, ended up imprisoning them, as will be discussed in what follows. At the same time the very fact that they lived under a regime that permitted, and indeed actively encouraged, far greater social mobility than did their own continued to open up the possibility for escape from the narrowest confines of Tajik society for those willing to risk the consequences. Thus, throughout the Soviet era and since, there has been a constant renegotiation of the relationship between the socially relatively permissive but politically extremely constraining government and the constrictive norms of Tajik society.