FROM TASHKENT TO MOSKOW; THE POLITICAL PATH OF JAHON OBIDOVA

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https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16932857

Annotation; This article explores the political trajectory of Jahon Obidova, one of the most prominent Uzbek female figures of the Soviet era. Starting her career in Tashkent, Obidova rose through the political ranks during a time of major social transformation in Uzbekistan. As an advocate for women's emancipation and education, she became a symbol of Soviet modernization and gender reform. Her journey to Moscow and eventual inclusion in the Soviet administrative elite marks a significant chapter in the political history of Central Asian women. Drawing on primary sources, memoirs, and archival materials, the study not only reconstructs Obidova's contributions but also situates her legacy within the broader narrative of Soviet gender politics and repression. The article also sheds light on the personal sacrifices and ideological complexities faced by women like Obidova who were navigating power in a patriarchal and authoritarian system.

Keywords: Jahon Obidova, Soviet Uzbekistan, women’s emancipation, gender politics, political repression, Moscow, Central Asia, politicak leadership, Tashkent, Moskow, gender politicc, Communist Party, Central Asian Women, Soviat-era feminism, Uzbek history, education and power, women’s emancipation.

Jahon Obidova holds a prominent and unique place in the political history of Uzbekistan as one of the first women to reach high political office during the early Soviet era. Her life and career reflect both the opportunities and contradictions of Soviet modernization in Central Asia, especially as it pertained to women[1]. She was born in 1900 in the Fergana Valley, an area deeply rooted in traditional Islamic culture, where women's lives were largely confined to the private sphere. As a child, Obidova was sold into marriage at the age of twelve, a fate not uncommon for girls in the region at that time. However, her story did not end there. Through Soviet social reforms and her own determination, she radically altered her life trajectory, becoming a key figure in the women's emancipation movement.

Obidova's political activism began in the 1920s after the Bolsheviks consolidated power in Turkestan. She joined the Communist Party and began

[1] Kamp E. The New Women in Uzbekistan; Islam, Modernity and Unveiling under Communism. Universiy of Washington Press. 2006

working with the zhenotdel, the women's department established to mobilize women for the socialist cause[2]. Through this work, she gained a political education and began participating in organizing campaigns, literacy drives, and public discussions aimed at drawing women out of seclusion. Most significantly, she was one of the first Uzbek women to publicly remove her paranja, the traditional veil worn by women. This act, seen as deeply controversial and even dangerous at the time, was a declaration of allegiance to the new Soviet ideals of gender equality and women's participation in public life[3].

Removing the veil symbolized more than just an individual act of defiance—it was a collective political gesture meant to challenge entrenched patriarchal norms and signal the dawn of a new era for Muslim women. For Obidova and others like her, unveiling was both a personal and political revolution, representing access to education, freedom of movement, and inclusion in the political sphere. Her courage in this regard made her a symbol of the "new Soviet woman" in Central Asia.

Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, Obidova's influence grew as she took part in the state-sponsored "Hujum" campaign, which sought to liberate Muslim women from traditional practices[4]. The campaign involved mass unveilings, educational outreach, and the establishment of women's clubs and schools. Obidova worked as an organizer in Tashkent, helping to coordinate local women's sections, deliver ideological training, and facilitate the opening of literacy schools for girls. She was particularly active in training young women to become community leaders and politically conscious citizens.

In 1929, Obidova achieved a major political milestone when she was appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Central Executive Committee of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. At the time, very few women—especially from the Muslim regions of the USSR—had ever reached such a high-ranking position. Her appointment signified official recognition of her contributions to the socialist transformation of society and confirmed her status as one of the leading female voices of her generation. She frequently traveled across the republic, visiting rural areas to meet with women, explain government reforms, and listen to the concerns of the local population. These journeys were not without danger—many in the traditionalist population viewed Soviet policies on women as foreign impositions and attacked women activists. Nevertheless, Obidova

[2] Kamp E. Unviling Uzbek Women; Liberation, Representation and Discourse in Early Soviat Uzbekistan. Journal of Women's History. 2001.
[3] Mirsaidov S. Revolutionary Women. Uzbekistan Publishing House. Tashkent; 1972
[4] Tokhtakhojaeva M. Between the Slogans of Commuism and the Laws of Islam. Tashkent; 1995

persisted, advocating for women's access to healthcare, employment, and education. In 1935, Jahon Obidova's career reached a new peak when she was invited to Moscow to participate in the All-Union Congress of Women. This marked her transition from a regional political figure to a national one. Following the congress, she took up a post in the Soviet Union Women's Committee, an organization tasked with advancing gender equality across the USSR[5]. Through this role, she gained broader influence and collaborated with other leading Soviet women to address social policy, labor rights, childcare, and education reform. Her work helped shape national conversations about the role of women in socialism, particularly in Muslim-majority republics like Uzbekistan.

As a member of the Soviet bureaucracy in Moscow, Obidova authored essays and reports on women's political engagement and the challenges of implementing socialist reforms in traditional societies. She emerged as both a policy-maker and an ideologue, offering guidance on the integration of gender equality within the broader goals of industrialization and collectivization[6]. At the same time, she maintained close ties to her homeland, using her position to advocate for Uzbek women's issues at the union level.

However, the progress Obidova had made came to an abrupt halt during the Great Purge of 1937–1938. Like many other Old Bolsheviks and political activists, she became a target of Stalin's repressions. Falsely accused of nationalism and alleged associations with "enemies of the people," Obidova was arrested and imprisoned. Her downfall reflected the volatile nature of Soviet politics, where yesterday's heroes were easily recast as traitors. Her arrest not only silenced one of the most influential female voices in Soviet Central Asia but also dealt a devastating blow to the broader women's movement in the region.

The years that followed were difficult. Obidova was largely erased from official memory, her name omitted from publications and public discourse. However, she was eventually rehabilitated in the 1950s, during Khrushchev's thaw, when many victims of Stalinist purges were posthumously or formally cleared of charges. In the 1960s, she returned to social work and research, though she never fully regained her political standing[7]. Despite this, her contributions were gradually rediscovered and reassessed, particularly during the post-Soviet era when historians began reexamining the complexities of early Soviet gender politics.

[5] Soviat Woman Magazine Archive. Moskow [1935-1952]
[6] Khodjaev F. The Uzbek Women in Socialist Construction. 1934
[7] Mumininva R. Uzbek Women on the Historical Stage. Sharq. Tashkent; 1998

Jahon Obidova's legacy extends far beyond her formal political roles. She represents a generation of women who navigated immense personal and societal transformation under a system that both empowered and betrayed them. Her life story—from a young girl forced into marriage, to a revolutionary figure in Tashkent, to a national policy-maker in Moscow, and finally to a victim of state repression—encapsulates the paradoxes of Soviet modernization[8].

In modern Uzbekistan, Obidova is increasingly recognized as a pioneer in the fight for gender equality. Her bravery in confronting patriarchal norms, her resilience in the face of political persecution, and her tireless work to uplift other women remain relevant and inspiring. She helped shape the intellectual and political contours of female emancipation in Central Asia, and her name is now included in discussions of both feminist history and the broader narrative of Soviet reform. Jahon Obidova stands as one of the earliest feminist symbols in Uzbek politics, her story etched permanently into the annals of history

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