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**THE VIEW OF FEMINIST MAGAZINES OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE
ON THE MARITAL PROBLEMS AND MORAL GENDER EQUALITY**

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Abstract

Feminism today is an alternative philosophical concept of socio-cultural development. The article highlights the marital problem and gender equality in the pages of feminist magazines of the early XX century in the Russian Empire. In modern society, there has been much discussion on the issues of gender equality, prohibition or legalization of abortion, legalization of prostitution, the relevance of legal marriage, child-rearing, etc., that is, socio-cultural aspects. All these issues were raised by the feminist press in the early XX century. The purpose of this article is to analyze the arguments of female correspondents of feminist magazines of the Russian Empire in accordance with the double standards, marriage and methods of achieving true gender equality. As a result of the study, we have identified that during the period moral and ethical issues were recognized as an important part of the "women's issue", which were considered by feminist women's magazines through the prism of two officially recognized sexual institutions in the Russian Empire: marriage and prostitution. Women's magazines sharply criticized the "double standards", which set unequal demands on the morality of men and women. According to them, "double standards" was the principal cause underlying the existence of prostitution and humiliated position of a woman in the family, so feminists demanded the recognition of "single sexual morality" either in the direction of "sexual abstinence" or through "sexual freedom" for men and women.

Key words: *socio-cultural aspects, feminism, moral inequality, women's magazines, feminist periodicals.*

**Погляд феміністських журналів Російської імперії
на проблеми шлюбу та моральної рівності статей
Анотація**

Фемінізм сьогодні являє собою альтернативну філософську концепцію соціокультурного розвитку. Дана стаття присвячена висвітленню проблеми шлюбу та рівності статей на сторінках феміністських журналів початку XX століття в Російській імперії. В сучасному суспільстві активно обговорюються питання гендерної рівності, заборони або дозволу абортів, легалізації проституції, актуальності законного шлюбу, виховання дітей – тобто соціокультурним аспектам, які свого часу піднімалися феміністською пресою початку XX ст. Метою даної статті є аналіз аргументів кореспонденток феміністських журналів Російської імперії відповідно до подвійної моралі, шлюбу та методів досягнення справжньої гендерної рівності. В результаті дослідження ми визначили, що в зазначений період морально-етичні проблеми визнавалися важливою частиною «жіночого питання», які розглядалися феміністськими жіночими журналами через призму двох офіційно визнаних в Російській імперії сексуальних інститутів: шлюбу та проституції. Жіночі журнали виступали із різкою критикою «подвійної моралі», що визначала нерівні вимоги до моральності чоловіків і жінок. На їхнє переконання, саме «подвійна мораль» була основною причиною існування проституції та приниженого становища жінки в родині, тому феміністки вимагали визнання «єдиної статевої моралі» або в напрямку «статевої стриманості», або шляхом «статевої свободи» для чоловіків та жінок.

Ключові слова: соціокультурні аспекти, фемінізм, моральна нерівність, жіночі журнали, феміністська періодика.

Problem statement

The contemporary world is changing rapidly and this creates a discourse about the need to change the moral and ethical attitudes of modern society. There has been much discussion on the issues of gender equality, prohibition or legalization of abortion, legalization of prostitution, the relevance of legal marriage, child-rearing, etc.

At the beginning of its formation, feminism existed as an ideology of women's equality and as a socio-political movement. These two aspects are very important for feminism, which seeks answers to real questions concerning the status of women in society.

Surprisingly, all this is strikingly reminiscent of the situation in the early XX century. Similar issues were raised and actively discussed in the feminist press of the period. Women struggled for the conditions that have been implemented today such as civil rights, co-education, equal access to education and professions, legalization of abortion, etc., but as a result new problems arose, which were difficult to predict at the time.

Thus, raising the issue of double standards in assessing the behavior of men and women, feminist magazines were not homogeneous in the strategy to address it. Some advocated the same "moral purity" of men and women, others believed that this could not be achieved, so it was worth absolving women from all moral restrictions. Society has taken the second path, which in our opinion, has led it to the current moral and ethical crisis.

Nowadays we are seriously discussing such issues as whether a person can choose their biological sex; whether child-rearing has to be gender-neutral; whether there is a need for gender roles at all; whether it is necessary to educate to perceive same-sex marriage as normal, etc. Thus, the debate that arose in the pages of the women's feminist press in the late XIX century continues to this day, acquiring new forms and directions.

It is hard to imagine what humanity will come to in the future by continuing to review moral and ethical attitudes and taboo subjects of the past. As some researchers, such as J.Harrari, predict, soon we will discuss the morality of relations

and rights between ordinary people and cyborgs, robots, etc. Other researchers believe that moral and ethical norms were formed not by chance and are essential to the survival of society. Violation of these norms will lead to the destruction of our civilization, as has happened many times in history (Babylon, Rome).

In this article, we have tried to focus on the moral and ethical aspects of social life discussed in the pages of feminist magazines in the early XX century as well as trace the heterogeneity of views of female correspondents of women's magazine on morals and permissible limits of behavior of men and women.

Purpose

Analyze the arguments of feminist magazines of the early XX century in accordance with double standards, marriage and methods of achieving true gender equality.

Base material presentation

The beginning of the XX century was marked by a general movement to revise the so-called "double" standards in the field of morality, which covered the educated part of society in Northern Europe (Germany, Scandinavia, to a lesser extent England) and the United States [Stayts 2004]. Unequal demands on the morality of men and women were sanctified by tradition and supported by the efforts of the then medicine and psychology. O.Weininger, P.Moebius, R.Kraft-Ebing and other luminaries of science denied womanly intelligence and the ability to have sexual experiences [Zider 1997], while men's sexuality was absolute: it was claimed that from the age of 14, a boy feels insurmountable sexual desire, the dissatisfaction of which allegedly leads to self-poisoning of the body [Ratov 1908]. Russia, where the situation was complicated by such a cultural and social phenomenon as decadence, did not escape this movement. Named after one of the first decadent works, M.P.Artsybashev's novel "Sanin" (1908), the style of behavior of young people who preached sensuality without love was called Saninism. A relatively mediocre work on passion, incest, and suicide provoked a barrage of criticism from publicists of all persuasions, but at the same time recorded a crisis of "bourgeois mo-

ality” [Stayts 2004: 262-264] and gave impetus to discussions about moral standards, the institution of marriage, prostitution, and so on.

Feminist women’s magazines were actively involved in discussing the problem of “double standards.” The contributors to the magazines opposed the people of the time, adding their arguments in defense of the situation: they argued that the same morality for men and women could not be demanded, because the real consequences of sexual immorality for them are unequal. Pregnancy of women always reveals that they “have not preserved their female honor”, and men can easily hide their vice [Muzh’ya 1905: 35-39].

The feminist press described the moral inequality of women and men in terms of “domination” and “slavery,” blaming men in the situation, while women solely played the victim.

The dominance of “double standards” determined the position of a woman in society, giving her two completely different roles. In one case, she was appreciated as a “decent woman” – mother, sister, bride, and others treated her with respect. In another case, the woman acted as a “priestess of love”, “instrument of pleasure”, and the less decent she was, the more attractive she was for men. These two worlds were separated by a wall of conventions: “decent women” did not have to know about the existence of “flawed women” to whom their husbands, parents and brothers devoted their leisure time. However, “dirt” penetrated a “clean” half of life through this thin wall, and “decent women” felt deep indignation. They began to demand the right “to see and know life without ornaments and to make amendments to it, dictated by their own developed consciousness” and resolutely declared: “Enough obedience! Obedience is synonymous to slavery!” [Zhuchenko 1917: 50] Thus, the established order was disrupted, and the feminist press, by capturing this moment, undertook to highlight and condemn the immoral phenomena prevalent in modern society.

In general, sex education was recognized as an extremely important element in improving the morality of society: aimed at girls, it was to acquaint the latter with their own nature, and regards boys – to help overcome “eroticism, i.e. more or less aroused sexual instinct” of the envi-

ronment [Ratov 1908: 14].

When asked how to overcome the “double standards”, women’s magazines unanimously said: first, to “liberate” a woman, and second – to introduce a “single sexual morality” for women and men [Pokrovskaya 1910: 89-92]. At the same time, M.I.Pokrovskaya noted that a single sexual morality can be achieved in different ways: either through complete freedom of sexual relations, or through the “asceticism” preached by L.M.Tolstoy. Personally for M.I.Pokrovskaya the way of “sexual purity” and “taming of sexual instinct” was more acceptable [Pokrovskaya 1910].

Feminist women’s magazines noted that “the desire for individual freedom makes it impossible for many to marry in its old form, strictly defined by law and custom.” Therefore, many women of initially “bourgeois and aristocratic origin” try to achieve a certain external and internal independence through some profession. Interestingly, in support of this attitude toward marriage among women, feminists denied the right to celibacy to men because the bachelor “denies the need for a woman as a life friend, as a wife, and as a mother to her children, reducing her to the lowest physiological need.” The first direct result of the refusal to marry is an increase in the number of “old maids”, the other – “the proletarianization of society”, as the main increase in population occurs due to the lower strata of society [Kholmogorova 1912]. In addition, due to illnesses and lack of practical life experience, which is acquired only in marriage, bachelors were declared incapable of either military or civilian service.

At the same time, in the pages of feminist publications, as an alternative to traditional marriage and celibacy, the idea of a “free union” based, in the words of the Swedish writer F.Steingingoff, on a common, “intersex” morality, was widely discussed [Rogovich 1907: 297].

“Modern marriage is nothing more than a commercial contract of sale, with a change in the roles of a seller and buyer depending on certain life benefits that fate has bestowed on one of the counterparties... Modern marriage is either the acquisition of a gifted workforce, or the joining of capital to capital, or the purchase of beauty, title, connections.” [Hoshido 1905: 264]. That is, traditional marriage according to feminists is a

forced union between a man and a woman.

It should be noted that in most cases women's magazines portray a woman as the injured party, and only in some cases do they note that marriage in the modern bourgeois environment is "complete disharmony" and causes both parties to suffer. This "disharmony" can be overcome only by abandoning the "patriarchal marriage" in favor of a "free union." [Lishnevskaya 1908; Rogovich 1910; Stegof 1912].

In addition to numerous translated works that promoted "free marriage", domestic feminists offered their own vision of the problem. In 1908, M. Rogovych, a regular contributor to the *Women's Herald*, published an article entitled "The Desperate Situation of Young Women," which stated that "women who strive for equality should do everything possible to promote new forms of sexual cohabitation," that is, "free marriage." According to her, it already exists among women workers, but it is not common among educated girls, who are instilled in schools with the idea of legal marriage as the only possible form of sexual intercourse that does not correspond to reality. Therefore, the state, represented by lawyers, should provide high school girls with detailed information on marriage laws, including in relation to illegitimate children [Rogovich 1908].

M. Orlovskaya sharply criticized M. Rogovych's views, seeing in the latter's article a call for "heterism." She noted that the "new relationship" between men and women does not meet the requirements of ethics or economic conditions. She sees the solution not in the destruction of the institution of marriage, but in changing the legislation on marriage and facilitating divorce [Orlovskaya 1908].

Thus, the problem of "free marriage" was often raised in the women's press, but its discussion did not go beyond theoretical considerations. "Free love" and "free marriage" were considered as a principle that could be implemented in other social conditions, as the proposed mechanisms for the protection of women could not be implemented in modern conditions. At the same time, feminists emphasized that "free love" "does not consist in polygamy, but in the fact that men and women are free to have sexual intercourse and maintain it not through outside pressure, but only

under the influence of mutual love" [Pokrovskaya 1908: 195-196].

Post-reform Russia was characterized by a clear division of roles in the family: a husband "breadwinner" and a "stay-at-home-wife", which recognized the unconditional supremacy of the husband in the family. Proponents of this order were convinced that it was natural and therefore did not require revision but is something forever set and resolved [Kradetskaya 2011].

Instead, feminists defined the position of women in the family as "slavery", "serfdom" and the "Pale of Settlement" and rejected the "naturalness" of the situation.

Attempts by women to expand their range of interests provoked a negative reaction from men, in particular the emergence of the term "third gender", which was used in relation to women seeking higher education. According to men, such women lost their femininity and became similar to infertile "workers" of the insect world [Moskvichka 1908].

Feminists were outraged by the gender roles that have developed in the traditional family. They opposed the notions that defined a woman exclusively as a wife, mother and housewife. According to them, a woman has the right to go beyond the domestic sphere, get an education, work, engage in public affairs and thus develop as a person. A woman's self-development is also important for her to perform the function of a mother.

A woman should be a conscious mother who responsibly approaches the problems of raising her children. In contrast, women are often unable to provide their children with even basic knowledge, because "even in the narrow field of activity assigned to women, she is not a specialist who can self-improve, but an amateur; she is like that in the kitchen and in the nursery, as a cook, housekeeper and educator" [Dubovskaya 1906: 17]. Therefore, in order to teach her children, the woman herself must receive a broad education. Towards that end it is essential to restructure both family and public education.

Analyzing the mechanisms of education, feminists argued that from the first days of children's lives, inequality between girls and boys is determined. Initially, this inequality is manifest-

ed in toys and other trifles, then deepens at the level of education of “male” and “female” qualities, and finally, is fixed in educational institutions by a kind of “drilling”, preparation for future married life [Vaysbeyn 1907; R.M.Z. 1905]. Feminist women’s magazines offered two ways to solve the problem: first, to implement the idea of gender equality in education, i.e. to introduce co-education at all levels; secondly, to give women the opportunity to study such subjects as the doctrine of heredity, degeneration, embryology, history of physical development of children, hygiene, childhood psychology, sociology of childhood, children’s literature, law, history of women’s movement in women’s high schools, and for illiterate women establish mothers’ schools or practical childcare courses [Swiat Kobiecycy 1914].

The issues of birth control and the attitude to abortion were also hotly debated in feminist magazines. The Pirogov Congress of Physicians in 1913 and the Congress of Russian Criminologists in 1914 spoke out against the punishment of abortion, while the government commission for the revision of hospital and sanitary legislation in Russia spoke in favor of severe punishment of women and doctors, except when pregnancy threatened the woman’s life. In this confrontation, feminists sided with “practitioners,” believing abortion to be a much lesser evil than high infant mortality due to adverse living conditions, infanticide, or child abandonment at orphanages, which became known as “angel factories.” [Pokrovskaya 1914; 1914a]. At the same time, they gave preference to the improvement of sexual life and various social activities, in particular, aimed at helping illegitimate children.

Other requirements imposed by women’s magazines but not implemented include the introduction of civil marriage and civil divorce.

In the early XX century, divorce was one of the most pressing issues in the life of Russian society, which required a legislative solution. At that time, marriage was dissolved only by a church court, and the reasons for divorce were considered to be the fact of adultery of one of the spouses confirmed by witnesses, inability to marry, unknown absence of at least five years, imprisonment and exile [Complete collection of

laws of the Russian Empire 1883]. Such demands often made divorce impossible, and women’s magazines abounded with reports of homicides and suicides as a result of family disagreements. Not only in society, but also in government circles, discussions began on ways to reform the institution of marriage.

Although all proposals and projects remained under discussion, domestic journalism did not ignore attempts to reform the institution of marriage. First, women’s magazines supported the proposed changes in the divorce process, such as the civil court. However, the division of the process between the spiritual and civil courts proposed by the Ministry of Justice was considered superfluous. Second, feminists welcomed the increase in the number of reasons for divorce but suggested adding alcoholism and “simply the unwillingness of the couple to live together” to the list [Ivanova 1910: 54-55]. Third, they pointed to the need for more attention to the fate of children. According to the bill, the right to keep children was given to the innocent party, while, according to feminists, on a case-by-case basis this issue had to be settled by the court, because it might turn out that the guilty divorcee is a good father and the innocent – a bad one [Pokrovskaya 1913].

Thus, according to domestic feminists, the institution of marriage in Russia should have undergone serious reforms, while another officially recognized sexual institution – prostitution, was to be destroyed.

The fate of the public woman became a subject of social debate in Russia in the 1880s – 1890s, and in the early XX century the seriousness of the problem was obvious: the number of prostitutes increased (in St. Petersburg alone there were 30 to 50 thousand registered and unregistered prostitutes), as well as the number of men who used their services (up to 70% of citizens), which contributed to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and prostitution crimes [Stayts 2004: 258].

Domestic feminists were actively working on the problem of prostitution, closely linking its solution to the issue of women’s equality in general. For them, prostitution was a clear indicator of societal attitude towards women.

In the spring of 1909, the first part of A.I.Kuprin's novel "Yama" ("The Pit") was published in the third book of the almanac "Zemlya" ("The Earth"). This work shocked the whole of Russian society. "Zhenskiy Vestnik" ("Women's Herald") in the person of M.I.Pokrovskaya, who worked for a long time as a sanitary doctor and was well aware of the problem, responded to the appearance of the novel. It should be noted that M.I.Pokrovskaya was quite critical of A.I.Kuprin's work, pointing out that the writer portrayed only the outer side of this special female world: "the backstage side of their lives, their inner world only occasionally and casually appear before us." [Pokrovskaya 1910: 37-41]. She strongly condemned men who use the services of brothels: "Every man who enters a brothel should be considered a criminal." [Pokrovskaya 1907: 229].

Looking for the causes of the phenomenon of prostitution, most women's magazine contributors pointed primarily to the economic side of the problem, and the spiritual component, in their opinion, determined only the degree of decline [Yelistratov 1907].

M.I.Pokrovskaya looks at the problem from a slightly different angle. She agrees with those authors who talk about the economic and moral causes of prostitution, she sees the root cause of this social phenomenon in gender inequality between men and women. Women are victims not only of class but also of "sexual" antagonism of society. At the same time, all the responsibility for the existence of prostitution M.I.Pokrovskaya put on men – first wealthy, and then all, regardless of class [Pokrovskaya 1902].

It should be noted that feminists thought a lot about ways to combat this social evil. They noted the need to improve the economic situation of peasant women, female workers and servants, spread of education among women, sexual education of youth, fight against pornography, and so on. All authors of women's magazines unanimously advocated the destruction of supervised prostitution.

In the Russian Empire, the Ministry of the Interior was responsible for the control of prostitution, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, and the investigation of related crimes, which di-

vided the respective responsibilities between the police and the medical-police committee for the supervision of prostitution. Public women were subjected to compulsory medical examinations, received government certificates ("yellow tickets"), and, in case of disease, were treated.

Feminist women's magazines condemned the existing system, arguing that "the regulation of prostitution never managed to preserve public health, "it was a "medical deception," but instead it degraded public morality by maintaining the view that debauchery was necessary for men and the government must secure it." [Mirovich 1908: 12] They argued that the "moral police" did not perform their direct duties, but also contributed to the increase in the number of prostitutes: government officials took bribes from prostitutes and den owners, and sometimes former police officers kept prostitutes themselves by figureheads. Therefore, according to feminists, the government had to immediately close all apparently existing brothels and strictly prosecute secret ones, eliminate medical and police surveillance of prostitution, and establish penalties for pimps and men who pay for procuration. However, as in the case of the reform of the institution of marriage, the only opportunity for feminists to implement these requirements in life was to gain women's legal rights, citing the examples of the United States and New Zealand.

Conclusions

Thus, in the early XX century moral and ethical aspects of socio-cultural development were recognized as an important part of the "women's issue", which were considered by feminist women's magazines through the prism of two officially recognized sexual institutions in the Russian Empire: marriage and prostitution. Women's magazines sharply criticized the "double standards," which set unequal demands on the morality of men and women. According to them, "double standards" was the principal cause underlying the existence of prostitution and humiliated position of a woman in the family, so feminists demanded the recognition of "single sexual morality" either in the direction of "sexual abstinence", as M.I.Pokrovskaya, or through "sexual freedom" for men and women.

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