

THE PLACE OF TURKISH WOMEN IN SOCIETY (*)

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During the Twentieth Century, many regions in the world have been the scene of vast and rooted changes. These changes have been formed partly by political and military factors such as war, occupation, annexation, revolution, and partly by social and economic factors such as industrialization, urbanism, educational mobilization and right of general vote. Among these changes especially women's status and role in the society occupy an important place. As Bayard Dodge has stated: «The habits of 2/3 rds of the women living in the world show a more rapid change within the duration of our lives than the change that took place during the last two thousand years.»

Political rights, economic needs, damage caused by wars and revolution and opinions on the liberation of women have forced more and more countries every day and their responsible leaders to review once again the duties and wishes of women. This is true especially for our country which has entered the phase for westernization with all its strength. Even in these places where tradition has not faded away completely, there exist great differences between the behaviours of different generations. These changes do not only reveal themselves in appearance, costume and external behaviours but also in value judgements which are renewed every day. As Daniel Lerner has pointed out sagaciously, the traditional society in the Middle East is declining, because, only a very small number of people adhere to the rules of their traditional society.

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Atatürk's courageous reformist efforts had aimed at rescuing women from second-degree, passive and obedient roles of being solely means of production or exchange. Atatürk's biggest yearning was to develop the abilities of the Turkish women which she was born with, by supplying her with equal opportunities and education possibilities and to provoke their curiosity towards public affairs by recognizing them political rights. His greatest wish was to have Turkish women serve for the progress of all the women in world by promoting their social, professional and political knowledge and experience.

This unshakable belief of Atatürk found its expression in this speech of his which was made only a few months before the proclamation of the Republic. «There exists no possibility at all for the development of a society, unless progress towards the same goal is made together with its men and women». (March 1923, S.D. 11)

What is the degree of realization of these goals fixed by Atatürk with unique precision, after these 45 years which have gone by since?

It can be declared without hesitation that these reforms which have been tried to be realized under the guidance of a unique political leader have not been sufficient to alter a paternal and traditional society, entirely, in spite of the support of an elite group sincerely believing in westernization. This situation can be clearly observed today by comparing the way of life of village women to that of city-women.

Even today, customs and tradition which condemn women to remain at the back of the stage, are strongly dominant, especially in the little remote villages and towns lacking communication possibilities and in the newly-developing towns. In other words, the Turkish women reform has not been able to attain practical value in these places where illiterate, isolated and unenthusiastic majorities of village men have influence and power and where no various ways of living exist.

Before examining the factors and results of speeding down the women reforms instead of speeding up in the desired manner, we have to determine the status of women of 1968's Turkey in regard with points such as their position in the structure of the Turkish population, education, general knowledge, vocational education, etc.

According to the 1965 census, the general population of Turkey is 31.4 millions. 15.4 millions of it are females. 22 millions of the general population, i.e. 70 % of it live in villages and towns. 10.9 millions of the people living in rural areas are males and 11 millions are females. When the way of settlement is taken as the basis, 72 % of the Turkish women live in villages, 15 % live in towns, and 13 % live in cities. When this differentiation is taken as the basis, it is required to divide this population group into three parts in order to define the status of Turkish women in the Turkish society.

1. Women in rural areas.
2. Women in half-developed or developing areas.
3. Women in urban areas.

I. Women in Rural Areas

As the model of a society in transition, one of the main problems of Turkey is no doubt the education, training of the village women, who constitute 3/4 of the Turkish general population, and turning them into conscious citizens. The rapid growth of the population of Turkey renders the solution of this problem more difficult, everyday.

As seen in all the developing countries, proportion of the population who can read and write in villages, to the female population in cities is much lower.

Table I. The distribution of the population at and above the age of 6 in regard to literacy. (1)

	Literate			Illiterate		Total %
	Total %	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %	
Total in Turkey	48.72	64.04	32.82	35.86	67.11	51.19
Cities	66.92	79.41	52.29	20.50	47.64	33.00
Villages	38.53	54.61	22.92	45.29	77.62	61.39

As the table indicates, the education situation of women is closely linked with the way of settlement and urbanization. While the proportion of women living in cities is much higher with res-

(1) Genel Nüfus Sayımı, Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, Yayın No, 537, Sh. XLII ves.

pect to nation wide proportion in the case of villages the situation is controversial. One of the factors also making this question difficult, is the lack of balance between the regions.

Table II. Distribution of the population at and above the age of 6 in selected provinces, regarding literacy. (2)

Cities	Literate			Illiterate		
	Male %	Female %	Total %	Male %	Female %	Total %
Developed provinces						
İstanbul	85.33	67.56	77.26	14.45	32.27	22.44
Kırklareli	77.44	58.79	68.83	22.55	41.20	31.16
Eskişehir	78.70	54.21	66.65	21.26	45.75	33.31
İzmir	76.89	53.06	65.47	23.06	46.89	34.48
Underdeveloped provinces						
Hakkâri	29.35	3.38	17.61	70.64	96.61	82.38
Adıyaman	35.28	6.57	21.17	64.61	93.33	78.72
Siirt	32.89	7.77	21.05	66.99	92.19	78.88
Urfa	34.41	8.06	21.46	65.39	91.89	78.41

The differentiation of education caused by lack of balance between regions can be observed much more clearly in table II.

In the Eastern cities where no influence of industrialization can be traced, since education is not regarded as a social duty, the entire female population is left out of it.

Age categories are also another factor affecting closely on the education state of women. In Central Anatolia, which is referred to as the 1st Region in the Turkish Population Research it has

Table III. Distribution of the rate of literate and illiterate women in Central Anatolia regarding age groups. (3)

Age groups	Literate	Illiterate
15-19	36.9	63.1
20-24	23.5	76.5
25-34	16.6	83.4
35-44	8.0	92.0
45-above	2.6	97.4
TOTAL	16.9	83.1

(2) Genel Nüfus Sayımı 24.10.1965, Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, Yayın No. 537.

(3) Türkiye Nüfus Araştırmasında Elde Edilen Hayatî İstatistikler, 1965-1966, Sh. 115.

been derived at that the proportion of education in women decreases as the age of women increases.

In Table III, it can clearly be observed that lack of knowledge shows an increase from young generation to higher age groups. A majority of the village women lack knowledge even in the subjects closely related to themselves and their families. For example, according to the results of a research made in Güdül around Ankara 25 out of 486 women did not have an idea on their monthly and yearly income of their families. (4) The same research has also revealed the existence of ignorance on the traditional contraceptive methods which are being implemented since old times. (5)

Meanwhile, another point worth learning is that even though women are ignorant on subjects which interests themselves and their families, they are enthusiastic towards meeting their severe needs. For example, in the Güdül research 88 % of the tested women have agreed to birth control, 43 % of these women have declared that they did not wish to have more than 3 children. (6)

In spite of her unsatisfactory Knowledge and education, the Turkish women occupies a very important place in the economic life of Turkey. Incidentally, in the 1965 Census, it can be observed that in the distribution of economically active female population between the ages of 15-64, against the 4.7 millions of women in the agricultural sector, there exist only 289-197 women in other sectors. The educational qualities of this group are as follows :

Table IV. Situation of education and the ability to read and write of the economically active women population between the ages of 15-64 (7)

Vocation	Illiterate	Can read and write but does not have any graduation	Graduate of primary or a higher degree of school.
In the Agricultural Sector	4.014.999	215.603	562.455
In other Sector	90.696	22.869	175.602

(4) N. Fincancıoğlu, N. Toraman, K. Somer, **Güdül Bilgi, Davranış ve Kullanma Araştırması**, S. S. Y. B. Nüfus Planlaması Genel Md. 1968, Sh. 8.

(5) The subjects on which the research is made: 81 % use traditional coitus interruptus, 83 % use douch method, 68 % have not heard at all about such methods. Look Research on Güdül p. 30.

(6) Güdül Araştırması, bk : (4), Sh. 23.

(7) Türkiye Genel Nüfus Sayımı, 24.10.1965, Devlet İstatistik Enst. No. 508.

As it is seen, the widest women group in Turkey, a mass of 4 millions of people, who contribute the most to the economic life of the country, lacks education, and thus is completely unaware of its social and economic rights.

Other than insufficiency of education, repressive social cultural circles which are not industrialized and have not completed their social mobility should also be added among the factors which hinders the village women in the traditional way of living. In this social culture, the place of women in the society is defined as a second-degree citizen who only raise new generations, contribute to production in a certain degree without any return.

In the majority of the villages the paternalistic system with respect to family structure still exists. The young girl always joins her husband's family. According to the customs of paternalist families the men eat the meals first, and the women eat the remaining. When these customs, which are considered as the symbol of the man's absolute hegemony in the house, are added to the ignorance of women with respect to nutrition, caused by lack of education, the health of the village women is closely endangered. Incidentally, a research which was made in the villages of Central Anatolia has shown that, unlike the industrialized countries, men are more healthy than women (8).

Other than the insufficiency of education which the village women suffer, one of the main factors which hinders them to break the traditional life chains is the religious inspirations, which increases its repression with the help of the unchanging social and economic structure. These are partly organized official institutions, like Koran courses, and partly unshaped group activities which propagate legends and superstitions together with religious activities. Thus, a research done during the foundation of industrial installations at Ereğli of Karadeniz, shows that the women in Ereğli and in the villages around it have much inclination to religious beliefs such as visiting it have much inclination to religious beliefs such as visiting the grave of an unknown saint, going to sorcerer, having fortunes read, having Mevlûd read with no reason, melting the lead and pouring it into cold water over the head of a sick person (9).

(8) Rezan Şahinkaya, *Orta Anadolu köylerinde aile strüktürü*, Ankara Üni. Ziraat Fakültesi Yayını 255, Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1966, Sh. 19-21.

(9) Mübeccel Belik KIRAY, *Ereğli, Ağır Sanayiden Önce Bir Sahil Kasabası*, DPT yayını, Ankara 1964, Sh. 184-185.

The Turkish village women who is deprived of a social and economic forum which is needed to achieve an autonomous personality, despite such obstacles, although unconsciously, have succeeded to make rational preferences on the basic subjects regarding her family and children. Another research, which was done on family planning, has shown that the rate of women who want to learn these methods in villages is 63 %, in small towns 75 % and in cities 79 %, (10) If it is also taken into consideration that, these family planning studies mostly took place at the coffee houses at the villages or at the roads where men were always present, thus causing the village women to be shy to participate in the studies, the research clearly shows that women want to draw a certain way for their lives or at least have the right to decide to have a baby or not. Essentially, it is observed that the mothers who have many children are the advocators of family planning. Gdl research has shown that, regardless of education, almost in all groups women did not wish to have babies. In other words, the over-population in the family which causes a heavy burden leads the Turkish women and mothers, consciently or not, to rule their own destinies. If it is considered that in Turkey the ratio of death of children (in 1965 120-150 %) is very high, besides, there are 500,000 abortions per year and 12,000 of these cause the mother's death because of primitive methods, the forum in which the village women struggle without her labour being valued, can be viewed better (11).

In rural areas the second-degree status which is given to girls shows itself in the education necessary for girls. In Eređli villages 7.5 % of the family heads think that «it is not necessary for girls to be educated, «and 41.2 % think that» a primary school education is enough for them.» However, same family heads think for their son «a university education is necessary». (12)

To give money in return of a future bride, which was placed as a rule in Islam with different aims, gives negative results in the villages as a father selling his daughter with bargaining. This custom which was instituted in order to furnish the poor father with some money to be able to stant his new life after he marries

(10) Bernard Berelson, **Trkiye'deki Nfus Arařtırmaları**, Trkiye Etd hakkında Rapor, 27 - 28, 1964, Sh. 7.

(11) Niyazi Erzin, **Çocuk Dřrme, Çocuk Sađlıđı ve Hastalıkları Dergisi**, 1/1/1958.

(12) Mbeccel B. Kıray, op. cit., Sh. 220.

her daughter, has been an additional income for girls' fathers. (13) This money is not paid to the girl but to her father, and if his father is dead to his brother. Thus, the purity of the girls gains importance. Domination of girls boys discrimination in the villages creates an atmosphere of taboo. The smallest aggression, symbolically or actually, made to a girl shakes the structure of her family. Thus, the «honour» concept is the greatest excuse even against the most serious unjust actions like killing a man because of this reason.

The static status of the girls and women in the rural areas has caused the continuation of religious weddings instead of civil wedding. In the regions where mass communications instruments are rare and the civil marriage has not been rooted, religious marriages are made. This has a big ratio especially in underdeveloped regions.

Table V — Number of marriages per year at the elected province centers (14)

Province Centers	Number of Marriages				Marriages per 1.000 people
	1950	1957	1964	1967	
Ankara	3.019	4.277	6.572	7.773	9 - 15.6
İstanbul	10.057	11.884	14.227	15.685	10 - 11.5
İzmir	3.599	4.502	5.295	6.123	10 - 12
Ağrı	42	73	156	105	2 - 3
Bingöl	35	26	79	53	4 - 4
Van	96	165	276	248	4 - 4

The differences of ratios of official marriages in cities and regions can also be met in matter of divorces. The Turkish women has been entitled the right to divorce upon on her own will, by the Turkish Civil Code. But, the reality is that the women can benefit from this right more in the cities where anonymity is dominant.

(13) Rezan Şahinkaya, op. cit., p. 40-42. According to research done by Şahinkaya in Central Anatolia, in 8 of the villages out of 86, polygamy has been observed 355 families. While this ratio has increased to 25 % in the villagen where polygamy has been a custom, it nas dacreased to 2.3 % in others. According to Şahinkaya the reason for polygamy is not sterility but the desire for higher status.

(14) T. C. Evlenme İstatistikleri, 1932 - 1960, No. 418.

Table VI — Yearly divorce rate in selected province centers (15)

Province Centers	Number of divorces			
	1950	1957	1964	1967
Ankara	584 (1952)	731	694	697
İstanbul	929	983	1.749	1.609
İzmir	838 (1952)	951	819	813
Ağrı	1 (1952)	11	10	12
Bingöl	4 (1952)	8	13	8
Van	15	17	37	61

As this ratio and numbers reveal, the illegal religious marriage is still widely dominating in Anatolia. So many problems occur like, the situation of the illegitimate children who are not officially registered, impossibility of going to school since they don't have identity cards, and impossibility to recruit them for military service and etc. As a remedy to such difficulties the Ministry of Justice has taken the initiative to legalize such situations from time to time. Thus, with three separate laws passed in 1933, 1945, 1950 over 7 million children born outside of wedlock have been registered as legitime children. All these events justify the following observations once again :

1. Even the most drastic legal reforms give positive results only with the changes in socio-economic structure of equal weight and effect;

2. Unless the education of women of communities in transition is founded on a functional base which secures concrete advantages they will remain devoid of overcoming traditional social pressures.

II. Women in big cities and urbanized regions

During the last ten years an extraordinary rapid development was achieved in some particular regions of Turkey. (For example in the cities Samsun, Adana, Bolu, Eskişehir.) The growing social mobility, intensifying communications, and the contacts between villages, towns and big cities cause, as a rule, less of confidence in superstitions and traditions and create differences in dresses and behaviours. Although the village and town women of these regions prefer baggy trousers and scarfs as working costumes, they usually go to the province centers in western clothes. Besides, the various

(15) Boşanma istatistikleri, 1932-1960, Yayın No. 419, Sh. 8-9.

public services taken to these regions (like health services for mothers and children, mobile village courses, village mid-wives) create drastic differences of behaviour. In fact, initiation of a children health center in a village pretty soon decreases the belief in attachment to spell and bewitched prayers apparently.

In the small towns and the cities, the structure of family is being transferred from paternalistic type to small family type. A main reason for this change, the lack of large houses in urbanized centers which can take in big families, can be shown. The modern Turkish family in cities or districts is generally composed of mother, the father, the children and in addition a mother-in-law or a father-in-law or an old aunt or a young nephew or a niece or a sister. Unlike the families in the villages, the women of city families hold the authority in administering their homes. In extended families the authority relationship is altered. The interdependence between father and son is dissolved. The mother here starts to play a buffer role between the father and her son, trying to protect the authority of the father on one-hand, and defending the wishes of her son on the other. As a result of these more strong relations develop between the mother and the daughter. Dissolution of big families and replacement of it by nuclear families, causes the wife-husband relationship to be less subjected to authority. (16)

An important difference of behaviour can be seen between the big cities and towns with respect to women's working. While in the towns women's working is generally considered negatively, and only teaching, dress making, mid-wifery, nursing and the like are considered suitable for women, because of the conditions in the big cities, it is considered desirable for women to work in any unit of public sector. In the towns the men of 25-34 years of age object women's working. One of the main reason for this is the existing unemployment in the country.

The women working in the big cities are divided into three groups: 1. The unqualified workers who work with daily wages, 2. Waged personnel who have had secondary school education, the lower degree officials, and the people working in the commercial sector, 3. These who have had lycée or higher education, who have acquired a profession and who are experts.

(16) Mübeccel Kiray, op. cit., Sh. 237.

At present in 14 main cities of Turkey of which the population is over 100,000 women work in the industries of textile, tobacco, nuts, grapes, figs, porcelains, clothing and etc. Equal wages are paid to men and women who work in industrial works. In line with the international standards, it is forbidden for women like children to work in mines, underground works and overnight.

According to the international conventions concluded with respect to the protection of maternity of working women, it is approved that they should be given after birth and for breast feeding, leaves. Women have the right to get leaves 6 weeks before and 6 weeks after the birth, and two times a day for one and a half hour each (or an hour each) for feeding.

Another development which is to be dwelled upon, is that more and more Turkish women workers find continuous jobs in foreign countries, particularly in West Germany's industrial companies. Electronic industries like Siemens prefer among all foreign workers, who go to West Germany, the Turkish women workers to employ them in works which require high finger skill and a keen attention. While 3,199 of the 27,501 Turkish workers in West Germany were women in 1963, this number increased to 19,586 in 1965. In 1965, 7,658 of these women workers were only since a half year in West Germany, this indicates that the increase of this women workers' transfer to foreign countries is very recent. As the research, carried out in 1963 (17) shows, the Turkish women workers compared with the majority of the men workers have higher education. It is observed that almost all of them, with respect to social origin, come from the middle class, who live in big cities. Quickness of perception is an outstanding point in the women group, of who the majority is young. This point can partially be explained with the yearning they have for western way of living, which they could not have the chance to practice. For this reason, they are more open to novelties and more prepared to adopt completely a different way of living. Because they have more knowledge than men in foreign languages (many of them know two foreign languages) their wish to know Germany and the world is more conscious. (18)

(17) Nermin Abadan, *Batı Almanya'daki Türk İşçileri ve Sorunları*. Ankara 1964, Başbakanlık Basımevi, Sh. 20.

(18) Nermin Abadan, *op. cit.*, Sh. 226.

Other than the women who work in big cities, either housewives or women who have professions, live a very different way of life compared to those who live in rural areas, As G. Lewis, a British writer who knows Turkey very well, has stated, there is one point which the propagandists who praise that all professions are open to women in Turkey should not forget: other Moslem countries have few, but high qualified women doctors, lawyers and teachers. But, in Turkey there are also a considerable amount of women shop assistants, secretaries, telephone operators, hostesses, trade union employees, laboratory assistants, bank clerks and even armed forces. The real measure of any reform for women initiated in any country is not the fact whether a field which belong to men is also occupied by a small group of extraordinarily talented women, but, whether a young girl or a women can do the work she wants and get paid for that job on equal pay with men. In this respect, Turkish women in recent years have spread to various vocational fields on a wide scale.

Table VII. Distribution of active population of 15 years of age and above with respect to various sectors (19)

Sectors	1955			1960		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Agricultural sector	4,734	5,062	9,800	4,983	4,942	9,925
Enterprisers, administrators, and clerical professions	200	26	226	309	33	342
Craftsmen, manufacturers, and repairmen	865	114	799	864	135	999
Vocations related to services	237	25	262	340	30	370

As it is observed from the above table, the sector in which the women work most intensively is the agricultural field. Following agriculture, it is seen that the women are employed in production sectors such as textile, clothing, shoe, food, alcohol, tobacco industries in the cities. In the vocational fields, women work mostly in financial enterprises such as banks, insurances, in whole sale trading, and in food industry. In the tertiary sector, it has been observed from the 1960 census that 44.480 women work in

(19) Numbers are taken as 1000. Only the sectors in which the women are reasonably represented are included. Source: 1963 Turkey Statistics Yearbook, No. 490, p. 67.

general services field, 10,042 women work in administrative service field, and 19,071 women work privately, i.e. at house work.

If the subject is handled with more details, in the public sector women mainly work in the Ministry of National Education, PTT services, Radio and Television, Airways. In liberal professions, women work as doctors, judges, chemists, architects, engineers, administrators, theater actresses, and diplomats. (At a higher number compared to many of the: Western countries).

Apart from this, Turkish women can be proud of achievements such as having been elected to the Court of Cassation, and having made many important archeological excavations, for the first time in the world. Some of our women artists who have gained great fame are opening exhibitions in European capitals, such as Paris and Rome, as an independent group. Turkish women virtuoses are representing their country, with their violine and pianos, in well known concert halls of the world. The number of women instructors in the Turkish Universities come third after the United States and Canada; this number is for ex. four times more than the number in the Federal Republic of Germany. (20) The Turkish press also possesses an important number of women correspondents and journalists.

During the first fifteen years following the establishment of the Republic, various rights and possibilities recognized to women have been utilized by the urban/girls and women in an unexpected scale and number, in Turkey. In our day, if the public life in urbanized developed regions and cities has reached the level of western standards, the causes of this should be above all attached to the far-sighted cultural policy of Atatürk and his social investments.

It can be observed in the Second Five Year Development Plan that this accomplishment is not sufficient. If the large masses of women which have remained traditional, are rendered active and developed by way of educational mobilization, this would not only bring dynamism to the Turkish economic life together with industrialization, but also will alter the life and the appearance which the Turkish women have been content with. (21)

(20) Nermin ABADAN, *Social Change and Turkish Women*, S.B.F. Yayını, 1963, Sh. 17.

(21) Nermin Abadan, Turkey, in Ed. Raphael Patai, *Women in the Modern World*, The Free Press, Glencoe, 1967.

The most important characteristic of the societies in transition is that they are in a process of continuous and rapid change. Turkey is one of the most dynamic, creative and developing of this type of societies. The Turkish women who have not been able to break their links with the past, will no doubt reach a more civilized level through the socio-economic structural change in Turkey, to be realized in a near future.