

Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva Oral History Content Summary

Track 1 [duration: 1:18:42] [Session one: 7 April 2013]

[00:00] Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva [MT] Born Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 1944. Father chemist, working in military mills, Chirchik, Uzbekistan. Mentions evacuation of people to Tashkent from other parts of Soviet Union, all nationalities in First World War era. Mentions father's position as Rector of Polytechnic Institute, Tashkent, first in Central Asia. Describes patriarchal household, mother serving poorer relatives, while going hungry. Describes father's transfer to Fergana Vallley, Uzbekistan, to work in cement mill, enabling mother freedom at home. Describes mill workers from The Gulag.

[05:18] Describes Soviet practice of employing deported aliens after war, example of Germans from Volga region, Crimean Tartars. Describes German military prisoners working in 'hard' industries, like mining. Story about German neighbour, ex-soldier sent to The Gulag, then Kuvasay not Leningrad [St. Petersburg, Russia] where lived before. Story about Jewish engineer from Moscow, sent to The Gulag, 1930s, then Kuvasay. Describes bad equipment and accidents in mills, workers subjected to Moscow time, radio forbidden during war time, no watches, working to call of sirens.

[10:13] Describes difficult living conditions, MT sleeping in kitchen. Describes few children in war time Kuvasay. Reflects on happy memories, living near mountains and river, Syr Darya, Uzbekistan. Describes families having land with vegetable gardens, end of card/wartime rationing, availability of bread and salt, impossibility of buying meat, so people keeping animals. Describes own family keeping hens and garden of fruits in open garden. Describes community and low crime. Describes public bath in Kuvasay. Describes general happiness after war, only few talking about war, MT overhearing. Describes lack of bazaar [market] people travelling to Fergana by bus.

[15:02] Describes for Kyzyl Kya, on Kyrgyz border, for medicine, butter. Describes going to baths with mother, women gathering to do embroidery, rare occasions of cake baking. Describes hearing and learning Russian at this time, Uzbek spoken at home. Mentions lack of children's books in Uzbek language, mother reading Russian books to MT. Describes attending Russian school in Tashkent, high level of education in capital from colonial history, as capital of Turkestan. Describes community elders working in Tashkent Gymnasia and Maria's College, Tashkent, high standard, MT learning English.

[20:02] Describes father's imprisonment for nationalist activity of closing Russian school to open Uzbek school where previously no access across river, using money belonging to mill. Mentions hand-built bridge. Describes father in Fergana prison, mother staying in area, MT sent to grandmother in Tashkent. Describes amnesty on Joseph Stalin's death, father's return home. Describes father's exclusion from Communist Party, and difficulty finding work, Russian friend helping to secure job as engineer in Angren cement mill, family's move to Angren, Uzbekistan.

[25:47] Describes Angren as very different to Kuvasay. Describes cement mill built by Japanese prisoners of war, mill workers deportees Chechen and Crimean Tatars from Central Asia and The Caucasus. Describes crime due to hard working and living conditions. Describes living in barracks, keeping hens and geese for meat. Mentions 20th Congress of Communist Party, 1956. Discusses father's friendships at the time.

[30:17] Describes school in Tashkent, fellow pupils orphans, single mothers leaving children in orphanage to enable work. Reflects on school in Angren as anarchic. Describes playing on dusty streets, duties at home, relatives visiting from Tashkent. Description of slow, crowded Tashkent-Angren train. Discusses free spirit of people after 20th Congress of Communist Party. Describes reading Russian books. Mentions Leo Tolstoy, Aleksandr Pushkin. Discusses difficulty of studying Uzbek due to lack of books, Russians not speaking Uzbek but living in harmony with local villagers, comments that result of pressure from authority.

[35:39] Describes Angren River, Uzbekistan, workers fishing there on day off. Describes Mayovka, May picnic celebrated in Russian Empire, organized by mill administration. Describes parents' meeting through mother's brother working in mill with father. Describes paternal grandmother as second wife of grandfather, grandfather Uzbek saddle maker from Kazakhstan, coming to Tashkent to open business in area known for saddles. Describes work carried out from house to house with raw materials.

[40:32] Describes maternal grandmother from wealthy, landed family before revolution, her father helping MT's grandfather set up business at time of Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP). Describes grandfather dying young, leaving grandmother with seven children, all receiving higher education with help of grandmother's parents. Describes own parents' home in Tashkent, lack of raw materials and money after war, taking 20 years to build. Describes helping mother with sewing as no children's clothes available, and expensive. Mentions national dishes, describing lack of meat, eating own produce. Describes collecting fruit from garden trees.

[45:00] Describes studying Architecture at Tashkent Polytechnical Institute as enjoyable time, surrounded by interesting people, professor famous architect. Mentions Tashkent Architectural Institute opened by professors of Moscow Architectural Institute evacuated during war. Discusses interest in architecture, love of drafting and painting. Mentions learning drafting from Maxim Novikov, whose work adorned Architectural faculty. Mentions loss of works, perhaps stolen. Mentions being student of Chengiz Ahmara, influencing MT's aesthetic.

[51:05] Describes students from other towns living in dormitories, as distinct from Tashkent students. Describes free atmosphere at university, students not under state control, as before. Describes Lenin Day citizen cleaning duties, required participation in official demonstrations 7 November marking revolution, 1 May. Describes as happy time, events later becoming duty after end of Soviet Union. Describes working for Department of Town Planning after graduation, then as analyst for General Plan, travelling throughout Central Asia.

[55:31] Discusses standing as working woman, as not unusual in Soviet Union, MT marrying young like many students, but others from patriarchal Uzbek families not realizing their potential after marriage, in spite of professional qualification. Reflects on own short unhappy marriage, age 37, one daughter, grandchildren. Describes mother study of medicine coinciding with mobilization of students of Medical Institute to war, grandmother remove her to prevent this, mother's dreams for career for MT. Describes father's death in car crash, MT working hard for family, with enthusiasm and interest.

[1:00:24] Describes successful career as landscape architect. Mentions winning competitions and prizes. Describes Gulistan Park project, Tashkent. Discusses work as analyst, lack of financing for implementation of General Plan, example of lack of space for planned development in Almaty, Kazakhstan, commenting on dangerous building there, given seismic zone and failure to review plans regularly.

[1:03:41] Describes first interest in women's rights, when working at Institute for Restoration of Monuments, on projects in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan. Describes losing work outside Uzbekistan after fall of Soviet Union. Describes conservatism and control over women witnessed while travelling to villages throughout Uzbekistan, return to tradition propagated. Describes meeting Shirin Akinir, visiting from The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, England.

[1:08:55] Describes visit to London to speak on position of women in Uzbekistan at conference on Perestroika in Central Asia, 1991. Story about book commission, resulting in, 'Between the Slogan of Communism and Laws of Islam'. Describes drive to return women to domestic sphere. Describes methodology behind research for book. Mentions Armorer Wason. Describes writing to women's organizations after death of publisher, response from Pakistani woman introducing to Shirkat Gah, Pakistan.

[1:15:39] Describe attendance of first women's conference in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Mentions Cassandra Balchin. Describes attending conference in Pakistan, launch of book, distributed by Women Ink (United Nations). Describes being inspired by Shirkat Gah and wanting to replicate organization in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Mentions meeting Mahnaz Afkhami. [telephone rings]

Track 2 [duration: 02:07] [Session two: 8 April 2013]

[00:00] Describes impressions of Shirkat Gah, taking books and leaflets to Uzbekistan for distribution. Describes response of friends and difficulty to transmit content in repressive conditions.

Track 3 [duration: 19:11] [Session two: 8 April 2013]

[00:00] Describes control of public organizations by government in Soviet era and people's fear of MT's initiative to found organization with three friends. Describes seeking legal advice, expense of going ahead. Describes obstacles. Mentions charter of *Obzhestvennye Organizatii*, Society of Citizen. Describes one women's

organization registered at time, Women's Business Association, organized on basis of Society of Businessmen.

[05:07] Describes lawyer from Institute of Law re-writing charter, discussions as to how to describe activities when each prohibited, final presentation as information resource centre, collecting and distributing information on women. Describes articles collected from newspapers on position of women, promoting return to home and raising children. Describes translating articles into Russian language. Describes conflict between Russian speaking intelligentsia and Uzbek speaking intelligentsia. Discusses adoption of Russian culture and traditions, sadness at distance from Uzbek people. Describes half population of Tashkent, Uzbekistan, as Russians working in technical capacity, scientific organizations, Uzbek intelligentsia falling behind in education. Describes government viewing Uzbek intelligentsia as opposition seeking power, repressing their activities. Describes escalation into movement for independence. Describes target of monuments to Russian writers, Tashkent, questioning reverence of Nikolai Gogol, Aleksandr Pushkin, Maxim Gorky, naming them 'Lost Way Monuments'. Discusses anti-Russian campaigns and own stance in support of Russian colleagues and identification with them. Opening of Women's Resource Centre, 1995.

[15:15] Describes findings in Uzbek villages. Mentions local criticism of government renting of monuments to be used for religious schools. Describes aggressive propaganda against working women. [pause]

Track 4 [duration: 01:28] [Session two: 8 April 2013]

[00:00] Describes Imam visiting workplace and asserting need for prayer room, on restoration project in Tajikistan, secular friends becoming active in mosque. [pause]

Track 5 [duration: 1:18:45] [Session two: 8 April 2013]

[00:00] Describes uncomfortable environment for women as secular colleagues became believers, installing prayer room at work. Describes educated women, poets, coming under attack. Describes lack of acknowledgement of women. Mentions system of nomenklatura, Komosol Party members given positions irrespective of qualification. Remarks on female Head of Republic and other ministers remaining silent. Describes publishing information bulletins, covering speeches with commentary.

[05:00] Comments on government understanding dangers of Islamic revival in Uzbekistan, as war began in Tajikistan, enabling registration of organization. Describes start of activities, with funding from Oxfam Novib. Describes male involvement in collective work. Describes reliance on funding outside of country as seen as rival organization to Women's Committee of Uzbekistan, remarking that members of committee envious of brave, independent action of Women's Resource Centre.

[10:00] Describes organizational focus on women's rights and human rights, dissemination of information, organizing seminars. Describes support from United

Nations Development Programme (UNDP), facilitating dialogue between governmental and non-governmental women, disparity of views between them. Describes legislative changes and campaign to change proposals regarding Family Law on polygamy and property rights. Describes detail of point on polygamy. Describes polygamy in Soviet time as hidden, becoming norm after independence. Describes campaign on reproductive rights to counter media promotion of large families.

[15:50] Describes campaign for right of girls to education, to counter increase in early marriage. Describes proposals for Family Law coming into effect in spite of campaigns. Describes government push to legalize lower pay for female workers. Describes difficulty in attracting women to organization as non-governmental, but good support from secondary school teachers, involving pupils and parents in seminars in rural areas around Tashkent.

[20:22] Describes elimination of books published in Soviet era, from libraries. Describes preface featuring Communist Party rhetoric. Mentions Pushkin and Tolstoy. Describes retrieving discarded books from waste disposal areas on street. Gives example of Daniel Defoe's 'Robinson Crusoe' with preface stating that Karl Marx spoke of Robinson as businessman exploiting Friday. Discusses indoctrination of society, with new school books, reform of Education, Health Care. Describes discussion of issues in bulletin limited to presentation of information.

[24:00] Describes meeting Mahnaz Afkhami, 1995, becoming partner of Sisterhood Is Global Institute (SIGI), translating 'Claiming Our Rights' manual, useful with quotations from verses of Koran supporting women's rights. Describes second manual 'Safe and Secure' against domestic violence. Describes network of organizations in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, remarking that at time, possible to travel to Ashgabat without visa. Describes good relations among activists in Central Asia. Remarks that few women's rights organizations in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, only German donors. Describes difficulty of working with volunteers in poverty situation. Acknowledges help of teachers as volunteers of organization. Remarks that university professors not cooperative, viewing organization with caution. Discusses impact of information bulletins in rural areas.

[30:23] Describes translating manuals into Uzbek and Russian languages, bulletins in Russian only. Remarks that Uzbek language becoming 'problem'. Describes ten-year working of organization before government closure of all non-governmental organizations (NGOs) supported by United States of America, European Union, after Georgia's Rose Revolution. Mentions Soros Foundation's support of NGOs and governmental organizations. Story about receiving funds from Soros Foundation at same time Ministry of Justice received threefold amount. Mentions Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Foundation (KAS). Describes success of International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) for journalist society. Mentions Winrock International.

[35:39] Describes time working with Women's Resource Centre as proudest achievement, for having the opportunity to discuss issues, witnessing life in her country, meeting women from different strata of society, broadening perspective.

Remarks on snobbery of architects. Describes closure of organization by government, criminal records filed for publication of materials, organization's possession of risograph raising suspicion.

[40:31] Describes donating library to Historical Institute of Academy of Science, Tashkent. Describes collaborating with journalists, providing material collated by Women's Resource Centre. Mentions Duestche Welle (DW), Voice of America (VOA). Describes continuation of activity personally, compiling photographs of women to illustrate changing image in 20th century, UN funding exhibition in Tashkent. Describes collaboration on documentaries, 'Time and Destiny', 'Women Business', 'New Woman' and book, 'Twentieth Century in the Eyes of Women of Uzbekistan', discussing how modernity may be preserved in Uzbekistan, from three diverse perspectives. Discusses detail of interviews conducted for book, covering women's experiences of repression, poverty, prejudice, influence of culture, music, films.

[48:50] Describes current involvement with Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) and collaboration with Kazakhstan group, working with Gulnara Karakulova. Discusses creativity of WLP manuals, useful for leaders in Uzbekistan. Mentions Mary Robinson. Remarks that manuals important for future, throughout Central Asia. Discusses idea of compromise in context of Soviet heritage. Discusses continued relevance of 'Leading to Choices' manual, importance of people's engagement to bring about bright future.

[54:06] Describes challenge of solidarity in former Soviet Union. Describes positive experience of collaboration with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, shared issues with shared heritage. Mentions book about gender order in Tajikistan. Discusses lack of international language among intelligentsia in Central Asia, making engagement with global community difficult. Describes failure of government efforts to promote English language. Discusses lack of commitment of teachers compared to MT's childhood, and legacy of Soviet suspicion against rest of the world, seen as 'enemies'.

[1:02:02] Story behind MT's title, Woman of the Year, 2003, given by UN Uzbek group. Mentions study on tangible heritage for The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Discusses problems in Uzbekistan today, rise in population, lack of water, migration for labour, unemployment pushing workers to Kazakhstan, Russia. Describes long line of men in black clothing at borders. Describes women taking housekeeping jobs in Turkey. Remarks on high number of Central Asian prostitutes in Turkey. Story about sister-in-law working in Turkey to raise money for sons' weddings.

[1:10:15] Discusses domestic violence in Uzbekistan. Describes *mahalas* becoming semi-governmental structures, domestic violence continuing to be 'hidden crime'. Mentions Uzbek newspaper, 'Family and Society'. Remarks on own stance lacking weight without organization. Discusses challenges of influencing younger generation. Mentions 'Leading to Choices' manual. Mentions The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) report on employment of women. Describes being considered on government blacklist.

[1:16:20] Describes interest in *suzani*. Describes deteriorating health, and devoting time to grandchildren and daughter.