



Women and Work in Russia 1880-1930

A study in Continuity Through Change

Jane McDermid
and Anna Hillyar



Women and Work in Russia
1880–1930

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'The best relief from sad thoughts is work' thought Vera Pavlovna, and she was quite right.

N.G. Chernyshevsky, *What is to be done?*, 1863

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Introduction

Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1953) is generally accepted, at least in the West, as a, if not the, central figure in the movement for the liberation of women in Russia and in the development of Marxist theory on sexual relations. In particular, Kollontai insisted that work and not emotion should be the centre of women's lives, and further that it was productive work, by which she meant paid employment outside the home, which would make women independent and personally fulfilled. She wrote that 'woman's position, her rights, her recognition as an individual, her access to the storehouse of learning always follow from her role in the economy and in production'.¹

In practice, before the revolution of 1917, although marriage was the destiny of the majority of Russian women, the stress was on the productive as well as reproductive value which they could contribute to the family economy. That economy changed dramatically with the abolition of serfdom in 1861, which made the peasant woman's ability to contribute to the household economy, whether by farming or through crafts, even more crucial for its survival, while it forced many upper-class women for the first time to support themselves. Thus the location of women's work after 1861 differed according to class, with the majority of peasant women tied to the home, and considerable numbers of gentry women pushed out of it. With the push for industrialisation from the 1880s, but especially from the 1890s, alongside growing impoverishment of the peasantry, more and more women were drawn to the towns in search of work. Often the type of employment which they found differed little from their village experience of work, especially domestic service, textiles, and cultivating kitchen gardens. However, as urbanisation developed and industry became more complex, women found a widening choice of jobs. Indeed, as the political opposition to the absolutist system of rule erupted into revolution in 1905, employers turned increasingly to women as replacements for

1. A.M. Kollontai, *Trud zhenshchin v evoliutsii khoziaistva* (Moscow, 1923), p. 45.

male workers, who were considered less reliable, not just politically but also because of their indiscipline, reflected most commonly in drunkenness.

Not surprisingly, the image of the Russian working woman in the nineteenth century is not a positive one in the eyes of Western feminists: she is essentially a beast of burden, passive in the face of often brutal patriarchy, epitomised two decades before the abolition of serfdom in the words of a Russian exile, Ivan Golovine:

The Emperor abuses his courtiers, and they revenge themselves on their subordinates, who, not finding words sufficiently energetic, raise their hands against those who, in their turn, finding the hand too light, arm themselves with a stick, which further on is replaced with a whip. The peasant is beaten by everybody: by his master, when he condescends so far to demean himself; by the steward and *starosta* [headman], by the first passer-by, if he be not a peasant. The poor fellow on his part has no means to indemnify himself, except his wife and his horse; and accordingly, most women in Russia are beaten, and it excites one's pity to see how the horses are used.²

Such violence against women persisted despite the reforms of the next tsar, Alexander II, in the 1860s aimed at modernising the economy, which was essentially still based on feudalism. Indeed, as we shall see, women who entered factory employment faced sexual as well as physical abuse, not only from foremen but from male co-workers. Hence the image of passive drudges also persisted.

Upper-class women workers, however, tend to be seen in a different light, because of their access to a far superior education than the vast majority of lower-class women, and to openings in the professions, particularly health and education, by the late nineteenth century. Although men dominated the professions in terms of salaries and status, these gentry working women might be seen as paving the way for Kollontai's 'new woman'. Female professionals and social reformers did not see themselves as either individuals pursuing careers for self-fulfilment or champions of women's rights. Rather, they dedicated themselves to service to the people, judging it immoral that a few should prosper in the midst of such exploitation and suffering. Hence self-sacrifice, the other side of passivity, was added to the ideal of the Russian woman worker.

This image of the docile, submissive woman devoted to the interests of family and society above her own both exaggerates and

2. I. Golovine, *Russia under the Autocrat, Nicholas the First* (London, 1846), vol. 1, pp. 88-9.

oversimplifies the nature of women's work. It also assumes an unbroken continuity in their position. The focus here is social, within a context of economic and political changes. Our method is not to use documents, including statistics, to build up a general picture of working women. Valuable though such a representation might be, we feel that it often obscures as much as it reveals. What we have tried to do, through a mixture of primary and secondary sources, is to uncover women's lives by examining some individuals within the context of economic and political developments. In a situation of widespread female illiteracy, the existence of a woman worker's memoir or recorded reminiscences shows that she was exceptional. However, by placing her within the wider context of information about women workers, we can not only establish how typical her story was, but also throw light on the lives of the 'silent' majority.

Our aim, then, is to construct a cogent picture of the variety of female work in Russia, and of the working women themselves, over an extended period of political as well as economic upheaval. The revolution of 1917 was not a watershed in terms of the work women did. Profound changes came with Stalin's 'revolution from above', dating from the adoption of the first five-year plan for industry in 1928 and the collectivisation of agriculture set in motion at the end of 1929. The period covered here begins with the assassination in 1881 of the tsar, Alexander II, in which two female terrorists took part, and ends with the liquidation in 1930 of the Zhenotdel, the Communist party's women's organisation, on the grounds that it was no longer needed to achieve sexual equality. Throughout this half century, Russia remained a patriarchal society dominated by a peasant economy. Women's scope for public action and employment was indeed limited, yet it included farm labour, crafts, the service sector, some professions, philanthropy and politics.

In the first chapter we shall consider the general picture of the condition of the working woman in Russia, as conveyed in both Western and Russian literature. Few peasants, male or female, and few women workers (at least until after the 1917 revolution) left written records about their lives, so that most of the sources historians use have been produced by those who were unrepresentative, in the sense that they left written records at all, or 'outsiders', in the sense of being socially superior observers of rural and working-class life. There is a remarkable measure of agreement about their situation in the secondary sources and in the observation of upper-class contemporaries, resulting in admiration for the stoicism of Russian women mixed with frustration at their apparently willing

acceptance of a subordinate role. We believe that such an interpretation is one-dimensional. Women had a central role in pre-industrial society and a strong sense of identity. As economic change and increased demographic mobility diluted patriarchy, peasant women manoeuvred to strengthen their position even while they struggled to retain their traditional way of life. Land hunger and large families forced millions of men to move to the cities in search of work, leaving wives and families behind to preserve what they could of village culture and economy. Fewer and usually single women also migrated in search of work. By the beginning of the twentieth century, and especially with wars in 1904 and 1914, their numbers greatly increased. Thus women's experiences of industrialisation and urbanisation differed in significant ways from men's. The process of economic modernisation in this period did not entail a complete break with the village. Hence, before going on to a detailed examination of what work women did, we shall consider the impact on gender roles of the continuation of the patriarchal tradition.

The second chapter will elaborate in detail the impact on women of the tsarist programme of economic modernisation, with its stress on heavy industry and railways, seen as bastions of male workers, and the continuing importance of the traditional textile industry, which became a key employer of women. The developing economy also led to growth in the professions. Given the autocratic nature of the political system, most posts were under state control. The state's determination to keep down costs opened up some of the professions, notably teaching and medicine, to single gentry women. By the later nineteenth century, deterioration in the economic situation of the landed gentry meant that increasing numbers of these women had to find employment to support themselves which would also maintain their social status. They were, however, still expected to work for less than their male counterparts.

Such work brought gentry women into close contact with the lives of their social inferiors. The experience at first hand of the poverty and ignorance in which the latter, in both village and city, were forced to live pushed a significant minority of upper-class women into political activity. Most worked for reform within the system, but a significant minority turned against it. Some wealthy women developed careers in philanthropy and as lobbyists for higher education for women, while a smaller number became full-time revolutionaries. Thus the third chapter will consider the impact of political developments on working women before the First World

War, including the professional and revolutionary work performed by women among both the peasantry and the factory workers from the 1880s, and the participation of women in the 1905 revolution. Yet revolution and working-class organisation were still considered to be male affairs, and after 1905 employers increasingly turned to women, whom they assumed to be ignorant of and uninterested in politics. This process of replacing male with female labour was evident not only in textiles, which women came to dominate, but in a wide variety of industries, as reported in 1909 by a factory inspector in the Moscow province. He identified employers adopting this strategy as including

sugar, tobacco, watchmaking, rope-making, glass, cement and brick factories; the sphere to which it is spreading is continually widening, affecting branches of industry where formerly male labour was exclusively employed. The reasons for such a phenomenon have already been explained in previous reports: women are a more peaceful and moderate element in factories, and above all, they are a significantly cheaper labour force than men.³

Yet it was women who took the first steps in the revolution which resulted in the collapse of the tsarist system in 1917. The First World War had resulted in both agriculture and industry becoming heavily dependent on working women. Feminists hoped that the contribution women made to the war effort would bring sexual equality, while revolutionaries were forced to pay more attention to organising women workers. Still the image is of the majority of women, both rural and urban, as politically unconscious, capable of acting only in a spontaneous fashion. The fourth chapter will examine the involvement of women in the First World War and the 1917 revolution, and challenge this stereotype of women workers as an elemental force.

The final chapter will consider the position of working women under the Communist regime which was developing in the 1920s. Tsarism had been overthrown, and yet the patriarchal and peasant nature of the old order continued to shape the new. The Communist party had committed itself to sexual equality, believing that the way to achieve it was by drawing women into the workforce. This widened the scope of female employment without challenging the traditional gender roles. Thus women retained the double burden of domestic responsibilities, which were regarded as their natural

3. A.G. Rashin, *Formirovanie rabocheho klassa Rossii: istoriko-ekonomicheskie ocherki* (Moscow, 1958), p. 226.

sphere, and paid employment. As under tsarism, women in the 1920s were considered more politically and culturally backward than men. Any equality between the sexes would have come from the actions of the state. Hence the general view among historians that in practice little had changed in the situation of women since the revolution, and that the vast majority of women were not actors on the historical stage, but the mute victims of a male-dominated state. Yet, as we shall see, working-class women clearly felt that there had been some improvements in their lives since the revolution, which suggests that what is called for is a more nuanced interpretation.

We cannot claim to present a fully comprehensive picture of Russian women at work in this period. Thus, for example, we discuss the numbers of women in the printing industry but not in translating, editing, publishing or journalism.⁴ Indeed, as female literacy grew, popular newspapers and magazines increasingly hired women as writers (of fiction and poetry as well as news stories).⁵ We write at length of peasant women's crafts, but only hint at the role of women in the applied arts.⁶ We spend considerable time on women as seamstresses and in the textile industry generally, but not on those who designed dress.⁷ We describe the lack of time the majority of working women had for leisure, but ignore those women who worked in, for example, the theatre, and who were patrons of the arts.⁸

We concentrate on women in employment but only glance at women as employers.⁹ The latter nevertheless are interesting because they reveal how varied was the female contribution to the economy of late tsarist and early Communist Russia. Catriona Kelly has pointed to the tendency within women's history to focus on

4. See V.R. Leikina-Svirskaja, *Intelligentsiia v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka* (Moscow, 1971), ch. 6 for the late nineteenth century. See also Mark D. Steinberg, *Moral Communities: The Culture of Class Relations in the Russian Printing Industry 1867–1907* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992) for examples of individual women in the industry.

5. See for example *Zhenskii Kalendar'* (Petersburg, 1906), pp. 302–26.

6. See Alison Hilton, 'Domestic Crafts and Creative Freedom: Russian Women's Art', ch. 14 in Helena Goscilo and Beth Holmgren (eds), *Russia, Women and Culture* (Bloomington, Ind., 1996).

7. See John E. Bowl, 'Constructivism and Early Soviet Fashion Design', pp. 203–19 in Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez and Richard Stites (eds), *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington, Ind., 1985).

8. See Catherine A. Schuler, *Women in Russian Theatre: The Actress in the Silver Age* (London, 1996).

9. See Jo Ann Ruckman, *The Moscow Business Elite: A Social and Cultural Portrait of Two Generations, 1840–1905* (De Kalb, Ill., 1984), pp. 85–6, 98, 105–6, 157–61 for a few examples of women in the roles not only of wives and mothers of businessmen, but also as businesswomen and patrons of the arts.

'the victims of capitalism (prostitutes, factory workers)' and ignore its beneficiaries, including those women who owned factories, who were merchants or traders. She also notes that the depiction of merchant women in the nineteenth century was similar to that of the female peasantry and working class: submissive to patriarchal authority, passive, apolitical, socially conservative and uncultured. The main difference seems to have been that merchant women had the wealth to enjoy and indulge themselves. Their indolence reflected not simply the grasping success of their men, but also the latter's exploitation of the customers. What Kelly further reveals is that however wealthy and cultured merchant families might become, they remained outsiders, patronised both by the aristocracy and the tsarist bureaucracy, and by the liberal and revolutionary intelligentsia. Moreover, she has calculated that throughout the last seventy years of the tsarist regime, there were hundreds of female merchants, while there was 'a "hidden" class of wives and daughters who helped the family business along'.¹⁰

However, these women were very much a minority even within their own class. Our focus is on employment which linked and highlighted differences not only between women and men, but also between women, such as domestic service, education and medicine. The general conditions of women's work, their attitudes towards their work and the obstacles they encountered are identified through detailed case studies. The picture which emerges is one which shows not only the burden of work weighing on women who had no choice but to sell their labour or themselves, no role outside the family; but also the strength, courage and initiative of Russian women at work. It is harder to reveal the satisfaction which women derived from their jobs and from their place in the household economy, but there are glimpses that even unremitting toil has its rewards. This helps explain why so many clung so fiercely to a traditional way of life which observers then and historians now perhaps dismiss too easily as one of patriarchal oppression. At the same time, women were not completely resistant to change. Rather, they did not simply accept what their social superiors or the state held as progress, but questioned what it held for them and their families. Certainly, few Russian women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries embraced the Western individualistic ethic and put their personal interests above all else, a choice which was open only to the upper

10. Catriona Kelly, 'Teacups and Coffins: The Culture of Russian Merchant Women, 1850-1917', ch. 4 in *Women in Russia and the Ukraine*, edited by Rosalind Marsh (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 56-62 especially.

classes. However, peasant and working-class women were by no means simply the 'grey mass' which generalisations about their subordinate position imply. We do not underestimate the difficulties or the inequalities which they faced, but neither do we underestimate the women at work in Russia.

CHAPTER ONE

To Labour, to Bear and to Endure: The Lot of the Russian Woman Worker?

The Russian girl is not a woman in the European sense, not an individual: she is merely a would-be bride.¹

This judgement, made by the literary critic Vissarion Belinsky in the early 1840s, was repeated in the late 1850s by another critic, Nikolai Dobroliubov, who commented that to give a woman a serious education would have meant recognising her right of personality, which would have gone against all the traditions upon which Russia, that 'realm of darkness', was based.² The enduring impression of Russian womanhood is one of abject passivity and selflessness within a patriarchal peasant system which survived urbanisation, industrialisation, war and revolution. It suggests not only continuity in female subordination between the tsarist autocracy and communist dictatorship, but a common female condition, despite vast social, cultural and economic differences between Russian women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their shared destiny was marriage, which entailed exchanging one male authority figure, the father, for another, the husband. Yet the majority of Russian women were also expected to contribute to the household economy through working both inside and outside the home, in the fields, in workshops, in other people's houses, and in factories. They had done so before the push for industrialisation in the late nineteenth century, indeed even before serfdom was abolished in 1861.

Most women continued to work after marriage. Indeed, what shocked British travellers to Russia in this period was the shared workload between female and male peasants, and that the latter looked for strength rather than beauty in a wife. Western visitors

1. V.G. Belinsky, *Selected Philosophical Works* (Moscow, 1956), p. 261.

2. N.A. Dobroliubov, *Selected Philosophical Essays* (Moscow, 1965), pp. 282, 305.

assumed that economic modernisation would improve the lot of Russian women, and bring them more into line with what was regarded as the superior situation of women in Britain. The isolation of the village was being eroded by improvements in transport and communications. There was also the development of a rural intelligentsia and the growth of a hereditary urban working class. Yet peasant women seemed reluctant to embrace 'progress', and village traditions proved remarkably resilient. Indeed, to foreign visitors the Russian town did not seem radically different, socially or culturally, from the countryside.³

Nineteenth-century Russia was an overwhelmingly peasant country. Until 1861 the political, social and economic structure had been based on serfdom, which had tied the peasants to the land. Such a feudal system weakened Russia's status as a great power in the context of the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of its rivals. For Russia to keep up with the Western powers, serfdom had to be abolished. The economic changes which followed the abolition of serfdom in 1861 included the impoverishment of many peasant families left with insufficient land. This placed even more importance on the contribution women could make to the household economy. At the other end of the social scale, the loss of their serfs so impoverished many gentry families that by the end of the 1860s contemporaries observed that 'a female proletariat' had arrived on the scene: not the women from the peasantry who, at least until the end of the century, were needed even more on the farm, but the women from the gentry which had 'lost' its serfs, the spinster aunts and sisters, the divorcees and widows, no longer living in and supported by the extended patriarchal family, but forced to fend for themselves.⁴ The situation had indeed changed since Dobroliubov's time. Publications from the 1860s to the end of the century identified education as a solution to the problems facing upper-class women. As a foreign observer noted:

Every year the necessity of providing some kind of higher education for women became more and more pressing, as an ever-increasing number of women belonging to the gentry were driven by the effects

3. See P. Herlihy, 'Visitors' Perceptions of Urbanization: Travel Literature in Tsarist Russia', in D. Fraser, A. Sutcliffe (eds), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London, 1983), pp. 125-37; H. Norman, *All the Russias* (London, 1902), pp. 381, 453.

4. See for example E. Karnovich, *O razvitiu zhenskogo truda v Peterburge* (St. Petersburg, 1865), pp. 64-7; S.S. Shashkov, *Istoricheskie sud'by zhenshchiny* (St. Petersburg, 1871), pp. 312-13; V.V. Stasov, *Nadezhda Vasilevna Stasova: vospominaniia i ocherki* (St. Petersburg, 1899), p. 215.

of Emancipation [of the serfs] to seek education as providing a means of self-support.⁵

Hence work was a large part of the lives of the majority of Russian women, and the type of work was determined not simply by what was expected of their sex, but by the social, cultural and demographic impact of changes in the economy. Until the late nineteenth century, the urban population had expanded and contracted through the seasonal migration of mainly male peasants. The demands of industrialisation from the 1890s, however, called for a stable labour force and at least a minority of skilled workers, again predominantly male. Revolutionaries, who at least until the 1905 revolution had to operate illegally, concentrated their efforts on the latter. Through propaganda circles and a desire for self-improvement, a corps of politically conscious workers grew. It was a small and overwhelmingly male minority. Peasant women who went to work in the towns were more restricted than their male counterparts in terms both of jobs open to them, and opportunities for training and education. Yet the very move to the town indicated that the female migrant was exceptional among peasant women. The fact that she was more likely than men to loosen or cut her ties to the village also indicated that she was more urbanised than many of the unskilled male migrants. Hence, before going on to a detailed examination of what work women did, this chapter will consider the impact on gender roles of a process of economic modernisation which did not entail a complete break with the village.

Women, work and family

The recorded reminiscences of a 56-year-old female factory worker, A.D. Batova, published in 1934 were intended to encapsulate the process of industrialisation and political upheaval in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as experienced by many lower-class women, culminating in the improvements brought about by Stalin's transformation of the economy.⁶ Batova had worked in a particular textile factory in Moscow for nearly 40 years. Born into a poor peasant family of 12 children, all of whom were illiterate, Batova was a farm labourer from the age of 10; in the winter, she

5. T. Darlington, *Education in Russia. Special Reports on Education Subjects*, vol. 23 (London, 1909), p. 215.

6. I. Kor (ed.), *Kak my zhili pri tsare i kak zhivem teper'* (Moscow, 1934), p. 11.

made lace and knitted, payment for which was in kind (soap). At the age of 14, she went to a textile factory in a nearby village. By law, she should have been 16 to be hired, but her father had bribed the local priest with eggs and meat to change her birthdate. Within a few days, and without training, Batova was put to work at a conveyor belt, earning seven roubles a month. She lived outside the factory, sharing accommodation, in effect a space on the floor, with between 25 and 30 other workers, men and women.

The hours were long: Batova left for work at 3.30 a.m., and returned at 10 p.m. She went to the public baths, which were overcrowded, once a week; she had to wash her clothes outside, even in winter, because there was no running hot water and no laundries. Food was cooked by the landlady, and the staple diet was bread and kvass (a sour, fermented drink); tea was a rarity. When meat was available, each worker would buy a piece, wrapping it in a dirty cloth, which would be marked to distinguish it from the other portions. All would be placed in the same big pot, and once cooked the landlady would fish out the bag of meat from what was essentially cabbage soup and try to identify the owner: if the mark had worn off, there would be arguments. Like the other workers, Batova paid extra for the cooking of the meal: in her 'spare' time, she did some sewing or embroidery for the landlady. All had to eat out of the same pot as none of the workers possessed plates; indeed, all had to sleep with their spoon under the pillow, for fear of thieves, and when they went home they would give their spoon to the landlady for safekeeping.

When she was 17, Batova married a cabinet maker from Moscow. Instead of staying in the village as so many peasant wives did, Batova moved to Moscow, in the hope that life would be easier. At first, their accommodation was the space under her husband's worktable in his workshop, and it was only before the birth of her first child that they managed to rent a windowless room at four roubles a month.⁷ By then, Batova was earning 15 roubles a month. She continued to work throughout her 13 pregnancies, leaving the factory only hours before each birth, giving birth at home with an old woman acting as midwife. Eight of her children survived into adulthood. Although a very religious person (and by implication

7. Barbara Engel implies that they lived separately at first, taking 'their pleasure' on the shavings under the husband's workbench, and that it was only Batova's pregnancy which forced his employer to assign them a room. See B.A. Engel, *Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work and Family in Russia, 1861-1914* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 214.

conservative), Batova had nevertheless been affected by the political developments of the period, and participated in the 1905 revolution, helping to build barricades. Indeed, she had lost a child who was born prematurely after Batova tried to defend a nephew from cossacks' whips. What, if any, action she took in 1917 is unrecorded, as is her experience of life in the 1920s, though the implication is that she continued in employment. Her religious faith survived the 1917 revolution, and was only shaken when she went to a meeting of the 'godless' campaign in 1920. In the early 1930s, Batova was still working at the same machinery in the Moscow factory as when she had first arrived, but she recognised that there had been changes. In her opinion, conditions were much better: she worked seven hours a day instead of 15; foremen had to treat the women with respect; there was a factory canteen, and the pay was good (140 roubles a month). Indeed, Batova had been given an added responsibility: she had been made a 'visitor' of those absent workers claiming illness. She reported that she had found one woman at a drinking session, who was then sent to court. In Stalin's Russia, Batova was helping to enforce work discipline, but she might also be seen in the traditional female role of moral guardian. It is tempting to portray women like Batova as downtrodden, ignorant and politically unconscious, potentially ideal subjects for a dictator such as Stalin. Indeed, the editor of the collection in which her memoir appeared argued that such women had only recently become politically aware.

Studies which consider lower-class women in the period from 1880 to 1930 tend to look at them *en masse*, with only occasional references to individuals. Even then, such individuals are generally politically active, so that they stand out from the crowd. Examples include the revolutionary workers Vera Karelina and Anna Boldyreva, who participated in the labour movement for around twenty years, setting up circles for women workers in the late 1880s, and continuing their political work into the 1905 revolution. Karelina organised women in Father Gapon's assembly of Russian Factory and Mill Workers. Both women were elected to the Petersburg soviet, though Karelina had to withdraw through ill health. Boldyreva was still active in 1917. Their stories are valuable for showing that the female working class was not an amorphous mass, not simply powerless and passive victims of a profoundly patriarchal system. A focus only on the lives of politically active women such as Karelina and Boldyreva, however, tends to highlight their uniqueness.

Indeed, it could be argued that Batova's experience was more typical. Most lower-class women, whether urban or rural, were not

politically conscious, and tended to accept their situation. That acceptance, however, entailed a great deal of action, of movement, and of courage, and was punctuated by episodes of sometimes violent protest, as the bare narrative of Batova's life reveals. Above all, it meant a lifetime of hard, ceaseless toil, interrupted only briefly (if frequently) by pregnancy. It was a life which was seen as a partnership with her husband, however unequal in terms of his patriarchal authority, of women's low and unequal pay, of the demeaning treatment in the factory to which women were subjected simply because of their gender and assumed inferiority to men. While she did not discuss her views of marriage, her reminiscences show that in practice it was based on the commitment she shared with her husband to work for the economic survival of their family. In Batova's memoir, it is a partnership portrayed in terms of what the wife contributed to the family, rather than the husband, who remains silent. Indeed the wife, however self-sacrificing and seemingly fatalistic in adversity, is central in her account.

Still, if Batova is 'more' representative of women workers' experiences, she too is relatively unusual in the fact that she left the village on marriage to move with her husband to his work in Moscow. The general pattern was for migrant male workers to marry early and leave their wives in the village, often for years, as described by the metal worker Kanatchikov:

Among the pattern-makers there was one group whose appearance set them off from the rest – the pattern-maker peasants, whose ties with the village were still strong. They wore high boots, traditional cotton-print blouses girdled with a sash, had their hair cut 'under a pot', and wore beards that were rarely touched by a barber's hand. Every pay day without fail they would send part of their money back to the village. They lived in crowded, dirty conditions and behaved stingily, denying themselves everything in order to accumulate more money for the village. They were always looking for a free drink. On holidays they attended mass and visited their countrymen, and their conversations were mostly about grain, land, the harvest, and livestock. When they weren't able to return to their village on visits, the 'missus', that is, their wives, would come to the town to visit them; these were fat, big-bosomed women in woolen skirts, in bright red calico sarafans, with whom the men would go to the taverns on holidays to be entertained and listen to the music 'machine'.⁸

8. *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semen Ivanovich Kanatchikov*, translated and edited by Reginald E. Zelnick (Stanford, Calif., 1986), p. 21.