



# Alexander Mikhailovna Kollontai

Made by : Dr.Biswaranjan Mohanty

SGTB KHALSA COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

University of Delhi

# Intro...

1. Alexander Mikhailovana Kollontai was born on 19 March 1872 and died on - 9 March 1952
2. She was a Russian Communist revolutionary
3. She was a first as a member of the Mensheviks
4. From 1915 onwards she was also a member of Bolshevik
5. In 1923, Kollontai was appointed Soviet Ambassador to Norway
6. She was one of the first women to hold such post

# Contd...

- ▶ She served as a cavalry officer in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78
- ▶ She was an advisor to the Russian administration in Bulgaria after the war until 1879
- ▶ she entertained liberal political views
- ▶ She favoured a constitutional monarchy like that of Great Britain
- ▶ In the 1880s, she had written a study of the Bulgarian war of independence which was confiscated by the Tsarist censors, presumably for showing insufficient Russian nationalist zeal

# Contd....

- ▶ Kollontai became interested in Marxist ideas
- ▶ She studied the history of working movements in Zürich
- ▶ She became a member of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1899
- ▶ She went into exile, to Germany, in 1908 after publishing "Finland and Socialism", which called on the Finnish people to rise up against oppression within the Russian Empire

# Contd....

- ▶ She visited England, France, and Germany, and became acquainted with Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht
- ▶ With the onset of World War I in 1914 Kollontai left Germany due to the German social democrats' support of the war
- ▶ Kollontai was strongly opposed to the war and very outspoken against it



# Proletarian Women and Disagreement with Lenin

- ▶ After the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917, Kollontai's political career began
- ▶ The Bolsheviks came to power with the idea of liberation of women and transformation of the family
- ▶ They were able to equalize women's legal status with men's by reforming certain laws such as the
- ▶ Code on Marriage,
- ▶ the Family, and
- ▶ Guardianship

# Contd...

- ▶ It ratified in October 1918
- ▶ It allows both spouses to retain the right to their own property and earnings, grant children born outside wedlock the same rights as those born within, and made divorce available upon request

# Contd....

- ▶ Bolsheviks launched a movement for women's self-activity; the Zhenotdel, also known as women's section of the Communist Party (1919-1930)
- ▶ Under the leadership of Alexandra Kollontai, and with the support of women spread the news of the revolution enforced its laws set up political education and literacy classes for working-class and peasant women and fought prostitution
- ▶ The provisional government did not last, and in October the Bolshevik party led another revolution
- ▶

# Contd....

1. While men were forcibly conscripted for service in the civil war following the October Revolution, women were not required to participate
2. Nevertheless, they did, in large numbers, suggesting the Bolsheviks had gained some women's support
3. During this time Bolshevik feminism really began to take form
4. Lenin spoke often of the importance of relieving women from housework so they could participate more fully in society, and an effort to pay workers for household chores began

# Contd....

- ▶ She talked about the principle "Equal pay for equal work" which was officially legislated
- ▶ Some changes to the traditional emphasis on family were implemented, including making divorce easily attainable and granting full rights to illegitimate children
- ▶ Peasant women were largely uninvolved in both the "bourgeois" feminist movement, and the Bolshevik revolution
- ▶ Patriarchal gender roles were way of life in villages, and the village was the only life peasant women knew

# Contd....

- ▶ Kollontai commented that historians have theorized that peasants saw revolution as a dangerous threat to their way of life, and that peasant women, already impoverished, feared the disruptions brought by war
- ▶ Only a small minority of peasant women joined the Bolshevik cause
- ▶ Alexandra Kollontai became People's Commissar for Social Welfare
- ▶ She was the most prominent woman in the Soviet administration
- ▶ She was also best known for founding the Zhenotdel or "Women's Department" in 1919

# Contd....

- ▶ His organization worked to improve the conditions of women's lives in the Soviet Union, fighting illiteracy and educating women about the new marriage, education, and working laws put in place by the Revolution
- ▶ As a foremost champion of women's equality like the other Marxists of her time, she opposed the ideology of liberal feminism, which she saw as bourgeois, though later feminists have claimed her legacy
- ▶ The Zhenotdel was eventually closed in 1930

# Proletarian women

- ▶ Kollontai's contribution is very much significant in empowering Women
- ▶ She talked about proletarian women and its socialization of housework in details:
- ▶ Worked to improve the conditions of women's lives in the Soviet Union,
  - ❖ Fighting illiteracy
  - ❖ Educating women about the new marriage
  - ❖ Working laws put in place by the Revolution
  - ❖ Social democracy
  - ❖ Struggle for Economic Independence
  - ❖ Struggle against the economic slavery of the working class
  - ❖ Socialization of Housework
  - ❖ Marriage and Family

# Contd....

- ▶ In the government, Kollontai increasingly became an internal critic of the Communist Party and joined with her friend, Alexander Shlyapnikov, to form a left-wing faction of the party that became known as the Workers' Opposition
- ▶ Lenin managed to dissolve the Workers' Opposition, after which Kollontai was more or less politically sidelined.
- ▶ Kollontai lacked political influence and was appointed by the Party to various diplomatic positions from the early 1920s

# Contd....

- ▶ In 1923, she was sent as a diplomatic counsellor to the Soviet legation in Norway, becoming the world's second woman serving in diplomacy in modern times
- ▶ Social democracy was the first to include in its programme the demand for the equalization of the rights of women with those of men
- ▶ Only direct participation in the government of the country promises to assist in raising women's economic situation

# Contd....

- ▶ The women's world is divided, just as is the world of men, into two camps
  - ✓ the interests and aspirations of one group of women bring it close to the bourgeois class
  - ✓ while the other group has close connections with the proletariat, and its claims for liberation encompass a full solution to the woman question
- ▶ Thus although both camps follow the general slogan of the “liberation of women”, their aims and interests are different
- ▶ Liberation of women cannot be completed without fighting the fundamental transformation of the contemporary economic and social structure of society

# Equal rights for the Proletarian women

- ▶ Kollontai's demanded that while for the feminists the achievement of equal rights with men in the framework of the contemporary capitalist world represents a sufficiently concrete end in itself
- ▶ Equal rights at the present time are for the proletarian women
- ▶ It is only a means of advancing the struggle against the economic slavery of the working class
- ▶ She further commented that the feminists see men as the main enemy, for men have unjustly seized all rights and privileges for themselves, leaving women only chains and duties

# Contd....

- ▶ Kollontai said that Proletarian women have a different attitude
- ▶ They do not see men as the enemy and the oppressor
- ▶ On the contrary, they think of men as their comrades
- ▶ They share with them the drudgery of the daily round and fight with them for a better future
- ▶ The woman and her male comrade are enslaved by the same social conditions
- ▶ The same hated chains of capitalism oppress their will and deprive them of the joys and charms of life

# Contd...

- ▶ It is true that several specific aspects of the contemporary system lie with double weight upon women
- ▶ It is also true that the conditions of hired labour sometimes turn working women into competitors and rivals to men
- ▶ In these unfavourable situations, the working class knows who is guilty

# Debate over Bourgeois Women

- ▶ The aspirations of the bourgeois woman, on the other hand, seem strange and incomprehensible
- ▶ They are not warming to the proletarian heart
- ▶ They do not promise the proletarian woman that bright future towards which the eyes of all exploited humanity are turned
- ▶ A woman can possess equal rights and be truly free only in a world of socialized labour, of harmony and justice

# Contd....

- ▶ The feminists are unwilling and incapable of understanding this
- ▶ It seems to them that when equality is formally accepted by the letter of the law
- ▶ They will be able to win a comfortable place for themselves in the old world of oppression, enslavement and bondage, of tears and hardship.
- ▶ For the majority of women of the proletariat, equal rights with men would mean only an equal share in inequality
- ▶ It is but for the “chosen few”, for the bourgeois women
- ▶ It would indeed open doors to new and unprecedented rights and privileges that until now have been enjoyed by men of the bourgeois class alone
- ▶

# Contd....

- ▶ But each new concession won by the bourgeois woman would give her yet another younger sister
- ▶ It would go on increasing the division between the women of the two opposite social camps
- ▶ Their interests would be more sharply in conflict, their aspirations more obviously in contradiction
- ▶ The conditions and forms of production have subjugated women throughout human history
- ▶ They have gradually relegated them to the position of oppression and dependence in which most of them existed until now

# Contd....

- ▶ A colossal upheaval of the entire social and economic structure was required before women could begin to retrieve the significance and independence they had lost
- ▶ The woman question assumed importance for woman of the bourgeois classes approximately in the middle of the nineteenth century - a considerable time after the proletarian women had arrived in the labour arena
- ▶ Under the impact of the monstrous successes of capitalism, the middle classes of the population were hit by waves of need

# Contd....

- ▶ The economic changes had rendered the financial situation of the petty and middle bourgeoisie unstable
- ▶ The bourgeois women were faced with a dilemma of menacing proportions, either accept poverty, or achieve the right to work
- ▶ Wives and daughters of these social groups began to knock at the doors of the universities, the art salons, the editorial houses, the offices, flooding to the professions that were open to them

# Contd....

- ▶ The desire of bourgeois women to gain access to science and the higher benefits of culture
- ▶ It was not the result of a sudden, maturing need but stemmed from that same question of “daily bread”.
- ▶ Division between bourgeois and proletarian is inevitable as far as other questions are concerned, but in the case of this particular question, the feminists imagine, the women of the various social classes have no differences
- ▶ They talked about *Marriage and the Problem of the Family*
- ▶

# Role of marriage and the family

- ▶ Kollontai's views on the role of marriage and the family under Communism were arguably more influential on today's society than her advocacy of free love
- ▶ Kollontai's views on the role of marriage and the family under Communism were arguably more influential on today's society than her advocacy of "free love".
- ▶ She viewed marriage and traditional families as legacies of the oppressive, property-rights-based, egoist past



# Contd....

- ▶ Under Communism, both men and women would work for, and be supported by, society, not their families
- ▶ Similarly, their children would be wards of, and reared basically by society
- ▶ Kollontai admonished men and women to discard their nostalgia for traditional family life

# Contd....

- ▶ The worker-mother must learn not to differentiate between yours and mine
- ▶ She must remember that there are only our children, the children of Russia's communist workers
- ▶ However, she also praised maternal attachment
- ▶ Communist society will take upon itself all the duties involved in the education of the child, but the joys of parenthood will not be taken away from those who are capable of appreciating them

# Disagreed with Lenin

- ▶ Kollontai was a member of the Social Democratic Labour Party
- ▶ At its Second Congress in London in 1903, there was a dispute between two of its leaders, Vladimir Lenin and Julius Martov
- ▶ Lenin argued for a small party of professional revolutionaries with a large fringe of non-party sympathizers and supporters
- ▶ She was the only speaker other than Lenin to support the demand for “All Power to the Soviets

# Contd....

- ▶ Kollontai failed to grasp the importance of ensuring Party leadership of the working class women's movement
- ▶ In this sense she remained closer to the positions of the Menshevik faction than to those of Lenin and the Bolsheviks

# Contd....

- ▶ She disagreed with Lenin on account of following reasons:
  - ❖ Revolutionary upsetting rooted in Russia
  - ❖ Split in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party
  - ❖ Critical policy of Lenin with regard to Worker's opposition
  - ❖ Formation of Left-Wing faction of the Party of Kollontai

## Contd....

- ❖ Kollontai was more or less politically sidelined
- ❖ Kollontai lacked political influence the strategy made by Lenin
- ❖ Question on Socialization of Housework

# Conclusion

- ▶ The resurgence of radicalism in the 1960s and the growth of the feminist movement in the 1970s spurred a new interest in the life and writings of Alexandra Kollontai in Britain and America