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THE DOUKHOBOR WOMAN

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Ethnographic account

THE DOUKHOBOR WOMAN

This paper will focus on the Doukhobor woman from the 1800's in Russia to the present time in Canada. Being a woman and a Doukhobor myself, I hope that this personal involvement in this society will add authenticity to the comments, especially to the present-day point of view. Along with going back through generations of researched data, I will include my own interpretations of the historical information available, but this need not detract from its objectivity, as the past will be seen ^{from} ~~through~~ the distance of the present perspective. [The past is always been for]

I have always wanted to research my own ethnic past - in terms of the woman's ^{the present} role and status relative to that of the man's. Did our society adapt its point of ^{change} ~~view~~ ^{by the past} in this regard, to the changing environmental conditions and to the constantly-evolving concepts of humanity around them? Or did it retain the same way of perceiving life, through many eras? How did the women of the Doukhobor past view themselves? Did their own perspective change? And finally - How does our present female generation differ from that of our mother's? ✓

These questions will be answered by scanning the historical scene and focusing in on key times that best demonstrate the position of women of that day, thus touching upon the Doukhobors in Russia in the 1800's, in Saskatchewan at the turn of the century, and in B.C. from the early 1900's onward.

To put the Doukhobor woman into a wider scope of vision, it is necessary to briefly summarize the reasons for the origin of the sect. The Doukhobors were a ^{the Russian Orthodox?} group of Russian peasants who, in the 18th century, broke away from the church and ^{did they form an anabaptist sect?} its rituals, in order to live closer to what they believed to be the true spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood. They lived in proximity, and gradually developed a full-scale communal lifestyle; the perfecting of this communal living was an ideal towards ^{for}

which they ^{strived} over and over again, after being moved and exiled and transferred throughout various parts of Russia, for their beliefs; and once again in Canada, years later, they returned to this communal living.

The basic philosophy of the Doukhobors was that all people had the spirit of God within them - making them all equal - and therefore to kill a fellow human being for any reason whatsoever, was to kill a part of the spirit of God. "Theirs was a universal striving for a world without guns, a world of peace, a world utopia where the Kingdom of God is to be created here on earth."¹ This life-concept which originated so long ago, has endured until today, and it is this life-concept that gives us an indication of how the Doukhobors should have viewed their women through the generations, and how the women should have viewed themselves. Since they believed that all humans were equal one to another, and all had the spirit of God within them, the women were theoretically, equal. However, it is not so simple. The basic Christianity espoused this same equality, but "...this fact was usually relegated to the background and the emphasis was on keeping them in their place here on earth... thus...they were called the weaker vessel who were to remain in subjugation to their menfolk."² Was this the case in the early Doukhor life also? From the following information, we will see that, though the women were definitely subordinated in a number of ways, they carried a lot of weight in many aspects of their daily life.

Beginning with the Doukhobors in Tsarist Russia, I found some interesting comments on the communal system, Mir, that the Doukhobors developed. An "egalitarian emphasis was a significant characteristic of the MIR".³ The commune was described as possessing rights as a unit, with the actions of its members binding upon the group; and the family "found its unity in its head: the father (the mother if the father is absent..."⁴ However, if the father died, it was not the mother who took over the full authority.

¹ Koozma Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. Mir Publication Society, 1982. p. 24

² Bullough, Christianity, Sex, and Women. Chapter 5. p. 101

³ Koozma Tarasoff, A Pictorial History of the Doukhobors. Western Producer, 1969. p. 29

⁴ Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 6

Without a father "the family simply could not exist;...because absolute equality prevailed in the family, anarchy would have broken out immediately, had there been no common leader. If the father died, his eldest brother or son took his place, assuming absolute paternal authority."⁵ This indicates the patrilineal tradition amongst the early Doukhobors; but we also can see that the woman was considered efficient enough to handle the emergency situation of the absence of her husband. ✓

If we explore the family unit further, we find that it was said to have "an authoritarian structure, to such an extent that right up to the time of the emigration to Canada at the end of the 19th century, marriages were arranged by parents in patriarchal style, so that often the bride and the bridegroom did not see each other until the day of the wedding..."⁶ Thus, neither the bride's nor the groom's feelings were considered in the choice, and the bride would inevitably move to her husband's family's home - in patrilocal style - to live under the often vigilant eye of her mother-in-law.

This method of marriage is clearly exemplified in Tanya and Vanya's situation in the book Tanya. She loved another, yet did not do anything about it - except have a mental rebellion - because of her inbred conditioning of listening to what her parents told her, implicitly believing them to always be right. Yet she was initially very frustrated, thinking how different things could have been with the one she loved: "She would have confided her secret hopes for a better understanding and mutual respect between husband and wife....and he would have understood."⁷ This kind of dilemma brings to mind 'Fiddler on the Roof' and the issue of TRADITION! *Misc analogy* Tanya's feelings succinctly describe the woman-man roles of the day: women were not equal, but there possibly existed receptive men who could have helped the situation.

Both Vanya and Tanya must have felt like pawns in their parents' hands, but, as they lived together through the years, Tanya grew to accept their situation and even to feel that their parents had made a wise decision. Through many situations,

⁵ Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 6

⁶ Ivan Avakumovic; George Woodcock, The Doukhobors. Oxford University Press, 1968. p. 42

⁷ Eli A. Popoff, Tanya. Mir Publication Society, 1975. p. 27

we see how she developed a caring and loving relationship with her husband. For example, Tanya is totally distraught when Vanya has an accident; and later, in old age, she cares for him with tenderness and deep understanding of his needs.

If we turn to how the brides were chosen, we find that in early Doukhobor life, a girl who worked hard in her parents' house and farm, was the one selected by a son's family. She brought her own contribution to the household into which she was received; the contribution of the ability to work. Thus it was for her personal qualities that a family would seek a particular girl out for their son, and dowries were not a vital part of the arrangement. Hopechests were made, but only after the Doukhobor sojourn to Canada did they begin to play a prominent part in the marriage ceremony. A trunkful of embroidered linens, and towels, and crocheted handicrafts would be moved to the husband's family's dwelling as a symbolic indication of the bride's entrance into his family. To this day, at a time when young couples live quite independently of their parents, there remains a great deal of pride on the bride's mother's part, as to the variety and perfection of the handiwork that is included in the hopechest. This involvement with handicrafts originated from the 1800's, when the women "were known for their creative skills in making wool skirts, shawls, and the like.....It is remarkable that no one had any formal designs, yet they kept very precise patterns in their heads".⁸ In the 1930's, women made their own shawls, using their own individual designs for embroidering them. These were so beautiful and unique that factory personnel would purchase them for cash payments. So the pride in the creativity of a bride's hopechest was a pride in the feeling of Doukhobor womanhood. It was a good feeling of worth and individuality.

Returning again to early marriage, we find it described as a "simple and mutually revocable contract."⁹ Though it was customary for the occasion to be marked by a gathering of friends and relatives, and by singing, no ceremony or bride-price were needed, just the two peoples' willingness to live together, which in turn was originally

⁸ Koozma Tarasoff, Traditional Doukhobor Folkways. National Museums of Canada, 1977. p. 106

⁹ Woodcock, p. 43

based on their parents' wishes. But Woodcock in his statement indicates that the marriage could be dissolved as easily as made. It is true that there were no documents to sign in the occasion of a divorce, but separations were not common if the couple lasted through the first year together. There was a sense of finality in the original binding of families, no matter how simply done. Also, in the situation of separations, the women seemed to be at a great disadvantage, as is clearly shown by Tanya's sister-in-law's situation. She didn't agree with her husband in a crucial religious issue and ultimately, with her two boys in tow, trekked the thirty kilometres to her parents' home. Two days later, her father-in-law and husband came with a police officer at their side, and forced her and the children to return. She later confessed that they had horsewhipped her on their return, and told her that, if she tried to run away again - which she threatened - both children would be kept under guard.¹⁰ So the word 'mutually' is crucial in the quote from Woodcock's book. If the male did not agree to the separation, it was difficult to succeed in getting one, no matter how determined the woman was.

As stated earlier, the woman moved to her husband's village and became totally immersed in his life. Her most intense relationship was developed with her husband's mother and therefore her daily contentment greatly depended on how well she could get along with her mother-in-law. Tanya initially resented this way of functioning, but when she nursed her mother-in-law's son along with her own daughter during the latter's illness, Tanya grew much closer to the entire in-law family. Much later in Canada, she cared for her mother-in-law through years of poor health; and eventually herself became a powerful mother-in-law in her own right. In Saskatchewan, she was able to influence one son's family to move to B.C. when she felt it would be to their benefit.

Discussing the topic of the mother-in-law with two local women who had lived in the Doukhobor communal system that had been set up in Canada in the early 1900's, I found they had very different experiences. Doris explained how hard it was for her to adjust to living with her husband's family. She said that nothing she did was right,

¹⁰ Popoff, p. 56

while her husband could do no wrong. At the break of dawn, after a long hard previous working day, her mother-in-law would tiptoe into their room^{and} whisper into Doris' ear that it was time to get up and milk the cows, cautioning her not to disturb her husband because he needed to rest! When Doris was pregnant, her husband offered to milk for her, but when he attempted to go to the barn, his mother would take over, saying that he was much too overburdened to have added responsibilities. If Doris went, right into her last month of pregnancy, the mother-in-law would not interfere!

Helen had a totally different story. She said that her mother-in-law was the kindest, most generous woman she had known, always chiding her own son for being too hard on Helen, and constantly trying to make her life easier. Both of these women lived some time after Tanya and married for love, but their general lifestyle was not that different and their happiness continued to largely depend on their relationship with the in-laws, particularly the mother-in-law. ✓

Brides in the Caucasus, where the Doukhobors lived in the 1800's, were usually 18 or 19 years of age, while their husbands were often two or three years younger. Never did men have more than one wife, and never does there seem to have been a period of sexual laxity. But when we do look at the topic of sex, we again find the women in the subordinate role.

Tanya's sister, for example, became pregnant by a Georgian, and this changed the entire family's life. In order to "avert a general shame"¹¹ from being reflected on the morals of the then exiled Doukhobors in Russia, her family returned from exile "as if in renunciation of their errant ways."¹² This certainly gives an indication of the intensity of the public scorn at the slightest deviation from the accepted sexual relationships of the day. The family was willing to be branded as losing their faith for which they had been willing to go into harsh exile, rather than allow the Doukhobors to feel smeared by what they considered to be the family's heavy shame.

But what was the accepted sexual relationship of the day? If we use Tanya as an example we find that she sees it as "...sleeping with her husband as a subservient dutiful wife should",¹³ and if we read on we find that she was not alone in this view.

¹¹Popoff, p. 94

¹² ibid

¹³Popoff, p. 29

Most of her girlfriends had the impression that "...sex was something that only men seemed to get enjoyment from, and the woman's role was simple to comply uncomplainingly and adapt to her man's moods and requirements."¹⁴ All around them, young girls saw married women who entered into a seemingly inevitable continuous cycle: carrying and giving birth, nursing the newborn, and then getting pregnant again. Tanya's mother, for example, had fifteen children of which only six survived to adulthood. Tanya mentally rebelled at this whole perspective on sex and womanhood and, if we take her as the historically true figure that she is meant to portray, this gives us an indication of how early the urge for striving for more adequate equality had begun to surface in Doukhobor women. ✓

In the late 1800's, marriages became based on love, and came to be described as being "...accomplished without any special ceremonies, or requirements, except the mutual love of the couple, the consent of the parents, and the acknowledgment of the community."¹⁵ And today, the union has remained one based on love, without priests, sanctioned by the parents and the community. Every home life is firmly based on the "divine institution of marriage".¹⁶ Doukhobors show their profound regard for its true meaning by having the parents of the bride and groom both occupy a similar position to a clergyman in reminding the couple of their mutual duties and responsibilities. Neither family is considered the more dominant, with the bride's parents' home as the first site for the day's proceedings, and the groom's parents' home the place where the day ends, still symbolically meaning that she is now a part of his household, ✓ even though couples no longer live with their parents. *do they not often build on land given by the husband's father?*

Until 1953, when the B.C. government finally accepted the Doukhobor marriage as legal,¹⁷ separations were an easy procedure to go through. If both people were unhappy in their situation, they simply returned to their parents' homes, and the marriage was over. Now, with the legality being affirmed, however, the Doukhobor divorces involve the same kind of legal procedure as non-Doukhobor ones.

¹⁴Popoff, p. 30

¹⁵Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 8

¹⁷Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 217

¹⁶J.P. Stoochnoff, Doukhobors As They Are. The Ryerson Press, 1961. p.49

If we turn from marriages, to other areas of the Doukhobor life in Tsarist Russia, we find that one of their early leaders was a woman by the name of Lukeria, 'Lushechka', Kalmykova. During her term of office from 1864 until her death in 1886, she gained considerable respect. Being a woman did not prevent her from achieving renown as the outstanding leader of the day. The Doukhobor peasants had had a history of leaders with outstanding personalities and with superior intellects who could organize them into a strong unified group. Lushechka was especially admired and loved because of her sensitivity to her people's needs. She always listened carefully to their problems, judged the situation described, and immediately decreed appropriate actions.

An example of her methods was her reaction ^{to} for wife beating. Her favourite punishment for this was to lock up the husband in a chicken coop for the night. "Next morning and the days following, he was so embarrassed by the laughter and ridicule of the neighbours, that he seldom reverted to the whip for settling family disputes".¹⁸ This revealing anecdote tells us several things. First of all, men did beat women, which indicates that they certainly had a sense of being the owner of a possession. Secondly, we see that the men obeyed Lushechka, even in this event of an extremely downgrading kind of punishment.

This obedience in the face of great embarrassment is also displayed in her methods of striving to stem alcohol abuse. She would order a recurrent abuser to a public whipping with twigs, the objective being to make an offender - by all indications always a man - look and feel foolish.¹⁹

Another interesting piece of information taken from this period is that Lushechka had a group of Kazaki to serve her as bodyguards and singers. These Kazaki were a group of about twenty to thirty expert horsemen who accompanied their leader on her many travels to the various villages of the Doukhobor settlements. The Kazaki had been picked by Lukeria's husband, but after his death, they continued to serve her throughout

¹⁸Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 13

¹⁹Woodcock, p. 71

her 22-year reign. Years later, in Canada, another leader, Peter Lordly Verigin - 'Petyushka' - also had a group that surrounded him, but this time they were pretty maidens who lived in the house in which he settled in Verigin, Saskatchewan. They lived there under the supervision of his aged mother, and, like their Kazaki predecessors in the Caucasus, were expected to transmit orally the hymns and psalms of their people. Thus we see that there seems to be an easy exchange of men or women contributing to the aid of the current leader, according to his or her expectations..

Returning to Lushechka, we find that she is remembered to this day for her common response of being "only a woman".²⁰ Yet she handled every situation with "diplomacy and tact".²¹ Even government officials admired her.

This only-a-woman apparently had "a strength of will equal to that of her husband, and an intelligence and a truth of character far surpassing his."²² In fact, this bothered him immensely when they first got married; but when he saw that she "took seriously the equality of women that is, at least theoretically, acknowledged in Doukhobor doctrine (women as well as men are vessels of the divine spark)....her husband...cherished her as a personality just as much as in the beginning he had admired the prettiness of her face and the grace of her movements."²³ This quote tells us a lot. The 'at least theoretically' indicates that the authors of this book questioned the equality that was supposed to have been given to Doukhobor women; the fact that Lukeria's husband eventually cherished her, tells us that it was possible for a woman to be an independent, dominant individual and yet to thrive in the community that they lived in; and the fact that he admired her physical beauty, shows us that those men were not too much different from our modern male. It seems that men have always looked at the physical appearance of a woman first, and then began to think about getting to know her better. In other readings, I found that the Doukhobor ideal of feminine

²⁰Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 13

²¹ibid

²²Woodcock, p. 69

²³ibid

beauty was the earth-mother figure, and this is an important point to consider in arriving at an understanding of how the women were viewed and how they viewed themselves. During their peasant communal life, this role of the earth-mother was a relatively easy one to fulfill and therefore the women could feel that they were an integral part of their community.

Before leaving the topic of Lushechka, I would like to make two more observations. One is that, during her era, the Doukhobors were already somewhat familiar with female power. In the 18th century there had been four reigning tsarinas. Therefore, when her husband suggested that Lukeria take on the leadership role after his death, the majority of the Doukhobors accepted her and revered her as they did their previous leaders. And the final comment is that, though Lukeria was the only woman leader among the Doukhobors, I am not at all sure that this indicates the subordination of the female. Anna Markova, for example, the current Doukhobor honorary chairman's mother, played an important part in the Doukhobor life in B.C. She was revered as a woman of example. Her speeches and words of advice were constantly sought. She was looked upon as a martyr, for she survived the terrible war years in Russia, survived a 15-year exile to Siberia, and survived being separated from her only living son for thirty-two years. Only in 1961 was Anna Markova allowed to come to Canada to reunite with her son. She had been exiled along with her brother because they belonged to the hereditary family of Doukhobor leaders, and maybe there was fear that they would influence the Doukhobors in an undesirable direction. There was no consideration of sex in that exile! Except for a three-month visit to the Soviet Union in 1968, Anna Markova lived out her life until her death in 1978, among the Canadian Doukhobors, as a respected and knowledgeable elder. Her participation in the children's program was greatly appreciated as was her involvement with choirs and fund-raising projects. Therefore, I do think that if an appropriate woman had arisen among the Doukhobor ranks again, after Lushechka, she would probably have had the same opportunities to lead the people as did Lushechka.

Though the issue of leadership does not directly relate to discussing the woman's role, it has been an important aspect of the Doukhobor life through many generations

and has greatly influenced their thinking. Therefore I would like to discuss it briefly, in order to give an indication of how it affected the women's lives.

Being originally illiterate peasants for the most part, both men and women in the community revered that individual among them who could express their own ideological concepts and aspirations in a comprehensive and articulate manner. These individuals, the Doukhobors felt, had a greater developed spirit of God within them, and so had a greater burden to bear in trying to enlighten the rest of the people. Therefore, while equality was and is, a basic norm among the Doukhobors from the time of their Russian communal existence, we find that both in Russia and in early Canada, most of the leaders lived a somewhat more affluent life than the rest of the community, and the power that they wielded was considerable. Lushechka, for example, when she came to the decision of who was to be her heir to the leadership position, had the power to annul her candidate's marriage and move him to her own home in another village, even though he was already a mature adult and a soon-to-be father.

This man was Peter P. Verigin. Petyushka, as he was called, in his own time did very much to change the women's situation in their early Canadian life. He counselled them to exercise adequately during pregnancy and suggested that they work as normally as possible, right to the time of delivery. But he insisted that they have a six-week period of complete rest and relaxation after giving birth. The mother-in-laws and other women in the household were to take over all the workload for this time. Petyushka also advised women to wear light clothing in the summer, instead of their traditional heavy attire that they brought from Russia. His reasons for this advice were twofold. The lighter clothing was more economical because it had less yardage, and it was more practical for field work. He did not seem to have the women's personal concerns in mind, but they did gain a new feeling of individuality with the change, especially since he also suggested that they cut off their long braids - for practicality and coolness in the summer. Petyushka also encouraged children to the age of twelve to run around bareheaded and barefooted all summer; and to wear one long shirt, regardless of whether the child was a boy or a girl. Many former community men recall now that as boys, they used to "...walk around all summer looking like girls, with nothing underneath

the extended shirts which went down to the knees."²⁴ He did this for "health and discipline"²⁵ reasons, but the effect was to discourage the division into sex roles in the early years of a Doukhobor child's life. Therefore, even though he may not have had it in mind, Petyushka did make an input into changing the Doukhobor lifestyle, especially the women's.

In our present day, we find that though the same deep reverence for a leader has no place, we are all still receptive to inspirational speeches made by knowledgeable members of our community, especially people on the executive committee with John Verigin at its head; and it was at John Verigin's suggestion that women were finally included in the executive committee as of 1979.²⁶ He was also one of the first to address a meeting with 'Dear sisters and brethren' when there were more women than men present, instead of the age-old traditional 'Dear brethren and sisters'. The Union of Youth council has included both young men and women since its beginning in the 1930's, but they have never yet had a woman chairperson. In Vancouver, the Union of Young Doukhobors however, have had several female chairpeople, maybe indicating the more urbanized advanced approach to male/female equality. In general, the younger generation feels that the equality between the sexes in our organization is developing, but slowly. There have been several effective women groups - from those dealing with administrative affairs to spiritual ones - functioning for many years and women composers of Doukhobor hymns and songs are beginning to surface for the first time. ✓

Returning to the value placed on the leaders in the past, we find that Tanya is a good example of how the people felt. Her undying faith in their goodness and their wisdom and knowledgeability sustained her through many trying times. The leaders were her inspiration in many ways and she built her life on their deeply-philosophical speeches.

When Petyushka first arrived in Canada, Tanya had little children; yet she was so

²⁴Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 112

²⁵Tarasoff, Pictorial History. p. 124

²⁶Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 224

determined to see him that she made arrangements to leave them with her husband, and travelled to another village where he was to be. Thus she overcame considerable obstacles and showed a resourceful and independent spirit in her efforts to meet her revered leader. She never had a sense of inequality in their daily existence and implicitly understood the leader's necessary role and life-style.

Besides this reverence for the leaders, there also developed an institution of the "respected elders".²⁷ This was a legitimate veneration for the elders who had gleaned wisdom from years of experience, and understood and lived the Doukhobor life-concepts; they were the real carriers of the culture. These elders were the men and women to whom everyone went for advice, and there does not seem to have been any separation of men and women in terms of accepting their knowledgeability or giving due respect.

In our present society, with the advent of modern educational systems in which the elders have no part, prestige in old age has declined. Young people tend to be able to express themselves more fluently than their elders. However, there still remains a great respect for the elders' intuitive knowledge of Doukhoborism and for their deep-rooted faith in its 'rightness'. Therefore, the younger generation still goes to the elders for explanations on historical or philosophical issues.

The negative aspect of the modernization of Doukhoborism, is that the patriarchs and matriarchs are sometimes left to fend for themselves in their failing years. Tanya, as an elder of ninety years, went to the Trail hospital to die, because there was no home for her, as would have been during the communal system.

Yet Tanya, as a young wife, found it difficult to cope with this great influence that the elders had. She "...found it hard to accept their* method of decision-making.... As with most Doukhobor families...the older the family member the more authority he seemed to have. Therefore, Tanya and her husband, even though they now had a family of their own, carried very little influence. Not only were Tanya's father and uncles the decision-makers, but their aged mother...who could hardly do any work, was still a respected

²⁷Tarasoff, Pictorial History. p. 23

(*her husband's family)

consultant in all matters. Indeed, if she insisted on some particular point, all her married sons and grandsons would invariably concede,..."²⁸ Here we note that the husband seems to have had as little power as the wife.

As Tanya's children grew, she began to be more tolerant of her husband's elders because she learned to understand and value them, thinking of her own future of being able to have a say in what would happen to her children. Then, when her mother-in-law died, in 1916 in B.C., Tanya was left at the age of forty-four as the woman elder of her husband's family; and it came to pass that her father-in-law "...treated her with proper deference and respect and she continued her role in the Doukhobor communal unit...with a dignified sense of dedication and responsibility..."²⁹ This is quite an insightful comment on the role of the woman in the Doukhobor society. She commanded a great deal of respect and obviously radiated a good sense of well-being.

Tanya turns out to be an extremely enlightening book to understanding the Doukhobor woman. Even though it is written by a man, Tanya's perspective is the dominant slant of the writing. Thus, the book develops the woman's outlook from Tanya's young years in Russia - she was born in 1872 - through to her last year as a 90-year old matriarch in Canada: nearly a century of Doukhobor life.

In describing the life of the day, the book demonstrates a fairly egalitarian view of life in terms of workload in the community. Both men and women were important in its successful running; but there still arise some aspects of patriarchal rule. Tanya's mother and father worked in the fields together, growing barley, threshing, and raking straw bricks, but it was the father who was the trader. "After making an extremely satisfactory barter deal with some Armenian or Georgian dealer, he would bring home presents by the armful for the entire family."³⁰

The mother was the disciplinarian but it was the father who "rarely had to revert to assert his authority."³¹ Mother's goose wing was the more common means of punishment,

²⁸Potoff, p. 34

²⁹ibid p. 170

³⁰ibid p. 6

³¹ibid p. 5

but certainly not as frightening and formidable. Even until the present generation, there has remained the idiom: 'Wait till your father gets home', as if he is really the one to contend with for serious discipline.

In Tanya, we also learn that it was the mother who taught her children the understanding of their faith. This responsibility has remained with the women for many generations, and is certainly an area that is crucial to the preservation of the Doukhobor life-concept; it is therefore one that ennobles the woman's role. Even today, when there has come to be more flexibility as to who teaches the faith - whoever has knowledge in a particular area shares it - there has remained a strong female prominence in issues involving Doukhobor belief. Especially within the radical element of Doukhobors, the Sons of Freedom, women have been much more actively involved than men, in responding to what they feel is going contrary to true Doukhobor philosophy. For example, in 1944 there were demonstrations in Krestova, where the zealots lived apart from the rest of the Doukhobors, in which women's clothes and jewellery were burnt as symbols of the vanity of modern civilization. Continuously in their midst, it is more the women who conduct the overt acts of protest. ✓

In discussing the issue of faith-teaching, one elder who was interviewed commented: "In the early days, grandmother (and to some extent mother) was the 'moral' instructor of Doukhobor children";³² and a Saskatchewan farmer says: "My grandmother knew about seventy or eighty psalms and she used to memorize them. Every evening she used to read them out and explain to me that you have to understand them to be a good boy in life and a good man".³³ In Tanya, we find that when Tanya had her first child, a girl, she felt that she now had an important obligation to fulfill, that of "...recounting for her the many stories demonstrating Doukhobor teachings, and familiarizing her with the various Doukhobor leaders. She would teach her the psalomchiki...and she would explain everything that the Doukhobors had always been struggling for."³⁴

Not only did the women have to teach the faith, but they also had to have the strength of their convictions. When one of Tanya's neighbour's sons was being sent to

³²Tarasoff, Doukhobor Folkways. p. 239

³³ibid p. 244

³⁴Popoff, p. 35

jail for refusing to go to war, his mother said: "Go, our dear son, and if it ever comes to pass that you will have the choice of renouncing your ideals as a price for coming back to us, do not ever be tempted to compromise your beliefs in order to return. You will break our hearts by sacrificing our mutual ideals..."³⁵ In this way, the mother gave a strength of faith to her son, at the expense of terrible pain for herself. This also shows that, though the military fight was directly the men's, the women were devoted and worked hard to support their struggle. Some wives and families even followed their husbands to Siberia, where they had been exiled.

Though it was the woman who gave the spiritual aid, it was the man who led the prayer service at the Sunday meetings. For example, the Lord's Prayer has always been and still is read by a man; and it has also been the men throughout Doukhobor history, who have begun the traditional bowing to each other in reverence to the God within each. Only after they have completed their part, do the women begin.

But, even though the men were the leaders at all the meetings, it is true that since the time of Lushechka, Doukhobor men have become more aware of women's valuable potential. As early as the first years in Canada, women became more welcome to attend the business meetings discussing the affairs of the commune. Because of age-old tradition, the women did not often attend in the beginning, but they did make more of their feelings known and began to comment on village affairs. Thus in Canada, Tanya felt that "...men and women were working together more than ever before, in total harmony and with a strong sense of partnership."³⁶

Another responsibility of the men's was to teach the children to read and write; for it was the man who had the priority to become literate. A farmer from Saskatchewan says: "My father was the literate member of our family,...It was my father who taught me to read and write Russian. He taught my sisters also. But my mother never knew how to read and write Russian."³⁷ There just did not seem to be a reason for the woman

³⁵Popoff, p. 100

³⁶ibid p. 117

³⁷Tarasoff, Doukhobor Folkways. p. 244

to have to be literate or educated. Even when I was completing school, there was a strong encouragement to get a job instead of going on with further education. After all: 'You'll get married, anyway, and never use your schooling.' 'It will be a waste of energy and money and time.' As a result, there were very few girls going to university even to the 1960's.

The women had another important role in the Doukhobor society of the past. They were the healers. It was Tanya's mother who picked a particular sage flower for a tonic and cleanser, and it was her mother who taught Tanya her home remedies for ailments. When her daughter was terribly ill, the village grandmother was called to help. It seems, then, that the Doukhobors were no different from other groups who have evolved from a folk type of society. Initially, being illiterate, they "...relied on folk cures and remedies, on prayers and incantations by select women."³⁸ Of course, now with the increased education and improved economic and social conditions, practically all such cures and techniques have been laid to rest. But at the time when they were needed, it was the women who used the remedies to attempt to cure people from mental as well as physical problems. We are told, for example, that Babas - women healers - could make feelings of fright disappear by putting wooden pegs into holes in the side of the door jam, with some hairs of the sick person in it, and then whispering particular words.³⁹ *It would be interesting to gather up all the folk remedies before it is too late.*

It is interesting to note that when a horse got sick in Saskatchewan during Petyushka's time, a doctor was fetched as quickly as possible. But when a woman got sick, it was "difficult to get help..."⁴⁰

There was one indication that men may have had a minor part in being healers also. One retired teacher from Saskatchewan said that "...my paternal grandfather was supposed to be some kind of medicine man among the Doukhobors here."⁴¹ It is true that broken-bone mending was totally the men's area of expertise, and bonesetters had a great prestige

³⁸Tarasoff, Doukhobor Folkways. p.207

³⁹ibid p. 209

⁴⁰ibid p. 222

⁴¹ibid p. 211

amongst the Doukhobors. One man said of a forbear: "He was not a chiropractor and not a trained man through any schooling but he had a sensitivity in his hands and then of course training, especially if his dad was a bone-setter..."⁴² and there remain, until today, men who have this kind of talent. But I have never heard of a woman bonesetter amongst the Doukhobors. Thus it seems that in the area of medical aid, there was a 'balance of power'.

Therefore Woodcock's comment that "paternalism reigned throughout"⁴³ may not be a totally accurate statement; but there definitely is some indication of the greater value placed on the male. For example, Tanya expressed a distinct feeling that her father would have wanted more sons because he seemed to lose more and more interest with each of the three daughters that followed her. She also noticed that he was firmer with Nicola, the eldest and only son. However, Tanya also did get a sense of the importance of the woman's role. Whenever she went with her mother to wash clothes in the lake near their village "...she became utterly fascinated by the heartwarming and invigorating scene of the women energetically rinsing and wringing the clothes, while maintaining a loud and cheerful chatter about everyday affairs. As she watched, Tanya couldn't help but feel a sense of reverence for the role of womanhood."⁴⁴ ✓

This feeling that women had a vital role in the functioning of the community was shared by many, and has sustained through many generations. In 1898, when a group of Doukhobors moved to Cyprus in an attempt to get away from Russian persecution, the women filled observers with awesome respect. The women were the ones who built their mud-brick homes and they worked courageously. One observer noted: "...and for force and strength, and regularity like a steam engine, I never saw anything to equal a middle-aged woman who, with garments kilted up to her thighs, was kneading the earth for brick-making by treading it. Such mighty limbs were a revelation to me."⁴⁵

When the Doukhobors moved to Canada in 1899, the women continued their important contribution, for, as soon as there were enough roofs to shelter everyone, able-bodied

⁴²Tarasoff, Doukhobor Folkways. p. 214

⁴³Woodcock, p. 42

⁴⁴Popoff, p. 5

⁴⁵Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 33

men were sent to look for jobs, many finding these in the railway construction. In this way they brought in much-needed money - for many had arrived to Canada penniless, and they needed oxen, horses and milk cows for their community.

The women were left to look after the village life, - left only with boys and older men. As Koozma Tarasoff states: "...only one fifth of the immigrants were men of working age; a few hundred men had been held in Russia because of the liability to military service. The disproportion of women was to have an effect on the kind of work pattern that the Doukhobors developed in their prairies settlements."⁴⁶ For one thing, because horses were also few, women sometimes hitched themselves, along with the few men, to a wagon and hauled supplies a distance of forty miles or more. Also, under the direction of old men, they felled timber and cut osiers, transporting them to the villages, dragging their homemade carts. Women cut the wheat crop with sickles, and worked at threshing flax, hoeing and raking, cleaning grain with home-made sieves. They carried water with a yoke around their neck, baked bread in indoor ovens. "Indeed, the women distinguished themselves by rising to the occasion when help was needed..."⁴⁷

Women were ingenious in every way. They even plastered their dwellings with their own hands. First they prepared the mortar by digging a trench into which they placed fine clay and water and chopped hay or straw; then the children and women trod the mortar until it was as smooth as paste. Then, after standing for half an hour, the mortar was carried to the construction site. The log walls were, in this way, plastered inside and out by "skillful feminine hands". "The neatness of the work was astonishing, for while in some cases logs large enough to build a log house were to be found, in others they had to be woven out of coarse willow branches, the upright posts alone being of sufficient strength to support the roofs of sod laid on with a neatness and precision that is seldom seen in this country."⁴⁸

Another job that the women undertook, Tanya took part in. It was a task whose undertaking by women shocked their Canadian counterparts. The task was to break the land and seed enough produce, especially potatoes, so that they would not starve during

⁴⁶Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 46

⁴⁷Tarasoff, Pictorial History. p. 78

⁴⁸Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 57

their first winter on the Canadian prairie. Because there was a shortage of horses, oxen, and manpower, the women hitched themselves to a plough in order to break the new sod.

The decision had been made solely by the women, for the few men who were present repeatedly attempted to dissuade them, saying that they would manage somehow. But the women insisted and when the 100 acres of stubborn soil was finished, they all experienced a great deal of satisfaction in the performing of a duty for the good of all their people.

There was never that same kind of need again, and so this was the only time that the women did this kind of backbreaking work; but the aura that the event created, reached everywhere on the North American continent. Some Canadians called it "barbaric and uncouth".⁴⁸ Other outsiders expressed shock because they felt that the women "were being used by the man as horses".⁴⁹ Both Canadian and American feminists were aghast at the suggestions made in the exaggerated newspaper accounts, that the Doukhobors were "virtually enslaving their womenfolk".⁵⁰ The publicity spread, but in reality the women only saw it as necessary and did it. The fact that the lives of their children depended on their efforts made them grasp the situation and face the challenge, as was their custom throughout their history. As far as they were concerned, it was a prestigious thing to do, and looking back now from the present perspective, this incident shows the kind of potential the women had in being a self-sufficient, organizing body without their male counterparts' easy shoulder to lean on. Thus it was that the first generation of Doukhobor women in Canada are remembered as the breakers of the land, - an unusual role for any woman of the time. ✓

Women also helped with the finances. Once their homes were established, when time was available, women and children gathered seneca root, a valuable medicinal plant that grew on the prairie year after year in the same place, without cultivation. They only earned \$360 the first year, but in 1903 one village received over \$10,000 for their

⁴⁸Tarasoff, Pictorial History. p. 78

⁴⁹Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 47

⁵⁰Woodcock, p. 163

efforts. Also, 150 men and women went out working with the Mennonite farmers at \$25 a month; and all the money collected from every source was turned over to the central treasury: to the elders nominated to look after the affairs of each village. These were always men, but apparently everyone felt that "...it was the essence of the end result you are striving for, that bestows a crowning glory to your effort."⁵¹

Later, when the Doukhobor moved to B.C., in 1911, they continued their communal village existence. The women's routine changed, however, because more men were home. In Tanya, we are told that ^{Tanya's} routine was identical to that of all the other women in her village. It consisted of alternating various workloads for various weeks: one week of cooking with another woman for the thirty-seven people in their group; one or two weeks of working in the gardens and yard; and three weeks of catching up with her own family needs of sewing, spinning, knitting, etc. In the planting and harvesting seasons, the women had more communal work, but in the wintertime, they usually worked only one out of six weeks for the group. The men in the meantime, cleared and broke the soil, set up irrigation systems, constructed a wooden culvert factory, and generally worked at setting up the agricultural aspect of their life-style.

At this time, therefore, it seems that the men's and women's work was quite segregated; the men had their chores, and the women theirs. Both worked together with their own sex. Even the bathing in the communal bath houses was always segregated, rather than family-oriented. But though there was this seeming separation of jobs, there still remained a shoulder-to-shoulder approach to their living. They had learned that cooperation was the way to survival for them, and this was their unifying force: cooperation in diverse roles. They were actually working side by side, and Tanya expresses her own feelings of this united effort. She "...sensed a binding unity and a feeling of closeness amongst the people in this process of working together...for their common benefit and...she never heard one word of dissent from the women, in regard to the men's decisions."⁵² This tells us that they worked together, but the decision-making was done by the men.

⁵¹Popoff, p. 138

⁵²ibid p. 117

The many years of suffering together also bound the men and women. The striving for the same ideals, and suffering in the process, eliminated the separation of men and women into sexist stereotyping. They were united suffering souls, who gathered strength of resolve in their sense of togetherness.

A good example of how the Doukhobors all pulled together is the Burning of Arms in Russia in 1895. Their exiled Petyushka sent a message that they should make a stand once and for all against the military machine, against all killing of human beings, and therefore should get rid of all their arms. . The Doukhobors immediately began collecting all their weapons, and designated a site for burning them. Men and women alike walked to the fire site, sang hymns, and endured the pain of the Cossacks' whips. Nothing daunted them as they formed a tight circle, so that those at the centre, still unharmed, could replace those who were beaten. On the outside of the circle.

As a result of this kind of commitment to non-violence that the Doukhobors displayed, they were exiled to other areas of Russia; relatives were split apart. They knew no peaceful life; and this common suffering eradicated trivialities such as male-female established roles. "The common ordeals that they were suffering for the great cause which they all understood and upheld, created a strong brotherly* bond within them, a feeling of kinship that remained in their hearts for decades after...everyone was always glad to help and share with those near them who were less fortunate."⁵³

Generations later, the same kind of egalitarianism was displayed at the peace manifestations in Canada. For example in 1963, at the Suffield testing ^{site} ~~sight~~ for biological, bacteriological and radiological warfare, --men, women and children alike stood for twelve hours, in miserable weather, to make a stand for peace.

And always, throughout the Doukhobor struggles, their singing helped them. They would sing together into a spiritual oneness that no enemy could destroy. Their singing has thus been a mainstay from the beginning of their existence, and to this day, and in this special kind of communication there is no sexism.

The trip from Russia, on ship, also demonstrated everyone's ability to work together. Young men carried water, served tea in the morning and night; they looked

⁵³Popoff, p. 92

* and sisterly

after lights, baking bread, bringing up provisions from the ship's hold. Women peeled potatoes and washed clothes. Some men looked after the cleanliness of the toilets, while others carried coal from the storage bins to the steam boiler;⁵⁴ and when they reached Canada, they shared everything they had, because of their destitute circumstances. There was no room for selfishness, or more elevated positions; no time to think of petty differences. There was a lot of work to be done, and everyone did what they could. Thus, the necessity for physical toil and the accomplishing of tasks, created a great bond among the people.

Another aspect of the Doukhobor world outlook that gave the woman a special kind of prestige, was their respect for those who give birth: "Among the Doukhobors there exists an exceptionally strong feeling of respect toward women. This respect is based mainly on the fact that the woman gives birth. She brings into this world this 'wonderful and miraculous creation of God' who is from birth endowed with a divine nature, who is the greatest manifestation of nature's creative powers, who enjoys the possession of full and perfect mind. Every woman is a Mother of God same as every man is Man God. Every woman....gives birth to this source of life which gives people 'purpose of life'. Every woman...brings into life 'God's way and God's work'....This is why every woman...who 'sings and speaks' is 'in celestial realm', i.e., enjoys a very deep and true esteem and respect. Is it necessary to speak of the fact that among the Doukhobors a woman is an entirely free, equal, loved and independent person, and that she occupies an honourable and high place in the commune?"⁵⁵ But what if the woman was not able to give birth? Or if she chose not to? Obviously, this would have diminished the community's sense of worth for her, and therefore her own as reflected from it. In fact, in all aspects, the community sense of right and wrong, good and bad, permeated every aspect of their life, and if an individual was somewhat outside the norm, he or she suffered for it, as was shown in the case of Tanya's sister's love affair with a non-Doukhobor, outside of wedlock.

So, where do we stand today? Do we still have a role to play? We have no visible struggle to fight together with the men; the divine role of motherhood has

⁵⁴Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 39

⁵⁵Vladimir Dmitrievich Borch-Bruevich, Book of Life. 1909. p. XXX of photocopied excerpt.

lost some of its lustre with the exploded cost of living, the world over-population, and the different lifestyle; and the peasant workload has certainly dwindled. Yet the previous generations that had been insulated in their villages from the influence of Canadian life, remained until the last generation "...conservative, anxious to preserve the old traditional ways in the new environment."⁵⁶ But these were difficult to preserve in the modern lifestyle context amongst non-Doukhobors, since 1939, when the community which Petyushka had set up was split apart by the government. Thus there began to be a separation of thought between the 'old' and the 'young'.

The traditional ways that have survived with the women until the modern generation are the inbred hospitality traits, the urge to meticulous cleanliness, the sense of great responsibility for the children's welfare, and the creativity in all aspects of the home life. One B.C. homemaker who was interviewed in 1975, remarked: "Nowadays, women are so capable and they can do things so beautifully with food, that it's almost unbelievable....They're so capable of extending hospitality to groups that come to them, or any individuals....Doukhor women are so industrious, so considerate and capable. They can create something out of nothing almost and make people feel so good....every year, there's somebody that thinks of a better way of serving, putting together or creating a new dish out of the same things that they had".⁵⁷ Many of these homemakers grow their own gardens and share the hard-earned rewards of their labour with close friends and relatives. They preserve and freeze produce, and get great satisfaction in watching their cooler in the basement filling up with canned food for winter use. Another homemaker says: "I'm not sure that I understand the position of some women, that they want men to do the same things that women do....If men had to look after the children, they would bear them....And I feel the mother is responsible for the child she brings into this world; she's so close to him. She is the sole person that can start him out with love and protectiveness and all that. And I think it is her role....The man can't do the sewing as well as the woman, why should he? Because he's adapted to other things that a woman can't do...."⁵⁸ And a B.C. carpenter adds: "...as you know, especially in

⁵⁶Woodcock, p. 192

⁵⁷Tarasoff, Doukhor Folkways. p. 118

⁵⁸ibid p. 30

the rural areas...the women are mostly just* housewives. They're not career women. They're satisfied with their home. They're not out to make a name for themselves as a career woman. And being a housewife all her life, I don't think she's concerned too much with this women's liberation."⁵⁹

These three quotes give us an indication of the expectations put on the Doukhobor women, - often by the women themselves - at least in 1975 when these interviews were made. We are to prepare food industriously for winter, be hospitable, be creative. with even the meagrest of resources, be the key rearers of children, and above all, be happy with our prescribed role or feel a failure as a modern Doukhobor woman.

However, the issue is not that simple. With the persecution pressure diminished and the families shrinking in size, women have suddenly found the time to begin broadening their scope of possibilities for a different lifestyle and developing a more individual plan for their future goals. My auntie, at the age of 65, began oil painting and has done some beautiful work. When asked why she didn't begin earlier since it was easy to see both her joy in it and her talent, she said that there was no time, and that it would have cost too much. At age 65, it was \$1 for pensioners!

What about the YOUNG woman who would like to pursue a career, or live a life outside the norm? Well, the feelings still remain that her life should eventually be based around the family and home. Therefore, if a couple has to make a choice of who will further their education, it is inevitably the man who has the preference. And if the man stays single into his late twenties and early thirties, it is perfectly acceptable for him to have sexual relations with various women. But the girl who stays single must still remain chaste, and by the late twenties is considered on her way to being an old maid. In other words, there has definitely remained a strong sense of the woman's 'role', so that it is very difficult to break away from the stereotyping, because of feelings of guilt at not living up to the parents' and the community's expectations in terms of womanhood.

But if we look at the brighter side, there is definitely a changing approach to individual capabilities. The present Doukhobor organization, the USCC, has a scholarship

⁵⁹Tarasoff, Doukhobor Folkways. p. 28

*an indication of his own estimation of the worth of housekeeping.

fund from which a yearly sum of money is awarded to a deserving high school Doukhobor graduate. The recipients must be going on to further education, and in the past twenty years more young women than men have received these. Also, there is more and more of an encouragement to 'do something with your life', whether male or female. The possibility of a positive life slipping through the careless fingers of the youth, is becoming more real, so that parents are pressing their children to make a decision as to what they want to be, regardless of sex. Finally, there is a growing need for the educated Doukhobor. In our present lifestyle, we are integrating with many other people, and we are ^{finding} that the interrelationships that are developing based on mutually-defined goals such as nuclear disarmament, require our taking part in these issues by dealing with all levels of the world society. Therefore, it is very beneficial to have Doukhobor lawyers, professors and so on, whether male or female.

My own feeling is that, with one more generation, we could be creating what may develop into a true egalitarian system. But, Doukhobor women will have to first acknowledge, understand, and accept their history, for it is "vital to a healthy sense of self-worth".⁶⁰ Then they will be ready to begin from there, fresh, - with today's opportunities and needs at hand - to cooperate and function on an equal basis with their brethren.

I DO believe in the value of 'family', and its needs are of paramount importance if the Doukhobor concepts are to be preserved for future generations. After all, we want to carry on the Doukhobor social movement's goal which is: "...a search for a society that is built on peace rather than war, a society where its members resolve disagreements through argument rather than resorting to physical violence; a society based on the fundamental brotherhood* of all men* and the supreme value of the individual human being; and on the belief that each person, having equal status, has therefore, the potential to create the new man or woman with a personal philosophy and social responsibility. Each is guided by conscience - the inner light of reason and love. That is the ideal".⁶¹ Thus there may come a time in a married couple's life, when a

⁶⁰ Tarasoff, Plakun Trava. p. 231

⁶¹ ibid p. 131

*and sisterhood
*and women

decision would have to be reached as to who would be best fitted to remaining at home with the family. By putting two heads together and thrashing out the problem, the mother and father can arrive at a mutually-acceptable decision. If it is the woman who is to work at home temporarily, she will be there from choice, not from a forced societal position. Thus, we may accomplish "...a mix of the traditional and the modern, with approval of the career route while, at the same time, encouraging the raising of children. The old and the new..."⁶² will have come together.

(A) To round the essay off, it would be useful to come back to the questions you posed at the beginning and briefly summarize the answers.

^{Doukhobor women} You have lots and lots of useful material on here - combined with your knowledge from other sources and your own observations this makes for interesting reading.

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Tarasoff, Doukhobor Folkways. p. 1

At the only problem I have with the paper is that of organization. We jump back & forward in time & move from topic to topic & back again. This is fine for general readers but an anthropology paper needs to be organized in some specific way. One possibility would be to use the topics on your "table for comparison of culture" as ^(class handout) sub-headings a framework for your exploration of the role & status of Doukhobor women.

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