

The Good Women of Garm

by Mahina Abdlojonova, Tillovat Abdurasullova, Manzura Giyoeva & Nasiba Mirzoeva

We are four girls who study English through the English Access Micro Scholarship Program in the Rasht Valley, Tajikistan. Our names are Mahina, Manzura, Nasiba and Tillovat and we are 14 to 16 years of age. We would like to introduce *Azizah* readers to five prominent women in our community, but first let us describe our beautiful and historic region in Central Tajikistan.

There are steep mountains with high pastures outlined by rugged snow capped peaks. The town of Garm is settled on the banks of the Surkhob River with its red waters and 14 neighboring villages settled higher up on the mountain slopes. The people have beautiful vegetable gardens and bountiful fruit trees. Many people raise animals such as cows, goats and sheep.

In Garm, there are many small businesses and an open-air

market where we buy our food and clothing supplies. There is a Pedagogical University, a Medical and a Technical College and many schools for the children. The highway that runs along the river through the center of the Rasht Valley is a trade route from Kyrgyzstan to Dushanbe, our country's capitol.

For this article, we interviewed five prominent women in our community in order to practice our English language and journalism skills. We first interviewed each woman in the Tajik language, summarized the information in Tajik, and then translated it into English.

Matluba Rajabaljeva

She is the chairman of the Development Centre of Garm, a non-governmental organization (NGO). This organization was established in 2001 with the support of the United Nations Development Program and is now supported by the Organization for Security

and Co-operation in Europe. Ms. Rajabaljeva told us her organization is a "resource center for women" which provides numerous services for the women of Garm, Tojikobod, and the neighboring villages.

While we were interviewing her, a woman entered the office. Her husband had died a few years ago, which left her alone with children and



no income. Ms. Rajabaljeva instructed her on how to establish personal identification with the government, which would provide her with a small pension.

Along with assisting widows and other single women, Ms. Rajabaljeva actively establishes reading programs for girls in remote mountainous

funds and it is her dream to finish it as soon as possible. We asked her what she was most proud of and she responded, “The people know and respect me.” She also takes pride in the fact that people often come to her apartment during the winter months for companionship and warmth. Besides being a person for refuge, an

advocate for women and a teacher for girls, Ms. Rajabaljeva is the mother of three children. She has two sons at university and one daughter in the eighth grade.

Tavakkalova Oimnisso

She was educated as a civil engineer at the Polytechnic University of Tajikistan. She now works as the Chief Surveyor Specialist for the town government of Garm. As we sat around Ms. Oimnisso’s desk in her office, she showed us an example of the paperwork she processes. When a citizen would like to procure a plot of land on one of the 22 streets of Garm, it is her job to draw up the surveyed plans, as well as the legal documents to make this happen.

Ms. Oimnisso is the only woman working in her department and she mentioned that she would like to see more women working there. Her professional plan for the future is to help develop Garm into a well-equipped modern city. Earlier this year, the surveyor was busy working on preparing the city for the festivities of Independence Day in September.

On the personal side, she has two sons and two daughters. The eldest daughter is studying medicine in Dushanbe and the younger daughter, Manzura, is studying English in high school.

Satorova Lojvarbe

She works as an anesthesiology nurse in the operating room at the local hospital. She loves her work, especially the obstetric cases where she can assist women who are afraid of the difficulty of giving birth. Ms. Lojvarbe also trains young medical students during their time of residency at the hospital. She told us that she would like to see more girls enter the medical occupation.

Speaking more about her professional ambitions, Ms.



Matluba Rajabaljeva, (left) Tavakkalova Oimnisso, (above) and Satorova Lojvarbe (right), all work hard to advance women in their community.

villages where the school is a very long walk away. We visited Ms. Rajabaljeva’s computer class where teenage girls were learning word processing. A very kind woman, she invited us to attend her computer class, as well.

Ms. Rajabaljeva is in the process of constructing a new office building with her own





Chef Kholova Amrikhon Jiandarovna, (left) and physician Savriniso Hafizova Khairulloevna (below) inspire young girls to succeed.

Lojvarbe said she wants to “create a more modern hospital for our district” with the addition of more medical equipment and computers. She advised us to “learn how to treat people well,” and encouraged us by saying “learning science was easy.”

Ms. Lojvarbe has two children, one of whom studies with us in our Access English class.

Kholova Amrikhon Jiandarovna

She is a professional cook and baker who makes breads, biscuits and cakes. She finished high school in the Rasht Valley but because of a difficult situation in the area at that time, she was unable to attend the university to further her education.

Ms. Jiandarovna has become a successful baker and chef. A few of us tried her food during Eid and it was delicious. We sampled otoll ah, which is a soup with fine noodles and meat, a salad of tomatoes and cucumbers, flat breads



called kohlcha and girdacha, and a very sweet, tasty cake with frosting.

She has two sons and three daughters. Ms. Jiandarovna said her hope is that her children will study

at the university and will become professionals in their home district of Rasht Valley.

Savriniso Hafizova Khairulloevna

She is a licensed physician of internal medicine. Ms. Khairulloevna related to us that when the civil war in Tajikistan was over in 1993, there were few doctors and no medicine to treat the sick people. She realized that she could treat people with the herbs growing in the local mountains.

Using her knowledge, Ms. Khairulloevna first taught women to use the herbs in a tea and then later as an ingredient in the traditional foods. Over time, she saw that the herbs brought good results.

As the chairwoman of a non-governmental organization called Niso, Ms. Khairulloevna has set up five self-help groups for women. In these groups, women learn to cook traditional Tajik food, such as *kochi*, which is a boiled root. They also learn how to make handicrafts and ways to make herbal therapies from local natural resources.

Ms. Khairulloevna promotes the teaching of ecology to women and

We have learned that in today's world, it is necessary to learn a foreign language. We think that learning the English language will enable us to read many books in English, travel internationally, and help us to understand other cultures. We believe that learning English will help us realize our dreams.

Tillova's dream is to become a psychologist. Nasiba and Mahina both have ambitions of becoming diplomatic ambassadors and want to represent Tajikistan abroad. Manzura's hope is to become an English teacher in remote mountainous villages where the students do not have the opportunity to study English.

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The authors from left to right: **Manzura Giyoeva, Tillova Abdurasullova, Nasciba Mirzoeva and Mahina Abdillojonova.**
Below: **Authors with the girls of Garm.**



their families. She reports that she is most proud when she sees women implementing and excelling from the skills and information that she teaches them.

At home, she has two sons, one who is an interpreter of Chinese

and the other who works for another NGO.

Like the women we have interviewed, we four young women strive for success. Like these good women of Garm, we hope to contribute to our community also. 🌱

