

## EMERGENCE OF IDEAS OF GENDER EQUALITY IN UZBEK LITERATURE

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## Q'ZBEK ADABIYOTIDA JINSIY TENGLIK G'OYALARINING PAYDO BO'LISHI

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## РАЗВИТИЕ ИДЕАЛОВ ГЕНДЕРНОГО РАВЕНСТВА В УЗБЕКСКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ

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**Abstract:** this article explores the evolution of gender inequality and feminist discourse in Uzbek literature, focusing on the portrayal of women in the early twentieth century. It examines the influence of the Jadids, who advocated for women's rights, and how their ideas are reflected in the works of writers like Cholpon and Qodiriy.

**Keywords:** gender equality, feminism, Uzbek literature.

**Annotatsiya:** Ushbu maqola o'zbek adabiyotidagi gender tengsizligi va feministik nutq evolyutsiyasini o'rganib, XX asr boshlaridagi ayollar obraziga e'tibor qaratadi. Unda xotin-qizlar huquqlarini himoya qilgan jadidlarning ta'siri, ularning g'oyalari Cho'lpon va Qodiriy kabi adiblar ijodida qanday aks etganligi o'rganiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** gender tengligi, feminizm, o'zbek adabiyoti.

**Аннотация:** В статье рассматривается гендерное неравенство и эволюция феминистского дискурса в узбекской литературе, особое внимание уделяется образу женщины в начале XX века. В книге исследуется влияние джадидов, защищавших права женщин, и то, как их идеи нашли отражение в творчестве таких писателей, как Чулпон и Кодири.

**Ключевые слова:** гендерное равенство, феминизм, узбекская литература.

The issue of gender inequality, the position of both sexes in society, and the roles of men and women in the family continue to pose challenges not only in developing and postcolonial countries but also in developed countries. However, as Estelle Freedman aptly notes in the *No turning back: The history of feminism and the future of women* (2007), "Despite the persistence of inequality, and despite formidable backlash, we live in a period of unprecedented attention to gender relations, marked by visible changes in women's status worldwide. Whether measured by the grassroots protests that draw on maternal authority or the flourishing of

women's art and literature, by women's participation in athletics or their election to legislatures around the world. Uzbekistan did not remain aloof from this process. The achievements highlighted by Friedman can be observed to varying degrees in the social and cultural life of the country. Notably, the influence of feminist tendencies in literature is particularly significant. Throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the most notable works of Uzbek literature have addressed social issues. In *The Sociological Imagination*, C.Wright Mills (1959) noted: "In the absence of an adequate social science, critics and novelists, dramatists and poets have been

the major, and often the only, formulators of private troubles and even of public issues<sup>1</sup>.

There were male writers who campaigned for the rights of women and girls and disseminated the ideas of equal rights for men and women, in Uzbekistan in particular. After the Bolsheviks came to power in the Soviet Union, women's liberation became a serious focus, and they carried out drastic measures to achieve gender equality. Researchers note that the Bolsheviks made great progress initially (Millett, 1970), and according to *The Practice of Resolving Issues Related to Women in the Soviet Period: Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Gender Relations* (2007), women gained equal footing with men in all areas, whereas feminists in the West had to fight for years for these rights. In 1918, Soviet Union proclaimed the equality of women in every field and introduced this article into the constitution. The same article was also introduced into the constitutions of all Soviet republics, including the Constitution of Turkestan Autonomous Republic (103). In Uzbekistan, the *Attack Movement*, a controversial political movement, emerged to fight against conservative worldviews, outdated customs, and mentalities. This movement faced public resistance, tragedies, victims, and family disruptions (108-110). Despite these challenges, the women's rights movement in Uzbekistan made significant progress, including the abolition of the veil and the right for women to study and work on an equal footing with men<sup>2</sup>.

Jadid-writers began experimenting with new character types suited for the new themes in European genres, leading to the development and rise of gender equality issues in both prose and poetry, as well as in drama. One notable character that emerged during this time was the image of an unhappy girl sold like a slave by her father, separated from her loved one, and forcibly married. Cholpon's short story, *Tulip in the Snow*, stands out as the first perfect example of a novelette that addressed the issue of gender equality. The story, written in a modern lyrical style, explored the ill-treatment of women and the equating of women with slaves. It is

worth noting that the dreams of the writer and educator were deeply embodied in these characters. Let us turn to the novel *Bygone Days* (1925). When the main female character, Kumush, finds out that she has been engaged to a man without her knowledge, she protests: "Kumush is going to be married... Who is going to be married? Kumush. Does Kumush like her groom or not? Is it necessary to know her opinion or not? It is not necessary to discuss this with her. Why? It is tradition! Kumush must be married to a man suitable to her parents" (69). In the novel, Kumush is lucky: her marriage turns out to be an unexpected happiness, as she falls deeply in love with a stranger she is married off to. However, the author emphasizes the irony of the old traditional custom. As a writer and educator, Abdullah Qodiriy felt that these outdated customs were against human freedom. Outdated views, particularly polygamy, which were deeply entrenched in feudalism, were rampant during these periods and left a heavy imprint on the fate of characters. Women's rights were a recurrent theme in various stories and novels written during this period, addressing not only domestic violence but also the low status given to women in society. In Cholpon's short story, *Baker Girl* (1928), the female protagonist from a poor family is raped by a wealthy man who lures her to his house<sup>3</sup>.

The theme of women's suffering continues in a different form in Oybek's novel *Sacred Blood* (1940), which also reflects the events of the recent past. In this narrative, the main character, a woman from a poor family, is coerced into marrying an older, wealthy man, leading to her separation from her true love. Her tragic fate culminates in her poisoning by her stepdaughter, who is older than her, after she becomes pregnant. This storyline exemplifies gender theory's exploration of power dynamics and the intersection of socioeconomic status and gender. The novel illustrates how patriarchal structures and economic inequalities can exacerbate women's vulnerability and limit their agency<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. 2014. *We Should All Be Feminists*. New York: Vintage Books.

<sup>2</sup> Alimova, Dilorom. 1991. *The Women's Issues in Central Asia: History of Research and Contemporary Challenges*. [Jenskiy vopros v Sredney Azii: istoriya izucheniya i sovremenniy problem]. Tashkent: Fan:120.

<sup>3</sup> Mills, Wright. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press. Classics.

<sup>4</sup> Oybek, Musa Toshmuhammedov. 2019. *Sacred Blood*. [Qutlug' qon]. Tashkent: Gafur Gulom.

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However, Uzbek literature of that period also features women characters who refuse to accept their

fate and challenge outdated customs and worldviews. One such example is Qodiriy's historical novel, *Bygone Days*, in which the female character Kumush saves her husband from the gallows. In *The Scorpion from Altar* (1928), the brave protagonist fights for her happiness and defies the King's wishes, which was considered a courageous act for the nineteenth century setting of the novel. Notably, the themes of romanticism and realism intersect in these novels, with romanticism prevailing in the portrayal of women characters.

In short, the emergence of ideas of gender equality in Uzbek literature is a profound change in cultural stories and attitudes in society. As writers and poets begin to depart from traditional norms and portray women's lives with authenticity and richness, they are a part of an overall discourse about gender roles and rights in Uzbekistan.

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