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The Issue of Attitude Towards Women's Education in Hamza's Novels

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Abstract: The socio-political transformations that took place in Turkestan during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries left a profound and enduring mark on Uzbek literature. As Abdullah Avloniy famously stated, "Literature is the mirror of the nation," and the loss of national independence under colonial rule, together with its tragic consequences, found vivid expression in the literary works of the period. During this time, members of the national intelligentsia, particularly the Jadids, began to recognize the underlying causes of the hardships faced by the people and sought ways to overcome them through unity and reform.

The Jadids regarded education and knowledge as the most effective means of restoring the nation's identity and liberating the country from the constraints of an oppressive political system. Their objectives included the formation of an enlightened intellectual class, the establishment of new-method schools, the introduction of Western educational and cultural practices, the publication of modern textbooks, the promotion of overseas study opportunities for young people, and the awakening of public consciousness through journalism and theatre.

Among the leading representatives of this movement was Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoziy, who made a significant contribution through his activities in the press, theatre, and literature. His poems and songs were designed to raise public awareness and stimulate social consciousness. However, one of Hamza's most important contributions to Uzbek literature was his attempt to introduce the novel genre, which was still relatively new to national literary practice.

Although his prose works may not fully correspond to contemporary standards of novelistic form and structure, they represented an important stage in the development of Uzbek narrative literature. In particular, the works Yangi Saodat (New Happiness) and Uchrashuv (The Meeting), which the author himself described as "national novels," addressed some of the most pressing social issues of the time. These included the importance of education, social inequality, and the status and rights of women. As such, these works occupy a notable place in the history of Uzbek literature as some of the earliest attempts to explore contemporary social realities through extended prose fiction.

This article examines the reflection of the socio-cultural realities of the period in Hamza's novels and analyzes the ways in which the author represented the major social concerns of his era through literary narrative.

Keywords: education and upbringing, Jadidism, reform, women's rights, novel

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1. Introduction

Hamza, the first recipient of the honorary title "People's Writer of Uzbekistan," devoted his life, like many other prominent Jadid intellectuals, to awakening the nation from ignorance, fostering national self-awareness, encouraging the pursuit of freedom, and promoting social progress through education and enlightenment. Through his rich

literary heritage and intellectual endeavors, he sought to preserve the nation's cultural identity and traditional values while guiding society toward modernization [1]. In addition to Uzbek, Hamza acquired a thorough knowledge of several languages, including Arabic, Persian-Tajik, Russian, and Turkish. In his literary works, he addressed a wide range of social issues, such as the importance of education and moral upbringing, women's rights, social inequality, and class stratification. He regarded the promotion of knowledge and the formation of an enlightened intellectual generation as the primary means of resolving these societal challenges [2].

Prose occupied a significant place in Hamza's literary output prior to the October Revolution. Among his prose works, *Yangi Saodat yoxud Milliy Roman* (New Happiness, or a National Novel) holds a particularly distinguished position. Through this work, Hamza introduced not only a new genre into his own creative practice but also contributed to the emergence of the novel as a distinct literary form in twentieth-century Uzbek literature. As noted by Matyoqub Qo'shjonov, the novel "represents both a continuation and a new stage in the writer's educational and enlightenment-oriented literary activity" [3].

The novel was written in 1914 and was first published on 5 March 1915 in Kokand as a lithographic edition with the support of A'zamjon Davron, publisher of the Madoro Library. In literary scholarship, the work is also referred to by the alternative title *Turmush Achchig'i* (The Bitterness of Life). No manuscript version of the novel has survived. The only extant lithographic copy is currently preserved in the Hamza Collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan under inventory number 357 [4].

Yangi Saodat was first republished in 1980 as part of Hamza's two-volume *Collected Works* and was later included in an expanded form in Volume Two of the five-volume *Complete Works*, published in 1988.

An announcement concerning Hamza's *Yangi Saodat* appeared in the 15 July 1915 issue of the journal *Al-Isloh*, which stated [5]:

"The publication of a forty-six-page national novel entitled *Yangi Saodat*, written in the Turkic language and the dialect of Turkestan, has brought us great satisfaction. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that, until now, no novel of such persuasive influence has been published in the Turkestan dialect with the purpose of encouraging the people toward literacy and education. The author of this novel is Mr. Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoziy, and its publisher is the Madoro Library in Kokand" [6].

2. Materials and Methods

The novel represents one of the most significant examples of Hamza's enlightenment-oriented literary activity and constituted a major social and cultural event in its time. In order to make his ideological purpose clear from the very beginning, Hamza chose the following verse as the epigraph to the work:

*"O'qub tahsili ilm ayla, maorif sharbatini yutgil,
Tilingni jahldan qutqor, g'ami millat bila o'tgil".*

Hamza begins the novel with a section entitled "Ikhtor" ("Notice" or "Prefatory Remark"). This section is included in the second volume of Hamza's five-volume *Complete Works* but is absent from the four-volume *Collected Works*. In this introductory part, the author notes that the majority of Muslim men and women in Turkestan over the age of twenty had received their education in traditional schools. As a result, their literacy was based on the old orthography and teaching methods, which prevented them from easily reading and understanding contemporary textbooks, newspapers, and journals published in the new script and according to modern educational standards.

3. Results and Discussion

Hamza further expresses concern that individuals unfamiliar with the new method and orthography devoted much of their reading time to works such as *Jamshid*, *Zarqum*, *Aldarko'sa*, *Bayoz*, *Dalli Muxtor*, *Gulandom*, and *Afandi*, which, in his view, contributed little to moral education and intellectual development. In contrast, he emphasizes that his own work was written in a simple and accessible style and that the use of the new orthography played an important role in making it understandable to a broad readership. At the conclusion of this preface, he invites educated contemporaries, whom he addresses as "our like-minded compatriots among the people of the press and the pen," to express their opinions regarding the work [7].

The main narrative of the novel begins with the chapter entitled "Olimjonning otasi" ("Olimjon's Father"). Through this section, the author introduces readers to the principal causes of the circumstances that later shape the life of the protagonist, Olimjon. Olimjon's father, Abduqahhor, is the beloved son of a wealthy merchant named G'ozzi. The merchant himself is portrayed as an ignorant individual who regards life solely in terms of wealth accumulation and material possessions. Convinced that his fortune would never diminish, G'ozzi pays little attention to his son's education. Growing up under the protection of his father's wealth, Abduqahhor likewise remains indifferent to learning and intellectual development.

When Abduqahhor reaches the age of twenty-five, his father dies. Completely unprepared to preserve and manage the inheritance left to him, Abduqahhor squanders his wealth on gambling and alcohol. Ignoring the advice of his wife, Maryam, he gradually falls into financial ruin. Eventually, his situation deteriorates to such an extent that he is forced to sell even the household possessions. Finally, he abandons his family his wife Maryam, his mother Ruzvonbibi, and his children Olimjon and Xadichaxon in Kokand and departs for Tashkent [8].

The question arises as to why Hamza chooses to begin the novel with a depiction of the upper generation of the family. The answer lies in the author's central ideological message: no matter how wealthy a person may be materially, without spiritual and intellectual development such wealth cannot benefit either the individual, the family, or society. Through this episode, Hamza conveys the idea that people who neglect education and place material prosperity above knowledge and enlightenment inevitably condemn themselves to a cycle of ignorance. The author emphasizes that unless such individuals return to the path of learning, their future will continue to be shaped by the consequences of their own intellectual negligence [9].

The subsequent chapters, entitled "Maryamning holi" ("Maryam's Condition"), "Olimjonning holi" ("Olimjon's Condition"), and "Bir so'z" ("A Word"), guide the reader more deeply into the essence of the narrative and provide a detailed account of the lives of the principal characters. In these sections, Hamza makes effective use of descriptive narration and literary imagery. Particular attention is devoted to the experiences endured by Olimjon's mother, Maryam, over a period of six or seven years, during which the author carefully portrays her resilience and perseverance [10].

Through the character of Maryam, Hamza highlights the differences among women of the period. Her mother-in-law, Ruzvonbibi, is depicted as a woman who has never been able to rely upon her husband for support. Like her grandchildren, she becomes dependent on Maryam for the family's survival. Maryam, however, differs significantly from those around her. Even before marrying Abduqahhor, she possessed a strong desire for knowledge and had received a modest education through the traditional system. She clearly understands the reasons behind her husband's downfall and recognizes the

importance of education. Moreover, she appreciates the profound difference between the future prospects of an educated person and the fate of one deprived of learning [11].

Consequently, although she is forced to work in other people's households merely to provide for her family, she never ceases to think about her children's future and dreams of securing an education for them. Maryam's patience, wisdom, and moral integrity attract the attention of numerous wealthy men who seek to take advantage of her vulnerable situation. Nevertheless, she remains steadfast, protecting not only her own dignity and honor but also the reputation of her absent husband and the pride of her children. Her endurance and moral strength constitute some of the most admirable qualities in the novel [12].

A similar female character appears in Hamza's novel *Uchrashuv* (The Meeting), namely Soliha, the wife of the negative character Abror. Like Maryam, Soliha suffers greatly because of her husband's behavior. At the same time, she is both his wife and his cousin, and she continues to love him despite the hardships she endures. Most importantly, like Maryam, she has received at least a basic education and maintains hope that the difficulties of life will eventually pass [13]. Through these two female characters, Hamza demonstrates that women constitute one of the most crucial foundations of society and of the future generation. The author suggests that when women are educated and guided by knowledge and enlightenment, the prospects for family welfare and social progress become significantly brighter [14].

In the novel *Yangi Saodat* (New Happiness), as Olimjon acquires an education, establishes his position within the school system, and begins working, he increasingly aspires to see his younger sister, Xadichaxon, benefit from education as well. Through his work, Olimjon regularly reads journals and literary publications, which enable him to develop a critical understanding of contemporary attitudes toward women's education in Turkestan. He becomes deeply concerned by the fact that Muslim women were often oppressed by their husbands, deprived of social recognition, and confined primarily to the roles of childbearing and childrearing. He also recognizes that mothers who themselves lack education are unable to provide the intellectual and moral foundation necessary for the development of future generations [15].

Motivated by these concerns, Olimjon removes his sister from the traditional instruction of the *otinoyi* and undertakes her education himself during his spare time, providing her with a modern upbringing based on the principles of the new-method schools. His goal is not merely to educate Xadichaxon according to his own knowledge but to prepare her to become one of the enlightened female teachers capable of contributing to the progress of the nation.

Similarly, Nazokatxonim, whom Olimjon later marries, is portrayed as an educated woman from a prosperous family. Through these characters, Hamza advocates not only for the modern education of girls but also for the importance of intellectual compatibility within marriage. The novel suggests that men should, whenever possible, choose educated spouses or, at the very least, support and encourage their wives' educational development after marriage. In this way, the author integrates his broader educational and reformist ideals into the narrative conclusion of the work.

As scholars have observed, the significance of Hamza's novels *Yangi Saodat* and *Uchrashuv* (The Meeting) has not always received the level of attention they deserve, either within the context of contemporary literary studies or in comparison with the interest shown during earlier periods of the twentieth century. This decline in scholarly engagement cannot be attributed to a lack of qualified literary critics; rather, it reflects the complexity of reassessing Hamza's multifaceted literary legacy. For many years, Hamza was presented as the sole founder of Soviet Uzbek literature and was strongly promoted by the dominant ideological discourse of the Soviet era. Re-evaluating his life and works

on new scholarly foundations therefore presents significant methodological and interpretive challenges.

Like Yangi Saodat, Hamza's novel *Uchrashuv* is devoted to addressing the social problems of its time through the experiences of young people striving for love, education, and personal development. Although the complete text of the novel has not survived, the extant portions indicate that Hamza intended to contrast educated and uneducated individuals through the characters of Yusuf and Abror. At the same time, through the character of Shirin, he appears to explore issues related to respect for women, the proper understanding of love, and the role and status of women within society.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, although Hamza is best known for his dramatic works and journalistic activities, this should not be interpreted as evidence of weakness in the field of prose. On the contrary, he produced some of the earliest examples of realism in Uzbek literature and pioneered the development of the national novel. While many of his prose works have not survived, readers familiar with Hamza's literary heritage recognize that he established a significant place for himself in the history of Uzbek prose as well. Further clarification of his contribution requires continued scholarly engagement by present and future literary researchers. Such investigations may not only deepen our understanding of Hamza's literary achievements but may also lead to the discovery and publication of previously unknown works, thereby enriching the broader field of Uzbek literary studies.

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