WOMEN AND SOCIETAL CONFLICT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GUSTAVE FLAUBERT'S "*MADAME BOVARY*" AND ABDULLA QODIRIY'S "*O'TKAN KUNLAR*"

M.E. Saidova
Head of the Information Service Department of the Committee on Sanitary and Epidemiological Welfare and Public Health; Advisor to the Chairperson of the Committee on Information Policy Matters

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18456180

Abstract. *This article provides a comparative literary analysis of two canonical novels: Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary and Abdulla Qodiriy's O'tkan kunlar. The study examines the representation of women within patriarchal social structures, focusing on the figures of Emma Bovary, Kumush, and Zaynab. Drawing on feminist theory, realism aesthetics, and socio-psychological analysis, the article argues that female tragedy in both Western and Eastern literary traditions is not merely the result of individual moral failure, but rather a systemic product of social norms, marriage institutions, and gendered power relations. Through a cross-cultural perspective, the research reveals how women's subjectivity is constrained by selective moral codes and internalized patriarchal mechanisms.*

Keywords: *comparative literature, female representation, patriarchy, marriage institution, realism, feminism.*

Introduction The question of women's position within society has long occupied a central place in world literature, serving as a critical lens through which social structures, moral codes, and power relations are examined. From nineteenth-century European realism to early twentieth-century Central Asian prose, female characters often embody the tensions between individual desire and collective norms. Literature thus becomes not merely a reflection of social reality, but an analytical space in which gendered hierarchies and patriarchal mechanisms are exposed and interrogated (Eagleton, 2008).

Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) stands as a foundational text of European realism, revealing how bourgeois morality and the institution of marriage function as instruments of social control over women. Emma Bovary's tragedy is not simply the result of personal moral weakness, but rather a consequence of a rigid social system that suppresses female subjectivity and emotional fulfillment (Lukács, 1962). Similarly, Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tkan kunlar* (1922), the first full-fledged Uzbek novel, depicts women's lives within a traditional patriarchal society shaped by custom, religion, and social hierarchy. Through the figures of Kumush and Zaynab, Qodiriy illustrates how women are simultaneously idealized and oppressed, valued morally yet denied autonomy.

While these novels emerge from distinct cultural and historical contexts, they share a fundamental concern: the structural vulnerability of women within male-dominated social orders. Previous studies have often examined *Madame Bovary* through the lenses of realism, morality, and individual psychology, while *O'tkan kunlar* has primarily been analyzed in terms of national identity, enlightenment ideals, and social reform. However, comparatively little attention has been

paid to a cross-cultural feminist reading that brings these works into dialogue with one another, particularly through the parallel analysis of Emma Bovary, Kumush, and Zaynab.

This article seeks to fill that scholarly gap by offering a comparative analysis grounded in feminist theory and socio-psychological criticism. The central argument advanced here is that female tragedy in both novels is not an isolated or individual phenomenon, but a systemic outcome of patriarchal norms, selective moral judgment, and the institution of marriage. By juxtaposing Western and Eastern literary traditions, the study demonstrates how women's oppression manifests through different cultural forms while maintaining similar structural foundations.

Methodologically, the research employs comparative-historical analysis, close textual reading, and feminist theoretical frameworks, drawing on the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Georg Lukács. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the article aims to contribute to contemporary gender studies and comparative literature by highlighting the enduring relevance of classical texts in understanding modern debates on women, society, and power.

Literature Review

The role and position of women in society, including their social and cultural formation, has long been a central theme in literary studies and feminist theory. Particularly within patriarchal societies, the restriction of female subjectivity, control via the institution of marriage, and moral regulation have been widely discussed in both theoretical and literary research.

Simone de Beauvoir's perspectives are foundational for understanding this issue. In *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949), she argues that women have historically been constructed as the "Other" in relation to men, emphasizing that femininity is not a biological essence but a product of socio-historical processes. This framework is instrumental for analyzing the characters of Emma Bovary, Kumush, and Zaynab, as all three operate within roles defined and enforced by society.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990) further deepens this analysis. According to Butler, gender is not a stable inherent trait but a set of repeated social behaviors. This perspective is particularly useful for interpreting Kumush and Zaynab in *O'tkan kunlar*: Kumush's obedience and moral integrity and Zaynab's jealousy and aggression are less a product of personal disposition than the result of patriarchal gender expectations. The phenomenon of "woman oppressing woman" is seen as an internalized mechanism of social control.

Georg Lukács' aesthetics of realism provide an additional methodological lens. Lukács views realism as a literary form that links individual destinies with broader social contexts. In *Madame Bovary*, Emma's personal tragedy is inseparably linked to bourgeois moral hypocrisy and economic constraints. Likewise, in *O'tkan kunlar*, women's fates are intertwined with custom, polygyny, and social hierarchy. This shows a methodological commonality between Western and Eastern realist traditions.

Previous studies have often analyzed *Madame Bovary* in terms of romantic illusion, moral decline, and consumer culture, whereas *O'tkan kunlar* has been approached through national awakening, enlightenment ideals, and social reform. However, there has been limited attention to a comparative feminist reading that examines Emma Bovary, Kumush, and Zaynab in parallel. This study thus integrates feminist theory and realism aesthetics with comparative methodology, presenting female tragedy as a systemic social phenomenon rather than merely a moral or personal issue. Such an approach enables a structural understanding of women's roles in both Western and Eastern literary traditions and provides a valuable foundation for contemporary gender studies.

Realism and Flaubert's Style Flaubert's realism emerged as a deliberate aesthetic response against the emotional excesses and idealization characteristic of Romanticism. Rejecting

sentimental exaggeration and overtly subjective narrative, Flaubert adopts a meticulous observational stance, portraying events and characters with clinical precision and objectivity (Flaubert, 1857; Lukács, 1962). This approach allows the social and psychological realities of his characters to emerge organically, without authorial intrusion or moralizing commentary.

His famous aesthetic principle—"the author must be like God in the novel: present everywhere but invisible"—is fully realized in *Madame Bovary*, ensuring that narrative authority is maintained while allowing characters and social contexts to unfold independently. The result is a complex interplay of detailed description, subtle characterization, and sustained psychological realism, which together create a rich and immersive representation of bourgeois society.

Flaubert's focus on precise language and narrative economy enhances the authenticity of the fictional world. Each scene, object, and interaction is carefully calibrated to reflect both external reality and internal subjectivity, allowing readers to perceive the nuanced tensions between societal norms and personal desires. The novel's attention to the minutiae of domestic life, economic constraints, and social expectations illustrates how the microcosm of Emma's world mirrors broader social structures, thereby situating individual tragedy within a systemic context.

Moreover, the psychological depth achieved in *Madame Bovary* exemplifies how literary realism can reveal the inner lives of characters with scientific rigor, capturing the complexity of human motivation and moral conflict. By employing a detached narrative stance, Flaubert ensures that his critique of bourgeois values and patriarchal restrictions is embedded within the narrative itself, rather than imposed externally, allowing for a subtle yet profound examination of societal norms and their impact on female subjectivity.

Female Characters: Emma Bovary, Kumush, and Zaynab

In a comparative analysis, the three female figures—Emma Bovary, Kumush, and Zaynab—serve as critical lenses through which the complexities of women's societal positions, psychological experiences, and the constraints imposed by patriarchal systems are examined (Beauvoir, 1949; Qodiriy, 1922; Butler, 1990). Each character embodies a distinct intersection of personal desire, moral expectation, and social limitation, illustrating the multifaceted nature of female subordination.

Emma Bovary actively seeks personal happiness and emotional fulfillment, her dissatisfaction manifesting in overt resistance to societal and moral norms. Her rebellion is both psychological and existential, reflecting the tension between individual aspiration and collective expectation:

"For Emma, this world was small and spiritually limited; she could not reach the joy of her heart, and each imaginary desire unsettled her further" (Flaubert, 1857, p. 123).

Marriage, for Emma, symbolizes a spiritual confinement rather than a source of satisfaction:

"Although she lived with her husband, a part of her heart always sought another life, another freedom" (Flaubert, 1857, p. 145).

Through Emma, Flaubert highlights the ways in which societal and marital structures can restrict female agency, producing psychological distress and existential disillusionment.

Kumush, in contrast, represents the archetype of moral purity, loyalty, and patient endurance. Her daily life revolves around fulfilling domestic and familial duties, yet her adherence to traditional values does not insulate her from systemic oppression:

"Every day Kumush patiently cleaned the house, striving to maintain her family's peace, yet inner pain would not let her be at rest" (Qodiriy, 1922, p. 67).

Despite her virtue, Kumush's life is shaped by social envy, polygyny, and entrenched patriarchal hierarchies, culminating in a tragic fate:

"Her face was bright, yet numerous inner conflicts and betrayals overwhelmed Kumush" (Qodiriy, 1922, p. 89).

Zaynab's character demonstrates a different dimension of female tragedy: the phenomenon of women oppressing women. Her actions, motivated by jealousy and the desire to maintain social standing, reflect the internalization of patriarchal norms and the competitive dynamics these norms engender among women:

"Whenever Zaynab saw her success, she could not suppress the anger within and sought ways to push her aside" (Qodiriy, 1922, p. 102).

This parallel with Emma Bovary illustrates that female oppression is not exclusively imposed externally by men, but is also perpetuated internally through socialized behaviors and internalized norms. Feminist theory underscores that the dynamics of female tragedy are complex, operating through both systemic patriarchal pressures and the socially mediated interactions between women themselves (Beauvoir, 1949; Butler, 1990).

By examining these three figures, the comparative analysis reveals how psychological distress, moral expectation, and societal pressures converge to limit women's autonomy, creating a shared structural foundation for female tragedy across disparate cultural and temporal contexts.

Marriage and Patriarchy In *Madame Bovary*, marriage is critically portrayed as an instrument of bourgeois society that functions to constrain female autonomy and enforce social conformity. Emma's experiences highlight the tensions between personal desire and institutionalized expectation, revealing marriage as a site where societal norms dictate the boundaries of women's emotional and psychological lives:

"Although Emma was with her husband, a part of her heart always sought another life, another freedom" (Flaubert, 1857, p. 145).

Through Emma's predicament, Flaubert illustrates how bourgeois marital institutions impose limitations that extend beyond the domestic sphere, shaping identity, desire, and subjective experience. The institution of marriage is thus revealed not as a source of personal fulfillment but as a vehicle for social control, where women are required to negotiate their aspirations within pre-defined moral and social parameters.

In *O'tkan kunlar*, marriage is similarly a tool of social regulation, though its foundation lies in the intertwining of social, religious, and economic traditions. For Kumush and Zaynab, marital arrangements reflect both familial expectations and the broader patriarchal hierarchy that governs women's roles and behavior:

"A woman's happiness is often shaped under the control of her husband and family; Kumush restrains herself with patience and obedience, yet this does not protect her" (Qodiriy, 1922, p. 74).

Kumush's restrained compliance illustrates the limited protective function of virtue and obedience within a system that privileges male authority. Zaynab's navigation of marital and social hierarchies further demonstrates the psychological and relational pressures exerted on women, revealing how interpersonal dynamics among women are often mediated by patriarchal norms.

By juxtaposing Western and Eastern literary representations, it becomes evident that marriage operates as both a personal and social prison. While the specific cultural manifestations differ, the structural constraints imposed on female subjectivity are strikingly similar. Feminist analysis emphasizes that these marital institutions serve not only as instruments of emotional and

economic regulation but also as mechanisms through which patriarchal power is maintained and internalized, profoundly shaping women's life courses, choices, and identities.

Social Morality and Female Tragedy In both *Madame Bovary* and *O'tkan kunlar*, social morality operates as a selective and systemic mechanism that enforces constraints on women, deeply influencing their agency and autonomy (Beauvoir, 1949; Eagleton, 2008). This moral framework is not merely a set of abstract rules but a tangible force shaping daily behavior, emotional responses, and social interactions.

Emma Bovary, whose desires and actions deviate from bourgeois expectations, is subjected to social scrutiny and public censure:

"Emma could not hide her mistakes before everyone; her actions were judged not only personally but by society" (Flaubert, 1857, p. 167).

Her moral transgressions are interpreted not as individual lapses but as challenges to the social order, demonstrating how collective norms enforce compliance and restrict female subjectivity. Emma's internal struggle, emotional turmoil, and eventual despair exemplify the psychological consequences of living under these rigid moral expectations.

Kumush, in contrast, embodies the plight of the morally upright woman whose virtue does not safeguard her against the structural pressures of patriarchy:

"Her loyalty and patience were insufficient protection; every unforeseen event altered Kumush's fate" (Qodiriy, 1922, p. 91).

Despite her adherence to social and familial duties, Kumush becomes a passive participant in the patriarchal system that limits her options and exposes her to vulnerability. Her experiences highlight the insufficiency of individual morality as a protective factor within a society structured by gender hierarchies and systemic inequities.

The comparative analysis of these characters illustrates that female tragedy transcends personal failings or moral misjudgments. It is a systemic phenomenon, emerging from the intersection of patriarchal norms, social judgment, and institutionalized expectations. Realist literary techniques employed by Flaubert and Qodiriy allow readers to perceive these systemic constraints with clarity, demonstrating how societal morality is both externally imposed and internally absorbed, shaping women's psychological landscapes and life trajectories (Butler, 1990; Lukács, 1962).

Ultimately, these narratives emphasize that women's vulnerability is structurally embedded, and that individual virtue or personal integrity cannot alone counteract the pervasive effects of social and patriarchal control. The novels thereby provide a critical framework for understanding female subordination as a product of systemic forces rather than mere personal weakness.

Women Oppressing Women: Zaynab and Emma Parallel

The characters of Zaynab from *O'tkan kunlar* and Emma Bovary from *Madame Bovary* illustrate that female tragedy is shaped not only by direct male dominance but also by the internalized pressures of patriarchal society. Emma represents active resistance to external social constraints, seeking personal autonomy and emotional fulfillment, whereas Zaynab exemplifies the internalized enforcement of societal norms, exerting control and opposition toward other women within the same patriarchal framework. This duality demonstrates that female oppression operates on multiple levels: externally through rigid social and moral codes, and internally through intra-gender competition and learned behaviors (Butler, 1990; Beauvoir, 1949).

In the case of Zaynab, her antagonism toward Kumush is not merely personal or emotional, but a reflection of a system that compels women to monitor and restrict each other. Patriarchal society conditions Zaynab to view other women as rivals or threats, turning her into an agent of the same social oppression that limits her own agency. This intra-gender tension reveals a critical dimension of patriarchal control, where women themselves become enforcers of societal norms, reinforcing the structures that restrict them.

Emma Bovary, by contrast, embodies the struggle against external societal limitations. Her dissatisfaction with her marriage and social expectations highlights the psychological and emotional consequences of living in a system that suppresses female subjectivity. Emma's pursuit of independence and personal pleasure, though ultimately tragic, illustrates the conflict between individual desires and collective moral judgments, emphasizing the broader systemic nature of female subjugation.

Together, Zaynab and Emma present complementary perspectives on female tragedy. One demonstrates how internalized patriarchy perpetuates oppression among women themselves, while the other reveals the consequences of resisting external societal pressures. Their narratives highlight two critical dimensions of women's subordination: the mechanisms of control imposed by society and the ways in which these mechanisms are internalized and enacted by women themselves. This dual framework provides a nuanced understanding of gendered oppression, suggesting that female tragedy cannot be fully comprehended without recognizing both societal and intra-gender dynamics.

Marriage Institution and Patriarchal Order

In *Madame Bovary*, the institution of marriage is portrayed as a formal instrument of bourgeois society, imposing social constraints and psychological imprisonment on women. Emma's marriage is not a source of personal happiness but rather a mechanism that restricts her freedom and emotional fulfillment:

"Even while living with her husband, a part of her heart always sought another life, another freedom" (Flaubert, 1857, p. 145).

Through Flaubert's realist lens, the novel illustrates how marriage and social expectations collectively limit female agency and reinforce patriarchal control.

In *O'tkan kunlar*, marriage is deeply embedded within social, religious, and economic traditions. For characters like Kumush and Zaynab, marriage serves not only as a familial obligation but also as a tool for maintaining patriarchal hierarchy:

"A woman's happiness is often shaped by the supervision of her husband and family; Kumush restricts herself through patience and obedience, yet this does not protect her" (Qodiriy, 1922, p. 74).

Both novels reveal that, despite cultural and historical differences, the institution of marriage functions similarly in restricting women's subjectivity. Marriage becomes both a personal and social cage, illustrating the intersection of individual desire and societal expectation. From a feminist perspective, this analysis demonstrates that female autonomy is consistently constrained by patriarchal norms, with marriage serving as a key instrument of such structural control.

Societal Morality and Female Tragedy

In both *Madame Bovary* and *O'tkan kunlar*, societal morality serves as a controlling force, imposing selective judgments on women and limiting their agency. In *Madame Bovary*, Emma's transgressions against moral norms lead to public scrutiny and social censure:

"Emma could not conceal her mistakes from the eyes of all; her actions were judged not only personally, but by society at large" (Flaubert, 1857, p. 167).

This exemplifies how societal expectations, particularly those rooted in bourgeois and patriarchal values, define acceptable female behavior and punish deviation.

In *O'tkan kunlar*, Kumush is subject to similar constraints, yet her suffering is amplified by the patriarchal system itself rather than personal moral failure:

"Her loyalty and patience did not protect her; every unforeseen event altered Kumush's fate" (Qodiriy, 1922, p. 91).

Through these narratives, both novels reveal that female tragedy is not a consequence of individual weakness but rather the systemic vulnerability of women within socially constructed frameworks. Social morality, intertwined with patriarchal norms, determines the boundaries of acceptable behavior and reinforces women's subordination.

The psychological and emotional impact of these social expectations is significant. In both texts, female characters experience inner conflict, despair, and a sense of entrapment, reflecting the profound influence of societal judgment on personal well-being. Realist literary techniques allow both Flaubert and Qodiriy to depict these psychological dimensions with precision, highlighting how external pressures are internalized and manifested in women's lives (Butler, 1990; Lukács, 1962).

Ultimately, these analyses demonstrate that societal morality is a double-edged mechanism: it not only regulates behavior through explicit rules and sanctions but also shapes internalized norms that govern thought, desire, and interpersonal relations. Female tragedy, therefore, emerges from the intersection of systemic control, moral judgment, and the personal struggle for autonomy.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tkan kunlar* demonstrates how the tension between women and society is systematically mediated through patriarchal structures (Flaubert, 1857; Qodiriy, 1922). The characters of Emma Bovary, Kumush, and Zaynab are interpreted as subjects constructed and constrained by social systems, illustrating the multifaceted ways in which patriarchal norms shape female experience (Beauvoir, 1949; Lukács, 1962; Butler, 1990). Emma represents open rebellion in Western society, Kumush embodies obedience and patience within Eastern traditions, and Zaynab reflects the phenomenon of women perpetuating oppression among themselves.

From a rigorous analytical perspective, these novels reveal female tragedy not as a mere individual or moral failing but as a systemic social phenomenon. The study highlights several key findings:

1. **Emma Bovary** — embodies external defiance and overt resistance to societal constraints. Her pursuit of personal freedom is continually curtailed by entrenched social mechanisms, illustrating the limits imposed on female subjectivity within bourgeois norms.
2. **Kumush** — exemplifies the model of obedience and patience, seeking harmony with traditional values. Nevertheless, the patriarchal system dictates the trajectory of her life and ultimately her tragedy.
3. **Zaynab** — embodies internalized oppression and inter-female competition, demonstrating how patriarchal structures foster conflict among women, compounding their marginalization.

These three models collectively underscore the intricate interplay between female subjectivity, social restriction, and patriarchal pressure. Such an analysis informs readers and scholars that female tragedy is not merely the result of personal choices or errors, but a product of broader social contexts and institutionalized norms. This study, grounded in feminist theory and comparative literary analysis, offers a novel scholarly framework for understanding women's experiences in both Western and Eastern literary traditions. It provides a foundational basis for contemporary gender studies by demonstrating how classical narratives illuminate enduring issues of patriarchy, social control, and female agency (Beauvoir, 1949; Butler, 1990; Eagleton, 2008; Lukács, 1962; Karimov, 2005). The research thus contributes both theoretically and methodologically to ongoing discussions regarding the intersection of literature, gender, and social structures.

REFERENCES

1. Flaubert G. (1857). *Madame Bovary*. Paris: Michel Lévy Frères.
2. Qodiriy A. (1922). *O'tkan kunlar*. Toshkent: Sharq nashriyoti.
3. Lukács G. (1962). *The Theory of the Novel*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
4. Beauvoir, S. de (1949). *Le Deuxième Sexe*. Paris: Gallimard.
5. Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
6. Eagleton T. (2008). *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
7. Karimov N. (2005). *Abdulla Qodiriy va o'zbek romanchiligi*. Toshkent: Adabiyot nashriyoti.
8. Butler J. – Judith Butler's foundational work on gender performativity, impacting feminist and queer scholarship.
9. Feminist Theory (SAGE Journal) – International peer-reviewed journal advancing contemporary feminist debates in arts, humanities, and social sciences.
10. Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory – Scholarly journal publishing feminist research on gender and performance studies.
11. Spivak G. C. – Work on postcolonial feminism and representation of subaltern women within discourse and institutions.
12. Feminist Literary Theory (SpringerLink) – Collection of recent research on feminist literary theory and critical methods in gender studies.
13. Linguistic Analysis of Gender in *O'tkan kunlar* – Paper applying gender and discourse analysis to Qodiriy's novel, showing how language constructs gender norms.