ISSN: 2181-3337 | SCIENTISTS.UZ VOLUME 5 ISSUE 7 JULY 2026

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERIZATION OF NAZIRA IN ZULFIYA QUROLBOY QIZI'S MASHAQQATLI HAYOT SO‘QMOQLARI (THE PATHS OF A DIFFICULT LIFE)

Sadullayeva Darmonjon
Master's Student, Urgench State University, Uzbekistan

DOI: 10.67620/sai.57c0007

ABSTRACT

This article examines the psychological characterization of Nazira in Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi's novel Mashaqqatli hayot so‘qmoqlari (The Paths of a Difficult Life). It adopts a qualitative close-reading method based on a purposive corpus of seven representative passages. The analysis distinguishes direct characterization, internal focalization, inner monologue, psychological portraiture, embodied detail, simile, metaphor, antithesis, and dream imagery rather than treating these devices as interchangeable. The findings show that the central organizing tension of the novel's psychologism lies between Nazira's outward endurance and her concealed need for affection, recognition, and support. Physical details such as wrinkles, the sparkle of the eyes, trembling lips, and greying hair translate emotional pressure into visible signs, while inner monologue marks moments when controlled endurance approaches breakdown. The dream of an expanding flower and a broken pot is interpreted as a symbolic condensation of accumulated distress and exhausted patience. The study also treats the novel's reported biographical basis as paratextual framing, analyzing Nazira as an artistically reconstructed biographical protagonist rather than as a purely documentary figure. Overall, the devices work as an integrated system that makes changes in Nazira's self-perception and emotional agency narratively legible.

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07.08.26

Keywords: *literary psychologism, psychological characterization, Nazira, female subjectivity, inner monologue, psychological portrait, dream imagery.*

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1. Introduction

The representation of consciousness is one of the central problems of narrative art because fictional characters become intelligible not only through what they do but also through how their perceptions, memories, bodily reactions, judgments, and unspoken desires are mediated by narrative discourse (Cohn, 1978; Herman, 2011; Palmer, 2002). Cognitive approaches further suggest that readers infer fictional minds from incomplete textual cues and attribute beliefs, intentions, and emotions to characters as they read (Zunshine, 2003). In contemporary Uzbek prose, this problem is especially important in works that place women's experience at the intersection of family obligation, economic pressure, social expectation, and individual aspiration. Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi's 2024 novel *Mashaqqatli hayot so‘qmoqlari* (The Paths of a Difficult Life) offers a productive case because its protagonist, Nazira, is repeatedly presented through the contrast between external composure and internal strain.

The book's publisher-facing description identifies Nazira Shodmonova, a well-known entrepreneur from Qashqadarya, as the life model for the novel and states that the author researched her enterprises,

family members, relatives, and business associates over several years (Asaxiy Books, n.d.). This paratextual claim matters because it positions the work between biography and fiction. It does not eliminate literary construction: selection, focalization, figurative language, scene arrangement, and the representation of consciousness remain artistic choices. Accordingly, the present study treats Nazira as an artistically reconstructed biographical protagonist rather than as a transparent documentary copy of a historical person.

Earlier scholarship on Uzbek prose has discussed the artistic interpretation of women's psychology and the role of portraiture, inner monologue, dream, memory, landscape, and detail in representing mental life (Eshmatova, 2020). International narrative theory has established more precise categories for consciousness representation, focalization, and characterization (Cohn, 1978; Genette, 1980; Herman, 2011; Rimmon-Kenan, 2002), while cognitive and affective research explains how readers infer fictional minds, simulate social experience, and respond to foregrounded language (Keen, 2006; Mar & Oatley, 2008; Miall & Kuiken, 1994; Oatley, 1999, 2012, 2016; Zunshine, 2003). Nevertheless, the particular interaction of these devices in the construction of Nazira has not been systematically clarified in the available discussion. The problem is not simply to list devices but to explain how they cooperate, what distinctions should be maintained among them, and how they mark changes in the protagonist's self-perception.

The article therefore asks three questions: (1) Which narrative and figurative devices make Nazira's psychological states legible? (2) How does the novel organize the tension between her outward endurance and concealed vulnerability? (3) What kind of character development can be demonstrated from the selected episodes without claiming more than the textual evidence supports? The study argues that the novel's psychological characterization is cumulative and relational: direct characterization establishes a disposition, internal focalization and inner monologue expose self-evaluation, embodied details externalize pressure, and dream imagery condenses conflict into symbolic form.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In Uzbek literary studies, artistic psychologism refers to the literary system through which a work represents the mental and emotional life of characters. Eshmatova's (2020) study of women's psychology in Uzbek novellas of the independence period emphasizes inner monologue, dialogue, authorial narration, landscape, dream, memory, and symbolic imagery. Her work is important for the present article because it treats women's psychological experience as a problem of poetics rather than as a collection of generalized psychological traits. This local scholarly tradition provides the literary-historical basis for examining Nazira, while the present study supplements it with narratological and cognitive terminology.

Narratology provides a precise vocabulary for differentiating the modes through which mental life is represented. Cohn (1978) distinguishes techniques for presenting consciousness, including narrated thought and forms that approach direct interior discourse. Genette's (1980) concept of focalization clarifies the difference between who speaks and whose perspective organizes the information presented. Rimmon-Kenan (2002) similarly shows that characterization can be direct, through explicit statements, or indirect, through action, speech, appearance, environment, and analogy. Herman's (2011) collection further demonstrates that representations of consciousness vary historically and formally across narrative traditions. These distinctions are necessary because not every description of appearance is a psychological portrait, and not every figurative sentence is a metaphor.

Cognitive approaches extend this framework by explaining how readers construct fictional minds from both internal and external evidence. Palmer (2002) argues that fictional minds are inferred from dispositions, emotions, actions, bodily signs, and social relations rather than from direct introspection alone. Zunshine (2003) connects this inferential process with theory of mind, emphasizing readers' efforts to interpret characters' beliefs, intentions, and emotions. Oatley (1999, 2012, 2016) and Mar and Oatley (2008) describe fiction as a cognitive and emotional simulation of social experience. These insights are

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particularly relevant to Nazira: wrinkles, trembling lips, sleeplessness, bodily shaking, and changed appearance after betrayal become part of the reader's evolving model of her mind.

For the purposes of this study, the following working distinctions are used. Direct characterization explicitly attributes a trait to Nazira. Internal focalization filters a scene through her perception or evaluation. Inner monologue presents her unspoken verbal thought with relative immediacy. Psychological portraiture uses appearance or bodily gesture to reveal an inner state. A psychological detail is a small physical or material sign that carries emotional significance. A simile makes an explicit comparison, usually marked by 'like' or 'as,' whereas a metaphor transfers qualities without such an explicit marker. Antithesis organizes opposed states, such as outward calm and inward turmoil. Dream imagery presents psychologically charged images whose meanings are inferential and must therefore be argued cautiously rather than declared as fixed (Cohn, 1978; Rimmon-Kenan, 2002). Foregrounded figurative language is treated as analytically significant when it disrupts ordinary perception and intensifies affect (Miall & Kuiken, 1994).

This framework also avoids essentializing 'women's psychology.' The object of analysis is not an allegedly universal female nature but Nazira's situated subjectivity as constructed by a particular narrative. Family conflict, labor, economic aspiration, social comparison, betrayal, and the need for care are treated as narrative conditions of her experience, not as biologically predetermined characteristics. Research on narrative empathy likewise emphasizes that emotional engagement is shaped by textual design, perspective, and readerly inference rather than by transparent access to another person's mind (Keen, 2006).

3. Materials and Methods

The primary source is the 2024 Read Book edition of Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi's *Mashaqqatli hayot so‘qmoqlari* (The Paths of a Difficult Life), a 575-page Uzbek-language novel (ISBN 978-9910-9544-7-4). The analysis uses a purposive corpus of seven passages cited on pages 33, 35, 153, 233, 256, 268, and 420. These passages were selected because they directly represent Nazira through characterization, perception, figurative language, inner monologue, bodily detail, or dream imagery. The study is therefore an intensive qualitative analysis of representative episodes, not an exhaustive frequency study of every psychological device in the novel.

The procedure involved four stages. First, each passage was classified according to the primary mode of psychological representation. Second, the wording and formal structure of the passage were examined to distinguish, for example, simile from metaphor and direct characterization from psychological portraiture. Third, each device was interpreted in relation to Nazira's changing self-understanding and the surrounding narrative situation. Fourth, the passages were compared across the character trajectory to identify recurrent tensions, especially the opposition between endurance and vulnerability. All English translations from Uzbek are the author's unless otherwise indicated, and all page references correspond to the 2024 Uzbek edition.

The method has two deliberate limits. It does not make clinical claims about the protagonist, and it does not treat dream imagery as having a single universal meaning. Nor does it claim that the selected passages represent every stage or device in the novel. Interpretations are restricted to features that can be supported by the quoted language and its stated narrative context.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Initial characterization: ability, diligence, and inwardness

Nazira is first established through a combination of direct characterization and indirect evidence. The narrator describes her as hardworking in domestic life, academically capable, warm-hearted, and somewhat dreamy:

Despite the numerous household responsibilities and her constant hard work, Nazira studied well at school. Apart from being somewhat dreamy, this diligent and warm-hearted girl was a favorite among her teachers. While other children sometimes had to read something three or four

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times before understanding it, Nazira could grasp it after reading it only once; whenever the teacher asked her, she would confidently recite the lesson fluently. (Qurolboy qizi, 2024, p. 33)

This passage should not be described solely as a psychological portrait because its main technique is explicit characterization supported by habitual action. The narrator names stable traits - diligence, warmth, intelligence, and dreaminess - and illustrates them through school performance. The adjective 'dreamy' is psychologically suggestive, but it remains a concise dispositional marker rather than a developed representation of consciousness. Its importance becomes clearer retrospectively: Nazira's inwardness and capacity to imagine alternatives later coexist with the practical discipline required by hardship.

A second passage defines her reserve:

Whenever she intended to undertake something, she did not announce it to the whole world before anyone else, as some girls tend to do. In general, until that time, not even her younger sister knew anything about her goals or intentions. (Qurolboy qizi, 2024, p. 35)

Here characterization emerges through a pattern of withheld speech. Nazira's privacy is not simply shyness; it is a strategy of self-protection and self-governance. She separates intention from public declaration, keeping plans within an interior space until action makes them visible. The passage therefore establishes a trait that later shapes the novel's psychologism: Nazira experiences deeply but does not readily externalize need, fear, or ambition. This reserve enables endurance, yet it also limits access to support.

4.2. Internal focalization and social self-evaluation

The scene in which Nazira observes other women marks a shift from stable characterization to active self-evaluation:

Looking at the women around her - some nervous and hurried, others calm and seemingly content with themselves and their lives - Nazira felt like a piece of straw being carried along by a vast current. She realized that, amid this crowd in which the diverse interests of life intertwined, it was not easy even to find a modest yet meaningful occupation, let alone accomplish something notable and make herself visible. Her mood deteriorated. She realized that she had become overly confident in herself and had deceived herself. (Qurolboy qizi, 2024, p. 153)

The passage is organized by internal focalization: the surrounding crowd is not presented neutrally but as it appears within Nazira's comparative consciousness. Her observation divides the women into visible emotional types and then turns inward. The simile of the straw in a current expresses diminished agency. Straw has little weight and no control over direction; the current stands for the complex social and economic forces into which she has entered. The figure does not merely decorate the sentence. It converts an evaluative judgment - 'I cannot yet direct my life effectively' - into a spatial and kinetic image.

The repeated phrase 'she realized' stages a movement from perception to self-critique. Nazira recognizes both structural difficulty and her own inflated expectation. This double awareness prevents the scene from reducing her to helplessness: she is momentarily discouraged, but she is also capable of metacognition, the examination of her own assumptions. The episode therefore develops character by showing how aspiration becomes more realistic through disappointment.

4.3. Simile, metaphor, and the emotional semantics of warmth and fire

The article's source manuscript originally classified the following sentence simply as metaphor, but its grammar is more accurately described as an explicit simile followed by symbolic elaboration:

Just as a cold person longs for the warmth of a bonfire, she too yearned to warm herself in the glow of love. (Qurolboy qizi, 2024, p. 233)

The phrase 'just as' creates the simile: physical cold and emotional deprivation are compared through the shared need for warmth. Within that comparison, however, 'the glow of love' becomes metaphorical, because affection is conceptualized as heat and illumination. The image links body and emotion without claiming that the two are identical. A cold body requires fire; Nazira's deprived emotional

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life requires kindness, intimacy, and recognition. The bonfire also implies a source outside the self, suggesting that endurance alone cannot satisfy every psychological need.

A later passage transforms fire from desired warmth into destructive inner pressure:

Although the woman pretended to be asleep and lay motionless, a merciless fire within her made her whole body tremble, deprived her of peace, and prevented her from concentrating her thoughts. (Qurolboy qizi, 2024, p. 256)

Here 'fire' is a metaphor for anguish, agitation, and accumulated tension. The image also participates in an antithesis between the visible body and the concealed mind: she lies motionless and performs sleep, yet her body trembles under internal pressure. The contradiction is not accidental. It condenses Nazira's habitual pattern of concealment. The body partly betrays what the social self attempts to hide. Read together, the two fire images form a meaningful progression. At one point warmth signifies desired emotional rescue; later fire signifies pain that has become internally consuming. The repeated semantic field of heat thus registers both need and crisis.

4.4. Inner monologue and the threshold of exhaustion

The same scene culminates in a sharply segmented inner monologue:

Enough, I can't take it anymore. I won't go to work tomorrow. Not tomorrow - I won't go at all. Whatever happens, happens! (Qurolboy qizi, 2024, p. 256)

Unlike narrated thought, this passage presents Nazira's unspoken language with minimal narratorial mediation. Its short clauses, repetition, correction, and exclamation reproduce a mind attempting to convert distress into decision. 'Not tomorrow - I won't go at all' revises a temporary withdrawal into a total refusal. The final sentence abandons calculation and accepts indeterminate consequences. Formally, the monologue dramatizes a threshold: controlled endurance becomes unsustainable, and language breaks into impulsive absolutes.

The importance of this moment lies less in whether Nazira permanently carries out the decision than in what the thought reveals. Her working identity has been maintained through self-discipline, but discipline has costs. The monologue exposes the psychic labor concealed by her external reliability. It also complicates any one-dimensional description of her as simply 'strong.' Strength in the novel includes fatigue, anger, refusal, and the desire to stop.

4.5. Psychological portraiture and embodied detail

The most accomplished instance of psychological portraiture combines facial detail with explicit concealment of emotional need:

Despite the appearance of yet another wrinkle on her forehead, the worries of married life had not yet deprived her of her youthful vitality. The sparkle in her large eyes indicated that the feeling of hopelessness was still unfamiliar to her. Yet, whenever her heart became restless and she struggled to resist some inexplicable doubts stirring within her, the involuntary, pitiful trembling of her lips still left the same impression on those who observed her. She was a woman, after all, and at the same time, she longed for someone's kindness and support, but she never let anyone notice this. (Qurolboy qizi, 2024, p. 268)

Three details organize the portrait: the wrinkle, the sparkle of the eyes, and the trembling lips. The wrinkle records accumulated pressure, while the sparkle resists a totalizing interpretation of suffering. Hope and vitality remain visible. The trembling lips are more unstable: they appear involuntarily and disclose what Nazira attempts to conceal. These details do not function as a static inventory of appearance. They produce a dynamic portrait by placing contradictory signs on the same face.

The antithesis is therefore more complex than 'sad inside, calm outside.' The exterior itself is divided. Some features reveal endurance; others reveal strain. The observer reads the face as evidence of competing mental tendencies. This is consistent with Palmer's account of fictional minds as constructs assembled from bodily and social signs as well as direct access to thought (Palmer, 2002). The sentence

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about longing for kindness makes explicit what the physical signs imply, but the final clause - 'she never let anyone notice this' - reasserts the governing pattern of concealment.

The phrase 'She was a woman, after all' requires critical caution. Taken literally, it risks naturalizing emotional need as an exclusively female condition. Within the scene, its more defensible function is rhetorical: it interrupts the public image of inexhaustible strength and insists on Nazira's human need for care. A contemporary analysis should therefore avoid converting this line into a general theory of women and should keep the focus on the protagonist's socially situated vulnerability.

4.6. Dream imagery as symbolic condensation

After Nazira learns that her husband has taken money accumulated through years of work, the narrative introduces an ambiguous state between sleep and imagination:

Nazira lay staring at the flowerpot on the windowsill. For a long time, she could not fall asleep. Eventually, she felt her eyelids growing heavy. Then she could not tell whether she had fallen asleep and dreamed or whether she had simply imagined it. All she knew was that the stem of the flower in the pot seemed to be slowly climbing upward like a crawling insect, producing branches and buds. In an instant, the sprawling branches of the flower seemed to fill the entire room. Its roots continued to grow larger and larger until the clay pot suddenly cracked and broke, scattering its fragments around. What could this signify? (Qurolboy qizi, 2024, p. 420)

The episode is psychologically significant before any symbol is decoded. Sleeplessness, uncertain consciousness, accelerated growth, spatial invasion, and sudden breakage translate distress into a sequence of sensory images. The flower is ordinarily associated with life and growth, yet here growth becomes excessive and threatening. The stem crawls 'like an insect,' branches occupy the room, roots enlarge, and the container fails. The dream reverses a positive image: vitality without containment becomes pressure.

The most textually grounded interpretation is that the expanding plant condenses accumulating problems, while the pot figures the limited capacity within which Nazira has contained them. This reading should remain explicitly interpretive rather than absolute. The passage itself invites interpretation through the question 'What could this signify?' and provides no fixed symbolic glossary. Nevertheless, the sequence corresponds closely to the surrounding crisis: labor and hope have grown over time, betrayal expands the emotional consequences beyond control, and the structure that has contained strain breaks.

Dream imagery in literary narrative need not be assigned a fixed psychological code. In this episode, its function is aesthetic and interpretive: accelerated growth, spatial invasion, and breakage foreground the crisis, defamiliarize ordinary objects, and intensify affect (Miall & Kuiken, 1994). More broadly, fiction can simulate emotional and social situations without functioning as clinical evidence (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Oatley, 1999). The ambiguity between dream and imagination also keeps the scene close to Nazira's consciousness without requiring a supernatural or diagnostic interpretation.

4.7. The post-dream portrait: time written on the body

The dream is followed by a mirror scene:

The woman awoke from sleep with an uneasy feeling. As she examined herself in the mirror, she noticed that several more wrinkles had appeared on her forehead. Her hair was still as black as a leech, but an almost imperceptible streak of white had appeared through the middle... (Qurolboy qizi, 2024, p. 420)

The mirror converts inward disturbance into self-observation. Wrinkles and the first white strand are conventional signs of aging, but their placement immediately after betrayal and the dream gives them narrative specificity. They register experienced time rather than chronological time alone. Nazira perceives that suffering has altered the visible self. The modifiers are important: the white streak is 'almost imperceptible,' so the transformation is beginning rather than complete. The portrait marks a threshold, not an endpoint.

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This scene also differs from the earlier portrait. On page 268, signs of vitality and strain coexist and are potentially visible to others. On page 420, Nazira herself becomes the interpreter of her face. The movement from being observed to self-observation strengthens the theme of changing self-perception. Psychological characterization therefore occurs not only through what the narrator tells the reader, but through Nazira's own reading of bodily evidence.

4.8. Character dynamics: endurance, vulnerability, and emerging agency

Across the selected passages, Nazira's development can be described cautiously as a change in the organization of self-knowledge rather than as a complete linear transformation. The early passages establish competence and reserve. The social-comparison scene introduces self-doubt and more realistic appraisal. The warmth imagery identifies an unmet need, while the destructive fire and inner monologue reveal the cost of suppressing that need. The portraits translate pressure into bodily signs, and the dream represents a crisis of containment.

This sequence supports a limited claim about character dynamics. Nazira does not move simply from weakness to strength, because she is capable and disciplined from the beginning. Nor does she move simply from hope to despair, because vitality remains present amid distress. Instead, the novel repeatedly revises the meaning of strength. At first it appears as diligence and privacy; later it includes self-criticism, recognition of emotional need, anger at injustice, and awareness that endurance has limits. Psychological depth arises from the coexistence of these tendencies rather than from a single dominant trait.

The devices are therefore best understood as an integrated system. Direct characterization supplies the initial trait structure. Internal focalization reveals comparative judgment. Simile and metaphor embody abstract feeling. Antithesis organizes conflicting states. Inner monologue gives crisis a verbal rhythm. Portrait and bodily detail make concealed strain externally legible. Dream imagery condenses accumulated conflict. Their interaction individualizes Nazira because each mode contributes different evidence to the reader's evolving model of her mind.

5. Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that psychological characterization in *Mashaqqatli hayot so‘qmoqlari* (The Paths of a Difficult Life) depends on the coordinated use of narrative perspective, figurative language, bodily detail, and symbolic imagery. Nazira's inner life is not presented through introspection alone. It is distributed across what the narrator says about her, what she perceives, what she tells herself, what her body involuntarily reveals, and what appears in the ambiguous space of dream and imagination.

The central pattern is the tension between external endurance and concealed vulnerability. Nazira's reserve enables purposeful action, but it also prevents others from recognizing her need for support. Warmth imagery presents love as a desired source of renewal; fire imagery later transforms emotional intensity into destructive pressure. Inner monologue marks the point at which habitual self-control approaches refusal. Wrinkles, trembling lips, sparkling eyes, and greying hair produce a dynamic portrait in which resilience and suffering coexist.

The dream of the expanding flower and broken pot is most convincingly read as symbolic condensation of accumulated distress and limited emotional containment, although this interpretation should remain open rather than absolute. The post-dream mirror scene further develops the protagonist by making her the observer of changes written on her own body. These episodes support the conclusion that Nazira's character develops through increasing awareness of the costs and limits of endurance, not through a simplistic movement from weakness to strength.

The novel's reported biographical basis functions as paratextual framing, while the analysis concerns an artistically mediated character. This distinction preserves the relationship to lived experience without collapsing narrative form into documentation.

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6. Limitations and Directions for Further Research

The study analyzes seven representative passages rather than the complete 575-page novel. Future research should map psychological devices across the full text, compare Nazira with other major characters, and examine the contribution of dialogue, setting, temporal structure, and economic discourse. Comparative work on contemporary Uzbek biographical novels could determine whether concealed vulnerability expressed through bodily and symbolic signs is distinctive to Nazira or part of a broader tendency.

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