

**WOMANHOOD, TRADITION, AND INNER CONFLICT: THE
FEMALE IDENTITY IN ZULFIYA QUROLBOY QIZI'S OYIMTILLA**

Mamatova Dilorom Azam qizi

Department of Foreign Languages

Karshi State Technical University

dilorombobur567@gmail.com

Abstract: *This article explores the portrayal of female identity and the conflict between personal desire and societal expectations in Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi's novel Oyimtilla. The work provides a psychologically nuanced portrait of a woman navigating the complexities of motherhood, love, and autonomy within a traditional Uzbek society. Through the character of Oyimtilla, the novel critiques rigid social roles assigned to women and reveals the deep emotional toll of sacrificing individuality in favor of communal honor and duty. Using literary analysis and gender theory, the article examines how the protagonist's struggle reflects broader tensions faced by women in post-Soviet Uzbek literature.*

Keywords: *Uzbek literature, Oyimtilla, female protagonist, gender identity, social conflict, womanhood, motherhood, feminist criticism*

Introduction:

Modern Uzbek literature has increasingly become a space where the challenges, aspirations, and identities of women are articulated with emotional intensity and critical depth. Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi's novel Oyimtilla is a notable contribution to this trend, focusing on a woman's internal world as she faces the psychological burden of cultural norms and personal longing. The character of Oyimtilla symbolizes the modern Uzbek woman caught between the past and the present. Her story is not simply a personal drama, but a social narrative that raises vital questions about women's roles, autonomy, and self-realization. This paper aims to analyze the novel through the lens of gender identity, psychological realism, and reproductive conflict, thereby shedding light on the intersection between literature

and the lived experience of women.

1. Oyimtilla as a Psychological Portrait of Womanhood

Oyimtilla is portrayed as a deeply introspective character whose emotional landscape is shaped by disappointment, resilience, and a search for love. Her thoughts and inner monologues form the backbone of the narrative, offering readers insight into a woman struggling to maintain dignity in the face of betrayal and neglect. Her psychological complexity distinguishes her from typical “patient mother” figures often found in traditional literature.

The reader observes her as she silently endures a loveless marriage, social judgment, and emotional isolation. Yet, Oyimtilla never fully surrenders to victimhood. She possesses a quiet defiance, a yearning for something more — for love that values her as a person, not just a wife or mother.

2. The Burden of Tradition and the Reproduction of Social Norms

The novel presents a sharp critique of societal expectations that bind women to restrictive roles. Oyimtilla is expected to be obedient, self-sacrificing, and endlessly patient — a mirror of idealized womanhood. The tension between what society demands and what the individual feels becomes a source of continuous inner turmoil for her. This conflict can be understood as a **reproductive conflict**: Oyimtilla’s identity is defined by her capacity to nurture and sacrifice, rather than by her personal desires or ambitions. The cultural obligation to prioritize family over self often forces her to suppress her individuality, leading to emotional and psychological exhaustion. Through Oyimtilla, the author highlights the silent suffering of many women whose lives are dictated by social codes and moral expectations.

3. Love, Autonomy, and the Search for Meaning

One of the most poignant themes in the novel is the gap between love as a human need and the reality of duty-bound relationships. Oyimtilla’s emotional emptiness is not due to material lack but stems from the absence of genuine affection and understanding. Her inner conflict intensifies when she begins to desire a different kind of life — one where she is not only needed but valued and loved as an

individual. The novel does not present an easy solution. Oyimtilla's yearning for selfhood is constantly challenged by guilt, fear, and societal shame. Still, the mere articulation of these desires signifies a shift in female consciousness in Uzbek literature — from passive endurance to inner awakening.

4. Literary Style and Feminine Voice

Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi employs a lyrical, intimate style to narrate Oyimtilla's experiences. The prose is rich in emotional depth and symbolism, allowing readers to access the protagonist's inner world with immediacy and empathy. The use of interior monologue and quiet reflection brings a distinctly feminine sensibility to the narrative. Moreover, the novel blends realist depictions of everyday life with subtle psychological detail, making it both socially relevant and artistically resonant. It also aligns with feminist literary approaches by presenting the female voice as central, credible, and critically aware.

5. Comparative Perspective: Oyimtilla and Sister Carrie

Although Oyimtilla by Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi and Sister Carrie by Theodore Dreiser emerge from vastly different cultural and historical backgrounds, both novels present women navigating oppressive social structures while seeking personal fulfillment. Each protagonist—Oyimtilla and Carrie Meeber—represents a different form of resistance to societal constraints, and their stories unfold as parallel narratives of inner conflict and gender-based struggle.

Carrie Meeber begins her journey as a naive girl seeking opportunity in the city, gradually rising through ambition and adaptability. Her transformation reflects the American ideal of self-making, yet she remains emotionally unfulfilled. In contrast, Oyimtilla is deeply rooted in her domestic role from the beginning, tied to family, motherhood, and moral expectations. Her conflict is not about rising socially, but surviving emotionally within a system that restricts her autonomy. A major point of convergence is how both novels depict **reproductive or gendered conflict**. In Oyimtilla, this takes the form of traditional expectations tied to womanhood—being a mother, a wife, a moral anchor. Oyimtilla's suffering stems from being expected to sacrifice personal happiness for family reputation and communal norms. In Sister

Carrie, although motherhood is not central, gender roles shape Carrie's identity as she is objectified and used by men who promise emotional or financial security.

Another key difference lies in the **resolution** of their respective stories. While Carrie achieves fame and material comfort, her internal emptiness persists, showing the cost of ambition without emotional grounding. Oyimtilla, by contrast, finds strength in quiet resilience, enduring her pain rather than escaping it. She may not achieve outward success, but she maintains an inner moral clarity that critiques the very structures that confine her. Both works, despite their differences, challenge dominant narratives of femininity. They reflect the psychological and social pressures placed on women, and call attention to how culture, class, and gender intersect in shaping a woman's destiny.

Theoretical Framework

To explore the thematic depth of Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi's Oyimtilla, this article draws on multiple strands of critical theory, particularly **feminist literary criticism**, **reproductive conflict theory**, and **intersectionality**. These approaches provide a nuanced lens through which the protagonist's internal and external struggles can be interpreted as symptomatic of broader cultural and gender-based tensions.

1. Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist literary criticism serves as the primary lens for understanding the representation of women's experiences in Oyimtilla. As articulated by theorists such as **Elaine Showalter** and **Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar**, feminist criticism interrogates the patriarchal values that govern literary production, character construction, and thematic emphasis. In Oyimtilla, the protagonist is shaped by and simultaneously resists traditional notions of womanhood—obedience, sacrifice, and moral purity. Her voice becomes a site of resistance against these inherited norms. The novel aligns with **gynocriticism**, a sub-branch of feminist theory that centers on women's writing and female identity construction. Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi reclaims the female voice, not merely to portray oppression, but to explore psychological depth, agency, and emotional complexity.

2. Reproductive Conflict Theory

The concept of **reproductive conflict**—originating in evolutionary psychology but adapted by gender theorists—highlights the tension between women's biological roles (such as motherhood) and their socio-political aspirations. In *Oyimtilla*, this conflict is evident as the protagonist's identity is reduced to her maternal responsibilities, while her emotional and psychological needs remain ignored. As theorized by **Adrienne Rich** in *Of Woman Born*, motherhood under patriarchy is often coercively idealized, rather than being a site of empowerment. *Oyimtilla*'s internal turmoil exemplifies the costs of this idealization: she is praised for her patience and sacrifice, but her individuality and emotional autonomy are systematically denied.

3. Intersectionality

Coined by **Kimberlé Crenshaw**, intersectionality offers a method for analyzing how different social categories—gender, class, culture—interact to produce unique experiences of oppression. While *Sister Carrie* deals with the intersection of gender and capitalism in an industrializing America, *Oyimtilla* addresses how traditional Uzbek values intersect with patriarchal family structures to confine women's choices. Struggle cannot be understood purely in gendered terms; her class, cultural expectations, and historical context in post-Soviet Uzbekistan all contribute to the limitations imposed on her life. Intersectionality thus helps situate her experience within a broader socio-historical matrix, rather than isolating it as a purely personal dilemma.

Conclusion:

Oyimtilla is not merely the story of a woman burdened by societal norms; it is a powerful literary meditation on the meaning of selfhood and agency in a traditional society. Through the nuanced portrayal of its protagonist, *Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi* challenges the patriarchal structures that dictate a woman's worth by her obedience and sacrifice.

The novel gives voice to the inner life of women often silenced in both literature and society. It emphasizes that happiness and dignity cannot be attained

through conformity alone but must come from self-awareness, emotional authenticity, and the courage to define one's own identity. In doing so, Oyimtilla opens new pathways for exploring gender in Uzbek fiction and enriches the broader landscape of post-Soviet women's literature.

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