

THE IMAGE OF WOMEN AND SOCIETY'S ATTITUDES IN ABDULLA QAHHOR'S PROSE: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS BASED ON SINCHALAK AND MAYIZ YEMAGAN XOTIN

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Annotation: This article examines the image of women and the evolution of society's attitudes toward them in the prose of Abdulla Qahhor, focusing on two contrasting female characters: the secluded wife in the short story "Mayiz Yemagan Xotin" ("The Wife Who Did Not Eat Raisins") and the young factory worker Saodat in the novella "Sinchalak." While the first character is confined to the domestic sphere and evaluated solely on the basis of outward piety and conformity, the second enters the productive economy and is evaluated on the basis of competence, vigilance and integrity. The article argues that these two images correspond to two distinct stages in the socio-economic position of women — exclusion from, and inclusion in, public economic life — and interprets the social tension surrounding each character through concepts familiar from economics and social science, including human capital, social capital, information asymmetry and informal institutions. The analysis suggests that Qahhor's depiction of women's social position retains direct relevance to contemporary discussions of female labor-force participation and gender norms in Uzbekistan.

Key words: *Abdulla Qahhor, image of women, gender norms, human capital, social capital, information asymmetry, labor-force participation, socio-economic analysis.*

Annotatsiya: Mazkur maqolada Abdulla Qahhorning nasriy asarlarida ayol obrazi va jamiyatning ayollarga nisbatan qarashlari tahlil qilinadi. Tahlil uchun ikki qarama-qarshi obraz — "Mayiz yemagan xotin" hikoyasidagi to'rt devor ichiga qamalgan va faqat tashqi taqvodorligi bilan baholanadigan xotin, hamda "Sinchalak" qissasidagi ishlab chiqarish sohasiga kirib, mahorat, sergaklik va halollik bilan baholanadigan Saodat obrazlari olinadi. Maqolada bu ikki obraz ayollarning ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy hayotdan chetlashtirilishi va unga qo'shilishining ikki bosqichini ifodalashi, bundan kelib chiqadigan ijtimoiy ziddiyat esa inson kapitali, ijtimoiy kapital, axborot assimetriyasi va norasmiy institutsional normalar tushunchalari orqali izohlanishi ko'rsatiladi. Tahlil shuni ko'rsatadiki, Qahhorning ayollar holatini tasvirlashi O'zbekistonda ayollarning mehnat bozorida ishtirok etishi va gender normalari haqidagi zamonaviy muhokamalar uchun ham dolzarbligini saqlab qoladi.

Kalit soʻzlar: *Abdulla Qahhor, ayol obrazi, gender normalari, inson kapitali, ijtimoiy kapital, axborot assimetriyasi, mehnat bozorida ishtirok, ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy tahlil.*

Аннотация: В данной статье анализируется образ женщины и отношение общества к женщинам в прозе Абдуллы Каххара. Для анализа выбраны два контрастных образа — затворница, оцениваемая лишь по внешней набожности, из рассказа «Майиз йемаган хотин», и Саодат из повести «Синчалак», вошедшая в производственную сферу и оцениваемая по компетентности, внимательности и честности. В статье показано, что эти два образа представляют два этапа социально-экономического положения женщин — исключение из общественно-экономической жизни и включение в неё, а возникающее при этом социальное напряжение объясняется через понятия человеческого капитала, социального капитала, информационной асимметрии и неформальных институтов.

Ключевые слова: *Абдулла Каххар, образ женщины, гендерные нормы, человеческий капитал, социальный капитал, информационная асимметрия, участие на рынке труда, социально-экономический анализ.*

Introduction

Literature does more than tell individual stories: it also records the unwritten rules by which a society evaluates its members — what is praised, what is hidden, what is forgiven, and what is never forgiven. In the prose of Abdulla Qahhor (1907–1968), one of the most influential Uzbek writers of the twentieth century, the position of women in society occupies a central place. Qahhor's female characters are rarely decorative background figures; they embody the tension between tradition and change, between private life and public participation, and between how a woman appears to others and what she actually is, does, or wants.

This article focuses on two of Qahhor's works that, read together, trace a striking arc in the socio-economic position of women: the short story "Mayiz Yemagan Xotin" ("The Wife Who Did Not Eat Raisins") and the novella "Sinchalak." The first is set inside the closed world of a religious household, where a wife's entire worth is measured by her outward piety and conformity. The second is set inside the open world of a factory workshop, where a young woman's worth is measured — at least formally — by her work and her integrity. By placing these two images side by side, this article asks a simple but far-reaching question: what changes, and what does not change, when a woman moves from being economically invisible to economically visible?

To answer this question, the article draws on concepts that are familiar to students of economics — human capital, social capital, information asymmetry, and informal institutions — and applies them to literary material. This approach is particularly relevant for a student of Tashkent State University of Economics: it shows

that the barriers to women's full economic participation that economists study today — unused talent, social resistance to visible competence, the gap between formal rights and informal acceptance — are not abstract statistical categories, but lived realities that a great writer was already describing more than half a century ago.

Analysis

1. *“Mayiz Yemagan Xotin”: The Secluded Woman and the Economics of Invisibility*

At the center of “Mayiz Yemagan Xotin” stands Mulla Norqo'zi, a man who views the outside world with constant suspicion — yet places absolute, unquestioning trust in his own wife. She is a woman who, in the story's own description, lives “behind seven curtains,” performs her prayers faithfully, and never leaves the narrow circle of household and ritual. To her husband, and to the mahalla around her, she is not so much a person as a symbol: the symbol of a “proper” wife, an embodiment of piety and obedience.

What is most striking about this character, from a socio-economic point of view, is her complete absence from any visible, measurable sphere of life. She has no occupation, no independent income, no property, no public voice, and — tellingly — no name of her own in the story; she exists only as “the wife.” Her only “asset” is her reputation for piety, and that reputation is not something she has earned through observable action — it is simply assumed, based on her conformity to an expected role. Mulla Norqo'zi “knows” his wife is faithful in exactly the same way he “knows” a stranger's female friend, glimpsed only from a distance in modest dress, must be virtuous: both judgments rest on appearance alone, not on information.

This is where the story becomes, in effect, a study in information asymmetry. Mulla Norqo'zi has almost no real information about the inner life of the person closest to him — and the story's central twist, in which his wife's secret relationship is revealed, is shocking only because the household's entire system of evaluation was built on appearance rather than evidence. Crucially, the story does not suggest that this woman simply lacked virtue; it suggests that a system which gives a person no legitimate outlet for an independent life — no work, no friendships outside an approved circle, no public role — does not eliminate that person's needs and desires. It simply pushes them out of sight, into an informal, unobserved space that the formal system cannot account for.

Read in economic terms, the secluded wife represents a case of zero formal economic participation. She produces no measurable output, holds no recognized position, and has no channel through which her abilities — whatever they might be — could be put to use or even noticed. The “cost” of this arrangement is invisible for most of the story, precisely because invisibility is the whole point; it becomes visible, and painful, only at the moment the hidden reality breaks through to the surface.

2. “Sinchalak”: Saodat and Women’s Entry into the Productive Sphere

The novella “Sinchalak” presents an almost opposite starting point. Its central character, Saida, is a young woman who works in a factory, where her quickness, sharp eye, and restless energy earn her the nickname “Sinchalak” — after a small bird known for being constantly alert, constantly in motion, and impossible to ignore. Unlike the wife in “Mayiz Yemagan Xotin,” Saida is not hidden behind walls and curtains; she stands at a workbench, in a workshop, where her actions and results are, in principle, visible to everyone.

This visibility is the key to her character’s social meaning. Saida does not simply do her job; she notices things — carelessness, shortcuts, problems that others have learned to overlook or quietly tolerate. And she says so. In a household economy of the kind depicted in “Mayiz Yemagan Xotin,” such directness from a young woman would have no outlet at all. In the workshop, it has an outlet — but that outlet is not always welcomed.

What makes “Sinchalak” so revealing, from a socio-economic perspective, is the nature of the resistance Saida encounters. It is not, primarily, resistance to the quality of her work — by that measure, she is clearly capable. It is resistance to the fact that a young woman is in a position to observe, judge, and speak about the conduct of others, including people who are older or more established than she is. Her competence is rarely in question; her right to be the one who notices is. In other words, formal economic inclusion — Saida has a job, a role, a place in the production process — has not been matched by informal social acceptance of everything that role implies, including the right to be taken seriously when she points something out.

Seen this way, Saida’s presence in the factory functions almost like an additional, informal layer of oversight. In economic language, an organization in which performance and conduct are closely watched tends to have lower “agency costs” — fewer opportunities for individuals to act carelessly, or worse, without consequence. By being alert and willing to speak, Saida reduces exactly this kind of slack. The friction she generates is, in a sense, the price of that improved oversight — paid not by the organization as a whole, but disproportionately by her, in the form of social discomfort, resistance, and the need to repeatedly prove that her vigilance is legitimate.

Discussion

Placed side by side, the secluded wife of “Mayiz Yemagan Xotin” and Saida of “Sinchalak” can be read as two snapshots of women’s socio-economic position, separated not only by setting but by an entire stage of social development.

In the first snapshot, a woman is economically invisible. She has no formal role, no measurable output, and is judged entirely on conformity to an idealized image. Because the formal system offers her no legitimate outlet, whatever she is — her thoughts, her relationships, her choices — exists outside the system’s view, in an

informal space the system cannot regulate, support, or even acknowledge. The “cost” of excluding her from any visible role is, in economic terms, the complete waste of whatever human capital she possesses — and, additionally, the risk that comes with a system that has no real information about a person it claims to fully understand.

In the second snapshot, a woman is economically visible. She has a role, a function, and results that can be observed and evaluated. Her human capital — her skill, her attentiveness, her judgment — is no longer hidden; it is, in fact, actively used by the workshop, whether or not everyone around her is comfortable with that. Yet formal inclusion does not, by itself, produce informal acceptance. The “unwritten rules” about who may notice, who may judge, and whose voice carries weight can lag far behind the “written rules” about who may be employed.

This is precisely the gap that modern economic and social science literature describes when it discusses informal institutions: the formal rules of a system (laws, job descriptions, organizational structures) can change relatively quickly, while the informal rules (norms, expectations, unspoken hierarchies) often change much more slowly — and it is this slower-changing layer that continues to shape outcomes long after the formal rules have, on paper, become equal. Qahhor’s two works dramatize exactly this gap: one shows what happens when the formal system offers a woman no role at all; the other shows what happens when the formal system offers a role, but the informal system has not yet caught up.

For a society’s overall productivity — and for an economy’s overall stock of human capital — both situations represent a loss. In the first case, the loss is total and largely invisible. In the second case, the loss is partial and at least partly visible, in the form of friction, resistance, and the extra effort a capable person must spend simply to be heard. Qahhor does not offer a simple solution to either situation; what he offers, with remarkable precision for a writer working many decades ago, is a clear picture of where the losses occur and why.

Conclusion

Read together, “Mayiz Yemagan Xotin” and “Sinchalak” trace an arc in the socio-economic image of women — from complete exclusion from public and productive life, judged only by conformity to an idealized appearance, to formal inclusion in productive work, judged by competence but still constrained by informal resistance. Neither stage, as Qahhor presents it, is free of cost: the first hides human potential entirely; the second reveals it, but does not yet fully welcome it.

For today’s reader — particularly a student of economics — these two portraits are more than literary history. They are a reminder that expanding women’s formal opportunities, whether through education, employment, or legal rights, is a necessary step but not, by itself, a sufficient one. Unless the informal attitudes that determine whose work is noticed, whose judgment is trusted, and whose voice is taken seriously

also change, a society continues to leave part of its human capital unused — exactly as both of Qahhor's heroines, in their very different ways, illustrate.

In this sense, Abdulla Qahhor's prose remains what it has always been: a mirror that reflects not only the society of its own time, but the unfinished work of every society that comes after it.

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