



International Conference on Education, Psychology and Humanities

Hosted Online from Moscow, Russia

Date: 28th October, 2026

Website: <https://econferencia.com>

FACTORS SHAPING THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN JADID LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article examines the historical, social and literary factors that shaped the image of women in Uzbek Jadid literature of the early twentieth century. Drawing on works by Behbudiy, Fitrat, Hamza, Qodiriy and Cho'lpon, it combines close textual reading with historical contextualisation to trace how female characters were constructed. The analysis identifies six interacting factors: the colonial crisis and the idea of national awakening, the new-method school movement, the reformist press, the transregional circulation of ideas about women's emancipation, the lived realities of marriage and seclusion, and the aesthetic turn toward psychological realism. The results show a gradual shift from the woman as a symbol of national duty, above all the educator-mother, toward the woman as an individual with an inner life and a fate of her own. The article argues that this shift was uneven, and that Jadid writers remained partly bound by patriarchal assumptions even as they criticised patriarchal customs.

Keywords: Jadid literature; image of women; national awakening; Turkestan; Uzbek literature; female character; social reform; education; patriarchy; realism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Jadid movement emerged in Turkestan, Bukhara and Khiva in the last decades of the nineteenth century and found its fullest literary expression between roughly 1910 and the late 1920s. Its supporters argued that Muslim societies in



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Central Asia could recover from political and economic weakness only through new-method schooling, a modern press, and a critical attitude toward customs that had hardened into habit [10, 1–5p.]. Literature was not a decorative side-line in this programme. Fiction, drama and poetry were expected to teach, to shame and to persuade, and for that reason the Jadids paid unusual attention to a category of characters that older Turkic literature had treated mostly as objects of desire or of moral warning: women.

The woman question was never only a question about women. In the Jadid writings of the 1900s and 1910s the family appears as the smallest unit of the nation, and the condition of the family is read as a measure of the nation's health. A mother who cannot read, a girl married at thirteen, a wife who shares her husband with two others: each of these figures carried a double meaning, personal and political. This is the reason why the study of the female image in Jadid texts cannot be separated from the study of the conditions in which those texts were written. The image of the woman was not simply invented by authors; it was assembled from pressures, debates, models and experiences that were available to them at a particular moment [8, 15–22p.].

Scholarship on the subject has developed unevenly. During the Soviet period, Jadid writers were either excluded from the canon or read selectively. Qodiriy's O'tkan kunlar and Cho'lpon's Kecha va kunduz could be discussed as critical-realist novels that exposed feudal backwardness, while the authors' own ideological positions were passed over in silence or condemned. Women characters in these works were usually presented as victims of the 'old order' whose liberation was brought by the October Revolution. After 1991 the situation changed. Collected works were republished, archives became more accessible, and Uzbek literary scholars began to treat the Jadids as authors of a national literary renewal in their own right [8, 7–14p.]. Outside Uzbekistan, historians



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such as Khalid [10], Northrop [13] and Kamp [12] examined the politics of gender in Jadidism and in the early Soviet period, although their main materials were archival and journalistic rather than literary.

What remains less developed is a systematic account of the factors behind the female image itself. Existing studies tend to describe images: the suffering wife, the faithful lover, the enlightened mother. They say less about why these images took the forms they did, and why the same writers sometimes drew very different women in different decades. Without this explanatory layer it is difficult to see the Jadid female character as a historical product rather than as a timeless literary type.

The present article attempts to fill part of this gap. It asks three questions. First, which external conditions, political, educational and journalistic, framed the way Jadid authors thought about women? Second, which internal literary changes, in genre, narrative technique and characterisation, allowed those ideas to take shape as images? Third, how stable was the resulting image, and where did it reveal the limits of Jadid reformism? After a description of materials and methods, the article presents six factors in turn, summarises them in a short typology, and then discusses what the typology says about the Jadid understanding of gender.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is qualitative and rests on three procedures: close reading of literary texts, content analysis of selected periodical materials, and historical-comparative interpretation. Because the aim was to explain how the female image was formed rather than to catalogue every female character in Jadid writing, the corpus was kept deliberately compact.

The primary corpus consists of six works chosen to cover the chronological span of the movement and the main genres in which women were represented. These



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are Behbudiy's drama Padarkush (1913) [5], Fitrat's family-oriented treatise Oila (1916) [6], Hamza's drama Zaharli hayot (1916) and his later play Paranj sirlaridan lavhalar (1926) [4], Qodiriy's novel O'tkan kunlar (1925–1926) [1], and Cho'lpon's novel Kecha va kunduz (1936) [3]. Qodiriy's Mehrobdan chayon (1929) [2] and Avloniy's Turkiy Guliston yoxud axloq (1913) [7] were used as supporting texts. The selection is not meant to be exhaustive. It includes works that Uzbek criticism has long regarded as central, and it also includes texts that are less polished but explicit in their social argument, because the latter often reveal the assumptions that the better-known novels only imply.

The periodical sources are used as context rather than as primary objects of analysis. They include the newspaper Turkiston viloyatining gazeti, the journal Oyina edited by Behbudiy between 1913 and 1915, and the newspaper Sadoi Turkiston, as they are described and quoted in the secondary literature [8; 10]. The reformist writings of Ismail Gaspirali and the women's journal Alem-i Nisvan, published in the Crimea from 1906, were treated in the same way, as a background for the transmission of ideas [10, 98–104p.].

The analysis proceeded in four steps. First, every female character in the primary corpus was described according to her social position, her narrative function, her degree of agency and the amount of interior speech or reflection that the author allowed her. Second, recurring images were grouped into broader types. Third, each type was compared with the historical conditions reported in the secondary literature, to see which social or ideological force best accounted for its presence. Fourth, the resulting factors were checked against one another to determine whether they acted independently or reinforced each other. In the terminology of Uzbek literary studies, 'image' (obraz) is understood here as an artistic generalisation of a human type, built through action, speech, detail and authorial evaluation [9, 187–189p.].



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Several limitations should be stated openly. The texts were read in modern Uzbek editions, mostly in Cyrillic or Latin script, while the originals appeared in Arabic script and in a language that differed noticeably from the present standard. Soviet editors sometimes shortened or altered passages, particularly those with religious content, so the reading of some details remains provisional. Further, the number of texts is small, and conclusions about the whole of Jadid literature, which also includes a large body of poetry and journalism, have to be formulated with caution. Finally, all the principal authors were men. The voices of Jadid-era women themselves appear only indirectly, through the press and through the later memoirs summarised by Kamp [12, 40–55p.].

3. RESULTS

3.1. The colonial crisis and the idea of national awakening

The first and most general factor was the political situation of Turkestan after the Russian conquest of the 1860s and 1870s. For Jadid intellectuals the colonial order was both a humiliation and a lesson. Russian administrative and technical superiority seemed to prove that Muslim society had fallen behind, and the explanation that Jadid writers offered was cultural rather than purely political: ignorance, empty ritual and the neglect of useful knowledge had weakened the community from within [10, 69–77p.]. In this framework the woman became a measure of backwardness. A secluded, illiterate woman could be pointed to as evidence that the community had failed to use half of its own human resources. This argument shaped the early female image in a particular way. Women appear less as persons than as indicators. In *Padarkush*, which is concerned with the damage done by a father who refuses to educate his son, women stand at the edge of the plot, and the family's future is debated through father and son [5, 31–58p.]. This is typical of the first phase of Jadid drama, where the central figure is the



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Website: <https://econferencia.com>

man who must change, and the woman is mentioned as part of the household that suffers or benefits from his decisions. Her absence from the foreground is itself informative: the early Jadids addressed a male reading and viewing public, and they imagined social reform as a male project to be carried out for the sake of women, children and the nation.

Later texts show a more complicated relationship between colonial crisis and gender. In Cho'lpon's *Kecha va kunduz* the sufferings of Zebi cannot be separated from the moral decay of the colonial period: bribery, the sale of offices, the corrupting influence of money in a society whose old authorities have lost their meaning [3, 112–130p.]. Zebi is given away in marriage as part of a bargain among men, and her misfortune is the private face of a public disorder. Cho'lpon does not need to say that the nation is sick; he shows a girl whose life is wasted by the mechanisms of that sickness. In this sense the colonial factor works at two levels, first as a general frame that made the woman question urgent, and second as a source of concrete plot situations in which a woman's fate is determined by corruption and social disorganisation.

3.2. The new-method school and the pedagogy of motherhood

The second factor was the educational programme of the Jadids. The new-method (*usul-i jadid*) school gave the movement its name and its institutional base, and it brought with it a distinctive theory of the family. Children, the Jadids argued, were formed first at home, and the mother was the first teacher. If the mother was ignorant, the effort of the school would be partly cancelled [7, 44–51p.]. This pedagogical argument was the most acceptable route for the defence of women's education in a society where more radical claims would have provoked immediate resistance from conservative clergy and neighbourhood elders.



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Avloniy's Turkiy Guliston expresses the idea in the language of moral instruction, with the family appearing as the first school of character, and Fitrat's Oila develops it into a short programme of household management in which the wife is the educator of children, the keeper of order and the moral partner of her husband [6, 215–240p.]. The woman is imagined here as a competent, knowledgeable, even authoritative figure, but her competence is defined by her function. She is to be educated so that she can raise good sons and daughters, run a clean and orderly home, and support her husband's work. The text does not ask what she herself might want to become.

The resulting image can be called the educator-mother. It is a positive image, and in the context of the 1910s it was also a bold one, since it affirmed that women should be taught to read, to keep accounts and to know the basic rules of hygiene. At the same time it fixed the woman inside the domestic sphere and tied her value to motherhood. This tension runs through Jadid writing for the whole period. The education of girls was defended with an argument that, in the end, still located a woman's purpose in the family, and the most progressive texts of the 1910s sometimes sound surprisingly conservative to a present-day reader. Readers should keep in mind, however, that the argument was designed to persuade audiences who were not ready for anything else.

3.3. The press and public debate

The third factor is the emergence of a public sphere in which the woman question could be discussed. Before 1905 the Turkestan press, with Turkiston viloyatining gazeti as the main Uzbek-language organ, was official in tone and limited in scope. After the 1905 revolution and especially after 1913, newspapers and journals such as Oyina, Sadoi Turkiston and others created a space in which readers' letters, essays and short stories could take up topics that previously



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belonged to the family or the mosque: early marriage, the amount of the bride-price, polygamy, the schooling of girls, the veil [8, 63–79p.].

The press had a direct effect on literature. It gave authors a ready-made repertoire of situations and arguments, so that a short story or play could be built around a problem already familiar to readers. The social types that appear in the early Jadid drama, the stern father who marries off a daughter for money, the greedy mullah who justifies every custom with a quotation, the young wife who has no means of protest, were first sketched in journalistic essays and feuilletons. It is probably no accident that many Jadid authors were at once editors, journalists and playwrights, and that the same person might write a reform article on Monday and a one-act drama on Saturday [10, 91–97p.].

The press also contributed to a particular tone. Public debate required a language that was simple and forceful and could be understood by readers with minimal schooling. For this reason, the earliest female images in print are often schematic. The suffering wife is almost entirely suffering; the conservative mother-in-law is almost entirely obstinate. Only later, when the novel became established and readers had more experience of complex fictional characters, could authors afford more subtle portraits. The relationship between press and fiction therefore explains both the speed with which the woman question entered literature and the rhetorical simplicity of many early depictions.

3.4. Transregional reformist ideas

The fourth factor extends beyond Turkestan. Jadid thinking about women was formed in conversation with reformist discourse elsewhere in the Muslim world and in the Russian Empire. Qasim Amin's work on the liberation of women, published in Cairo in the 1890s, argued that the seclusion and ignorance of women were not required by Islam and were harmful to society; translations,



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summaries and polemical responses to this and similar works circulated among Ottoman, Tatar and Azeri intellectuals [17, 3–20p.; 16, 144–168p.]. Gaspirali's newspaper Tarjimon and the journal Alem-i Nisvan of his daughter Shefika brought the same debates to Turkic-speaking readers of the Russian Empire, and the Tatar reformist press mediated many of these ideas for Turkestan [10, 98–104p.; 19, 75–80p.].

It would be wrong to describe this as a simple transfer of ideas. Jadid authors in Turkestan chose what suited their situation and left out what did not. The argument that Islam, correctly understood, did not demand the veiling and confinement of women was welcome because it allowed reform to be presented as a return to original principles. Positions that sounded too radical, such as demands for women's political rights or for their entry into public professions, were largely absent from Uzbek-language texts before 1917. Kandiyoti's concept of 'bargaining with patriarchy' helps explain this selectivity: where women's practical room for manoeuvre was narrow, reformers and women alike often preferred strategies that improved their position inside the family without openly challenging its structure [20, 274–290p.].

The transregional factor also shaped literary models. Tatar drama, Ottoman fiction and, through translation, Russian and European realism offered ready examples of how a female character could be placed at the centre of a plot. These examples did not determine Uzbek texts, but they widened what was thinkable. When Qodiriy later made a woman's death the emotional climax of his novel, he was working in a form, the social-psychological novel, that Uzbek literature had barely known a decade earlier and that was largely learned from translated and imported models [8, 182–190p.].



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3.5. Everyday social realities: marriage, polygamy and the veil

The fifth factor is probably the most direct: authors wrote about what they saw. Early marriage, marriages arranged without the consent of the bride, the payment of qalin, polygamy, divorce by the husband's declaration and the use of the paranji and chachvon were routine facts of urban and rural life in Turkestan. They were not new inventions of literature, and the Jadids did not need to look far for material [12, 22–39p.].

Hamza's *Zaharli hayot* presents a young woman destroyed by a forced and unequal marriage; the moral of the play is plain and the villains are clearly marked [4, vol. 2, 61–118p.]. The drama is not subtle, but it is revealing in the way it combines three elements that recur in Jadid texts: the family elder who makes decisions for the young, the religious authority who gives those decisions a respectable justification, and the woman who has no formal means of resistance. Hamza's later play *Paranji sirlaridan lavhalar* uses the veil as a theatrical emblem. By 1926, when the play was written, the Soviet campaign for unveiling was near its peak, and Hamza's text can be read both as a continuation of the Jadid critique and as a contribution to the official campaign [4, vol. 3, 20–75p.; 14, 215–240p.]. The case of the veil shows that social reality could push the image in two directions. For the early Jadids, the veil was something to be discussed with caution, since an attack on it could discredit the whole reformist project in the eyes of the community. For Soviet agitators of the late 1920s, it was a target of an open campaign, and the 1927 hujum produced both enthusiastic unveiling and violent reprisals against unveiled women [13, 91–112p.; 12, 160–185p.]. Kamp argues that the actual history of unveiling in Uzbekistan cannot be reduced either to Jadid progress or to Soviet coercion, since women's own choices and local circumstances mattered considerably [12, 8–16p.]. Literature of the 1920s



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inherited all these tensions. A play about a woman who removes her veil could be read in several ways, and authors who wrote it had to be aware of that.

3.6. Literary change: genre and psychological realism

The sixth factor lies inside literature itself. Before the Jadids, written Uzbek literature was dominated by classical lyric poetry, the epic *dostan* and didactic prose. Women in these forms were present as the beloved, the faithful wife of a hero or, sometimes, the temptress. The Jadids introduced new genres, the realist drama, the short story and above all the novel, and these genres demanded different ways of building a character [8, 120–131p.].

The difference is most visible in Qodiriy. In *O'tkan kunlar* the central woman, Kumush, is not only a victim and a model of virtue. She has a social background, she speaks, she hesitates, she is jealous and then ashamed of her jealousy. Her rival Zaynab, who in a simpler didactic novel would have been merely an obstacle, is given a share of the author's sympathy, because her situation is also the result of arrangements in which she had no voice [1, 205–230p.]. By showing two women who are both harmed by the same customs, Qodiriy shifts attention from villainy to structure. The conflict is no longer between a good woman and a bad woman; it is between persons and a system that sets them against each other. Cho'lpon goes further. In *Kecha va kunduz* Zebi's inner life receives sustained attention: her fears, her moments of silence, the gap between what she says and what she feels. The narrative frequently follows her perceptions closely, and the reader is invited to understand her not as an example but as a person [3, 140–175p.]. The same tendency is visible in Qodiriy's later novel *Mehrobdan chayon*, where women characters take part in the moral debates of the plot rather than merely serving as their occasion [2, 90–120p.]. The psychological interest of the later Jadid prose therefore marks a real change in the status of the female



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Website: <https://econferencia.com>

character. She is no longer only a sign of the nation's condition; she is a figure whose experience matters in itself, at least to the degree that the male author's perspective allows.

3.7. A typology of images

The six factors did not act in isolation. Table 1 summarises how they combine in the six primary works.

Table 1. Dominant female images and their shaping factors in selected Jadid works (compiled by the author).

Work (year)	Dominant female image	Main shaping factors
Padarkush (1913)	Marginal figure within the household	Colonial crisis; school reform
Oila (1916)	Educator-mother, household manager	School reform; reformist ideas from abroad
Zaharli hayot (1916)	Victim of forced marriage	Social realities; press debate
O'tkan kunlar (1925–1926)	Individual and moral centre; victim of custom	Literary realism; social realities
Paranji sirlaridan lavhalar (1926)	Veiled woman as emblem of backwardness	Social realities; Soviet unveiling campaign
Kecha va kunduz (1936)	Person with inner life; victim of social disorder	Colonial crisis; psychological realism

Three general types can be distinguished. The first is the symbolic woman, defined by national and educational needs: the educator-mother and the indicator of backwardness. The second is the victimised woman, whose suffering reveals a social problem. The third is the individualised woman, whose interior life



International Conference on Education, Psychology and Humanities

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Date: 28th October, 2026

Website: <https://econferencia.com>

becomes a subject of the narrative. The types overlap, and Kumush and Zebi are at once victims and individuals, but the order in which they became prominent corresponds roughly to the development of Jadid literature from journalism-driven didactic writing toward the psychologically oriented novel.

4. DISCUSSION

The results suggest that the Jadid female image is best understood as a layered construction. The older layers, the symbolic woman of the national awakening and the educator-mother of the school programme, were produced mainly by ideological needs. The younger layers, the victim of custom and the individualised heroine, grew out of social observation and literary experiment. None of these layers fully replaced the others. Even in the novels of the 1920s and 1930s one can find traces of the earlier didactic approach, as in the way virtuous women are sometimes made to carry the moral message of the whole book [8, 190–205p.].

One of the more interesting points to emerge is the gap between the Jadids' declared programme and their practice of representation. In their programmatic writings, the Jadids spoke about women as rational beings who deserved education and respect. In their fiction, however, women are repeatedly shown as sufferers, and their suffering is presented as the main evidence for the need of reform. This is understandable, since suffering moves readers and persuades them quickly. Yet it also has a cost. A woman whose main literary function is to suffer is not easily allowed to act. Kumush and Zebi are memorable partly because they endure, and partly because the authors manage to give their endurance moral and psychological weight, but their endurance still defines them. Few Jadid heroines resist openly, and those who do are usually punished by the plot [1, 230–260p.; 3, 175–210p.].



International Conference on Education, Psychology and Humanities

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Date: 28th October, 2026

Website: <https://econferencia.com>

This observation should not be turned into a simple reproach. The Jadids wrote in conditions where criticism of marriage customs and of the veil already counted as a radical gesture. Their audience included conservative readers who suspected any change in family life of being a first step toward moral collapse, and colonial authorities who watched Muslim reformers with suspicion. The cautious, family-centred form that the woman question took in Jadid literature was, at least partly, a strategic choice. It allowed reformers to argue for women's education and against the worst forms of coercion without being easily dismissed as enemies of Islam or of the community [10, 211–225p.]. Seen this way, the educator-mother was a compromise that made a real expansion of women's opportunities possible. It is nevertheless important to recognise the limits of the compromise. The Jadid authors were men of their time, and their view of gender relations had a patriarchal core even when they criticised patriarchal abuses. Women were to be educated for the sake of the family and the nation, and rarely for their own sake. The authors seldom imagined a woman as a writer, a teacher in her own right, or a political actor, even though women with such ambitions did exist in the Muslim societies of the Russian Empire, as the example of the Tatar and Crimean women's press shows [19, 78–84p.]. In this respect Jadid literature resembles the early reformist writing of the Middle East more than it resembles the later feminist literature of the twentieth century. Ahmed has observed that reformist discourses on women often combined real criticism of social practice with a conviction that the family order itself should be preserved, and the Uzbek Jadids fit this pattern closely [16, 160–175p.].

Another point concerns the relation between Jadidism and the Soviet state. The Jadid critique of the veil and of early marriage was taken up, and radicalised, by Soviet policy in the 1920s. Massell described Soviet planners as treating Muslim women as a 'surrogate proletariat', a group expected to take the place of an



International Conference on Education, Psychology and Humanities

Hosted Online from Moscow, Russia

Date: 28th October, 2026

Website: <https://econferencia.com>

industrial working class that did not yet exist in the region [14, 117–140p.]. For literature, this meant that the same plot could now serve two very different purposes. A play about forced marriage could be a Jadid appeal to the community or a Soviet exhibit of 'feudal' oppression. Several of the Jadid writers, among them Fitrat, Qodiriy and Cho'lpon, were later arrested and executed in the repressions of 1937–1938, and their work was removed from circulation for decades. The female characters of their major novels were then kept alive in an altered form, as examples of the Soviet narrative of emancipation, until the rediscovery of the authors' original context after independence [8, 7–14p.; 11, 280–310p.].

The findings also have a methodological implication. They suggest that an analysis of images alone, without attention to factors, easily produces a flat picture. If one looks only at Kumush, Zebi and the heroines of Hamza's plays, one may conclude that Jadid literature simply 'defended women'. A factor-oriented reading shows that this defence was shaped by several different pressures at once, and that the pressures sometimes pulled in different directions. The need to persuade conservative readers, for example, favoured the educator-mother, while the demands of realist narration favoured the individualised heroine. Reading the two together explains why the same corpus contains both an obedient, domestic ideal and some strikingly modern interior portraits.

Some limitations of the present study should be repeated. The corpus is small and consists exclusively of works by men; poetry and the Jadid short story, which would probably add nuance, were treated only indirectly. The influence of transregional discourse is described here mainly through secondary sources, and a more thorough study would need to trace specific translations and borrowings in the periodicals themselves. Finally, the question of readers' reception, how women and men of the period actually understood the female characters, remains largely open and requires archival work that goes beyond the scope of this article.



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5. CONCLUSION

The image of women in Jadid literature emerged from the interaction of six factors: the colonial crisis and the idea of national awakening, the new-method school and its pedagogy of motherhood, the reformist press, transregional reformist ideas, the everyday realities of marriage and seclusion, and the development of realist and psychological prose. The earliest images, shaped mainly by the first three factors, presented women as symbols and instruments of national renewal. Later images, influenced by social observation and by literary maturity, gave women individual voices and inner lives, although their agency remained limited.

The main conclusion of the study is that the Jadid female image was a product of historical circumstances as much as of authorial intention. It carried the strengths of a movement that sincerely sought to improve women's condition, and the limits of a movement that did not question the underlying order of the family. Recognising both sides is useful for the contemporary reader, since it allows the works of Qodiriy, Cho'lpon, Hamza and Fitrat to be read neither as simple monuments of progress nor as relics of an outdated worldview.

Further research could move in at least three directions: a comparative analysis of the female image in Uzbek, Tatar and Azeri Jadid writing; a systematic study of Jadid-era periodicals with particular attention to women's letters and reader responses; and a re-examination of the Soviet editorial history of the major texts, so that the original form of women's speech and action in them can be established more precisely.



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Date: 28th October, 2026

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