



THE CONCEPT OF “WOMAN” AS A GENDER ISSUE IN 19TH-20TH CENTURY LITERARY WORKS

EL CONCEPTO DE “MUJER” COMO CUESTIÓN DE GÉNERO EN LAS OBRAS LITERARIAS DE LOS SIGLOS XIX Y XX

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Suggested citation (APA, seventh ed.)

Rafiyeva, A., Hamzayeva, S., Valiyeva, I., Zeynalli, G., & Zeynalova, R. (2026). The concept of “woman” as a gender issue in 19th-20th century literary works. *Universidad y Sociedad*, 18(1). e5602.

ABSTRACT:

Gender inequality is one of today's most pressing social concerns, encompassing everything from access to the labor market and domestic autonomy to the persistence of discriminatory stereotypes that have historically relegated women to a subordinate position. While the 19th century marked the beginning of challenges to this worldview, critiquing gender injustices required cultural vehicles capable of reaching a broad audience to rise awareness. Despite the growing body of research on feminist literary movements, comparative analyses examining how different national traditions, particularly non-Western contexts, addressed the “woman question” through literature remain limited, leaving gaps in our understanding of the diverse strategies and cultural specificities of literary resistance to gender oppression. With this in mind, this study undertakes a comparative literary analysis of canonical works from English, French, Russian, and Azerbaijani literature produced during the 19th and 20th centuries. We focus on how female authors represented gender oppression, described forms of female resistance, and proposed alternative social arrangements. We found some patterns across all traditions, such as critiques of educational exclusion, forced marriages, and domestic confinement. In general, literature functioned as an agent of social transformation,

challenging biological essentialism. This study contributes to feminist literary criticism by broadening the geographical and cultural scope of the analysis beyond Western canons, demonstrating how diverse literary traditions converged in recognizing women's emancipation as fundamental to human progress.

Keywords: Gender inequality, Feminist literature, 19th- and 20th-century literature, Azerbaijani literature, Molla Nasreddin movement, Comparative literary analysis, Women's rights.

RESUMEN:

La desigualdad de género es una de las preocupaciones sociales más acuciantes de la actualidad, y abarca desde el acceso al mercado laboral y la autonomía doméstica hasta la persistencia de estereotipos discriminatorios que históricamente han relegado a las mujeres a una posición subordinada. Si bien el siglo XIX marcó el inicio de los desafíos a esta cosmovisión, la crítica a las injusticias de género requirió de vehículos culturales capaces de llegar a un público amplio para generar conciencia. A pesar del creciente volumen de investigación sobre los movimientos literarios feministas, los análisis comparativos que examinan cómo las diferentes tradiciones nacionales,



en particular los contextos no occidentales, abordaron la “cuestión de la mujer” a través de la literatura siguen siendo limitados, lo que deja lagunas en nuestra comprensión de las diversas estrategias y especificidades culturales de la resistencia literaria a la opresión de género. Con esto en mente, este estudio realiza un análisis literario comparativo de obras canónicas de la literatura inglesa, francesa, rusa y azerbaiyana producidas durante los siglos XIX y XX. La investigación se centra en cómo las autoras representaron la opresión de género, describieron formas de resistencia femenina y propusieron acuerdos sociales alternativos. Se encuentran patrones comunes en todas las tradiciones, como las críticas a la exclusión educativa, los matrimonios forzados y el confinamiento doméstico. En general, la literatura funcionó como un agente de transformación social, desafiando el esencialismo biológico. Este estudio contribuye a la crítica literaria feminista al ampliar el alcance geográfico y cultural del análisis más allá de los cánones occidentales, demostrando cómo diversas tradiciones literarias convergieron en el reconocimiento de la emancipación de la mujer como fundamental para el progreso humano.

Palabras clave: Desigualdad de género, Literatura feminista, Literatura de los siglos XIX y XX, Literatura azerbaiyana, Movimiento Molla Nasreddin, Análisis literario comparativo, Derechos de las mujeres.

INTRODUCTION

Gender studies have become one of the most significant areas of reflection in contemporary social analysis, serving as a lens through which to examine structural inequalities, socially constructed roles, and power dynamics that have historically shaped the relationships between men and women (Peralta-Jaramillo, 2025). Nowadays, there seems to be an apparent agreement that “gender” goes beyond biological differentiation to encompass the complex web of cultural constructs, social expectations, and normative structures that define what it means to be a woman or a man in a given context. As Simone de Beauvoir aptly pointed out in her seminal work, *The Second Sex*, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” a statement that highlights the performative and socially constructed nature of gender identity. This conceptualization challenged the essentialist notions that for centuries naturalized female subordination, presenting it as an inevitable consequence of immutable biological differences (Rudman et al., 2021).

During the 19th and 20th centuries, a crucial period in the evolution of feminist consciousness and the articulation of women’s rights movements, world literature underwent a profound transformation in its treatment of the “woman question” (Farooqui & AIDoseri, 2024). It is known that industrial revolutions, social reform movements, transformations in educational systems, and the rise of

ideologies emphasizing universal human rights created tensions between traditional patriarchal structures and growing demands for equality, autonomy, and recognition. In this context, literature became a privileged vehicle for exploring the contradictions between the ideals of individual freedom proclaimed by modern societies and the persistent denial of those same rights to half the population. Authors from diverse literary traditions began to document, criticize, and challenge the multiple forms of oppression experienced by women: from the denial of access to education and exclusion from public life, to forced marriages, domestic violence, and systematic objectification (Lewis, 2025).

Nineteenth-century literature, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon and European context, bore witness to this new awareness. Works such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* not only narrated individual stories of women but also criticized the social structures that limited their opportunities for personal, intellectual, and professional development. These narratives explored the psychological consequences of gender oppression, documented the resistance strategies developed by women, and questioned the ideological foundations that justified their subordination. The figure of the “angel in the house,” the Victorian ideal of femininity that enshrined domesticity, passivity, and sacrifice as essential feminine virtues, was systematically deconstructed by authors who revealed the existential cost of that mythology (Palacios Knox, 2020). Meanwhile, in Russian literature, authors such as Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Chekhov explored the tensions between women’s individual desires and relentless societal expectations, depicting both the tragic consequences of rebellion and the silent suffering of conformity.

In the Azerbaijani context, 19th- and 20th-century literature played a significant role in raising awareness of women’s rights, particularly within the framework of the Enlightenment. Pioneering figures like Mirza Fatali Akhundzade recognized that women’s emancipation was not merely a matter of individual justice, but a necessary condition for the progress and modernization of society as a whole (Elkhan, 2024). The magazine *Molla Nasreddin*, under the leadership of Jalil Mammadguluzade and with contributions from writers such as Mirza Alakbar Sabir, Ali Nazmi, and Uzeyir Hajibeyli, served as a platform to denounce practices like child marriage, polygamy, and the denial of education to girls, establishing explicit connections between the enforced ignorance of women and social backwardness. These authors used satire, drama, and poetry not only to make visible these injustices but also to imagine alternatives and mobilize social change (Afary, 2022; Mamedova, 2025).

This study examines how 19th- and 20th-century literature addressed the “woman question” as a social, political,

and existential issue through canonical works of English, French, Russian, and Azerbaijani literature. Our comparative analysis identifies the narrative strategies employed to represent gender oppression, the forms of resistance by female protagonists, and alternative visions of social organization, revealing both universal patterns in women's experiences and unique contributions from each tradition. We pay particular attention to how Azerbaijani authors such as Mammadguluzade, Sabir, Nazmi, and Hajibeyli, in dialogue with Enlightenment and modernizing currents, contributed to forging critical awareness of the need to transform gender relations in their society, demonstrating that the literary struggle for women's dignity and rights constitutes a fundamental chapter in the history of human emancipation.

DEVELOPMENT

Gender Issue in World Literature

In her book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir wrote: "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Koşar, 2020, p. 83). To support this argument, she elaborates on the ideas presented in the book. According to the author, no gender is born fully formed; rather, it is gradually shaped under the influence of society and external elements. It is not a biological trait that makes a woman a woman or a man a man, but rather their roles and positions in society. Contrary to some beliefs, a woman is not born as a passive, secondary gender compared to a man. Unfortunately, the indifferent attitudes of certain members of society compel women to think of themselves this way, leading to the degradation of their self-worth. Stripping women of their inherent rights, which belong to all people, is an assassination of humanity. As noted in the book, fate is not a cosmic force but the result of human choice, culture, and circumstance. Until the 19th century, the idea that men were dominant and aggressive while women were more emotional and submissive was propagated. As a result, it became inevitable for women to accept the harsh conditions imposed by traditional gender hierarchies to survive and be accepted by society. However, social progress led to some changes regarding the role of women in society.

By the mid-19th century, the English-speaking world was swept by a new gender ideology. As social justice and human rights became more widely discussed within society, the forced confinement of women to rigid domestic roles, and their limited participation in public life, became more apparent. Women's societal roles consisted of working at home, taking care of their families, giving birth to children, and helping transmit existing ideologies to future generations. For centuries, women had grown tired of playing mythologized roles, such as being the "mother" or "guardian angel" in the family. Literature presented these angels as "those who accepted their responsibilities and disappointments with stoicism". In the works written during this period, authors opposed the division of

social and political issues into gender-based categories. Literature sought to explore the primary reasons for distinguishing men and women as individuals. Investigating the psychological and economic reasons for men's dominant position in society and women's subordination was one of the key tasks of the literature of this era. The denial of educational opportunities to women, along with the limitations and obstacles they faced in education, was also a subject that literary figures needed to address. In addition to these topics, other issues, such as women and literature, the role of women in literature and creative fields, became relevant, calling on readers from many countries to reflect on them.

A significant work that brings attention to the gender issue is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, written toward the end of the 19th century and published in *The New England Magazine*. The story describes the oppression of women's rights in 19th-century America and portrays the suffocating effects of male-dominated demands. The walls covered with yellow wallpaper symbolize women's confinement to the home and the lack of life outside its walls. In the story, the author portrays the woman as psychologically fragile, which is not unreasonable. The instability prevailing in the inner world and psyche of women is rooted in the dominant position of men in the existing society. Unfortunately, women hesitated to stand up against this injustice and openly defend their rights. For Gilman, writing and expressing thoughts in her works was the only way out of this situation. The plot of the story is inspired by the author's life experiences. After suffering from severe psychological distress and depression, a doctor, supported by her husband, prescribed isolation as her only treatment and confined her to a small "prison" with yellow wallpaper for a long period. The closed environment did not stabilize her condition; rather, it worsened it. A woman in psychological crisis is observed crawling on her knees, trying to escape from within a yellow wallpaper adorned with patterns and various designs. This woman is a reflection of herself, representing the oppressed women of American society. By the end of the story, Gilman instills in the reader the belief that women can tear down the wallpaper and escape this captivity. In the author's view, a woman can dramatically change her financial situation and achieve freedom by establishing a dialectical movement between the private and public spheres (Alkan, 2021, p. 1234).

One of the notable works on the topic of gender inequality is *Middlemarch* by English writer George Eliot. In depicting the events of Victorian-era England, gender issues were reflected alongside political and economic topics. The novel covers topics such as social progress, family principles, personal ambitions, and moral freedom. The author critiques the social structure of the society in which she lived and the negative impact this structure had on individuals. In the novel, Eliot analyzes women's significant

roles in society and their attempts to challenge those roles. *Middlemarch* also examines marriage and the relationships between various couples, revealing the harsh realities behind idealized marriages.

Another important work is *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, written in the mid-19th century and highly acclaimed by readers. This novel not only advocates for women's freedom and personal identity but also criticizes gender differences and the unjust laws preordained by society. As a distinguished piece of classical English literature, *Jane Eyre* draws attention with its feminist ideas. The protagonist, Jane, promotes a sense of self-confidence in women, as well as the freedom of choice in marriage, continuing her struggle despite the sharp pressures from society. Brontë highlights the negative impact of class differences and social status on women's lives, showing no hesitation in exposing the flawed aspects of society. The main character, spiritually crushed under the weight of inter-class differences, struggles with all her might to overcome these barriers. "Jane Eyre encapsulates a generalized representation of the time and place in which it was written. It also portrays a setting in which a woman with limited economic means must struggle to assert her position" (Jnge, 1999, p. 14).

In the early 20th century (1929), English writer Virginia Woolf penned *A Room of One's Own*, considered a masterful work on the subject of women's freedom. This piece, which reflects the sexual discrimination Woolf faced in her youth, is a brilliant literary example. During Woolf's education, the sharp gap between women and the representatives of the opposite sex was one of the issues that deeply troubled the young girl. Throughout her education, the restrictions on girls going to the library alone, the diplomas awarded with certain privileges after graduation, and even the differentiation of meals in cafeterias between girls and boys, among other forms of discrimination, inspired the writer to describe and critique these events.

The purpose of the title *A Room of One's Own* is not to suggest physical isolation but rather to encourage women to free themselves from domestic responsibilities and escape the role of "the angel in the house." According to Woolf, women should see writing as a means of making their voices heard, as a way to access public spaces, and as an idea through which they could strengthen their connections with the outside world. In the book, Woolf criticizes the degrading treatment of women and sees the main reason for her opposition to the patriarchal society in the educational inequality between men and women. The inequality between women and men was particularly evident in every field, especially in the literary environment. In a speech given at Newnham College in 1928, Woolf tried to clarify why women, like men, could not write great works. Why were there no female-authored works as widely read as *War and Peace*? In order for a woman to

create a beautiful and readable piece of art, she needs two things besides talent: a room of her own and sufficient financial means. As noted in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a person can only engage in creative activity once their basic, essential needs are met. In the book, Woolf also discusses the concepts of virtue and moral norms, criticizing how certain freedoms available to men were forbidden for women. During this period, women were confined to their homes and forced to remain hidden behind closed curtains. As Woolf remarked, "the world was care-free for talented men, but always ready to attack women with criticism" (Huseynova, 2021).

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the position of women as independent individuals in society and the issues of eliminating dependence on the opposite sex were also addressed by representatives of the French literary environment. Authors such as George Sand with *Indiana*, Simone de Beauvoir with *The Second Sex*, and Hélène Cixous with *The Laugh of the Medusa* created female characters who resisted male dependency and sought paths to independence in their life choices. Each author explored how gender is portrayed in literature and criticized the narrow frameworks, social pressures, and shortcomings of the existing social structures imposed on women. These works played a significant role in advancing feminist ideas in French literature, sparking long-lasting debates on women's rights and their protection.

In Russian literature of the 19th and 20th centuries, many writers also addressed themes related to gender issues and the social status of women. They were particularly interested in topics such as the position of women in society, their role in family relations, and their struggle for freedom as independent individuals. When discussing literary examples reflecting the gender issue in the 19th century, Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* comes to mind, along with the portrayal of the attitude towards women in Russian society within the novel. In the novel, we witness Tatyana's pure and sincere love for the main character, Onegin, and her unhesitating confession of these feelings to him. However, it should be noted that, unlike French romantic novels, the harsh realities of Russian society at that time did not accept a young, unmarried girl's confession of love to a man. The writer, with regret, portrayed through Tatyana how a woman had to set aside her own desires in order to conform to societal expectations.

The complete opposite of Tatyana's character is Lev Tolstoy's rebellious heroine, Anna, who represents a completely different figure. In the novel, Anna does not hesitate to challenge the strict laws of society and openly express her desires and wishes. Throughout the novel, Tolstoy illustrates how women who refuse to submit to society and defy its expectations can face harsh and unforgiving consequences. Anna, moving against the current of societal expectations, ultimately faces a tragic fate (Tolstoy,

2024). The author delicately portrays the painful outcomes of defying the rigid rules imposed by society. "In this novel, we see the protagonist acting against a vast world, so we must note the connection between the 'personal-universal' antitheses and the protagonist's development and changes" (Andreyeva, 2019, p. 14).

Additionally, in the work *Three Sisters* written by Anton Chekhov in 1901, the desires and wishes of women, the social limitations that hinder the realization of these dreams, and internal family conflicts are depicted. One of the most realistic works reflecting the gender issue in society is *The Gulag Archipelago*, written by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in 1973 (Solzhenitsyn, 2017). In the novel, the author portrays the harsh living conditions faced by women during the Stalin regime and their intense struggle for survival. *The Gulag Archipelago* is an outstanding work that realistically depicts the harsh lives of women and raises the issues of their struggle against the existing structure.

Gender Issues in Azerbaijani Literature

With the development of the Enlightenment movement in the 19th century, several defective aspects of Azerbaijani society's attitudes towards women started to become more apparent. A group of intellectuals endeavored to promote the formation of democratic thought and Enlightenment ideas in the country. Among these intellectuals, M.Ş. Vazeh, H. Zardabi, and M.F. Akhundzade stood out for their significant contributions. One of the crucial issues that concerned them was the matter of women's liberation. They believed that women should have the same freedom and choice rights as men in society. M.F. Akhundzade was not only an advocate of securing this right from a moral standpoint. The dramaturg believed that women should be given freedom of speech and expression in state administration, alongside men. This genius, who repeatedly addressed the role of women in society in his works, opposed the deprivation of women's enjoyment of life's blessings and freedom based on the hijab verse.

M.F. Akhundzade believed that the most correct way to free women from the shackles of ignorance was through their enlightenment and education. He noted that while Azerbaijani women were occupied with household chores and childbearing, women in Europe were actively involved in state administration and had equal rights with men. According to Akhundzade, the root of societal troubles was gender inequality, which forced women to serve only their husbands and engage solely in domestic duties and child-rearing. He saw education as the only way to address the disaster caused by gender inequality in the 19th century. Akhundov wrote: "...our women are not deprived of any natural talent or beauty: health, courage, resourcefulness, perseverance—all are present in them. But their only enemy is ignorance..." (Mammadguluzade, 2004, p. 272).

Following M.F. Akhundzade's trailblazing efforts on women's freedom, many poets and writers sought to define women's position in society and advocate for their rights. Many authors addressing gender inequality in their works gathered around the "Molla Nasreddin" journal. This journal highlighted the issue of women's freedom among other pressing problems of the time. They began to call for equal rights for women, including the right to pursue education and to address women as equal individuals to men. Among those who fought shoulder to shoulder on the front lines of the Mollanəsrəddin movement were writers such as J. Mammadguluzadeh, A. Hagverdiyev, M. Sabir, A. Nezmi, A. Qamkusal, U. Hajibeyli, and others.

J. Mammadguluzadeh, who was not hesitant to openly criticize social vices, prominently addressed the issue of women's rights in his works. Whether in his lyrical poems, prose works, or drama, the author often included criticism of practices such as forced early marriages for girls, denial of education beyond the age of nine, confinement of girls within four walls, and polygamy. One of the works highlighting these issues is his tragicomedy "The Dead". Among the targets of criticism in "The Dead" are the disreputable fathers who sell their daughters as slaves and servants. Representatives of the delicate gender, who were raised solely to get married by their elders, were completely unaware of the events happening around them and the blessings of life. The tragic fate of girls is poignantly expressed through Kefli Iskander's lament: "Oh my beautiful, delicate sister! Look, the sun has risen outside, but you will never see that light. What need is there for its light?" (Mammadguluzade, 1958, p. 85). The author laments that Nazli and many girls of her time were born to serve "sacred" figures like Sheikh Nasrullah.

Mammadguluzadeh's "Tales of Danabash Village" is a rebellion against the intolerable life of Azerbaijani women. "Jalil Mammadguluzadeh aimed to highlight violence against women and the use of uncivilized methods by the powerful to fulfill their desires by portraying Zeynab's fate, her suffering, and, more precisely, the national tragedy" (Mammadli, 2010, p. 7). By addressing this issue, Mammadguluzadeh sought to define the position of women in early 20th-century Azerbaijan and advocated for equal rights for them. He believed that enlightenment was the only way to achieve these goals.

The author's journalism had not overlooked the issues that had troubled him. J. Mammadguluzadeh wrote about the plight of Azerbaijani women in various newspapers and periodicals. Affected by the suffering of Muslim women and the injustice they faced; he wrote:

As I write these words, I look at the dark clouds. Sometimes I imagine these clouds are the humidity of the Black Sea and Caspian Sea, which the sun has drawn up to create rain here. Sometimes I imagine that these clouds are the

clouds of lament and despair of Muslim women, and these rains are not sea waters, but the tears of these unfortunate ones. (Jalal, 2004, p. 98).

In his articles “Wife issue”, “Engaged girl”, “Nine years old”, “Girl”, “To the ladies”, and other articles like these, the recognition of women’s rights in Muslim society was discussed.

One of the poets who wanted to see all members of the nation enlightened, educated, and beneficial to the homeland and the nation was M. Sabir. He saw the development of the nation in raising an educated generation and ensuring proper upbringing. He believed that children raised in ignorant and uneducated Muslim families would not be beneficial to their people, and that the burden of this problem fell on women’s shoulders. According to Sabir, a knowledgeable and educated woman would not raise children who could become a threat to society. An educated mother is also the teacher and guide for future generations. To achieve this, it was necessary to overcome the obstacles of the time and support the liberation of women from their veils, ensuring their active participation in social and cultural affairs. The poet had urged women not to be content with only paying attention to their outward appearance, but to also focus on their inner world, and had advised them not to be indifferent to science and education. Sabir’s poem “An educated mother and uneducated mother” is a notable piece in this regard:

The most honorable adornment of a true parent
Is a well-mannered, disciplined child, not mere appearance.

A mother without nurturing her child well
Is not a worthy example of parenthood.

The real ornament of life is the gem of knowledge,
Which is not mere material value but true life capability.
(Sabir, 2012, p. 345).

The difficulties faced by women, the barriers they encountered in their social and cultural lives, and the injustices they were subjected to were sharply criticized in Sabir’s satirical works. The poet emphasized the importance of women’s enlightenment for societal development. For this, it was crucial for them to have the same right to education as men. By expressing these ideas with considerable courage for his time, Sabir advanced the issue of women’s freedom in Azerbaijani literature. His satires “Oh granny, red-bearded man”, “An uninvited guest arrived”, “Three wives”, and “The advice of the envious old woman to the girls” depicted the dire state of women in early 20th-century Azerbaijan and called for a solution to improve their condition. In “An uninvited guest arrived”, Sabir sharply

criticized the practice of marrying young girls to much older men, saying:

Wearing a hat like Dudkeş,
with white hairs visible on his brow,
though he is old—around my grandfather’s age—
he is still vigorous, don’t let him go, he has arrived!
Despite his dirtiness, don’t let him go, he has arrived!
(Sabir, 2012, p. 144).

Following Sabir, poets like A. Nazmi, A. Qamkusal, and M. Mojuz, who were part of the “Molla Nasraddin” journal circle, also addressed the issues of women’s freedom and gender equality in their works.

One of our poets who addressed the lack of rights of our women and fought for their enlightenment in his works was Ali Nazmi. Rabil Mehdiyev, who showed great interest in the poet’s work, noted that the poet’s legacy developed on the basis of enlightenment and initiative, promoting solutions to social problems and progressive ideas. R. Mehdiyev highlighted as an important point that Ali Nazmi utilized a comparative analysis method to present the catastrophes in the social sphere in a comparative manner (Nazmi, 2006, p. 15). The lack of social rights for Azerbaijani women and the opportunity for girls from other nations to receive education and strive for progress created a sharp contrast in the social sphere. In his poems such as ‘Our Girls,’ ‘Our Wives,’ ‘The Hardship of a Girl in ‘Molla Nasraddin,’ and ‘Our Wives,’ the poet drew attention to the issue of women’s freedom. In the satire ‘Our Girls,’ Ali Nazmi noted that the reason for the lack of women’s rights in our society was the family in which they were born and raised. He lamented that the fate of young girls was determined by the male members of their families:

I was not yet eleven years old, Molla!
I was surrounded by countless traps, Molla!
In the end, they handed me from hand to hand, Molla!
I ended up married to a tyrant, a fool,
My old father sold me to a madman!
(Nazmi, 2006, p. 62).

The author drew attention to the content of an article quoted from one of the Baku newspapers in the “The Women’s Issue” feuilleton published in the 1915 issue of the magazine “Mazali.” The newspaper compared the women of the Caucasian and Crimean Muslims with the women of Russian Turks. Compared to the latter, Muslim women were described as mute, dead, and blind. The main reason

for this was that 'Caucasian women' deprived themselves of the blessings of life under their chadors: 'According to the newspaper's opinion, the wives of the Caucasian and Crimean Muslims are blind, mute, and dead. When their husbands face such situations, they cannot do anything but eat the prepared food at home. From the words of "Vaqt," it seems that, although not as capable as Russian wives, the wives of Russian Turks are still somewhat skilled and discerning. Unlike the Crimean and Caucasian women, they do not suffer under their chadors. They can go anywhere with their eyes open, express their problems to everyone, and seek solutions for their issues' (Nazmi, 2006, p. 370).

In the 35th issue of the "Molla Nasreddin" journal from 1927, a feuilleton titled "I Will Reveal the Truth" was published under the pen name "Mashadisijimqulu" by Ali Nazmi. In this short piece, the author's target of criticism was the Muslim men who confined women within four walls: 'If the wall of a garden were not as high and thick as the wall of the house where all Muslim and Iranian women live, and like the chador they wear in the street and at home, the fruits there would not ripen like these women and would remain unripe' (Nazmi, 2006, p. 381).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Ü. Hajibayli, who was noted for his method of exposing social and domestic issues in Azerbaijan, was also among those who opposed gender inequality. In his articles, feuilletons, and comedies, the writer did not limit himself to highlighting the family and domestic problems of the time but also spoke out against the violation of women's rights in the family and society. Ü. Hajibayli's comedies "O olmasın, bu Olsun", "Arşin mal alan", and "Husband and wife" are particularly noteworthy works in terms of defending women's rights. For instance, Western critic Matthew O'Brien claimed that Üzeyir Hajibeyli's comedies were specifically aimed at defending women's rights. In these works, the playwright made a strong call for the recognition of women's rights and the restoration of their place in society. To achieve this, the author, using various literary techniques, did not shy away from criticizing the old patriarchal thinking of the time that displayed unjust attitudes towards women.

Through laughter and irony, he brought out critical points about outdated practices—forced marriage of young girls, marriage of older men to girls younger than themselves, women being sold as slaves for money, and the lack of any choice in society. Ü. Hajibayli did not hesitate to express the internal voices, desires, and wishes of women through their dialogue. In the comedy 'O Olmasın, Bu Olsun,' some expressions given through the character of Gülnaz convey the idea that, alongside men, women also have rights. With this, he emphasized that women should not remain silent in the face of the unjust laws of society. In the comedy 'Arşin Mal Alan,' the female characters, especially the character Asya, represent modernity and draw attention with their role as defenders of women's rights.

Unlike many of her peers, Asya is a character who desires to make her own decisions regarding her personal life and demands independence in choosing a marriage partner.

In contemporary works, the gender issue is depicted in a multifaceted and comprehensive manner. Writers address this topic from various angles, incorporating societal gender issues, women's rights, men's dominance over the opposite sex, and related pressures into their narratives. Modern literary works combine several different approaches to the gender issue. These include feminist perspectives (Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale"), critiques of male roles (Sally Rooney's "Normal People"), intercultural and racial problems (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Americana"), and postmodern approaches (Jeanette Winterson's "Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit"). Contemporary literary works aim to portray the gender problem in a multifaceted and dynamic way, using diverse artistic methods and approaches to encourage readers to think differently about existing societal issues.

CONCLUSIONS

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature played a fundamental role in making visible gender oppression, becoming a prominent means of challenging the patriarchal structures that denied women fundamental rights. Through a comparative analysis of English, French, Russian, and Azerbaijani literary traditions, in this research we identified patterns in the representation of female subordination, such as the confinement to the domestic sphere, as well as various forms of violence. Emblematic works like Jane Eyre, The Yellow Wallpaper, Middlemarch, A Room of One's Own, and Anna Karenina documented these injustices while simultaneously actively deconstructed the Victorian ideal of the "angel in the house," exposing the existential cost of these myths, and the strategies of resistance developed by women.

In Azerbaijan, the literary movement associated with the journal Molla Nasreddin presented a distinctive perspective by linking the intellectual subjugation of women to the collective stagnation of the nation. Mammadguluzade, Sabir, Nazmi, and Hajibeyli employed diverse literary resources—from biting irony to musical comedy—to highlight the devastating consequences of customs such as early marriage, polygamy, and the exclusion of girls from education. Their argument transcends their time and the demand for individual rights, positing that the transformation of gender relations is a requirement for modernization and national development, thus contributing a unique sociopolitical dimension to the international feminist debate.

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