

Article

Motherhood as Cultural Institution: Female Education, Gender Socialization and the Intergenerational Transmission of Values in Abdulla Qodiriy's *Mehrobdan Chayon*

Hulkar Salimova ^{1,*} and Ulugbek Ochilov ^{1,2,*}¹ History and Foreign Languages Department, Asia International University, Bukhara 200103, Uzbekistan² Interfaculty Department of Foreign Languages, Bukhara State University, Bukhara 200117, Uzbekistan

* Correspondence: hulkarsalimova1@gmail.com (H.S.); elnurbeast@gmail.com (U.O.)

Abstract

The novel *Mehrobdan Chayon* by Abdulla Qodiriy has been studied mostly as a historical, social and literary text, and its representation of motherhood and women as agents of cultural transmission has received little scholarly attention. This article suggests that Qodiriy presents motherhood not primarily as a biological relationship but as a cultural institution, in which Uzbek society is reproduced across generations in terms of literacy, religious and literary canon, comportment and marital expectation. The analysis, based on close reading of three figures, i.e., the neighbourhood girls' teacher, Nigor oyim; the educated daughter, Ra'no; and the marital-futures-managing woman, Mohlar oyim, and an interdisciplinary cultural-studies approach, demonstrates that the maternal line functions as the novel's mechanism of cultural continuity, transmitting both knowledge and social constraint. The article adds a Central Asian case to the study of motherhood and rethinks Qodiriy's domestic scenes as the place where Uzbek womanhood is reproduced and reformed.

Keywords: motherhood; cultural transmission; Uzbek literature

1. Introduction

Abdulla Qodiriy occupies a foundational place in modern Uzbek prose, and his fiction remains the framework for the reflection of Uzbek culture on its own formation. His work has been subject to recent criticism, which emphasizes its continuity and sees it as a living cultural resource, not a closed historical artefact (Salimova 2025). *Mehrobdan Chayon*, which is set in the intrigues of a Kokand court, has primarily been examined for its depiction of social life (Nasriyeva 2023) and for the interplay of language and image in his prose (Ismonova 2024). That body of scholarship has established the novel as an important historical and literary work. It has been much less interested in a dimension which the text foregrounds with surprising insistence: motherhood, female education and the role of women in the transmission of cultural value from one generation to the next.

In the previous scholarship, *Mehrobdan Chayon* has been read almost exclusively as a historical, social or literary novel, for its court politics, its social panorama and its narrative art. What this scholarship has largely overlooked is that the novel does not find cultural continuity in the political apparatus it portrays but in the maternal institutions which function behind the scenes of these political institutions. Motherhood as a mechanism of cultural reproduction and women as agents of intergenerational transmission have been



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two aspects that have not been examined. This article examines both dimensions through a close reading of the novel. It suggests that Qodiriy's conception of motherhood is not a biological one but rather a cultural one—a stable, socially acknowledged structure through which a community passes on literacy, moral values, religious and literary traditions, gender norms and social expectations—and that the maternal line becomes one of the novel's key sites for imagining cultural continuity. In *Mehrobdan Chayon*, mothers function as teachers, cultural mediators and agents of social positioning, and they extend their power beyond the house to the neighbourhood.

The argument is developed through three female characters. Nigor oyim is a literate mother who teaches the daughters of several quarters, thus making the household a place of cultural reproduction. Her oldest daughter, Ra'no, is the inheritor of a devotional and literary canon and represents a new generation of educated womanhood. Mohlar oyim, a widow, is in charge of her daughter's social and marital destiny. Taken together, these three women form a coherent pattern of cultural transmission, from one generation of women to the next, of literacy, of comportment and expectation. A cultural-studies approach, which is based on motherhood studies, gender socialization, cultural memory and the study of intergenerational transmission, helps situate the Uzbek case within a broader comparative context while remaining secondary to the close reading of Qodiriy's text.

The argument is grounded in its historical context. The early 20th century in Central Asia was a time of heated discussion on reform, literacy and the social status of women (Tadzhiev and Shakenova 2024), and Qodiriy is a key player in the cultural modernization of Uzbekistan (Salimova 2025). A novel that presents a literate mother as an agent of cultural continuity inevitably participates in that debate, whatever its apparent subject, and it provides a means of reading how early Uzbek fiction envisioned the future of its women.

2. Literature Review

The social and historical scope of Qodiriy's fiction has been the focus of criticism. Research on *Mehrobdan Chayon* focuses on its portrayal of social life and court politics, interpreting it as a portrait of Kokand society (Nasriyeva 2023), while other studies explore the harmony of word and image in Qodiriy's creation of meaning (Ismonova 2024). Uzbek criticism has also highlighted his ongoing relevance and significance in the country's cultural identity (Salimova 2025). What this scholarship has failed to provide is sustained discussion of the novel's women as agents of cultural reproduction, with motherhood and female education as structuring institutions, rather than as the backdrop to the political plot. What has not been asked is how the maternal and domestic scenes operate as a mechanism of cultural transmission or what competences and constraints are transmitted along the maternal line from one generation of women to the next. The present article aims to fill this gap by reading motherhood and female education in the novel as a structured institution of intergenerational transmission, instead of as a narrative background. This study addresses that gap.

Motherhood studies provide an important theoretical foundation. One of the most common motifs in the literature is the mother as a bearer of culture. Akujobi (2011) contends that African literature represents motherhood as a cultural and symbolic institution and not a biological role and that the maternal figures carry communal value and memory. In Indonesia, Kalauserang (2023) reads mothers in Indonesian short stories explicitly as "bearers of culture", and in comparative studies of Indian English literature, the maternal line is a main source of cultural continuity (Sharma 2024). This cross-cultural pattern is especially important in the case of Uzbekistan, as in Qodiriy's novel, the transmission of culture through motherhood is manifested not only symbolically but also in concrete ways,

such as the teaching of literacy and the transmission of a devotional and literary canon. This combination has rarely been discussed so explicitly in the comparative literature.

A second strand of scholarship examines the norms and identities associated with motherhood. Williamson et al. (2022) demonstrate that motherhood is regulated by strict ideologies of the “good mother”; İyiyaydin and Ergun (2025) explore how womanhood is tied to motherhood as an almost inevitable destination; Kaymaz et al. (2026) map the changing roles of mothers across generations, as inherited expectations are confronted with new realities; and Jadid et al. (2025) examine the construction of maternal identity in early marriage. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that motherhood functions as a normatively regulated social institution.

A third aspect is the transmission as a cultural process. Studies of mothers and peers reveal the social reproduction of gender-role identity (Olivetti et al. 2018), and sociological work on the intergenerational self reveals the construction of identity across the line of descent (Friedman et al. 2021). This literature is important for a literary reading because it is not a matter of biological inheritance, as the novel models through its mothers, but of modelling, instruction and structuring of expectation, which is to say, a matter of social mediation.

A fourth strand examines women as custodians of lineage and cultural memory. In the medieval literary imagination, female genealogies are a means for authors to communicate across time (O’Loughlin 2017); in the case of the Khasi, women are the ones who hold the knowledge of the matrilineal system (Myllemngap 2024); in Muslim contexts, women are the ones who negotiate inheritance (Kooria 2021); and in diasporic fiction, women are the ones who recover subjugated maternal knowledge (Tia 2025). The mother figure can become more pronounced as a bearer of cultural identity in situations of displacement (Morkina 2021), and the literary mother–daughter relationship is a known space for enacting continuity between generations (Sharma 2024).

Lastly, women’s education links motherhood to social change. Economic-historical studies on the long convergence of gender roles highlight the role of education in changing the position of women (Goldin 2014), and feminist literary studies focus on the encoding and contestation of gendered structures in women’s writing and its translation (Hite 2018; Irshad and Yasmin 2022). Research on the cultural role of women in specific historical contexts reveals that women maintain and transform community life through their daily practices of teaching and caring (Ahmed and Abdulla 2023), and research on intimate histories of social upheaval demonstrates how women’s lives are lived through large-scale changes (Hanley 2020). In the specific context of Central Asia, the study of devotional and poetic traditions of early twentieth-century Central Asian writers provides a context for the religious canon the novel conveys (Tadzhiyev and Shakenova 2024).

This article also incorporates comparative criticism, which treats canonical fiction as a diagnosis of the production and transmission of identity in societies. Ochilov’s work on Stephen King’s *Carrie* is an analysis of the narrative as a study of the production of deviance and the reproduction of social violence by institutions (Ochilov et al. 2026a); his work on *The Green Mile* emphasizes difference, power and moral inheritance (Ochilov et al. 2026b); and his work on moral ambiguity in Nazar Eshonqul’s fiction develops a Central Asian perspective on reading moral formation in narrative (Ochilov 2026). These studies, like the present one, are dedicated to the idea that literature is a place where cultural values are passed on and challenged and that the domestic scenes of a single novel can be used as evidence of collective cultural processes.

3. Theoretical Framework

The framework is cultural-studies-oriented, and the theoretical vocabulary is used in the service of the reading, not to replace it. Four perspectives are brought together: motherhood studies, which views motherhood as a socially regulated institution rather than a biological fact (Akujobi 2011; Williamson et al. 2022); gender socialization, which focuses on how womanhood is learned through modelling and teaching (Olivetti et al. 2018); cultural memory, which concerns the transmission of a shared, often gendered past (O'Loughlin 2017); and intergenerational cultural transmission, which traces how values and expectations descend across a line of kinship (Friedman et al. 2021; Kaymaz et al. 2026). The framework rests on three main premises.

First, motherhood is treated as an institution rather than a purely biological condition. To say that it is an institution is to say that it is patterned, normatively enforced and reproducible. The maternal figure functions as a cultural institution with communal value and memory, as suggested by literary scholarship (Akujobi 2011; Kalauserang 2023), and empirical studies confirm that mothering is subject to historically changing ideologies (Williamson et al. 2022; Kaymaz et al. 2026). To read Nigor oyim and Mohlar oyim as occupants of an institution allows the novel's specific women to represent general cultural expectations.

Second, womanhood is culturally acquired. Gender identity is learned through modelling and teaching, and mothers play a key role in this process (Olivetti et al. 2018). This premise focuses on the ways in which a girl in the novel is made into a specific type of woman, the ways she is taught to read, to behave, to imagine a future and the ways she is taught implicitly, as well as explicitly.

Third, cultural transmission operates through distinct and identifiable modes. What is transferred from generation to generation is transmitted by identifiable means: explicit teaching, modelling of behaviour, structuring of expectation and opportunity (Olivetti et al. 2018; Friedman et al. 2021). The heuristic value is for a literary reading: these modes allow the novel's transmissions to be classified. This is not merely a difference between Nigor oyim correcting girls' literacy and Mohlar oyim referring Ra'no to a suitor but also between explicit instruction and implicit expectations.

The framework is enriched by two concepts. Cultural memory is the shared past a community carries (often gendered and intergenerational (O'Loughlin 2017)) via carriers and practices. The genealogical approach is not just concerned with what is valued but also the trajectory of value and its moments of reinforcement or modification (Kooria 2021; Myllemngap 2024; Tia 2025).

As the article does, a genealogical perspective does not examine individual female characters in isolation but the line that connects them. It is about the process, not the person: it is about how values are passed on, how social norms are being reproduced, how educational practices are maintained and how cultural memory is transferred from one generation to the next. When applied to *Mehrobdan Chayon*, it does not view Nigor oyim, Ra'no and Mohlar oyim as individual portraits but as locations along a maternal line, and it asks at each location what is conserved in the passage between generations and what is changed. The working definition that guides the analysis is a consequence of this: Motherhood in the novel functions as the institution through which literacy, religious knowledge, literary culture, comportment and marital expectations are reproduced across generations and women are at once teachers of culture and managers of constraint.

4. Analysis

The analysis is based on a close reading of the novel's three central female characters.

4.1. *Nigor oyim: The Mother as Teacher and Carrier of Cultural Memory*

The clearest illustration of motherhood as an institution appears in Nigor oyim's role as a teacher. The novel reports that "the girls of two or three quarters used to gather for Nigorxonim's lesson" and that "Nigorxonim was a woman who, in her time free from her own work, corrected the girls' literacy" (Qodiriy 2019, p. 22). These two brief sentences establish several important features of Nigor oyim's role. They show a mother extending her authority beyond her own children to the daughters of surrounding quarters; they make literacy—*savod*—the explicit content of her transmission; and they fold this teaching into the rhythms of domestic labour, performed "in her time free from her own work". Teaching is not a substitute for the mother but an extension of her.

The second sentence deserves closer attention. Nigor oyim means "a woman who corrected the girls' literacy", which is a relative clause, making literacy correction a defining attribute, not an occasional act. The verb "corrected" (*tuzatuvchi*) suggests that there is an existing competence that is being refined and that she is the one who takes the neighbourhood's girls to a higher level of literacy. The term "two or three quarters" (*ikki-uch guzar*) means that she can be spread out over a familiar urban unit and that her household is a node with a specified catchment. This illustrates how the novel locates a social institution within a specific community.

In the case of gender-role competence, which is reproduced when Nigor oyim instructs, corrects and shapes what the next generation of women can do, the lessons are a paradigm case of explicit transmission. This is consistent with gender-socialization theory: a mother is the model and teacher from whom a girl learns the skills that define her as a woman (Olivetti et al. 2018); Nigor oyim's literacy lessons are one obvious example of this in the text. But the scene is more than just socialization. The institutional dimension of comparative scholarship, which sees mothers as bearers of culture, whose transmission sustains a collective rather than a family (Akujobi 2011; Kalauserang 2023), is what is being achieved here because the pupils are drawn from several quarters.

As important as the form of the transmission is its content. Here literacy is not a neutral skill but a means to a devotional and literary canon; the ability to read is a means to access cultural memory and teaching girls to read is a means to admit them to that shared inheritance. The mother is therefore the keeper of a textual inheritance, a role often associated with women as custodians of cultural memory (O'Loughlin 2017). This episode illustrates its portrayal of cultural transmission across generations: Nigor oyim "transmits knowledge, raises girls and shapes the norms of womanhood", so that "cultural heritage passes from generation to generation". What she transmits is not just inherited but taught, and the mother is the active channel of a socially mediated transmission (Olivetti et al. 2018).

Two other features help to reinforce the institutional reading. The first is the casualness of the narration of the teaching: the novel mentions in passing that the girls came together and that Nigor oyim corrected their literacy. A practice has to be normal in order to be reliably reproduced from generation to generation, and the matter-of-fact tone is exactly that. The second is the breaking down of the distinction between domestic and public. Nigor oyim brings girls from neighbouring quarters into her home, thus transforming the domestic interior into a pedagogical space, the household, traditionally the place of biological reproduction, into the place of cultural reproduction. This merging of domestic and public space is one of the novel's key narrative strategies, and it is what authorizes the novel's claim that Qodiriy imagines motherhood as an institution.

The domestic setting surrounding her teaching further clarifies the portrait. In the provided passages, Nigor oyim is seen nursing a baby, with her older daughter taking care of the child and her household revolving around her; one passage reads, "several pieces

of meat, by the quarter, came often to Nigor oyim's kitchen", which indicates plenty and provisioning and places her as the manager of a large household. By placing these details together, the novel suggests that the woman who supplies a kitchen, nurses a baby and cares for her dependents is the woman who corrects the neighbourhood girls' literacy. This is why teaching is not distinguished from these domestic roles but rather is read as an extension of motherhood and not as a professional role. The novel does not take the girls to school; it introduces them to a working maternal home, where literacy is imparted along with the mundane work of provisioning and caring.

The limits of what the text says also constrain the reading. The novel makes it clear that Nigor oyim is a teacher of literacy and that girls come to her for lessons; it does not dramatize a specific lesson or the longer-term impact of the reading on the women of the neighbourhood, and the reading does not purport to be more than the text itself demonstrates. What the text clearly establishes and which the argument is based on is the structural fact alone that the domestic authority of the mother is extended, as a recognized practice, to the literacy of the community's daughters.

4.2. *Ra'no: Education as Inheritance and the New-Generation Woman*

Nigor oyim is the transmitter; Ra'no is the inheritor in whom the novel's vision of educated womanhood is realized. The text identifies her as the oldest child on the verge of adulthood: "Ra'no was Nigor oyim's eldest; this year she completed seventeen". She is a 'to'ng'uchi' (first born), which means that she is the first of a new generation, the one in which the mother's cultural investment is most concentrated. Seventeen years puts her right at the point of intersection of the inherited formation and the marital horizon.

The content of that investment is found in the catalogue of Ra'no's learning. The novel presents a curriculum that runs from a religious foundation—"Haftiyak, Qur'on, Chahor kitob, So'fi Olloyor, Maslaki muttaqin"—into the literary canon, including "all of Navoiy's works" and "the divan of Fuzuliy". The catalogue is remarkable in both scope and cultural significance. It combines devotional literacy with the high literary tradition of the Turkic-Persianate world and presents both as inherited cultural possessions. As this passage demonstrates, "knowledge and culture are given to the girl as inheritance". Education is presented as something passed from one generation to the next.

This is a curriculum in condensed form of cultural memory. Reading the Qur'an and the basic devotional books is to share the religious memory of the community; reading Navoiy and Fuzuliy is to share the literary memory of the community. The curriculum is the medium through which a shared, gendered past is passed on from one generation to the next; in the terms of cultural-memory theory, what is passed on to Ra'no is not information but membership in the community's remembered canon (O'Loughlin 2017). The mother's transmission of literacy, traced above, is what is fulfilled here: the key is literacy and the canon is what it opens. This is because the devotional and literary texts were not distinct in the early-twentieth-century Central Asian cultural life but rather were continuous (Tadzhiev and Shakenova 2024). Comparable scholarship on women as custodians of inheritance aids in naming what happens: that is, the maternal line is the means by which cultural capital and memory are passed on to the next generation (Kooria 2021; Myllemngap 2024; Tia 2025; O'Loughlin 2017).

Ra'no is also a reformer, as evidenced by her education. She represents the potential that the passing on of canon to a daughter can also pass on a capacity that can change her status, as in the case of the long movement of female education that changed women's status (Goldin 2014). This is not separated from the maternal institution: Nigor oyim teaches, and Ra'no is the daughter of a literate, teaching mother, and this is why Ra'no's formation is possible. Her figure embodies continuity (the canon descends intact) and change (an

educated daughter is a new kind of woman) in her, as described by intergenerational scholarship (Kaymaz et al. 2026; Friedman et al. 2021).

Ra'no's education is not abstracted but located within affective bonds, which are the ones that surround her domestically. In one domestic scene, she "came in after washing, glanced at her father, sat down beside Nigor oyim and with her small hand stroked and kissed the infant nursing at her mother's breast". The scene brings together three generations within a single domestic space: the mother nursing, the older daughter caring and the little one being cared for. This scene suggests that motherhood functions not merely as a biological relationship but as a centre of affection, care and social formation. As the passage indicates, the mother is "not merely biological but the centre of affection, upbringing and family relations". There is no opposition between education and affection; the transmission of literary culture develops alongside maternal care. Culture and care go hand in hand, along the maternal line.

This Ra'no is contrasted with an earlier image of her, which is a measure of the work of maternal formation. During a scene from the family's everyday life, the child Ra'no "fell in between two bowls on the courtyard floor, played with their mud and didn't know that her loose braids sweeping the ground were smeared with dust". The portrait is of a formless childhood: absorbed in play, unconcerned with dust and dishevelment, unaware (xabarsiz) of herself. The mud-play scene is set next to the later Ra'no, who washes before she enters, acknowledges her father, takes her place beside her mother and tends the infant. The same girl who used to sit in the courtyard dust and was unaware of it goes through the house with washed hands and ordered comportment. The novel does not actually tell the story of the intervening discipline, but it brackets Ra'no's formation between these two images, and the bracketing itself is an account of socialization: from the unformed child of the courtyard to the literate, modest young woman of the nursing scene. The change is the result of the maternal institution. The earlier image is deliberately repeated. The fact that the child's "loose braids sweeping the ground were smeared with dust" and that she "didn't know" it measures the distance between an unformed body and the ordered comportment that maternal formation will impose. What the novel offers as a straightforward opposition of images is, read against the institution, a condensed version of the story of a girl's initiation into womanhood.

Later in the scene, these small actions collectively illustrate the process of socialization. Ra'no washes, bows to her father, sits down next to her mother and cares for the baby: a choreography of cleanliness, deference, position and care, which rehearses the dispositions of a young woman within the household order. The gestures are not random detail but rather the implicit curriculum of comportment that is taught along with the explicit curriculum of canon. This is further accentuated by a moment. When an exchange embarrasses her, "Ra'no, ashamed at these words, buried her head in the infant's chest". Modesty and shame management is itself part of her formation—the feeling and bearing the culture is implicit, structural and pedagogical (Williamson et al. 2022; İyaydn and Ergun 2025) and attaches to a marriageable young woman.

A broad education and a well-regulated modesty are not opposed but are the hallmark of the institution. Ra'no is handed the literary canon and schooled in the demeanour of a marriageable woman, both of which are passed down through the maternal line. Her modesty is as much a part of her education as her education is of her modesty, and to take either of these elements alone would be to miss the other. The novel holds the two together, and the genealogical method requires the reading to do the same. What is passed down to Ra'no is a complex inheritance: a capacity that is bound to a discipline, the enabling and the constraining passed down as one inheritance, as is recognized in motherhood studies (Williamson et al. 2022; Sharma 2024).

4.3. Mohlar oyim: The Mother as Manager of Marriage and Social Future

While Nigor oyim is the one who passes on literacy and Ra'no is the one who passes on canon, Mohlar oyim is the third face of the maternal institution: the management of marital and social futures. The novel introduces her through displacement and responsibility—"after her husband's death, Mohlar oyim had moved to Kokand with her younger daughter"—establishing her as a widow who carries the burden of securing her children's place in society. Widowhood intensifies the mother's role: the mother is now the only one to position a daughter in the community.

That work is reflected in her orchestration of social interaction. She "drew Ra'no out from her embrace and instructed her: 'Go, greet your elder brother Anvar!'" The instruction appears minor, yet its social implications are significant. The mother arranges the meeting between the young woman and the young man; she handles the courtesies of salutation; she establishes a relationship whose social code in the novel is marriage. The gesture and instruction together facilitate a transition from maternal supervision to social engagement—the mother lets go of her own embrace to guide the daughter to another embrace. Her smile signals satisfaction with the successful management of a socially significant encounter when the scene resolves: "Anvar took Ra'no into his embrace; at this, Mohlar oyim smiled". These passages indicate that mothers are the mediators of intergenerational regulation of marriage, family and social relations.

This is the structural/expectational mode of transmission. It demonstrates how much of what is transmitted between generations is not taught but rather is structured in terms of expectation and opportunity, as is central to the study of intergenerational transmission (Friedman et al. 2021). Mohlar oyim does not tell Ra'no who to marry; she sets up the circumstances that make a certain future more probable. This mechanism reflects theories of intergenerational transmission: a lot of what is transferred from generation to generation is not formal teaching but is a structuring of expectation and opportunity, a channelling of a younger person to a sanctioned outcome (Olivetti et al. 2018; Friedman et al. 2021). The management of marriage is also the point where the maternal institution intersects with the normative force of womanhood being realized through marriage and motherhood, which is demonstrated to be both potent and restrictive (Iyiaydin and Ergun 2025; Jadid et al. 2025).

The results of Mohlar oyim's management are reflected in the satisfaction of those around her. The novel reports that "Anvar returned home very pleased with Mohlar oyim"—the young man's pleasure attaching not only to Ra'no but to the mother who orchestrated the meeting. The detail is significant in that it is Mohlar oyim who is acknowledged in the social world of the novel as the agent of the encounter: it is she who is pleased, she whose management has produced a satisfactory result, with Anvar. The maternal role also has a public dimension, and it is the community that reads her as the one who arranges. It is this recognition that is the mark of institutional authority as opposed to private feeling. The affection of a mother is her own, but the management of Mohlar oyim is recognized by others as a social function, and this is what makes it institutional.

When we come to the language of the novel for the daughter's future, we also see the logic of the system. One passage refers to the moment of "handing Ra'no over to her master" (*egasiga topshirish*), an idiom that frames marriage as a transfer of a young woman from the maternal household to a husband's authority. It is not so much an endorsement of the phrase by the narrator as the social grammar that the novel records: the daughter is an inheritance to be transmitted, and the mother is the one who effects the transmission. The idiom reveals the double status of the daughter in the maternal institution, as inheritor of a cultural canon and as an inherited and transmitted object, in the light of scholarship on women as carriers and transmitters of lineage (Kooria 2021; Tia 2025). The same institution

that gives Ra'no her literacy also makes her transferable, and the novel's diction is both. The fragment is short, and the present reading is based on its wording alone and not on a more extended narrative context; nevertheless, the idiom is significant because the language that a culture uses for marriage reflects the role that it assigns to the woman who passes through it.

The widowhood of Mohlar oyim is worth stressing, as it illuminates the functioning of the institution. Exiled to Kokand, without a husband, she is the focus of her daughters' social continuity. Research on the mother figure as a factor in the formation of cultural identity, particularly in the context of displacement, has demonstrated that the role of the mother figure becomes more pronounced in the absence of other supports (Morkina 2021). This intensification is exemplified in Mohlar oyim, who is widowed and moved away and is the only one in charge of her daughter's entry into the social and marital order; the novel's focus on her handling of the encounter shows the burden of this singular responsibility.

The fact that this regulatory work is performed by Mohlar oyim and the pedagogical work by Nigor oyim is significant. The novel does not focus the maternal office in one exemplary woman but disperses it, making it seem as if it were something greater than any one woman—a social structure in which various women do various aspects of one job. The idea is not that Mohlar oyim is a less maternal mother than Nigor oyim but that the regulation of a daughter's marriage and the cultivation of her literacy are both maternal functions, both part of the reproduction of womanhood (Williamson et al. 2022; Kaymaz et al. 2026).

4.4. *The Maternal Line as Genealogical Institution*

Taken together, Nigor oyim and Mohlar oyim can be interpreted as two parts of one institution. Nigor oyim is the novel's character of literacy, pedagogy and cultural inheritance: she brings together the girls of various quarters, corrects their savod and reveals to her daughter the devotional and literary canon that is the cultural memory of the community. Hers is the passing on of knowledge—the enabling endowment of the next generation of women. Mohlar oyim embodies the maternal functions of marital mediation, social positioning and the regulation of womanhood, who, widowed and displaced, organizes her daughter's entry into the social order, choreographs the encounter with Anvar and functions within the idiom of “handing over” that determines a young woman's marital destiny. Hers is the passing on of social expectation—the positioning of a woman in structures that will shape her. Both functions are not mutually exclusive but complementary. Without literacy, social positioning alone would leave the daughter culturally unequipped, while literacy without social positioning would remain socially incomplete. Qodiriy's distribution of the maternal institution between these two women is exactly to demonstrate that the maternal structure has two aspects, i.e., the transmission of knowledge and the control of destiny, and that both are transmitted maternally. They are the whole of motherhood as a cultural institution, the reproduction of cultural competence and social form in each new generation of women.

The three figures together make up a genealogical institution. Nigor oyim teaches, Ra'no inherits and can reform, Mohlar oyim positions and constrains. Literacy, canon, comportment and expectation pass down the line from mother to daughter. The domestic scenes in the novel, when read in order, are not private moments but a portrait of the reproduction of a culture and of its women.

The genealogical reading helps to understand what is conserved and what is subject to change. Conserved: the devotional and literary canon, handed down to Ra'no; the affective ties of care, handed down from mother to daughter; the assumption that a young woman's future will be marriage. Open to change: What does it mean to be an educated daughter, a

literacy that the previous generation did not necessarily have and that could change her status? This is the pattern intergenerational research describes as inherited expectations meeting new realities (Kaymaz et al. 2026) and as the negotiation of an intergenerational self across the line of descent (Friedman et al. 2021).

Gender is pervasive in the institution. Women educate women, women set women up, women pass on the canon and comportment. The novel situates the reproduction of culture, its memory, norms and literacy, in the maternal line specifically, which is the case with the carrying of inheritance and memory, which is often a gendered function, even within patriarchal orders (Kooria 2021; Myllemngap 2024; Tia 2025). Qodiriy's achievement lies in demonstrating this function in a real Uzbek context, via specific women whose everyday domestic activities constitute the scaffolding of cultural continuity. Comparative criticism of fiction as a diagnosis of social reproduction is helpful for reading these scenes as evidence of collective processes: Ochilov's reading of Carrie is an analysis of how institutions produce social outcomes as a single narrative (Ochilov et al. 2026a); and his account of moral formation in Eshonqul reads as a laboratory for testing values (Ochilov 2026). In this way, the maternal scenes in *Mehrobdan Chayon* are the novel's theory of the descent of Uzbek womanhood.

5. Discussion

This analysis is part of three larger conversations: the criticism of Qodiriy, motherhood studies and the role of women in early twentieth-century cultural reform in Central Asia.

In the case of Qodiriy criticism, the focus is not on the political plot but on the domestic substructure that supports it. Previous studies have charted the novel's social landscape and its representational artistry (Nasriyeva 2023; Ismanova 2024) and validated the ongoing vitality of Qodiriy's writing (Salimova 2025). This reading further suggests that the novel's description of cultural reproduction is located in its women. Nigor oyim's neighbourhood school, Ra'no's inherited canon and Mohlar oyim's marital management are not merely part of the court intrigue but the novel's most important statement about the making and remaking of a society. *Mehrobdan Chayon* cannot be fully understood without considering its mothers, for it is a book that shows how culture is passed on.

The Uzbek case offers a distinctive example of the cross-cultural phenomenon of mothers being figured as bearers of culture (Akujobi 2011; Kalauserang 2023; Sharma 2024). Qodiriy makes the pedagogical role of mothers explicit, as is the canon that is being transmitted. Nigor oyim is not merely a repository of cultural value; she is a teacher of literacy for girls from various quarters and a quasi-public space for female education. The canon she opens for Ra'no, devotional texts along with Navoiy and Fuzuliy, is not a generic one. The Central Asian case therefore contributes to motherhood studies, revealing maternal transmission not just affectively and exemplarily but also formally, in the context of literacy and a named canon.

In addition, the analysis speaks to the normative ambivalence in the core of motherhood studies. Recent studies emphasize the importance of the demanding ideologies that govern motherhood and the connection of womanhood to maternal fulfilment (Williamson et al. 2022; İyiyaydın and Ergun 2025; Kaymaz et al. 2026; Jadid et al. 2025). This ambivalence is registered in Qodiriy's novel but not resolved. Ra'no's literary inheritance is the same institution that sets her on a course for a predetermined marriage. The novel does not simply portray an emancipation by education, nor does it simply affirm the marital channelling; both are carried out along the same maternal line—a more complicated picture than a reading of the novel that sees only emancipation or only constraint.

The novel is located in a historical context and thus is involved in the cultural modernization of Uzbekistan. The early twentieth century in Central Asia was a time of turmoil, in

which the role of women was actively challenged, and the literature was used to envision alternative futures for women; studies of intimate histories of social upheaval reveal how women's lives are lived through in the process of social change (Hanley 2020). In Qodiriy's work, the literate mother and the educated daughter are the protagonists, bringing to the fore a space of women's cultural agency that is otherwise elided in political narratives of the period (Ahmed and Abdulla 2023). The maternal institution he portrays is not a timeless element of an unchanging tradition but a structure at a moment of potential change, where female literacy held the promise of changing women's status—a continuity with the reformist energies for which Qodiriy remains a touchstone (Salimova 2025). These developments are part of the larger picture of Jadid educational reform and the issues it brought up regarding women's literacy and female education.

The social significance of the educational function of Nigor oyim is conditioned by the situation of women's literacy in the world described in the novel. In much of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Central Asia, women's education was limited and often took place in informal and domestic contexts; in this context, a woman who taught the neighbourhood's daughters to read was not a common sight but a locally significant one, a rare site of female cultural authority. It was also an era of educational reform, and the role of the educational institution and of women in it was a subject of debate, with Qodiriy as a key figure in the cultural modernization that brought these debates into Uzbek prose (Salimova 2025). The devotional and literary instruction that Ra'no receives is integrated, and the cultural world in which they are integrated is one in which devotional and literary learning are continuous, such that a woman who transmitted both was transmitting the whole of an available cultural formation (Tadzhiyev and Shakenova 2024). This is a socially significant act: in the context of low female literacy rates and a debate among reformists on women's access to literacy, the act of a mother teaching girls to read is a reproduction and a quiet expansion of the cultural competence of her community's women (Ahmed and Abdulla 2023). In its centrality of such a woman, the novel makes a statement about where its cultural value lies. The fine grain of Jadid-era argument over female schooling, its specific advocates, programmes and disputes, is beyond the scope of this literary reading and the sources it draws on; what the analysis can establish is that Qodiriy's portrait of a literate teaching mother is part of and participates in the reformist cultural moment of which his own work is a recognized part (Salimova 2025).

The novel illustrates several interconnected modes of cultural transmission that work together within the narrative. *Mehrobdan Chayon* sets up the enabling transmission of literacy and canon and the affectionate transmission of care and the structural transmission of marital expectation. These modes are not a psychologization of the characters but rather a description of the type of transmission that is at work in a particular scene: Nigor oyim's lessons are explicit and pedagogical, the canon's descent to Ra'no is cultural-memorial, and Mohlar oyim's management is structural-expectational. Feminist studies on the encoding of gendered structures in women's texts and their transmission (Hite 2018; Irshad and Yasmin 2022) highlight that such transmission is never neutral and the novel does so in its transmission of constraint and capacity. The significance of the literary value of the reading is that these modes are not abstract categories but are concrete practices which the text describes: a lesson corrected, a canon listed, an encounter arranged.

One restriction determines the range of the reading. Its evidence is limited to the first movement of the novel, where the household of Nigor oyim and the formation of Ra'no are set up, and the argument has been constructed solely on the basis of these scenes. So the maternal institution is not followed throughout the course of Ra'no's further career but rather at the time of its establishment; what happens to the enabling and constraining faces of the institution as the plot develops is a question the later novel would answer.

That the institution is so fully legible in the opening pages is significant in itself: Qodiriy places where cultural continuity lies before the court intrigue is in full swing, as though the maternal household is the ground on which the novel stands. The reading is also confined to the mother–daughter axis. Future studies might expand the genealogical perspective to other female relatives, including grandmothers and aunts, and might also take into account the possibility of multidirectional transmission, as daughters can also modify the expectations they receive.

6. Conclusions

Reading *Mehrobdan Chayon* through its mothers shifts our understanding of where the novel locates cultural meaning. A book long cherished for its court intrigue turns out to be a book about the endurance of culture, not in the palace but in the household and to be the inheritance of a new generation of women: Nigor oyim, who makes her home a school; Ra'no, in whom a devotional and literary canon becomes a new generation's inheritance; Mohlar oyim, who positions a daughter within the marital order. These three women are not simply individual portraits but different expressions of the same cultural institution, and the recognition of that institution reorganizes the novel around a centre which its critics have overlooked.

The study contributes to three intersecting fields of scholarship. As a Central Asian case, the study contributes to motherhood studies by showing that mothers function not only as bearers of cultural values but also as teachers of literacy and transmitters of a clearly defined devotional and literary canon, including the Qur'an, So'fi Olloyor, Navoiy and Fuzuliy (Akujobi 2011; Kalauserang 2023; Sharma 2024). For cultural studies, it reveals how a literary text can make cultural transmission tangible, domestic, not abstract, and how a household can be seen as a site of the reproduction of value and how the acts that a household performs have capacity and constraint in them. It highlights the cultural labour performed by women in early Uzbek fiction and, to the genealogical study of culture, shows that descent is an achievement won through labour: female education in early Uzbek fiction is neither a rupture nor an inert continuity but is a transmission that conserves a canon while opening the possibility of revising it (Goldin 2014; Kaymaz et al. 2026; Friedman et al. 2021).

The novel's deeper assertion comes when its domestic scenes are juxtaposed with its political scenes. The title and much of the plot of *Mehrobdan Chayon* are based on the intrigues of a Kokand court, but the analysis has demonstrated that the work of cultural continuity is not located there. The court is a space of power, political conflict and continual change; it is the arena of events rather than cultural transmission. It is not the khan's institutions that endure but the lessons of Nigor oyim, the formation of Ra'no, the management of a marital future by Mohlar oyim: Literacy, the devotional and literary canon, the forms of comportment and marriage. In Qodiriy's work, cultural continuity is found in the educational, domestic and cultural work of women, not in political institutions, court structures or state power. The mothers of the novel are the main agents of the transmission of collective memory, literacy, social expectation and cultural identity from one generation to the next; the women are the agents of cultural continuity; and motherhood, as the teaching, forming and positioning of the next generation, is the infrastructure of cultural reproduction on which the visible world of the novel rests. Who rules may be decided by the court, but what is remembered, what is read and what kind of woman the next generation will be is decided by the maternal household. In this comparison, which is not explicitly presented as a thesis, the novel subtly shifts the focus of cultural continuity from the palace to the home, from men's political activity to women's cultural work.

Finally, what Qodiriy shows is a culture that is reproducing itself via its women. There is a cultural space of agency, a public sphere that the mother in *Mehrobdan Chayon* inhabits, and granting her that status is a way to recover it from a political reading of the novel, where she remains a private entity. The broader argument is that cultural continuity is sustained through the formation of successive generations in this basic text of Uzbek prose, not in the realm of power struggle but in the realm of the next generation. To consider this reading in the context of Ra'no's subsequent arc and the reformist discussion of women's education that frames Qodiriy's moment would be to test the balance of the institution's gift of knowledge and its discipline of constraint as the novel progresses.

The novel also has important implications for contemporary Uzbekistan, as the novel's questions about who is educating women and for what purpose are still very much alive. The maternal household in which Qodiriy grew up and was educated in reading and cultural competence is a continuity between the reformist debates of his time and the current attempts to increase women's access to education. The novel's double portrait, in which the same maternal line that initiates the canon to a daughter also directs her towards a socially and culturally foreordained marriage, provides a means of thinking about the gender relations of the present, where cultural transmission and social constraint are not mutually exclusive. The analysis indicates that broadening women's education is most significant when it is coupled with a relaxation of the expectations of what an educated woman can be. In this way, the novel's focus on women's literacy is a forerunner to a problem that remains relevant in women's education in the region: access to knowledge does not necessarily lead to the ability to act on it.

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