MASCULINITY, AUTHORITY AND THE WOMAN IN POWER: GENDER ROLES IN ASKAD MUKHTAR'S NOVEL "CHINOR"

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Abstract. The thesis examines how Askad Mukhtar's novel "Chinor" represents male authority and the woman leader. Looking at the patriarch Ochil buva, the shepherd Bozorqul, the district party secretary Orif and the regional party secretary Mariya Vasilyevna, it shows that the novel questions hegemonic masculinity and partly reverses the opposition "emotional woman – rational man", while still portraying the woman in power through masculinised features.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, woman leader, patriarchy, gender roles, Askad Mukhtar, "Chinor", Uzbek prose.

Studies of gender in literature often concentrate on female characters, yet stereotypes about women cannot be separated from ideas about men. R. W. Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity, the dominant model of manhood against which other forms are judged (Connell, 2005), is useful for reading Askad Mukhtar's "Chinor", a novel written in 1969 and built around the figure of a patriarch (Bol'shaya rossiyskaya entsiklopediya, n.d.). This thesis looks at how the novel constructs male authority and how it places a woman in a position of political power. Quotations are given from the 2018 edition in our translation.

The patriarchal frame is set on the first pages. The plane tree, more than a thousand years old, was planted by one of Ochil buva's distant ancestors (Mukhtar, 2018, p. 4), and the old man calls the whole clan spread across the country simply "my children" (p. 9). Genealogy runs through fathers and sons; women enter it through marriage or through a name. The adopted girl in Orif's house receives the name of his sister, Onabibi (p. 50), and Ochil buva remembers his own daughter Onabibi as the reason he spent twenty years serving the bek (p. 30). Female lives are recalled as parts of the male line.

The novel also shows how a particular kind of masculinity is handed down from father to son. Bozorqul's father, Omonqul-farang, travelled with the bek's karakul to Europe and told his son that he would not be satisfied unless the boy became a rich karakul merchant (p. 14). His mother, "a very beautiful woman", died while he was a

child, and he did not even weep for her, because he loved his father (pp. 14–15). The father raised him to be as ambitious as himself (p. 15). The female figure is erased from the boy's upbringing, and ambition for wealth is passed on as the core of manhood.

Within this frame the novel shows men who fail the hegemonic model. Bozorqul, the bek's chief shepherd, is introduced as broad-shouldered and "greedy for life" (p. 14). His dream of becoming a rich karakul trader leads him to leave his wife. The narrator then takes away, one by one, the attributes of male strength: Bozorqul weeps "an ugly cry, a man's cry" (p. 18), loses his nerve on the caravan route until the flick of a lizard makes his heart sink (p. 24), and is finally carried out of the mountains by his disguised wife (pp. 26–28). He realises that he himself was the "heavy load" that cost her life (p. 29). The conventional plot of male rescue is turned upside down.

Ochil buva offers an alternative model. He is physically powerful, "like a mountain" beside his grandson (p. 7), and he gives orders with natural authority: on the road he tells a young shepherd how to treat his sick baby and how to stop an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease among the sheep (pp. 10–11). Yet the same man says he would like to roll in the grass "like a baby" and dreams of writing a "book of farewell" to the beauty of nature (pp. 11–12). Saying goodbye to the plane tree, he weeps "without a sound, without tears" (p. 4). The novel thus contrasts two kinds of male tears: Bozorqul's helpless, "ugly" cry and the patriarch's quiet, dignified one. Strength and tenderness are not opposed in Ochil buva's character, and this is the masculinity the author clearly values.

Azimjon, the son of Onabibi and Bozorqul, represents yet another variant. Born and raised abroad, he is a wealthy karakul expert, yet he is almost forty and still unmarried; Ochil buva notices how small he is, "like a sparrow", and pities him as a man without a homeland (p. 30). On arriving he buys boots, a silk sash, a striped robe and a skullcap and wears them carefully, "as if they were borrowed" (pp. 7, 9–10). His attempt to become an Uzbek man through costume illustrates the idea that gender and national identity are performed through dress and gesture (Butler, 1990).

Orif, Ochil buva's son and the newly appointed district party secretary, is a different type. He is honest and impulsive and openly reflects on the empty formalism of official slogans (pp. 56–58). His relationship with his superior, the regional secretary Mariya Vasilyevna, is where gender and power meet. After a quarrel on the telephone he remarks: "If it were a man, I would curse seven generations of his ancestors and get it off my chest" (p. 33). The phrase reveals an ambivalent attitude: the woman's authority is acknowledged, but the familiar rules of male rivalry cannot be applied to

her. Ochil buva rebukes his son from another angle: “Is that how one talks to the head of the region?” (p. 33). For the old patriarch the office matters more than the sex of the person holding it.

Mariya Vasilyevna’s portrait follows a familiar stereotype of the woman in power. She holds out her hand “in a rather mannish way”; she is “not beautiful, her face even somewhat fierce, but when she laughed she became attractive” (p. 62). Orif’s compliment concerns her laughter, not her work (p. 62). When he asks why she never married, she replies with a sentence about the new state farms (p. 39): private life is replaced by the language of duty. The image corresponds to the “new woman” promoted by Soviet policy in Central Asia, whose public role often came at the expense of a personal one (Kamp, 2006; Northrop, 2004).

Yet the writer does not turn her into a caricature. In the dispute about the abandoned mountain district, Orif speaks from memories and grief, while Mariya Vasilyevna answers with facts: seven years of work, water brought to the steppe, six new farms built (p. 64). Orif has to admit: “You are right, Mariya Vasilyevna” (p. 65). In this scene the opposition “emotional woman – rational man” is reversed.

Orif’s inner life also undermines the image of the self-sufficient male leader. Returning at night from his late wife’s ruined native village, he feels lonely and helpless, searches the dark house for a cigarette and ends up drinking with the night watchman (pp. 54–55). The only “light” in his life, the narrator says, is his daughter Onabibi (p. 50). The district secretary depends emotionally on a girl, while officially he is the one who protects her.

Orif’s style of leadership is a further challenge to authoritarian masculinity. Talking to the editor of the district newspaper, he refuses to give instructions: “I will never give you instructions … Think for yourself” (p. 58). After a clumsy conversation with a railway station chief, he reproaches himself: “We see a person not as a human being but only as an executor” (p. 59). The ideal he arrives at is an atmosphere in which a person can say at a meeting what he thinks at home (p. 60). Male authority here is redefined as openness and dialogue rather than command, and it is significant that the first person Orif wants to share these thoughts with is a woman, Mariya Vasilyevna.

The opposition returns in the next generation. Watching his daughter Onabibi and the neighbour’s son Temir, Orif describes the girl as sensitive and able to delight in beauty, and the boy as a “dry reasoner”, and concludes: “Two halves make one whole” (p. 61). Temir looks after the girl “like his own sister” (p. 60). The father sees

this division of roles as natural harmony; the novel thus shows how gender patterns are passed on through affection rather than coercion.

Conclusions. "Chinor" rests on a patriarchal model of family and history, but it repeatedly exposes the weakness of hegemonic masculinity: the man who chases wealth collapses, a woman rescues him, and a woman leader wins the argument with an emotional man. At the same time, the woman in power is drawn through masculinised traits and an absent private life, and the gender binary is handed on to the young. This ambivalence makes the novel valuable material for studying how late Soviet Uzbek prose negotiated changing gender roles.

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