



## THE GENDER IMAGE OF WOMEN IN ABAI KUNANBAYEV'S POETRY: A TRANSFORMATIVE SHIFT IN KAZAKH LITERATURE

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of the study was to examine how, under the influence of Abai Kunanbayev's works, perceptions of women, their social roles, and their spiritual world began to change in the 19th century. A comprehensive approach was employed as the methodology, including a descriptive-analytical method for the study of the poet's literary texts and a historical-cultural analysis of the socio-historical conditions of Kazakh women's lives. The research analyses the functions of women in A. Kunanbayev's works, particularly their social role as mothers, wives, mentors, as well as the depiction of issues such as emancipation, gender violence, and cultural stereotypes. The main findings of the study indicate that in A. Kunanbayev's work, the image of the Kazakh woman acquires new meanings, particularly through the condemnation of patriarchal norms and violence, which were widespread during the pre-Abai period.

**KEYWORDS:** Emancipation, Abai, literary analysis, social role, patriarchy, violence, spiritual development.

## **LA IMAGEN DE GÉNERO DE LA MUJER EN LA POESÍA DE ABAI KUNANBAYEV: UN CAMBIO TRANSFORMADOR EN LA LITERATURA KAZAJA**

*RESUMEN:* El objetivo del estudio fue examinar cómo, bajo la influencia de las obras de Abai Kunanbayev, las percepciones de las mujeres, sus roles sociales y su mundo espiritual comenzaron a cambiar en el siglo XIX. Se empleó un enfoque integral como metodología, incluyendo un método descriptivo-analítico para el estudio de los textos literarios del poeta y un análisis histórico-cultural de las condiciones sociohistóricas de la vida de las mujeres kazajas. La investigación analiza las funciones de las mujeres en las obras de A. Kunanbayev, en particular su rol social como madres, esposas y mentoras, así como la representación de temas como la emancipación, la violencia de género y los estereotipos culturales. Los principales hallazgos del estudio indican que en la obra de A. Kunanbayev, la imagen de la mujer kazaja adquiere nuevos significados, en particular a través de la condena de las normas y la violencia patriarcales, que estaban generalizadas durante el período anterior a Abai.

*PALABRAS CLAVE:* Emancipación, Abai, análisis literario, rol social, patriarcado, violencia, desarrollo espiritual.

## **L'IMAGE DE GENRE DE LA FEMME DANS LA POÉSIE D'ABAI KUNANBAÏEV : UN CHANGEMENT TRANSFORMATEUR DANS LA LITTÉRATURE KAZAKHE**

*RESUME :* L'objectif de cette étude était d'examiner comment, sous l'influence des œuvres d'Abai Kunanbaïev, la perception des femmes, de leurs rôles sociaux et de leur univers spirituel a commencé à évoluer au XIXe siècle. Une approche méthodologique globale a été adoptée, incluant une méthode descriptive et analytique pour l'étude des textes littéraires du poète et une analyse historico-culturelle des conditions socio-historiques de vie des femmes kazakhes. La recherche analyse les fonctions des femmes dans les œuvres d'A. Kunanbaïev, notamment leur rôle social de mère, d'épouse et de mentor, ainsi que la représentation de questions telles que l'émancipation, la violence sexiste et les stéréotypes culturels. Les principaux résultats de l'étude indiquent que dans l'œuvre d'A. Kunanbaïev, l'image de la femme kazakhe acquiert de nouvelles significations, notamment à travers la condamnation des normes et de la violence patriarcales, répandues avant Abai.

*MOTS CLÉS :* Émancipation, Abai, analyse littéraire, rôle social, patriarcat, violence, développement spirituel.

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## 1. Introduction

The gender status of women in modern society remains one of the most relevant topics of research in the fields of humanities and social sciences. This issue becomes even more pressing amid the rapid changes in sociocultural paradigms associated with globalisation processes, which actively impact all spheres of public life, including the economy, politics, and culture. The question of gender equality in contemporary society is not limited solely to legal or economic aspects. It also encompasses profound social and cultural transformations related to the redistribution of social roles and statuses, particularly concerning perceptions of women's roles.

Contemporary scholarship is intensely exploring these processes to understand changes in women's positions in society and to formulate new approaches to addressing the issue of gender inequality. Researching the role of women in various sociocultural contexts allows not only to comprehend how women influence societal development but also to analyse how their social, economic, and cultural status evolves under the influence of external and internal factors. In Kazakh literature, the issue of gender status holds particular significance, as societal perceptions of women have been based on traditional patriarchal norms for centuries. Women were predominantly viewed as custodians of the hearth, wives, and mothers, restricting their societal roles to domestic responsibilities and child-rearing. Such a traditional perspective on women was deeply rooted in social structures and cultural narratives.

A. Lindqvist et al. (2021) deconstructed the concept of gender in social sciences, emphasising its complexity beyond a binary framework and providing guidance for researchers on how to consider various facets of gender in their research questions and analyses. D. Hastuti and S. Sudrajat (2022) examined the position of women in the public sector, highlighting the persistence of patriarchal culture in both developing countries like Indonesia and developed nations like South Korea. I. Kerner (2020) examined the challenges and pitfalls of feminism in a postcolonial context. She critiques provincialism and proposes a semi-intersectional perspective to better understand the complexity of gender identities and experiences.

A. Yeszhanova and G. Esim (2023) identified similarities between the views of A. Kunanbayev and B. Pascal regarding the categorical apparatus and key ideas. It uses a historical-philosophical approach and hermeneutics to analyse their works in the context of the global history of thought. In the work by H.H. Yasir and H.S. Fnteel (2023), the significance of poetry in Asia is studied as a reflection of the world, history, and culture. They emphasise the contributions of prominent poets and call for renewed attention to Asian poetry to preserve and popularise its unique features through anthologies and translations, despite the challenges of modernity such as materialism and commercialisation. L. Kossuth (2023) described his work on

translating A. Kunanbayev's poems, highlighting the significance of interlinear translation as a crucial tool in preserving the nuances and intricacies of the original text.

K.G. Priyashantha et al. (2023) examined the definitions, dimensions, and outcomes of changing gender stereotypes, revealing both their impacts on various spheres and highlighting gaps in research, particularly in the context of technology. N. Faizin et al. (2022) analysed the depiction of women in Kyai Abul Fadhol As-Senori's literary work. It explored their roles in various societal domains through the lens of Islamic feminism, while critiquing the cultural structures that perpetuate gender imbalances in the Nusantara archipelago.

Despite the growing interest in the issue of gender inequality in Kazakh literature, the question of women's gender position remains underexplored, particularly in the context of A. Kunanbayev's (1970) works. The literary analysis of A. Kunanbayev's works from the perspective of his poetic stance on women remains a relatively unexplored aspect, opening up opportunities for new scholarly inquiries. Indeed, within A. Kunanbayev's poetry lie important ideas that address issues of women's emancipation, self-determination, and their significance for social development. Thus, the objective of this study was to reflect the gender status of Kazakh women in national literature, particularly during the period leading up to and encompassing A. Kunanbayev's creative output. The primary focus was on identifying the characteristics of A. Kunanbayev's poetic position, which transcends traditional notions of women's roles, emphasising their inner world, emotional state, and active role in societal formation.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study employs a range of methods that allow for a comprehensive analysis of the gender status of Kazakh women in the works by Abai Kunanbayev (1970). This includes Kazakh folklore and authors such as D. Babatayuly (1993), A. Seydimbekov (2019), A. Margulan (2018) and prominent representatives of the literature of the peoples of Central Asia: C. Aitmatov (2008), Tugolbai Sydykbekov, A. Qadiri (2019), Manas (2004), Rudaki (Tabatabai, 2023), M. Tursunzoda (1957) and the works of A. Kunanbayev. The primary material for the research consists of the poet's poems dedicated to women, reflecting various aspects of their social roles and gender status in 19th-century Kazakh society. To ensure a coherent and in-depth examination of the issue, several methodological approaches were applied.

In this study, the poems of A. Kunanbayev were analysed using a selective approach. Instead of featuring all of his writings, a number of poems was picked since

they were directly related to the subject. In addition to poems that critically deal with gender violence, patriarchal standards, and the struggle for female independence, poems that depict women in important social roles, such as mothers, wives, and mentors, were given preference. The selection criterion centred on finding texts that offer a complex portrayal of female characters, taking into account both their conventional roles and newer representations of intellectual and spiritual independence. In addition to guaranteeing that the corpus represents a representative sample of Kunanbayev's work on gender dynamics, this subject focus enables a thorough examination of his progressive views on women's social standing.

The descriptive-analytical method was utilised for a detailed analysis of the functions of Kazakh women in A. Kunanbayev's poetry (1970), where they appear in various social roles. The application of this approach enabled an examination of how the poet portrays the diverse roles of women, emphasising their social significance and status in society. Within the framework of the axiological method, particular attention was paid to the moral and ethical stance of the author regarding women and their gender status. Axiology, as a method, allowed for the exploration of the values and orientations presented in A. Kunanbayev's works. It also allowed for analysing how cultural and spiritual values, which shape the image of women, are conveyed through the linguistic fragments of his poetic texts.

For a deeper understanding of women's gender status during A. Kunanbayev's era, a historical-cultural method was employed. This method helped to examine the socio-historical context in which the poet created, as well as the changes occurring in society regarding women's rights and status. Special attention was given to analysing the social conditions that compelled women to seek emancipation, independence, and resistance to gender inequality. This approach also facilitated an analysis of the portrayals of heroines in feminist poems, who, in defiance of societal norms, chose either suicide or the struggle for freedom.

The hermeneutic method was employed to uncover the hidden meanings within poetic texts associated with gender and cultural imagery. A comparative approach was utilised to analyse the portrayals of women in literature prior to A. Kunanbayev and in his own works, emphasising the poet's innovative approach to depicting women's nature and social status. Additionally, the comparative-typological method was applied to highlight the evolution of these representations. In this context, the status of women prior to the poet was analysed, revealing that they were predominantly perceived through patriarchal constructs.

In contrast, A. Kunanbayev emphasised their inner strength, individuality, and spiritual independence. This analysis includes indicators such as social roles (mother, wife, daughter), the degree of freedom in decision-making, the level of education and

emancipation, gender-based violence, and cultural stereotypes regarding femininity. Changes in the gender status of women in the literature and culture of other Central Asian countries, such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, were also investigated. The analysis is structured around three key phases: modernisation and early 20th-century reforms, the Soviet era's reconfiguration of gender roles, and the post-Soviet revival of traditional gender identities in literature.

The analysis of the gender status of women also draws upon contemporary social and legal documents of Kazakhstan, specifically referencing the speech by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on gender equality and the protection of women's rights, delivered in 2021 (Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021). It is important to note that these sources are used to provide context rather than form the basis of a detailed legal or policy analysis. The study utilised the results of a large-scale sociological research project by A. Kusayinovna et al. (2022), which demonstrated that the issues of gender-based violence and inequality raised by A. Kunanbayev in the 19th century remain relevant in modern Kazakh society. The sociological data were specifically integrated through a thematic comparison that emphasised the concerns Kunanbayev addressed in the 19th century, including gender-based violence and inequality, and their ongoing relevance. Through this comparison, it became clearer how Kunanbayev's works' themes relate to contemporary socioeconomic reality.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. *Gender status of Central Asian women in literary works: The pre-Abai period*

In scientific studies, the terms “sex” and “gender” are often distinguished, which is important for understanding the social status of men and women. “Sex” usually refers to the biological and anatomical characteristics of a person, defining them as male or female, based on genetic, anatomical, and reproductive features. In contrast, “gender” reflects socially constructed roles and behavioural models perceived by society as appropriate for men and women. As B. Pereira-Román et al. (2021) highlight, gender encompasses roles, behaviours, actions, and characteristics that a particular society deems suitable for each sex. As a result of this social construct, the concept of gender status arises, which determines a person's social position, based on cultural, religious, psychological, and other factors. Gender status changes depending on time, place, and the influence of various social conditions. It is shaped by social consciousness and defines the role and position of men and women in society. Gender status can be both general, reflecting a woman's place in society in the context of power, religious, and cultural norms, and individual, indicating the

social hierarchy of each person according to lifestyle, self-realisation, and accepted gender standards.

Studying the gender status of women in literature before A. Kunanbayev (1845-1904) requires consideration of the social and cultural contexts that shaped the role of women in traditional society, where women performed important social and family functions; however, their status was largely determined by patriarchal norms, which limited their rights and opportunities.

Traditional Kazakh society was based on patriarchal principles, where men played a leading role in the family and society (Kieliszek, 2024). Kazakh customs prescribed a clear division of roles between men and women. Women's main responsibilities were child-rearing, maintaining the family hearth, and fulfilling duties related to household management. In society, women were perceived as symbols of family stability and lineage continuation, but their everyday life was dominated by dependence on male decisions (Sheikh and Juergensmeyer, 2019; Satybaldieva et al., 2024). The social status of women was also reflected in traditional marriage norms. Marriages were often dictated by the economic and political interests of families, rather than by personal preferences or a woman's right to choose.

Women in traditional Kazakh society embodied many cultural stereotypes, which were reflected in oral folklore, including epics, songs, and tales (Daurenbekova et al., 2021). In Kazakh folklore and ethnography, the image of Mother Umai symbolises the origin of all humanity, embodying motherhood and care. According to mythological beliefs, families wishing for offspring or during significant life events, such as marriage or childbirth, would turn to Mother Umai (Kusayinovna et al., 2022). They prayed to her for help, which demonstrates the high socio-cultural status of women as progenitors and keepers of the family hearth. Thus, mythological concepts emphasise the importance of women through their capacity for motherhood, which was regarded as an elevated and sacred role. In some studies by Turkologists, the image of Mother Umai is even associated with the figure of Eve, reflecting analogies between Kazakh and other mythological traditions (Zhernosenko, 2022).

In addition to the image of Umai, folklore also features characters associated with the chthonic world, characterised by negative or demonic traits, such as Old Copper, Zhalmauz, and fairy maidens. These figures often perform aggressive roles in myths and fairy tales, manifested through actions like poisoning the food of the main characters, binding a sleeping hero, or digging the ground with a shovel-like tooth. These characters embody feminine powers that held a special influence within the context of shamanic culture and beliefs. Their role reflects a high gender status for women during the matriarchal period when women possessed significant power and influence in society, even if that influence had a demonic or destructive aspect.

The evolutionary development of the female image in Kazakh literature can be traced through the figures of heroines such as Akzhunis, Nazim, Karliga, Gulbarshin, Kurtka, Zhibek, Bayan, Aiman, and Sholpan (Abdimaulen, 2021), who appear in heroic and lyrical-epic poems. These women symbolise not only beauty but also embody wisdom, fidelity, intellect, and spiritual values that resonate with the image of Mother Umai. They represent the ideal traits of Kazakh women, possessing moral virtues such as stability, loyalty, compassion, kindness, and prudence. These works particularly emphasise their natural beauty and portrait characteristics, reflecting cultural notions of female attractiveness. However, beauty is not their only virtue. Women in these poems also serve as advisors to their beloved and heroes, assisting them in difficult life situations, demonstrating resilience and courage. For instance, when their partners are in danger, these heroines offer wise advice, train their horses to combat enemies, or even join the battle alongside men, defending their honour and the fate of their loved ones. Additionally, some heroines exhibit willpower and independence, acting against the wishes of their parents and societal norms, taking risks alongside their partners for the sake of love. Other heroines achieve their goals through cleverness, intellect, and feminine cunning, emphasising their multifaceted nature and self-sufficiency.

For example, P.T. Auyesbayeva et al. (2020) noticed that in the heroic poem *Kobylandy Batyr*, the cleverness of the heroine Kurtka is manifested in an episode where she is able to defuse a tense situation and influence the course of events through her wit and ingenuity. An important moment, where her sharp mind helps to calm an enraged hero, is reflected in the following lines (*Kobylandy Batyr Epic Poem*, 2024):

Kurkaghan, why are you sorrowful,  
Your tiger still stands strong and true.  
If I return safe from this journey,  
Healthy and unharmed to you,  
Though you are a woman, Kurkaghan,  
I will make you queen for our people too.

In the provided text, although the image of the woman is presented as an embodiment of wisdom and intellect, elements of a masculinist perspective from the hero Kobylandy can be observed. Despite the high appreciation of female virtues, he still regarded women as less worthy than men. This is clearly evident in his statement: “Though you are a woman, Kurkaghan, I will make you queen for our people” (*Kobylandy Batyr Epic Poem*, 2024). This phrase indicates that, according to established patriarchal norms, governance was seen as a prerogative of men, and women were not viewed as equal contenders for political or social power. Thus, these

lines provide confirmation of the traditional understanding of gender hierarchy, where the male role in society and power dominates over the female.

In Uzbekistan, literary representations of women were deeply influenced by the Islamic tradition and the feudal social order (Daurenbekova et al., 2024). The works of classical poets, such as A. Navoi (2018), are essential to understanding the cultural depiction of women during this period. A. Navoi's poetry, while idealising women as symbols of beauty, devotion, and chastity, reflects the constraints placed upon women by the prevailing social system. Women were often portrayed as objects of male admiration and inspiration, but rarely as autonomous agents with independent desires or social influence (Kieliszek, 2022).

For example, in the work "Farhad and Shirin" (Navoi, 2018), a well-known allegorical romance, the female protagonist Shirin is a figure of immense beauty and virtue, whose purity motivates the male hero, Farhad, to achieve great feats. While Shirin is central to the narrative, her role is largely passive and symbolic, representing an idealised version of womanhood shaped by male perception. This emphasis on women as passive figures of inspiration, rather than active participants in society, highlights the gender limitations within the pre-modern Uzbek literary canon. The folk poetry and epics of Uzbekistan, though less formally structured than classical works, also reinforce the subservient roles of women. Traditional Uzbek folklore often revolves around themes of loyalty, chastity, and sacrifice, with women being praised for their ability to endure hardships and maintain the integrity of the family unit (Guliyeva and Kopanitsa, 2024). In these narratives, women's honour and virtue are closely tied to the honour of their male relatives, further entrenching their dependence on men for social status and protection.

One of the most significant works of pre-Abai Kyrgyz literature is the *Manas* (2004), which recounts the heroic deeds of the warrior Manas and his companions. While this epic centres around themes of heroism, loyalty, and warfare, it also offers insight into the roles assigned to women in Kyrgyz society prior to modernisation. In the epic *Manas*, women are typically portrayed as wives and mothers who support the male protagonists in their endeavours. Though there are some examples of strong female characters, such as Kanikey, the wife of Manas, their influence is primarily confined to the domestic and familial spheres. Despite their marginalisation in terms of direct action in the epic, Kyrgyz women in these narratives are portrayed as possessing moral and spiritual strength. However, this strength is often framed within the confines of their roles as wives and mothers, rather than as independent individuals. This reinforces the notion that women's value was measured in terms of their contributions to the well-being of men and the preservation of family honour.

Tajik literature, particularly its classical Persian poetry, has long been influenced by the mystical and Sufi traditions, which often portray women in symbolic or allegorical terms. Pre-Abai Tajik poetry presents women as embodiments of divine beauty, love, and inspiration. However, these representations are largely metaphorical, and real women's experiences and social positions are not the central focus of such works. In the poetry of Rudaki (Tabatabai, 2023), women are idealised as embodiments of love and beauty, often serving as metaphors for spiritual truth or divine love. This idealisation, while elevating women to a higher spiritual plane, simultaneously abstracts their real-life experiences and reduces their roles to symbolic representations.

In the works of poets-singers from the 15th to the 19th centuries, there is a decline in the gender status of women, and female inequality becomes one of the key social issues. This can be attributed to the fact that the representatives of literature from this period were deeply concerned about the colonial policies of the Russian Empire, which gradually seized Kazakh lands. The imperial government not only pursued a policy of territorial expansion but also implemented cultural and linguistic assimilation, creating significant pressure on the traditional values of Kazakh society, including the status of women. Prominent poets of this time, such as Asan Kaigy, Kaztugan, Margaska, Dosmambet, Shalkyiz, Dulat, Shortanbay, Murat, Maylikozha, Birzhan, and Akan actively expressed their dissatisfaction with the loss of Kazakh lands (Matayeva et al., 2022). They also expressed their anger towards the colonial policies of the Russian Empire. These policies sought to alter the lifestyle and mentality of the Kazakh people. The poets particularly focused on the negative consequences of imperial policy on the younger generation, especially regarding alienation from their native language and religious values.

Under the pressure of these social and political conditions, the gender status of women also underwent transformations. Women experienced spiritual stress and lost the traditional roles assigned to them in earlier eras. Despite significant changes in the social and political landscape, the poets of this period could not avoid the issue of women's status, which remained a relevant theme in literary discourse (Kulakevych, 2022). However, it is noteworthy that the primary focus in the works of this time was on women's external beauty and their roles in family life, depicting women as simple housewives, with their main function being the maintenance of domestic comfort. Literary works from this period are characterised by a didactic approach to the female image, where women were attributed certain moral qualities and traits. The depiction of opposing characteristics of women – “good-bad” – became one of the primary means of forming the female image in literature. This approach emphasised the

idealisation of women as carriers of traditional moral values, while simultaneously downplaying their social or political roles in society. For example (Babatayuly, 1993):

If your wife is wicked, with no sense,  
And heedless of advice you dispense,  
Your home will be a battlefield,  
And discord will be the fire's yield.

The pre-Abai poetry, which encompasses the period before the 19th century, reflects the social, cultural, and gender stereotypes that prevailed in traditional Kazakh society. In many works by Kazakh authors, this theme is depicted through motifs of women's self-sacrifice for the well-being of the family or husband. For instance, in folk epics such as *Kobylandy Batyr Epic Poem* (2024) and *Alpamys Batyr Kazakh Heroic Epic* (Seydimbekov, 2019), female characters like Gulbarshin emerge as loyal wives and lovers, ready to wait for their husbands for years and remain faithful regardless of the circumstances. These images create the ideal of a woman who remains steadfast in her love and devotion even in the face of difficulties and separation.

In pre-Abai poetry, the image of women was often idealised, where their beauty, fidelity, and ability to support men were highlighted, while their individuality and potential for self-realisation were overlooked. For example, in epics and lyrical works, heroines such as Bayan Sulu (Kumisbaev, 2021) are celebrated for their unmatched beauty. Their appearance becomes the primary factor determining their social value and attractiveness to men. Women were portrayed as passive guardians of the home, with their primary value lying in their ability to ensure harmony within the household.

Additionally, some poetic works from that time also trace instances of gender inequality and even gender-based violence. Despite women formally occupying important positions in Kazakh culture, their actual situation often differed from idealised perceptions. In the poems of "akyns" and "zhyraus" that glorify traditional values, the marriage arrangement process is often mentioned, where parents or relatives play a key role, and women appear merely as passive subjects of this process. For example, in the epic *Kozy Korpesh – Bayan Sulu* by A. Margulan (2018), it is described how the fate of the main heroine is determined by agreements between clans rather than her own desires. The image of women as objects in marriage relations reinforces the stereotype of their economic dependence on male figures in the family. The discrepancy between cultural ideals and social reality, which includes gender violence and restrictions on rights, raises concerns in modern society, which strives for more just and equitable gender relations.

### 3.2. Transformation of perceptions regarding the role and status of women in Abai Kunanbayev's poetry

Gender issues occupy an important place in the works of A. Kunanbayev (1970), a prominent Kazakh poet, thinker, and reformer. His poetry reflects profound social transformations occurring in Kazakh society at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. In his creative output, A. Kunanbayev addresses the problems of gender inequality, critically analysing traditional roles of men and women, and offers a new vision of the social status of women, their place in society, and within the family.

One of the main themes that A. Kunanbayev explores is the critique of patriarchal stereotypes that oppressed women and limited their opportunities in traditional society. C. Aitmatov (2008) suggests that the grim and pitiable fate of Eastern women, as depicted in folk verses and domestic songs, takes on a new significance in A. Kunanbayev's work. He argues that A. Kunanbayev rejects the shameful institution of polygamy and advocates for women's equality in society through his poetry.

For instance, in the poem *A Beautiful Girl Lived with the Khan* by A. Kunanbayev (1970) condemns traditions that belittle women, restricting their choices in life paths and opportunities for self-realisation. Below is an example from A. Kunanbayev's poem addressing gender injustice concerning Kazakh girls:

A beautiful girl lived with the khan.  
He gave everything to the one dear to his heart.  
She wore gold, in flowered silks,  
A crowd of maids was with her everywhere.  
Both the bull and the ox have their lot,  
The khan is agile, he feasts, he has grown bold.  
Let the body be gnawed by worms, than the old man,  
She rushed from the cliff to another limit.

Through these lines, A. Kunanbayev demonstrates that men often fail to understand the true needs and desires of women, perceiving them solely through the lens of their own notions and social stereotypes. In A. Kunanbayev's work (1970), women acquire a new, significantly deeper, and more multifaceted meaning compared to previous stages of literature. While the image of women in the works of pre-Abai poets was predominantly confined to their traditional roles as homemakers and mothers, A. Kunanbayev first brings to the forefront their spiritual world, inner experiences, and emotional depth. This represents a crucial innovation in national literature, as attention to women's spiritual needs had been largely overlooked until that point.

One of A. Kunanbayev's key features is his emphasis on the emancipation of women and the raising of the issue of female inequality, which was revolutionary for its time. In his poetic conception, a woman is no longer a passive subject limited by the confines of family life; she emerges as a person with her own aspirations, internal conflicts, and potential for self-development. He underscores the importance of self-awareness, the ability to resist injustice and evil, while maintaining inner freedom. A. Kunanbayev (1970) creates an image of a woman who possesses not only external attractiveness but also profound emotional and intellectual richness:

A person's virtue lies in wisdom and knowledge,  
In having good parents, good friends, and a noble teacher's pledge.

These words demonstrate the poet's deep conviction that both men and women can and should have access to education and spiritual development, making them equal participants in the social process.

An important aspect of A. Kunanbayev's work (1970) is that he depicts women as complex, multidimensional personalities. He illustrates their internal contradictions: dissatisfaction with life, self-critical attitudes toward both themselves and their partners, as well as the capacity for humanistic expressions such as friendship, love, and moral resilience. In his poetry, the female nature exhibits significant emotional freedom and expresses individuality that does not conform to established social norms. This contrasts markedly with the previous literary tradition, where women were compelled to fulfil solely familial roles, lacking opportunities for personal development.

A. Kunanbayev also elevates the idea of the imperfection of female nature, acknowledging that women, like men, can make mistakes and face difficulties, yet still retain the ability to resist injustice and even combat human cruelty. His portrayals of women are distinguished by a particular moral strength that helps them remain true to their principles and maintain their inner dignity. In his works, A. Kunanbayev sharply criticises the tragic fate of young girls who are forced to become victims of ancient traditions that violate fundamental human values. The poet condemns customs under which girls are "sold" for livestock, as well as marriage unions between older men and significantly younger girls. He compares such elders, who consider wealth as the basis for marrying young girls, to "dry bones" and calls for the liberation of girls from such fates, offering them the opportunity to unite with their loved ones. Here, the poet does not criticise all older men, but rather those who, being spiritually mutilated, see wealth as a right to an unequal marriage.

A. Kunanbayev also raises the issue of women's suicide as a form of protest against gender violence and social injustice. In the poet's view, this is not a manifestation of weakness, but rather a courageous act aimed at combating oppression. The poet also moves away from the traditional image of the Kazakh girl as an embodiment of modesty and fidelity, depicting her as a person capable of expressing her feelings and emotions. For instance, in the poem *The Boy's Word* (Kunanbayev, 1970):

My eyes will not stray to another,  
No stranger could suit me better.  
On narrow beds with bare embrace,  
Could I find joy in your tender grace?  
Your hair on my shoulder lies,  
We wrestle and entangle, no disguise,  
Would it not bring us delight,  
With closed eyes and hearts so light?

These lines emphasise the harmony of emotions and physical love, transcending mere bodily pleasure. A. Kunanbayev also employs the description of a woman's outer beauty as a metaphor for higher aesthetic and spiritual values, as seen in his comparisons: "Her face is a rose, her eyes are gems," and "Her forehead is broad, like polished white silver". In this context, the woman emerges not as an object of physical desire, but as a muse who inspires the man towards creativity and inner development.

In A. Kunanbayev's literary heritage, images of women are also represented in accordance with national traditions and mentality, embodying the heroic traits of the Kazakh woman. He portrays women in roles such as a devoted mother willing to sacrifice herself for her child, a loyal companion who protects her beloved from enemies, as well as a beautiful girl and a loving wife. These images reflect the traditional values of Kazakh society, emphasising upbringing in the spirit of national ethics and morality. However, in his feminist concept, A. Kunanbayev places particular importance not only on traditional qualities of women, such as kindness, humility, fidelity, and love, but also underscores the significance of maintaining inner freedom and spiritual independence. For him, it is fundamentally important that a woman not only fulfils traditional gender roles but also develops her individuality, preserving her dignity and inner freedom. According to A. Kunanbayev, these qualities form the true character of a woman and make her an equal social individual.

In the poet's artistic texts, women are not only objects of love and maternal self-sacrifice, but also subjects who confront life's challenges, pain, and difficulties.

A. Kunanbayev's heroines accept life and love with all their complexities, demonstrating inner strength, dignity, and moral resilience. He creates multi-dimensional images of women who not only live by traditional social norms but also strive to fulfil their own desires and emotional aspirations. The representation of female images in A. Kunanbayev's poetry reflects the complex process of forming gender identity. Women, who were traditionally subordinated to men, begin to realise themselves as social individuals in his works, seeking to break free from a passive role and live according to their inner desires and ideals. The inner struggle of the heroines for equality and self-realisation is revealed through the philosophical subtext that shapes the gender concept in his creativity.

### *3.3. The influence of A. Kunanbayev's work on gender perspectives in society of Central Asian countries*

The creative work of A. Kunanbayev (1970) marked a turning point in the culture and society of Central Asian countries, influencing many aspects of life, including gender relations. A. Kunanbayev emerged not only as a poet and philosopher but also as a social reformer who critiqued traditional stereotypes and outdated social norms that restricted women's rights and opportunities. His works facilitated changes in the perception of women's roles, their social status, and their rights in society.

One of the key aspects of A. Kunanbayev's creativity is his criticism of the patriarchal norms that defined women's subordinate position in traditional Kazakh society. In the poems and Words of Instruction by A. Kunanbayev (1970) it is analysed the limitations faced by women and proposes an alternative approach to their status in society. The poet critiques customs such as "kalým" (bride price) and forced marriages, which diminished women's rights and reduced their social role to that of an object of economic exchange.

A. Kunanbayev reflects on the injustice of this situation, asserting that women have the right to their own choices and a dignified life. The main idea of his poems for women is: "One must know a woman's spirit, her mind, her will, but in life's race, we forgot this still. For she is alive, no mere commodity – she deserves respect and love, fully and properly". These lines emphasise that treating a woman as a commodity is a humiliation of her human dignity. A. Kunanbayev sought to change this perception by calling for fair treatment of women, equal to men.

One of the most important aspects of changes in the gender status of women under the influence of A. Kunanbayev's work (1970) was his desire for the emancipation of women through education. A. Kunanbayev was convinced that

education was a key factor in improving the status of women and their role in society. He believed that women, like men, should have access to knowledge that will help them achieve personal development and become active participants in social life. This approach of A. Kunanbayev was revolutionary for its time, as Kazakh society at that time did not provide women with ample opportunities for education. A. Kunanbayev called for change, believing that an educated woman is capable of fulfilling not only the traditional roles of wife and mother, but also being an active participant in social and cultural processes. The main changes in the gender status of women before and after A. Kunanbayev are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative characteristics of the gender status of women before and in the context of A. Kunanbayev.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Before A. Kunanbayev</b>	<b>In A. Kunanbayev's work</b>
Social role	A woman traditionally performed the role of mother and wife. Her status was determined primarily by her ability to bear children and be faithful to her husband.	A. Kunanbayev raises the topic of a woman's independence, her right to spiritual freedom and individuality. A woman appears as a person capable of independent choice and self-determination.
Family role	A woman was often seen as a man's property, whose main function was to provide offspring and support family life.	The family becomes a place of harmony and cooperation, where a woman is not considered as a subordinate, but as an equal partner, a spiritual mentor and a source of inspiration.
Gender violence	Physical and sexual violence, paedophilia and forced marriages were part of the patriarchal norm accepted in society.	A. Kunanbayev condemns any form of violence against women, emphasising her right to freedom of choice and inviolability.
Emancipation	A woman did not have the right to make an independent choice in marriage or life in general. Her life was controlled by her husband or family.	The first calls for women's emancipation, the right to personal freedom, education and personal choice in matters of marriage and love appear in A. Kunanbayev's works.

Cultural stereotypes	Patriarchal stereotypes defined a woman as a weak, subordinate being, focused on the household, raising children and pleasing her husband.	A. Kunanbayev reinterprets these stereotypes, offering the image of a strong, spiritually rich woman who can be a mentor, a source of inspiration and an active participant in public life.
The right to education	Access to education for women was limited, their role was confined to the household, and they were not given opportunities for intellectual development.	A. Kunanbayev emphasises the importance of education for women, calling for their intellectual development and cultural enlightenment, which makes a woman an active participant in social change.
Emotional expression	Women were forbidden to openly express their emotions, especially regarding love or sexual desires.	A. Kunanbayev gives a woman a voice in matters of emotions and feelings. He celebrates their ability to love and feel, breaking the taboo of discussing women's feelings and desires.
Sexuality	A woman's sexuality was a taboo subject, and any manifestation of her desires was considered unacceptable and reprehensible in society.	In A. Kunanbayev's poetry, a woman's sexuality is recognised as a natural part of her personality, and although she remains within the bounds of modesty, her desires are not denied or condemned.
Women's leadership	The leadership qualities of a woman in society were not encouraged, her role remained limited to the domestic space.	A. Kunanbayev emphasises the potential of a woman as a leader in spiritual, cultural and moral life, seeing her as an equal participant in social transformations.
Attitude to the beauty of a woman	A woman's physical beauty was one of the main criteria for her value in the eyes of society, which led to her objectification.	A. Kunanbayev praises not only the external, but also the internal beauty of a woman, emphasising her spirituality, intellectual and moral qualities as the main criteria of value.
The right to personal opinion	In traditional Kazakh society, a woman rarely had the right to express her opinion, especially in public matters or family affairs.	In A. Kunanbayev's work, a woman appears as a thinking individual who has the right to express her views and participate in solving important social and family issues.

The creativity of A. Kunanbayev had a significant impact on changing views within Kazakh society regarding women. He raised issues that had previously been overlooked in the literature and philosophy of his time, leading to gradual shifts in societal consciousness. A. Kunanbayev became a voice for progress, advocating for the modernisation of society, particularly concerning gender relations.

Although real changes in the status of women did not occur immediately after A. Kunanbayev's literary activities, his poetry laid the groundwork for subsequent social transformations in the 20th century. Ideas of equality, education, and personal freedom became significant during the era of national awakening and contributed to the formation of new generations of Kazakh women who aspired to emancipation and active participation in their country's life.

Democratic poets of the 20th century, such as Sultanmakhmut Toraygirov, Mirzhakip Dulatov, Zhusipbek Aymauytov, Spandiyar Kobeyev, Magzhan Zhumabaiev, Beymbet Maylin, Mukhtar Auezov, and Sabit Mukhanov, actively worked on the development of Kazakh literature, drawing upon the humanistic ideals of A. Kunanbayev (Yermekbayeva, 2023). They continued the tradition of their predecessor, focusing on issues of social justice, human values, and the role of women in Kazakh society. The problem of gender status and the place of women in society became a central theme in their literary legacy. Writers of this period, by incorporating A. Kunanbayev's ideas, developed the image of women not only as mothers and homemakers but as individuals with their own rights, thoughts, and social roles, significantly surpassing traditional stereotypes.

A considerable influence on the development of these ideas was exerted by the political situation of the time. Following the establishment of Soviet power, Kazakh women faced serious challenges in political camps, where, alongside educated men, they endured torture and persecution. However, even under such conditions, Kazakh intellectuals continued their struggle for gender equality. The activities of intellectuals led to an increasing number of women engaging in social and economic life, receiving education, and working in various fields (Kusayinovna et al., 2022). This tradition did not cease over time. Magazines that began their activities during the Soviet era continued to be published in independent Kazakhstan in the 21st century under the title *Women of Kazakhstan*. These publications still address issues of gender equality, women's rights, and their participation in socio-political life.

The activities of the Alash Orda government played a crucial role in shaping contemporary perceptions of women's rights. At the All-Kazakh Congress in 1917, a series of resolutions aimed at protecting women's rights were adopted. In particular, in the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 603 "On Approval of the Model Curriculum of General Education Disciplines for

Institutions of Higher and (or) Postgraduate Education” (2018) political equality between men and women was proclaimed, forced marriages were abolished, women were ensured the right to choose their husbands by mutual consent, and a minimum marriage age was established – 16 years for girls and 18 years for boys. These decisions became important steps toward ensuring gender equality in Kazakhstan and laid the foundation for further changes in social and familial relations.

The legacy of A. Kunanbayev's literary and philosophical reforms catalysed a broader re-evaluation of gender roles not only in Kazakhstan but across Central Asia. His critique of patriarchal norms and advocacy for women's rights contributed to a rethinking of the social, cultural, and literary representation of women.

In the early 20th century, the Central Asian region was exposed to a wave of social and political reforms as part of broader modernisation efforts, including the Jadid movement in Uzbekistan and similar reformist currents in other parts of Central Asia. This period witnessed an intensification of debates around women's roles in society, marriage practices, and education. The Jadid reformers in Uzbekistan, who sought to modernise Islamic education and cultural practices, were among the first to articulate a new vision for the role of women in society. In literature, women began to appear not only as passive figures of tradition but as active agents of social change. *Days Gone* by A. Qadiri (2019) serves as a critical example of how literary depictions of women began to shift in response to reformist ideas. In the work, female characters such as Kumush are depicted as intelligent and morally upright individuals, capable of navigating the complexities of love, family, and social expectations. Although they remain bound by certain patriarchal norms, these women are increasingly portrayed as individuals with personal desires, internal struggles, and a capacity for agency within a restrictive society.

In Kyrgyz literature, the early 20th century also saw a reimagining of women's roles, influenced by the rising awareness of social inequalities and the influence of reformist ideas from neighbouring regions. While the *Manas* (2004) continued to serve as a cultural touchstone, new poetic and literary forms began to challenge the rigid gender norms depicted in earlier works. Poets such as Tugelbai Sydykbekov incorporated themes of women's empowerment into their works, advocating for women's education and their role as equal partners in nation-building (Damilova, 2023).

The Soviet era brought about dramatic changes in the social and political fabric of Central Asia, including the status of women (Karabalaeva et al., 2025; Osmonova et al., 2025). In Uzbekistan, literature of the Soviet period, especially during the 1930s-1950s, increasingly portrayed women as equal to men in both the private and public spheres. Women were no longer confined to the roles of mothers and wives but were depicted as workers, intellectuals, and leaders within the socialist state. The

works of M. Aybek, a prominent Uzbek writer, exemplify this shift. In the novel *Nevai* by M. Aybek (2014), the author highlights the intellectual contributions of both men and women in the service of society and portrays women as having agency over their lives, a direct result of Soviet gender policies.

The works of Tajik authors such as Mirzo Tursunzoda (1957) depicted women as vital contributors to the collective goals of the Soviet state. M. Tursunzoda's poem *Hasan-Arbakesh* celebrates the life of a young woman who, despite the traditional constraints imposed upon her, emerges as a leading figure in her community through her involvement in collective labour and socialist activism. This shift in the portrayal of women in Tajik literature was mirrored in societal changes, as women gained access to education, employment, and legal protections under Soviet law. Nevertheless, the idealised image of the Soviet woman was often criticised for being too prescriptive. It required women to balance the dual responsibilities of work and family, without fully addressing the underlying cultural norms that continued to enforce gendered divisions of labour.

In Kyrgyzstan, the Soviet government's efforts to transform gender relations were similarly reflected in the literary works of the period (Sheikh, 2019; Le, 2024). Kyrgyz women, who had previously been depicted primarily as wives and mothers in epic literature, began to emerge as central figures in the nation-building efforts of the Soviet Union. C. Aitmatov's early works, such as *Jamila* (2008), famously depicted the emotional and social awakening of a young woman who defies societal expectations to follow her own desires. This novella is often cited as one of the earliest and most influential works of Kyrgyz literature that explores the inner life and personal agency of a female character.

Contemporary Kazakh literature, beginning with the period of independence in 1991, reflects deep transformations in the role of women both in literature and in real society. In the first decade of independence (1991-2001), women faced new challenges and opportunities amid societal and economic crises and transformational processes. These social changes found their reflection in literature, which actively explored shifts in female identity and social roles. In particular, the works of authors such as K. Tleukhan (2023) and others became significant literary sources that depicted the internal experiences and worldviews of women in the context of social and economic upheavals of that time. These works reflect the spiritual and emotional aspects of women's identity formation during the crisis.

Tajik literature post-independence has seen a tension between the resurgence of traditional roles and the ongoing influence of Soviet-era gender reforms. The works of contemporary authors often depict women navigating the dual pressures of tradition and modernity, highlighting the struggles faced by women in balancing family

responsibilities with personal aspirations. In Kyrgyzstan, the legacy of C. Aitmatov (2008) continues to influence contemporary writers, who grapple with the changing status of women in society. While traditional values have regained prominence in some circles, literature has remained a space for exploring the complexities of gender roles in a rapidly changing world. Women in post-Soviet Kyrgyz literature are often depicted as struggling against the constraints of tradition while seeking self-realisation in a modern context.

Over time, Kazakh literature continues to pay significant attention to the issue of gender equality. While in the last century, the question of women's equality became a subject of public debates and literary discussions, contemporary Kazakh literature transcends this discourse, offering new perspectives and a deeper understanding of women's roles in shaping modern society.

In addition to strengthening the role of women in the family and politics, there are state and public organisations and constitutional laws that support women's interests and protect their rights. At the same time, address of the head of state, the ideas of protecting the mother and child, supporting the economic and political position of women (Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021). Encourage women to respect, take into account their opinion, and not put gender pressure on them. Also, in 2022, a large-scale study by A. Kusayinovna et al. (2022) was conducted among scientists and media specialists in Kazakhstan, organised by representatives of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. This study explored a wide array of gender-related issues, examining their representation and impact across various domains, including literature and the arts, history, the economy, politics, and mass media. The research aimed to assess the current state of gender equality in these sectors, identifying both progress and ongoing challenges. It also provided valuable insights into how gender issues are reflected and addressed within Kazakhstan's cultural and intellectual spheres, further contributing to the broader discourse on gender rights and equality in the country.

#### **4. Discussion**

The gender concept in A. Kunanbayev's poetry (1970) is characterised by a deep understanding of the social restrictions imposed on women in traditional Kazakh society, and a desire to reform these restrictions. A. Kunanbayev criticises patriarchal structures and stereotypes, advocates the education and moral freedom of women, raising their status as active participants in social processes. His poetry not only reflects the realities of his time, but also lays the foundation for future changes in the attitude towards women in Kazakh society. This brings Kazakh literature to a new

stage in the understanding of gender roles and demonstrates the development of the idea of female emancipation. Thus, the gender role of women in A. Kunanbayev's poetry gradually goes beyond the stereotypical notions of their dependence on men.

The poet creates a new artistic space where women are capable of active self-realisation, preserving traditional virtues, but at the same time demonstrating individual strength and striving for inner freedom. This is confirmed by the works of many scientists. For example, the work of S. Beylur and O. Hanayı (2021) analysed the image of a mother woman in the work of A. Kunanbayev and its influence on subsequent Kazakh writers and cultural traditions. The main focus was on the harmonious combination of beauty, love and motherhood, which A. Kunanbayev brought to a new level in Kazakh literature. The poet emphasised the importance of a woman as a mother and wife, her central role in society and the moral education of the nation, which influenced further literary works. If in the work the emphasis was on the image of a mother woman and her influence on family and social values, then the research focused on how A. Kunanbayev destroys traditional patriarchal norms in her work. This raises the image of a woman to the level of spiritual independence. An important aspect in the research was that a woman in A. Kunanbayev's works appears for the first time not only in the traditional roles of mother and wife. She also appears as a person capable of self-determination and fighting for her rights.

Research by G. Zhussipbek et al. (2024), on gender equality and women's rights in the context of Islam, emphasised the need to consider social factors alongside theological ones in explaining the persistence of conservative patriarchal interpretations of religion. Comparing this study with the previous one, several key commonalities and differences can be noted. In the conducted study, devoted to gender issues in the Kazakh poetry of A. Kunanbayev (1970), the main focus is on the transformation of gender roles through poetic heritage. Poetry becomes a means of rethinking the traditional role of women in a patriarchal society. Similarly, research on women's rights in Islam has emphasised the transformation of patriarchal norms and the development of gender equality through enlightenment and reformist ideas. Both studies emphasised that literature and culture can play an important role in changing gender perceptions and social structures. Both studies share the ultimate goal of achieving gender equality. The conducted study showed how A. Kunanbayev's poetry helps to rethink the gender role of women in society due to her spiritual and social independence. In the study of Islam and gender, reformation processes in religion are proposed as a way to achieve the same goal – gender equality, through a profound re-evaluation of religious and social norms.

The article by G. Nurysheva and B. Kaldaeva (2021) was devoted to the image of a woman in the traditional worldview of the Kazakh people. It had several

important common features and differences compared to studies on gender issues in A. Kunanbayev's work and the evolution of ideas about women in Kazakh literature. As in the study, the authors of this article emphasised the importance of analysing the traditional worldview and its influence on gender perceptions. The conducted research also emphasised that A. Kunanbayev's poetry became a tool for transforming patriarchal ideas about women in Kazakh society, opening new perspectives for understanding her role. Like our research, this article emphasised the need to consider traditional notions of women in the context of modernity. In the comparative study, emphasis was placed on folklore, mythology and epic works that form the traditional image of the Kazakh woman. The conducted research is focused mainly on the literary and cultural aspects, considering poetry as one of the main tools for transforming ideas about women.

N. Durrani et al. (2022) analysed textbooks, which made it clear how gender stereotypes are formed and transmitted in the educational system. Research indicates that textbooks can reinforce gender hierarchies and stereotypes. The conducted research concerned issues of gender inequality in the context of social and cultural values. The analysis of the textbooks indicated the presence of paradoxes related to gender equality in education, which is important for understanding the broader structures that shape the status of women in Kazakhstan. Thus, the conducted research became an important addition to the already existing discourses on gender in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, revealing new aspects of how cultural, literary and educational practices interact and influence the status of women in modern society.

A study by K. Sadirova and P. Sydyk (2024) devoted to language reflection in the work of A. Kunanbayev analysed the process of verbalisation and interpretation of texts through metatexts, determining how the poet used language tools for introspection. It also involved the reader in the process of reflection. The conducted research also examined the works of A. Kunanbayev, but the emphasis is shifted to the depiction of the gender status of women and the transformation of gender roles in Kazakh society through poetic creativity. In this case, the analysis is formed around the question of rethinking traditional gender stereotypes, where A. Kunanbayev uses his poetry to form new ideas about women as spiritually and intellectually rich individuals capable of self-expression. At the same time, his approach to women in creativity may also include reflective elements, but they are aimed not only at personal introspection, but also at the socio-cultural rethinking of the role of women. Although both studies concerned A. Kunanbayev's work, one focused on issues of gender role rather than linguistic reflection as a separate phenomenon.

A. Kunanbayev's poetry offers a complex perspective on women that both supports and contradicts the feminist principles that were popularised in the West in

the 19th century. Kunanbayev criticises the social restrictions placed on women, especially in Kazakh society, much like the suffragists of the era did (Heidorn, 2020), who fought for women's rights and the reform of patriarchal structures. His writings present women as independent beings with the capacity for both intellectual and emotional self-realisation, challenging the passive roles that have historically been ascribed to them as merely wives and mothers. His opposition to forced marriages and polygamy, which restricted women's autonomy, is a clear example of this. Like early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft, who advocated for women's education and moral development (Hunt, 2023), Kunanbayev places a strong emphasis on women's education, intellectual development, and spiritual independence. Thus, his work is in line with global feminist ideals of equality and autonomy and not only challenges regional gender norms but also advances a larger discussion about women's emancipation.

But Kunanbayev's representation of women also runs counter to the feminist ideologies of the West at the time, especially in his philosophical and cultural perspective. Western suffragists prioritised political and legal changes to protect women's rights (Gabrielli, 2025), but Kunanbayev's writings call for a more profound, spiritual shift. His depiction of women is characterised by a focus on their inner strength and intellectual capacity, presenting them as complex individuals who contribute to the moral and cultural advancement of society rather than just as figures deserving of rights. Although Kunanbayev's emphasis on women's spiritual freedom and their function as moral mentors adds a layer to the feminist discourse that is anchored in Kazakh cultural and spiritual traditions, this is still in line with some of the more holistic aspects of early feminist thought (Hunt, 2023). Therefore, although his idea of women's empowerment reflects many of the objectives of feminists in the West, it also presents a unique, culturally-specific story of women's liberation that emphasises the significance of intellectual and spiritual self-actualisation.

J. Beyer and P. Finke (2019) explored the processes of traditionalisation in Central Asia, particularly how cultural, social, and political factors influence traditional practices and identities. They examined how these processes shape gender roles, including the portrayal of women in the poetry of Central Asian peoples, and reflects on their role in society and culture. The book emphasised the importance of contextual factors that affect the perception of gender and traditions in the region. This work aligns with research on A. Kunanbayev's poetry, where he critically re-evaluates traditional gender roles and advocates for the emancipation and empowerment of women in Kazakh society. Both studies address the interaction between traditional cultural norms and gender representations, highlighting the transformative potential of literary and intellectual contributions in reshaping societal views on women's roles.

Additionally, the focus on contextual factors complements analysis of how A. Kunanbayev's environment and time period influenced his perspectives on gender equality, making this book a relevant source for understanding the broader dynamics of gender and tradition in Central Asian contexts.

A.G. Chingiz (2024) spoke about women in folklore, who emphasised that women's folklore tradition, although it reflects patriarchal values, also serves as a means of expressing female solidarity and opposition to gender norms. Both studies focused on the diverse roles of women in folklore, including their status as creators, bearers, and objects of folk traditions. The study highlighted the importance of women's oral traditions as a source of understanding of their experiences and cultural contributions. Both studies recognise the need for further study, suggesting that the study of gender aspects in folklore and literature continues to be relevant and important.

In conclusion, the conducted research demonstrated A. Kunanbayev's significant contribution to the transformation of traditional gender roles in Kazakh society. His poetic work not only reflects the problems of his time, but also acts as a means of reforming social stereotypes about women, expanding the possibilities of their social and spiritual self-expression. In A. Kunanbayev's writings, women go beyond limited patriarchal ideas and become active participants in social processes, capable of intellectual and moral independence. A comparison with other research on gender equality and women's status indicates that literature and culture play a key role in reinterpreting gender stereotypes. The analyses of A. Kunanbayev's works in the context of gender, carried out in this study, show the connection between cultural and literary practices that influence the formation of modern ideas about the status of women in society. Comparison with other works on folklore, linguistic metaphors and educational practices confirms the relevance of the issue of gender equality. Thus, the work of A. Kunanbayev appears as an important cultural phenomenon that contributed to the evolution of ideas about women in Kazakh society, laying the foundations for further reform movements in literature and social life.

## 5. Conclusions

The research established that the gender status of women in Kazakh society before A. Kunanbayev was characterised by a rigid patriarchal hierarchy. Women's roles were confined to traditional functions as mothers, wives, and keepers of the hearth, lacking independent social status. Their social and legal subjectivity was entirely dependent on male figures such as fathers, brothers, or husbands. Literary works of this period reinforced these stereotypes and traditional gender norms,

contributing to a repressive attitude toward women. A. Kunanbayev's poetry marked a significant turning point in transforming these established gender norms. His work redefined the social status of women, portraying them as spiritually rich, independent individuals capable of emotional, intellectual, and social development, as well as making their own choices. The analysis of A. Kunanbayev's poetic works reveals a marked departure from previous literary traditions in his depiction of female images. He created new representations of women not merely as symbols of beauty or loyalty but as active participants in social processes, capable of defending their rights and freedoms. This innovative portrayal was unprecedented in Kazakh literature at the time.

Additionally, A. Kunanbayev addressed issues of gender-based violence and the oppression of women in his works, paving the way for a deeper understanding of gender emancipation and equality. The study's findings indicate that A. Kunanbayev's poetry played a crucial role in reshaping the perception of women in Kazakh society. He not only dismantled traditional stereotypes but also proposed progressive models for female behaviour and roles. His work prompts a re-evaluation of women's emotional and intellectual development, challenging conventional ideas about femininity and social roles. In A. Kunanbayev's poetry, women are no longer confined to family responsibilities; they emerge as spiritually rich, independent individuals striving for self-realisation and personal growth. This shift played an essential role in forming new ideas about women, laying the groundwork for future processes of emancipation and equality in Kazakh society.

However, the research had limitations, focusing exclusively on A. Kunanbayev's poetic heritage and its impact on gender perception in Kazakh society. Future studies should consider other aspects of Kazakh literature, such as prose works, folk epics, and the writings of contemporaneous authors. A comparative analysis of A. Kunanbayev's works with those of his peers or subsequent generations could provide additional context for understanding the evolution of gender relations and their artistic representation. Furthermore, investigating the interaction of literature with other cultural forms – such as folklore, theatre, and song writing – could significantly enrich our understanding of women's identity and cultural status in society.

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