

A Comparative Analysis of Utopian Visions and Gender Dynamics in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "*Herland*" and Omon Mukhtor's "*Ayollar Mamlakati va Saltanati*"

Usmanova F.R. Senior teacher

Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Annotation: This study compares the portrayal of gender dynamics and utopian societies in *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and *Ayollar Mamlakati va Saltanati* (1990) by Omon Mukhtor. Gilman presents a feminist utopia where women hold power, promoting a vision of peace, cooperation, and maternal authority, challenging patriarchal norms of the early 20th century. In contrast, Mukhtor offers a satirical critique of gendered governance, illustrating how reversing patriarchal structures does not automatically lead to justice, as the women in power adopt authoritarian tactics. Through a comparative literary analysis, this paper explores how each work reimagines gender and governance, shaped by their distinct cultural and historical contexts, and emphasizes the need to address the underlying structures of power rather than merely reversing gender roles.

Keywords: *Utopia, Gender roles, Feminism, Satire, Comparative literature, Power dynamics, Matriarchy, Gender essentialism, Social critique*

Utopian fiction serves as a powerful vehicle for authors to challenge societal norms, offering alternative visions of governance and social organization. In this regard, both Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Omon Mukhtor envision societies where female power is central. Despite this common ground, their works diverge significantly in their portrayals of gender, power, and societal change. Gilman's *Herland* presents a utopia designed to inspire reform in early 20th-century patriarchal societies, where maternal authority serves as the foundation for a peaceful and prosperous community. In contrast, Mukhtor's *Ayollar Mamlakati va Saltanati* employs satire to critique the notion of gendered governance, exposing the limitations of simply reversing patriarchal structures without addressing underlying societal inequalities. This study explores how both authors engage with themes of

gender and utopia, considering the cultural and historical forces that shape their narratives.

In Gilman's work, society is envisioned as free from the violence, competition, and poverty typical of patriarchal civilizations. The women in *Herland* reproduce parthenogenetically, creating a society independent not only of men but also of the biological constraints that typically define women's roles. The women of *Herland* live in harmony with nature, each other, and themselves, forming a cooperative and highly educated society. Gilman highlights that motherhood, seen as both a social duty and the highest profession, forms the foundation of this utopia. In this society, traditional gender roles are redefined, with traits like nurturing, compassion, and emotional intelligence being reframed as necessary for a stable and progressive society. For example, the women in *Herland* are depicted as highly rational, logical, and skilled in various fields, such as medicine, agriculture, and education—traditionally male-dominated spheres in Western societies. Gilman shows how these women's abilities are not inherently different from men's; they are simply unencumbered by societal limitations placed on women in patriarchal structures. This utopia, which Gilman imagines as a place where rationality, education, and cooperation thrive, challenges the traditional view of women as being limited to the private, domestic sphere.

Gilman uses the reactions of male characters—Terry, Jeff, and Van—to explore different responses to this matriarchal society. Terry, who holds deeply ingrained patriarchal views, rejects the equality of *Herland*, calling it unnatural and undermining the female authority in the society. His resistance to the women's autonomy demonstrates how deeply ingrained patriarchal values can distort the perception of what constitutes a just and harmonious society. Van, the narrator, begins to appreciate the rational and cooperative nature of the society. His realization that "They were not superwomen; they were just highly civilized human beings" (Gilman, 1915, p. 97) underscores the novel's critique of Western gender dichotomies. The women in *Herland* are not superhuman but are unburdened by patriarchal constraints, allowing them to achieve a higher level of civilization.

Gilman presents a utopian society where gender roles are not based on superiority but on the recognition of the unique capabilities of individuals freed from oppressive gender norms.

In contrast, Mukhtor's *Ayollar Mamlakati va Saltanati* presents a satirical view of matriarchal rule. His novel depicts a kingdom where women in power adopt authoritarian practices similar to those of their male predecessors. A notable example is the character Gulxumor, who becomes increasingly obsessed with control and bureaucracy, mirroring the behavior of male rulers she once criticized. Mukhtor portrays her as becoming an autocrat, completely obsessed with the exercise of power and control over her subjects. In one passage, Gulxumor is described as imposing harsh measures and excessive bureaucracy, much like her male counterparts in patriarchal societies: "Female rule does not automatically mean justice; she is human too, and she also makes mistakes" (Mukhtor, 1990, p. 44). This encapsulates the irony of the novel. The simple reversal of gender in leadership does not inherently result in a more just or enlightened society. Mukhtor critiques the assumption that female rule leads to fairness, emphasizing that true justice cannot be achieved by gender alone but requires addressing deeper social and political flaws. Through Gulxumor's authoritarian leadership, Mukhtor highlights that simply replacing one gender with another does not address the root causes of inequality or create a more just society.

Mukhtor's use of satire in his portrayal of female leadership points to a key flaw in utopian thinking about gender: that reversing gender roles in power does not necessarily lead to the dismantling of oppressive structures. For example, in one particularly striking scene, women in the kingdom follow rigid, top-down rules of conduct that mirror those imposed by patriarchal rulers. This depiction critiques the assumption that gender alone can bring about a more equitable society. By showcasing how Gulxumor replicates the oppressive practices of male rulers, Mukhtor suggests that power itself—regardless of gender—can corrupt those who wield it.

A comparative analysis reveals that while both works explore the concept of matriarchal societies, their conclusions differ significantly. Gilman's utopia promotes a vision of peace, education, and cooperation, where women transcend traditional gender roles to create a just society. On the other hand, Mukhtor's novel warns against the dangers of uncritical power, regardless of gender. The rulers in Mukhtor's society exhibit the same flaws as their male counterparts, suggesting that power structures themselves—not just the identities of those who hold power—must be reexamined. This is particularly evident in how Gulxumor's leadership evolves into a despotic regime, mirroring the flaws of male-dominated systems. This idea of power's corruptibility is in line with Michel Foucault's theories on power, which argue that power is not inherently corruptible by gender but by the structures within which it operates (Foucault, 1982).

Gilman's work challenges the traditional binary understanding of gender, suggesting that true liberation lies not in elevating one gender over the other but in dismantling rigid gender distinctions. This critique aligns with broader feminist arguments against gender essentialism, advocating for the dissolution of restrictive gender roles (Butler, 1990). In *Herland*, the women do not see themselves as inherently superior to men but as human beings unshackled by societal expectations. This is evidenced by the way in which the women's accomplishments—such as their scientific knowledge, their ability to govern, and their expertise in various fields—are celebrated without being framed as an exception to their gender, but as a natural extension of their human capacities.

Mukhtor, in contrast, uses gender reversal to critique authoritarianism, illustrating how power, in any form, can become corrupt and unjust if the structures that perpetuate it are not addressed. His work serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of replacing one oppressive system with another. As scholar bell hooks (2000) writes, "Feminism is not about replacing patriarchy with matriarchy but rather about challenging all forms of domination." Mukhtor's novel challenges the assumption that women in power will automatically lead to more just and egalitarian societies,

pointing out that any system of governance—if it replicates the flaws of its predecessor—will ultimately fail to produce equity.

The distinct cultural and historical contexts in which these works were written shape their utopian visions. Gilman's work, written in the early 20th century, reflects the optimism of the women's suffrage movement and early feminist thought, emphasizing the transformative potential of women's involvement in public life. Scholars such as Nancy Cott (1987) suggest that Gilman's ideal of *Herland* was informed by the desire to create a more just, rational world through women's active participation in governance and public discourse. Mukhtor, writing in post-Soviet Uzbekistan during the 1990s, critiques both Soviet and traditional patriarchal governance, warning against the simple reversal of gender roles as a solution to entrenched systemic problems. His satire underscores the complexities of power and the need for deep structural reform rather than superficial changes.

Both works offer significant critiques of gender and power, though their methods diverge greatly. Gilman's work offers an optimistic vision of a feminist utopia where women, liberated from patriarchal constraints, create a peaceful and rational society. Mukhtor, in contrast, uses satire to question the notion that simply reversing the gender of rulers can create meaningful change. These works illustrate diverse feminist approaches to gender and power, ultimately emphasizing that true societal change requires a fundamental reimagining of the structures that underpin power itself. As such, both texts challenge readers to reconsider not just the identities of those in power but the systems that enable or constrain that power.

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