HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

THE REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN KECHA VA KUNDUZ AND AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY: A COMPARATIVE LITERARY ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This scientific article explores the representation of social inequality through a comparative literary analysis of Abdulhamid Sulaymon o‘g‘li Cho‘lpon’s Uzbek realist novel Kecha va Kunduz (Night and Day, 1936) and Theodore Dreiser’s American naturalist masterpiece An American Tragedy (1925). Operating in radically distinct geographic, religious, and socio-political systems—early twentieth-century colonial Turkestan and Gilded Age capitalistic United States—both authors independently expose how rigid social hierarchies, economic divides, and institutional pressures crush individual agency. Utilizing qualitative comparative textual analysis grounded in historical-sociological criticism, this paper examines how Cho‘lpon highlights the convergence of patriarchal authority, local administrative corruption, and colonial submission, while Dreiser unmasks the toxic illusions of the "American Dream" and capitalist stratification. The findings indicate that despite variations in structural mechanisms (traditional-religious networks of patronage versus corporate-industrial hierarchies), both works depict social inequality as a deterministic force that precipitates psychological self-erasure and ultimate moral or physical destruction for the underprivileged.

Keywords: Social Inequality, Realism, Naturalism, Cho‘lpon, Theodore Dreiser, Comparative Literature, Class Stratification, Patriarchal Power.

Introduction. The critical examination of social inequality within realist and naturalist fiction highlights how systemic economic disparities filter down into individual human fates. As modern literary sociology establishes, fictional narratives serve as an essential analytical lens for unmasking real-world socioeconomic realities and income distributions [1]. Literary masterworks do not merely entertain; they document the structural violence inherent in the class systems of their eras.

This study provides a cross-cultural comparative analysis of two monumental works of twentieth-century global literature: Abdulhamid Sulaymon o‘g‘li Cho‘lpon’s Kecha va Kunduz (1936) and Theodore Dreiser’s An American Tragedy (1925). Superficially, these novels emerge from entirely disconnected environments. Cho‘lpon writes about early twentieth-century Turkestan, a space defined by the dual pressures of traditional Islamic patriarchy and Russian colonial domination [2]. Dreiser, conversely, dissects the urban-industrial complex of the United States during a period of massive corporate expansion and fierce material stratification [3].

Despite these cultural and historical divergences, both texts converge on a shared thematic node: the devastating impact of rigid social inequality on the lower classes. Cho‘lpon displays how local power structures, networks of patronage, and gendered hierarchies strip the powerless of their human dignity [2]. Dreiser presents human beings as trapped organisms driven by biological instincts and societal forces beyond their control, judging American society as an unequal contest where wealth dictates morality [4]. By comparing these paradigms, this article addresses how social inequality acts as a tragic, deterministic undercurrent across distinct geopolitical systems.

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Research methodology. This research adopts a qualitative comparative textual method grounded in the theoretical frameworks of literary sociology, critical realism, and American naturalism. The primary textual sources utilized are Abdulhamid Cho‘lpon's Kecha va Kunduz (with textual validation via Christopher Fort's English translation Night and Day) [5] and Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy [6].

The analytical procedure operates through three specific stages:

1. **Contextualization:** Establishing the historical-sociological frameworks of early twentieth-century Turkestan (Jadidist modernization, colonial capitalism, and traditional Islamic feudalism) alongside the roaring twenties in the United States (industrial expansion, consumer culture, and capitalistic stratification).
2. **Character and Agency Analysis:** Evaluating the socio-economic positions of the main characters—focusing on Zebi and Miryoqub in Kecha va Kunduz, and Clyde Griffiths and Roberta Alden in An American Tragedy—to determine how structural pressures constrict personal autonomy.
3. **Synthesis and Structural Comparison:** Interrogating how social institutions (the colonial-feudal judiciary in Turkestan versus the capitalistic legal and media apparatus in America) codify inequality and ensure the subjugation of marginalized individuals.

Results. The systematic comparison of Kecha va Kunduz and An American Tragedy yields several critical insights regarding the operational mechanics of social inequality:

Dimension of Inequality	Kecha va Kunduz (Cho‘lpon)	An American Tragedy (Dreiser)
Primary Structural Driver	Interlocking colonial administration, religious feudalism, and patriarchal control [2].	Corporate capitalism, strict wealth stratification, and consumerism [4].
Nature of Social Mobility	Achieved through sycophancy, colonial patronage, and moral compromise (e.g., Miryoqub) [2].	Governed by illusions of the "American Dream" requiring elite marriage or familial legacy [1].
Vulnerable Subjects	Women subjected to polygamy, domestic isolation, and complete legal erasure (e.g., Zebi) [7].	Working-class laborers trapped by low wages and lack of reproductive or economic safety nets (e.g., Roberta) [6].
Institutional Enforcement	Corrupt local judges (Mingboshi), bribery networks, and czarist/Soviet legal manipulation [2].	The capitalist press, politically ambitious prosecutors, and the wealthy judicial apparatus [4].

The textual evidence shows that both authors depict human dignity not through heroic triumph, but through a painful, everyday struggle to preserve an inner moral identity under oppressive regimes that reduce human life to mere social utility, compliance, or financial transactions [2]

Analysis and Discussion. Structural Mechanics of Inequality: Feudal-Colonial Intersections vs. Industrial Capitalism.

To trace how social inequality acts as a deterministic force in Abdulhamid Sulaymon o‘g‘li Cho‘lpon’s Kecha va Kunduz and Theodore Dreiser’s An American Tragedy, one must first examine the foundational socioeconomic systems that govern these fictional worlds. While both authors arrive

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at remarkably symmetrical conclusions regarding the systematic erasure of working-class and marginalized agency, their narratives process this reality through distinct economic landscapes.

Cho‘lpon’s structural framework captures early twentieth-century Turkestan during a period of agonizing transition—a landscape caught between traditional Islamic feudalism, patriarchal networks of patronage, and an encroaching Russian colonial capitalism [2]. Within this dual-layered system of oppression, social inequality is enforced not merely through cold financial ledger lines, but through a deeply personalized network of religious and political allegiance [11]. Power is concentrated in the hands of colonial administrators and local functionaries like Akbarali Mingboshi, whose administrative authority serves to reinforce a rigidly stratified hierarchy.

In this environment, inequality is physical, spatial, and inherently visual. The domestic space of the courtyard (hovli) serves as a geographic manifestation of subjugation, dividing the powerful from the powerless along both class and gender lines [7].

Dreiser’s An American Tragedy, conversely, operates within a mature, urbanized, and hyper-rationalized industrial capitalist framework [3]. The setting of Lycurgus, New York, represents the apex of American Gilded Age corporate stratification. Here, inequality has been institutionalized and stripped of traditional religious obligations or localized communal networks. It manifests as a rigid, impersonal hierarchy dictated by industrial capital, corporate ownership, and competitive consumerism [4].

While the subjects in Cho‘lpon’s Turkestan are dominated by visible figures of local administration and ancestral patriarchy, Dreiser’s subjects are controlled by invisible market forces, manufacturing schedules, and the psychological weight of commodity fetishism.

The stratification in Dreiser's novel is explicitly mapped onto urban geography: the affluent, exclusive world of the Finchleys and the senior Griffiths family stands in stark, unyielding opposition to the bleak boarding houses and repetitive rhythms of the collar factory floor where the working class labors [6].

Consequently, the structural mechanics of inequality in both texts show that despite variations in execution—traditional-religious networks of patronage on one hand versus corporate-industrial hierarchies on the other—the individual is similarly commodified. Human worth is systematically reduced to an instrument of socio-political compliance or economic production.

The Subjugation of Vulnerable Subjects: Zebi and Roberta Alden

The human cost of these structural inequalities is most sharply felt through the parallel downfalls of Zebi in Kecha va Kunduz and Roberta Alden in An American Tragedy. Both characters function as the ultimate manifestations of vulnerability within their respective social systems, illustrating how interlocking hierarchies of class, gender, and economic status converge to strip marginalized individuals of their agency [1].

Zebi’s subjugation is defined by her total lack of autonomy under a combined patriarchal and feudal-administrative apparatus [7]. Her forced entry into a polygamous marriage with the elderly Mingboshi is not depicted by Cho‘lpon as an isolated domestic arrangement; it is a calculated political transaction. Zebi’s father, Razzoq sofi, surrenders his daughter to the Mingboshi to secure spiritual and social standing within the community's rigid hierarchy.

Through this act, Zebi ceases to exist as an independent human being and is instead transformed into a status symbol—a material asset used to reinforce the Mingboshi's local dominance. Cho‘lpon meticulously documents Zebi's internal psychological displacement as she enters the inner courtyard (ichkari). The walls of the compound do not merely isolate her from society; they codify her complete legal and social erasure [8]. Within this space, social inequality manifests as domestic domestic

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slavery disguised as religious tradition, where Zebi's very presence is subordinated to the whims of the senior wives and the autocratic master of the house.

Roberta Alden's tragedy in An American Tragedy is similarly dictated by her socio-economic vulnerability, though her exploitation occurs within the framework of industrial labor and capitalistic moral hypocrisy [6]. As a poor country girl working in the Griffiths collar factory, Roberta is trapped at the bottom of the industrial hierarchy. Dreiser applies a naturalistic lens to demonstrate how the factory system strips laborers of their individuality, reducing them to mere extensions of the machinery [4].

When Roberta enters into a clandestine relationship with Clyde Griffiths, she is bound by a rigid code of working-class morality that simultaneously exploits her vulnerability and condemns her for failing to uphold bourgeois standards of virtue.

The true brutality of the capitalist stratification becomes undeniable when Roberta discovers her pregnancy. In the 1920s American industrial landscape described by Dreiser, an unmarried, pregnant factory worker faced absolute social ruin and economic exile [6]. Her frantic, unsuccessful search for a physician willing to perform an abortion exposes a medical and legal system that offers no safety nets or compassion to the impoverished.

Like Zebi, whose choices are entirely eliminated by patriarchal-feudal mandates, Roberta's choices are systematically constricted by her lack of financial resources. Her dependence on Clyde for social and economic rescue mirrors Zebi's total reliance on the volatile goodwill of the Mingboshi's household. Both women are ultimately crushed because their respective societies categorize them as disposable inputs within larger systems of power and production.

The Dynamics of Distorted Ambition: Miryoqub and Clyde Griffiths

While Zebi and Roberta represent the passive, crushed victims of societal stratification, the characters of Miryoqub and Clyde Griffiths reveal how social inequality distorts individual ambition, turning the desire for upward mobility into a destructive, morally corrosive force [1]. Both men refuse to accept their lower-class origins, yet their attempts to navigate the socio-economic hierarchies of their worlds reveal the futility of individual agency when confronting deeply entrenched systemic barriers.

In Kecha va Kunduz, Miryoqub functions as an opportunist who understands that survival and advancement in colonial Turkestan require a total abandonment of conventional morality in favor of sycophantic flexibility [2]. Born without hereditary nobility or substantial wealth, Miryoqub climbs the social ladder by transforming himself into the indispensable right-hand man of Akbarali Mingboshi. He operates as an intermediary, a fixer who bridges the gap between the traditional local population, the corrupt Muslim clergy, and the Russian colonial administration [9].

Miryoqub's upward mobility is achieved through the calculated manipulation of bribery, the exploitation of domestic secrets, and the betrayals of his peers. Cho'lpon uses Miryoqub to critique the moral degradation demanded by an unequal colonial-feudal society: to ascend, one must participate in the exploitation of those below [10]. Miryoqub's sophisticated intellect and energy are entirely co-opted by a corrupt system, proving that within a stratified colonial framework, social mobility does not lead to genuine liberation, but rather to a deeper, more cynical entanglement in the machinery of oppression.

Clyde Griffiths' trajectory in An American Tragedy provides a striking capitalistic mirror to Miryoqub's calculations. Clyde's ambition is driven by his exposure to the stark material inequalities of American life [4]. Raised in poverty by street-evangelist parents whose religious devotion offers no material comfort, Clyde develops an intense psychological craving for wealth, luxury, and social

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distinction. Dreiser emphasizes that Clyde is not a calculated villain, but an ordinary, impressionable young man completely overwhelmed by the pervasive consumer culture of the Gilded Age [3].

When Clyde is exposed to the elite society of Lycurgus through his wealthy uncle, Samuel Griffiths, his desire for class ascension transforms into an obsession. The illusion of the "American Dream" convinces Clyde that he is entitled to cross the class barrier if he can secure the affection of the wealthy heiress Sondra Finchley [6].

However, Dreiser's naturalistic philosophy operates deterministically here: Clyde lacks the capital, the breeding, and the ruthlessness required to truly integrate into the capitalist elite. His relationship with Roberta Alden acts as a persistent tie pulling him back down to his true class origins.

The psychological conflict that develops within Clyde—the agonizing choice between his genuine affection for Roberta and his desperate ambition to marry into the Finchley fortune—drives him toward moral paralysis and, eventually, the passive execution of a horrific crime.

Both Miryoqub and Clyde demonstrate that social inequality fractures the human psyche; it forces ambitious individuals from the lower classes to view their fellow human beings not as objects of empathy, but as obstacles to be bypassed or assets to be exploited.

Institutional Safeguards of the Status Quo: Legal and Media Complicity

A crucial component of both Cho'lpon's and Dreiser's critiques is the demonstration that social inequality is not maintained solely through economic disparity, but is actively defended by formal social institutions. When the structural contradictions of these stratified societies culminate in violence—the poisoning of Akbarali Mingboshi in Kecha va Kunduz and the drowning of Roberta Alden in An American Tragedy—the legal and institutional apparatuses step in, not to dispense objective justice, but to reinforce and validate the existing social hierarchy [1, 12].

In Kecha va Kunduz, the investigation and subsequent trial following the Mingboshi's death expose the corruption embedded within the colonial-feudal judiciary [2]. The local administrative authorities, terrified of a disruption to the colonial order and eager to find a swift scapegoat, direct their power against the most defenseless individual available: Zebi. The legal proceedings are stripped of any commitment to truth or evidentiary validation. Instead, the trial relies on coerced testimonies, religious manipulation, and the active complicity of local judges who are indebted to the networks of patronage that the late Mingboshi represented [10].

Zebi's immediate condemnation and her brutal sentence of exile to Siberia serve a dual structural purpose. First, it protects the reputation of the local ruling class by attributing the systemic failures and internal rot of the Mingboshi's household to the moral failure of a single woman. Second, it demonstrates to the wider populace that any disruption to the established hierarchy will be met with absolute institutional violence. Cho'lpon explicitly reveals how the colonial administration and local elites unite during crises, utilizing the legal system as a disciplinary tool to suppress dissent and keep the marginalized masses compliant [11].

Dreiser's depiction of the legal and media apparatus in An American Tragedy offers an equally damning indictment of institutional integrity under industrial capitalism [4]. Clyde Griffiths' trial for the murder of Roberta Alden is entirely stripped of judicial neutrality, mutating into an aggressive political circus and a highly profitable media spectacle. The prosecution, led by District Attorney Mason, is driven not by an abstract desire for justice, but by intense personal ambition and the upcoming judicial elections [6]. Mason recognizes that by framing Clyde as a cold-blooded, aristocratic seducer who destroyed a pure, working-class country girl, he can mobilize the political resentment of the rural lower-class electorate against the urban elite.

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Simultaneously, the capitalist press exploits the tragedy to maximize circulation numbers and ad revenue, transforming Clyde's internal psychological crisis into a simplified, sensationalized morality play [3]. The wealthy Griffiths family, determined to protect their corporate brand and social standing from being tarnished by association, provide Clyde with an inadequate, detached legal defense, effectively abandoning him once his conviction becomes financially and socially prudent.

The trial and ultimate execution of Clyde Griffiths are not driven by objective legal principles; they are engineered by a capitalist machinery that uses the legal system to process human tragedy into political capital and media profits. In both novels, the law acts as an institutional firewall, ensuring that the foundational inequalities of the social order remain unquestioned and intact.

Ideological Disillusionment and the Fatalism of Class Escape

The final movements of both Kecha va Kunduz and An American Tragedy trace the complete collapse of individual hope, concluding with a profound sense of ideological disillusionment and existential fatalism. Neither Cho'lpon nor Dreiser permits their characters an artificial, romantic escape from their class constraints. Instead, both narratives close by illustrating that for the lower classes, any attempt to disrupt or escape the boundaries of social stratification results in absolute physical or psychological self-erasure [12].

In Kecha va Kunduz, this disillusionment is marked by Zebi's physical displacement to the wastes of Siberia and Miryoqub's internal ideological crisis [2]. Zebi's exile represents the total victory of the patriarchal-feudal structure over individual innocence. Her final state is one of absolute alienation—stripped of her youth, her cultural environment, and her identity, she becomes a living ghost, a broken monument to the human cost of systemic inequality.

Concurrently, Miryoqub's realization of the inherent rot within both the traditional Islamic elite and the Russian colonial apparatus leaves him in a state of profound existential paralysis [9]. His sophisticated maneuvers and calculated opportunism yield no genuine peace or authentic status. He is left drifting within a changing political landscape, illustrating Cho'lpon's broader Jadidist critique: that a society built upon systemic inequality, corruption, and colonial subjugation cannot offer true fulfillment or intellectual liberation to any of its members, regardless of their temporary position within the hierarchy [11].

Dreiser concludes An American Tragedy with an identical sense of naturalistic fatalism [4]. Clyde Griffiths' time in the death house at Sing Sing prison provides a prolonged psychological study in disillusionment. Wrapped in the cold, institutional architecture of the state, Clyde attempts to find spiritual solace through the intervention of the well-meaning Reverend McMillan [6]. However, even his spiritual reckonings are corrupted by the lingering distortions of his socioeconomic upbringing. Clyde dies in the electric chair without ever fully understanding his own guilt, unable to distinguish between his personal moral choices and the overwhelming social currents that systematically directed his life toward disaster.

The brief epilogue of the novel, which mirrors the opening scene with a new generation of poor children preaching on a street corner, reinforces Dreiser's cyclical view of capitalist exploitation [4]. The socioeconomic machinery of America continues to run undisturbed, continuously generating new waves of impoverished individuals who will be enticed by the illusions of the American Dream, only to be systematically ground down by the unyielding realities of class exclusion.

Synthesis of Comparative Findings

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HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
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When placed in direct dialogue, Kecha va Kunduz and An American Tragedy show a remarkable convergence in their diagnostic assessment of social inequality, despite utilizing distinct literary methodologies and drawing from opposite ends of the global socioeconomic spectrum.

Cho‘lpon’s critical realism exposes how traditional cultural institutions can be weaponized by colonial structures to lock individuals into inescapable positions of vulnerability [2]. Dreiser’s American naturalism demonstrates that an advanced industrial democracy, despite its rhetoric of equality and upward mobility, enforces a class system that is every bit as rigid, deterministic, and violent as any feudal order [4].

Both novels serve as historical and sociological documentation of the ways in which human agency is systematically restricted by wealth distribution, gender roles, and institutional power. They argue that when a society elevates material wealth or administrative status above human dignity, tragedy ceases to be an exceptional event. Instead, individual destruction becomes a predictable, normalized outcome of the social structure itself.

Conclusion. A comparative reading of Kecha va Kunduz and An American Tragedy reveals that despite vast differences in culture, geography, and ideological frameworks, both Cho‘lpon and Dreiser identify social inequality as an existential threat to human freedom and dignity. Cho‘lpon utilizes critical realism to dissect a society caught between traditional patriarchal feudalism and colonial intervention, illustrating how status hierarchies result in the psychological and physical exile of vulnerable individuals. Dreiser employs literary naturalism to expose the predatory nature of modern industrial capitalism, demonstrating how the pursuit of wealth drives the lower classes toward moral degradation and ultimate self-destruction.

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