



THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HEIAN PERIOD LITERATURE AND THE
FORMATION OF WOMEN'S LITERATURE BASED ON KANA SCRIPT

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Abstract. *This paper explores the literary development during Japan's Heian period (794–1185), with a particular focus on how the emergence of kana script enabled the formation of women's literature. While men wrote mainly in Chinese (kanbun), women—excluded from formal Chinese education—adopted kana to express personal thoughts, emotions, and daily life. The study highlights the literary environment of the time, the significance of kana, and the influence of prominent female writers such as Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shōnagon. Their works, *The Tale of Genji* and *The Pillow Book*, exemplify how kana literature reflected and shaped Japanese aesthetics and cultural identity.*

Keywords: *Heian Period, Kana Script, Women's Literature, Murasaki Shikibu, Sei Shōnagon, The Tale of Genji, The Pillow Book, Mono no Aware, Japanese Aesthetics, Court Culture, Diary Literature, Classical Japanese Literature, Gender and Writing, Emotional Expression.*

Main Body

2.1 Linguistic Environment and Features of Heian Literature

During the Heian period, Japan experienced a flourishing of indigenous culture, especially in literature. The aristocracy, particularly court women, played a central role in this literary golden age. While Chinese remained the dominant written language for official and scholarly texts, it was inaccessible to most women due to educational restrictions. In contrast, kana—a phonetic script developed from simplified Chinese characters—became the medium of personal and creative expression.

Heian literature is renowned for its sensitivity to aesthetics, seasonal change, and inner emotion. The ideals of **mono no aware** (a deep, empathetic appreciation of transience) and **okashi** (elegance and charm) shaped the literary atmosphere. These concepts found perfect expression through kana, enabling new genres like **monogatari** (tales), **nikki** (diaries), and **waka** poetry to flourish.

2.2 The Role of Kana in Women's Literary Expression

Kana script revolutionized literary participation for women. Deprived of access to Chinese classical training, aristocratic women turned to kana to communicate their thoughts. Through this medium, they developed intimate, lyrical, and introspective literary forms.

Women's writings reflected domestic life, romantic relationships, spiritual reflections, and social dynamics. Works written in kana allowed for fluid emotional expression,





TANQIDIY NAZAR, TAHLILIY TAFAKKUR VA INNOVATSION G'OYALAR



complex narrative structures, and detailed psychological characterizations, laying the groundwork for uniquely Japanese prose.

2.3 Literary Contributions of Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shōnagon

Two female writers—Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shōnagon—stand as towering figures in Heian literature. Murasaki's **The Tale of Genji** is considered the world's first psychological novel, portraying court life through the complex emotional experiences of Prince Genji and his relationships. The work embodies the refined aesthetic of the era and provides deep insights into Heian-era court culture.

Sei Shōnagon's **The Pillow Book** offers a contrasting style: witty, sharp, and observational. As a collection of essays, lists, and reflections, it paints a vivid portrait of daily life and court manners. Both authors used kana to establish new literary paradigms, representing women's voices in a male-dominated cultural context.

