

A journey through Uzbek literature: From Ancient Epics to Modern Independence'

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It is well known that Uzbek literature, with its unique style, has been drawing the attention of Western readers. Allow me to evoke the character of Shahrizoda from the "One Thousand and One Nights," a collection of Middle Eastern folk tales from the medieval era. The reader is moved by the intriguing premise wherein Shahrizoda saves herself from the executioner's ax by captivating Caliph Harun ar Rashid with her tales during the night. Similarly, Uzbek literature, with its centuries-old history, has undergone significant development.

The founder of Uzbek national literature is the eminent statesman and prime minister of the Timurid king, Husayn Boykaro, the renowned poet Amir Alisher Navoi. Navoi, who became a minister in the city of Khirat, played a crucial role in establishing the Uzbek language, one of the Turkish languages. During the 14th-15th centuries, Arabic and Persian held dominance in the country. In this complex period, Hamza, with his collection of five epics, laid the foundation for the Uzbek literary language and literature.

Alisher Navoi's poetic epics, including "Khayratul Abror," "Farkhod and Shirin," "Sabbayi Sayer," "Layli and Majnun," and "Iskandarnama," have persisted in Uzbek literature for six centuries. Navoi, a great statesman, general, and poet, stands alongside historian Zakhridin Muhammed Babur, the second significant figure in Uzbek literature. In his work "Boburnoma," Babur provides insightful information about the history of Movvun Nahr, Turkestan, Afghanistan, India, and Iran. Historical records show that Babur founded the Babur dynasty in India, which ruled until British conquest.

Uzbek literature continued to evolve. In the 16th and 17th centuries, poets such as Zavki, Mukimi, Furkat, Ogakhi, Mashrab, Akhmad Donish, Sufi Olaler, Hamza, and Munis Khorazmi emerged from Turkestan. This era was characterized by the dominance of three khanates in Central Asia: the states of Kukon Khanate, Khiva Khanate, and Bukhara Emirate. Unfortunately, these three khans were perpetually in mutual hostility, engaging in frequent feudal wars.

In 1756, Umarshaikh Mirza ascended the throne in Kukon Khanate, succeeded by his son Muhammed Alikhan. During these centuries, the rulers maintained the Haram, an inner palace where Muslim kings kept concubines. According to Umarshaikh Mirza, his son Muhammad Alikhan fell in love with one of these concubines and married her, leading to strong disapproval from religious scholars of the Kukon Khanate.

Enraged religious scholars sent an emissary to Amir Saeed Nasrullah Khan in Bukhara, with a message inscribed on the ambassador's ashes: "Kukon Khan Muhammad Ali Khan married his stepmother, violating Sharia laws. A Muslim can never marry his stepmother. The Khan must be punished." Emir of Bukhara, Said Nasrullah Khan, seized this opportunity and mobilized 25,000 men for a military campaign in Kukon.

The Bukhara troops easily captured the city, plundered and burned it. Nadira and Ugli Muhammed Alikhans were arrested, and the mullahs of Kukon executed the mother and child rulers. Said Nasrullah Khan returned to Bukhara with great cheers. Nasrullah Khan died in 1858, and his son Said Muzaffar Khan ascended the throne.

In 1863, Tsarist Russia's troops attacked Central Asia. Instead of resisting the invaders, the Khans of Kukon Khanate, Khiva Khan Muhammad Rahim Khan, and Bukhara Emir Saeed Muzaffar Khan, failed to cooperate militarily, enabling the Russian generals Skobolev and Cherniyaev to conquer the master khanate skillfully.

During this period, Uzbek literature also experienced a decline. The Kukon Khanate was abolished, and the General Governorate of Turkestan was established. The first governor-general of Turkestan was von Kaufman, turning the Khans of Bukhara and Khiva into Russian colonies.

In the 1900s, the "Jadid movement" gained momentum throughout Turkestan. Modern artists such as Exbudi, Fitrat, Khamza, Chulpon, Avloni, and Abdulla Kodiri attempted to raise awareness by creating new works in dramaturgy, sharia, and novels. Even the occupying Russians expressed displeasure with the works of Abdulla Kodiri's "Last Days" and Chulpon's "Night and Days".

In 1917, a revolution (effectively a coup d'état) led by Vladimir Lenin took place in Russia, bringing the Red Bolshevik Party to power. The Bolsheviks, upon seizing control, implemented a policy of violence. Nobles, wealthy individuals, businessmen, scientists, and oppressors were suppressed through repression. In 1920, both the Khanate of Khiva and the Emirate of Bukhara were abolished. Many Uzbek people were forcibly displaced by organizations such as Cheka, GPU, and NKVD. These repressions began in 1920 and persisted until 1953, during the leadership of the formidable Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. Hundreds of representatives of Uzbek literature were exiled as "kulok" and met their demise at the hands of the NKVD. Majority of Uzbek valorous individuals were killed.

Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of the new USSR following Stalin, put an end to these repressions, ushering in an era of freedom. In the 1950s and 1960s, influential writers such as Kamil Yashin, Sharof Rashidov, Mirmukhsin, Oybek, Gafur Gulom, Abdulla Kakhkhor, and Zulfiya Israilova emerged from Uzbekistan. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the contributions of writers like Maksud Shaykhzoda, Uygun,

Hamid Gulom, Abdulla Oripov, Erkin Vokhidov, Halima Khudoyberdieva, Utkir Khoshimov, and Turob Tula to the development of Uzbek literature.

Finally, on September 1, 1991, Uzbekistan declared its independence. Uzbek literature and culture entered a new era. During this period, the Association of Uzbekistan Writers was established. The works of writers such as Muhammed Yusuf, Shukur Kholmiraev, Sirojiddin Sayyid, Usman Azim, Erkin Azam, Shodmonkul Salam, Kuchkor Norkobil, Eshkobil Shukur, and Mahmud Toir gained global recognition.

The sun of independence shone upon the shoulders of the Uzbeks.

This journey through Uzbek literature, translated from Uzbek to English by translator Shaxnoza Axmatova, reflects the resilience and creativity of a rich cultural heritage. The article pays homage to the writers who shaped Uzbek literature, from ancient epics to the challenges of the modern era.