

National Identity – National Poetry – National Independence

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Abstract: This article explores the role of Uzbek literature in shaping national identity, particularly in the context of Soviet repression and the struggle for independence. The research highlights how literary figures such as Abdurauf Fitrat, Cho'lpon, Oybek, G'afur G'ulom, and Maqsd Shayxzoda embedded themes of freedom, resilience, and self-awareness within their works, even in times of strict ideological control. The study also delves into how poetry and artistic expression served as a hidden but persistent force in preserving cultural heritage and fostering the spirit of independence. The findings suggest that literature not only reflected but also actively influenced national consciousness, ultimately contributing to Uzbekistan's independence at the end of the 20th century.

Keywords: Uzbek literature, national identity, Soviet repression, independence movement, Abdurauf Fitrat, Maqsd Shayxzoda, cultural heritage, poetry, resistance, freedom.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most pressing tasks of Uzbek literary studies remains the exploration of the historical evolution of national identity in conjunction with the intellectual-spiritual world of the people, their moral-cultural traditions, and enlightenment heritage.

It is evident that the repressions during the Soviet era in the 20th century had a significant impact on Uzbek literature. Many literary figures who instilled in the nation the spirit of resilience and the struggle for freedom were among the first to be repressed. In the post-repression years, intellectuals and creative minds were forced into silence in their pursuit of national self-awareness.

As the literary scholar I. Gafurov aptly states, "Words, emotions, and thoughts attain universal significance only when they are mobilized for the defense of humanity" (G'afurov, I. 2018). In this sense, for nearly a century, Uzbek literature, particularly poetry, has been engaged in the struggle for human dignity, life, peace, comfort, and, ultimately, for freedom and happiness.

Undoubtedly, in shaping national identity, essential components such as language and literature, particularly poetry, play a significant role. National uniqueness, general essence, and belief serve as the foundation for the people's self-awareness. Of course, national identity has socio-historical, philosophical, and psychological dimensions. However, in this study, we focus on the aspects related to the artistic power of words, literature, and especially poetry, which profoundly influence the human soul and spirit.

During the Soviet era, open discussions about national pride and identity were suppressed.

However, the literature of that time, particularly regional literature, continued the formation of national distinctiveness through various means. This process was reflected in folklore, cultural values, material and spiritual heritage, traditions, historical figures, and the literary symbols of freedom and heroism.

This spirit of resilience and freedom also influenced the representation of historical narratives, the movement for courage and independence, and the portrayal of great poets and intellectuals in Uzbek literature. These elements contributed to a rich poetic tradition that celebrated the ideals of power and liberty (Hojimatov, M).

Looking at 20th-century Uzbek poetry, we observe that poets, whether openly or subtly, conveyed national identity, history, and cultural pride through their verses. In analyzing the works of poets such as Cho'lpon, Oybek, G'afur G'ulom, Maqsd Shayxzoda, Mirtemir, Erkin Vohidov, Abdulla Oripov, Omon Matjon, and Halima Xudoyberdiyeva, it becomes evident that their poetry contains symbols, metaphors, and hidden expressions, revealing their desire to break ideological chains, their longing for freedom, and their unwavering hope for independence.

First and foremost, it should be emphasized that at the beginning of the 20th century in Turkestan, the study of national history, its bright and tragic pages, and the heritage of great thinkers who illuminated the depths of the past played a significant role in shaping national identity, spirituality, and issues related to the mother tongue. In this regard, the awakening power of the works of the Jadids, especially Abdurauf Fitrat, holds a special place.

Onam! Seni qutqarmoq uchun jonmi kerakdir?
Nomusmi, vijdon bila imonmi kerakdir?

Understanding national identity is directly related to an individual's life and destiny. Literature, as a medium of words, influences thought through emotions embedded within, shaping a person's character and worldview. In this sense, the Jadid literature of Turkestan, particularly the works of Abdurauf Fitrat, played a progressive role not only in Uzbek literature but also in the destiny of all the nations in the region. It became a driving force in the later development of national literatures, awakening a sense of national identity and fostering the spirit of independence in millions of hearts.

The poems of Abdurauf Fitrat provided a powerful spiritual impetus for the nation's striving toward freedom and liberty in his time.

In Abdurauf Fitrat's poem "Ögut" (*Advice*), the poet addresses the men—the hope and trust of the nation—by saying:

Og'ir yigit, sening go'zal, nurli ko'zingda,
Bu millatning saodatin, baxtin o'qidim.
O'ylashingda, turishingda hamda o'zungda
Bu yurt uchun qutulishning borlig'in ko'rdim.
Turma – yugur, tinma – tirish, bukilma – yuksal,
Hurqma – kirish, qo'rqma – yopish, yo'rilma –
qo'zg'al.
El yo'lini to'sib turgan eski bulutlarni
Yondirib qo'y, yirtib tashla, barchasin yo'q et.
Qilolmasang shu ishlarni,
Sening uchun xo'rlikdir bu...
Yiqil, yo'qol, ket!

With these lines, Fitrat instills an unbreakable will in the youth of the nation: "*Turma – run, tinma – strive, bukilma – rise, hurqma – enter, qo'rqma – hold on, yo'rilma – revolt.*" The poet urges young men to awaken their national consciousness and fight against oppression.

The intensity of his call to action grows from line to line:
"*Tear apart the old clouds blocking the path of the people. Burn them down, destroy them completely. If you cannot do this, then for you, disgrace is inevitable... Fall, vanish, leave!*"

Through these powerful words, the poet seeks to revive the dignity and wounded pride of a nation whose rights have been trampled upon. He firmly believed that his people could achieve national

independence through a deep understanding of their identity.

What is most significant is that Fitrat loved his homeland with an immense passion, and this love illuminated his entire life and work. His famous collection "*Yurt Qayg'usi*" (*The Homeland's Sorrow*) addresses the most urgent and pressing issues of his time.

The historical and social significance of these poetic essays lies in the great ideas they present—they became the voice of a nation whose freedom was crushed, whose honor and spirituality were violated. The burning cries of the poet strike deep into the heart of any reader, exposing the bitter sorrows suffered for the homeland.

His lyrical persona's pain, sorrows, and lamentations over his misfortune vividly come to life in his poetry. The simplicity of his language, its deep passion and emotional intensity, captivate the reader. Fitrat felt the eternal and boundless spirit of life through the lens of his nation's freedom.

"Oh, sacred spirit of my beloved Turan, do not leave me, do not part from me. Stay by my side, remain in my eyes, in my heart, in my conscience—do not go away. Turan, to be separated from you is death for me. To die for you is my true life. My refuge, my place of worship, my hope! Did your enemies bring you to this state today? My wish, my desire, my happiness! Did your children leave you in such a condition? My joy, my comfort, my hearth! Did the oppressors see you as abandoned? No, you are not abandoned. Here I am, with my entire being, ready to support you. Here I am, with a sincere heart, willing to die for your cause.

Even if the Qaf Mountains block my path, even if the flames of hell rise before me, I will still walk toward you. Even if not men, but an army of devils come against me; even if not chains, but the serpents of hell coil around my feet, I will still move toward you. Even if all the calamities of the world fall upon my head, even if the iron thorns of the desert of oppression pierce my eyes, I will still save you.

I have been reborn for you, I will live for you, I will die for you. Oh, sacred hearth of Turkicness! Death to those who wish for your demise! Curse upon those who come to bury you!"

These passionate words are not just poetic expressions but rather the voice of national honor and dignity. They ignite a sense of fury and resistance against those who came with "iron thorns" to "bury Turan" and extinguish the "sacred hearth of Turkicness."

Who were the oppressors who wanted to erase Turan, a land with an uncertain future and a tangled fate? Who will pay for the blood spilled in Turan, for the trampled destinies, for the disappearing traditions and national values?

These cries, emerging from Fitrat's heart, were not merely artistic or emotional outbursts—they were an act of rebellion against the humiliation of his ancient and sacred homeland. His poetry reflects a deep sense of historical and moral obligation to revive his nation's spirit.

Regardless of the pain an artist carries in his heart, no matter how much he tries to keep it hidden, its sparks will inevitably reveal themselves. In this sense, the profound inner torment and suppressed grief of the great poet G'afur G'ulom become evident in his poetry. As literary critic O. Sharafiddinov states:

"It can be said with full certainty that G'afur G'ulom was one of the most unique, brightest, and most profound poets of the East in the 20th century—and he remains so today. However, despite all this, he lived a truly tragic life. In this sense, he was not the darling of the Soviet regime but rather its victim. His tragedy lay in the inability to fully express his true self, in the necessity of always shaping his external image to fit the required mold, in the constant conflict between his heart and the imposed reality, and in the absence of creative freedom. His suffering stemmed from the fact that he could never unleash the full potential of his talent."

This deep internal suffering is vividly portrayed in his poem "Aql va Qalam" (Wisdom and the Pen). "If you cannot consider the interests of the people, If you cannot think of the happiness of the homeland, It is better for the tongue of the interpreter to fall silent— If you cannot grasp the meaning of freedom".

Some have described G'afur G'ulom as a poet who fully accepted the ideology of his era during the oppressive Soviet regime. However, we believe otherwise—G'afur G'ulom remained faithful to the roots of his national identity throughout his

life. At times, he expressed his inner truth through beautiful poetic lines; at other times, through sarcasm and irony, or in layers of hidden meaning that only a perceptive reader could decode. He never hesitated to speak from his heart.

We have visited the poet's sacred home many times. The more we understood his soul, the more we realized that G'afur G'ulom lived with a weeping heart but a smiling face.

In this sense, we can say that G'afur G'ulom and Maqsd Shayxzoda were deeply connected in their thoughts and emotions. These two great poets could read the hidden meanings in each other's verses simply by looking into one another's eyes. It is no coincidence that Maqsd Shayxzoda titled his article about G'afur G'ulom "The Poet's Language is the People's Heart."

Indeed, G'afur G'ulom spent his entire life striving to be the voice of his people. He lived each day as if giving an account to his conscience—hiding his pains behind laughter and his resistance within expressions of goodwill.

During the Soviet era, our national identity and history were severely distorted. The great contributions of our ancestors were belittled, and our people were portrayed as an illiterate nation that had only seen the "light" thanks to the October Revolution. The true history was falsified—the cultural and scientific revolutions of the Timurid era were erased, and our forefathers were depicted as ignorant. The past was rewritten in a way that instilled shame instead of pride, stripping away the spirit of national identity from history books.

It was in such an era that G'afur G'ulom wrote his poem "For Samarkand," which stands as an undeniable testament to his national patriotism:

Niliy gumbazlari ko'k ichida ko'k,
Lojvard osmonda chinniiy kabutar.
Samarqand sayqali ro'yi zamin ast,
Sharqning ko'rki bo'lgan tarixiy shahar.
Manglaying bir ajin kasb etolguncha,
Minglab jafolarni kechirdi boshing.
"Ziji Ko'ragoniy" sekundlarida,
Ko'p karra tutildi ko'kda quyoshing.

In the oppressive system of that time, writing such poetry was an act of moral courage. However, the poet also had to find ways to navigate the ideological pressures and protect himself from the ruling regime's retribution. At first glance, these verses may seem like mere admiration for

Samarkand, but in reality, they express a deep connection to national identity and historical pride.

The 20th century was marked by struggles between power and justice, faith and disbelief, ignorance and enlightenment, freedom and colonialism, false philosophies and eternal truths, oppression and liberty, national prosperity and relentless humiliation across the world.

According to the renowned literary scholar Umarali Normatov, *"No other field in the 20th century fought as consistently and persistently for the fate of the nation, social justice, human freedom, and dignity as literature. I fully agree with the view that the great masters of words were the first to prepare the ideas and ideology of independence in the 20th century."*

At the beginning of the last century, prominent Jadid intellectuals such as Behbudiy, Qodiriy, Avloniy, Fitrat, Cho'lpon, Hamza, Munavvarqori, and Tavallo were brutally repressed by the totalitarian regime, but their ideas did not disappear.

Even though literature in the post-repression era was shaped by doctrines like "proletarian literature" and "socialist realism," and many works were influenced by ideological conformity, the quest for truth, the pain of national self-awareness, and the hope for freedom and independence repeatedly surfaced.

The Jadids' legacy of national identity and the fight for independence continued secretly within literature. Despite the threats and pressures of the Soviet system, some courageous writers dared to write rebellious works, and one of the most remarkable figures among them was Maqsd Shayxzoda.

Even though the Uzbek people were trapped under an oppressive system, suffering ideological suppression and persecution, and even though many writers were lost to the machinery of repression, the poetry of Maqsd Shayxzoda—imbued with truths hidden within verses, calls for freedom, and the unyielding will of the people—gave strength and spirit to those who sought a greater purpose.

In his 1939 poem "Uzbekistan," the poet reveals the aspirations and determination of the nation:

Keldi elga bir shohkim xalqlar jallodi,
Qilgan ishi qaro-yu, oq podsho oti,

Bu davrda el yorug' bir kun ko'rmasdi.
Qo'ydi xalqni beishton bu chor la'nati,
Garchi edi ko'p kaltak, shapaloq va o'q,
El umidin uzmasdi, orzuga ayb yo'q!

Although the poem refers to "Oq podsho" (the White Tsar), the phrase "xalqlar jallodi" (executioner of nations) clearly indicates who the poet is truly talking about.

Maqsd Shayxzoda's Poem "Qo'llar" (Hands)

Maqsd Shayxzoda's poem "Qo'llar" (Hands) also reflects a profound truth. The poet describes eyes as the mirrors of the soul and interpreters of the heart, but he wonders why hands—despite their rich symbolism—have been overlooked in poetry:

Negadir odamning qo'llari, biroq –
Shoirilar lutfidan qolibdi yiroq.
Holbuki, qo'llarning har siquvida
Ne-ne ma'nolar bor, alomatlar bor.

The poet emphasizes that each movement of the hands, even a simple grip, carries deep meanings and signs. Only those who observe with understanding can perceive the mysteries of the heart through the hands.

Qo'llar bor – oshirar senga to'g'rilik,
Qo'llar bor – yashirar quvlik, o'g'rilik.
Qo'llar bor – mag'zida mardlik, qo'rqqanlik,
Qo'llar bor – ramzidir qo'rqqanlik, pastlik.

At the poem's conclusion, the poet returns to the metaphor of the heart, drawing a powerful analogy: *"Just as a tree's height determines its shadow, hands are merely the executors of their owner's will."* He ends with a striking declaration:

"Yes, hands are the servants of the heart."

Upon reflection, we see that the poet is sending a message to the people—a warning that their hands should not become blind instruments that obey commands without thought. Instead, they should act only at the call of their hearts.

During our research, we observed that the breath of freedom has always existed in the essence of every era's literary works—hidden like a pearl within a shell. It was precisely this inner spirit that ultimately led the nation to independence at the end of the 20th century.

Without hesitation, we can say that this victory was the result of our national literature, which nurtured awakened hearts, cultivated national thought, instilled a free worldview, and prepared the fighters for liberty.

Indeed, words are victorious because they have the power to inspire freedom—not only in individuals, but in entire nations and humanity as a whole.

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