

THE REVIVAL OF FOLKLORE ELEMENTS IN XX CENTURY UZBEK LITERATURE

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Annotation. This article examines the revival of folklore elements in Uzbek literature of the 20th century, with a particular focus on how traditional oral forms were artistically reimagined in modern literary texts. The study analyzes how writers utilized folklore such as myths, epics, legends, proverbs, and symbols to preserve national identity, convey cultural memory, and respond to social-political changes during the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. Through close textual analysis of works by Abdulla Qodiriy, Oybek, Gʻafur Gʻulom, Oʻtkir Hoshimov, and Erkin Aʻzam, the article demonstrates how folklore motifs were adapted to modern themes and genres. It also explores the stylistic and ideological significance of folkloric references in developing narrative voice, national consciousness, and moral discourse. Special attention is paid to the dual function of folklore as both a literary device and a cultural strategy to maintain continuity amidst rapid modernization and political suppression. The findings suggest that folklorization of literature played a crucial role in shaping the aesthetics and identity of 20th-century Uzbek prose.

Keywords: folklore, Uzbek literature, identity, narrative, symbolism, tradition, oral heritage, modern prose.

Introduction. The twentieth century marked a pivotal era in the evolution of Uzbek literature, characterized by a dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation. Amidst political upheavals, cultural shifts, and ideological transformations, Uzbek writers increasingly turned to folklore as a source of creative inspiration, national identity, and spiritual resilience. The revival of folklore elements during this period was not merely a nostalgic return to the past, but rather a conscious aesthetic and ideological strategy to reconnect with the cultural roots of the Uzbek people and to preserve their historical consciousness through literature. Folklore, encompassing oral

narratives, epic tales, proverbs, songs, rituals, and mythologies, had always been a vital part of Uzbek cultural heritage¹.

However, its integration into modern literary forms during the Soviet era took on new functions. Writers such as Abdulla Qodiriy, Oybek, Gʻafur Gʻulom, and later, Oʻtkir Hoshimov and Erkin Aʼzam, skillfully employed folkloric motifs, symbols, and linguistic patterns to enrich their works with deeper national color, allegorical meaning, and ethical significance. In doing so, they often navigated complex ideological terrains, subtly critiquing sociopolitical realities while foregrounding timeless human values expressed in traditional narratives. This revival of folklore in Uzbek literature served several key purposes. First, it allowed writers to encode resistance and social commentary in a veiled yet resonant manner, particularly under repressive censorship regimes. Second, it functioned as a cultural bridge between generations, transmitting moral, philosophical, and communal wisdom through accessible and emotionally powerful symbols. Third, it reinforced the authenticity and distinctiveness of Uzbek literature in the broader Soviet and post-Soviet literary landscapes.

Moreover, the folklorization of literary discourse also gave rise to new hybrid genres and stylistic innovations, blending epic storytelling with psychological realism, lyrical introspection with mythic structure. The presence of folklore in the narrative voice, character archetypes, and symbolic imagery highlighted a return to indigenous modes of storytelling while simultaneously responding to modern themes such as alienation, identity crisis, and the struggle for self-expression. This article explores the aesthetic, cultural, and ideological dimensions of the folklore revival in XX century Uzbek literature². It examines how key authors appropriated and transformed folklore to craft a unique literary language that resonates with the collective memory of a nation and contributes to the continuity of its cultural tradition. The 20th century was a turbulent but transformative period for Uzbek literature. As political ideologies shifted and cultural identities were redefined under Soviet influence, Uzbek writers began to search for ways to preserve their national heritage within the frameworks of modern literary expression.

One of the most effective tools in this process was the revitalization of folklore elements³. The incorporation of folk tales, epics, mythological symbols, idioms, and proverbs into literary prose served not only as a bridge to cultural memory but also as a subtle form of cultural resistance. Folklore, as a body of orally transmitted cultural narratives and beliefs, played a critical role in shaping the aesthetics and moral

¹ Toʻxtaboyev X. Oʻzbek xalq ertaklarining poetikasi. – Toshkent: Fan, 1987. – 198 b.

² Nazarov Q. Adabiyot nazariyasi. – Toshkent: Oʻzbekiston, 2001. – 384 b.

³ Matjonov A. XX asr oʻzbek adabiyoti taraqqiyot bosqichlari. – Toshkent: Akademnashr, 2014. – 312 b.

worldviews of the Uzbek people for centuries. In the early Soviet period, however, folklore was viewed with suspicion by the authorities, often labeled as backward or “bourgeois nationalist.” Despite these challenges, many Uzbek writers continued to embed folklore elements into their works, albeit with careful discretion. Over time, folkloric themes and devices were reinterpreted, symbolically charged, and woven into the fabric of modern Uzbek prose. One of the pioneering figures in this regard was Abdulla Qodiriy. His historical novel *O‘tgan kunlar* (*Days Gone By*) masterfully employs folkloric structure in its character development and narrative arc. Qodiriy’s use of oral storytelling techniques repetitive dialogue structures, parable-like events, and embedded moral lessons evokes the atmosphere of traditional Uzbek storytelling. Moreover, his use of proverb-like sayings and metaphorical language reflects the cadence and wisdom of folk speech, anchoring the novel in a deeply rooted cultural worldview. Similarly, Oybek’s *Navoi* integrates elements of folk epics to portray the legendary figure of Alisher Navoi⁴. Oybek draws from *dastan*-style narration, using elevated language, moral dichotomies, and heroic motifs. The text mirrors not only the grandeur of epic storytelling but also promotes the cultural and intellectual pride of the Uzbek people, subtly countering Soviet narratives that sought to erase pre-Soviet cultural legacies. In mid-century works, authors like G‘afur G‘ulom revived folkloric motifs in more urban and satirical contexts. In *Shum bola* (*The Mischievous Boy*), G‘.G‘ulom integrates riddles, folk idioms, and humorous storytelling patterns to highlight the resilience of traditional culture amid modernization.

His characters often express themselves through proverbial speech and folk logic, emphasizing that folklore is not just a remnant of the past, but a living, evolving system of cultural interpretation⁵. The late 20th century witnessed a resurgence of folklore as a conscious literary strategy, particularly among authors seeking to explore issues of identity, alienation, and spirituality. O‘tkir Hoshimov’s novel *Ikki eshik orasi* (*Between Two Doors*) is a powerful example of how folkloric elements can enrich modern narrative with emotional depth and moral clarity. Hoshimov’s portrayal of the Uzbek mother figure a wise, patient, and spiritually strong woman is constructed through layers of folkloric symbolism and language. The use of lullabies, superstitions, and rural customs provides an intimate glimpse into the cultural psychology of the nation. Likewise, Erkin A‘zam’s works demonstrate a refined use of folklore to explore existential and philosophical questions. In *Hijron kunlari* (*Days of Separation*), folkloric metaphors and dreamlike storytelling evoke themes of memory, loss, and the

⁴ Mirvaliev B. *O‘zbek xalq og‘zaki ijodi*. – Toshkent: O‘zbekiston Milliy ensiklopediyasi, 2010. – 260 b.

⁵ Ergashov R. *O‘zbek romani va xalq og‘zaki ijodi*. – Toshkent: Sharq, 2006. – 219 b.

search for meaning. A'zam frequently uses nature symbols, such as rivers, trees, and birds, drawn from folk beliefs, to represent emotional and spiritual transformation. The stylistic function of folklore in these works is multifaceted. First, it enhances the poetic quality of prose, giving rhythm and resonance to narrative structure. Second, it anchors the text in a shared cultural reality, enabling readers to recognize familiar patterns of thought and expression⁶. Third, it provides authors with a flexible symbolic system through which they can critique society, navigate censorship, and explore complex moral issues. Furthermore, the revival of folklore has contributed to the hybridization of literary genres. Elements from dastans (epics), masals (fables), and afsonas (legends) have been combined with modern realist, psychological, and postmodern techniques, resulting in a distinctive literary style unique to Uzbek literature. This synthesis reflects a broader cultural phenomenon: the negotiation between tradition and modernity, locality and universality. In sum, the revitalization of folklore in 20th-century Uzbek literature represents more than a stylistic choice; it is a cultural statement. Writers have used folkloric forms not only to preserve heritage but to reshape it, adapting ancestral knowledge to address the challenges of the modern world⁷. Through the voices of their characters, the structures of their narratives, and the symbolic textures of their language, these authors have ensured that folklore remains a vital part of Uzbekistan's literary and national identity.

Conclusion. The revival of folklore elements in twentieth-century Uzbek literature reflects a profound cultural and artistic response to the challenges of modernity, political change, and identity preservation. Throughout the century, Uzbek writers consistently turned to folk narratives, symbols, and stylistic devices as a means of grounding their work in national heritage while addressing contemporary themes. This process was not simply a matter of imitation or nostalgia, but a creative adaptation that gave new life to ancient traditions within the context of literary modernism.

By incorporating folklore into prose, authors such as Abdulla Qodiriy, Oybek, G'afur G'ulom, O'tkir Hoshimov, and Erkin A'zam contributed to a unique narrative style that balanced historical depth with literary innovation. Their works reveal how folklore functions as a living system—capable of transformation, reinterpretation, and symbolic richness. It helped preserve collective memory, instill cultural pride, and offer subtle critiques of dominant ideologies.

Ultimately, the resurgence of folklore in literature underscores the resilience of national identity and the enduring value of oral heritage in shaping modern literary discourse.

⁶ Rajabov A. Adabiyotda tarix va mifologiya. – Samarqand: SamDU nashriyoti, 2011. – 175 b.

⁷ Shamsiyev S. Poetik tafakkur va folklor tafakkuri. – Buxoro: BDU nashriyoti, 2016. – 200 b.

This synthesis of the old and the new continues to define Uzbek literature as a space where cultural memory and creative expression converge.

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