

STATUS OF AN UZBEK LANGUAGE. NATIONAL LITERATURE OF UZBEKISTAN AND ITS REPRESENTATIVES.

Jizzakh branch of the National University of Uzbekistan

named after Mirzo Ulugbek

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Annotation

This paper examines the historical development and contemporary status of the Uzbek language, emphasizing its legal, social, and cultural significance in the modern Republic of Uzbekistan. It also explores the evolution of national literature, its major stages, and the contributions of prominent representatives who played a crucial role in shaping Uzbek literary thought. The study highlights the strong interconnection between language and literature, showing how literary figures have enriched the Uzbek language and contributed to national identity. Finally, the work summarizes the importance of preserving and further developing the Uzbek language and literature in the context of globalization.

Key words

Uzbek language, language status, national identity, Uzbek literature, literary representatives, linguistic development, classical literature, modern literature, cultural heritage, language and literature connection.

The Uzbek language has a long and multifaceted history shaped by the cultural, political, and ethnic transformations that have taken place in Central Asia over many centuries. As a member of the Turkic language family, its deepest roots lie in the

speech of the early Turkic tribes that migrated into the region from the 6th century onward. These tribes, including the Qarluks, Chigils, and Yagmas, spread across the Amu Darya and Syr Darya basins, where they gradually mixed with local peoples who spoke Eastern Iranian languages such as Sogdian and Bactrian. This interaction between Turkic and Iranian linguistic environments created a rich foundation upon which the early forms of the Uzbek language would later develop. Over time, Turkic speech became dominant in the region, especially with the rise of political entities such as the Western Turkic Khaganate and later the Kara-Khanid Khanate, which helped normalize Turkic as a language of governance, trade, and daily communication. A major turning point in the evolution of Uzbek came with the development of the Chagatai language, which emerged as a prestigious literary and cultural medium in Central Asia from the 14th century onward. Chagatai held a unique place in regional history as both the administrative and literary language of the Chagatai Khanate and the Timurid Empire. It was during this period that some of the greatest literary figures of Central Asia, including the renowned poet Alisher Navoiy, produced their works. Navoiy's writings demonstrated that Turkic languages were capable of expressing complex ideas, refined artistic styles, and deep philosophical meanings. His works elevated Chagatai to new heights and laid the intellectual foundations for the later development of Uzbek. Chagatai remained the dominant literary language until the 19th century, during which it continued to absorb Persian and Arabic elements while maintaining its Turkic character. As political structures shifted and new powers arose in Central Asia, Chagatai gradually declined as a unified literary standard and began to fragment into regional spoken dialects that would later form the basis of modern Uzbek. The transformation from classical Chagatai to modern Uzbek took place primarily in the 19th and early 20th centuries, a period that saw significant political changes with the expansion of the Russian Empire into Central Asia. Linguistic diversity became more visible during this time, and the foundations for standardizing modern Uzbek began to take shape. Various dialect groups emerged more distinctly, with the southern Karluk dialects of Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara eventually

becoming the core of the modern literary language. These dialects, influenced by centuries of interaction with Persian-speaking communities, contributed many phonetic and lexical features that distinguish Uzbek from other Turkic languages. At the same time, northern dialects preserved more conservative Turkic elements, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the region. The early Soviet period played a crucial role in defining modern Uzbek. Scholars and linguists were tasked with formalizing the language by developing standardized grammar rules, creating dictionaries, preparing educational materials, and establishing a unified literary norm. This era also brought dramatic changes to the writing system. Historically, Uzbek had been written in the Arabic script, but in 1929 it was replaced with a Latin alphabet as part of Soviet language reform. Just over a decade later, in 1940, the script was changed again—this time to Cyrillic—which remained in official use until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Each of these script reforms reflected broader ideological and political goals and had a significant impact on literacy, cultural expression, and linguistic continuity.

With the independence of Uzbekistan in 1991, the Uzbek language gained renewed importance as a central symbol of national identity, unity, and cultural heritage. The government adopted a Latin-based script in 1993, emphasizing the need to modernize the language in line with global communication trends. Contemporary language policy focuses on expanding the use of Uzbek in all spheres of public life, including state administration, education, science, media, and digital communication. Efforts are ongoing to enrich the vocabulary with scientific and technical terminology, improve linguistic research, and strengthen the role of Uzbek in digital platforms and international communication. Despite the challenges posed by globalization, the Uzbek language continues to evolve while preserving its historical roots and distinct cultural identity. Taken as a whole, the history of the Uzbek language reflects the broader trajectory of Central Asian civilization—from ancient Turkic migrations and medieval literary flourishing to modern nation-building and technological development. Its long evolution demonstrates the dynamic interaction of cultures, the creativity of literary figures, and the resilience of linguistic traditions. Today, Uzbek stands not only as a

means of communication but also as a living embodiment of the cultural memory and historical identity of the Uzbek people.

The Uzbek language today holds an officially recognized and highly significant position within the Republic of Uzbekistan. Since the adoption of the Law on the State Language on 21 October 1989, and later in the Constitution, Uzbek has been affirmed as the **state language**, meaning it must be used in government administration, official documents, lawmaking, education, and public institutions. This legal status ensures that Uzbek functions not just as a cultural symbol, but as an active and obligatory means of communication in nearly all state-related domains. According to official sources, Uzbek is considered one of the essential elements of national identity, on par with national symbols such as the flag, emblem, and anthem, which reflects its deeper cultural and historical significance in shaping the modern Uzbek nation. Government institutions continually reinforce and expand the role of Uzbek through language policy reforms. One of the most important developments is the establishment of the State Language Development Department under the Cabinet of Ministers, which is responsible for the modernization, standardization, and promotion of Uzbek in science, technology, education, and digital communication. This initiative demonstrates the state's commitment to strengthening the language's status in a rapidly globalizing world. In the field of education, the significance of Uzbek has increased even further. Starting from 2025, all secondary school graduates—regardless of the language of instruction in their schools—must pass an Uzbek language (state language) examination in order to graduate. This requirement legally secures Uzbek as a unifying educational standard and ensures that all citizens possess proficiency in the state language. Despite the strong legal status of Uzbek, the rights of ethnic minority groups in Uzbekistan remain protected. The state language law does not prohibit members of different nationalities from using their own languages; instead, it establishes Uzbek as the common language for official communication while preserving linguistic diversity. Government bodies emphasize that adopting Uzbek as the state language does not violate the constitutional rights of minority communities. Altogether, the Uzbek

language holds a central place in state governance, education, media, and various social spheres. Its legal status strengthens national unity and cultural identity, while ongoing reforms aim to modernize and expand its use in line with technological progress and global communication standards. As a result, Uzbek today is not only the historical and cultural backbone of the nation but also a legally protected and actively developed language shaping the future of Uzbekistan's society.

Uzbek national literature emerged over many centuries through the interaction of oral traditions, written culture, historical change, and artistic creativity across the territory that is now Uzbekistan. Its earliest foundations lie in ancient Turkic oral folklore—epic tales, legends, songs, and narrative poetry performed by traditional storytellers (*bakhshis*). These oral works shaped the collective cultural memory of Central Asian peoples and provided the first thematic and stylistic elements that later entered written literature. Over time, as literacy spread and cultural life developed, a more formal written tradition began to grow. From the 9th century onward, important early Turkic works such as *Kutadgu Bilig* by Yusuf Khass Hajib and *Diwan lughat al-Turk* by Mahmud al-Kashgari appeared, establishing the foundations of Turkic literary thought in Central Asia and influencing the cultural heritage of the Uzbek people. These works reflected the spiritual, philosophical, and social values of the era and served as early examples of a developing literary identity.

A major flowering of literature in the region occurred from the 14th century onward, especially under the Timurids, when Central Asia became a vibrant center of intellectual and literary activity. During this period, poets and scholars produced works in Turkic as well as Persian and Arabic, but the Turkic literary language—later known as Chagatai—became particularly influential. This era produced masterpieces that are now considered classical Uzbek literature. Writers such as Alisher Navoiy elevated Chagatai to a sophisticated literary medium, showing that Turkic languages could convey deep artistic and philosophical meaning. As centuries passed, the literary traditions of khanates such as Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand further enriched regional

literary life, each contributing its own stylistic and thematic characteristics. By the second half of the 19th century, the classical literary tradition, which had existed for nearly a millennium, reached its final stage, eventually giving way to new currents shaped by social and political change. At the beginning of the 20th century, the emergence of the Jadid movement marked a turning point. Reformist intellectuals and writers advocated for cultural renewal, educational reform, and modernization. As a result, literature began to explore new themes related to social change, national awakening, and the need for progress. Genres that had been less common in earlier periods—such as modern prose, drama, and politically engaged literature—started to flourish. These shifts reflect the transition from classical poetic forms to modern literary expression, influenced by both internal reformist ideas and global cultural developments. The Soviet period introduced yet another major transformation. On one hand, the rich classical and folkloric heritage of Uzbek literature began to be systematically studied, collected, and published, and institutions dedicated to literary scholarship and philology were established. On the other hand, writers operated within the constraints of Soviet ideology, producing works that often reflected themes of socialist realism, social transformation, industrial development, and collective life. Expanded access to publishing, education, and mass media helped widen the readership and created a literary environment that supported many new authors. Important literary journals, such as *Sharq Yulduzi* (founded in 1932), became platforms for Uzbek poetry, prose, and critical thought. The independence of Uzbekistan in 1991 opened a new era in national literature. Freed from ideological restrictions, writers began to explore themes of national identity, spirituality, historical memory, cultural heritage, and the challenges of modern life. Literature became more diverse, drawing on realism, modernism, symbolism, and experimental styles, while still remaining connected to the country's deep cultural roots. At the same time, efforts to document, preserve, and reinterpret the full history of Uzbek literature have intensified. Scholarly projects—such as the creation of multi-volume histories of Uzbek literature—aim to present a comprehensive account of its evolution from ancient oral traditions to modern artistic

forms. Today, Uzbek national literature stands as a rich, layered tradition shaped by centuries of continuous development. It reflects the experiences, values, and aspirations of the Uzbek people from ancient times to the present. Blending oral heritage, classical brilliance, reformist movements, Soviet-era transformations, and post-independence renewal, it represents one of the most significant cultural achievements of Uzbekistan and continues to evolve as a dynamic expression of national identity and creativity.

Uzbek national literature has been shaped by a number of extraordinary figures whose creative work has left a lasting imprint on the cultural and literary heritage of the nation. Among the most prominent is **Alisher Navoi**, often considered the founder of classical Uzbek literature. Writing in the literary Turkic language known as Chagatai, Navoi demonstrated that Turkic could express the same depth, subtlety, and artistic beauty as Persian or Arabic, thereby elevating the status of Turkic literary culture in Central Asia. His most famous work, the ***Khamisa*** or “Five Treasures,” is a quintet of narrative poems exploring love, morality, justice, spirituality, and human values, and his treatises on poetics, ethics, linguistics, and statecraft further reinforced his role as a central intellectual figure. Navoi’s works established the foundations of Uzbek literary identity and continue to inspire writers and poets today. Another key figure is **Abdulla Qodiriy**, a leading writer of the early 20th century and the founder of modern Uzbek prose. His novel ***O‘tgan kunlar*** (“Bygone Days”), written in 1922, is widely regarded as the first full-length Uzbek novel, while his later work ***Mehrobdan chayon*** (“Scorpion in the Mihrab”) further developed modern Uzbek narrative techniques. Qodiriy’s works focused on social realities, the transformation of Central Asian society, and psychological depth, embedding realism and contemporary themes into Uzbek literature. In addition to novels, he produced plays, satirical stories, and translations of Russian classics, broadening the reach of world literature among Uzbek readers and enriching the literary language. From an earlier classical tradition, **Babarahim Mashrab**, a 17th–18th century Sufi poet, contributed profoundly to the spiritual and lyrical currents of Uzbek literature. His mystical and philosophical poetry

blended folklore, Sufi thought, and poetic expression, preserving cultural memory and conveying moral and spiritual values during periods of political fragmentation. Alongside these central figures, numerous other poets, prose writers, and intellectuals from different eras — including the khanate period, the Jadid reformist movement, and the Soviet and modern eras — have shaped the national literary canon. During the khanate era, cities such as Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand became centers of literary production, producing lyric poets, chroniclers, and historians who documented folk tales, genealogies, and cultural traditions. The Jadid reformists of the early 20th century introduced educational and social themes, modernization, and literary experimentation, creating a bridge between classical literature and the emerging modern prose and drama of Uzbekistan. In the Soviet period, literature underwent further transformation: classical and folk traditions were systematically studied and published, while writers also incorporated socialist themes, realism, and social critique into their works. Literary journals such as *Sharq Yulduzi*, founded in 1932, became platforms for poetry, prose, and critical thought, fostering new generations of Uzbek writers. Following Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, literature experienced renewed freedom, allowing writers to explore national identity, historical memory, cultural heritage, and contemporary life through diverse genres and narrative styles. Today, Uzbek literature represents a continuous and evolving tradition: the classical masters established linguistic, poetic, and moral foundations; modern writers introduced realism, narrative innovation, and social critique; and contemporary authors continue to engage with both tradition and modernity. Collectively, these literary figures have ensured that Uzbek literature is a living, dynamic expression of the nation's identity, values, and historical experience, bridging centuries of creative achievement with ongoing cultural relevance.

In conclusion, the Uzbek language and national literature together form the enduring backbone of Uzbekistan's cultural identity, historical consciousness, and artistic heritage. The language, rooted in ancient Turkic traditions and shaped through centuries of social, political, and cultural evolution, has developed into a vibrant and

living medium, serving not only as a tool of everyday communication but also as a symbol of national unity, identity, and pride. Its legal and social status today reflects the recognition of its central role in governance, education, media, and public life, ensuring that every generation remains connected to its linguistic and cultural roots. Similarly, Uzbek national literature represents a rich continuum of human thought, creativity, and expression, spanning from oral folklore and classical poetic masterpieces to modern prose and contemporary literary experimentation. The works of classical masters such as Alisher Navoi elevated the Turkic language to the level of high literary and philosophical discourse, while mystical poets like Babarrahim Mashrab infused literature with spiritual depth and moral reflection. In the modern era, writers like Abdulla Qodiriy and others bridged tradition and modernity, introducing realism, social critique, and new narrative forms that reflected the challenges and transformations of Uzbek society. Together, these literary contributions form a living cultural archive, preserving the history, values, and intellectual spirit of the Uzbek people. Today, both language and literature continue to evolve, balancing the preservation of classical heritage with the demands of contemporary society. They are not merely relics of the past, but dynamic forces that inspire creativity, foster national consciousness, and promote cultural dialogue in a rapidly changing world. The enduring legacy of the Uzbek language and its literature demonstrates the resilience, depth, and richness of the nation's identity, offering inspiration and guidance to future generations while honoring centuries of artistic achievement. Ultimately, they stand as a testament to the Uzbek people's ability to preserve their heritage, celebrate their cultural uniqueness, and continue to contribute meaningfully to the broader human literary and linguistic tradition.

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