

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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Annotation: This article discusses recent reforms in Uzbekistan and their influence on the development of **language and literature**. It explains how new educational programs, modern literary museums, and improved research centers support the study of the Uzbek language and honor the country's great writers. The article also highlights efforts to preserve classical manuscripts, promote translation projects, and strengthen linguistic research. Overall, it shows how current reforms help Uzbekistan protect its literary heritage while encouraging modern growth and cultural development.

Key words: Uzbek language; Literary heritage; Reforms; Classical manuscripts; Modern literature; Translation projects; Cultural development; Linguistic research; Educational programs; Writers and poets; National identity; Cultural preservation; Literary museums; Language promotion; Literature studies

Introduction

Language and literature hold a special place in the cultural development of Uzbekistan. The Uzbek language, with its long historical roots, serves as an important symbol of national identity, while the country's rich literary heritage reflects the wisdom and creativity of generations. In recent years, various reforms have supported the preservation of classical works, the modernization of literary studies, and the promotion of the Uzbek language in education and society. These efforts help strengthen cultural values, connect tradition with modern development, and highlight Uzbekistan's growing role in the global cultural community.

The Official Language of Uzbekistan

The official language of the Republic of Uzbekistan is **Uzbek**, a key element of the nation's cultural heritage and identity. Uzbek was formally granted its state language status with the adoption of the Law "On the State Language of the Republic of Uzbekistan" on October 21, 1989. This status was later reaffirmed in the Constitution of 1992, highlighting the language's importance in the political, social, and cultural life of the country. Linguistically, Uzbek belongs to the **Turkic language**

family, specifically the **Karluk branch**. Throughout its development, the Uzbek language has shared many historical and structural features with other Turkic languages such as Uyghur, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz. These similarities reflect centuries of cultural interaction among Central Asian peoples, as well as a common linguistic foundation rooted in Turkic traditions. A notable characteristic of the Uzbek language is the evolution of its **writing systems**. For many centuries, Uzbek was written in the **Arabic script**, which significantly influenced classical literature and scholarly works. During the 1920s, a transition to the **Latin alphabet** was introduced as part of broader cultural reforms. In 1940, the writing system was replaced again, this time with the **Cyrillic script**, which remained in official use throughout the Soviet period. After gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan moved toward adopting a **modern Latin alphabet**, officially introduced in 1993. Although the Latin script is now legally recognized, Cyrillic continues to be widely used in everyday communication, publishing, and digital platforms. Beyond its legal and linguistic status, Uzbek holds great **cultural significance**. It functions as the primary language of state administration, education, science, media, and modern literature. The language serves as a unifying force for the diverse population of Uzbekistan, strengthening national consciousness and linking present-day society with the region's historical legacy. Through schools, universities, cultural institutions, and literary traditions, the Uzbek language plays an essential role in shaping the country's intellectual and cultural life.

The Stages of the Uzbek Language

The Uzbek language, one of the oldest members of the Turkic language family, has developed through several significant historical and linguistic stages. Its evolution reflects the cultural history of Central Asia and the deep roots of Turkic civilization. The earliest stage, known as the **Ancient Turkic Period (6th–10th centuries)**, is represented by Old Turkic, written first in the Orkhon–Yenisey runic script and later in the Arabic script following the spread of Islam. During this era, the language showed strong agglutinative features, a vocabulary dominated by Turkic roots, and early forms of vowel harmony. Important sources from this period include the Orkhon inscriptions of the 8th century and Mahmud al-Kashgari's *Divanu Lug'at at-Turk* from the 11th century. The next stage, the **Karakhanid or Old Uyghur Period (10th–13th centuries)**, began with the rise of the Karakhanid state. A literary language based on Karluk–Uyghur dialects emerged, forming the foundations of modern Uzbek. Major works such as Yusuf Balasaguni's *Kutadgu Bilig* and Ahmad Yugnaki's *Hibat al-Haqāyiq* reflect the intellectual achievements of this era. The most celebrated phase of Uzbek linguistic history is the **Chagatai Period (14th–19th centuries)**, often referred to as the Old Uzbek literary period. Chagatai Turkic became the leading literary language of Central Asia, comparable in prestige to Persian. Its greatest representative, Alisher Navoi, raised the language to remarkable heights through masterpieces like

Khamisa and *Muhokamat al-Lughatayn*. Other notable writers, including Babur, Mashrab, Munis, and Ogahiy, enriched Chagatai literature with historical, poetic, and philosophical works. This language was known for its rich vocabulary, influenced by Persian and Arabic, and served as a unifying written medium for various Turkic peoples. The **Transitional Period (late 19th – early 20th centuries)** marked the decline of classical Chagatai and the rise of modern Uzbek under new social and political conditions. Influenced by Russian colonial rule and the reformist Jadid movement, the language began shifting toward spoken Uzbek dialects, especially those of Tashkent, Fergana, and Samarkand. Writers such as Abdulla Qodiriy, Cho'lpon, and Fitrat played a key role in introducing the early forms of modern Uzbek in literature. During the **Soviet Period (1924–1991)**, Uzbek was declared a national language of the Uzbek SSR. Major alphabet reforms took place: from Arabic to Latin in 1929, and from Latin to Cyrillic in 1940. The language experienced strong Russian influence, especially in scientific and administrative terminology, while the modern standard was codified mainly on the Tashkent dialect. This period strengthened the development of a unified literary standard taught in schools and used in media. The final stage, the **Independence Period (1991–present)**, began with Uzbekistan proclaiming Uzbek as its state language. A new Latin-based alphabet was introduced in 1993, initiating a long transition from Cyrillic to Latin script. Modern Uzbek continues to evolve through the addition of international terminology, efforts to revive Turkic roots, and its expanding use in digital communication, education, science, and global cultural dialogue.

Overall, the history of the Uzbek language can be summarized in six main stages: the Old Turkic period, the Karakhanid/Old Uyghur period, the Chagatai golden age, the transitional Jadid era, the Soviet period, and the era of independence. Each stage contributed to shaping Uzbek into the rich, dynamic, and culturally significant language it is today.

Uzbek Literature and Its Historical Stages

Uzbek literature has developed over many centuries and reflects the spiritual, cultural, and intellectual heritage of the Uzbek people. Its evolution can be traced through several important historical stages, each contributing to the richness of today's literary tradition. The earliest roots of Uzbek literature lie in the **Early Turkic and pre-Islamic period (6th–9th centuries)**, when oral traditions, epic legends, and folklore shaped the worldview of Turkic tribes. Although not specifically “Uzbek,” the Orkhon–Yenisey inscriptions from the 8th century are recognized as the earliest written monuments of the Turkic world and form the foundation of later literary development. With the spread of Islam, Uzbek literature entered the **Islamic Golden Age and Classical Period (9th–15th centuries)**, marked by strong Persian and Arabic influence. Writers such as Mahmud al-Kashgari, author of *Divanu Lug'at at-Turk*, and

Yusuf Balasaguni, who wrote the didactic epic *Kutadgu Bilig*, played a major role in recording and shaping Turkic literary culture. Sufi poets like Ahmad Yassawi enriched this era with deeply spiritual and philosophical works, blending religious themes with poetic expression. The **Timurid Renaissance (14th–15th centuries)** represents one of the brightest periods in the history of Uzbek literature. Under the cultural leadership of Timur and Ulugh Beg, Central Asia experienced a remarkable flourishing of science and the arts. The greatest figure of this era was Alisher Navoi, celebrated as the “Father of Uzbek literature.” His masterpieces, including the *Khamasa* and *Muhokamat al-Lughatayn*, elevated the Chagatai language—often called Old Uzbek—to a highly respected literary language on par with Persian. In the **Post-Navoi and Khanate period (16th–19th centuries)**, the Chagatai literary tradition continued across various khanates of Central Asia. Poets such as Mashrab, Ogahiy, Munis Khorezmi, and Uvaisiy produced works that explored moral, philosophical, and national themes. Their poetry preserved and expanded the artistic legacy of earlier centuries. A major transformation began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the rise of **Jadidism and the National Awakening**. This movement introduced modern educational ideas, national awareness, and new literary genres. Writers like Abdulla Qodiriy, Cho‘lpon, and Fitrat used literature to promote enlightenment, cultural renewal, and resistance to colonial oppression. Their works marked the early stages of modern Uzbek literature. During the **Soviet period (1920s–1991)**, Uzbek literature underwent major changes under the influence of socialist realism and ideological restrictions. Even with censorship, authors such as G‘afur G‘ulom, Oybek, Abdulla Qahhor, and Hamid Olimjon created novels, poems, and dramas that blended national themes with the demands of the Soviet era. This period also brought the development of new literary genres and expanded opportunities for publishing. With the emergence of independent Uzbekistan in 1991, Uzbek literature entered a new stage of growth and renewal. The **Independence period (1991–present)** is characterized by creative freedom, rediscovery of national identity, and exploration of modern global issues. Contemporary writers and poets—including Erkin Vohidov, Abdulla Oripov, Muhammad Yusuf, and many new authors—continue to shape modern Uzbek prose and poetry, contributing to the dynamic cultural landscape of today’s Uzbekistan.

The Development of Uzbek Literature

Uzbek literature has a long and rich history that reflects the cultural, spiritual, and intellectual life of the Uzbek people. Emerging from ancient Turkic traditions, it developed through several important historical stages and produced some of the most influential poets and thinkers of the Islamic world and Central Asia. Classical Uzbek literature is strongly shaped by the works of great scholars such as **Alisher Navoi**, whose contributions laid the foundation for the Chagatai literary language, the predecessor of modern Uzbek. During the medieval period, Uzbek literature flourished

in major cultural centers such as **Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva**, where poets, historians, and philosophers produced works that enriched the spiritual and intellectual life of society. These works often explored themes of love, justice, morality, human dignity, and the relationship between the individual and the divine. Writers like **Babur, Ogahiy, Mashrab, and Furqat** continued to expand the literary tradition with poetry, memoirs, and philosophical reflections. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Uzbek literature entered a period of renewal as the Jadid movement promoted educational reform and modern thinking. Writers such as **Abdulla Avloni, Mahmudhoja Behbudi, and Fitrat** used literature as a tool to awaken national consciousness and improve society. During the Soviet period, literature continued to evolve, producing new genres such as novels, plays, and short stories. Authors like **Abdulla Qahhor, Oybek, Said Ahmad, and Pirmqul Qodirov** played an important role in shaping modern Uzbek prose. After independence in 1991, Uzbek literature entered a new era characterized by a revival of national values, interest in historical themes, and a renewed focus on freedom, identity, and spirituality. Contemporary writers explore a wide range of topics, from social issues and modern psychology to philosophical questions and national heritage. Today, Uzbek literature continues to expand globally through translation projects, international book fairs, and collaboration with foreign publishers.

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