



## ORAL STORYTELLING AND FOLKLORES AS PRECURSORS TO WRITTEN LITERATURE IN THE REGION

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### Introduction

Modernistic manifestations in Uzbek literature can be seen as a response to the changing social, cultural, and political landscape of Uzbekistan during the 20th century. The Modernist movement in Uzbek literature was influenced by broader global literary trends and sought to break away from traditional forms and themes.

One key figure in Uzbek Modernist literature is Nazar Eshonqul, whose works often explored themes of individualism, alienation, and the search for identity in a rapidly changing society. This modernist use of innovative narrative techniques and experimental styles marked a departure from the more traditional forms of Uzbek literature.



## Main body

Oral storytelling and folklore have been significant in shaping the literary traditions not only within Uzbekistan but also across Central Asia. Before the written word, oral storytelling served as the primary conduit for passing down cultural and historical knowledge through generations. In Uzbekistan, a prominent form of oral storytelling is the "epics," epic tales recounted by skilled storytellers called "bakhshi." These epics weave together historical events with mythological aspects and heroic feats, often featuring iconic figures like Amir Temur (Tamerlane) and Alpamysh. "Symbolism and allegory are intricately woven into these tales, enriching the storytelling tradition. Folklore, including myths, legends, fairy tales, and proverbs, has played a fundamental role in shaping the literary landscape of the region"<sup>1</sup>. These oral narratives reflect the cultural values, beliefs, and traditions of the Uzbek people, passed down through generations. Elements from folklore continue to serve as a well of inspiration for contemporary Uzbek writers, infusing their works with creativity and cultural richness. The shift from oral to written literary traditions in Uzbekistan began in the early 20th century during the Soviet era's modernization endeavors.

Writers such as Abdulla Qahhar, G‘afur G‘ulom, and Hamza Hakimzade Niyazi drew on oral traditions and folklore to craft works that both honored Uzbekistan's cultural heritage and engaged with contemporary social and political contexts. The coexistence of oral and written traditions has led to a complex interaction between the two forms of literature. Despite the impact of writing on oral traditions, both mediums persist in many societies, each offering distinctive qualities and influences on literary expression. Appreciating the diverse forms of literary expression across culture and historical epochs necessitates understanding the differences between oral and written literature. Oral literature centers on traditional storytelling transmitted orally, while written literature

<sup>1</sup> <https://theuzbekmodernist.com/>



comprises works documented and shared through written texts. Folklore and oral literature share a bond through their emphasis on orally transmitted cultural traditions, although they differ in their scopes and focuses within the broader realm of literature and storytelling. Traditional themes and styles in Uzbek literature, deeply entrenched in the cultural and historical legacy of the region, mirror the distinct values and characteristics of the Uzbek populace. Here are some primary traditional themes and styles prevalent in Uzbek literature. Firstly, Heroism and Valor, “Uzbek literature reveres heroism and courage, often portraying revered figures like Amir Temur (Tamerlane) and Alpamysh as embodiments of strength, bravery, and noble virtues. These legendary characters symbolize resilience and valor in the face of adversity. In Love and Romance:Uzbek literary works prominently feature themes of love and romance, showcasing tales of fervent relationships, loyalty, and dedication. Whether tragic or triumphant, these love stories delve into the intricate realms of human emotions and relationships. Nature and Landscapes are Uzbek literature skillfully weaves descriptions of nature and landscapes to establish settings and evoke a sense of place. The vivid depictions of landscapes such as the expansive steppes, mountains, and deserts of Central Asia enhance the storytelling with depth and richness. Next one is Cultural Traditions and Customs Traditional customs, rituals, and cultural practices are integral elements in Uzbek literature, offering insights into the social norms, values, and traditions of the Uzbek community”<sup>2</sup>. These aspects provide a glimpse into the daily lives and heritage of the people. In Spirituality and Mysticism, Uzbek literary works often explore themes of spirituality, mysticism, and philosophical contemplations on life and existence. Symbolism, allegory, and metaphysical elements are employed to delve into profound meanings and transcendental experiences. And then, Historical Narratives, Uzbek literature frequently draws on historical events, prominent figures, and chronicles to portray the region's rich history, encompassing the struggles and triumphs of its inhabitants. By intertwining historical realities with imaginative storytelling, Uzbek literature breathes life

<sup>2</sup> Uzbek literature". Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved. 2021 pp 12-11.



into the past. Folklore and Mythology are important parts of this. The incorporation of folklore and mythology is a fundamental aspect of Uzbek literary traditions, enriching narratives with fantastical elements, supernatural beings, and moral teachings. These folk tales and myths serve as a cultural foundation, linking contemporary literature to ancient wisdom. In social Critique and Realism alongside traditional themes, Uzbek literature engages with social critique and realism, addressing contemporary issues, societal injustices, and political realities. Through authentic portrayals of society, writers tackle the complexities of modern life.

In essence, the diverse range of themes and styles in Uzbek literature showcases the complexity of the Uzbek cultural landscape, blending historical traditions with contemporary issues to offer a vibrant tapestry of storytelling that resonates with audiences both locally and globally. Oral storytelling and folklore have played a significant role in shaping the literary traditions of Uzbekistan and Central Asia as a whole. Before the advent of written literature, oral storytelling was the primary means of transmitting cultural and historical knowledge from generation to generation. One of the most well-known forms of oral storytelling in Uzbekistan is the tradition of "epics," which are epic tales often recited by professional storytellers known as "bakhshi." These epics are typically long, complex narratives that blend historical events with mythological elements and heroic deeds. They often feature legendary figures such as Amir Temur (Tamerlane) and Alpamysh, and are rich in symbolism and allegory. Folklore, including myths, legends, fairy tales, and proverbs, also played a crucial role in shaping the literary imagination of the region. These stories were passed down orally through generations and reflected the cultural values, beliefs, and traditions of the Uzbek people.

Folklore motifs and themes continue to influence contemporary Uzbek literature, providing a rich source of inspiration for writers. The transition from oral storytelling to written literature in Uzbekistan began in the early 20th century with the modernization



efforts of the Soviet era. Writers such as Abdulla Qahhar, G‘afur G‘ulom, and Hamza Hakimzade Niyazi drew on oral traditions and folklore to create works that reflected the unique cultural heritage of Uzbekistan while also engaging with contemporary social and political issues. Overall, oral storytelling and folklore have served as important precursors to written literature in Uzbekistan, providing a foundation for the development of a rich and diverse literary tradition that continues to evolve and thrive in the present day. The distinction between oral literature and written literature is essential in understanding the diverse forms of literary expression found in different societies. Oral literature encompasses the traditional forms of storytelling, poetry, songs, and myths that are passed down orally from generation to generation in societies without a writing system or among those who do not use writing extensively.

In contrast, written literature refers to literary works that are recorded and transmitted through written texts. The introduction of writing has had a significant impact on oral traditions, as it has influenced the way stories are told, preserved, and shared. Written literature often reflects the conventions and structures of written language, which can differ from the oral traditions that preceded them. The coexistence of oral and written traditions in many societies has led to a complex interplay between the two forms of literature. While oral literature may continue to exist alongside written literature, it is important to recognize the distinct characteristics of each and how they interact and influence one another. Scholars have proposed alternative terms such as "standardized oral forms" or "oral genres" to describe the traditions of oral storytelling more accurately. However, the term "oral literature" remains widely used, despite its potential limitations in capturing the richness and complexity of oral traditions and their relationship to written literature. Understanding the differences between oral and written literature is crucial for appreciating the diversity of literary expression across cultures and time periods. The relationship between folklore and oral literature lies in their shared emphasis on traditional forms of expression that are



transmitted orally. Folklore encompasses a wide range of traditional stories, customs, beliefs, and practices that are passed down through generations within a community.

On the other hand, oral literature specifically refers to the storytelling, songs, and poems that are recited and shared verbally from one generation to the next. While both folklore and oral literature involve the oral transmission of cultural knowledge and traditions, they differ in their scope and focus. Folklore encompasses a broader range of cultural expressions beyond just literary works, including rituals, customs, and beliefs. In contrast, oral literature is more focused on the literary aspects of oral tradition, such as storytelling and poetry. Overall, folklore and oral literature are interconnected through their shared reliance on oral transmission as a means of preserving and passing down cultural heritage. They both play a crucial role in maintaining and transmitting cultural values, beliefs, and narratives within a community. Oral literature is more important than written literature, according to literary and modernists, for several reasons. In the preservation of cultural heritage, oral literature serves as a repository of cultural knowledge, traditions and values that may not be preserved in written form. Oral literature helps maintain a connection with a community's cultural roots and history by preserving and orally transmitting these stories, songs, and poems. In accessibility and Inclusivity oral literature is often more accessible to a wider audience, as it does not require literacy or access to written materials. This accessibility allows oral literature to reach individuals who may not have the ability to read or write, making it an inclusive form of cultural expression. Additionally, in dynamic and Evolving Nature: Oral literature is dynamic and adaptable, allowing for variations and improvisations in storytelling and performance. This flexibility enables oral literature to evolve over time and adapt to changing social contexts, ensuring its relevance and resonance with contemporary audiences. In inspiration for Written Works: Many written literary works draw inspiration from oral traditions and folklore. Writers often incorporate elements of oral literature, such as myths, legends, and folktales, into their



written works to enrich their narratives and connect with readers on a deeper level. In cultural Exchange and Dialogue: Oral literature fosters cultural exchange and dialogue by sharing stories, songs, and poems across communities and generations. Through oral storytelling, different cultures can interact, exchange ideas, and learn from each other's traditions, promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

In summary, oral literature plays a vital role in preserving cultural heritage, promoting inclusivity, inspiring written works, fostering cultural exchange, and maintaining a dynamic connection to tradition. Its importance lies in its ability to enrich and enhance the world of written literature by providing a rich source of inspiration, creativity, and cultural diversity. When it comes to the relationship between folklore and oral literature, there are similarities and similarities between them. "Folklore and oral literature are closely related as both involve the transmission of cultural knowledge, traditions, and stories through oral communication"<sup>3</sup>. Folklore often includes a wide range of elements such as myths, legends, fairy tales, proverbs, rituals, and customs that are passed down orally within a community.

Oral literature, on the other hand, specifically refers to the literary works that are orally shared and preserved, including folk tales, epic poems, ballads, and songs. In essence, oral literature is a key component of folklore, as it represents the creative expression and artistic traditions of a culture that are transmitted through spoken word rather than written text. Both folklore and oral literature serve as important vehicles for preserving and sharing the cultural heritage and values of a community, reflecting its beliefs, history, and identity. The impact of modernistic influences on Uzbek literature has been profound, reshaping the essence and articulation of contemporary literary creations in significant manners. These modern trends have introduced a fresh vitality and range to Uzbek literature, fostering inventive experimentation, creativity, and a redefinition of literary frontiers.

## Conclusion

<sup>3</sup> Moroxin V.N. " the tiniest janres of the Russia"p.78-87



Oral literature focuses on verbally transmitted storytelling, while written literature comprises works documented and shared through written texts. Although folklore and oral literature share an emphasis on orally transmitted cultural traditions, they diverge in their scopes and emphases within the broader landscape of literature and storytelling. The oral storytelling and folklore traditions have been instrumental in shaping the literary heritage of Uzbekistan and Central Asia, acting as crucial mediums for the transmission of cultural and historical knowledge before the widespread use of written language. In Uzbekistan, skilled storytellers known as "bakhshi" intricately narrated epic tales called "dastans," blending historical facts with mythical elements and heroism, often featuring famous figures like Amir Temur (Tamerlane) and Alpamysh. Symbolism and allegory were skillfully incorporated into these narratives, enriching the storytelling tradition with depth and complexity. Folklore, encompassing myths, legends, fairy tales, and proverbs, has significantly influenced the literary landscape of the region by reflecting the cultural values, beliefs, and traditions of the Uzbek people.

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