

TRACES OF MULTICULTURALISM AND LANGUAGE IN UZBEK LITERATURE

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Abstract. *The concept of multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of diverse cultures, their mutual enrichment, and the promotion of a tolerant environment. The literary heritage of Turkic peoples, particularly Uzbek literature, serves as a rich source in this regard. Over the centuries, Uzbek literature has developed under the influence of Turkic, Persian, Arabic, and other cultures, evolving along a multifaceted trajectory. Within this literature, the languages, folklore, and religious-philosophical worldviews of different peoples are reflected.*

Multicultural influences are clearly visible in medieval Uzbek literature. In particular, the works of **Alisher Navoi** combine Turkic, Persian, and Arabic literary traditions. His *Khamsa* embodies the multicultural values of not only Uzbek literature but the entire Eastern literary tradition (Navoi, 1991). While Navoi advocated for the recognition of Turkic as a state and scholarly language, he also drew on classical Persian and Arabic literature, demonstrating the synthesis of cultures.

Uzbek folklore similarly contains motifs from various peoples. For instance, the epic *Alpamysh* belongs to the shared epic heritage of Turkic peoples, while also reflecting influences from Iranian and Indian epic traditions (Karimov, 2005). This illustrates how multicultural elements have been integrated into collective memory.

In the early 20th century, representatives of the Jadid movement—such as **Mahmudkhoja Behbudi**, **Abdurauf Fitrat**, and **Abdulla Qodiriy**—sought to harmonize national ideals with global thinking by incorporating European literary influences into their works. In contemporary Uzbek literature, multicultural ideas remain significant. In works written during the independence period, the unity of the Turkic world, the universal values of Islamic culture, and dialogue with Western culture are especially emphasized. Uzbek writers express the multicultural traditions embedded in the nation's historical memory through new literary genres (Turdiev, 2018). Fitrat's *Munozara* is an exemplary illustration of East-West cultural dialogue (Fitrat, 1911/1993). Abdulla Qodiriy's novel *O'tkan kunlar* provides a literary representation of multicultural values and the relationships among diverse religious and ethnic groups (Qodiriy, 1926/2009).

Abdulla Qodiriy (1894–1938) is considered one of the founders of the realist novel in Uzbek literature. His novel *O'tkan kunlar* (1926) not only explores love and socio-political relations but also reflects the multicultural environment of Central Asian society in the late 19th century. Various social strata, religious, and ethnic groups' interactions are depicted, highlighting multicultural values.

The novel is set in the second half of the 19th century in Central Asia, primarily in the cities of Marg'ilon and Bukhara. The main characters are O'tabek and Kumush. O'tabek is an enlightened, reform-minded young man engaged in trade and interested

in Russian culture, reading newspapers and books. His father, Yusufbek Hoji, wishes him to marry into a reputable family. By chance, O‘tabek meets the intelligent and beautiful Kumush and falls in love with her. Kumush reciprocates his love. However, several obstacles hinder their relationship:

1. Kumush’s family initially opposes the marriage.
2. Ignorance in society and restrictions on women’s freedom obstruct their happiness.

Ultimately, after many hardships, O‘tabek marries Kumush. One of the main antagonists, Homid, driven by greed for Kumush, spreads lies and creates discord. Additionally, O‘tabek is forced by his father to marry another woman, Zaynab, resulting in jealousy and conflict between Zaynab and Kumush. Zaynab’s schemes lead to Kumush’s poisoning and death. Kumush’s death is a profound tragedy for O‘tabek, who loses his zest for life and is shaken by the contradictions of his society.

The main ideas of the novel can be summarized as follows:
a) Criticism of feudal relations, women’s restricted rights, and ignorance in Uzbek society.

b) The love of O‘tabek and Kumush symbolizes the struggle for freedom and equality.

c) The novel reflects both traditional national values and openness to Western innovations, giving it a multicultural significance.

The events occur in a complex multicultural environment, where Uzbeks, Tajiks, Tatars, Russians, and other peoples coexist. Qodiriy conveys the coexistence of multiple languages, customs, and religious-philosophical views to the reader. For instance, language and communication are emphasized: characters speak not only in Uzbek but also incorporate Persian and Arabic words, reflecting the multilingual and multicultural milieu:

“In every word of Yusufbek Hoji’s son, Arabic and Persian words were interspersed, indicating his madrasa education” (Qodiriy, 1926/2009, p. 57).

Multicultural elements also appear in characters’ lifestyles and daily behavior. O‘tabek, open to Western modernism while remaining faithful to national-Islamic values, embodies the intercultural dialogue of the era:

“O‘tabek read newspapers printed in Petersburg and marveled at the news” (Qodiriy, 1926/2009, p. 102).

Religious diversity and tolerance play a key role. Alongside Muslim community practices, the novel portrays Christian missionary activities and Russian administrative religious influences. Qodiriy presents these interactions objectively and realistically, emphasizing mutual influence rather than conflict, expressing religious tolerance as a multicultural value.

The fates of female characters are also linked to multicultural perspectives. Kumush represents the traditional Uzbek woman, yet her struggle for freedom and love resonates with Western feminism, providing a universal (multicultural) message regarding women’s rights:

“Kumush’s love was a struggle for her own freedom” (Qodiriy, 1926/2009, p. 211). The concept of multiculturalism encompasses the coexistence of diverse cultures, their mutual enrichment, and the promotion of tolerance. The literary heritage of Turkic peoples, particularly Uzbek literature, provides a rich field for studying these phenomena. Over centuries, Uzbek literature has evolved under the influence of Turkic,

Persian, Arabic, and other cultures, resulting in a complex and multifaceted literary tradition. This literature reflects not only diverse cultural, religious, and philosophical ideas but also the multilingual environment in which it developed.

Multicultural influences are particularly visible in medieval Uzbek literature. For example, **Alisher Navoi**'s works integrate Turkic, Persian, and Arabic literary traditions. His *Khamsa* exemplifies the multicultural values of both Uzbek and broader Eastern literature (Navoi, 1991). While advocating for the recognition of Turkic as a language of governance and scholarship, Navoi simultaneously drew from Persian and Arabic classics, reflecting cultural synthesis.

Language plays a central role in expressing multiculturalism in Uzbek literature. In folk epics like *Alpamysh*, we see the integration of oral motifs from various Turkic peoples, alongside traces of Persian and Indian epic traditions (Karimov, 2005). Language in these works does not simply convey narrative; it reflects the interweaving of cultural and religious identities. In both medieval and modern Uzbek texts, the coexistence of multiple languages—Uzbek, Persian, Arabic, and later Russian—illustrates the historical multilingual reality of Central Asia.

In the early 20th century, Jadid writers such as Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, Abdurauf Fitrat, and Abdulla Qodiriy incorporated European literary influences, harmonizing national ideals with global perspectives. Language served as a key tool for this intercultural dialogue, with authors alternating between classical Turkic, Persian, Arabic, and modern European-influenced Uzbek. Contemporary Uzbek literature continues this trend, emphasizing Turkic unity, the universal values of Islam, and dialogue with Western culture (Turdiev, 2018).

Abdulla Qodiriy's novel *O'tkan kunlar* (1926) provides a detailed depiction of 19th-century Central Asian society's multicultural and multilingual environment. The novel's characters communicate in Uzbek while incorporating Persian and Arabic words, highlighting a socially and culturally multilingual milieu:

"In every word of Yusufbek Hoji's son, Arabic and Persian words were interspersed, indicating his madrasa education" (Qodiriy, 1926/2009, p. 57).

The main characters, O'tabek and Kumush, navigate personal and social challenges shaped by cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity. O'tabek's openness to Western ideas and literature, alongside loyalty to national-Islamic values, exemplifies cultural and linguistic hybridity:

"O'tabek read newspapers printed in Petersburg and marveled at the news" (Qodiriy, 1926/2009, p. 102).

The novel also addresses issues of language in public and private life, demonstrating how multilingualism intersects with social hierarchy, education, and intercultural contact. Language, in this sense, becomes a marker of social mobility, intellectual openness, and cultural tolerance.

Religious and ethnic diversity further reinforces the multicultural dimension of the text. Muslim practices coexist with Christian missionary influences and Russian administrative structures, which Qodiriy portrays realistically, emphasizing interaction rather than conflict. Female characters like Kumush embody both traditional Uzbek identity and Western-inspired notions of freedom and rights, contributing to a universal multicultural message:

“Kumush’s love was a struggle for her own freedom” (Qodiriy, 1926/2009, p. 211).

Conclusion

Uzbek literature is a rich source for the idea of multiculturalism. From Alisher Navoi to the contemporary period, it has developed at the intersection of various cultures, languages, religions, and philosophies. This tradition enriches not only the Uzbek nation but also the shared cultural heritage of Turkic peoples. Abdulla Qodiriy, in *O‘tkan kunlar*, presents a literary depiction of 19th-century Central Asian society’s multicultural character. The novel emphasizes linguistic diversity, religious tolerance, East-West dialogue, women’s rights, and intercultural interaction, making it universally significant for Uzbek, Turkic, and world literature.

Uzbek literature, from **Alisher Navoi** to the contemporary period, has developed at the intersection of multiple cultures, languages, and philosophies. Language serves as both a medium and a marker of multicultural identity. Abdulla Qodiriy’s *O‘tkan kunlar* illustrates the multilingual, multicultural, and tolerant nature of 19th-century Central Asian society, emphasizing linguistic diversity, intercultural dialogue, religious tolerance, and women’s rights. This makes the work universally significant not only for Uzbek literature but for Turkic and world literature as well.

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