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ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION OF FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND NATIONAL MENTALITY IN UZBEK PROSE

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Abstract

This article examines the artistic interpretation of family environment and national mentality in Uzbek prose through the works of Said Ahmad and O‘tkir Hoshimov. Particular attention is paid to the role of family relationships, ethnographic details, and social statuses in shaping national character. The study analyzes such artistic details as the cradle, basil, clay oven, quilt, and the social image of the sister-in-law as symbolic representations of Uzbek cultural values and worldview. Using literary-psychological and comparative methods, the article demonstrates that family concepts and domestic objects function not merely as descriptive elements but as psychological mechanisms revealing hospitality, modesty, loyalty, and self-sacrifice. The findings show that national mentality is reflected through the interaction of characters with their social and cultural environment, while artistic details serve as important means of expressing ethnic identity and collective memory in Uzbek prose.

Keywords: Uzbek prose, national mentality, family discourse, national character, artistic detail, cultural identity, Said Ahmad, O‘tkir Hoshimov.

One of the most significant aspects of artistic mastery is that national elements serve as the fundamental basis for revealing a character’s psychology. Any literary character first emerges as a representative of a particular family structure. From this perspective, the character’s inner world is largely shaped by the familial gene pool and psychological determinants inherited from ancestors. Consequently, the formation of an individual’s character is inseparably connected with the mental traits characteristic of the family, neighborhood, and region to which they belong.

The study of national character in literary works requires not only an examination of a character’s actions but also an understanding of the evolutionary development of the universal and national traditions underlying those actions. One of the primary tasks facing contemporary literary scholarship is to provide a theoretical explanation of the mechanisms through which traditions emerge in literary texts and to determine their role in the modern literary process.

In O‘tkir Hoshimov’s short story *Umr Savdosi* (“The Bargain of Life”), individuals who do not sufficiently embody the characteristics of national identity and fail to observe traditional customs are analyzed from the perspective of the national worldview, thereby revealing their social and spiritual positions conceptually. Poshsha Khola evaluates a prospective bride based on whether the girl’s family observes Uzbek customs and traditions. This serves as one of the most important depictions demonstrating the role of national values within family relationships.

The institution of matchmaking (*sovchilik*) is among the oldest and most significant traditions of the Uzbek people. While in some cultures marriage may begin with bride kidnapping or a period of cohabitation before formalizing a family union, Uzbek tradition requires representatives from the groom’s side to visit the bride’s family and formally request her hand in marriage from her elders. If both families approve, the young couple is given an opportunity to become acquainted, after which a series of customary procedures precedes marriage.

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Matchmaking itself is governed by established rules. Traditionally, experienced and eloquent elderly women serve as matchmakers. Another common custom is to visit the prospective bride's family early in the morning to assess the household's orderliness and way of life. In the story, Poshsha Khola follows this custom by inspecting the future bride's home at dawn. According to traditional Uzbek expectations, a household with a marriageable daughter should be clean and orderly, adorned with flowers and basil, while the courtyard and surrounding streets should already have been swept and watered before sunrise. Failure to meet these expectations may negatively affect public perceptions of the daughter and her family.

According to the research of Guli Ergasheva, who defended a doctoral dissertation on gender equality in the United States, "In the USA, a woman is primarily viewed as a mother, spouse, or sister; the concept of a daughter-in-law as a distinct social status does not exist."

In literary works, the concept of the individual is interpreted in close connection with their national and social environment. In Uzbek prose, family relations function not merely as a domestic background but as a central artistic device that shapes a character's psychology.

The role of material details such as the cradle (*belanchak*), clay oven (*tandir*), and quilted mattress (*ko'rpacha*), as well as social statuses such as sister-in-law (*yanga*) and daughter-in-law (*kelin*), is particularly significant in the formation of national character, as illustrated in Said Ahmad's *Alla* ("Lullaby") and O'tkir Hoshimov's *Yanga* ("Sister-in-Law").

The cradle symbolizes family continuity and spiritual responsibility. In Said Ahmad's *Alla*, the cradle functions as the central artistic detail, embodying the Uzbek people's attitude toward children and the fundamental life philosophy expressed in the proverb, "A house with children is like a marketplace." The writer depicts the scene as follows:

"A cradle hung from the ceiling… Its shadow gently swayed across the curtain while a woman's soft lullaby could be heard."

The suspended cradle represents a typical ethnographic feature of an Uzbek household. Its rhythmic movement and shadow create an atmosphere of domestic peace and stability. Within the story, the cradle and the lullaby become symbolic axes connecting and separating the destinies of Ozoda and Murodjon. Seeking personal comfort, Ozoda consciously renounces the happiness of motherhood. Through her emotional suffering, the author reveals the national perception of childlessness as a tragedy. The cradle in Murodjon's second family symbolizes the natural continuation of life, while Ozoda's tears become the moral price of betraying both national and human values.

Thus, the cradle is not merely an object but a psychological mirror reflecting the character's happiness or unhappiness. While Said Ahmad achieves depth of meaning through symbolic detail, O'tkir Hoshimov places the semantic burden primarily on the characters themselves.

In Hoshimov's *Yanga*, one of the most delicate aspects of Uzbek family hierarchy – the relationship between a sister-in-law and her husband's younger brother – is explored. This relationship is founded upon the concepts of modesty (*andisha*) and duty. The sister-in-law emerges as a moral pillar within the family. In Uzbek culture, she often assumes a role comparable to that of a mother, preserving family secrets and maintaining kinship bonds. Akmal's sister-in-law remains faithful to her mother-in-law's will and sacrifices her personal comfort to care for him. Her actions, such as chopping firewood and baking bread in the clay oven, are not merely physical labor but manifestations of the archetypal self-sacrifice associated with Uzbek women.

The story also demonstrates how modesty and social etiquette arise from family status. Although Akmal deeply respects his sister-in-law for caring for him after his mother's death, he remains conscious of her social position. Upon visiting his ancestral home in the absence of his elder brother,

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he politely declines her invitation to enter the house and suggests sitting on the outdoor platform (*so'ri*) instead. Understanding his embarrassment, she refrains from insisting. This mutual consideration exemplifies the concept of *andisha*, one of the defining features of Uzbek national character.

The platform (*so'ri*) symbolizes openness, hospitality, and respectful communication while preserving appropriate social distance. Likewise, the status of a daughter-in-law in Uzbek culture is measured by her sense of responsibility toward her parents-in-law. The female protagonist in *Yanga* embodies loyalty to a sacred trust. Preparing food and setting the table for Akmal without even asking his consent reflects the maternal instinct deeply rooted in Uzbek culture, transferred here into the social role of a daughter-in-law. She accepts her mother-in-law's request not merely as an obligation but as a guiding principle of life.

The depiction of the *so'ri* symbolizes the Uzbek culture of maintaining respectful social distance. It functions simultaneously as a space of hospitality, openness, and tactful communication.

In Uzbek family values, the status of a bride is measured through her responsibility toward her in-laws. In the image of the sister-in-law in *"Yanga"*, loyalty to a final testament becomes a defining characteristic. Without even asking Akmal's permission, she prepares food and sets the table for him, reflecting the maternal instinct deeply rooted in Uzbek women. She perceives her mother-in-law's request not simply as an obligation but as her personal moral mission.

National identity and nostalgia are also embedded in artistic details. Ethnographic elements and natural imagery occupy a crucial place in creating national color within literary works. In O'tkir Hoshimov's prose, such details are not merely descriptive devices but psychological signs activating the character's lyrical memories and emotional experiences.

"His sister-in-law immediately brought out a quilt. As Akmal walked across the neatly swept courtyard, the scent of basil suddenly filled his senses. The smell reminded him of something deeply familiar and soothing. His mother used to plant basil every year, repeating: 'Basil brings blessing, my son.' Indeed, the fragrance seemed to fill the whole courtyard with peace."

Here, basil functions as a symbol of national worldview. Its inclusion in the depiction of the household reflects the peculiarities of Uzbek domestic culture. The plant embodies social, aesthetic, and even medicinal meanings within a complex semantic structure. Akmal's emotional comfort triggered by the clean courtyard and basil scent represents a literary technique known as retrospection. The sensory perception of smell becomes an associative bridge connecting the character with the innocence of childhood memories.

The mother's words – "Basil brings blessing" – confirm the harmony between the material and spiritual dimensions of the concepts of blessing and prosperity in Uzbek mentality. Basil has thus become a symbolic representation of peace and harmony in Uzbek households.

The immediate act of bringing out a quilt by the sister-in-law reveals a common artistic motif in the works of Said Ahmad and O'tkir Hoshimov. It demonstrates how hospitality and tact are typified as essential codes of Uzbek national character across different writers' works. In employing the basil detail, the writer also draws upon centuries-old traditions of folk medicine. The integration of folk customs associated with basil into character portrayal strengthens the harmony between the protagonist's inner world and national identity, thereby enhancing the conceptual depth of the literary work. In this sense, basil becomes artistically generalized as the "national plant" of the Uzbek people.

The image of the sister-in-law who sacrifices her comfort and well-being for Akmal in obedience to her mother-in-law's testament combines both maternal and sisterly roles. Her kindness toward Akmal continues throughout the story in a manner similar to maternal care.

The use of details such as basil, the clay oven, and the quilt within the household interior reinforces the national atmosphere of the work. Through these elements, the writer artistically depicts

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the stable order, pursuit of cleanliness, and loyalty to ancestral traditions characteristic of Uzbek mentality.

Neither writer employs national details such as the quilt, cradle, or clay oven merely as decorative objects. Rather, these items serve to reveal the characters' behavior, speech, and interpersonal relationships. Said Ahmad reflects issues of lineage and loyalty through the cradle, while O'tkir Hoshimov portrays modesty and social duty through the figures of the sister-in-law and the *so'ri*.

As M. Javbo'riyev notes: "The specificity of time and space, inseparably connected with the writer's personality, creates national color in a literary work. National identity is expressed through characters. Since character constitutes the artistic image of a person, national traits are manifested in the condition, behavior, and speech peculiarities of a given character."

The above analyses demonstrate that family concepts and domestic objects in Uzbek prose function as psychological tools revealing the deepest layers of national character – such as modesty, hospitality, and self-sacrifice. The artistic excellence of a literary work is ultimately measured by how naturally and authentically these details are portrayed.

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