

**THE LITERARY AND SCHOLARLY LEGACY OF SADRIDDIN AYNİ: A
HISTORICAL, CULTURAL, AND PHILOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF HIS WORKS**

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Abstract: This article analyzes the literary and scholarly legacy of Sadriddin Ayni, highlighting his role in shaping modern Central Asian literature and reviving Tajik literary heritage. Special attention is given to his documentary narrative style and his lasting influence on Uzbek and Tajik literary studies.

Key words: Sadriddin Ayni; Central Asian literature; Tajik literary heritage; Uzbek literature; philology; classical Persian poetry; national identity; cultural revival; literary criticism.

Sadriddin Ayni (1878–1954) is one of the central figures in the cultural and literary history of modern Central Asia. As a poet, novelist, scholar, and critic, he documented the social realities of his time and preserved classical Tajik and Uzbek literary traditions. His major works—*Sparks of Revolution*, *Dukhunda*, *The Slaves*, *Odina*, and *Memoirs*—demonstrate his commitment to truth, simplicity, and social justice.

In 1923, Sadriddin Ayni published his poetic collection *Sparks of Revolution*. The volume included the finest poems written under his pen name Ayni. Ayni's poetry represents a distinctive creative environment, one in which the reader may feel the bubbling springs of pain and heartfelt emotion. As the poet himself stated, "A true poem must evoke deep excitement in the reader and listener. To achieve this, the poet must rely on sincerity and be able to reveal his own personality in what he 'utters'."

His 1924 novella *The Adventures of a Poor Tajik*, later published under the title *Odina* (1927), was issued by the State Publishing House of Tajikistan in 1927. The work was later translated into Russian, Ukrainian, and several other languages. In the preface to *Odina*, the prominent statesman and political figure F. Khojaev wrote: "S. Ayni is a great writer who, in his turn, has truthfully and without embellishment depicted the lives of tens of thousands of utterly rightless and mercilessly oppressed laborers."

Indeed, the image of the hardworking common people is realistically portrayed in all of Ayni's works. Drawing on events he had personally witnessed, he constructed artistic reflections and created authentic life-like characters. All his narratives are grounded in what he saw and experienced.

"Ayni's style is simple yet vivid, extraordinarily sincere, and free of ornamentation. In none of his works did he attempt to describe or persuade the reader about something he had not seen, understood, or comprehended. For him, artistic interpretation had to be natural and truthful from beginning to end—far from any literary artificiality.

From work to work, his sense of truth sharpened, and his intellectual wisdom deepened. Beginning from the 1930s, the belief emerged in our literature that one could engage in artistic creation without studying and understanding the classical literature of the East. Over time, this misconception became widespread. Ayni's experience demonstrates that such a tendency is absolutely harmful to the development of literature, and that it is impossible to progress without learning from the masterpieces of great Eastern artists such as Rumi, Saadi, Hafez, Navoi, Babur, and Bedil," writes Ibrohim Haqqul in his evaluation of Ayni's oeuvre.

Ayni was a zullisonayn writer who created in two languages. Along with Uzbek, he also wrote extensively in Tajik. In 1927–1928, the author produced his first novel *Dukhunda*. The novel was republished in both Uzbek and Tajik and translated into several other languages. It narrates the tragic fate of Yodgor, an orphaned young man, whose dreams and hopes were shattered by the harsh realities of the time.

In 1935, Ayni wrote *The Slaves*, a novel that has become part of the golden fund of literature. Covering nearly a century of historical events, the novel realistically depicts the history, life, and struggle of the Uzbek people through the character of Neqadam.

In 1921, Ayni published an article titled *The Deeds of a Deceitful Sheikh*, which may be regarded as the preface to his later work *The Death of a Usurer*. In the 1939 novella *The Death of a Usurer*, Ayni's protagonist Qori Ishkamba stands shoulder to shoulder with world literary characters such as Balzac's *Gobseck*. The work was translated and published in France by the French writer Louis Aragon, who wrote in the preface: "With this immortal work, S. Ayni stands alongside the great figures of world literature—Balzac, Shakespeare, and Goethe."

Ayni's literary output was regularly published in *Oyna*, *Bukhoro-i Sharif*, *Turon*, *Sadoi Turkiston*, *Mushtum*, *Mashrab*, and other periodicals of Turkestan. His satirical and humorous pieces such as *I Do Not Know*, *The Council*, *Grandfather Mashrab*, *If Your Money Is Honest*, *Hold a Wedding*, and others also appeared in these publications.

Reflecting on the path he had travelled and wishing to leave bright memories for future generations, the author began writing his work *Memoirs* in 1948. This book consists of concise yet meaningful stories that cover his childhood up to the period when he became a well-known writer. Readers experience these narratives with deep emotion and empathy. Particularly striking is the depiction of his thirsty-for-knowledge childhood in the village of Suktari, the difficult days that befell him after losing his parents, and the years of hardship and poverty he spent as a student in madrasa cells. These scenes evoke sorrow and compel the modern reader to appreciate and be grateful for today's life. Several stories of the book are based on truthful, real events witnessed by the author himself. In 1950, Ayni was awarded the State Prize for this work. His writings have been translated into nearly forty languages, including Russian, Ukrainian, English, French, German, Romanian, Hindi, Hungarian, Chinese, Czech, and Polish. I. S. Braginsky described this work as "the masterwork Ayni left behind shortly before his death."

This book may indeed be regarded as one of the finest examples of critical prose of its time. It presents before the reader an entire human life in its authentic and unembellished form.

In his 1904 poem *Bazm* ("The Feast"), Ayni respectfully mentions the names of renowned singers of that era, such as Qori Kamol, Qori Najm, Halimi Safed (Domla Halim Ibodov), Levicha (Levi Bobokhonov), the tanbur player Atojon, the dutar player Tohirjon, and the doira master Karim. A separate scholarly study by O. Safarov, titled *An Analysis of Ayni's Poem "Bazm"*, is dedicated to this poem.

Our beloved writer S. Ayni enriched literature with masterpieces such as the novels *Dukhunda* (1928), *The Slaves* (1935), the novella *The Death of a Usurer* (1939), his monumental work *Memoirs* (1949–1954), the story *The Old School* (1935), the novellas *The Orphan*, *A Girl or Khalida*, and the collections of poetry *Inqilob Uchqunlari* ("Sparks of Revolution"), *Guli Surkh*, *Yodgorlik*, as well as the epic *The Struggle of Man and Water*, and the legends *Temur Malik*, *The Muganna Rebellion*, *The Seven-Headed Giant*, and *The March of Revenge*. Ayni, whose intellectual world was broad and ever-inquiring, worked tirelessly. As the writer himself asserted, "Whoever leads an idle life is insignificant in this world," and indeed, he did not waste a single moment of his time.

S. Ayni also conducted significant scholarly research on the history of Uzbek and Tajik literature. His works dedicated to Rudaki, Saadi Shirazi, Avicenna, Mirzo Bedil, Navoiy, Kamol Khojandi, Abdurahmon Jomi, and Ahmad Donish are of exceptional value.

The scholar produced important works in the fields of Oriental studies and literary criticism, including Firdawsi and His Shahnameh, Shaykh al-Ra'is Abu Ali Ibn Sina, Shaykh Muslihiddin Sa'di Shirazi, Kamol Khojandi, Master Rudaki, Alisher Navoi, and Vasifi and His Work.

Ayni is also recognized as a prominent Bedil scholar. Notably, in 1912, under the pseudonym "Idrisi," an article by Ayni about Bedil's life was published in the journal Shuro, written during his madrasa years in Bukhara. Later, in 1946–1947, he published additional articles dedicated to Bedil in the journal Sharqi Surkh. Eventually, he produced the significant monograph Mirzo Abdulqadir Bedil.

In the preface to this book, Y. E. Bertels wrote: "Very few people could have accomplished such a task, and even then, only a master as deeply knowledgeable about his people's literary heritage, language, and the entire textual tradition written in that language as S. Ayni could complete this work successfully."

Sadriddin Ayni's first research work on Alisher Navoi was the 1938 article Mir Alisher Navoi, written in honor of the 500th anniversary of the poet's birth.

He devoted all his strength and energy to restoring the treasury of Tajik literature. His scholarly work Samples of Tajik Literature (1925) provided detailed information about Persian and Tajik poets who were on the verge of being forgotten. In this study, he presented biographical notes and literary analyses of more than two hundred representatives of Tajik literature from the 10th to the 20th century, including selected passages from their works. By writing his own works in the Tajik language and promoting it as a national literary medium, Ayni made a decisive contribution to this cultural revival.

In particular, in his research works such as Firdawsi and His Shahnameh, Master Rudaki, Zayniddin Vosifi, Kamol Khojandi, Mirzo Bedil, and Shaykh Sa'di, Ayni thoroughly revealed the creative legacy of Persian and Tajik poets. In Samples of Tajik Literature, he also included significant scholarly and historical information regarding the lives and works of Akmal Khojandi, Gulshani, Nodira, Mashrab, and others. Especially noteworthy are Ayni's reflections on one of the great figures of Uzbek literature, the eminent 17th-century poet Boborahim Mashrab:

"His name was Boborahim. By the fatwa of scholars and by the decree of Mahmudbiy Qataghan, he was martyred in Kunduz in 1123 AH. He was among the respected nobles of Subhonqulixon and Muqimxon."

In his treatise dedicated to Sa'di Shirazi, Ayni writes: "The critics of the ancient East call Sa'di a vuqu'guy, which, if expressed in modern international terminology, corresponds to 'realist'."

Sadriddin Ayni's novellas and novels such as The Slaves, Odina, and The Executioners of Bukhara were written on the basis of concrete historical events, most of which are considered factual historical occurrences. His first major historical inquiry focused on the Manghit dynasty, which ruled on the throne of the Emirate of Bukhara until 1920.

Ayni's historical narratives are distinguished by their strict adherence to documented events, the precision of his observations, and his deep familiarity with the socio-political structures of Central Asia. His works not only reconstruct episodes of the region's past but also expose the mechanisms of oppression, social stratification, and cultural transformation that shaped the lives of the common people. Through carefully crafted characters and vivid descriptions, Ayni presents history not as a distant chronicle but as a lived human experience.

Moreover, his commitment to philological scholarship played a decisive role in establishing a scientific foundation for both Uzbek and Tajik literary studies. By identifying, comparing, and interpreting manuscripts, poetic traditions, and archival materials, he laid the groundwork for

future generations of scholars. His analytical method—combining historical documentation, textual criticism, and cultural interpretation—remains influential in contemporary literary research.

Ayni's contribution extends beyond literary creativity; he became an intellectual architect of national identity. By reviving the forgotten names of classical poets, systematizing Tajik literary heritage, and producing exemplary works in both Uzbek and Tajik, he ensured the cultural continuity of the region. His scholarship demonstrated that a deep understanding of classical Persian-Tajik literature is essential for any meaningful study of Central Asian literary history.

Through his artistic and scholarly legacy, Sadriddin Ayni emerged as one of the most significant figures of the twentieth century in the cultural landscape of Central Asia—a writer, historian, critic, and nation-builder whose influence continues to resonate today.

Sadriddin Ayni's literary and scholarly heritage stands as a monumental contribution to the cultural and intellectual formation of modern Central Asia. His works, grounded in historical fact, personal observation, and deep human empathy, provide a uniquely authentic portrayal of the social structures, struggles, and aspirations of the region's people. As a philologist and literary historian, he restored the classical Tajik tradition, systematized its foundations, and demonstrated the essential role of Persian-Tajik and Uzbek classical literature in contemporary national consciousness.

Ayni's influence extends beyond literature: he shaped cultural identity, enriched historical understanding, and established methodological standards that remain relevant in twenty-first-century literary studies. His legacy continues to resonate not only within Tajik and Uzbek intellectual discourse but also in the broader field of global literary scholarship. Through his tireless dedication to truth, culture, and human dignity, Sadriddin Ayni emerges as a towering figure whose contributions remain indispensable for the study of Central Asian humanities.

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