

REFLECTIONS OF NATIONAL SPIRIT IN CHO‘LPON’S SHORT
STORIES

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Abstract: *This article explores the expression of national spirit in the short stories of Abdulhamid Cho‘lpon, one of the leading figures of Uzbek literature in the early 20th century. Focusing on two of his notable stories — “On Bright Nights” (Oydin kechalarda) and “A Tulip in the Snow” (Qor qo‘ynida lola) — the article analyzes how Cho‘lpon embeds traditional values, spiritual identity, and social critique within the framework of poetic realism. The stories reflect not only the cultural and emotional realities of Uzbek people during a period of sociopolitical turmoil but also assert the importance of national identity in literature.*

Key words: *Cho‘lpon, national spirit, Uzbek literature, women in literature, poetic realism, colonial critique, cultural identity*

The short story genre holds a prominent place in world and Uzbek literature due to its concise structure, realistic themes, and focus on life events. According to V. Belinsky, a short story is “a small-scale artistic work that reflects simple but profound emotional experiences of a person.” Uzbek storytelling developed significantly in the early 20th century, led by figures like Cho‘lpon, Abdulla Qodiriy, and Fitrat. Their realistic approach introduced a new perspective to national literature, moving beyond plot-driven narratives to explore spiritual and social issues.

Cho‘lpon (1897–1938), one of the foremost representatives of Uzbek modernist prose, contributed significantly to shaping national consciousness through literature. Cho‘lpon’s stories, in particular, offer vivid portrayals of national values and societal dynamics. His stories reflect what Edward Said termed as “resistance literature” — texts that oppose domination not just politically but culturally and spiritually (Said,



1993). Through female protagonists and symbolic motifs, Cho'lpon crafted a nuanced resistance to colonial ideologies. As Uzbek storytelling shifted from oral epic traditions to written narrative forms, Cho'lpon introduced psychological depth and lyrical imagery. His prose does not merely depict external events but enters the emotional realm of his characters, allowing readers to “feel” rather than “observe” national decline and hope.

His prose brings forward the struggles, hopes, and moral values of ordinary Uzbek people, especially women. “On Bright Nights” and “A Tulip in the Snow” reflect the author’s concern for women’s rights, social inequalities, and the preservation of moral standards during colonial rule. This article analyzes the place and significance of Cho'lpon’s stories in Uzbek literature, especially “*On Bright Nights*” and “*A Tulip in the Snow*”, as examples of how national values are represented through artistic expression.

In “*On Bright Nights*,” Cho'lpon masterfully illustrates the inner world of two central characters — Zaynab kampir and the young bride — to reflect the emotional and spiritual wounds caused by the breakdown of traditional family values. The story is deeply rooted in the themes of loyalty, chastity, and maternal affection — all of which form integral parts of the Uzbek national character. Through Zaynab kampir’s memories and pain, the reader is taken into a world where national identity is intertwined with motherhood and moral responsibility. Her emotional suffering is not simply personal but emblematic of a society that has drifted from its moral compass under foreign influence. Cho'lpon uses poetic imagery and emotionally charged language to evoke a nostalgic yearning for the past — a time when traditions were upheld, and women were revered as moral anchors of the household. Additionally, Cho'lpon critiques the social vices introduced during the colonial period — such as alcoholism, moral decay, and negligence towards women — suggesting that the deterioration of national values begins with the erosion of women’s status. The story, although short in form, serves as a powerful call to return to spiritual and cultural authenticity.



In “*A Tulip in the Snow*,” the symbol of the tulip — a flower native to Central Asia — is central to understanding Cho‘lpon’s metaphorical technique. The tulip blooming in the cold, hostile environment of snow represents the persistence of national spirit despite external hardships. The main character, a young woman full of inner beauty and purity, symbolizes the suppressed soul of the nation itself. Cho‘lpon uses the contrast between the vibrant tulip and the desolate snow to underscore the tension between tradition and colonization, between spiritual warmth and societal coldness. The woman’s fate reflects the fate of the nation — neglected, misunderstood, and gradually being silenced. Yet, in her quiet dignity and resistance to moral corruption, she becomes a symbol of hope. The story critiques the alien values imposed by colonizers and presents the survival of cultural identity as both a personal and collective struggle. The protagonist’s spiritual strength, her inner poise, and her quiet endurance exemplify the resilience of the Uzbek national character in the face of modern degradation.

Both stories center on female characters — yet they represent different temporal and symbolic positions. Zaynab kampir belongs to the *past*, holding on to memories. The tulip girl represents the *present*, standing against suppression. Yet both embody the essence of the Uzbek nation. From a comparative lens, the women’s silence is striking. Neither gives long speeches nor leads revolutions. Their resistance is quiet, internal, and spiritual. This aligns with Cho‘lpon’s philosophy that cultural identity is not always asserted through action but preserved through endurance. Cho‘lpon’s stories are defined by poetic realism — blending lyrical language with stark reality.

What distinguishes Cho‘lpon’s prose is not only his social critique but his lyrical and symbolic style. His use of metaphor, emotional depth, and poetic rhythm allows readers to feel the *national spirit* rather than simply observe it. Both stories exemplify how Cho‘lpon does not directly preach nationalism; instead, he embeds it in the emotional fabric of his characters, particularly women, who become vessels of cultural memory and ethical strength. In this way, Cho‘lpon’s short stories operate on multiple levels: they are literary works of art, social commentaries, and



repositories of national identity. His portrayal of women as moral and spiritual centers reinforces the idea that the preservation of national spirit depends on the reverence and recognition of traditional values.

Conclusion

Cho'lpon's "*On Bright Nights*" and "*A Tulip in the Snow*" serve as compelling narratives that reflect the national soul of Uzbekistan during a time of great upheaval. By presenting female characters as embodiments of cultural resilience, and by contrasting poetic symbols with harsh realities, Cho'lpon asserts the enduring significance of national identity and spiritual values in literature. His stories remind readers that even in darkness and despair, the light of cultural integrity and hope can shine through — like a tulip blooming against the snow.

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