

# Traditional Manifestations Of The Ideas Of Freedom And Enlightenment In The History Of Turkic Literary Development

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**Annotation:** This article explores the traditional manifestations of freedom and enlightenment ideas in the history of Turkic literary development. The authors analyze the literary heritage of various historical periods of Turkic peoples to reveal the origins, evolution, and artistic expression of these ideas. Special attention is given to themes such as free thinking, personal liberty, social justice, and spiritual elevation that are evident in works of literature. Additionally, issues related to connections with world literature are also discussed throughout the articles.

**Keywords:** History of Turkic Literature, Idea of Freedom, Enlightenment, Literary Heritage, Creative Expressions, Relationship with World Literature.

In the history of the development of Turkic literature, the ideas of freedom and enlightenment have always been formed as fundamental conceptual notions and have remained at the center of socio-political as well as philosophical and aesthetic thought. Beginning with ancient Turkic oral creative traditions and written monuments, these ideas continued in later periods as one of the main directions of national literary and aesthetic thinking. The Orkhon–Yenisei inscriptions dating back to the 8th century provide the earliest theoretical expression of the concepts of freedom and independence in the process of national self-awareness of the Turkic peoples. These sources reflect, in a highly poetic and publicistic tone, ideas of uniting the people, ensuring political and spiritual freedom, and achieving state independence. From this perspective, the concept of freedom during this period was interpreted not as individual liberty, but rather in harmony with collective liberation and state independence.

Although these themes have undergone changes in form and content over the centuries and have been enriched by the spirit of new eras, they have consistently constituted an integral heritage of Turkic literature. Therefore, these themes may be regarded as spiritual codes of the Turkic peoples. They serve as an organic bridge between the ancient worldview of the people and nations and modern literary thought. Through these common themes, Turkic literature demonstrates a unified cultural harmony that has been formed across different historical periods over its millennia-long history. From ancient inscriptions to classical lyric poetry, folk epics, and modern poetry, themes such as heroism, patriotism, love, knowledge, nature, religion and mysticism, and freedom are constantly repeated. While these themes reflect the shared spiritual characteristics of the Turkic peoples, they also acquire distinct national features within each literature.

Among these, the theme of freedom occupies a central place from the earliest layers of Turkic literature. It is mainly interpreted with great emotional intensity in heroic epics. Notably, in ancient Turkic monuments such as the “Lament for Alp Er Tunga” and the “Orkhon–Yenisei inscriptions,” the defense of the homeland and people, free and independent thinking, and the glorification of heroism emerge as core ideas. In the stone inscriptions of Tonyukuk, Kül Tegin, and Bilga Khagan, the people’s struggle for freedom, the necessity of preserving an independent state, and the unity of the nation are especially emphasized and vividly depicted. In these inscriptions, the concept of freedom is expressed as a symbol of political independence, national unity, and historical memory, thereby laying a strong traditional foundation for later Turkic literature.

The researcher Q. Sodiqov attempts to substantiate these ideas through his scholarly studies. He emphasizes that had Eltarish Khagan and Tonyukuk not stood shoulder to shoulder and achieved victory, the state would not have risen. As stated in the inscription: “Because the Khagan achieved victory, and because

of my vigilance, the people became a people, the nation became a nation.”

(Q. Sodiqov, *The Inscription of Bilga Tonyukuk*, “Uzbekistan Literature and Art” newspaper, 2012, No. 2).

A careful reading of the monument reveals that it speaks throughout about national freedom and the peace of the homeland.

In later periods, the epic “Oghuznama,” which provides information about Turkic history, also interprets national unity, freedom, and bravery through the image of the heroic individual. The figure of Oghuz Khan appears as a symbol of national liberation and state stability. The protagonist, Oghuz Khan, fights many peoples for the peace and prosperity of his land. Toward the end of his life, he bequeaths to his sons:

“O my sons, I have endured much,  
I have seen many battles.  
With spear I struck much,  
With stallions I rode far.  
I made enemies weep,  
I made my friends rejoice.  
I fulfilled my duty to the Blue Sky.  
Now I give my land to you.”

(*Oghuznama*, “Uzbekistan,” Tashkent, 2007, p. 12)

Similarly, in Uzbek folk epics such as “Alpomish” and “Gorogly,” the idea of freedom is depicted in harmony with personal courage and national pride. In these epics, heroes are portrayed as ideals not only through physical strength but also through enlightenment, wisdom, and justice. Freedom is often interpreted as resistance to oppression rather than defiance of divine will, while enlightenment is largely associated with Islamic knowledge and religious awareness. Therefore, in many literary works, the idea of freedom is linked not to individual liberty but to social justice in accordance with religious and social order.

In ancient epics and oral folklore, the ideas of freedom and enlightenment are frequently reflected as symbols of wisdom, justice, patriotism, and bravery. For example, in the epic “Alpomish,” the hero’s courage, loyalty to his homeland, and determination symbolize freedom, while his wisdom and honesty represent enlightenment. This is evident in Alpomish’s battles against the Kalmyks to rescue his beloved Barchin and in his dialogues with his friend Karajon.

Thus, ancient Turkic literary works expressed the earliest forms of the concepts of freedom and enlightenment and prepared a solid theoretical and aesthetic foundation for subsequent literary processes. As Turkic peoples lived across vast territories and led nomadic lives, themes of homeland, native land, and mother earth occupied an important place. In ancient Turkic poetry, separation from the homeland, travel, migration, and love for the native land were particularly emphasized, and later in classical literature, images of the homeland remained among the leading poetic themes. Alongside this, due to numerous struggles for independence in the political history of Turkic peoples, themes of freedom, liberty, and justice consistently occupied a central place in literature. From ancient inscriptions onward, folk epics criticized unjust rulers and praised people-oriented heroes. In later periods as well, Turkic literature continued to celebrate the ideas of freedom, human rights, and justice.

Initially, the Orkhon–Yenisei inscriptions sang of the unity of the Turkic peoples and loyalty to the homeland. In Uzbek literature, this tradition found expression in the “Lament for Alp Er Tunga” and later in the epic “Gorogly.” In Turkish literature, patriotic and freedom-loving ideas are promoted through the Oghuz heroes in *The Book of Dede Korkut*. Each story in the work embeds an important theme and idea, and at the end of the stories, Dede Korkut blesses the hero and his people. For instance, in the story “Kan Turali,” concepts such as bravery, honor, and defending the dignity of the homeland are discussed. The story concludes with Dede Korkut’s words:

“Where are the brave young men now,  
Who say the world is mine?  
To whom did this fleeting world remain?  
The world comes and goes at once!”

(*Stories of Dede Korkut*, “Jurist Media Center” Publishing House, 2010, p. 28)

This epic is distinguished by its aesthetic perfection, profound philosophical perception, richness of form, and other qualities, making it the principal book of the Turkic peoples. The transformation of mythological imagination into realistic representations, or rather the predominance of socio-political, familial, and everyday issues, can be characterized as the beginning of a new stage in Turkic epic thought. *Dede Korkut* is among the richest and most magnificent artistic monuments of the national culture created by the Turkic peoples. As the renowned scholar M. F. Köprülüzade stated, “If all works of Turkish literature were placed on one pan of the scales and *Dede Korkut* on the other, the scale holding *Dede Korkut* would still outweigh the rest.”

(Elman Quliyev, *Literature of the Turkic Peoples*, Renaissance Press, Tashkent, 2022, p. 17)

After the adoption of Islam, a new stage of scientific and educational development began in Turkic culture. In the 9th–10th centuries, scientific centers emerged in Bukhara, Samarkand, and other cities. In his work *The Virtuous City*, Al-Farabi links freedom with the construction of a just society and enlightenment with scientific thinking and wisdom. In the works of al-Biruni and Ibn Sina, knowledge, intellect, and spiritual perfection are interpreted as the highest goals of human life. This process also found expression in literature, strengthening the idea of enlightenment through the glorification of knowledge and wisdom.

In Uzbek literature, Yusuf Khos Hajib’s *Qutadg‘u Bilig* centers on the themes of a just society and the supremacy of knowledge. In subsequent centuries, the rise of Sufi literature further directed the concepts of freedom and enlightenment toward spiritual and moral dimensions. Created in the 11th century, *Qutadg‘u Bilig* (“Knowledge That Leads to Happiness”) is recognized as a major example of enlightenment thought in Turkic literature. It deeply explores issues of enlightenment, knowledge, justice, wisdom, and the cultivation of the perfect human being. One of the initial chapters is devoted to enlightenment and is titled “Knowledge Explains the Difference and Benefit of Intellect.” The author compares knowledge to a bridle that restrains a person from all base and evil deeds:

“Knowledge is like alchemy, it gathers and endures,  
It is the fortress of intellect, always assembled.  
Fragrance and knowledge are similar things;  
They cannot be concealed or hidden from others.”

(Yusuf Khos Hajib, *Qutadg‘u Bilig*, FAN Publishing House, Tashkent, 1971, p. 107)

Likewise, the poet likens the human heart to the sea and enlightenment to a pearl at its depths; if the pearl is not brought up, it remains no different from an ordinary stone. Yusuf Khos Hajib emphasizes the incomparable importance of enlightenment for societal development, interpreting knowledge in harmony with justice and moral perfection. In this respect, the work is also valued as the earliest Turkic expression of the philosophy of state governance in Eastern literature. Mahmud Kashgari’s *Divanu Lughat al-Turk* (11th century) is not only a linguistic monument but also a work embodying the spiritual values of the Turkic peoples. It contains proverbs, wise sayings, and songs that express values such as enlightenment, ethics, life wisdom, and diligence, thereby reinforcing the spirit of valuing wisdom and freedom within literary traditions. In Sufi literature, enlightenment was interpreted as a means of purifying the soul, knowing God, and attaining divine truth. Ahmad Yassavi and Sulaymon Bakirgani, for example, sang of freedom as liberation from enslavement to the ego and enlightenment as spiritual perfection, divine love, and human purity. In Ahmad Yassavi’s *Hikmats*, spiritual enlightenment, purity of heart, moral perfection, and love for God are promoted. In Sufi literature, freedom is understood primarily as spiritual liberation rather than external independence.

Later, thinkers such as Yunus Emre and Jalal al-Din Rumi interpreted enlightenment as divine knowledge and freedom as liberation from ego and ignorance. In Rumi’s works, particularly *Masnavi* and *Divan-e Kabir*, enlightenment and freedom are central themes. Rumi viewed enlightenment as the soul’s inner journey toward divine truth and freedom as spiritual liberation rather than political independence. As he famously stated, “The inner world of man is the realm of freedom”.

The harmony of these themes undoubtedly fostered spiritual closeness between Uzbek and Turkish literature, contributing to the creation of a shared enlightenment heritage that later Turkic literary schools drew upon. From the 13th to the 15th centuries, the theme of enlightenment continued to occupy a central position. In the works of Alisher Navoi, the ideas of freedom and enlightenment reached a new stage. Navoi

regarded enlightenment as the foundation of societal development and freedom as human dignity, justice, and patriotism.

Thus, in Uzbek literature, poets such as Yassavi, Yugnakiy, Navoi, and Babur became great advocates of enlightenment, while in Turkish literature, figures like Rumi, Yunus Emre, Fuzuli, and Nedim reflected similar themes. As shown above, the literary relations between the two traditions were notably close and mutually enriching.

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