

# **THE SEMIOTIC NATURE OF NATIONAL COLOR IN THE SHORT STORIES OF SHUKUR KHOLMIRZAYEV**

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## **Abstract**

This article investigates the problem of national color in the short stories of the prominent Uzbek writer Shukur Kholmirezayev from a semiotic (sign system) perspective. Ethnographic elements, linguistic units, spatial and temporal relations, as well as national symbols within the author's works are classified and analyzed as semiotic codes.

**Keywords:** Semiotics, national color, artistic sign, denotation, connotation, cultural code, ethnosemiotics.

## **Introduction**

In a literary text, national color is not merely a collection of ethnographic elements; rather, it constitutes a complex system of signs that reflects the worldview, philosophy, and mentality of a specific nation. The prose of Shukur Kholmirezayev is an exemplary model of creativity that visually and linguistically captures Uzbek national existence with the utmost precision, particularly through the prism of life in the Boysun oasis. Examining the national color in the author's short stories from a semiotic perspective serves to uncover the latent cultural attributes behind the text, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the author's style and distinctive conceptual framework.

## **MAIN BODY**

When discussing the manifestation of nationality within a literary text, several significant studies regarding the exploration of nationality in world and Uzbek

literary criticism must be acknowledged. In global scholarship, the problem of nationality has frequently been examined within the contexts of “national character”, “cultural identity”, and “comparative literature”. Notably, Johann Gottfried Herder was the first German philosopher and literary critic to systematically substantiate the concepts of nationality and the “spirit of the people” (*Volksgeist*). He demonstrated that the literature of every nation derives sustenance from its unique climate, language, and culture. Subsequently, Hippolyte Taine conducted fruitful research concerning the “historical-biographical method”. This French scholar investigated nationality in literary works through the triad unity of three factors: race (national genetic makeup), milieu (geographical and social conditions), and moment (the historical epoch). The Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, who advanced seminal views regarding the theory of the “chronotope,” posited that the concepts of space and time within a work are intrinsically linked to the national worldview, and that the national mentality manifests itself vividly during dialogic relations (when encountering other cultures).

Postcolonial studies (Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak), which emerged under the strict scrutiny of political-social systems, represent a major direction in the literary criticism of the second half of the 20th century. This field examines the artistic expression of national identity awareness and ideas of national independence in the literature of peoples who liberated themselves from colonial oppression.

In Uzbek scholarship, although the issue of nationality was not entirely overlooked even under the ideological pressures of the Soviet era, genuine and objective research truly aligns with the revival of Jadid studies and the literary criticism of the independence period [Jabborov N. 2012].

During the era of national awakening in Jadid literary criticism, nationality was studied as a vehicle for awakening the nation from ignorance and fostering self-awareness. The scientific treatises of Fitrat on the Uzbek language, literature, and history served as the cornerstone of this national concept. In this regard, it is pertinent to recall the research of Matyoqub Qo‘shjonov. His works, such as *On the National Character of the Uzbeks* and *National Character in Uzbek Novel Writing*, stand as the most fundamental investigations in this direction within Uzbek literary studies. The scholar scientifically unveiled traits characteristic of

the Uzbek nation – such as modesty (*andisha*), chastity (*iffat*), and honor (*or-nomus*) – using Abdulla Qodiriy's novel *Days Gone By* as a primary case study [Qo'shjonov M. 2018].

In the research of the versatile scholar Ibrohim Haqqulov, the Uzbek national psyche, its religious-mystical roots, and the artistic evolution of national thought were explored within the context of Sufi literature and classical heritage. In the scholarly works of Nurboy Jabborov and Baxtiyor Nazarov, including monographs like *The Poetics of Uzbek Prose of the National Awakening Period*, the role of nationality in genre formation and the ideas of national independence were thoroughly investigated.

### DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Semiotics (from the Greek *semiotikos* – the study of signs), or semiology, is defined as: 1) a branch of science that studies the general properties of signs and sign systems that serve to store and transmit information; 2) the system of a particular object studied not merely from a general semiotic perspective, but specifically as the semiotics of a certain film or literary work, the semiotics of communication and address within a specific nation, etc. [Madvaliyev, Mirzayev. 2000: 244].

**Semiotic Classification of National Color.** The system of national color in Shukur Kholmirezayev's short stories can be conditionally categorized into four primary semiotic codes (signs):

#### a. Linguosemiotic Codes (Signs of Language and Speech)

The author's characters actively employ elements of the oasis dialect, phraseological units, and proverbs in their speech. In the short stories, the Surxon and Boysun dialects predominantly dictate and shape the dialogue of the characters. Notably, in the substantial short story *The Moon Obscured by Clouds*, there is a prominent display of dialectal elements, barbarisms, vulgarisms, argot, jargon, curses, and blessings:

“– To the dacha? Oh, we will take you there ourselves! Come on, take off your raincoat! Hey, doorman, look over here... [Kholmirezayev Sh. *Ozodlik*, 2023: 4].

“...Oh, *apisanka* [you beauty]! Oh, bless her soul, come over here. *Davay zajivo* [Come on, lively]... *Nakroy* [Set the table]! *Eto – moy gost* [This is my guest]! What did you say, madam?” [Kholmirezayev Sh. *Ozodlik*, 2023: 5].

“...Oh, one-nil, – he said... – Next... *Pirnisi* [Bring it], cognac! *Ladna, pust* [Alright, let it be] “Napoleon!” *Slishish? Vot taak* [Do you hear? Just like that]...” [Kholmirezayev Sh. *Ozodlik*, 2023: 6].

In the short story *The Language of Birds*, where images of birds belonging to the faunistic stratum play a leading role, proverbs and idioms are integrated into the characters’ speech:

“You will walk straight, and you will work straight. You will not engage in hooliganism; if you do, I will tie your tail (*dumingni tugaman*) that very day” [Kholmirezayev Sh. *Tabassum*, 2023: 130].

Idioms in the story are introduced very appropriately, perfectly aligning with the characters’ speech and situational contexts. The author’s mastery manifests through eloquence and quick-wittedness, contributing significantly to the delineation of character traits. The idiom “to tie one’s tail” (*dumni tugmoq*) conveys the meanings of “to dismiss” or “to expel” and serves to reveal specific facets of the character’s persona, such as strictness, resoluteness, and a degree of ruthlessness.

“His surname was Qoryog‘diyev. Yet he himself was pitch-black, with eyes that darted about, and moreover, he was hard of hearing (*qulog‘i og‘ir*); whenever you looked, he would be standing in front of the office, smoking a cigarette” [Kholmirezayev Sh. *Tabassum*, 2023: 130].

In the excerpt above, the phrase “hard of hearing” (*qulog‘i og‘ir*) is used in place of the explicit term “deaf,” imparting a softer, more positive nuance. Utilizing the idiom “hard of hearing” instead of “deaf” reflects a euphemistic approach (*qog‘ozga o‘rog‘lik qilib aytilgani*) by the speaker toward the listener, which renders the language of the work richer and more evocative.

“...My patience wearing thin (*ensam qotib*), I looked at him” [Kholmirezayev Sh. *Tabassum*, 2023: 130].

“My patience began to wear thin (*ensam qota boshladi*) once again. This young man could be perceived as highly astute, a master of diversion (*ustasi farang*), or perhaps a simpleton-schemer” [Kholmirezayev Sh. *Tabassum*, 2023: 132].

In these passages, the idiom “one's patience wearing thin” (*ensasi qotmoq*) operates in harmony with “a master of diversion” (*ustasi farang*) to evaluate a youth capable of “hitting the stars without a ladder” (*yulduzni benarvon uradigan*), thereby exposing the negative traits of an unfamiliar character. Here, the idiom *ustasi farang* is employed not in its typical positive sense of being “highly capable, agile, or dexterous,” but rather to signify its opposite – deceitful cunning.

“True, I was not one of those who touch those who touch them, and throw stones at those who do not (*tekkanga tegib, tegmaganga tosh otadiganlardan emasdim*)” [Kholmirezayev Sh. *Tabassum*, 2023: 134].

This idiom, typically applied to mischievous or provocative children, is presented in the text as the confession of a person who does not possess such volatile traits. The protagonist-narrator is not inherently mischievous. Instead, he is depicted as a righteous individual who cannot tolerate injustice when he witnesses it.

“A doctor is not the doctor; the one who has endured it is the doctor (*Tabib tabib emas. Boshidan o'tkazgan – tabib, deydilar*), so they say” [Kholmirezayev Sh. *Tabassum*, 2023: 134].

It would be no exaggeration to state that the proverb cited in the above passage stems from the centuries-old history, culture, and socioeconomic life experiences of our people. Indeed, much like the popular expressions “do not bypass the presence of one who has experienced it” (*boshidan o'tganning qoshidan o'tma*) and “stab yourself with the knife first; if it does not hurt, stab another” (*pichoqni avval o'zingga ur, og'rimasa, birovga*), this proverb illustrates vital dimensions such as accumulated experience, competence, and the ability to accurately assess a given situation.

The short story *Nasib Etsa* (“If Destined”) employs the Uzbek folk proverb as its epigraph: “*If destined, it shall come from Damascus and Iraq; if not destined, it shall slip away from beneath one's eyes and brows.*” The narrative structure leaves an impression that the overarching moral of the story is encapsulated within this epigraph, which actively serves to unveil the author's artistic intent until the very denouement of the work. Furthermore, the story underscores the notion that truth is the cornerstone of any justice. It highlights that a commitment to truth is not universally welcomed, echoing the folk proverb, “*The truth is unpalatable even to one's own kin.*” This is evident in the passage:

“...A seeker of truth means a truth-teller. As they say, speak the truth even if a sword hangs over your head” [Xolmirzayev Sh. *Cho‘loq turna*, 2023: 97].

**Dialectal Expressions:** Regional lexical units such as *chorigil* (a specific geographical/topographical term), *otliq* (horseman/mounted), and *enish* (descent/slope) do not merely demarcate physical space. Instead, they function as semiotic signs that signify the character’s social origins and their organic harmony with nature. In the short story *Ot Egasi* (“The Horse Owner”), the protagonist Inod possesses three main treasures, chief among which is his *Qorabayir* horse. The horse is interpreted as a vital semiotic sign that guarantees his masculine pride, honor, and social prestige. While the term *otliq* can generally denote anyone who owns a horse or a person riding on horseback rather than walking on foot, in *Ot Egasi*, *otliq* encapsulates a deeper sense of existential belonging and identity. It is discernible that the *Qorabayir* horse holds a status akin to a loyal companion and confidant for Inod.

**Speech Etiquette:** Verbal formulas such as greetings, blessings, and curses (e.g., “*May darkness fall upon your eyes,*” “*May your lineage multiply*”) carry profound national connotations, serving as semiotic instruments that lay bare the psychology of the characters. Conversely, in the short story *Bulut to‘sgan oy* (“The Moon Obscured by Clouds”), the dialogue of a group of hedonistic characters is laden with profanity and coarse language. This serves to expose their character flaws and the disrespectful, uninhibited relationships that exist among these individuals:

“Hey, Gulsara, it turns out that until Independence, we didn’t even have our own Ministry of Geology! Well, it existed, but it was subordinate to Moscow. It didn’t answer to Uzbekistan. Oh, those bastards!” [Xolmirzayev Sh. *Ozodlik*, 2023: 97].

### **b. The Manifestation of Ethnosemiotic Codes (Signs) in Daily Life and Material Artifacts:**

In Xolmirzayev’s works, items of material culture bear profound symbolic significance.

**The Horse and Horsemanship:** In the short stories *O‘zbek xarakteri* (“The Uzbek Character”) and *Ot yili* (“The Year of the Horse”), the horse is far from a mere means of transportation. It functions as a semiotic dominant – a symbol of bravery, freedom, social status, and masculine dignity. Vignettes illustrating the horse and its pivotal role and significance in the life of the Uzbek man can also be found across the author's other narratives, such as *Bir ko‘rgan tanish* (“An Acquaintance Met Once”), *Tikan orasidagi odam* (“The Man Among Thorns”), and *Arpali qishlog‘ida* (“In the Village of Arpali”).

**National Attire:** Traditional garments such as the *chopon* (quilted robe), *belbog‘* (waist-cloth/sash), and *mahsi-kavush* (leather inner boots with overshoes) serve as visual codes that reveal the characters’ inner worlds and their steadfast fidelity to tradition. In the short story *Qush Tili* (“The Language of Birds”), the author explicitly mentions the *do‘ppi* (traditional skullcap). Where a Western-style fedora, a cap, or any other headgear could have been substituted, the traditional Surkhandarya *do‘ppi* is instead celebrated with distinctly Uzbek motifs through the voice of a child of Boysun:

“...By the time Qamariddin finished bathing, the mother and child had gathered a whole skullcap full of grasshoppers” [Xolmirzayev Sh. *Tabassum*, 2023: 25].

### c. Toposemiotic Codes (Semiotics of Artistic Space):

Space within the author’s short stories possesses a dynamic character. Mountains and foothills serve as symbols of sublimity, purity, and uncorrupted national values. In stories like *Cho‘loq turna* (“The Lame Crane”) and *Hayot abadiy* (“Life is Eternal”), the *chayla* (temporary field hut) or the traditional *hovli* (courtyard) can be interpreted as a protective national micro-cosmos isolated from the external world. They function as semiotic indicators of stability and tranquility, standing in sharp proportion to the chaotic, noisy city.

In almost all of the writer’s short stories, one can observe micro- and macro-landscapes associated with mountains, ravines, hills, dense thickets, vast fields, caves, and rocky ledges. For instance, in the story *Notanish odam* (“The Stranger”), a character ventures into the mountains to hunt but lacks any knowledge of the craft. Guided by a local mountaineer who aids him, the narrative unfolds vital worldviews and philosophical musings, illustrating that any

profession must be rooted in knowledge and that before embarking on an endeavor, one must invariably anticipate its outcome. Within this narrative, the depiction of the mountain slopes and small ravines assumes paramount semiotic importance.

Similarly, the orchard and mountain landscapes in *Yovvoyi olmazor qaroqchisi* (“The Pirate of the Wild Apple Orchard”), *Olis yulduzlar ostida* (“Under Distant Stars”), *Yovvoyi gul* (“The Wild Flower”), *Kakku sayrayapti* (“The Cuckoo is Singing”), and *Nasib etsa* enrich the environmental imagery. Furthermore, in stories such as *Bir ko‘rgan tanish* and *...Ikki ko‘rgan bilish* (“Meeting Twice Brings Familiarity”), the depictions of nature are articulated through the harmony of flora and fauna, intrinsically tied to the traditional life of the *ovul* (rural pastoral settlement).

#### d. Psychosemantic Codes (National Archetypes and Character)

Sh. Kholmirezayev conveys the most subtle nuances of the national character through deliberate sign systems. In particular, in the short story “*Bodom qishda gulladi*” (“The Almond Bloomed in Winter”), the characters’ absolute silence and their tendency to internalize feelings serve as a semiotic expression of Uzbek restraint (*andisha*) and intrinsic pride. The tragic misunderstanding between the hospitalized patient Nosirjon and Xubbijamol, the doctor caring for him, stems precisely from this cultural constraint; unfortunately, the unspoken words and misconstrued emotions caused by *andisha* ultimately shatter Nosirjon’s heart and exacerbate his illness.

In the story “*Tabassum*” (“The Smile”), the protagonist is deeply unnerved by the historical struggles for national liberation, the conflicts surrounding their suppression, and the “rewards” acquired through betrayal and sycophancy. Consequently, he refuses to marry his granddaughter into the lineage of a traitor, yet out of *andisha*, he resists exposing the individual's past sins publicly.

In the semiotic analysis of a literary text, a sign operates on two distinct layers: denotation (the literal meaning) and connotation (the figurative or cultural meaning). In Kholmirezayev’s short stories, every ethnographic element is elevated to a connotative level:

- In the short story “*O‘zbek xarakteri*”, the protagonist’s refusal to surrender his horse to a stranger may appear on a **denotative level** as a simple property

dispute; on a **connotative (semiotic) plane**, however, it symbolizes the Uzbek man's defense of his personal honor, freedom, and inner independence.

- In the story “*Turnalar*” (“The Cranes”), the seasonal migration of cranes is a literal natural phenomenon (**denotation**), but within the text, it functions as a cultural code for the passage of time, deep longing, and an unbreakable bond with one’s native soil (**connotation**).

While depicting the natural landscape of the Surxon oasis and the distinctive lifestyle of the Uzbek people in “*O‘zbek xarakteri*”, the author reflects upon the cotton harvesting processes in the Buka district, alongside the joys and bliss of student life. Uzbek nationality is poignantly articulated through the image of the traditional loom (*o‘rmak*) being operated by the shepherd Botir’s wife:

“...And in front of the small hut, do you know what was there? A loom... an *o‘rmak* was set up. A woman was striking it heavily with a large comb, tossing the yarn back and forth through the threads, weaving a carpet (*sholcha*). I quietly approached her: yes, this sight is so close to our hearts, so familiar! Sensing my presence, the woman pulled the edge of her headscarf down over her forehead.

- Assalamu alaykum, I hope you are not tired, sister? – I said.
- Welcome, younger brother, – she replied. Glad you have come... Have you all settled in well?..” [Xolmirzayev Sh. *O‘zbek xarakteri*. 2023: 5].

Such signs play a critical role in realizing the author’s artistic purpose through the structural and thematic essence of his prose. In “*O‘zbek xarakteri*”, material artifacts like the *o‘rmak* (loom) and *sholcha* (handwoven rug) serve as vital signals indicating the traditional occupations of the women of Surxondaryo and the Buka district. The fact that the shepherd’s wife adjusts her headscarf not merely upon seeing a strange man, but the moment she *senses* his presence, illuminates deep-seated national and religious values, specifically the modesty and bashfulness (*ibo-hayo*) intrinsic to the Uzbek woman. Furthermore, addressing an unfamiliar individual as *opa* (older sister) or *uka* (younger brother) – or, depending on age dynamics, as *aka* (older brother), *singil* (younger sister), *amaki* (paternal uncle), or *tog‘a* (maternal uncle) – can be interpreted as a defining semiotic marker of nationality. Indeed, the Uzbek people are inherently warm, hospitable, and generous, traditionally greeting an elderly man as *bobom* (“my

grandfather”). They honor those older than themselves with familial terms of respect and treat those younger with protective affection, embracing them as kin. The breath of nationality in Shukur Kholmirzayev’s short stories is equally manifest in his philosophical musings. For instance, in “*Xumor*” (“The Longing”), the author offers philosophical-artistic insights into the transience of human life, illustrating how destiny pursues an individual at every turn and how one cannot escape what is “written on the forehead” (predestined):

“...Ah, human life is fragile! People fear boarding an airplane. There are those who fear riding in a car. Yet, those very individuals might pass away simply by tripping on a straight path” [Xolmirzayev Sh. *Tabassum*. 2023: 192].

In another instance, the author channels his philosophical outlook by directly quoting Alexander Pushkin: “*As Pushkin noted, ‘The further you distance yourself from a woman, the closer she draws to you’*” [Xolmirzayev Sh. *Tabassum*, 2023: 135].

Every single detail in the author’s works functions as a “hidden code” that demands to be decoded within the matrix of national culture. Among his structurally substantial narratives, the character of the elderly wrestler Amirqul Polvon holding up a poplar tree in the story “*O‘zbek bobo*” (“The Uzbek Grandfather” – also addressed as “*O‘zbek bobo*” within the text) represents the semiotic peak of the national archetype striving to preserve both cultural identity and ecological heritage. In the contemporary era, where environmental conservation is increasingly recognized as synonymous with human self-preservation and safeguarding nature is a sacred duty, the relevance of such stories and literary archetypes remains peerless.

### CONCLUSION

In the short stories of Shukur Kholmirzayev, national color is not a superficial ornament but a systematic semiotic structure that constitutes the ideological and aesthetic foundation of his works. The author encodes the national reality through a network of signs spanning language, space, material objects, and character psychology. This sign system successfully transmits the mental landscape and cultural identity of the Uzbek people to the reader on profound socio-cultural and philosophical levels. The ethnosemiotic space carved out by Shukur

Kholmirezayev within the Uzbek short story genre endures as one of the most fundamental chapters of national literary history.

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## Omega Journal of Linguistics and Language Studies

ISSN: 3072-4678

Volume 01, Issue 02, May, 2026

Website: <https://omegajournals.org>

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