



LITERARY AND HISTORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF BABUR IN UZBEK AND WESTERN NARRATIVES

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Abstract

This article explores the literary and historical representations of the Central Asian ruler Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur in two prominent works: Pirmkul Qodirov's *Yulduzli Tunlar* and Harold Lamb's *Babur the Tiger*. Through a comparative analysis, the study examines how Babur's personality, political life, and cultural contributions are depicted in Uzbek and Western literary traditions. While Qodirov presents a deeply introspective and ideologically driven portrait of Babur within a nationalistic and spiritual context, Lamb offers a more action-oriented, heroic narrative tailored to Western historical fiction. The article analyzes the authors' literary styles, use of historical sources, and their respective cultural lenses. The findings highlight how the same historical figure is reimagined through differing worldviews, thus offering valuable insights into the role of literature in shaping historical memory.

Keywords: Babur, historical fiction, comparative literature, Uzbek literature, Western literature, national identity, cultural perspective

Introduction

The figure of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire and a towering historical personality in Central and South Asia, has inspired generations of historians, poets, and novelists. As both a political leader and a literary figure, Babur occupies a unique position in world history—his autobiography, *Baburnama*, stands as one of the earliest and most detailed



memoirs in Islamic and Turkic literature, reflecting a blend of personal introspection, political observation, and cultural documentation. His life and legacy have been interpreted and reinterpreted across different periods, cultures, and ideological frameworks. This article focuses on the literary and historical representations of Babur in two influential works from different cultural contexts: Pirmkul Qodirov's Uzbek historical novel *Yulduzli Tunlar* (Stars of the Night) and Harold Lamb's Western narrative *Babur the Tiger*. These texts offer distinct portrayals of Babur—Qodirov frames him as a morally driven, spiritually evolving national hero, while Lamb depicts him as a charismatic conqueror within the conventions of Western historical fiction. The comparison of these works allows us to examine how literature serves not only as a reflection of historical reality but also as a medium through which cultural identity, ideological values, and national narratives are constructed and conveyed. By analyzing character development, thematic emphasis, and narrative structure, this paper explores how each author's cultural and ideological background informs their interpretation of Babur. The study aims to demonstrate how the same historical figure can be transformed into different symbolic meanings depending on the cultural lens and literary tradition through which he is viewed.

I. Literature Review

The historical and literary portrayal of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur has been the subject of interest in both Eastern and Western scholarship. Babur, as the founder of the Mughal Empire and the author of the *Baburnama*, has received significant attention not only as a statesman but also as a writer, thinker, and cultural symbol. Existing literature highlights how interpretations of Babur have evolved across time and space, often shaped by ideological, nationalistic, and cultural narratives. In Uzbek literature, Pirmkul Qodirov's *Yulduzli Tunlar* holds a special place. Published during the Soviet era, this novel is not merely a historical account, but a patriotic reinterpretation of Babur's life. Scholars such as Tohir Malik and Ozod Sharafiddinov have pointed out how Qodirov humanizes Babur by delving into his internal conflicts, spiritual development, and love for his homeland. This version of Babur reflects broader themes of national awakening, cultural identity, and moral leadership. Uzbek literary criticism has



emphasized the novel's role in restoring historical memory and national pride during a time when official ideology often distorted or silenced local histories. Conversely, Western treatments of Babur, especially in historical fiction, tend to emphasize his military campaigns, adventurous life, and charismatic leadership. Harold Lamb's *Babur the Tiger*, written in the mid-20th century, presents Babur as a bold and energetic conqueror. Lamb's narrative style is characteristic of Western historical adventure writing, where exoticism, heroism, and conflict are central themes. Scholars such as Michael Curtis and Edward Said have critiqued such portrayals for often reflecting orientalist perspectives—depicting Eastern rulers in a romanticized yet sometimes one-dimensional manner. Moreover, comparative literature studies suggest that literary portrayals of historical figures are often filtered through the cultural lenses of the author. According to Linda Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction, historical novels are not neutral representations of the past but are shaped by contemporary concerns and ideological frameworks. Applying this framework, we can interpret Qodirov's Babur as a postcolonial symbol of resistance and cultural continuity, while Lamb's version reflects Western fascination with Eastern empires and heroic conquest. While both authors draw inspiration from Babur's real-life memoirs and historical records, their aims and narrative techniques differ significantly. This contrast illustrates how literature serves as both a mirror and a mold—reflecting historical facts while simultaneously reshaping them to fit cultural and ideological narratives. This review of the existing literature reveals a gap in direct comparative analyses between Eastern and Western portrayals of Babur in fiction. Therefore, this study contributes to the field by juxtaposing Qodirov's and Lamb's works to explore the intersection of history, literature, and cultural identity.

II. Methodology

This study employs a comparative literary analysis method to examine the representation of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur in Pirimkul Qodirov's *Yulduzli Tunlar* and Harold Lamb's *Babur the Tiger*. The primary aim is to explore how cultural, historical, and ideological contexts influence the literary portrayal of a shared historical figure across different literary traditions—Uzbek and Western.



The analysis follows a qualitative and interpretative approach, grounded in the frameworks of comparative literature, postcolonial criticism, and historiographic metafiction theory. These frameworks provide a critical lens for analyzing the narrative strategies, character development, and thematic concerns in both novels. Close reading of both novels to identify how Babur's character is constructed, including his personality traits, values, political decisions, and inner struggles. Attention is given to dialogue, description, narration, and the use of historical facts.

Each work is analyzed within its historical and cultural context. Yulduzli Tunlar is studied against the backdrop of Soviet-era Uzbek literature and national identity formation. Babur the Tiger is examined in the context of Western historical fiction and orientalist literary traditions. Thematic parallels and contrasts between the two works are identified, focusing on issues such as leadership, exile, identity, heroism, and cultural memory. This helps highlight how the same historical figure is interpreted differently through Eastern and Western lenses.

The study evaluates how each author incorporates or adapts material from Babur's own Baburnama, as well as other historical documents, into their fictional narratives. This includes analyzing the degree of historical accuracy, creative liberty, and ideological influence. This methodological approach not only allows for a nuanced comparison of two literary texts but also sheds light on broader cultural discourses surrounding the legacy of Babur. By interpreting literature as a space where history is both remembered and reimagined, the study contributes to understanding how collective memory and identity are constructed through fiction.

III. Analysis and Discussion

This study compares the portrayal of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur in Pirimkul Qodirov's Yulduzli Tunlar and Harold Lamb's Babur the Tiger. The analysis reveals significant differences in narrative approach, character construction, and cultural context. Qodirov presents Babur as a spiritually deep, morally conscious leader whose internal struggles and poetic sensibility reflect Uzbek national identity and historical pride. His narrative style is introspective and philosophical,



influenced by Babur's Baburnama and postcolonial literary trends. In contrast, Lamb depicts Babur as a heroic conqueror in a fast-paced, action-driven narrative. His portrayal is shaped by Western historical fiction conventions, focusing on adventure, leadership, and external achievements rather than inner transformation. These differences highlight the role of cultural and ideological perspectives in historical fiction. While Qodirov uses Babur's image to reinforce national consciousness, Lamb appeals to a Western audience's fascination with exotic and heroic figures. Both texts illustrate how literature reimagines historical figures to serve broader cultural narratives.

IV. Comparative Analysis

The comparative examination of Yulduzli Tunlar by Pirimkul Qodirov and Babur the Tiger by Harold Lamb highlights distinct cultural, ideological, and literary approaches to representing Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur.

| Aspect | Pirimkul Qodirov – Yulduzli Tunlar | Harold Lamb – Babur the Tiger |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Perspective | Eastern, Uzbek, nationalistic | Western, historical-adventure |
| Character Portrayal | Introspective, moral, culturally rooted | Heroic, action-oriented, militaristic |
| Narrative Style | Philosophical, slow-paced, poetic | Fast-paced, dramatic, accessible |
| Historical Basis | Closely linked to Baburnama, historically reflective | Loosely based on history, emphasizes storytelling |
| Cultural Aim | Reinforces Uzbek identity and cultural memory | Entertains and informs Western readers about the East |
| Ideological Tone | Postcolonial resistance, national revival | Orientalist tendencies, romanticized East |

Conclusion

This study has examined the literary and historical representations of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur in two culturally distinct narratives: Yulduzli Tunlar by Pirimkul Qodirov and Babur the Tiger by Harold Lamb. By comparing these two works, the research has demonstrated how Babur's character has been adapted and reshaped in accordance with the ideological, cultural, and literary goals of their respective authors and audiences. Qodirov's depiction of Babur is deeply



rooted in Uzbek cultural heritage and historical consciousness. Written during the Soviet period, Yulduzli Tunlar serves not only as a historical novel but also as a subtle form of national self-assertion. Qodirov portrays Babur as a morally grounded, intellectually deep, and emotionally complex leader whose personal journey mirrors the broader themes of national identity, cultural resilience, and spiritual growth. The narrative emphasizes Babur's human side—his love for his homeland, his inner struggles, and his poetic soul—thereby restoring his image as both a historical and cultural figure important to the Uzbek people. In contrast, Harold Lamb's Babur the Tiger reflects a Western perspective shaped by the conventions of historical adventure fiction. Lamb presents Babur as a courageous warrior, an ambitious ruler, and a strategic military leader. The focus is more on action, conquest, and leadership than on personal introspection or cultural identity. While Lamb's portrayal is sympathetic and historically informed, it lacks the depth of cultural engagement found in Qodirov's work. His narrative appeals to Western audiences through exoticism and heroism, and can be interpreted through the lens of orientalist literary traditions. This comparative study confirms that literature plays a critical role in shaping historical memory. Authors do not merely retell historical facts; they reinterpret them, influenced by their own cultural contexts and intended readership. Babur, as a historical figure, becomes a flexible symbol—of national pride in one case, and of heroic adventure in another. Ultimately, this research contributes to broader discussions in comparative literature and postcolonial studies by showing how a single historical figure can carry different meanings across literary traditions. It also emphasizes the importance of reading historical fiction critically, understanding the cultural lenses through which history is retold and reimagined.

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