

POLITICAL REPRESSION IN UZBEKISTAN DURING THE SOVIET UNION PERIOD

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of the period of repression from 1937 to 1953 in Uzbekistan and throughout the entire USSR. The study analyzes the causes and consequences of repressive policies and their effects on the population, poets, writers, and military specialists. At the same time, the article highlights the social and spiritual consequences of economic development and industrial achievements, as well as their influence on literature and science. The paper emphasizes the importance of preserving the historical memory of the victims of repression and passing on their legacy to future generations. Based on scholarly works and historical evidence, the article provides readers and researchers with comprehensive and accessible information about the period of repression.

Keywords: Repression, Uzbekistan, 1937–1953, intelligentsia, poets, writers, political repression, Soviet Union, historical memory, literature, economic development, human rights.

The years 1937–1938 are remembered as one of the most tragic periods in the history of the Soviet Union. During these years, a large-scale policy of repression was carried out by the totalitarian regime led by Stalin. This policy resulted in the imprisonment and execution of thousands of innocent people on unfounded charges. The repressions were particularly directed against national intellectuals, writers, and scholars. In Uzbekistan as well, this period dealt a severe blow to literature, science, and spiritual life. This article explores the causes, consequences, and historical significance of the repressive policies of the 1937s.

The repression of 1937–1938 clearly demonstrated how the Soviet totalitarian system functioned and how intolerant it was of free thought. Intellectuals who defended the interests of the people, promoted national self-awareness, and sought to develop society through enlightenment were regarded as dangerous forces by the state. The

Jadids—leaders of the Uzbek national awakening movement and progressive figures in literature, education, and politics—were eliminated during this period under the label of “enemies of the people” [1; p. 275]. In reality, the Jadids aimed to educate the population, shape modern thinking, and achieve national progress. The Soviet regime interpreted these ideas as disobedience to central authority and nationalism, choosing strict punishment as its response. As a result, many Jadids were imprisoned on false charges, exiled to distant regions, or executed. This tragic process caused deep and long-lasting damage to the cultural, scientific, and spiritual development of the Uzbek people.

The policy of repression not only ended individual lives but also created a deep atmosphere of fear and instability throughout society. People were forced to live in fear of expressing free opinions or openly voicing their views, which led to stagnation in social and cultural life. Many families lost loved ones, children grew up without parents, and the trauma of repression became a psychological wound passed down through generations. The works, scientific research, and ideas of repression victims were banned for years, and attempts were made to erase their names from history. As a result, Uzbek literature and science were diverted from their natural path of development and artificially restricted. Only during the years of independence was the innocence of repression victims recognized and their legacy returned to the people. Today, studying and commemorating this historical tragedy plays an important role in educating future generations in the spirit of justice, freedom, and national identity.

The repression carried out during these years constitutes one of the darkest pages in the history of Uzbekistan, inflicting immeasurable damage on the social, cultural, and political life of the people. Between 1937 and 1953 alone, nearly 100,000 people in Uzbekistan were subjected to repression, and 13,000 of them were executed [2; p. 474]. These horrifying figures clearly illustrate the scale of repression and the extent of human tragedy. As a result of these policies, the most active and conscious segments of society were destroyed, and many talented individuals who could have contributed to national development were lost prematurely. Repression did not target only political figures or intellectuals but also affected ordinary peasants, workers, and military personnel. Unjust trials and fabricated accusations completely undermined trust in the legal system. The consequences of this tragic period remain a painful lesson in the collective memory of the people.

The atmosphere of fear created by repression deeply penetrated everyday life, forcing people into silence and submission. Any independent thought, critical view, or national

idea was immediately regarded as dangerous and could result in severe punishment. Many intellectuals and ordinary citizens were compelled to abandon their beliefs and views in order to protect themselves or their loved ones. As a result, initiative, creativity, and free thinking sharply declined. During this period, education, science, and culture were placed under strict ideological control, limiting their development. This significantly slowed the natural progress of the Uzbek people and created serious obstacles to national self-awareness. Today, a thorough analysis of this period and drawing the correct conclusions from it is essential for restoring historical justice and preventing similar tragedies in the future.

The repression years had a tragic impact on the lives of prominent Uzbek poets, forcibly halting their creative activities. Poets who expressed free thought and national spirit in their works were regarded as dangerous figures by Soviet ideology and were subjected to constant surveillance and persecution. Many were arrested on fabricated charges and sentenced to long prison terms or executed. As a result, the lives of talented poets and writers such as Cho‘lpon, Fitrat, and Abdulla Qodiriy ended tragically. Those who survived were forced to conceal deep meanings in symbolic forms to preserve their lives. During this period, literature ceased to be a space of free creativity and became a tool of ideological control. Today, the works of repressed poets have been restored as an integral part of national memory, and their lives and legacies are commemorated with deep respect.

The short story *“Unforgettable Day”* depicts the life of Maqsud Shayxzoda after his release from prison. He was arrested for the second time on September 21, 1951, sentenced to 25 years, and released early in June 1954 after Stalin’s death [3; p. 39]. The story is closely connected to the author’s personal fate and vividly reflects the spiritual suffering and injustice experienced during the repression period. Through this work, Shayxzoda artistically portrays the harsh realities of prison life and the humiliation of human dignity. The themes of longing for freedom, reintegration into life, and inner emotional struggle dominate the narrative. His personal tragedies led to deeper philosophical reflection in his works. This story symbolizes the shared fate of thousands of intellectuals who became victims of repression and holds great historical and moral significance.

During the repression period, Uzbek writers who boldly expressed truth and free thought were considered one of the most dangerous forces by Soviet ideology. Cho‘lpon sharply exposed Bolshevik violence, stating: “A Bolshevik is a person who has lost all human qualities, who knows no mercy, a bloodthirsty executioner... There

are countless Bolsheviks—kill one, ten appear; kill ten, a thousand rise with swords” [4; p. 77]. These words express the poet’s deep hatred of tyranny and his demand for justice. For Cho‘lpon, literature was not merely an aesthetic tool but a battlefield against oppression. Such courage and open criticism were among the main reasons for his repression. Today, his words are considered historical testimony that helps reveal the truth of that era.

Because poets and writers could not freely express themselves, they were forced to convey their emotions through symbols and metaphors. Cho‘lpon’s open criticism thus stands as a symbol of national awakening and resistance. Their works possess not only artistic but also historical value, preserving the truth of that era for future generations. Many poets were imprisoned or executed, weakening the literary sphere, while others struggled to preserve national memory and spirit under extreme conditions. These hardships shaped deep philosophical and spiritual themes in their later works, making the literary legacy of the repression period especially valuable.

Regarding repression, Lieutenant General Pavlenko stated: “In world history, no country has ever destroyed its military specialists so mercilessly and on such a scale on the eve of an approaching war” [5; p. 308]. These words reveal that repression targeted not only civilians but also skilled military personnel, weakening national defense. As a result, experienced officers were lost, creating strategic risks alongside social damage. The strict surveillance and fabricated accusations undermined human values. Today, Pavlenko’s words help us understand the horrors of that period and assess historical truth accurately.

Repression affected not only intellectuals and military figures but also ordinary citizens, creating an atmosphere of constant fear. Families were torn apart, children grew up without parents, and psychological trauma was passed down through generations. Free thought and national ideas were strictly prohibited, forcing people to suppress their inner feelings. The destruction of skilled individuals hindered social and strategic development. The consequences were felt across literature, science, and culture, severely limiting creative freedom. Today, historians and cultural figures continue to study this period and honor the victims.

The repression period also had a profound impact on the economy. During the Second Five-Year Plan (1933–1937), industrial growth surged, making the USSR the second-largest industrial power after the USA [6; p. 126]. However, this growth relied heavily on forced labor and strict control. Collective farming and production quotas drastically

altered lives, plunging many families into poverty. The loss of skilled specialists negatively affected industry and science. Economic achievements came at the cost of human dignity, making this period a combination of industrial progress and tragic repression.

The repression era of 1937–1953 remains one of the most tragic chapters in the history of Uzbekistan and the USSR. Thousands of innocent people—including intellectuals, writers, poets, and military specialists—were imprisoned, executed, or exiled. Repression devastated not only individual lives but also society’s cultural, spiritual, and intellectual development. Literature and science were constrained, and economic progress was achieved through coercion. Today, this tragic history serves as a powerful lesson about justice, human rights, and freedom, strengthening national consciousness and historical awareness.

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