

**SADRIDDIN AYNİ AND THE FINAL PERIOD OF THE BUKHARA EMIRATE: A  
LITERARY AWAKENING**

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**Abstract:** This article explores the formative years and intellectual growth of Sadriddin Ayni (1878–1954), one of the most influential figures of the Central Asian enlightenment movement. Born in the Bukhara Emirate, Ayni grew up in a modest family of craftsmen and scholars whose values shaped his passion for knowledge and reform. Drawing mainly on his autobiographical works *Memoirs* and *The Old School*, the article traces Ayni’s path from his childhood education and early hardships to the personal losses that strengthened his resolve for social change. His experiences under the oppressive rule of the Emir later inspired his literary and reformist vision. In Samarkand, Ayni created some of his most remarkable works, including the revolutionary poem *The March of Freedom* (1918), which powerfully voiced his ideals of liberty and progress.

**Keywords:** Sadriddin Ayni; Bukhara Emirate; Memoirs; Mir Arab Madrasa; Social reform; Literary awakening; Central Asian enlightenment; Freedom poetry; *Marshi Hurriyat*; Autobiographical prose.

Sadriddin Ayni, the son of Said Murodkhoja, was born on April 15, 1878, in the village of Khojasokhtari, located in Gijduvan district of the Bukhara Emirate. He came from a family of peasants whose ancestors were known for their craftsmanship and artistry. His great-grandfather, Said Ahmadkhoja, was a follower of the Kubrovia Sufi order, while his grandfather, Saidumar-khoja, was admired as an educated man capable of “bringing life to wood,” a phrase that reflected his creative skill. Because of their trade, Ayni’s family often moved from one village to another in search of work.

Information about Ayni’s early life and relatives mainly comes from his own writings, particularly his autobiographical works *A Brief Biography* (*Qisqacha tarjimayi holim*) and *Memoirs* (*Esdaliklar*), which remain the most reliable sources for studying his life and intellectual background.

In his autobiographical works *Memoirs* and *The Old School*, Sadriddin Ayni gives vivid portrayals of his father, Said Murodkhoja, describing him as a literate and forward-thinking man who stood out among his fellow villagers. His father’s commitment to education was evident in the way he arranged for Ayni’s elder brother, Muhiddinkhoja, to study at the Mir Arab madrasa, while enrolling young Sadriddin in the village’s old-style maktab (traditional school). From these accounts, it is clear that his father played the most decisive role in awakening Ayni’s interest in learning and culture.

In *Memoirs*, Ayni recalls how his father once praised a short Persian quatrain the young boy had written about the construction of a new mosque veranda. The poem, simple yet imaginative, revealed the child’s early gift for observation and expression.

At the age of six, Ayni began attending the village maktab. However, as he later wrote in *The Old School*, the instruction there was unsystematic and limited. His father, understanding the value of proper guidance, later sent him to a women’s maktab led by an *otin-oy* (female teacher). Alongside his formal lessons, his father personally introduced him to the Abjad numerical system, encouraging analytical thinking and curiosity from an early age.

Ayni grew up with three brothers: his elder brother, Muhiddinkhoja, and two younger ones, Sirojiddinkhoja and Kiromiddinkhoja. Sadly, the latter two passed away in childhood. The family moved frequently between two villages — Sokhtare in Gijduvan district, where their ancestral home stood, and Mahallai Bolo in Shofirkon district, his mother's native village. These rural environments and his family's craftsmanship background left a deep imprint on Ayni's imagination and sense of realism.

It was within this setting that Ayni first encountered poetry. He often mentioned that he heard the words "poet" and "poetry" for the first time from his father. The first poet he personally met was Iso, a friend of his father who frequently visited their home in Sokhtare. Although Ayni's early schooling was traditional, his real lessons in reading, writing, and reflection came from his father's example and encouragement.

Tragedy struck the family in 1889 when both of Ayni's parents died during a cholera epidemic — his father at fifty-seven, his mother Zevaroy soon after. Ayni was only eleven years old at the time, while his brother Muhiddinkhoja was nineteen. Within a short period, their youngest brother Kiromiddin also passed away from illness. These early losses marked the beginning of a life shaped by resilience, endurance, and an unshakable faith in learning as a means of survival and transformation.

While aspiring to study in the Bukhara madrasas, Ayni once took part in a "*baytbarak*" (poetic contest) with a young mullah from the city. His talent caught the attention of Sharifjon Mahdum, an influential scholar and poet, which became the first significant turning point in Ayni's academic and literary journey.

Ayni's passion for knowledge and poetry led him to Bukhara at the age of twelve, and by thirteen, he began his studies at the Mir Arab Madrasa. At that time, entering such institutions was extremely difficult for poor students like him. To support himself, Ayni undertook various forms of manual labor — planting maize and pumpkins, repaying debts incurred for his father's memorial, and even helping his elder brother who was also studying at Mir Arab.

While studying, he also worked as a janitor at the madrasa. Nevertheless, his dedication, intellectual curiosity, and perseverance enabled him to overcome all obstacles. Over the course of sixteen years, Ayni received his education in several prestigious Bukhara madrasas:

- Mir Arab (1891)
- Olimkhon (1892–1893)
- Khoji Zohid (1894–1896)
- Badalbek (1896–1899)
- Kukaldosh (until 1908)

After completing his studies, he served for some time as an assistant to Sharifjon Mahdum, a progressive scholar and poet known by the pen name Sadri Ziyoy. Sharifjon's home frequently hosted literary gatherings and intellectual discussions, and it was within this vibrant atmosphere that Ayni's literary talent matured, paving his way into the world of literature and enlightenment.

Even after leaving Bukhara, Sadridin Ayni continued to face the cruelty of the Emir's regime. The Emir's spies actively searched for him in Samarkand, determined to capture or eliminate the

reform-minded writer. On April 22, 1918, Ayni fled to Tashkent, where he lived for six months under constant threat. Unable to find Ayni himself, the Emir's soldiers arrested his younger brother, Sirojiddinkhoja, in Mahallai Bolo village of Shofirkon district. Although innocent, Sirojiddin was executed behind the walls of the Ark fortress, in a mud-brick stable near the Rope Bazaar (Arqon bozor). Tragically, this was not the end of the family's suffering. In the spring of 1922, Ayni's elder brother, Muhiddinkhoja, who served as the imam of the Sokhtare mosque, was tied to a gujum (mulberry) tree and brutally killed by the Emir's soldiers.

These horrific events deeply scarred the young poet's heart and mind. The loss of his beloved brothers became a turning point in his moral and creative consciousness. Ayni immortalized these tragedies in his literary works, especially in his novel "Slaves" (*Qullar*), where he artistically depicted the cruelty of despotism and the pain of loss.

In memory of his brothers, Ayni composed a heartfelt elegy (*marsiya*):

Jigaram ob shudu rext zi du chashmi taram,  
Jigaram, vo jigaram, vo jigaram, vo jigaram.

*(My liver melted and poured from my tearful eyes,  
My liver, oh my liver, oh my liver, oh my liver.)*

This quatrain conveys the depth of Ayni's grief and the symbolic disintegration of the poet's inner self, marking one of the earliest expressions of personal tragedy and social protest in his writings.

After the tragic losses of his brothers, Sadriddin Ayni settled permanently in Samarkand, where he later married and established his family life. In 1923, he purchased a house with a courtyard, moving there with his family. Today, this very house has been converted into the Sadriddin Ayni Memorial House-Museum, preserving the memory of the great writer and thinker.

Ayni's wife, Salohat opa, was an educated and enlightened woman, known for her progressive views and support of reformist ideas. She was a true companion, sharing in all of Ayni's joys and hardships, and providing unwavering emotional and intellectual support. Thanks to this stable family life and creative atmosphere, Ayni produced some of his finest literary works in Samarkand.

It was also during this period, in 1918, that Ayni composed one of his most famous poems in the Tajik language, titled "*Marshi Hurriyat*" (*The March of Freedom*). This poem became a powerful symbol of liberation and awakening for the peoples of Central Asia:

Ey sitamdidagon, ey asiron!  
Vaqti ozodii mo rasid.  
Mujdagoni dixed, ey faqiron!  
Dar jahon subhi shodi damid.

*O ye oppressed ones, O captives!  
The time of our freedom has come.  
Rejoice, O poor ones!  
For the dawn of joy has risen upon the world.*

This poem marked the emergence of Ayni as both a national poet and a social reformer, whose voice spoke not only for his nation but for all the oppressed peoples seeking freedom and enlightenment.

Sadriddin Ayni's life reflects the journey of a thinker who rose from hardship to become a symbol of enlightenment and reform in Central Asia. His early struggles, family tragedies, and years of study shaped his belief in education and justice. Through works like "Memoirs," "The Old School," and the poem "The March of Freedom," Ayni exposed social injustice and voiced the ideals of liberty and progress. His legacy unites the cultural heritage of the past with the spirit of renewal, inspiring future generations to value knowledge, freedom, and human dignity.

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