

## Kurdish Language

The Kurdish language is an Indo-European language closely related to Farsi. It shares words with English, for example, *ster* (star), *der* (door) and *rhoobar* (river), and Sanskrit, for example, *tanoor* and *na'an*. Dialects include Kurmanji, Bahdini, Sorani, Gurani, Hawrami and Dimili (also known as Zaza or Zazaki). Gurani was the poetic language of the Ardalan and Baban dynasties. Kurdish is written in the Latin script in Turkey; in the Cyrillic script in Armenia, Georgia and Russia, and in the Arabic script in Iraq, Syria and Iran.

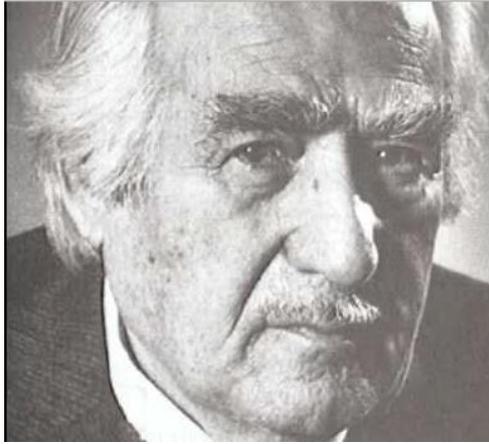
## Kurdish Literature

Until the tenth century, Kurds relied on an oral tradition to pass down folklore, proverbs and poems. Poetry in literature heavily relied on this folklore, commemorating love, sacrifice, freedom, heroism, justice, beauty and Kurdistan. The *Sharafnamah* written by the Kurdish prince, Amir Sharaf al-Din Bitlisi, in 1597, outlines Kurdish history, culture and the boundaries of Greater Kurdistan. Ahmed Khani (1651 – 1707) from Hakkari wrote a 6,000-line narrative couplet poem about a tragic love affair called *Mem U Zin*. Other renowned classical poets include Nali (1797 – 1856) and the Sufi, Mawlawi Tawagozi (1806 – 1882), both from southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq).

In classical poetry there are rules regarding rhyming and metre, with poems varying in the number of lines for each verse. These rules generate more than six styles, like the *maqams* of music. *Ghazal* is the style for love and women; *mahdah* is the style for describing powerful people; *ratha* is for sadness; *l'eeni* or *parasti* is for religious poems, and *haja* are couplet poems created by two people in a contest, each making up alternative lines according to the beat and rhyme of the previous line. Poets that bridged classical and free form poetry include Pire-Merd (1867 – 1950), and Abdullah Goran (1904 – 1962). The free form poets of the twentieth century include Sherko Bekas, Marif Agha-e, Abdulkhaleq Perhezi and Nasser Aghabra, and female poets like Jheela Hussein, Zara Nadri, Seemin Gaychi and Kalsoom Osmanpoor.

Until the late twentieth century, literature was often written in the language of the rulers, i.e. the language of the educated. For example, Amir Sharaf Khan Bitlisi wrote the *Sharafnamah*, in classical Persian. In the 1920s, Jamil Saa'ib wrote the first novel ever published in the Kurdish language. Yet many Kurdish writers continued to write in the languages of the rulers. Salim Barakat from western Kurdistan (northern Syria) wrote in Arabic and Yashar Kamal from northern Kurdistan (eastern Turkey) wrote in Turkish.

However, Cigerxwîn, meaning 'bleeding lung' in Kurdish, wrote in the Kurmanji dialect. His poetry and other works influenced many Kurdish authors and playwrights to adopt their mother tongue, particularly since the 1960s. Like many Kurdish writers, Cigerxwîn was politically active. He was a member of Xoybun, a pan-Kurdish organisation that lobbied for an independent Kurdistan.



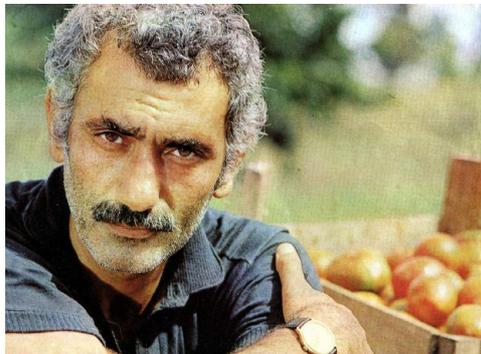
Cigerxwîn (1903 - 1984)

In the poem *Who am I?*,  
Cigerxwîn writes:

I am the proud Kurd  
Of a noble race  
The enemy's enemy  
To the peaceful friend  
Like my mighty ancestors  
I want to be free  
Not forever oppressed.

Kurdish writers now work in diverse media. For instance, two of the most well-known Kurdish filmmakers are Yilmaz Guney, whose films include *Yol* or *The Road*, and Bahman Ghobadi, whose films include *A Time for Drunken Horses* and *Turtles Can Fly*.

Too many Kurdish writers have been imprisoned for writing about Kurds and Kurdistan or for writing in the Kurdish language.



Yilmaz Guney (1937 - 1984)



Bahman Ghobadi (b.1961)

Photo sources:

Cigerxwîn - <https://encrypted-tbn1.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcQj8YY9Frot6ehfE7TFMkSavlsFyAllFWM34vPO-qehfeGJ12bb>

Yilmaz Guney - <http://www.unhcr.org/about-us/promref/3b725510e/guney-yilmaz-putun.html>

Bahman Ghobadi - [https://encrypted-tbn3.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcRSVsxbrRo6UDBAVoAPrRmRWwB63MEP\\_QNiZxw1ijihKvJy0VI10](https://encrypted-tbn3.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcRSVsxbrRo6UDBAVoAPrRmRWwB63MEP_QNiZxw1ijihKvJy0VI10)



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