

Uzbek Folklore and Social Values: Historical, Cultural and Pedagogical Foundations

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Abstract:

This article focuses on analyzing the role and significance of folklore in Uzbek literary studies. It examines the historical development of folklore, its scientific research, and the role of oral literature in the national values and traditions. The richness of Uzbek folklore in terms of its genres, as well as the importance of oral literature in the upbringing of younger generations and its inclusion in education, are discussed. The article emphasizes the necessity of studying folklore as a means to impact human spirituality and to reflect national ideals and values.

Keywords: folklore, oral folk art, national values, literary studies, historical period, folk poetic art, epic poems, social relations, mass culture, folk literature, folk heroes, uzbek folklore, folk traditions, historical heritage, folklore research.

INTRODUCTION

Until a nation reaches its own civilization, throughout various historical processes, people's way of life, ease, and aesthetic taste evolve to a high level. During these stages, concepts related to specific fields, which later separated from philosophy, began to emerge. These concepts formed the foundation for the creation of large knowledge bases, reflecting the initial perceptions that shaped a nation's free scientific and creative activities.

Before people knew writing or when literacy rates were low, they expressed these perceptions orally. In this context, unique examples of "the art of words" emerged, shaping the oral folk literature. These works played—and still play—a crucial role in enhancing people's spirituality and introducing them to national traditions and values. As the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, stated: "These immortal works of the world's cultural heritage remind us that

humanity's lineage, historical roots, and noble ideals are one, and that the aspirations of different nations and ethnic groups toward the future are also shared" [1].

For this reason, efforts are being made to pass down and increase the relevance of Uzbek folk oral literature, which reflects the nation's identity and values. Among these efforts, the resolution issued by the President of Uzbekistan on November 22, 2018, regarding the International Bakhshi (traditional minstrel) Art Festival aims to strengthen friendship and creative cooperation among nations, preserve the art of epic storytelling, and promote it widely among the public. Similarly, the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan on June 27, 2018, concerning the "Nurli Navolar" International Folklore Festival, aims to establish creative collaboration among folklore artists and showcase national folk art on an international scale. Additionally, the government's initiative to publish a 100-volume collection of "Uzbek Folk Art Monuments" reflects its commitment to preserving and promoting the nation's creative heritage.

In today's era of globalization, the influence of "mass culture" poses threats to national spirituality, potentially filling the moral voids in young people's consciousness. To prevent this and to instill national values in the younger generation, these initiatives contribute positively to cultural and moral development.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The term folklore originates from the combination of the words "folk" (people) and "lore" (wisdom). It was first introduced into the academic world by William Thoms in 1846. Since then, the term has been used alongside "oral folk literature". In English-speaking countries such as England and the United States, folklore encompasses poetry, prose, music, dance, painting, carving, religious beliefs, and customs. However, in other cultures, including Uzbek folklore, it primarily refers to the art of words, specifically the oral poetic tradition within literary studies [7, 5].

In this regard, while genres like epics, fairy tales, riddles, and proverbs are common to all nations, Uzbek folklore also includes unique genres such as askiyaa (witty verbal duels) and lof (exaggerated storytelling), which are exclusive to Uzbek oral tradition. Other branches of folk art are collectively classified under "Folk Applied Arts".

The study of folklore as an academic discipline began in Western scholarship in the second half of the 17th century. However, Uzbek folkloristics emerged later due to the political influence of the Soviet Union, specifically in the first quarter of the 20th century [6, 6]. In 1935, H. Zarif and Sh. Rajabiy were the first to introduce the term "folklore" in Uzbek scholarship through their work "Samples from Uzbek Soviet Folklore". Before this, terms such as "folk literature", "oral creativity", and "oral literature" were commonly used [7, 6].

With this development, research and academic works in Uzbek folkloristics began to expand. Some notable studies include: H. Zarifov – Uzbek Folklore (1939), a university-level textbook, M. Afzalov – Orzigul (1941), B. Karimov – Uzbek Folk Tales (1939), H. Zarifov & V. Zhirmunsky – Uzbek Folk Heroic Epics (1947), M. Saidov – Artistic Mastery in Uzbek Folk Epics, T. Mirzayev – Variations of the Uzbek Epic "Alpomish", M. Qodirov – Uzbek Folk Oral Drama (1963) [4, 18] and e.t.c. These studies examine fundamental characteristics of Uzbek folklore, such as collective authorship, oral transmission, traditionalism, and the existence of multiple variations.

RESULTS

After gaining independence, Uzbekistan, like other developing nations, has focused not only on economic and political growth but also on cultural and educational advancement. In this process, strong attention has been given to oral folk literature, as it plays a crucial role in promoting national values and sacred concepts—the foundation of the Ideology of Independence. The aim has been to widely disseminate both folk heritage and universal humanistic idea. This emphasis stems from the

fact that every piece of folklore reflects a certain ideological purpose, the hopes and aspirations of the people, and their life-affirming vision for the future [2, 6].

Uzbek folklore vividly reflects the spirit of historical periods, often presenting them in a generalized and symbolic form. For instance, in the epic "Alpomish", the conflict within the Qongirat tribe, caused by misunderstandings, leads to the separation of relatives and the disintegration of families. This situation mirrors the decline of patriarchal-tribal relations and highlights the struggle for family unity, which played a significant role in shaping social relationships at that time [3, 12].

At the same time, folklore reinterprets reality through fantastic and romantic imagination. Elements such as dragons, winged horses, extraordinary warriors with supernatural strength, and mystical guides with magical powers serve as narrative tools to inspire hope for a brighter future. This combination of abstract-idealistic and realistic worldviews defines the uniqueness of oral folk literature.

The reason behind this storytelling style is that people recognize and admire only heroes who possess ideal virtues and can lead others. Folklore figures such as Alpomish, Go'ro'g'li, Ravshan, Avazbek, Rustamkhan, Nasreddin Afandi, Aldar Kosa, Zumrad, Barchinoy, Hiloloy, and Xolbeka embody the power, wisdom, and national values of the Uzbek people. These characters overcome hardships and emerge victorious in struggles, fully representing the people's ideal vision of resilience and success.

Folklore narratives not only depict the historical characteristics of different eras but also serve as a reflection of the Uzbek people's moral and ethical values. They emphasize respect for parents and elders, patriotism, bravery, honor, the protection of women and children, good neighborly relations, loyalty to friends, steadfastness in faith, the pursuit of truth, honesty, perseverance, sincerity, kindness, simplicity, and hospitality. These sacred concepts, deeply rooted in Uzbek culture, are vividly portrayed through folk tales, epics, and legends.

Folklore characters are generally divided into positive and negative heroes, based on their role in the eternal struggle between good and evil. However, instead of detailed psychological characterization, their personalities are revealed through actions, behavior, appearance, and dialogue with other characters. For instance: Go'ro'g'li fights for his homeland's freedom, cares for his children, and stands up for the oppressed; Alpomish, at the age of seven, lifts a 14-botmon (65,32 kilogramms) bow inherited from his grandfather. He is modest, stubbornly proud, and courageous, yet refuses to accept his friend's help while imprisoned due to his sense of honor; Zumrad, an orphan, endures her stepmother's cruelty with patience. In the end, her kindness and diligence are rewarded by a magical old woman; Rustamkhan's devotion to his mother leads to his near downfall when an evil sorceress, disguised as his mother, tries to kill him. This highlights the deep reverence for mothers in Uzbek culture; The three warrior brothers are raised not only physically and intellectually but also spiritually by their father. Their courage and wisdom help them overcome challenges; Nasriddin Afandi, known for his sharp wit and intelligence, outsmarts even the most powerful figures in tricky situations, reflecting the Uzbek people's love for wisdom and humor. These examples demonstrate how Uzbek folklore serves as both a mirror of historical reality and a guide for ethical conduct, shaping cultural identity and moral values across generations.

DISCUSSION

From birth to adulthood, children are nurtured through traditional lullabies, ensuring a peaceful sleep, and engage in folk games that develop their social, intellectual, and physical abilities. Fairy tales, riddles, tongue twisters, and folk songs play a crucial role in shaping their cognitive and linguistic development. However, in today's world, busy work schedules of parents and their own unfamiliarity with folklore have led to a decline in its role in instilling universal values in children.

Additionally, the rapid progress of globalization, technological advancements, and the rise of social media—despite their intended purpose of improving human life—have brought about a crisis of identity and human values. In many developed countries, where people have achieved economic prosperity and fulfilled their biological needs, folklore and literature that promote humanistic ideals are often viewed as exotic relics rather than essential cultural components. As a result, mental health issues, rising suicide rates, moral degradation, and identity crises have become prevalent in society. Since the ultimate goal of any technological revolution or economic development is to improve human life, it is essential to prevent moral decline by ensuring that people are enriched with spiritual and cultural values. Humanity must not only focus on material well-being but also on preserving its identity through history, traditions, and folklore. These cultural treasures play an irreplaceable role in helping individuals discover their true selves and maintain a sense of belonging and purpose in an ever-changing world.

CONCLUSION

During the years of independence, serious attention has been paid to the promotion and dissemination of folklore as an integral part of national values. The ideological pressure and restrictions that hindered the study of oral folk art in previous centuries have been lifted, allowing scholarly research to resume. Practical efforts are being made to preserve oral traditions across all genres.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Jadid intellectuals emphasized that language, literature, and education were fundamental to the existence, freedom, and progress of the nation. Their views remain relevant today. However, in the face of "mass culture" and various spiritual threats, folklore remains crucial for strengthening cultural immunity and enhancing human spirituality. The teaching and study of oral literature at all educational levels is an urgent necessity. Any research conducted on this subject contributes significantly to the methodology of folklore education. Since folklore serves as a spiritual and aesthetic tool for understanding national identity, its continued exploration, preservation, and integration into education is essential for cultural continuity and self-awareness.

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