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HISTORY OF TRADITIONAL UZBEK PUPPET THEATER

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Abstract

This article describes the history, forms and content of the traditional Uzbek puppet theater. The role of the puppet theater as folk art, ritual art and a tool of social criticism is analyzed. The article provides detailed information about the main types of dolls, famous characters and their symbolic meanings. In addition, the results of the research show that the traditional puppet theater occupies an important place in the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Uzbek people, and its preservation and development is one of the urgent tasks of today.

Keywords: *Tradition, clown, comic, puppeteer, Korfarmon, puppet, show, "Chadir Jamal", "Chadir Hayal", "Fonus Hayal", "Kachal Polvon", "Sarkardalar", satire, humor, improvisation*

Introduction

Puppet Theater is one of the oldest forms of entertainment, and Central Asia is recognized as one of the oldest centers of this field in world theater studies. Because, in this area, the first performances of Puppet Theater appeared in the early stages of the development of society and began to form in the process of deification of nature, adaptation to the laws of life, celebration of religious ceremonies. "Because in the territory of Uzbekistan, the buds of the traditional theater appeared in primitive times in the form of imitation combat and folk games depicting hunting and other labor processes, rituals in which worship of the forces of nature took place" (Kadyrov M. H., 2022).

According to M. Kadirov, an art historian, two sources played an important role in the creation of the Uzbek puppet theater. The first

one is related to the cases of the peoples living in our country using different masks in the rituals of remembering the deceased based on animistic beliefs, and the second one is related to the processes of these rituals gradually turning into ordinary spectacles and the masks passing into the hands of clowns. So, the beginning of the Uzbek puppet theater appeared in ceremonies and began to find its initial form in the work of clowns. It can be concluded that theater puppets appeared due to the fact that masks played a leading role in performances at events.

The famous Russian puppeteer Y. V. Spersansky commented that "A person wearing a simple carnival mask is a half-puppet. If there is an actor on top of that, he becomes a puppeteer, because while trying to animate a lifeless mask, he plays better with the «puppet method»" (Kadyrov M. H., Kadyrova S. M.,

2006). However, it cannot be said that all these masks were the basis for the appearance of the puppet theater. Because “before the Arab invasion (VII century), the mask was widely used in the local traditional theater, for this reason we called the theater of this period the theater of masks” (Kadyrov M. H., Kadyrova S. M., 2006). It follows that in the development of puppet shows as an art form, performances of clowns and amateurs, first with masks, and later with puppets, played an important role.

In the traditional Uzbek folk theater, such genres as “criticism” and “simile” typical of the comic direction were leading. The reason is that oral dramaturgy in the satirical direction has been improved in all aspects, the events of social life are reflected, the main attention is focused on monologues and dialogues, the representatives of the ruling class are laughed at, the hatred of the suffering people for the officials and the rich is embodied, which expresses the important importance of the art of clowns and amateurs in the life of society. The sharpness of the satirical blade in the performances, the unscrupulous criticism of the incompetent people, and the communication of social problems through puppets made clowns somewhat comfortable. Therefore, the doll as an auxiliary tool has become a specific direction of the art of criticism. “In particular, there are a number of comedies in the traditional theater such as “Shingilmurad”, “Wooden Wrestler”, “Shepherd”, “Shepherd Boy”, “Maryamxon”, in which one of the main characters is a puppet. “Dolls are sometimes human-sized, sometimes 30–40 cm. The actor played two different roles at the same time in such shows. The conflict is built between a living person and a puppet” (Kadyrov M. H., Kadyrova S. M., 2006). So, the plot line, idea and theme of the performances, the reflection of life reality in comic forms, comedies, pantomimes, funny stories, and the fact that the games are based on improvisation determine the general image of the traditional puppet theater. After that, the art of clowns, entertainers and puppeteers was formed and developed in an inextricably linked manner and lived in a traditional form until the 20th century.

I. N. Solomonik, who comprehensively researched the history of puppet theater in Eastern countries, concluded that “Puppet theater is one of the oldest types of theater art. It was

known to many peoples of the world and played an important role in the life of archaic societies in the long past” (Solomonik I. N., 1983). Scientists who have studied the stages of development of this art in Central Asia come to the conclusion that “artists from economically and culturally well-developed cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Shahrisabz, Tashkent, including groups of puppeteers, moved with caravans on the Great Silk Road in the direction of Eastern and Western countries, contributing to the wide spread of this art” (Kadyrov M. H., Kadyrova S. M., 2006). For this reason, hand-played and string-controlled forms developed and reached Southeast Asia from Central Asia. “In our opinion, the puppet show appeared in the ancient classical countries of Asia and later spread to Europe through Italy and Iran. It is possible that Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, played the role of a conduit” (Kadyrov M. H., 2022). That is probably why there are common features of puppet theaters of the world’s nations, performance styles, and even puppet characters. In particular, characters such as German Hanswurst, Austrian Cosperele, Italian Punchinello, English Punch, French Polishinel, Czech Kashparsk, Persian Pahlavon Kachal, Turkish Karagoz, Russian Petrushka are similar to the character, position and even appearance of the character of the Uzbek traditional puppet theater Kachal Polvon. Although these common features indicate that the puppet shows of Eastern and Western countries were formed and developed as a result of interaction, it cannot be denied that they have fundamentally different characteristics. In particular, it can be seen in the three main characteristics of the puppet theater of the Eastern countries, that is, it is based on humor, it is formed as a street show and it is directed to satirical laughter. In Western countries, the theme and idea of puppet shows are mostly prepared in advance, revealed in the form of bitter laughter.

In the Eastern countries, there were four types of Puppet Theater – gloves, string, shadow, and live puppetry. The shadow theater in Uzbekistan is called “Fonus hayal”. In the past, the type of performance performed by three actors in front of the audience was popular only in Japan, and it was called “bunraku”. Today, this type of performance is considered one of the main types of Puppet Theater in the world.

In the Chinese historical chronicles, Central Asia was also called the “land of the West”. The reason is that under the influence of the artists who came from the West and settled in China, the “baisi” national theater, including the puppet theater, was formed in China. Japanese and Russian scholars write that “Western theater” played a great role in the emergence of “gagaku”, “bunraku” and “sangaku” theater systems in Japan.

In the Middle Ages, the conquest of Central Asia by the Arabs (the first half of the 7th century) led to the decline of art forms. “Any image (picture, statue, doll) is forbidden, mansions and mansions filled with unique works of art and sculpture will be razed to the ground. As a result, painting enters the manuscript books, sculpture becomes a toy and amulet, the puppets in the masked theater shrink and land in the hands of the clown-puppeteer” (Kadyrov M. H., Kadyrova S. M., 2006). Puppeteers fight for the survival of this art, especially despite the strict prohibition of puppet shows. It is known from the descriptions given in various interpretations of the creation of puppet shows by many scholars that this art first appeared with gloves, and then with strings.

In the 9th–14th centuries, the types of puppet theater developed somewhat, and its educational value increased even more. Mythological plots have been replaced by life events and social themes, which have penetrated deeper into people’s lives. Among them, poets, scientists and philosophers gave various definitions and encouragements. “Comparison of a puppet to a person, its play to a person’s life, and the work of a puppeteer to the sky is not only found in treatises, but also in classical poetry” (Kadyrov M. H., Kadyrova S. M., 2006). In particular, this situation is clearly visible in the works of Omar Khayyam and Pahlavon Mahmud. For example, master of rubai Umar Khayyam, talking about the “Chadir Jamal” type of puppet theater, compares it to a matter of life and death. Pahlavon Mahmud’s rubai clearly describes the “Fanus hayal”, that is, the type of shadow theater.

The art of puppeteers reached its peak of development in the XV–XVI centuries. After all, this period entered history as a period of renaissance with the flourishing of art throughout the world. In particular, puppet

characters played a major role in “Comedia del arte” shows in Italy.

Puppet Theater, like many other arts, developed at this stage of history, which is recognized as the Timurid period in the history of Uzbekistan. In particular, shows dedicated to social issues and conflicts between different layers of society appeared. Information about the puppet theater of this period can also be found in the work of the great thinker Alisher Navoi. In particular, the “Hayrat-ul Abror” epic contains a number of information in this regard. The poet calls “kovorchachchi”, i.e., puppeteer, “chodar” – tent, and the puppet “lubat” and “kovorchak”. Referring to the “Chadir Jamal” and “Chadir Hayal” shows, he talks in detail about the “Fonus hayal” type. Based on the information of Navoi and his contemporaries, it can be understood that the “Fonus hayal” theater became a tradition among representatives of the upper class in the XIV–XVI centuries. Since these performances were mainly performed in palaces, his fable gradually fell into disrepute and, unfortunately, did not reach our time.

“Fonus hayal” is today’s shadow theater, and the movement of puppets on the lantern is considered to be a show performed through shadows. Dolls are made of wood and leather, and they are mounted on sticks. By moving the sticks and pulling the strings attached to them, the puppets came to life.

Performances were performed in the evening or in a dark building, mostly in palaces. The shadows of the dolls are cast on a thin white cloth by the light of candles or linseed oil lanterns. As a result, their shadow in motion appeared. Performances of the theater “Fonus Imagination” were performed mainly based on epic motifs, that is, folk heroic epics, and unfortunately, oral examples have not been preserved.

By the 16th and 17th centuries, unfortunately, the “Fonus Hayal” theater fell out of circulation. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the puppet theater mainly consisted of two types: “Chadir Jamal” and “Chadir Hayal”.

A special kind of performance of traditional puppet theater is the theater of “Chadir Hayal”. Based on its content, this performance is also known as “Theatre of Dreams and Fantasy”. Theater “Chadir Hayal” is described as

more complex and perfect than “Chadir Jamal”. “This feature is clearly visible in all the components – the structure of the stage, the making of puppets, the style of performance, and the scope of the theme” (Kadyrov M. H., Kadyrova S. M., 2006). “Chadir Hayal” was mainly a type of show performed in the evening, that is, with the help of various lights and torches, mainly during public holidays. It shows puppets on strings, behind a black curtain in the dark. The strings that make the puppets move are black, through which the puppet’s body, head, legs and arms are tied and connected to the handle. The puppeteer controlled the puppet through this handle, hidden in the inner curtain. The puppet show is technologically very rich. This is because it was able to control up to 10 puppets at the same time. In this regard, the actors in such a troupe are considered very talented. The character of Yasovul is the main character of the theater “Chadir hayal”. Although he resembles Kachal Polwan in some ways, there are significant differences that set them apart. For example, although it is similar in leading the show and connecting events, it is completely different in terms of character and social status. “In fact, we imagine Yasovul in a humbler and purer image than the officials who came from the lower class, served in the palace, but did not cut off contact with the people” (Kadyrov M. H., Kadyrova S. M., 2006).

Puppets in the form of historical figures were of great importance in the performances of “Chadir Hayal”. In addition, music and artistic decoration led the performances. In particular, such tunes as “Ufar”, “Miyankhana” and “Charkh” were used. Puppets in the form of historical figures were of great importance in the performances of “Chadir Hayal”. In addition, music and artistic decoration led the performances. In particular, such tunes as “Ufar”, “Miyankhana” and “Charkh” were used.

Performances in all three types of traditional Uzbek puppet theater were led by performers. After all, there is no clear information about whether or not the art of directing existed in the Uzbek folk puppet theater until the 20th century. However, in many places, it has been commented that korfarmons have aspects similar to the profession of director as the organizer, author, and manager of puppet shows. However, in many places, it has been

commented that korfarmons have aspects similar to the profession of director as the organizer, author, and manager of puppet shows.

In particular, Professor M. Kadyrov defines “Korfarmon – the head of a gang of clowns, an ordered, a director, a person who manages the game from a puppet theater visible to the audience” (Kadyrov M. H., Kadyrova S. M., 2006). It is not for nothing that a scholar who has deeply studied the history of Uzbek traditional theater compares these professionals to directors.

Korfarmon is a talented actor with vast experience, who was engaged in directing (corporation) activities at the peak of his skills. The director’s instructions mainly helped the actor in choosing the subject, in clarifying his skills, in creating the puppet image, in determining the time and place, in taking into account all the organizational work, and in ensuring his practice. Korfarmon was also engaged in artistic decoration of the performance by saying a verse corresponding to the verb of each character, that is, small poetic verses. In order to make the show more enjoyable, they engaged the puppets in a dialogue based on nonsense in addition to the text of the show. That is why the skill of the performers was the leading factor in the popularity of these performances among the people. Their performances based on eloquence, similes, and humor played an important role in the success of the show. Therefore, if the director manages the performance secretly, the conductor determines its duration and success based on the performance during the performance. In this respect, the corporal is now confidently called a director. In this regard, L. A. Perepeletsina said: “Korfarmon helps to create the illusion of a performance by using the technique of traditional puppet theater – the dialogue between the audience and the puppet” (Perepelitsyn L. A., 1959). In fact, in the scene of the quarrel between Kachal Polvan and his wife Bichakhanim, the Korfarman actively intervenes in this conflict. He humiliates the heroes in front of the people, makes them feel ashamed and helps them to reconcile. It can be seen that Korfarmon took an active part in revealing the true purpose and idea of the show. In a word, the role of corporals was important in the success of puppet shows. The role of the choir-

masters was especially important in the performances of the Theater “Chadir Hayal”.

The art of Uzbek puppetry has been passed down from generation to generation, from father to son. For example, an amateur puppeteer who studied under a special master for ten years and received a blessing received the title “puppet master”. “Egamberdi Karimov, a well-known trickster in his time, was a close associate and student of the puppeteer Tursunboy. Tursunboy often exchanged roles with Egamberdi, and both of them were able to demonstrate their skills in tricks and puppetry” (Kadyrov M. H., 2022).

The satirical edge of the spectacles shown by the puppeteers becomes even sharper in the conditions of colonialism and social realism. In particular, from the middle of the 19th century, the revealing power of the two spectacles increases even more. “In the history of the puppet theater of Turkestan, there is information that a severe administrative punishment was applied to the puppeteer for making fun of famous representatives of the tsarist government in the form of puppets” (Gavrilov M. F., 1928).

Puppets lost their satirical power as the expository comic direction of traditional theater competed with the new European-style professional theater. As a result, the puppeteers also tried to harmonize the puppet shows with the demands of the new times. “During the Soviet era, more than 40 groups of traditional puppet theaters operated in Uzbekistan. They were mainly engaged in the “Chadir Jamal” theater. “Chadir Hayal”

performances were performed in Tashkent, Bukhara, Kokan, Samarkand and Khiva in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century and gradually disappeared”. During this period, the show “The Adventures of Kachal the Wrestler” was shown, and gradually, due to the decrease in satirical features, some characters disappeared and turned into a domestic comedy. Some puppeteers save only the dance scene due to the lack of troupe members. As a result, dancing dolls such as Osmakhon-Surmakhon, Oftobkhan-Mohtobkhan, Oyjamol-Guljamol appear. They perform dances such as “Tanozor”, “Janon” and “Lazgi”.

In such shows, the puppeteers tried to focus on the behavior rather than the art. This led to further improvement of their puppet control skills. However, a performance without a plot, because of striving for a dance concert, Puppet Theater becomes a mere entertainment show and gradually loses its social importance. Therefore, after the Second World War, in particular, the traditional puppet theater was absorbed into the professional state puppet theater.

In conclusion, it can be said that traditional puppet theater, with its ancient roots and rich cultural heritage, has become an important branch of national art even today. This art form, inextricably linked with modern stage art, performs its own pedagogical and aesthetic tasks. Puppet theater, on the one hand, plays a major role in preserving the historical memory and values of the people, and on the other hand, in communicating socio-moral issues to modern audiences.

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