

PUPPET ART – AN INTEGRAL PART OF UZBEKISTAN’S TRADITIONAL THEATRE**Umarkhodjaeva Mamura Karimbaevna**

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Abstract. In this article, an opinion is expressed about the exemplary life of the ancestors of our nation, their contribution to world civilization, and the historical interpretations of good and evil on the stage of the puppet theater, which has its place in the cultural life of the Uzbek people, especially in the development of the younger generation.

Key words: puppet, theatre, art, stage, viewer, actor, fairy tale, national, traditional, image.

Puppet theater groups not only perform for young audiences but also stage great works for older viewers. The Uzbek National Puppet Theater (Republic Puppet Theater) staged the play “Qanotli odamlar” (inspired by N. Tolakhojayev's work) based on the “Alpomish”, “Bird Language”—“Qush tili” (H. Rasul) based on the

Navoi, “Alpomish” by Jora Mahmud at the Fergana Regional Theater, at the Khorazm Regional Puppet Theater “Jaloliddin tulporlari” by Shukurjon Safoyeva, and at the Andijan region's “Lola” puppet theater, there are main-themed plays like N. Mamatov's (adapted from H. Olimjon's work) “Oygul and Bakhtiyor”.

The Republic Puppet Theater has been entertaining young audiences with its performances for nearly eighty years. During the years of independence, traditional and innovative research was conducted in this theater. Particularly, the play “Karvonsaroy”, directed by I. Yakubov and based on the script by I. Lukyanova and D. Yuldasheva, stands out for its harmony with traditional puppet shows and its relevance to contemporary modern theater art. This performance attracted a wide audience during the years of independence and has maintained its status to this day. The reason for this is that the performance promotes the understanding of national identity and the appreciation of our people's characteristic traditions.

Directed by I. Yakubov, this performance is significant for presenting the most common forms of ancient folk performance arts, which are on the verge of being forgotten, to today's audience. Only glove, string, and rod puppets were used in one performance. All of these are considered the main manifestations of ancient puppet shows.

In the show, it appears live action is also used alongside puppets. Actors singing, dancing, and playing **doira** on stage became an integral part of the puppet show. Moreover, the puppeteers bring the characters to life by simultaneously using different puppets in each hand and altering their voices to match the characters. Besides, the unique educational aspect of the show emerges when the performers engage in a question-and-answer interaction with young audiences about each traditional type of puppet. “The process that takes place on stage captivates not only children but also adults: the enchanting enthusiasm, the sincerity of the actors, and a sense of joy and connection towards the wonder of theater” [1].

The show was enriched with colorful stage equipment related to national culture. It appears that the traditional interior arrangement was brought to the stage by the set designer R. Kamoliddinov. Colorfully decorated carpets, prayer beads,

and even the costumes worn by the actors are expressions of our unique, unparalleled national identity.

The “Karvonsaroy” show, described as a “fun and vibrant performance, introduces the audience to the traditional art of the Uzbek people” [2]. The creators entertain children through their performances, providing them with unique information and telling stories about our traditions to introduce them. Director I. Yakubov's innovative research ability comes to the fore here. Therefore, despite twenty years since its staging, this show still reaches an audience of fans of all ages and nationalities.

The ongoing research aimed at further developing the direction of the Republic Puppet Theater and introducing new genres and forms can also be seen in other performances. One of these is the director D. Yuldasheva's play “Anderson Again”. It is adapted from the fairy tale “The Little Match Girl” by the famous Danish fairy tale writer G. H. Khan Andersen.

In the play “Andersen Again”, which is a puppet theater interpretation of a fairy tale, the narrator himself appears on stage. Sitting at a table backstage, he writes the events on paper with a pen and provides verbal commentary. This creates the illusion that the events in the play are happening in front of the audience's eyes, in the present moment. The director has managed to reflect this characteristic aspect of dramatic theater in harmony with the artistry of the show in puppet theater. All the puppets participating in the events have a tablet-like appearance.

When the curtain opens, houses with snow-covered roofs are seen on both sides. After the poverty they experienced in their childhood, a long bridge that takes them to the market connects them to each other. Most of the action takes place here. Here, we encounter a girl holding a match, dressed quite modestly. She tries to sell matches to passersby shivering from the cold. He knows very well that if he can't sell matches, his father will punish him at home. The audience can feel the thoughts passing through his heart every second while silently watching the children around him playing in the snow and shouting with joy, the doors of the houses on either side opening, and the parents calling their children to the New Year's table.

During the performance, the characters and objects from the girl's imagination come to life before the audience's eyes and begin to communicate with her. At the end of the show, her mother's spirit descends from above and takes the little girl with her. The girl was slowly flying upwards, following all the objects and creatures that appeared in her imagination. On the first day of the new year, in the tale where a frozen and lifeless body of a girl is discovered, director D. Yuldasheva found a poetic ending for the play. This play, which belongs to the tragedy genre, remains relevant even today. Because we still witness the existence of parents who are indifferent to their children and abandon them in orphanages. In this regard, the play invites the audience to reflect.

When we think of puppet theater, we always imagine various entertaining plays filled with humor. The play “Andersen Again” is staged as a work that reflects a completely different mood. Furthermore, the figurative solution of the play has been approached from a psychological perspective. It is natural that these aspects have been the subject of various criticisms. However, if we look at S.V. Obraztsov's works, the theater directed by one of the important figures of puppet theater, he “aimed to express the psychology and bright, characteristic side of a person” [3]. In this context, it can be said his experience was adapted to contemporary issues in the Republic Puppet Theater as well.

In addition, the director's aim is to clearly present the aforementioned issues in a new, tragic mood for the theater, thereby better reaching the audience's heart and directly addressing adults through a play aimed at children. As the great 20th century theater reformer B. Brecht said, “Only a new purpose leads to the birth of a new art” [4]. With this performance, it became clear that the director's aim was to express the work in a new form and appearance for the theater. It should be noted that in the play “Andersen Again,” the unity of time, place, and action is observed. This is a valuable characteristic of the forgotten period of classicism.

A puppeteer and stage master who brings a little girl doll to life with her puppetry technique and beautiful, characteristic voice V. Yusupova's performance also brings a psychological approach to the role, presenting the girl's tragedy with a

sadness and serenity befitting her character. There is a certain harmony between her and the puppet. After all, “the true magic of puppetry lies in the inseparable bond between the puppet and the human” [5].

The management of the Uzbek National Puppet Theater generally shows that the traditions of folk performing arts have been revived during the independence period and that the experience of presenting these to today's audience has been realized. “The national puppet dramaturgy approaches folklore and classical poetry in all thematic areas” [6]. Similarly, contemporary theater also relies on traditional tools to express national identity on stage.

In the interpretations of theater directors, innovative explorations are observed, such as the inclination towards genre diversity and finding an unusual direction, enriching the characteristic aspects of dramatic theater with some expressive tools of puppet theater, achieving harmony and replication effects in performances based on world experience, introducing different puppets simultaneously, and associating with shadow theater.

In puppet theater, the world around us, the good and evil around us, should always be conveyed in a sincere and miraculous manner. Because children cannot be deceived. We need to teach them the realities of life. “Whether it started as a grand, magical spectacle or a domestic puppet theater, it was born from life and has always been inextricably linked to it throughout all historical periods” [7]. The creative activity of theater shows that even today it is not separate from life but continues to develop and shape [8].

In the cultural life of the Uzbek people, particularly in the development of the younger generation, the puppet theater stage has always showcased the exemplary lives of our ancestors, their contributions to world civilization, and historical interpretations of good and evil. S. Kadirova, who studied puppet theater as her research subject, wrote, “Puppet artists have fulfilled a significant social and aesthetic duty for the people by criticizing the tyrants of the time who caused pain and sorrow to the nation and the country, and by laughing at some of the backwardness and distortions of life” [9]. However, during the Soviet era, this art

form was also interpreted from a class perspective, or similar interpretations were emphasized. Especially historical figures like the Khan of Kokand, Hudoyor Khan (1845-1851, 1862-1863, 1865-1876), and his commanders Mirzo Ahmed and Isa Avliya were depicted as cruel and cunning individuals, while the images of the independence fighters, whom the Soviets referred to as “bandits”, were portrayed as marauders and brigands.

In the years of independence, due to the changing policy towards our history and great ancestors in puppet theater, their reputation began to be restored among the people. Just like on the theater stage, the figures of our greats such as Shirak, Jaloliddin Manguberdi, Amir Timur, Mirza Ulughbeg, Alisher Navoi, and Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur have been brought to the stage in puppet theater as well.

According to the famous puppet theater director Volkhovsky, “The creative position of puppet theater is to inform the audience about the urgent tasks of the time through the use of the living theater language of the puppet and the actor, facial expressions, movements, pantomime, and precise plasticity”. Therefore, the puppet theater should be interpreted in conjunction with the contemporary issues of that era. Puppet theater is different from other theatrical arts due to its unique ability to create images. The puppeteer brings the puppet to life, a work of art created through the collaboration of an actor, an artist, and a puppeteer. It is also possible to give the doll the characteristics of historical themes or historical figures. It allows for the reflection of historical significance in the face, figure, appearance, and clothing of a historical figure. Sometimes, in addition to reading historical artifacts, historians themselves are consulted on this matter. As the facial features and ages of the historical figures changed during the performance, the number of puppets also increased. For example, in the 2010 production “The Legend of Shirak” by the Surkhandarya Regional Puppet Theater, the puppet portraying Shirak appeared in two different forms. So, in 323 BC, when Shirak had to fight alone against the Achaemenid ruler Darius, he resorted to a trick. With this trick, two puppets were made for Darius, who was suffering the pain of his “folk”; their ears were cut off,

their noses were cut off, and they appeared in their original form. This ancient story, which tells the tale of a simple shepherd boy who sacrificed his life for the freedom of his homeland, still attracts interest today due to the importance and glorification of patriotic ideals [10].

It is no secret that the Bukhara Regional Puppet Theater achieved the success it deserved in 2016 with the play “The Legend of Shirak”. The puppeteer expresses the heartache, love for his homeland, dreams, and hopes that he cannot convey to the audience on stage through the puppets without seeing them behind the curtain. And then a miracle happens on the puppet theater stage. An ordinary material object comes to life, and the audience believes that it lives, breathes, exists, remembers, cries, laughs, and mourns with the puppet like a human.

One of the scholars who shed light on our national history and serves as an example for today's youth with his life and works is Pahlavon Mahmud (1247-1326). Pahlavon Mahmud's art was brought to the puppet theater stage by the Khorezm Regional Puppet Theater Team, established in 1993. This performance won an award at the 4th Traditional Puppet Theaters Festival held in Samarkand in 2000 [11].

The Semerkand Regional Puppet Theater team presented the play “Star of Ulughbek” to the audience in 2021. This performance was presented to young audiences on March 22, the birthday of Mirzo Ulughbek. From the perspective of historical reality, it is known that the image of Mirzo Ulughbek is brought to the point of being verified by real historical facts in almost every action. This feature not only gives historical significance to the image of the hero but also to the entirety of the tragedy. To accurately convey Mirzo Ulughbek's contributions to world science, it is important to understand his works. Sometimes, in addition to the playwright and director, the actor also needs to grasp the importance of this scientific discovery. Only then will he be able to convey the image of the great character he has created to the audience. This is considered a complex issue in puppetry. Therefore, it took several years to create plays dedicated to historical figures. During the Soviet era, the figure of Mirzo Ulughbek was depicted more as a tragedy, that is,

as someone who was killed by his own son. Considering that this representation process has been more preserved in theaters, the Samarkand Regional Puppet Theater team has abandoned this tradition and has instead focused on adequately conveying Mirzo Ulughbek's scientific discoveries to younger generations.

On May 15, 2023, the play “Javohir tabib”, staged by young director Ravshan Rasulov at the Bukhara Regional Puppet Theater, was presented to the members of the art council appointed by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Written by Munojot Ergasheva, this work reflects events that clearly depict the childhood of our great ancestor Abu Ali ibn Sina and his significant contributions to the field of medicine. An expert who attended the presentation stated that some minor issues in the play needed to be corrected and said that the play would be allowed to be shown to the audience after these issues were resolved.

Among the puppets in the Uzbek puppet theater, the puppet depicting the Tatar doctor Botirishin in the early 20th century was popular among Uzbek children. He wore a low white wool hat, a military uniform, a red sash around his waist, and a black jacket with gold embroidery. He has a dark complexion, a beard and mustache, pale eyebrows, and green eyes. When you look at him, his nationality, position, and character are easily understood: a military officer with a cold and vengeful character, but in reality, a kind-hearted and hardworking man [12]. There is no doubt that this baby represents a historical figure.

In 1907, R.A. Komarov's depiction of the baby stated that Doctor Botirishin was still alive. So, he had already become a character in a puppet theater while still alive. It is no secret that Botirishin was a historical figure and a physician. However, the question of how he came to Turkistan and why he became a character in a puppet theater remains an issue. We tried to solve this problem as best as we could. Historical sources indicate that Muhammed Botirishin (1833-1912) served as a translator in the Russian mission that arrived in Khiva in 1858 under the leadership of wing commander Colonel N. Ignatov and that he also obtained his doctorate at that time [12]. After the establishment of the Turkistan General Governorship in 1867, he came to Tashkent and continued his work as a translator and physician. He

was kind to the local people, especially to children, and was involved in their treatment. For this reason, he was very popular among Uzbek children.

In conclusion, interpretations of historical facts and historical figures have been presented, although to a small extent, on the puppet theater stage and continue to be presented. In this process, the principle of historicity requires hard work, creative thinking, and the creation of historical compositions. In puppet theater, interpretations of historical figures such as Shirak, Abu Ali ibn Sino, Jaloliddin Manguberdi, Amir Timur, and Mirzo Ulughbek have traditionally been featured. However, we hope that one of the goals of theater groups in creating new historical realities and bringing new interpretations to historical figures is this.

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