

CHARACTERISTICS OF PERFORMING ART IN THE UZBEK TRADITIONAL PUPPET THEATRE

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Abstract: This article explores the historical roots and distinctive performance features of the Uzbek traditional puppet theater, as well as its philosophical and aesthetic significance in the spiritual life of society. The creative activities of puppeteers, their traveling performances, musical skills, imitation and trick artistry are analyzed. Special attention is given to the educational, moral, and spiritual importance of puppet theater within folk culture. The article also highlights the close relationship between puppet art and other forms of traditional performing arts, as well as its Sufi and philosophical interpretation.

Keywords: puppet theater, puppeteer, performing arts, traditional theater, imitation art, trick performance, buffoonery, moral education, folk performances, Sufism.

Puppet theater is not an art form that appeared yesterday or today. Its history goes back several millennia. It has witnessed great realities on its complex path of development. Each past era has left its mark on its development. This is natural, any type of theater is a product of this era. Whatever ideology, whatever idea the era promotes, this is reflected in art, and whatever it condemns, it encourages people to abandon. However, at all times, puppet theater has not lost its folk spirit, miraculous power and educational significance. It has always sought to embody large-scale realities, universal, philosophical ideas.

Puppet theater actors have always tried to preserve their art, to protect it from people who do not understand it, and to convey it to future generations with all its charm. At a time when clowns, actors, in short, performers of the performing arts were expelled, exiled, and cruelly punished, puppet theater creators survived this difficult fate. In the eyes of religious leaders, the “Risolai lu’bat”, which calls for goodness, spiritual purity, and obedience, becomes the life amulet of performers, in modern parlance, a “license” that gives the right to independent activity.

“A scholar gives a fatwa that a puppet show can be watched once, and explains this as follows: “The puppet comes out of this hole, makes a gesture, and enters the second hole. A person is born from a mother, comes into the world, makes a brief appearance in the world, and finally enters the cave. That is why this play can be seen once, not twice. Because this is a play created by Satan, and whoever sees it twice loses his faith.””¹.

However, over time, the requirements were not followed, and religious leaders, officials, and heads of state were subjected to sharp satire and criticism. In addition, it was not always easy to comply with the requirements and strict laws established in traditional theater based on oral dramaturgy. Therefore, puppet theater actors promoted the principles of optimism, love of life and enjoyment, rather than passivity, renunciation, and sophism emphasized in the treatise.

Above, we have discussed the role of a traditional theater actor in the performance, and we have tried to determine his specific features in performance as

¹ Кадыров М. Узбекский традиционный театр кукол. – Т.: 1979. С.67.

much as possible. At the beginning of this chapter, we considered it appropriate to dwell separately on the creative path, spiritual world, and emotional experiences of puppet theater performers. Therefore, this is a truly exemplary, rich history and a great school that can serve as an example for today's actors.

Bringing life to a puppet is an art. However, it was not accepted positively in all eras. However, the puppet theater, which boldly continued its path, was able to combine elements of philosophical and religious teachings in its field.

As you know, in the "Puppet Treatise" there is a wonderful story about the emergence of puppet theater. It describes this art form as a "devil's play." They do not believe that an ordinary person can create the miracles performed by it with his own hands. It seems that this power can only be achieved with the help of magic. However, prominent scientists of their time react to this incredible phenomenon in a different way.

In this regard, the thoughts of the famous historian and scholar Husayn Voiz Kashifi on the puppet theater play are valuable for us. "I was present at a tableau (in the sense of a player – M.Q.) and saw a person sitting with a tent over his head and showing two figures (puppets) from it. Sometimes he would answer in the language of one figure with a man's voice, and sometimes in the language of another figure with a thin and delicate voice of a girl. Without changing his posture, he would say his words in such a way that one could (easily) hear the questions and answers (of the two figures) spoken in different voices... All this was the speech and actions (words and actions) of the person inside the tent, and I was impressed by it. If anyone," he writes, continuing his thoughts, "thinks carefully, he will know that these are several motionless and powerless, tongueless and handless (puppets), the puppeteer (the puppeteer) acting as if he were a speaker and is mobile".²

It is clear that Koshifiy had watched puppet shows many times. From his words, it can be understood that the puppet actor and his achievements in the harmony of movement and speech were quite noticeable. Depending on the character, gender and appearance of the puppet, a special tone of voice was found,

² Қодиров М., Қодирова С. Қўғирчоқ театри тарихи. – Т.: Талқин, 2006. 90-б.

and this was conveyed to the viewer in a clear, understandable and artistic manner. Moreover, since he impressed such an advanced, intelligent person of his time as Koshifiy, it means that the performance of puppet art in the Middle Ages was truly at a high level.

Both before and after Koshifiy, there were many books written about the traditional form of puppet theater, its acting and performances. The works of Al-Farabi, Abu Ali ibn Sina, Abu Rayhan Beruni, Omar Khayyam, Nizami, Shamsi Tabrizi, Alisher Navoi, Pahlavon Mahmud clearly touched upon this art form, made metaphorical and philosophical comparisons.

It follows that the art of puppet theater also functioned as a popular, folk and artistically high genre of performing arts in those times. It is also noteworthy that when it comes to traditional puppet theater of this period, we witness that most researchers interpret its creative function in a philosophical, mystical direction. That is, the whole world, all creatures in it, people are puppets controlled before the puppeteer - the creator. This refers to the form of puppet art, its general performance. More precisely, the technique of puppetry, the method of control are mentioned.

Such views are found not only in the East, but also in the works of European philosophers in the most ancient times. For example, the great scientist Aristotle said: "Man is a marionette moved by the gods (Olympus)". The Greek historian Xenophon noted that at the feast of Kalias in Athens, Socrates wanted to see another type of performance in exchange for a puppet show. This historical event, says the famous actor, "detracts from the honor of our profession, but proves that puppet theaters were popular in those times.

Another incident proves that puppet theater was popular in ancient Rome. In those days, Julius Caesar was forced to prohibit puppeteers from using the speech genre. Perhaps they used words that were offensive to Caesar."³.

The primacy of the democratic spirit was relevant not only for the Western, but also for the traditional puppet theater of the East. In the Uzbek traditional puppet theater, the puppeteer also fulfilled the task of reprimanding some bad people,

³ Икромов Х. "Кўғирчоқ театрининг илк қадамлари". "Давр ва театр". – Т.: Ўз.М.Э., 2009. 8-бет.

examining their inappropriate actions, and punishing them with the help of puppets when necessary. It is no secret that he, in turn, called for order in society in matters of upbringing and morality. Puppeteers, in addition to being unrivaled performers, were also engaged in propaganda activities. Puppeteers played an important role in the spiritual, moral and spiritual outlook of the people. The spiritual significance is manifested in enriching the inner world of people and teaching them to think, the moral principle is manifested in exposing the vices of society, showing them to oneself and eliminating them through the example of puppets, and the spiritual aspect is manifested in cleansing the human heart from impurities, nourishing the inner spirit, being a balm for the people's pain in difficult times, and being together in their good and bad days.

The good days of the people are their festivals, weddings, performances, and holidays. On the other hand, on the bad days, they are manifested in suffering over some kind of sorrow, anxiety, or pain. According to sources, some childless families invited puppeteers to their homes with their children. The house, filled with children's laughter, brightened the hearts of the owners of the house and helped them forget their troubles, at least for a moment. After the performance, the puppeteers would bless the owners of the house and express their good intentions. If the puppeteers' prayers came true and a child was born in this house, they would find that puppeteer, no matter where he was, and give him a head and foot sarmo, gifts, and greetings.

Rarely can representatives of this field be so respected and noticed by the people. Only God knows whose prayers will be heard first. However, ordinary people sincerely believed in the honest work of puppeteers, their pure hearts, and the joy-giving puppets, and they knew very well whose intentions could be fulfilled.

Of course, puppet actors have not been shown such respect and honor in all eras. The masters of this field overcame hardships with humility, willpower, and patience. This is reminiscent of the art of clowning. You share joy, but you do not show your sadness to anyone, especially the audience.

The lessons of demandingness in the matter of the audience have been taught from teacher to student. In any situation, the theater team has been specially taught that it is necessary to serve the people equally in good and bad times.

The puppeteer approached his work with great responsibility and strong faith. He believed in the sacred, divine power of his profession. That is why he did not betray his profession even in any difficult situation.

Puppeteers, like traveling actors, traveled from house to house, village to village, state to state. Some creative journeys lasted for years. According to M.F. Gavrilov, these journeys lasted for many years. One such journey in the work of puppeteer Yoldosh Tursunbayev lasted for 28 years (1898-1926). Usually, serious preparations were made for such long journeys. The screen was renewed, the puppets were restored, and the musical instruments were retuned.

A knowledgeable person in his field, who had certain achievements, experience and skills in his field, could speak several languages, and was respected and noticed, went on trips. During such trips, the puppeteer closely studied the life, lifestyle, traditions and customs of other countries. This gave him an impetus to further enrich his worldview and thinking, and to become aware of the events taking place in the world. In addition, this played an important role in strengthening mutual cooperation and friendly relations between nations.

This is what N.Kh. Nurjonov, a researcher of Tajik traditional folk performances, writes about this. "There was sincere friendship and mutual respect between Uzbek and Tajik artists, and representatives of each country would invite each other to their country during their trips. Sometimes Uzbek and Tajik artists would go out together and celebrate New Year, weddings, and holidays together."⁴.

Just as Uzbek puppeteers could speak Tajik fluently, Tajik actors also performed in Uzbek. According to researcher M. Kadyrov, there were Tajik neighborhoods next to Uzbek neighborhoods. Due to this, the language, customs, and lifestyle of both nations were harmoniously combined.

⁴ Кадиров М. Узбекский традиционный театр кукол. – Т.: 1979. С.96.

Uzbek puppeteers were versatile actors and were also unrivaled in their musical skills. According to the requirements of the puppeteers' treatise, each puppeteer had to be proficient in playing music on the doira, nagora, karnay, and surnay. In particular, the surnay played a key role in the puppet show. The puppeteer was required to master playing the tune on the surnay perfectly. For this reason, many puppeteers were called "mehtar", that is, "skillful trumpeter". In addition, many puppeteers were familiar with such art forms as trickery and imitation. According to M.F. Gavrilov, the famous puppeteer Egamberdi Karimbayev of his time was a close associate and student of the puppeteer Tursunboy. Tursunboy often exchanged roles with Egamberdi, and both were able to demonstrate their skills both in trickery and in puppetry. One of such puppeteers was the famous master puppeteer Tursunboy Abdujabbarov (1838-1898), originally from Margilan, who settled in Tashkent. In addition to puppetry, he was also well versed in the art of trickery. His puppet show and the performances of such tricksters as Egamberdi Karimboyev were played together, forming a single composition.

As for the art of imitation, most of our critics, even European scholars, have proven that the roots of the art of puppet theater go back to imitation, that is, the art of imitation. According to ancient religious beliefs, a ceremony was held to commemorate the deceased, during which a conditional performer, wearing a special mask, imitated the words and actions of the deceased and performed dialogues and actions that commemorated him. This created a unique small performance consisting of dialogues, like a performance of a two-person play.

Over time, the ceremony of embodying the image of the deceased moved away from its function and meaning. Only that formal feature was preserved. Masks fell into the hands of talented clowns, and the ritual turned into small performances.

Masks were the main tool of clowns in creating images and were widespread in Central Asia until the Arab invasion. Later, clown mask performances became popular even in the Soviet era. Clowns K. Mominov, K. Bobojonov, Y. Kurbanniyozov widely used mask performances in their performances.

The art of puppetry is also a special form of the art of imitation. In both, performers try to revive the image of some creature or human being. One through a mask, the other through a puppet. Therefore, with some features, the art of clowning is close to the art of puppetry. Critic M. Kadyrov lists the similarities of both art forms. These are conditionality, absurdity, humor, contradiction, eccentricity and spectacle.

That is why we said above that puppeteers were well aware of the art of imitation. The similarities of both art forms, the unity of their historical roots and their harmony with each other were also reflected in the performances of these artists.

The image of a puppet occupies a leading place in many clown performances. In traditional theater, puppets were embodied as the main characters in clown performances such as “Shingulmurod”, “Yogoch polvon”, “Podachi”, “Chopon”, “Chopon bola”, “Mayramkhon”, “Qimorbozlik”. In such performances, the clown, along with playing his role, also brought the puppet to life. In this, the conflict was built between a living person and a puppet, they communicated with each other, argued, quarreled, quarreled and finally came to a compromise. For example, the criticism of “Indamaskhon” by the famous comedian Aka Bukhor Zakirov is a performance of this nature.

From the above, it can be concluded that puppetry is a broad art form and has developed as an independent art form. At the same time, it was able to fully demonstrate its charm through other art forms.

The skills of the performers of the Uzbek traditional puppet theater were not limited to the tent (screen). They expanded their capabilities by performing live as tricksters, tricksters, and entertainers. They tried to embody all types of art in their performance, not being limited to playing with special puppets. This indicates that the puppeteers seriously engaged in improving their performance skills, constantly working on themselves, and fearlessly striving for innovation in the development of the field.

Before the emergence of professional theater, traditional puppet theater performers won the hearts of audiences with their boundless enthusiasm and served as a great school for the formation and independent standing of professional puppet theater actors.

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