

Some Reflections on the Local Characteristics of Uzbek Wedding Folklore

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the genesis of the genre composition and the laws of historical and progressive development of the Uzbek wedding ceremony folklore of the Middle Zarafshan oasis, the specific local characteristics and artistry of the ritual songs, the specific nature of the wedding ceremony folklore and its place in the system of intangible cultural heritage.

The author used the scientific works of folklorists M. Juraev, O. Safarov, G. Mardonova. The wedding ceremony and its melodies are an ethnographic event among the inhabitants of Samarkand, Navoi, Bukhara regions and Zarafshan region.

This scientific article can serve as an important source for researchers, master's students studying Uzbek wedding ritual folklore.

Keywords: Ceremonial folklore, customs, ethno folkloristics, folklore sources, genre, genesis and poetics of folklore genres, intangible cultural heritage, local features, means of artistic expression, poetic context, rituals and traditions, song, wedding ceremonies

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary world folklore studies, the ritual folklore that reflects the national identity of each people, as well as the unique features of the genre composition of this folklore, its historical-

genetic foundations, the structural-semantic characteristics, and poetics of ritual songs, have become one of the urgent scientific research directions.

Collecting and studying the spiritual values that define our national mentality, including ritual folklore materials, across all regions has remained one of the fundamental principles of folklore studies. This direction has enabled the identification of the local features and regional diversity of ritual folklore genres, revealing their distinctive aspects.

Indeed, within the composition of Uzbek wedding ritual folklore, the wedding ceremony occupies an important place as a separate system, distinguished by the diversity of folklore samples performed therein. At the same time, wedding rituals and folklore exhibit specific local characteristics in each region. Comprehensive study of these processes allows for a thorough investigation of the all-Uzbek wedding ritual folklore and serves as a basis for drawing relevant theoretical generalizations.

Today, collecting and studying the spiritual values that define the Uzbek national mentality, including ritual folklore materials, across all regions remains one of the key principles of folklore studies.

In folklore studies, the classification and categorization of oral artistic works of the people are often based on certain distinctive features and characteristics. One common criterion for classification is the place of performance of a particular genre work, or in other words, its "practical and everyday orientation."

From this perspective, the present article focuses on collecting sources of wedding ritual folklore from the Middle Zarafshan Valley, which uniquely preserves the intangible cultural heritage of our people, identifying existing genres, and studying their role within the ritual system as well as their artistic and aesthetic value. Throughout the article, new theoretical conclusions concerning the historical development and artistry of folklore genres, supported by evidence from recent research, are discussed.

The objectives of this study are as follows: to identify and analyze the genesis and historical-phased development patterns of the genre composition of Uzbek wedding ritual folklore in the

Middle Zarafshan Valley, and to utilize the distinctive local features of ritual songs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The object of this research consists of folk songs, sayings, and blessings that reveal poetic imagery and artistic means within the Uzbek wedding ritual folklore.

Significant work has been done in collecting, scientifically studying, and publishing Uzbek wedding ritual folklore. The unique artistic features and genre nature of wedding songs have been studied by folklorists such as M. Alaviya, B. Sarimsoqov, O. Safarov, M. Jo'rayev, S. Davlatov, N. Quronboyeva, O. Ismonova, and L. Khudoyqulova. Ethnographers including G.P. Snesev, N.P. Lobacheva, K. Shoniyozov, T. Qilichev, G. Tosheva, and A. Ashirov have also conducted research in this area [1].

These studies indicate that further research is needed to investigate the historical roots, social functions, and origins of customs within the Uzbek wedding ritual folklore composition.

Regarding the classification of ritual folklore genres and the naming of each type with corresponding terms, the following opinion by Academician T. Mirzaev is considered appropriate: "Uzbek ritual folklore is divided into three major categories: a) seasonal ritual folklore; b) family and everyday ritual folklore; c) religious and devotional ritual folklore. One of the components of family and everyday ritual folklore consists of folklore samples related to wedding ceremonies. The folklore and rituals associated with weddings are extremely rich. Independent folklore genres such as *jar* (invocations), *ulan*, *lapar*, *yor-yor*, *kelinsalom* (bride's greeting), *kuyovsalom* (groom's greeting), *kelino'tirsin* (let the bride sit), *kuyovo'tirsin* (let the groom sit), and wedding blessings exist within the context of wedding ceremonies. Each of these requires separate, specialized research" [2].

One of the scholars who classified the genre composition of Uzbek folklore, B. Sarimsoqov, considered the "everyday-practical orientation" as the leading criterion in the classification

of folklore genres. Based on this, he divided the works of Uzbek oral artistic creativity into the following two types:

- a. Folklore genres associated with rituals;
- b. Folklore genres not associated with rituals [3].

Professor O. Safarov was among the first to begin studying the regional and local features of Uzbek wedding ritual folklore genres. Based on factual materials recorded from informants residing in Bukhara and Navoi regions, he published the first studies on the folklore of customs such as *kelino'tirsin* (let the bride sit), *kuyovo'tirsin* (let the groom sit), *kelineltish* (bringing the bride), and *kuyoveltish* (bringing the groom). These materials from the valley's wedding folklore sources demonstrate the importance of analyzing matchmaker songs and sayings, the historical-genetic foundations of customs [4], and their local characteristics [5].

METHODS

The methods applied in this article include historical-comparative analysis, literary analysis, and ethno-folkloristic research and interpretation:

1. **Comparative methods:** a method of comparing two or more objects to identify similarities and differences, with the aim of classification and typology.
2. **Cross-cultural research:** anthropological and related disciplines (philology) were employed to scientifically analyze data collected during field research on the wedding ritual folklore of the population in the Middle Zarafshan Valley.
3. **Philological analysis:** this approach clarified both the commonalities with the general Uzbek folklore tradition and the unique regional-local characteristics of the material.
4. **Genre-specific analysis of rituals:** various methods were used to identify and analyze local specificities in the genres such as *yor-yor* and *ulan*, which are performed during the

rituals of Uzbek wedding ceremonies, as well as in the lyrics of ritual songs and sayings.

MAIN PART

Although the formation history and historical-evolutionary development of the genre structure of oral folk art have not been studied in a fundamental way in Uzbek folklore studies, certain works have been carried out on identifying samples of genre-specific texts in ancient written sources, as well as on the history of recording, popularizing, and scholarly studying of folklore works. In particular, shedding light on the history of collecting and analyzing wedding songs, which form a component of Uzbek ritual folklore, along with ethnofolkloric concepts, sayings, and beliefs directly related to the wedding, serves as one of the important steps in constructing the history of folklore studies.

The wedding ceremonies held in each region of our country possess distinctive features due to the local conditions, the ethnic composition of the population, artistic-aesthetic traditions, and the regional specificity of folklore performance. Therefore, applying the cartographic method in folklore studies yields good results in determining the distribution area, regional-local characteristics, commonalities and differences of these types of folklore genres. Consequently, the publication of an article by the folklorist scholar S. Shodieva on the theoretical foundations of applying the cartographic method to study the spread of various customs, traditions, and the folklore genres performed during wedding ceremonies has acquired significant scientific value. According to the author of the article, "mapping the folklore of wedding ceremonies and identifying the manifestation of 'ethnic contact' in folklore in regions where Uzbeks live in mixed settlements with other nationalities" [6] is considered one of the primary criteria for defining the local characteristics of oral folk art.

The Uzbek wedding ceremony consists of two main components in terms of composition: its principal part comprises a variety of customs, rituals, and beliefs that form the ethnographic context, while the unique ritual songs and magical

expressions of blessings performed during these customs constitute the verbal component of the wedding ceremony.

Although some ancient elements of the Uzbek wedding ceremony folklore have been forgotten over time, many traditional genres continue to exist in a state of live performance. In the customs of wedding ceremonies held across all regions of Uzbekistan, traditional poetic folklore forms such as *To'y muborak* (Congratulations on the wedding), *Xushkeldingiz* (Welcome), *Yor-yor*, *Kelinsalom* (Bride's greeting), *Kuyovsalom* (Groom's greeting), *Kelino'tirsin* (Let the bride sit), *Kuyovo'tirsin* (Let the groom sit), *Tushqaytarar*, *To'yolqishi* (Wedding blessings), and *Bet ochar* (Veil unveiling) have preserved their ancient characteristics to this day. In this regard, the genre composition of Uzbek wedding folklore is distinguished by the diversity of customs, rituals, and superstitions, as well as by its regional-local features.

The songs, sayings, and blessings included in the wedding ceremony, which encompasses a variety of customs and rituals, belong to the ancient genres of Uzbek folklore. Traditionally, the wedding ceremony, conducted collectively by the mahalla community, relatives, and close acquaintances, is characterized by the preservation of traces of ancient beliefs and magical perceptions. Therefore, the customs and poetic folklore associated with wedding ceremonies have been passed down from generation to generation for centuries as a national heritage and cultural value of our people, and have been preserved to this day.

Among the Uzbek people, the customs and rituals associated with wedding ceremonies differ from other family events in terms of their manner of execution, as well as the balance between the ritual ethnographic context and the verbal component. Although the Uzbek wedding ceremony and its poetic folklore have undergone certain changes over time, the fact that they have preserved their living traditions up to the present day necessitates a special study of the current state of wedding songs as post-folklore, their regional-local features, and the influence of historical and social realities on the customs of wedding ceremonies.

Among Uzbeks, the traditional customs related to the holding of wedding ceremonies have developed as a unique ethno-folkloric system composed of several stages, with adherence to these customs having become a strict rule. In the Zarafshan valley region we studied – specifically in the Jizzakh, Samarkand, and Navoi provinces – it was identified that during the first stage of the wedding ceremony, the following customary practices were observed: *beshikkerti* (arranged cradle marriage), *qiztanlash* (bride selection), and *sovchilik* (matchmaking), which included rituals such as *og'izochdi* (initial proposal), *halva keldi* (gift of sweets), *non sindirdi* (bread breaking), *boshbog'landi* (formal engagement), *unashtirar*, and *non sindirar*.

In order to reveal the local features of the wedding ceremony folklore of the population in the studied region, as well as the distinctive aspects that differentiate these traditions from similar ones elsewhere, we now turn to an analysis of the main customs and rituals carried out in the pre-wedding phase and the folk works performed during their observance.

According to ethnofolkloristic observations, in earlier times, the inhabitants of the villages in the Zarafshan valley—particularly those in the city of Nurata and its surrounding rural areas—traditionally arranged marriages within their kinship circles. This was largely because the behavior and conduct of the girls were already well known to their relatives and neighbors. As ethnographer O. A. Sukhareva noted, “Among the population of Nurata, who maintained mutual kinship relations, if a suitable partner for a daughter or son was available within their own community, but a match was made with someone from another group, it could even lead to a severing of kinship ties” [7]. Today, however, the tradition of practicing exogamous marriage in this region has been forgotten.

A closer look at the customs and rituals embedded within the wedding ceremonies of the Zarafshan valley population reveals that similar pre-marriage traditions were once recorded among the Uzbek, Tajik, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh peoples of Central Asia as well [8]. According to these traditions, families would often seek to establish kinship ties through engagement even before children were born. In such cases, the decision was

typically made based on consultations with close relatives, elders, and community members. In contemporary times, however, the custom of arranging marriages between children at a young age – known as "betrothing them to each other" – has fallen into disuse.

The tradition of betrothing children from a young age – sometimes even before birth – among two families intending to establish future kinship ties has also been documented among other Turkic peoples, particularly the Yakuts and Kyrgyz. According to scholarly sources, the Yakuts referred to the mutual agreement made by two families to marry off their unborn children – should they turn out to be a girl and a boy – as *bilasu* [9]. Among the Kyrgyz, this custom was known as *bel kudalik*. The practice of betrothing already-born infants was referred to in the Yakut language as *bisikteehkepsetii* and in Kyrgyz as *beshiquda* [10].

According to ethnographer S. M. Abramzon, the tradition of betrothing children from a young age is one of the ancient forms of marriage and is connected to the custom of intermarriage among close kinship families [11]. Furthermore, in recent years, Uzbek ethnology has also produced scholarly works that comparatively and typologically examine the tradition of early child betrothal. In particular, in E. Jumanazarov's article on the comparative analysis of Uzbek and Kyrgyz wedding ceremonies, customs such as *bel quda*, *qaychiquda*, *ishonibqo'yish*, and *ichkuyov* (also *kuchkuyov*), which are practiced among the population of the Fergana Valley, have been studied. The article identifies commonalities in the composition of matrimonial customs between the two peoples' wedding ceremonies [12].

According to tradition, the wedding ceremony always begins with the matchmaker's visit. The origin of the word "matchmaker" (*sovchi* in Uzbek) is connected to the ancient Turkic lexeme *sav*, which meant "word," "message," or "story." The famous linguist Mahmud Kashgari noted in his work *DivanuLugatit Turk* that the word *sav* carried meanings such as "proverb, saying," "to tell or narrate an event," "a story, written message, letter," and also "a person who delivered messages between the bride and groom" [13].

According to Kazakh linguist R. Sizdikova, the element *sav* at the root of *savchi* or *javchi* is related to the Turkic root *söz/sau*, which means “word” [14]. Matchmakers act as intermediaries, helping the bride and groom lead a happy life and uniting two families through kinship ties. Therefore, whether a man or a woman is chosen as a matchmaker, special attention is paid to their experience, wisdom, reputation, and prudence. Matchmaking is not only considered a sacred task but also requires a great sense of responsibility.

In the Samarkand and Jizzakh regions, matchmakers were usually men. They traditionally rode white horses or white donkeys to visit the bride’s home. The first visit of the matchmaker was called “opening the door” (*eshikochap*), while repeated visits were referred to as “tearing the knot” (*kovushyirtar*).

According to linguist A. Omonturdiyev, “when the **sovchi** (matchmaker) goes to the bride’s father, the fact that he is a **sovchi** is conveyed not directly with words (such as ‘we are matchmakers, we have come for your daughter’), but rather through psychological signals, silence, and other actions. The intention of matchmaking is expressed by traditional euphemistic phrases such as ‘we have come to serve,’ ‘we have come to sweep the door or courtyard,’ ‘we have come to become relatives,’ ‘we have come to ask for the hand of one of your children,’ ‘we have come to adopt one of your children,’ ‘we have come to make one daughter (or child) into two,’ ‘we have come for our child to become your son,’ or ‘we have come as uninvited guests’” [15].

In the village of Suluvqorgon, Pakhtachi district, Samarkand region, the first visit of the matchmakers is referred to as *g’osala* (meaning “female calf”) search or *yitik* (meaning “lost item or person”) search. Typically, when matchmakers arrive, the bride’s parents address their intentions with phrases such as: “We have come to take one *romol* (headscarf),” “We have come to tie your daughter’s head,” “We have come to sweep your door as a servant” [16]. According to tradition, before openly declaring their intentions, the *sovchi* expresses their purpose of the visit

through euphemistic speech, which is considered a customary practice.

RESULTS

The Uzbek wedding ceremony folklore is characterized by a rich variety of verbal components related to customs and rituals, namely songs and ritual chants (aytim-olqishlar). These elements possess local features formed within the framework of each region's unique ethno-folkloric traditions. The folklore embodies poetic forms that have emerged as a result of the historical development of the people's artistic thinking over many centuries. It also expresses ancient rituals and belief systems related to the transition of a person from one age or social status to another, interpreted as poetic codes.

Thus, an analysis of studies dedicated to the Uzbek wedding ceremony folklore based on materials from different regions allows the following conclusions:

Firstly, folklore, ethnographic, and linguistic research carried out so far has established that the customs and rituals, along with their verbal components within the Uzbek wedding ceremony, differ by distinctive regional-local characteristics.

Secondly, the conducted research revealed that the historical fate of the Uzbek wedding ceremony folklore is similar across all regions. Namely, as a result of social-economic development and political-ideological changes, the traditional ritual components have undergone continuous transformation, with some parts gradually disappearing. In particular, the verbal components of the ceremony, such as the majority of songs, chants, and ritual blessings, have mostly been forgotten by today.

Thirdly, studying the Uzbek wedding ceremony folklore according to its local features enables us to uncover the origin history of the general Uzbek traditions, the ethnographic aspect of the ceremony, the formation of poetic folklore, and the laws of its historical development and evolution.

CONCLUSION

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the local features of Uzbek wedding ceremony folklore, highlighting its rich verbal components related to diverse customs and rituals, namely songs and ritual chants (aytim-olqishlar). It emphasizes that these components possess local characteristics shaped within the framework of each region's unique ethno-folkloric traditions. The folklore embodies poetic forms that have emerged through the long historical development of our people's artistic thinking. It also reflects ancient rituals and beliefs related to the transition of a person from one age or social status to another, interpreted as poetic codes.

The results demonstrate that the folklore of various customs, rituals, and ceremonies held during the pre-wedding period in Jizzakh, Samarkand, and Navoi regions exhibits distinct local features. These features are shaped by the ethnic composition, cultural traditions, and artistic-aesthetic values of the population living in the Zarafshan valley, thus setting it apart with its unique local characteristics.

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