



THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMEDY GENRE IN EASTERN LITERATURE

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 7 th June 2025 Accepted: 6 th July 2025	This study explores the emergence and formation of the comedy genre in Eastern literature. Particular attention is given to the importance of traditional folk performances such as puppetry, clowning, and satirical shows, which served as the foundation for the development of comedic elements. Although classical Uzbek literature did not have a clearly defined comedy genre, it included satirical works that resemble comedy. The research examines the opinions of medieval scholars on this genre and emphasizes the significant role played by the Jadid movement in creating the earliest examples of comedic plays in Uzbek literature.
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INTRODUCTION

In the East, Uzbek comedic elements emerged within the framework of oral folk traditions, particularly in the forms of satirical clowning, humorists, and puppet theater performances. These performances depicted real-life events using unique expressive means. Over time, such humorous spectacles laid the groundwork for the development of dramatic art and the emergence of popular theater. Muhsin Qodirov, who extensively studied Uzbek folk theater and traditions, described these performances as follows: "Clowning, humor, and puppetry are comedic performances; they act as a hammer against the corrupt and a source of optimism, laughter, inspiration, and joy for the righteous. This is a marvelous form of folk art." By equating laughter with a metaphorical hammer, the scholar presents it as a tool to punish the wicked. He emphasized that the history of professional theater among the Uzbek people spans many centuries, while acknowledging that traditional theatrical forms began to flourish in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

MAIN BODY

Theatrical performances were traditionally performed by special actors who used satire, criticism, and imitation to evoke laughter from the audience. This form of art was primarily satirical in nature and relied heavily on elements of humor and satire. These tools served as a means of defense, through which performers sought to protect the working class from oppressors such as tyrannical landlords, corrupt officials, and deceitful religious leaders. Through

mockery and parody, they exposed and condemned such figures. The early forms of folk theater, while foundational, significantly differed from the more developed popular theater of the 20th century. One key distinction was that traditional theatrical performances were not bound to a specific time or location; instead, they were staged in public places such as streets and markets, often drawing large crowds. The long-standing history of these traditional performances laid the groundwork for the development of oral dramaturgy. These performances were typically prose comedies of varying lengths, with a broad spectrum of themes and messages. Plays created within this oral tradition stood out for their sharp social satire and colorful, expressive language.

Furthermore, these performances can be classified into different genres such as "critique," "mimicry," "comic narrative," and "praise." Although scholar Muhsin Qodirov referred to these as distinct genres, we argue that they should instead be categorized based on the types of performances they represent, rather than as fully developed literary genres. During this period, the predominant form of comedy was satirical, targeting exploitative social classes—landowners, aristocrats, and traitorous officials. These were categorized under the genre known as "critique." Notably, characters like village elders and judges (ra'is and qozi) were used to depict corruption and incompetence. For example, in the satirical comedy Eshon rais, the daily activities of an elder responsible for monitoring compliance with Islamic law in the marketplace are portrayed. The plot reveals how this figure, while turning a blind eye to



bribers, punishes the poor and interrogates vendors about religious knowledge. This comedy features dozens of characters, with the central figure being the hypocritical and ignorant elder. Performers brought this character to life with masterful humor and parody.

Similar comedies include *Qozi*, *Mirob*, *Qozibozlik*, *Domla eshon*, *O'g'rilik*, *Ketmon tilash*, and *Yer bo'lish*, which center around corrupt legal and administrative figures. Likewise, comedies such as *Mozor*, *Hoji kampir*, and *To'rt jinni* mock religious figures. These early folk comedies primarily embodied satirical elements, expressing the public's disdain for oppression and injustice. Notably, these comedies served the interests of peasants and craftsmen, mercilessly exposing the exploiters of feudal society. Oral satirical comedies were also grouped thematically into the following categories:

1. *Comedies that expose corrupt officials*
2. *Comedies that criticize wealthy usurers and landlords*
3. *Comedies that mock religious figures*
4. *Comedies that ridicule thieves, gamblers, and other social outcasts*

These plays were not authored by professional writers, but were created and performed by jesters in traditional theaters. These jesters were not only witty and courageous but also strong advocates for the people. Based on the classification mentioned above, plays like *Rais*, *Xirmon ko'tarish*, *Mirob*, and *Qozibozlik* belong to the first category, which targets corrupt officials. Works such as *Sudxo'r akam jon berdi*, *Sudxo'ning o'limi*, *Hundibozlik*, and *Boy va kosib* expose exploitative landlords and moneylenders. Comedies like *Kar hojining namoz o'qishi*, *Zambur*, *Domullo*, and *Ko'histonlik domla* unveil the true face of religious figures. Meanwhile, comedies that satirize thieves and tricksters include *Xum o'g'risi*, *To'n o'g'risi*, *Kigiz o'g'risi*, *Ho'kiz o'g'risi*, *Mozordagi o'g'rilar*, and *O'g'rilik*.

In addition to satirical comedies, there also existed oral comedies with a humorous tone. These were imbued with rich folk humor, characterized by playful, lively, and meaningful content. Many jokes, tales, dances, and songs were created in this spirit. Similar to satirical comedies, humorous comedies were also classified thematically, based on Muhsin Qodirov's book *Oral Drama of the Uzbek People*. These include:

1. *Comedies depicting the lives of artisans and craftsmen*
2. *Comedies focusing on pastoral life*
3. *Comedies centered on hunters*
4. *Comedies that mimic folk ceremonies, rituals, and customs*

Examples of the first category include *Bo'z do'koni*, *Alacha to'qish*, and *Bo'zchilik*. The second and third categories include *Yog'och polvon*, *Podachi*, *Cho'pon*, *Tuya*, and *Mayramxon*. The fourth includes *Dorboz*, *Uloq chopish*, *Ayiq*, *Uylanish*, and *Otashxo'r*. In addition,

animal-based performances—similar to those found in other cultures—were also part of Uzbek traditional theater. For instance, in 1878, the traveler I.L. Yavorsky witnessed a performance in Bukhara involving a trained bear mimicking a drunken man, a vain woman preening in front of a mirror, labor animals being loaded and unloaded, and wrestling with a goat. These performances also included imitations of animals through physical movements and gestures, such as *Echki o'yin*, *Pishik o'yin*, *Tustovuq*, *Chag'alloq*, *Qumpishik*, *Xo'roz urishtirish*, *Kaptar o'yin*, and *Bedana urishtirish*, which were also observed in regions like Fergana and Bukhara.

These performances often symbolized human behaviors: cats represented flatterers and schemers, hens symbolized quarrelsome individuals. Other pantomimes, such as *Sipsa o'yin* and *Chugurma tikish*, portrayed labor and household themes in detail. Despite the marginalization of women throughout history, they have made significant contributions to Uzbek culture, literature, and the arts. Oral drama performed by women existed as well, with women working separately from men due to social restrictions. In his research, Muhsin Qodirov noted the existence of all-female traditional theater groups in regions like Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand, Fergana, and Surkhandarya. In these performances, men and women did not share the stage; each performed separately. Women often played male roles, and vice versa, which added a layer of comedic effect.

Around ten female performers were interviewed, and about thirty dramatic texts were documented, including performances such as *Piyonistaning to'yi*, *Bug'doy sotuvchi savdogarlar*, *Qurt boquvchi xotinlar*, *Qarilar sevgisi*, *Otin oyi*, *Cholning uylanishi*, and *Ota o'limi*, all recorded on audio tape. These women also engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, gardening, and domestic work. They were categorized as professional (paid) or amateur (unpaid) performers. Women's performances were typically held in private settings—homes, gardens, or secluded corners—out of view from men. Although religious women often disapproved of female comedians, the latter continued their art with passion, bringing joy to other women and helping uplift their spirits.

A notable example is a female performer from Piskent named *Iqlim Tayib*. Despite her husband's disapproval and even physical abuse, she secretly continued to perform at women's gatherings because of her deep love for the art. In addition to these traditions, the classical theater also included various forms of satirical performances. Researcher T. Obidov classified traditional Khorezm theater into four genres:

1. *Pantomimes (solo performances)*
2. *Dramas without music*
3. *Acrobatics incorporating comedy*



4. *Multi-act plays called "Xatarli o'yin" ("Dangerous Play")*

Among these, pantomimes were considered the most prominent, involving imitations of birds and animals through body movement, facial expression, and gesture. Hungarian orientalist A. Vambéry, who traveled through Central Asia in the guise of a dervish, wrote about a Khorezm jester: "He won the hearts of the people; his witty words and entertaining antics provoked constant laughter. Sometimes he mocked people, sometimes told amusing tales, sometimes chirped like a bird or meowed like a cat."

Russian painter L. Dmitriy-Kavkazsky also praised a court jester's ability to parody foreign songs and dances and mock daily life struggles. He described the jester as "an extraordinarily talented actor."

CONCLUSION

Oral dramaturgy, deeply rooted in the traditions of Uzbek folk culture, emerged as a unique artistic phenomenon. These theatrical performances did not follow the norms of written dramaturgy and were not bound by the rigid structures of classical drama. Instead, they were grounded in the daily lives, struggles, and joys of the people. The primary feature of oral folk plays was their vivid, satirical portrayal of real-life issues. These performances fearlessly criticized the negative traits of individuals from the ruling class, religious hypocrisy, and social injustice. Through laughter, parody, and humor, they revealed hidden truths and delivered powerful messages to the public.

Importantly, the oral drama tradition was a collective creation of the people. It reflected their worldview, moral values, and experiences. These performances not only entertained but also educated, inspired, and unified the community. Despite being performed by jesters rather than professional playwrights or actors, they possessed high artistic and ideological value. The role of women in oral folk drama is especially noteworthy. Even in the face of social restrictions and disapproval, female performers contributed meaningfully to the development of this genre. Their courage, creativity, and dedication to the art form played a key role in enriching and preserving this cultural heritage.

In summary, oral folk dramaturgy represents a precious legacy of the Uzbek people. It stands as a testament to their creativity, wit, and resilience in the face of hardship. This unique cultural tradition deserves continued scholarly attention and preservation for future generations.

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