

ASKIYA – A MASTERPIECE OF UZBEK FOLK ART

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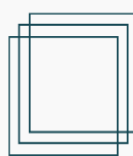
Abstract

This article is about the askiya genre – folklore of Uzbek people. The author provides data about development of this verbal contest, its prominent performers, types of this folk art and several examples, as well as uniqueness of this word game.

Keywords: askiya, comedian, folklore, laughter, responsiveness, agility, fun, contest.

Askiya (Arabic – sharp-witted) is a type of Uzbek folk art. It is “the art of wit”, an oral argument of two or more people or groups in public gatherings (wedding, holiday) on a certain topic. The parties try to answer quickly, sometimes in a circle, sometimes facing each other, sitting, standing or walking, and make their answers concise, eloquent, witty, impressive, attractive and funny. When finding an answer, the party that deviates from the scope of the topic, genre, or makes a mistake in the choice of words is considered the loser. The audience evaluates the parties and their answers with their laughter and passionate screams. People are overjoyed to hear the meaningful, flamboyant askiya, and strongly resent the shallow and rude ones. While performing the meaningful, pleasant and funny askiya, the parties are required to be quick-witted, attentive, as well as to be able to find meaningful words related to the topic, they should be able to use facial expressions, body language, sounds and gestures appropriately. People who have mastered askiya types perfectly and can compete in large circles are called *askiyachi*, *askiyaboz* (performer of the art of wit). In Turkestan (a historical region in Central Asia), such people are known as *badikhaguy* (*bakhshi* – folk storyteller). *Askiyachi* should be able to master the wide linguistic possibilities, use puns, jokes, sarcasm, irony, simile, exaggeration, mockery, etc. Tactfulness and promptness are the main criteria in askiya contest. *Askiya*’s task is to lighten people’s mood by making them laugh, to give them pleasure, to further expand their knowledge within a certain topic, to sharpen their minds and thoughts, to encourage them to be intelligent and responsive, at the same time, to laugh lightly at the flaws in life and the behavior of some people. There are such types of askiya as *payrov*, *qofiya*, *radif*, *tutal*, *o’xshatdim*, *bo’lasizmi*, *bahri bayt*, *safsata*, “*gulmisiz*, *jambilmisiz*, *rayhonmisiz*”, *shirinkorlik*, *afsona*, *rabbiya*, *laqab*.

As a separate genre, it was formed mainly from the 15th century. *Mir Sarbiraqcha*, *Mavlona Burkhonilang*, *Said Giyosiddin sharfa*, *Maulana Khalil Sahof*, *Muhammad Badakhshi* lived in this period. The most talented and famous among them was *Maulana Abdulvose’ munshi* (secretary).

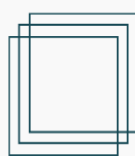


In the 18th and 19th centuries, askiya developed, especially in the Fergana Valley and Tashkent. In the following years, Tursunbuva (Ijrakombuva) Aminov, Mamarozik Iskhakov, Rakhmatkul and Abdullajon Yasharov, Abdulkhay Maksim Kozokov, Mamajon Madaminov, Shojalilov brothers made a great contribution to the development of askiya in Tashkent.

Askiya is also found in oral and written literature: “Alpamish” and “Kuntugmish” epics contain passages rich in puns typical of askiya. “Majolis un-nafois” (Alisher Navoi), drama “Tor-mor” (Komil Yashin), etc. works contain interesting episodes created using askiya, characters whose language is individualized using the art of wit. Currently, payrov is one of the widely developed types of askiya.

Since we are talking about askiya, it is high time to make a brief comment about its essence. On the one hand, it is difficult to perform askiya, on the other hand, it is not easy to understand it. Because a subtle wordplay is used while performing the askiya. Understanding a pun is as difficult as inventing one. In a word game, it is necessary to use the logic of the person who invented it. That’s why someone laughs during the askiya, and someone remains confused, unable to understand what is being said. The main purpose of the askiya genre, its essence is to burst the audience into laughter through wordplay. Askiya is a genre based on creating words from words, making full use of the gloss of words, and playing on words, which may be rarely found in the folklore of any people in the world. The non-existence of the same genre in other nations can be explained mainly by the richness of Uzbek vocabulary. In particular, the genres of proverbs, riddles, fairy tales, songs, and epics can be found in the works of the peoples of the world in the same or slightly modified form, but scientists have not yet determined the existence of askiya in other nations. Sometimes in anecdotes similar situations can be found (пешка ходит Е 2 – Е 4; он ходит едва, едва (in Russian) – the smallest pawn in the chess game moves from Е 2 room to Е 4, it means that the pedestrian can barely walk). But a separate genre with certain characteristics is not found.

Let’s turn to a small example. One day, Sanobar Karimova, a member of the girls’ ensemble, was the first to come to the room where the music rehearsal was held. She asked her mentor Ganijon Tashmatov: *Qizlar kelishmadimi? (Did the girls come?)* Mr. Ganijon, a natural comic person, immediately answered with a warm smile: “*Kelishgani kelishdi*”. These two words reflect the most important feature of askiya. First, Mr. Ganijon used the word “kelish” (to come) very effectively in Sanobar’s question. Since the answer consists of two words, both words look the same in form. Secondly, the first word itself expresses two meanings. That is, it means “a person who came is considered to have come”. Thirdly, it should not be surprising that the word “kelishgan” (have come) is used with a plural suffix in relation to Sanobar. Because in the Fergana Valley, it is customary to express an opinion in the plural form in relation to one person.



At the same time, the word “kelishgan” (have come) in this place, except for the meaning of “come”, among Uzbeks, is also expressing the meaning of “beautiful girl”, “handsome boy”. That is, Mr. Ganijon is answering the girl’s question gracefully. The next word “kelishdi” (came) means a verb, its plural form is being used in the Andijan dialect. The mentor skillfully answered Sanobar’s ordinary question. First, the student who entered the room was told that she was good-looking and had a beautiful figure. For a person who does not fully understand the meaning of the words in “Kelishgani kelishdi”, the answer itself may be incomprehensible. But an Uzbek man, who feels the possibility of words to express real thoughts, gets immense pleasure from the mentor’s answer. One can admire the possibility of the Uzbek language. The mentor can be praised to the skies for his skillfulness in using words.

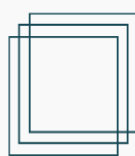
The basis of the word “askiya” is derived from the Arabic language “zakiy”, which means sharp-minded person thinking with a delicate nature. “Azkiyo” is a plural form. In our opinion, the voiced “z” may have become voiceless and became “s” under the influence of the voiceless consonant “k”.

Rasul Muhammadiyev, the first researcher of this genre, writes: “Responsiveness is the most important condition of askiya, because if a party cannot give a deep meaningful and strong answer on time (if there is a pause), laughter will decrease, which means that weakness will be felt in the opponent’s expressions”.

According to Muhammadiyev, the performance of Askiya by Uzbeks began in ancient times. In particular, the 15th-century poet Zayniddin Vasifi mentioned in his memoirs that there were sharp-witted masters of words in the city of Herat, such as Mirsarbarahna, Burkhoniy Gung, Hasan Voiz, Said Giyosiddin, Sharfiy, Khalil Sakhxob, Muhammad Badakhshiy. Askiya became more popular as the craftsmanship developed. Especially the satin weavers, as their hands and feet were constantly in motion, either sang songs, or amused themselves with askiya. In this respect, residents of the Fergana Valley were distinguished. Famous comedians such as Yusufjon Shakarjonov, Mamayunus Tillaboyev, Erka Qori Karimov, Amin Buva, Ganijon Toshmatov, Tursun Buva Aminov, Abdulkhay Makhsun made a worthy contribution to the development of the art of wit. People’s artist Jurakhon Sultanov, Rasulqori Mamadaliyev, Shoqosim, Shoolim, Shoakbar Shojalilov, Orif Kasimov, Orif Alimakhsumov and dozens of singers were also famous as excellent askiyaboz at weddings.

Another way to make somebody laugh is playing on the nicknames of askiya performers. The real skillful askiyachi inserts the nicknames of his opponents into the askiya context in such a way that only the listener with a subtle understanding of the askiya would be able to realize its meaning.

When the famous artist Mamayunus (his nickname was “bald”), who was travelling on a train, involved his friend Erka Qori (who was blind) in playing askiya, hinting at his blindness:



- Turing, qori aka! *Ko'r otga (kurortga)* keldingiz! (Get up, bro! You have come to the *blind horse (resort)*!) - he says. Raising his head from the pillow, the man hurriedly looked out of the compartment window, and immediately turned his face to Mamayunus:

- Hovliqmay qoling, Mamayunus! *Sho'rtepa*-ku! (Don't panic, Mamayunus! This is Salty Hill!) - he replies.

When analyzing the text, if the listener does not immediately understand the meaning of the words "ko'r ot" and "sho'rtepa" in the sense of blind and bald, then the whole essence of the askiya will lose its value. As a result, one may not appreciate the interpersonal skills of Mamayunus or resourcefulness of Erka Qori.

Askiyachi may choose a particular type of the folk and a topic to contest with his rival. In the following example, they have chosen the *o'xshatdim* type of askiya and the topic of football:

Example 1:

Teshavoy: Men sizni o'xshatdim.

Boltavoy: Nimaga o'xshatdingiz?

Teshavoy: Stadionga kirayotgan muxlisga o'xshatdim.

Boltavoy: Stadionga kirayotgan muxlis bo'lganimda nima qilardingiz?

Teshavoy: Melisa bo'volib, "baklashka"dagi suvingizni olib qolib, rosa chanqatardim.

Example 2:

Teshavoy: Men sizni biru nolga yutayotgan jamoa murabbiyiga o'xshatdim.

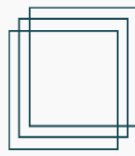
Boltavoy: Biru nolga yutayotgan jamoa murabbiyi bo'lganimda nima qilardiz?

Teshavoy: Hakam bo'volib o'yinga o'n minut qo'shib berib yuragingizni rosa po'kkilatardim.

In the first example, two askiyaboz have expressed the scenario which regularly occurs in football matches. While entering a stadium, policemen usually collect the water bottles from fans (due to security reasons). This is a funny case, because fans need water inside, but it is being collected by officers. In the second example, they talk about a coach whose team is winning. In such cases, coaches are worried because of the additional minutes (as there might be possibility that his team may lose due to the extra time). So, these kinds of moments are picked up by comedians and the crowd roars with laughter after imagining the situation.

In conclusion, it should be noted that askiya is a word game, folklore genre of Uzbek people and verbal contest which is mainly performed by males. One should be very agile to catch the meaning hinted in askiya.

Also, the text of askiya is a multi-interpretation text view. Since Askिया is considered a linguistic, folklore, and comic genre at the same time, it can be the subject of research in the fields of linguistics, literary studies, cultural studies, semiotics, sociology, psychology, and history.



The description of askiya can be carried out in different aspects, for example, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, lingvocognitive, lingvoesthetic, lingvodidactic, etc.

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