

THE TRIUMPH OF LIGHT OVER DARKNESS

Temirov Zafariddin

Xujanova Nasiba

Department of Scientific Development,
Republican Center of the Art of Bakhshi”

Abstract:

This article explores the life and creative work of Islom Shoir Nazar ogli, a representative of the Narpay epic school. It analyzes the plot of the epic "Orzigul", performed by him, and its significance in the artistic legacy of the bakhshi tradition.

Keywords: Epic school, Islom Shoir, Herodotus, poet, epic, performance.

Introduction

Islom Shoir Nazar ogli, a prominent representative of the Narpay epic school, was born in 1874 in the Narpay district of the Samarkand region. From an early age, he had a deep passion for the folk epic tradition and became a disciple of Ernazar Shoir. In his memoirs, he wrote: “One day, as I was playing the dutar and singing with a loud voice at a gathering in my village, Ernazar Shoir happened to be present and listening. It seems he was impressed by my voice, for he noticed my enthusiasm for poetry and immediately approached my father to ask for his permission to take me as his apprentice.” From that moment, Islam’s amateur practice reached its conclusion, and Ernazar Shoir began teaching him with great sincerity, imparting his lifelong experience in the art of bakhshi performance and the secrets of mentorship. Ernazar Shoir was well-versed in the traditions of the Shahrisabz school of epic poetry, but he had also trained with Ergash Jumanbulbul, a representative of the Qorgon school of epic performance. As a result, his apprentice, Islam Shoir, embodied the finest qualities of both the Shahrisabz and Qorgon traditions in his creative work. At the age of 26, he achieved the status of an independent bakhshi. Folklorists have recorded 29 epics from Islam Shoir Nazar ogli. Considering that the poetic sections of each epic contain between two to five thousand lines, it is evident that he possessed an extraordinary memory and artistic capability. Islam Shoir Nazar ogli, who had deeply mastered the traditions of his predecessors, included the following epics in his repertoire: Alpomish, Kuntugmish, Gorogli, Orzigul, Ravshanxon, Tohir va Zuhra, Sohirqiron, Xirmon dali, and Erali va Sherali. Several devoted folklore collectors, including Quddis Muhammadiy, Yahyo Yuldosh, B. Togayev, M. Gavrilov, M. Islomova, and G. M. Minsafin, played an essential role in transcribing his epics and terms. Additionally, distinguished folklorists such as Hodi Zarif, M. Afzalov, O. Sobirov, M. Alaviya, S. Asqarov, and M. Toshpulatova made significant contributions to preserving his work. This remarkable talent was honored with the prestigious title of People’s Poet of Uzbekistan in 1940 in recognition of his invaluable contributions to Uzbek epic poetry.

According to scholars, Islam Shoir's skill in performing epics was distinguished by its musicality, softness, clear and simple narration of events, improvisational ability, and, when appropriate, humorous expressions. He masterfully performed numerous epics, but among them, Orzigul held



special significance. Orzigul is one of the romantic epics in Uzbek oral literature. It is well known that a significant portion of Uzbek folk epics belong to the romantic genre. Their plots are highly similar, yet their structure is remarkably complex. Just as heroic epics contain romantic elements, romantic epics also incorporate heroic motifs. In some cases, multiple themes are interwoven within a single epic. Therefore, romantic epics are categorized into three subtypes: a) heroic-romantic; b) love-romantic; c) social-romantic. The Orzigul epic falls into the social-romantic category. Its central character, Orzigul, embodies the finest virtues of the people and is portrayed as a woman who fights for justice. Her struggles and life journey are interpreted within the framework of the social issues of that era. The love between Orzigul and Suvonxon is depicted as an unstoppable force capable of overcoming all obstacles. The epic's climactic moment—the victory of Orzigul, Suvonxon, and Dono Cho'pon over the army of King Qoraxon—is a powerful representation of the triumph of justice and truth, symbolizing the victory of light over darkness. The epic Orzigul was first recorded in 1938 by the skilled folklorist Mansur Afzalov from Islam Nazar ogli. However, Orzigul was not exclusive to Islam Shoir's repertoire. Other renowned bakhshis, such as Polkan Muhammad, Jonmurod ogli, Nurmon Abduvoy ogli, Toqli Shoir Ruziyev, Qozi Shoir Ruziyev, and Xolmirza Jo'rayev, also performed this epic. Despite multiple variations, the version performed by Islom Nazar ogli stands out due to the completeness of its plot, its rich thematic depth, well-developed character portrayals, and its poetic language full of artistic devices. Additionally, this version preserves relatively archaic motifs, distinguishing it from other variants. According to the folklorists V. Zhirmunsky and H. Zarif, this epic plot was widely known among the peoples of Central Asia as a "folk book" narrative, particularly in the form of the popular story Malikai Dilorom. Orzigul follows an expansive storyline, touching upon one of the traditional themes in world literature—the motif of a father unknowingly falling in love with his own daughter. In B. Sarimsoqov's article, Several Observations on the Epic Orzigul, the scholar explores this motif in depth. He references the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, who documented two legends in his Histories. The first tells of the Egyptian king Mycerinus, who fell in love with his daughter and sought to marry her. The second describes Cambyses II, the son of Cyrus, marrying both of his sisters upon ascending the throne. While these stories did not directly serve as the basis for Orzigul, Sarimsoqov suggests that such narratives, preserved in literary and historical sources, may have influenced the Turkic epic tradition over time. At the heart of Orzigul lies the theme of moral purity and the inescapable consequences of one's mistakes. The epic presents a philosophical exploration of human nature, familial responsibilities, and ethical values from the perspective of ordinary people. It condemns negative traits while highlighting the resilience of its characters. The epic is rich in psychological depth, vividly portraying the inner struggles of its protagonists. Among its most powerful moments is Orzigul's departure from the gardener's household, an emotionally charged scene that captures her inner turmoil:

As long as there is life within me, I am a wanderer,
Better to die than live in exile.
For the sake of this sorrow, I give my soul,
Leaving my homeland, forsaking my father.
Know this well, father and mother, I leave,
And in a foreign land, I shall seek my home.



Despite facing injustice and severe hardships, the virtuous characters in Orzigul remain steadfast in their principles, preserving their honor and dignity. In the end, they triumph over oppressive forces, achieving their goals and emerging victorious. This epic, with its profound emotional contrasts and compelling character portrayals, exemplifies the artistic and narrative mastery of the Uzbek bakhshi tradition.

Each genre of folk oral literature, including epics, possesses distinct artistic and figurative techniques that are essential for fully understanding their poetic nature. Uzbek folk epics, and particularly Orzigul, masterfully employ various methods and artistic expressions characteristic of oral poetic tradition, skillfully incorporating both semantic and phonetic embellishments.

Islom Shoir Nazar ogli is considered one of the most talented and highly skilled poets among Uzbek folk bakhshis. His mastery of poetic techniques is evident in the depth and artistic quality of the epics he performed. The artistic portrayal of a work largely depends on the performer's ability to skillfully utilize language and various poetic forms to enhance the meaning of the narrative. From this perspective, Orzigul, a central piece in Islam Shoir's repertoire, stands out as a well-crafted and aesthetically refined epic. While performing Orzigul, Islam Shoir enriched the epic with new ideas, deeper meanings, and masterfully integrated various figurative and rhetorical devices. His use of diverse artistic techniques was deliberate and purposeful, enhancing the aesthetic impact of the epic.

Structurally, Orzigul follows the traditional composition of Uzbek folk epics, interweaving prose and verse in alternating segments. This dynamic structure amplifies the artistic and ideological value of the epic, engaging listeners with vivid storytelling and immersive descriptions. The shifting narrative perspectives and evolving character actions further sustain the audience's interest and emotional connection to the unfolding events.

Islam Shoir demonstrated remarkable skill in shaping and developing the epic's characters. Each figure in Orzigul is portrayed with distinctive traits, and the poet skillfully employs various artistic techniques, psychological depictions, and vibrant imagery to bring them to life. His descriptions of characters' appearances and personalities are executed with artistic precision, employing striking similes, vivid epithets, hyperboles, and even mythological references. Additionally, the inclusion of folk proverbs and idioms enhances the epic's appeal and authenticity. The poet's ability to craft dialogues and monologues with remarkable clarity and poetic elegance significantly elevates the artistic merit of Orzigul. The language of the epic is rich and expressive, contributing to its strong educational and moral significance.

The epic Orzigul contains several mythological elements. For instance, when the characters Orzigul and Suvonxon see a dream, Hazrat Khidr appears to help them. The fortress of Qo'shqanot is guarded by a dragon and is considered an enchanted place. Birds are depicted as speaking in human language, among other mystical aspects. The epic also employs the literary device of hyperbole extensively:

*"When the horse gallops, the valley of the mountain rumbles,
The wound from a spear makes even the bravest men groan..."*

Similarly, the description of the legendary horse Olmakoz includes:

"Suvon rides a dragon..."

Suvonxon's horse is described with grand exaggeration:

"Its hooves are as mighty as a fortress,



Its mane as vast as a citadel."

Additionally, scenes of battle feature vivid hyperbole:

"Gallop through the battlefield,

He trampled down the enemy.

Orzigul swung her sword,

Beheading countless foes...

For three days and nights,

Orzigul fought relentlessly,

Seeking revenge against the enemy.

The mountains roared with the clash,

The smoke from the battlefield

Covered the face of the sun..."

Throughout the epic, the use of hyperbole enhances its dramatic appeal, making it more captivating for the audience.

In conclusion, Orzigul holds a significant place in the creative legacy of Islom shoir Nazar ogli. The epic masterfully intertwines themes of heroism, true love, and loyalty, reflecting the core values of traditional bakhshi storytelling.

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