

Uzbek Folk Tale “Bulbuliguyo”: Plot and Symbolism

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Received: 31 May 2025; **Accepted:** 29 June 2025; **Published:** 31 July 2025

Abstract: This article is devoted to the Uzbek folk tale “Bulbuliguyo.” It examines the plot, symbolic images, and magical motifs through which important moral ideas are revealed. Special attention is given to how the storyteller, within the oral tradition, conveys values characteristic of the Uzbek people—such as humanity, selflessness, courage, and nobility.

Keywords: Tale, shah-tyran, tree, Bulbuliguyo, younger prince, symbol.

Introduction: “Bulbuliguyo” is one of the classic Uzbek folk tales, belonging to the three-part narrative type, where events unfold in a logical sequence, gradually becoming more complex and revealing deeper meanings. The tale combines magical motifs, trials, and the struggle for justice, which serves as the central moral concept. Through the characters' actions, traditional notions of good and evil are revealed: good is associated with qualities such as courage, honesty, and self-sacrifice, while evil is characterized by selfishness, envy, and betrayal.

The tale begins with an order from a tyrant shah who, over the course of seven years, collected taxes from his subjects to create a marvelous tree: its trunk was carved from rubies, its branches from emeralds, its leaves from pearls, and its fruits from precious stones. One day, the shah notices that a leaf has disappeared from the tree and commands that it be guarded and the thief found. Whoever finds the thief will be rewarded; those who fail will be executed. Every day, forty young men guard the tree, yet each day another leaf goes missing. Eventually, the task of guarding the tree falls to the shah's three sons. They take turns, but even the elder princes fail to prevent the theft. Only the youngest prince succeeds in uncovering the truth: the thief is a magical bird named Bulbuliguyo.

The elder brothers set out first in search of the bird. A few days later, the youngest prince has a prophetic dream and asks his father for a blessing to begin his journey. He catches up with his brothers and joins them. Together, they continue the quest for

Bulbuliguyo. Along the way, they come across a fork in the road with three paths, each symbolizing a different fate: the first promises return, the second warns of misfortune, and the third foretells no return. The eldest prince chooses the first path; the middle prince initially takes the second but, fearing misfortune, turns back and joins his older brother. The youngest prince chooses the third—the most difficult and perilous path.

On his journey, the prince meets a monkey and shares his last flatbread with her. In gratitude, she offers him her help. The monkey guides him to the magical bird Bulbuliguyo's sanctuary. However, upon hearing her enchanting song, the prince faints and ends up imprisoned. The ruler of the palace where Bulbuliguyo is kept gives him a difficult task: if the prince brings him a princess from a distant land, he will receive the bird. The prince and the monkey continue their journey. They find the princess but fall into another trap and are forced to complete a new challenge—to obtain the magical horse Karakaldirgach, which belongs to the sorcerer Arzak.

With the monkey's help, the prince manages to escape the trap and captures the horse. Following her advice, the prince keeps the horse. The monkey, as previously agreed, transforms into a horse, and the prince presents her to the ruler while taking the princess with him. When they return to the shah who owns Bulbuliguyo, the prince prepares to hand over the princess in exchange for the bird. The monkey, who transforms back from a horse, now appears as a beautiful young woman, whom the prince gives to the

shah—thus finally obtaining Bulbuliguyo. As a result, the prince becomes the owner of the magical horse, the enchanted bird, and the beautiful princess.

On the way back, the prince is invited by the monkey to her magnificent palace. She reveals her true identity as the daughter of the peri (fairy) shah. Cutting a lock of her hair, she gives it to the prince and promises to come to his aid whenever he is in trouble.

On the return journey, the youngest prince finds his brothers, who have lost everything and become servants. Along the way, the brothers grow envious of the youngest. Plotting against him, they get rid of him and, assuming he is dead, return home. They present the bird, horse, and princess to the shah. But the bird falls silent—harmony is lost. The prince, using the fairy's hair lock, calls for her help. Disguised as a wanderer, he returns to the palace. Recognizing the poor stranger as the true prince, Bulbuliguyo begins to sing and reveals the truth.

In the end, the shah punishes the elder sons, marries the youngest prince to the princess, and passes the throne to him.

In the final part of the tale, the moral strength of the youngest son is emphasized: despite his brothers' betrayal, he refuses to seek revenge. Seeing his nobility, the shah rewards him with trust and passes the throne to him. This episode reflects a common motif in Eastern folk tales—forgiveness as the highest virtue, and the granting of power as a deserved reward for moral resilience and compassion.

The symbolism embedded in the tale serves as an essential tool for uncovering its deeper meanings and reflects the worldview of the folk culture. The magical tree, crafted from precious stones, represents more than wealth and power—it is a symbol of the fragility of order. Despite its outward brilliance and strength, it proves vulnerable, as a single leaf vanishes each day. Thus, the tree embodies the dual nature of wealth and authority: desirable yet unstable, and subject to decay if not guarded by justice and moral principles.

The three roads, from which the youngest prince chooses the most perilous, represent an archetypal motif of moral choice. Each road is not merely a physical path but a symbol of a life journey: easy, difficult, or deadly. The youngest prince's choice of the hardest path highlights his readiness for self-sacrifice and true heroic calling. This motif is closely tied to the folkloric idea that only good which endures trials is worthy of reward.

The monkey's image is a variation of the widely-known motif of the magical helper in folk tales. The monkey is a magical creature not only endowed with supernatural

powers but also with a kind heart, loyalty, and wisdom. She plays a key role in the prince's fate, acting as his guide and savior—repeatedly rescuing him, offering direction, and helping him overcome obstacles. Her journey alongside the prince is a path of self-sacrifice: she gives herself up, turning into a horse, then a princess; she arrives at crucial moments to help; and remains with the prince out of pure friendship. Thus, she becomes a symbol of true loyalty, wisdom, and hidden strength, her role much deeper than it might initially appear.

The image of the bird Bulbuliguyo plays a central role in the tale. She is not merely a songbird but a symbol bearing deep allegorical meaning. Her song is associated with harmony, truth, and the restoration of justice, while her silence reflects moral disorder, deceit, and lawlessness. Through this image, the folk motif of the "voice of truth" is realized—capable not only of exposing lies but also of restoring balance to the world. Bulbuliguyo acts as a moral indicator of the state of society: when good prevails, she sings; when evil triumphs, she is silent. When the youngest prince becomes a victim of his brothers' treachery, harmony is lost, and the bird falls silent—a metaphor for the absence of justice and order. The prince's return and the bird's resumed song symbolize the restoration of justice and moral equilibrium.

"Bulbuliguyo" is more than just a tale—it is a living example of Uzbek folk tradition. Its key symbols—the tree, the three roads, the monkey, and the bird—are deeply interconnected, creating a rich tapestry of meaning. Through magical imagery and trials, the tale conveys important life lessons. These reflect our understanding of good and evil, moral choices, justice, and spirituality. The symbols do not merely drive the plot; they also pass down essential moral teachings from generation to generation. At the heart of the story lies the idea that good always triumphs over evil, and that a true hero's strength lies in honesty, courage, and the ability to help others. The tale teaches the value of loyalty, bravery, and justice, and reminds us that true happiness and strength come only through hardship and overcoming obstacles.

The story also reflects features of social injustice typical of its time: tyranny, abuse of power, intrigue, and inequality, as well as strained family dynamics. The image of the youngest prince embodies the figure of a hero-victim, ready to endure trials not for personal gain, but for the sake of restoring justice and achieving the common good. His journey symbolizes the moral superiority of inner virtue over external circumstances. The tale conveys the message that power should serve the people, and that injustice and betrayal lead to the breakdown of harmony in society. This folk narrative

remains relevant today, reminding us of the importance of justice, honesty, and the individual's role in maintaining balance and harmony in the world.

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