

The Interpretation of National Games in Uzbek Fiction Literature

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Abstract: The title of the article – “Interpretation of National Sports Games in Uzbek Fiction”. This article discusses, as in all Turkic countries, the types of ancient national games in Uzbekistan, as well as their depiction in folklore and modern literature. The Uzbek people have cherished many traditional sports games. Among them, equestrian sports have been the most popular competitions and will continue to remain so. One of the main types of equestrian contests that requires ingenuity and agility from riders is kupkari (ulak), which originated in the early 2nd–3rd centuries BCE. In the Turkic languages, “kupkari” has traditionally been called “ulak”. According to the rules of the game, the carcass of a goat or calf is thrown into the arena. The riders try to seize the carcass without dismounting from their horses. The task is to escape from the crowd while resisting pursuers. Ulak was primarily held during festivals and wedding ceremonies, attracting riders from neighboring villages, and, according to the rules, the participants were divided into two groups. At the end of the contest, winners were announced and awarded prizes such as livestock, clothing, carpets, money, and other gifts. This national sport is also vividly depicted in the Uzbek folk epic “Alpomish”.

Keywords: National games, festival, fiction.

Introduction: As many nations and ethnic groups as there are in the world, each has its own unique customs, values, beliefs, and national games. Likewise, among Turkic peoples, the Uzbek nation also has distinctive national sports and games that have been passed down from generation to generation. As is well known, physical culture with a long history is considered an integral part of general culture. Due to the shared lifestyle and cultural similarities of the Turkic peoples living in Central Asia - Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Karakalpaks, Turkmens, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and others - their customs, wedding ceremonies, and oral folklore have become closely intertwined.

There are many national sports games beloved by the Uzbek people. One of them is equestrian sport, which has been the most popular type of competition and will continue to be so. Kupkari (ulak), an equestrian sport requiring ingenuity and agility from riders, dates back to the early 2nd–3rd centuries BCE. In Turkic languages,

“kupkari” has traditionally been referred to as “ulak”. According to the rules, a goat or calf carcass is thrown before the riders, who try to pick it up without dismounting from their horses. Their task is to escape the crowd while resisting pursuit. Ulak is primarily held during festivals, weddings, and ceremonies, attracting riders from nearby villages, usually divided into two groups. Winners are announced and awarded prizes such as livestock, clothing, carpets, and money. This national sport is vividly depicted in the Uzbek epic “Alpomish”.

Alongside equestrian sports, there is also tightrope walking (dorbozlik), the art of maintaining balance on a stationary rope. This art, now widespread around the world, originated in the East about 2,500 years ago. Even today, highly trained performers demonstrate it during celebrations in Uzbekistan. It is skillfully portrayed in the Uzbek film “To‘ylar muborak”.

Another popular sport is kurash, the traditional belt

wrestling. It embodies values such as respect for one's opponent, humanity, and honesty. Any form of aggression or humiliation is prohibited in this sport. Kurash is прежде всего a contest of strength and agility, built on mutual respect between competitors, and it is loved by both young and old.

Ancient national games play an invaluable role in human health. Even in the Hadiths, it is mentioned that in order to avoid illness, maintain good spirits, and keep the body fit, every believer should regularly engage in physical exercise.

National games such as kurash, kupkari, archery, and horsemanship are also reflected in Uzbek literature. For example, in the epic "Alpomish", the hero's bravery, riding skills, marksmanship, and courage are artistically portrayed through competitions like wrestling, racing, and archery.

In the epic, Barchinoy declares that she will marry the man who fulfills her four conditions, which include demonstrating excellence in competitions such as horse racing, wrestling, and archery.

I shall stand against whoever meets my four demands,

Go and tell the sultan who seeks me across these lands.

Let him ready his steed and ride into the field,

Carry my message to every Kalmyk foe—none should yield.

If they dare, let them all come forth to the battleground,

Let not a single warrior leave with regret unbound.

Alpomish fulfills all these conditions, defeating his rivals and appearing as a true heroic figure. From childhood, his experiences—riding horses, wrestling, and tending livestock—shaped his courage, generosity, and integrity.

In their first meeting, Alpomish defeats Karajan with ease. The epic describes his immense strength so vividly that even a handshake causes pain, and an embrace nearly breaks ribs. These passages emphasize his extraordinary power.

You seized my hand and tore my beloved away,

You struck my side till my ribs began to sway.

O friend, I stand in awe of your might and fame,

Your strength alone brings honor to your name.

Such noble beks are born of the Qo'ng'iro't line,

Fate-bound souls are destined your power to find.

Any Kalmyk who crosses your path shall fall,

Who in this world could stand against you at all?

Kurash, as shown in the epic, is a sport that demands honesty. It is described as a contest where true heroes demonstrate skill rather than aggression.

Brave men do not wrestle — they strike and cast aside,

When the field is set, they prove their worth with pride.

In addition to wrestling, horse racing is also vividly described in "Alpomish". One of Barchinoy's conditions involves a long-distance horse race. Archery is another traditional sport that develops calmness, mental strength, flexibility, eyesight, and overall health. It also enhances concentration and confidence.

The epic also includes a condition where a suitor must hit a coin target from a great distance, demonstrating exceptional marksmanship.

To the one who knows my mother's sorrow deep,

Who has toiled through distant lands without sleep,

Who brings dark days upon the enemy's might,

Whose bow, once drawn, will never break in fight—

To that archer, that warrior, I give my right.

Furthermore, Uzbek writers such as Gafur Ghulom, Abdulla Qahhor, Oybek, O'tkir Hoshimov, and Shukur Xolmirzayev have also depicted various national sports in their works. For instance, in O'tkir Hoshimov's story "Dunyoning ishlari", childhood games like "lanka", "hide-and-seek", and "tag" are described so vividly that readers feel as if they are participants.

In the same work, the traditional game "soqqa" (played with nuts) is naturally portrayed, emphasizing skill and strategy. This game is still played in rural areas and fosters friendship and cooperation among children.

National folk games reflect the dreams, values, and traditions of the people. For example, unity is shown in tug-of-war, cleverness in hide-and-seek, bravery in wrestling, cooperation in "Oq terakmi, ko'k terak", and agility in chasing games. Another traditional game is "besh tosh" (five stones), which is very popular and

engaging for all ages. It enhances concentration and creativity and requires precision and experience.

Mahmud Kashgari's work "Devonu lug'otit turk" also includes descriptions of national games. These games help relieve mental fatigue, increase enthusiasm for life, and promote a cheerful mood, which in turn fosters creativity and initiative. The author also provides valuable information about children's upbringing and activities. Games involving boys and girls aim to improve concentration, alertness, and practical skills.

In "Devonu lug'otit turk", a game similar to polo, called "tobiq", is described. In this game, boys ride on each other's backs like horses; if the "rider" falls, he loses and swaps places with the winner. The purpose of the game is to develop agility, attentiveness, and quick reactions in children.

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