
Manuscript on the Art, Design and Culture

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THE ART OF ASKIYA IN UZBEK FOLK ORAL TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes askiya, one of the important genres of Uzbek folk oral art, examining its origins, stages of development, and artistic features. The role of askiya in folk life is highlighted, along with its construction based on quick wit, wordplay, irony, and sarcasm, as well as its socio-educational significance. Information is provided about the various forms of the askiya genre, the payrov technique, traditions of using nicknames, and the activities of famous askiya performers. The article also considers the place of askiya art in national culture, its importance in the spiritual and aesthetic education of the younger generation, and issues related to its preservation and development.

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted/Received: 15 Jan 2026

First Revised: 29 Jan 2026

Accepted: 24 Feb 2026

Publication Date: 14 Mar 2026

KEYWORDS:

Askiya, folk oral art, word art, payrov, quick wit, irony, sarcasm, nickname, humor and satire, cultural heritage.

Introduction:

The Uzbek people possess a rich and distinctive cultural heritage that has been passed down from generation to generation over the centuries. One of the most unique and distinctive genres of folk oral art is the art of askiya. Askiya is not merely wordplay or light-hearted humor, but rather a complex art form that demands profound philosophical depth, sharp intellect, and the highest level of artistic mastery.

The word "askiya" derives from the Arabic "askiya," meaning "mockery" or "irony," and refers to a humorous yet meaningful verbal contest conducted in an improvisational format between two or more performers. Askiya artists skillfully exploit the polysemy, similarity, and phonetic proximity of words in order to logically outmaneuver their opponent and make the audience laugh.

The roots of this art form stretch back to the oral tradition of the ancient Turkic peoples. Historical sources record that askiya was widely practiced in Central Asia, particularly in the Fergana Valley, Tashkent, and Samarkand regions. The Fergana Valley has been recognized as the principal center of askiya art, producing many great askiya masters.

The inclusion of askiya on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2014 officially recognized its global significance. This recognition clearly demonstrates the Uzbek people's relationship with the art of the spoken word and how vital askiya is to human thought and cultural diversity.

Methodology:

In the folk oral performance tradition of Tashkent and Fergana, the art of askiya is an invaluable treasure of our people. On November 27, 2014, at the 9th session of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee held at UNESCO Headquarters, askiya was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This was yet another international recognition of our people's rich culture and art.

At the national level, no celebration, event, or festivity is complete without askiya and comic askiya performers. The original meaning of "askiya" comes from the Arabic "azkiyo," signifying "sharp-minded," "knowledgeable," "clever," and "quick-witted." Askiya is widely practiced and has flourished in the regions of Fergana, Andijan, Kokand, Margilan, Namangan, and Tashkent.

Askiya is a form of Uzbek folk oral art that unfolds as a dialogue between two or more participants who compete using subtle wordplay on a given topic. Askiya is performed by men, and a participant must have an excellent command of the Uzbek language, the ability to improvise, think rapidly, and skillfully employ humor and wit in their speech. Despite its humorous form, askiya plays a significant role in informing the population about events and occurrences in society in a distinctive manner.

Quick-wittedness is the most essential requirement of askiya. If a performer fails to respond in time (if there is a pause), the height of laughter subsides and a weakness in the flow of the opponent's thinking becomes apparent. Quick-wittedness is not simply saying the first thing that comes to mind, but rather the readiness of thought, intellect, and perception — the logical, consistent development of an idea; the speed of thinking about a topic, exercising the mind, and forming perceptions, hypotheses, and images. Thus, the ability to express a thought suddenly and correctly, without preparation, is the defining feature of the askiya genre.

A characteristic feature of askiya is the use of playful phrases and words with multiple meanings and figurative senses. The clearer, more resonant, and precisely articulated the words, the shorter and more well-formed the sentences, the more quickly the subject matter (payrov) reaches and resonates with listeners, interest intensifies, and the payrov continues for a longer time.

To date, more than thirty forms of the askiya genre have been identified, including payrov ("narrative thread"), bo'lasizmi ("will you be"), o'xshatdim ("I compared you"), gulmisiz, rayxonmisiz, jambilmisiz ("are you a rose, a basil, a jambil"), qofiya ("rhyme"), laqillatish ("teasing"), kinoya ("irony"), and others.

Payrov is a sustained and coherent flow of thought — the most perfected and complex technique in askiya.

Payrov develops the meaning of a given topic from beginning to end. The askiya performers do not deviate from the bounds of the topic. When both sides respond to each other with quick wit, the content of each exchange must surpass the previous one — that is, it must develop — and ultimately be fully resolved.

A payrov is considered complete only when the subject and its phenomena are revealed down to their finest details. Just as a fully realized literary work depicts scenes of nature, the images and characters of people, their attitudes toward life, the development and resolution of events, and the details that complement the idea and action — so too must these requirements be fulfilled in a payrov; otherwise it remains "unfinished" and "raw." In this respect, a payrov is considered an integral, plot-driven artistic work.

Results and Discussion:

Folklore scholars refer to the "o'xshatdim" ("I compared"), "bilasizmi" ("do you know"), "gulmisiz, rayxonmisiz, jambilmisiz" ("are you a rose, a basil, a jambil") and other forms of askiya as minor forms. In all three of these forms, the askiya performer equates, attributes, and characterizes their "opponent" to some person, or their behavior to some event or occurrence. Both sides take turns asking and answering questions, working toward revealing the purpose. A characteristic feature of these techniques is that with each exchange of questions and answers, a more difficult topic (plot) is resolved, while subsequent exchanges can move on to any other desired topic.

Just as the various genres of literature and art are organically interconnected and sometimes resemble one another, so too do the forms of folk oral art develop through creative exploration and the necessity of expressing reality, enriching and shaping one another through mutual influence. This principle holds true in the art of askiya as well. For example, at the core of askiya lie wit, refined wordplay, exaggeration, metaphor, and other qualities.

The askiya genre developed and took shape under the influence of our people's clever folk tales, anecdotes, proverbs, and sayings, and is continually enriched by the vast treasury of the folk language.

For example, the anecdotes of Nasriddin Afandi (Nasreddin Hodja) are widely known among the Uzbek people. These anecdotes contain enormous exaggerations, similes, figurative expressions, wordplay, and witty retorts that are directly composed of askiya elements. For example:

"One day, in the course of a conversation, Afandi said to the learned man: 'You are a foolish person.' The learned man dragged him before the king. After the king had delivered a number of stern warnings to Afandi, he said: 'Apologize immediately. Say: 'You are not a foolish person, forgive me,' otherwise I will summon the executioner right now!' Afandi looked at the learned man and said: 'You — a foolish person — you are not! Forgive me!...'"

In folk oral art, the richness of language — wordplay — serves as a method for expressing ideas beautifully and elegantly. Underpinning language are knowledge, wisdom, intellect, and the mastery of depicting life realistically; in the askiya genre, these qualities are manifested in the ability to respond to a previous thought with quick wit and a superior rejoinder.

Wordplay awakens immense joy, taste, and delicate emotional sensibility in people; it cultivates the qualities of laughing at the old and the bad, striving toward the good, and on that basis longing for the beauty of life. In order to understand wordplay, a person is compelled, almost involuntarily, to think deeply and quickly, and to reflect.

In his novel "Mavlono Muqimiy," writer Sobir Abdulla enriches the portrayals of Muqimiy and his contemporaries, depicting their mastery through their ideologically and artistically sharp poetry and refined wordplay — askiyas. Wrathful (satirical) laughter accompanied them in exposing Muqimiy's enemies, while gentle (humorous) laughter cheered the hearts of his friends. The work contains vivid scenes from askiya techniques that have flourished since ancient times in Kokand, Andijan, Margilan, Tashkent, and other regions of the republic. This has contributed to making the work engaging in its narrative and fully developed in its

characterization.

Thus, askiya — as a form of folk oral art — is also finding a worthy place in our artistic literature.

Askiya also has its own distinctive traditions — one of which is the use of nicknames. Using nicknames in our day must not be confused with giving people nicknames based on their physical shortcomings, mocking and ridiculing them. Such nickname-giving — satirizing and deriding people's natural physical shortcomings out of malice — is a sign of disrespect toward them. However, in askiya, a nickname is not used to harm the personality of the performer, but rather as a tool for developing the askiya's plot, describing events and occurrences, creating character images, and generating laughter through wordplay. Furthermore, the ability to instantly articulate the secondary and tertiary meanings and behaviors of nicknames, and to compare them with real-life evidence, demonstrates the performer's skill and understanding of life's events. The meanings of nicknames enrich and deepen the theme of the askiya.

Writer Abdulla Qahhop's words confirm our point: "If there is no hook in an askiya, there will be no laughter. The hook is precisely the nickname. Askiya must serve two functions at the present time: first — to express our people's goals and struggles on the path of new life; second — to mercilessly expose the negative aspects of our lives." For this reason, studying the biography and creative work of the skilled askiya performers active today is of great importance. For, just as other genres of folk art, askiya in the past expressed the aspirations of the working classes — their feelings of freedom, humaneness, and love of labor. Word artists — askiya performers — who emerged from among the working people, through the sharp blade of the language's sword — through witty retorts, comparisons, and exaggerations — criticized freeloading wealthy men, fraudulent judges and religious figures, and thieves and charlatans, thereby providing the necessary aesthetic education of our people. The nickname facilitates this function of askiya.

Dehqon Yuzboshi Shernazarov, Erka Qori Karimov, and Yusufojon Qiziq Shakarjonov rose to fame as askiya performers during the period 1895–1940 and attained the status of masters to an entire generation of askiya artists. Tursinbuva Aminov, Po'latjon Nurmatov, Komil Qori Qulijonov, Mamatbuva Vaxobov, and Jo'raxon Sultonov are the contemporaries and successors of the aforementioned masters.

On November 28, 2014, askiya art (the Uzbek art of wit and wordplay) was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Today, alongside skilled askiya performers, a new generation of young performers is emerging in the republic, continuing these traditions and carrying forward the master-apprentice tradition.

Based on the above, we wish to offer the following recommendations:

- Establishing askiya schools at the local level;
- It is advisable to regularly hold meetings and masterclasses with skilled askiya performers.

Conclusion:

The art of askiya is an embodiment of the Uzbek people's way of thinking, their attitude toward life, and their supreme mastery in the art of the spoken word. Over the centuries, it has become an inseparable part of folk life, fulfilling not only the role of entertainment but also profound social, moral, and educational functions.

The analyses conducted within the scope of this article allow us to draw the following important conclusions:

First, the art of askiya, as a unique and distinctive genre of Uzbek folk oral art, has an ancient history, with its roots traceable to the ancient cultural traditions of the Turkic peoples. This art has been preserved and refined over the centuries.

Second, the artistic and aesthetic essence of askiya is based on the polysemy of words, irony, sarcasm, and wordplay. An askiya performer must be not merely a joker, but a deeply knowledgeable, quick-thinking, and broad-minded creative individual. This elevates askiya to the level of a highly intellectual art form that is fundamentally distinct from ordinary humor.

Third, askiya has performed an important function in social life — serving as a unifying force at public gatherings, weddings and celebrations, and in labor processes, a means of lifting spirits and gently criticizing social problems.

Fourth, its inscription on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list confirms that askiya is not merely a national but a universal human value. This recognition is regarded as Uzbek culture's distinctive contribution to the world community.

Fifth, in today's era of globalization, preserving the art of askiya, teaching it to the younger generation, and harmonizing it with contemporary stage arts are among the most pressing tasks. Transmitting askiya as cultural heritage to future generations is a necessary condition for preserving national identity.

The art of askiya is a brilliant expression of the Uzbek people's richness of language, intellect, and creative power. Studying, promoting, and developing it is not merely a matter of cherishing the past, but of securing the future of our national culture.

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