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THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THEATER ARTS IN KHOREZM

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Abstract: This article discusses the establishment of theatrical art in the Khorezm region during the Soviet era. It also sheds light on the activities of amateur circles,troupes, and state theater ensembles.

Keywords: theater, state theater, amateur circles, troupe, performance, play, drama, comedy, director, actor.

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The history of traditional theatre is both ancient and rich. Its origins can be traced back to the era of primitive communal societies. In its earliest forms, theatrical art manifested through ritualistic dances that imitated hunting and labor activities, as well as in martial performances, folk games, and ceremonies that arose from animistic beliefs and nature worship. Petroglyphs found in numerous river valleys and caves across Uzbekistan, along with surviving traditional games, serve as evidence of these early theatrical expressions.

Over time, theatrical elements became increasingly complex, gradually intertwining with animistic beliefs centered on nature, birds, animals, and spiritual forces. Additionally, rituals and customs derived from Zoroastrianism were integrated into these practices. This synthesis, evolving over centuries, gave rise to a distinctive form of performative art [1].

By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the principal forms of theatre had been preserved across the regions of Uzbekistan, with notable developments in repertoire and performance styles. Urban centers witnessed the strengthening of performer associations. In Khorezm, performances such as “Khatarlı o‘yin” ("The Dangerous Play") and “To‘kma” became widespread. Meanwhile, the traditions of comic performance (qiziqchilik) and witty verbal duels (askiya) flourished in the Fergana Valley and Tashkent. In the second half of the 19th century, a group of approximately 30 comic performers led by Zokir Eshon gained recognition in Kokand, while in Bukhara, a troupe of about 20 jesters under the leadership of Tula Masxara also achieved notable fame [2].

During the period of Russian colonization, theatrical troupes from Russia—and later from Tatar and Azerbaijani regions—began to appear in Turkestan. These groups, with their distinct ideological and aesthetic frameworks, stood in sharp contrast to the traditional local theatre. Prominent representatives of Uzbek intellectual and cultural life—such as Furqat, Ahmad Donish, Behbudiy, and Abdulla Avloniy—expressed great interest in these performances and encouraged the local intelligentsia to learn from them. This period marked the emergence of a movement aimed at creating a new form of national theatre [3].

In 1914, the first Uzbek amateur theatre troupe was established in Samarkand under the

leadership of Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy. The group staged his drama “Padarkush” (The Parricide), marking a significant milestone in the development of modern Uzbek theatre.

The first theatre in Khorezm was established on April 22, 1922, in the city of Khiva under the name “Government Theatre.” This institution is closely associated with the names of Muhammad Sharif Polvonov and Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoziy. Initially, the troupe consisted of 12 performers. Muhammad Sharif Polvonov served as the first director of the Government Theatre. Under his direction, a number of plays were staged, including Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoziy’s “Tuhmatchilar Jazosi” (The Punishment of Slanderers), “Zaharli Hayot yoki Ishq Qurbonlari” (A Poisoned Life or Victims of Love), and “Farg‘ona Fojiasi” (The Tragedy of Fergana); Mirtemir Uyg‘ur’s “Turkiston Tabibi” (The Doctor of Turkestan); G‘afur Zafariy’s “Erk Bolalari” (Children of Freedom); and Uzeyir Hajibeyov’s famous operettas “Arshin Mal Alan” and “Husband and Wife” [4].

According to the 1927 report of the Executive Committee of the Khorezm district, in 1925, the Khorezm state budget supported the operation of five clubs and one theatre. Within these clubs, musical and dramatic circles were active. Documents preserved in the Khorezm regional party archives emphasize that 107 amateur and folk artists participated in three dramatic music groups and one choir ensemble. It is also reported that in May 1925 alone, the artistic amateur circles of Urgench city organized 23 concerts [5].

On September 6, 1923, the Executive Committee of the Khorezm district passed a resolution exempting all theatre groups and cinemas from local taxes. This decision significantly revitalized the activities of all theatre circles in the region. The Government Theatre in Khiva, the amateur circle "Young People's Mobile Theatre" affiliated with the Pedagogical Institute, and the theatrical associations of the May Club in Urgench, located at the "Red October" factory, united Khorezm’s talented individuals who later actively participated in the activities of the People's Theatre.

At that time, two People's Theatres had been established and were operating in Khorezm, specifically in Urgench and Khiva. In each district, troupes and amateur circles affiliated with clubs worked regularly. The creative members of the People's Theatres—Matyusuf Kharratov Chokar, Safo Mug‘anni, Komil Devoniy, Madrahim Yoqubov, Sheroziy, Matyoqub Otajanov, Khojikhon Boltayev, Ahmadjon Kazanskiy, Samandar Saraymanov, stage master Abdulla Ismoilov, Onabibi Safayeva, Khudoybergan Devonov, and other prominent artists—also led the activities of dramatic circles.

The period from 1927 to 1929 was marked by the organizational consolidation of dramatic theatres and circles in Khorezm, with their repertoires being enriched by new works. During this time, dramatic performances based on Hamza's plays “Punishment of the Slanderers” and “Victory,” Abdulla Qodiri's “The Unfortunate Groom,” Behbudi's “Padarkush,” Cho‘lpon's “Yorqinoy,” G. Zafari's “Halima,” as well as Alisher Navoi’s “Layli and Majnun” and “Farhad and Shirin” were staged and presented to the public. In 1929, the cultural center was relocated from Khiva to Urgench [6].

In Urgench city, the establishment of a state theatre and the provision of adequate specialist personnel became a priority issue. The newspaper “Inqilob Quyoshi” reported: “Today, the Urgench stage has begun to take flight like a swallow.” Through the initiative of local organizations, amateur stage performers in Urgench were gathered into a single center, forming a permanent troupe. This troupe commenced its activities in mid-January. Financial support amounting to 22,000 soms was allocated to sustain the troupe economically.

Alongside the Urgench State Theatre, a state theatre was also operational in Khiva. The establishment and development of the Urgench State Theatre were significantly contributed to by renowned artists such as Tamarakhonim Zukhurqabulov, Platjon Rakhimov, Akbar Muhammadov, Yusufjon Dadajanov, and Vahobjon Fayozov. The Urgench State Theatre became a training school for skilled actors, vocalists, and dancers.

Among them, the artistic performances of Bibijon Devonova, Matniyoz Yusupov, Razzoq Ota, Matchan Khudoyberganov, Rajabbibi Bayjanova, Mahmudjon Safayev, Qalandar Boyjonov, Onabibi Safayeva, as well as dancers Roziya Abdurahmanova, Oybibi Karimova, O‘rozgul G‘oibova, A. Mahmudova, O. Rozmatova, and Kh. Rakhmanova, merit special recognition.

In the 1930s, efforts began to record folk songs and dances of Khorezm. The vocal performances of Matyusuf and Matyoqub Kharratov, Safo Mug‘anniy, Komiljon Islomov Devoni, Bibijon Devonova, and others were captured on phonograph records. Several treatises concerning Khorezm music were also published.

Fahriddin Rozi’s 12th-century treatise on music, originally written in Persian, was translated into Uzbek. In 1935, forty-eight samples of Khorezm songs and maqams were prepared for study. In the same year, the “Young Spectators’ Theatre” was established under the district state theatre. During the 1930s, performances such as “Layli and Majnun,” “Farhad and Shirin,” “Khalima,” “Garib and Shokhsanam,” “Gulsara,” “Arshin Mal Alan,” “Marriage,” “Rebellion,” and “The Mask was Torn” were staged in Khorezm theatres.

In 1937, a decision was made in Moscow to hold a ten-day festival dedicated to Uzbek literature and arts. This event served as a platform to showcase the creative abilities of literary and artistic figures. In this context, from July 26 to August 10, 1936, selection festivals were held in Urgench city and all its districts to choose participants for the decade. Amateur clubs, troupes, and state theatre groups from the Khorezm district took part in these festivals. As a result, prominent artists such as Safo Mug‘anniy, Madrahim Yoqubov Sheroziy, Rahim Ollaberganov, Orozgul G‘oibova, Khudak Qurbonov, and others were selected. The entire Uzbekistan admired the talent and skill of poets including Safo Mug‘anniy, Komiljon Islomov Devoni, Matyusuf Kharratov, Chokar, Otamaxsum Muhammad Latif oghli, and Partav. Consequently, B. Yo‘ldosh Oxunboboyev, the respected elder of Uzbekistan, invited them to Tashkent to prepare for the ten-day Uzbek literature and arts event in Moscow. Safo Mug‘anniy created several staged performances based on Khorezm folk songs [7].

He was both a musician, a singer, and a poet. Safo Mug‘anniy, Chokar, Komiljon Devonov, and Partavlar composed melodies for their own poems and were the first to perform them among the people.Chokar and B. Rakhmanov jointly authored a book titled "The History of Khorezm Music," published in Moscow in 1925. Together with his father Matyoqub Kharratov, Chokar created more than 30 European-style compositions. His songs such as “Kolkhoz Melody,” “Energy for Cotton,” “Pick the Cotton, Red Soldier,” “Defense March,” “Red Army,” and “Long Live Deqoniy” are among them. For his contributions to the development of Khorezm theater art, the collection of folk songs, and the training of local artistic personnel, Chokar was awarded the title “Honored Artist of Uzbekistan” in 1944 [8].

In the late 1930s, a female accordion players' ensemble was established in the region. Fifteen young women were recruited into this ensemble, including the famous accordionist Saraxon and the well-known artist Onajon Safayeva [9].

It is important to emphasize that between 1925 and 1941, significant efforts were made to develop Khorezm theater art, including singing and dancing arts, as well as to nurture artists who gained recognition regionally and nationally. During these years, notable poets, writers, and stage masters emerged in the area. In 1928, with the aim of uniting writers in the Khorezm district, the Khorezm branch of the “Red Pen” organization was established. Since 1934, it functioned as the Khorezm branch of the Writers’ Union of Uzbekistan. The local press and radio committee also played a significant role in raising the spiritual and cultural level of Khorezm’s working people [10].

From 1937 onwards, the regional radio committee began broadcasting programs. Publications like “Inqilob Quyoshi,” “Khorezmskaya Pravda,” and district newspapers kept workers informed of daily news and updates [11].

During the Second World War, Khorezm theatre created numerous concert programs and dozens of plays that celebrated the bravery of Uzbek soldiers of that period. After the war, the theater staged some of the best translated works from foreign and Russian classical dramaturgy, including K. Gors’s “Princess Turandot,” N.V. Gogol’s “The Inspector General,” A.S. Pushkin’s “The Miserly Knight,” A.N. Ostrovsky’s “Without a Dowry,” “The Innocent Culprit,” Molière’s “Scapin’s Deceits,” Schiller’s “Intrigue and Love,” N. Dumbadze’s “Welcome,” E. Robles’s “Stronger than Death,” and Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” [12].

In 1959, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Muhammadrizo Ogohiy’s birth, the theater was named the Ogohiy Khorezm State Musical Drama and Comedy Theater.

The 1960s to 1980s were years of significant development for music performance art, especially theater art, in Khorezm. Elderly khafizes (masters of maqom) like Madrim Yoqubov-Sheroziy, brothers Hojikhon and Nurmamat Boltaev, and Komiljon Otaniyozov made great contributions. They gathered talented young people around them, teaching them the unique secrets of Khorezm's vocal and musical arts, leaving behind gifted students. Especially notable was the Khorezm Maqam Ensemble, formed on their initiative, which became a special school for producing talented performers recognized throughout the republic. Among them, artists such as Otajon Khudoyshukurov, Bobomurod Hamdamov, Ortiq Otajonov, and Rozmat Jumaniyozov earned respect and admiration not only in the republic but also in neighboring regions.

During the same years, theatrical and stage arts also flourished in Khorezm. The Ogohiy Drama and Comedy Theater, one of the oldest in the republic, played a special role in the cultural life of Khorezm [13].

At the end of the 1970s, the regional theater moved into a new, beautiful building in the center of Urgench city. The theater troupe strengthened with talented young actors and musicians, allowing for enrichment and staging of new, modern plays. The theater's repertoire featured works by Uzbek playwrights such as Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoziy, A. Qahhor, M. Shayxzoda, Uyg'un, and I. Sulton, alongside foreign dramatists [14].

Additionally, local authors' works were staged on the theater's stage, including Yu. Yusupov-Ayyomiy's "Strange Lover and Shahsanam," "Mavlono Ogohiy," "Night and Darkness," A. Bobojon's "The Last Khan," "Lover Stranger," Egam Rahim's "Sacrifices for Enlightenment," R. Bekniyoz's "I Cannot Live Without You," "Between Two Fires," E. Samandarov's "Our Ancestors' Sword," "The Debate Continues," and Q. Matrizaev's "Makhtumquli," "Oath and Conscience" [15].

In conclusion, the Khorezm Drama and Comedy Theater not only nurtured famous actors, directors, and composers recognized throughout the republic but also, together with regional theaters, troupes, ensembles, and amateur clubs, sincerely served the people and made a significant contribution to raising the cultural level of the population.

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