

# Ghulam Zafari's Role in the History of Uzbek Dramaturgy

Olim Usmanov

*Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature named after Alisher Navoi, Tashkent, Uzbekistan*

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Abstract: Ghulam Zafari is a significant figure in Uzbek modern literature. He distinguished himself as a poet, dramatist, folklorist, and musicologist. Regarded as the founder of Uzbek children's drama and the author of the first Uzbek musical drama, Ghulam Zafari holds a pivotal position in the literary history of the country. His play, "Halima", garnered substantial popularity among the Uzbek people during the 1920s and 1930s. Esteemed figures of Uzbek literature, including Fitrat, Cholpon, and Abdulla Qadiri, as well as Russian art critics like B. Pestovsky and V. Ouspensky, highly rated his work. Ghulam Zafari left a lasting legacy in 20th-century Uzbek culture. This article provides a succinct analysis of Ghulam Zafari's life and his masterpieces, drawing upon an archival analysis of newspapers published at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The first quarter of the 20th century marked a period of dramatic changes in the history of Uzbek literature and culture. Having developed within the cultural environment of the East for a thousand years, Uzbek literature started to exhibit elements typical of Western literature during this period. Poetry took on a more social tone, the new poetic style "barmoq" replaced the traditional aruz, and novels and other prose genres emerged. One of the most significant innovations of this period was the rise of a new, European-style theatre, which catalysed the rapid development of dramaturgy. Many Uzbek writers of this era endeavoured to create dramatic artworks. In particular, Ghulam Zafari, with his deep affection for the theatre, established the genre of children's drama and musical drama in Uzbek literature.

A new European-style theatre deeply permeated the cultural life of the Uzbek people. Following the emergence of drama as a genre in Uzbek literature, it quickly became one of the dominant literary forms. The Uzbek population greeted this art form with enthusiasm, recognising the theatre as a potent instrument for influencing the public mind. Consequently, numerous renowned writers of that time exhibited considerable interest in producing dramatic artworks. The allure of theatre captivated

progressive intellectuals and the youth with its magnetism. This heightened interest, particularly following Behbudi's acclaimed work "Padarkush", led to the emergence of numerous new dramas. The rise of the Uzbek theatre was a historical necessity. Other Turkic nations, including the Turks, Tatars, and Azerbaijanis, had initiated this process slightly earlier and had made certain contributions to the creation of the new Uzbek theatre.

At the dawn of the last century, there were many who failed to appreciate the potential of theatre in serving the development of the nation, thus condemning it. However, thanks to the efforts of dedicated intellectuals, the nation, which was in the midst of a national renaissance, came to understand that theatre acted as a school and mirror, revealing its shortcomings and inconsistencies. Despite resistance from the regional administration of the Russian Empire and local adversaries, theatre flourished.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

In this article, the dramatist's life and legacy were studied using the qualitative content analysis method, based on archival materials. Specifically, we analysed Ghulam Zafari's dramatic works through the lens of Russian theatre critic B. Pestovsky's thoughts, which

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\* Corresponding author

were published in the 3rd and 4th issues of "Inqilob" magazine in 1922. We derived certain conclusions from the announcements and brief reviews about the presentations of several short plays by Ghulam Zafari in "Ishtirokyun" newspaper and in the issue of "Turkiston" newspaper dated October 4, 1919. We discovered, through a review in the "Ishtirokyun" newspaper on September 14 of the same year, that the first performance of the drama "Halima" began on September 10, 1920. During the 1920s, the Uzbek people showed great interest in the drama "Halima". National Uzbek tunes were appropriately used, and the work received high praise from many Uzbek intellectuals. This fact is substantiated by Cholpon's review of the work, which was published in the December 16, 1922 issue of the "Turkiston" newspaper.

### 3 DISCUSSION

Ghulam Zafari played a unique role in introducing the Uzbek people to theatre. His dramatic work began before the changes of 1917. A Russian theatre critic of the time, B.A. Pestovsky, writes the following in the article "History of the Uzbek Theatre": "Comrade Zafari's dedication to the world of theatre, art and literature in general, had a significant and fruitful impact on the nation." Indeed, Ghulam Zafari's love for the theatre was exceptional. He was driven by the desire to incorporate the best traditions of folk theatre into modern theatre, to create truly national dramatic works imbued with the essence of Uzbek national art, and to resonate with the spirit of the people. According to Pestovsky, Ghulam Zafari, like a number of leading artists of his time, was influenced by Mahmudhoja Behbudi's work "Padarkush", and in 1915 he wrote a drama entitled "Unfortunate Apprentice". However, the play was not published.

It was impossible to instantly dispel ignorance that had been entrenched in the minds of the people for centuries. Therefore, it was necessary to initiate this work by educating children, instilling in their pure hearts feelings of patriotism, faith in the future, and enlightenment. Recognising that the role of modern theatre is incomparable in implementing this noble work, Ghulam Zafari began to write small stage plays based on the lives of children and young people, contemporaneously, of a moral and promotional nature, and he laid the cornerstone for children's drama in Uzbek literature.

That period was challenging for the local people in the region, and Ghulam Zafari encouraged all enlightened individuals to work collaboratively in all areas, including preparing children for a bright future and educating them in an enlightened way. Works such as "Spring", "Viola", "Wish", "Resistance", "Merciful Disciple", "In the graveyard", "Rabbit", "Tatimboy father", "Children of Freedom", written by the playwright in the late 1910s - early 1920s, were created for this purpose. These works were first performed on amateur stages and later on professional theatre stages. In the play "Wish", written in 1919 and staged the same year, the playwright expresses his noble desires and views through the character of Murad, the main character of the play. According to Murad, in order for the nation to progress, all its members must be enlightened. "So, why aren't women able to receive education? After all, half of humanity is made up of women, isn't it?! If women are illiterate, doesn't that mean that half of society will be illiterate?!"

The intellectuals of that time placed significant emphasis on the education of women and girls. They deeply understood that the future of the nation is in the hands of mothers. Every person receives their initial upbringing, first and foremost, from their mother. Therefore, the enlightenment of the mother guarantees the bright future of the nation. The same idea is proposed in the play "Wish".

This play was performed together with Ghulam Zafari's plays "Dishonest Son" and "Merciful Disciple" by the theatre troupe led by Mannon Uyghur on October 4, 1919. It's noteworthy that this work was the first performance of the State Theatre for children. This performance was also shown together with the works of Fitrat and Mannon Uighur, who were close friends of Ghulam Zafari. In the October 4, 1919 issue of the "Ishtirokyun" newspaper, there is the following notice:

On Saturday, October 4, 1919, on the "Turon" stage, the following will be performed by the Artists Union:

1. "Tilak" is a one-act educational and didactic play. Writer: Ghulam Zafari.
2. "Dishonest Son". A scene that depicts the grim situation of a merciless son. Writer: Ghulam Zafari.
3. "The Merciful Disciple" An operatic scene depicting the Merciful Disciple. Writer: Ghulam Zafari.
4. "Recitation". The works of the famous poet Fitrat Effendi will be performed.

5. "House of Science". A one-act comedy depicting the concepts of science of arrogant, ignorant people. Writer: Uighur.

6. "Turkistani Doctor" A one-act comedy (comedy) showing the procedures performed by a so-called doctor. Writer: Uighur.

Ghulam Zafari's "The Merciful Disciple" is a single-view drama, written in a very simple and understandable way. One of the advanced students meets a beggar boy on the street and invites him to school. He says that there is sufficient food and clothing, and that he can receive a good education. The student promises to provide a place in his house for the sick mother and sister of the beggar boy.

During this period, the socio-economic situation in the country was challenging. Orphans, left parentless due to societal upheavals and class conflicts, were surviving on the streets or resorting to various corrupt means. This situation also deeply affected the nationalist writer, Ghulam Zafari. As a result of his profound suffering, he penned the play "In the Graveyard". In this work, the lamentation of an orphan child at his mother's grave, his sighs and wails, and the spectral cries of his mother's spirit emerging from the grave are portrayed in a starkly dramatic fashion. People who lived during this period and watched the play remember that the piece had a profound impact on the audience, stirring their emotions.

Ghulam Zafari, a firm believer that enlightenment is the only path to save the nation from destruction, urged people to pursue education in nearly all of his works. This play also concludes with school children approaching the grave, inviting the orphan child to join them at school – an invitation which he accepts. Such an ending naturally created an element of artificiality within the work. However, this characteristic was commonplace among the works of most writers of that time, as the great process taking place – the national revival – required propaganda from the intellectuals.

Ghulam Zafari also celebrated youth, beauty, and love in the one-act musical dramas "Children of Freedom" and "Tuygunoy", which were inspired by the lives of young people. Both of these works portray the vibrant moments of two young men and women in love and their friends, delighting in the joy of youth and love in a beautiful spring garden. "Children of Freedom" and "Tuygunoy" were performed in 1921 by a theatre troupe led by Mannon Uyghur and were showcased in numerous industrial towns in all the

country's cities for several years. Later, they were included in the main repertoire of the ethnographic ensemble organised by Qori Yakubov. In 1923, both productions were performed by an Uzbek concert group at an agricultural exhibition held in Moscow, with the author in attendance.

In 1925, at the World Exhibition of Decorative Arts held in Paris, Qori Yakubov and Tamarakhonim performed the play "Children of Freedom". The libretto was translated into French and German and published. The play's straightforward dramaturgy, pleasant and playful melodies attracted and piqued the interest of the European audience in Uzbek art.

In addition to the dramas mentioned above, Ghulam Zafari also created stage works such as "Chin Temir Batir", "Gulasal", "Buzuklik Armughoni", "Pakhtakhon", "New Man", "Walk and Wedding". Unfortunately, such works were not preserved due to their not being published in a timely manner. It should also be considered that the stage works created by Ghulam Zafari were pioneering attempts at musical drama. Therefore, it is natural for the plays to have certain imperfections and shortcomings. However, despite this, these works found their way into the hearts of the people during that time and received their appreciation and respect.

The most significant work that secured Ghulam Zafari's place in the history of Uzbek culture is his drama "Halima". "Halima" was staged many times in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century. It was also performed in the summer of 1930 by the ensemble of the Uzbek Music Theater on the stages of Moscow and Leningrad. "Halima" was the first musical drama created in the history of Uzbek culture, and it gained unparalleled fame during its time.

Uzbek people, who could not fully comprehend the musical dramas of Tatar, Azerbaijani, and other nations due to language barriers, longed to see such dramas in the Uzbek language. Ghulam Zafari, who felt this strong need deeply, began by creating small stage works and, after gaining a certain level of skill, he completed writing the drama "Halima" towards the end of 1919. The theatrical life of the drama began on 10th September 1920. The play was directed by Mannon Uighur. "Ishtirokyun" newspaper reported this: "On Tuesday, 14th September 1920, the five-act opera "Halima" will be performed by Uzbek Soviet artists in the "Rohat" park of the old city. Writer: Ghulam Zafari. This work is a tragedy drawn from real life. The music was performed on local musical

instruments, in the Uzbek language. The performance starts at 7:30..." From that day, the drama "Halima" was shown continuously on the stage of the Uzbek theatre until the repressive Stalinist regime suppressed it in 1937, and every performance deeply moved the hearts of the audience.

In Cholpon's review of "Halima", written in the 16 December 1922 issue of the "Turkistan" newspaper, we read the following words: "On 11 December, in the "Turon" theatre building, we saw "Halima" performed - perhaps for the hundredth time... Despite the fact that the work was performed on the old stage, the building was filled to capacity". At that time, the term opera was used instead of musical drama. Fitrat also referred to this work as an "opera". "Ghulam Zafari took the first step on the path of opera," he wrote in his book "Literary Rules". B. A. Pestovsky, in his article "History of Uzbek Theatre", said: "Today, the founder of Uzbek opera is Ghulam Zafari". In collaboration with Ghulam Zafari, there was a constant effort to enhance the theatricality of the play. As a result of intense collaboration between the author and the theatre team, "Halima" became one of the most perfected stage works of its time.

As a result of close collaboration between the author and the theatre team, the events of the play were enriched year by year, and the range of music and instruments expanded. The playwright himself chose the music for the play. The musicians were also invited by Ghulam Zafari himself.

Thus, as a result of the tireless efforts of the author and the theatre team, "Halima" became one of the most perfected stage plays of its time. Although the play was staged time and again, the theatre was always packed, the audience savoured the play and watched it with tears in their eyes. A work that received such an outpouring of public affection was a rare event in the history of Uzbek theatre. "Halima" is a symbol of people's love for theatre, and the role of Halima has become a favourite role of Uzbek actresses. Masuma Qoriyeva, Tursunoy Saidzimova, Lutfikhanim Sarimsokova, and Halima Nosirova became known for the first time through this role. The skill of Abror Hidoyatov, who played the role of Ne'mat, deserves special praise. The Uzbek National Academic Drama Theatre, which has been operating for 42 years in the building where the Uzbek Drama Theatre is located, raised its first curtain in this building with the musical drama "Halima". "Halima" was the first play of the first Uzbek musical theatre established in Samarkand in 1929, based on the

experimental ethnographic ensemble under the leadership of Qori Yaqubov. Its premiere took place on 10 August 1929 in Samarkand. The performance was enriched with new music and melodies and was shown for the first time with the participation of the Uzbek national and symphony orchestra. The musical drama "Halima" and its author, despite being so famous, also had a tragic fate. From the end of the 20s and the 30s, the Soviet authorities began to attempt to make literature and works of art fully serve their interests. "Do we need the work of "Halima" by 'class-conscious' people in this era? Can it meet the requirements of Soviet policy?" Such questions were raised. "Halima" was a somewhat "raw" work in terms of covering issues of class struggle. Because the author himself was one of those creators who, in the words of "class-conscious" critics, "did not fully realise the importance of the Soviet reality." Some critics interpreted the work, which was highly appreciated by writers like Fitrat and Cholpon, and most importantly, received the incomparable love of the people, as "...the feeling of hatred, struggle... does not reach the social vein of the construction that enslaved women and girls". Such unfounded accusations gradually increased and reached a climax in 1937: Ghulam Zafari was repressed, and "Halima" was banished from the stage.

In the 70s of the last century, the drama "Halima" was reworked by Turob Tola and staged at the Mukimi Theatre. In this "reworked" play, the main characters are more politically "mature", and even Ne'mat and Zakir are portrayed as revolutionaries. This contradicts Ghulam Zafari's original intention and obscures the authenticity of the work. Therefore, the "reworked" drama was not accepted by the people, and it justifiably provoked objections.

The musical drama "Halima" was not published in time. Only a copy of the play, which was kept in the archives of the Institute of Art Studies and was placed in Andijan in 1926, has survived to the present day. This play consists of four acts and contains more than ten songs - arias, duets, choral pieces. After all, it is challenging to describe the state of the hero's inner world, which is extremely vibrant and the feelings are so heartfelt, that they can only be vividly expressed through songs.

Posters and reviews published at the time described the work as a "tragedy." However, this tragedy was not limited to just two young people. As a result of various evils caused by misconception, ignorance, and the inadequacy of civil society, the issue of



personal freedom in the country was in a miserable state.

The author uses folk songs and tunes to reveal the feelings of the main characters. Although no special music was written for the drama, it was selected from the musical heritage of the people, yet no artificiality can be felt in the work. On the contrary, the behaviour of the characters, the text of the songs, and the music show an organic balance. While creating the drama "Halima," the playwright focuses on making the work popular and tapping into the realm of people's spirit and interest. Ghulam Zafari, who conducted research on Uzbek music and folklore, realised that folk art is an infinite ocean and a priceless treasure. In his articles on the history of Uzbek theatre and music, written around the 20s, he emphasised that Uzbek cultural heritage is very rich and ancient, and that it can be effectively used in modern literature. The enjoyment of folk art was one of the factors that ensured the success of the playwright's works.

The songs and music in the work dynamically increase, sharpen, and become more intense in proportion to the events. Finally, at the end of the fourth act, the work reaches its climax. The dramatist vividly described the situation that shakes the viewer's heart and reaches the peak of emotions, using various possibilities of stage art. Halima's state before death is similar to that of the mad Ophelia in Shakespeare's Hamlet. Halima's last aria, sung in a semi-conscious state, undoubtedly caused strong emotions in the audience of that time. Russian theatre expert B. Pestovsky, who saw "Halima" on the stage of "Turon" in the 20s, writes: "In the first act, the aria of the young man who fell in love with Halima, and in the fifth act, the Uzbek wedding and Halima's death were very moving. Even a person who has no knowledge of music and no sense of music will be deeply affected by this piece."

In his review of the drama "Halima," Fitrat commented on the success of the work: "Ghulam Zafari has a new quality that is not found in many of our writers. Ghulam knows our national tunes very well. In fact, the songs and melodies embedded in the text of the drama have a charming and magical power that moves everyone. Through the sad arias of Ne'mat and Halima, the main characters of the work, the dreams that burst out from the depths of their hearts, at the same time, the suffocating atmosphere of the time are vividly described. This is one of the factors that ensured the success of the drama and gained popularity among the people.

## 4 CONCLUSION

Based on the opinions and considerations presented in this article, a few important conclusions can be drawn. Initially, the emergence of European-style theatre in Turkestan was a historical necessity. Among many Uzbek writers, Ghulam Zafari holds a special place in laying its foundation. He was one of the first actors, playwrights, and directors of the Uzbek theatre. He expressed his life's story and original ideas through small stage works, sought and found ways to instil enlightenment in the hearts of young people. Ghulam Zafari's small stage works served as a stepping-stone in the creation of the musical drama "Halima". The play "Halima" was an absolute novelty for both Uzbek dramaturgy and Uzbek theatre art.

Moreover, Ghulam Zafari brought the melodies of folklore into dramaturgy and was the first to understand that this important part of the centuries-old heritage can be one of the leading factors in the development of written literature. He correctly understood that the theatre is a new form of art that can influence all layers of the public, actively participated in changing people's consciousness and worldview with his works, and tried to bring it to the level of a conscious member of society. For this purpose, he also used elements of sentimental literature. Based on the ideas described above, it can be said that Ghulam Zafari, as a dramatist, is a creator who made a great contribution to the expansion of the horizons of Uzbek theatre.

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