

THE PRESENCE OF MYTHICAL ELEMENTS FROM FAIRY TALES IN MODERN SHORT STORIES

(A Case Study of Khurshid Dustmuhammad's Story «Jajman»)

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Annotation: This article analyzes mythical characters found in folk tales and their interpretation in modern short stories. The artistic expression of mythological and folklore elements is examined based on Khurshid Dustmuhammad's short story «Jajman». Through the characters such as Khurmacha Polvon, Kholpolvon, and Pufakvoy, the paper explores archetypes embedded in the collective consciousness of the people.

Keywords: Mythical elements, folklore, plot, motif, character, fairy tale, Kholpolvon, Jajman, mythological element.

It is well known that mythology is closely connected to oral folk traditions and ceremonial folklore. Folklore scholars Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm are considered the founders of the mythological school in literary studies. Through their work, they demonstrated the strong relationship between mythology, oral traditions, and literature. Many of the tales in their collection are, in fact, modern representations of ancient Germanic mythology. Stories involving magical objects, characters, and events related to natural forces preserve traces of ancient beliefs and myths.

In Uzbek literature, mythical elements have similarly found expression in fairy tales, and these elements (plots, motifs, characters) are also clearly visible in contemporary Uzbek storytelling.

From the 20th century onward, storytelling in Uzbek literature experienced significant development, enriched by many talented writers. Among them, Khurshid Dustmuhammad stands out as a notable figure. He is one of the most prominent representatives of Uzbek literature, and his stories have been highly praised for their distinctive and unique style.

In particular, his story «Jajman» became a major event in the literary world. It has been the subject of many scholarly articles and various interpretations by literary critics. Writers have analyzed it from different angles.

Mythical elements are characters and motifs that reflect ancient layers of popular consciousness, commonly found in fairy tales, legends, and ritual folklore. In this paper, we aim to analyze the mythical elements in Uzbek stories, using «Jajman» as a case study, and compare them to traditional Uzbek folk tales.

First of all, the title of the story itself draws attention and arouses curiosity. Why was the story given such a title? Who—or what—is «Jajman?!»

The author, in an interview titled «Without Discovery, There is No Literature» with journalist Umid Ali, commented on the meaning of the word «Jajman» as follows: «When it comes to the meaning of the word, fans often ask this question at literary meetings and gatherings. But I have always left it unanswered. That’s my secret—it’s part of the story’s charm. Let the reader figure it out themselves».¹

This implies that the reader must deduce the meaning and symbolic nature of «Jajman» while reading the story. However, interpretations may vary. In her article «The Charms of Jajman», N. Dovurboyeva offers a unique explanation. She notes that in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, «Jajman» in dialects can mean «jajji», or «small». If we consider this as the first meaning, a second interpretation links the word to Alisher Navoi’s «Saddi Iskandariy» from his Khamsa. We are familiar with the figures of Ya’juj and Ma’juj in that work. The roles of these figures (Navoi’s Ya’juj-Ma’juj and Dustmuhammad’s Jajman) are similar—they both bring disaster upon humanity. Perhaps the author, inspired by this resemblance, derived a new word by abbreviating the term used by Navoi.

It is possible that the syllable «juj», which belongs to the two parts of «Ya’juj-Ma’juj», was taken, and by adding the adjective-forming suffix «-man» to it, the vowel «a» in the suffix may have been harmonized with the «u» in «juj». This may have created a new word with the meaning of calamity or disaster—perhaps intentionally.²

Indeed, in the story, Khurshid Dustmuhammad describes Jajman as a very small creature. «The old man was startled, as if his gaze had been disturbed, upon seeing a strange creature no taller than a handspan, casting a dangerous shadow across his heart».

In the «Construction of Iskandar’s Wall» section of Alisher Navoi’s novel «Saddi Iskandariy», part of his Khamsa, the monstrous beings Ahraman and the Ya’juj-Ma’juj are depicted. Navoi describes them as «one as small as one span, the other ten fathoms tall».³ Similarly, Khurshid Dustmuhammad notes that Jajman is one span in height. This parallel suggests that both authors are reflecting on similar mythical beings.⁴

Moreover, in her article, N. Dovurboyeva describes Jajman as a metaphor for corrupt individuals—bribe-takers, extortionists, embezzlers, and profiteers—figuratively, the small internal enemies of the nation.⁵ In truth, Jajman symbolizes the most powerful adversary of humanity: unbridled desire.

In the story, people initially like Jajman. They boast, «I’ll be the one to feed him!» They offer raisins and dried fruits in the marketplace with joy. However, Jajman becomes increasingly gluttonous. Eventually, people can no longer satisfy him. He begins to steal food

¹ X. Do’stmuhammad. «Adabiyotda kashfiyot bo’lmasa...» . Bekajon. 2008. 72-son.

² N. Dovurboyeva. «Jajman»ning jilvalari. «Yoshlik» 1991. 5-son. 43-b.

³ A. Navoiy. Xamsa. –Toshkent., Yangi asr avlodi. 2010.

⁴ [https://arxiv.uz/uz/Psixologizm va psixologik tahlil.](https://arxiv.uz/uz/Psixologizm%20va%20psixologik%20tahlil)

⁵ N. Dovurboyeva. «Jajman»ning jilvalari. «Yoshlik» 1991. 5-son. 43-b.

from sacks, even taking money. He becomes a threat. But is it easy for a person to rid themselves of their Jajman, their inner desire? No—it is not an easy battle.

Though in the story, the market people manage to kill Jajman, a larger one appears not long after. This reveals the author's deep philosophical message: defeating desire is not a one-time event, but a continuous struggle. Desire cannot be eradicated completely—it can only be temporarily restrained.

The setting of the story—the marketplace—also holds symbolic significance.

«People awaken, the market awakens... the gate swings wide open, the buzz begins... crowds rush in and out... sellers come, buyers come, idlers come... like ants they come... and go... feet never stop, hands never rest, mouths never close... they enter and exit again and again... someone says: 'my money', another: 'my goods'... life places a bridle on mankind and leads it into the whirlwind called 'market'... turning and turning... the ant grabs and carries what it can... buying-selling, buying-selling, buying-selling... anything that can be touched or named is sold... Oh, alas, Ahura Mazda! The weak are in need of fire, Ahura Mazda!»⁶ — these words, spoken through the voice of the ancient Zoroaster, suggest that the marketplace is a metaphor for life itself.

Indeed, people are turning life into a market. One wants to buy, another to sell. From dawn to dusk, no one stops. Everyone is different. One is this way, another is that way. Thus, the market in the story symbolizes life and the world. Zoroaster's phrase, «The weak are in need of fire, Ahura Mazda!», implies humanity is immersed in sin.

Now, if we analyze Jajman's characteristics separately: First, he is very small—only a span tall. Second, he is extremely gluttonous—devouring everything he can.

Third, he carries a sack with him. These traits are also found in Uzbek folklore. For example, in tales like «Nokhatvoy», «Quloqboy», and «Khurmacha Polvon», we find stories of children born miraculously late in their parents' lives, often depicted as tiny beings. Comparing Jajman to these figures in terms of appearance, we see similarities—especially with «Nokhatvoy».

The character of a small-bodied, pea-sized child is widespread in oral folk creativity and serves as a vivid example of mythical elements. Such figures often arise from unnatural births, acquiring a mythical status. Unlike ordinary children, those born in extraordinary ways are usually portrayed as exceptionally intelligent or powerful and become the central heroes of great adventures in the course of the tale.

For instance, in one folk story, it is told: «Once upon a time, there was a wealthy man who had a farmer. The laborer had no children. Due to the landowner's oppression, the farmer could not even go home. While the farmer was plowing the field, his wife would bring him food. One

⁶ X. Do'st Muhammad. *Bezor qushning qarg'ishi*. «Sharq» nashriyot matbaa aksiyadorlik kompaniyasi bosh tahririyati. Toshkent. 2006. 139-b.

day, while she was cooking, she gave birth to a pea-sized boy and was greatly weakened by the event».⁷

As we can see, such small-sized characters appear frequently in folk tales. Similar figures are also found in the folklore of other nations. In English tales, there is «Tom Thumb», and in Japanese oral literature, «Issun-bōshi» (the one-inch boy). In general, smallness or miniature stature holds a special place as a mythological element in fairy tales. Interestingly, these tiny characters are typically portrayed in a positive light.

However, in the Uzbek folk tale «Kholpolvon», there is a myth of a one-span-tall, gluttonous creature.

«While the wrestler Toshchi Polvon was cooking soup, a one-span-tall creature with a forty-span-long beard emerged from beneath the bridge. With a single hair from its beard, it tightly bound Toshchi Polvon's hands and feet and drank the boiling soup, even devouring the bones».⁸

From this passage, we understand that the creature—despite its small size—is incredibly gluttonous. The same event repeats daily, as it consumes the meals and even the bones of wrestlers. Both the body and appetite of this creature remind one of Jajman. «The old man observed the creature for a while—its hands and mouth never ceased moving, but it did not appear to be satisfied anytime soon».⁹

The quality of Jajman's gluttony can also be compared to the tale «Pufakvoy» (Bubble Boy).

«In recent times, Pufakvoy became very greedy. He was no longer content with the food given by the old couple. Whatever he saw, he would say, 'Sip, my mouth!' and gulp it down».¹⁰

There are clear parallels between the greed of Jajman and that of Pufakvoy. Interestingly, the events of Pufakvoy also take place in a marketplace.

«On the market day, the old man went out to do some shopping. Meanwhile, Pufakvoy followed him to the market. First, he saw a man riding a donkey and carrying many roosters and hens. Pufakvoy thought, 'I would enjoy those chickens,' and immediately said, 'Swallow, my mouth!' With that, the man, his donkey, and all the birds were gulped whole».¹¹

Throughout the tale, Pufakvoy consumes everything in the market, leaving nothing behind. His insatiable appetite is portrayed as a mythological force and carries a moral message,

⁷ «Birlashgan o'zar». O'zbek xalq ertaklari. «O'zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi». Davlat ilmiy nashriyoti. Toshkent — 2019. 96-b.

⁸ «Devbachcha». O'zbek xalq ertaklari. «O'zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi» Davlat ilmiy nashriyoti. Toshkent — 2019. 29-b.

⁹ X. Do'stmuhammad. Beozor qushning qarg'ishi. «Sharq» nashriyot matbaa aksiyadorlik kompaniyasi bosh tahririyati. Toshkent. 2006. 140-b.

¹⁰ «Devbachcha». O'zbek xalq ertaklari. «O'zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi» Davlat ilmiy nashriyoti. Toshkent — 2019. 4-b.

¹¹ «Devbachcha». O'zbek xalq ertaklari. «O'zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi» Davlat ilmiy nashriyoti. Toshkent — 2019. 5-b.

warning against gluttony, greed, and the consequences of being consumed by one's desires. Similar themes are also prevalent in Slavic and Japanese folk tales.

Thus, Jajman's greed and excessive desire can be considered mythological elements. Furthermore, attention should be paid to the small pouch inside Jajman's belly: «The creature, comfortably squatting beside a pile of raisins, reached for them as if grabbing rice from a platter, and occasionally stuffed a handful or two into the pouch in its belly».¹²

Similar mythic characters are found in Uzbek folk tales as well. Take, for example, the story of «Khurmacha Polvon». A poor, elderly couple finally have a child in their old age—the wife gives birth to a ceramic bowl (khurmacha). The khurmacha of Khurmacha Polvon cannot even be filled by all the wheat from the threshing floor. Such figures appear frequently in folklore.

These parallels indicate that Khurshid Dustmuhammad has reimagined traditional mythical figures from oral folklore in a modern literary context. The mythical elements found in folk tales are being revitalized and given new life in contemporary artistic works. Khurshid Dustmuhammad's short story «Jajman» incorporates various mythological elements into Uzbek literature. The character of Jajman bears notable similarities to mythic figures from Uzbek folk tales such as «Nokhatvoy», «Pufakvoy», and «Kholpolvon», reflecting how these archetypes resonate within modern society. Through these parallels, themes such as desire, greed, and social vices are explored using mythological imagery, prompting the reader to engage in deep reflection.

This demonstrates the ongoing relevance of mythological motifs in Uzbek storytelling and shows how they acquire new meanings in contemporary literature.

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