

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Historical and Cultural Factors in The Development of Religious-Educational Narratives

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the historical and cultural factors that influenced the formation of the religious-educational prose narrative genre in classical Uzbek literature. The study examines five principal factors that gave rise to this genre: the influence of Islam and Quranic teachings, the traditions of oral folk literature, the spread of Sufi doctrine, socio-moral and educational needs of society, and the impact of Eastern literary traditions. The article elaborates on the lexical and literary meanings of the term *qissa*, the historical roots of the genre, and the pivotal role of Nasiriddin Rabghuziy's *Qisas ul-Anbiya* in the development of religious-educational narrative prose. The findings demonstrate that religious-educational narrative fiction emerged as a product of the interplay between Islamic doctrine, Quranic narratives, oral folk tradition, Sufi teaching, and classical Eastern literary conventions, and that it served as an indispensable medium for elevating public morality, providing ethical instruction, and transmitting the national spiritual heritage across generations.

KEYWORDS

Religious-educational narrative prose, *qissa* genre, classical Uzbek literature, Quranic narratives, Rabghuziy, *Qisas ul-Anbiya*, Sufi doctrine, oral folk literature, Eastern literary tradition, moral-educational ideas, Islam, prophetic narratives, genre formation, spiritual-ethical upbringing, epic genre.

INTRODUCTION

The scientific study of the rich heritage of Uzbek national literature and culture, and the systematic exploration of our ancestors' spiritual and educational, religious and philosophical, and artistic-aesthetic perspectives is recognized as a priority task in literary studies. In particular, the issue of understanding national identity, historical memory, and the formation of spiritual and moral consciousness among the younger generation through examples of classical literary heritage remains a pressing problem in contemporary science. This article focuses on a thorough examination of the genre of religious-educational narratives in Uzbek classical literature, which has particular scientific significance. Therefore, the

emergence of the genre of religious-educational narrative in Uzbek literature, the socio-historical, cultural-educational, and artistic-aesthetic factors influencing its formation will be analyzed comprehensively, and the position of this direction in the history of literature will be determined.

LITERARY ANALYSIS AND METHODS

The religious-educational narrative, which emerged in close connection with oral folk creativity, religious-Islamic narratives, and Eastern literature, and later enriched by Sufi, didactic, and educational ideas, is considered one of the significant epic genres in Uzbek literature. According to

[Holdorov D., in his dissertation, "The Issue of Artistic Style in Contemporary Uzbek Narratives (with examples from the narratives of Shoim Botayev and Nazar Eshonqul)": "It is a genre that has passed through a long literary-historical process and achieved artistic perfection" [p. 11]. Literary scholar A. Holmurodov, in his doctoral thesis on "Uzbek Narration: Issues of Progress," investigates the stylistic changes in Uzbek narratives created at the end of the 20th century. He explores the historical roots of the narrative genre, its theoretical nature, transformation, composition and epic depiction in narratives, the depiction of characters, the distinct characteristics of modern narration, and the challenges of creating images in historical narratives, real characters in historical narratives, artistic fabrications, new artistic thought, and creating historical images through the narratives created over the last twenty-five years. In particular, there is a special place for Quranic narratives at the beginning of the genre and its terminology. When we consider the specifics of the narrative genre, it is observed that narratives approaching the divine essence stand out as bright examples of epic literature. This highest form of the narrative may serve as a model for narratives of all times [Qozikhujayev A. on the narrative genre / Collection of scientific articles dedicated to the 80th anniversary of N. Karimov – Tashkent: Fan, 2012. – p. 206].

Thus, the term "Qissa" is derived from Arabic, and according to its lexical meaning, it expresses artistic historical meanings that narrate adventures or specify certain periods of the life and activities of individuals; it is one of the genres widespread in the literature not only of Uzbekistan but also throughout the entire Near and Middle Eastern peoples. For this reason, some dictionaries explaining literary terminology describe two interrelated meanings that express its entire historical progress as follows: "Qissa... 1. Works of folklore and written literature widely spread in the Near and Middle East. 2. In Uzbek prose, works that are larger than stories and smaller than novels and are often based on the adventures of the main character that have emerged in the last decade are also referred to as qissa. Such works are similar to the novella genre in terms of their character, genre possibilities, and artistic-descriptive principles and methods" [Hotamov N., Sarimsokov B. Explanatory Dictionary of Literary Studies Terms. – Tashkent: O'qituvchi, 1983, p. 169].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious-educational narratives constitute an important

component of Uzbek classical literature and folk creativity, serving as educational sources that invite individuals to goodness, honesty, patience, faith, and spiritual maturity. For this reason, such works hold a distinct place in the history of Uzbek classical literature. That is, religious-educational narratives are a significant literary phenomenon formed in close connection with the spiritual life, religious beliefs, and moral views of the people. Firstly, if we focus on the lexical meaning of the term qissa, the National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan states: "In the history of Uzbek literature, historical-legendary works written in prose or verse in the narrative style are called qissa. For example, 'Qissai Sayfulmulk,' 'Qisasi Rabg'uziy,' and others" [Uzbek National Encyclopedia, volume 12, page 22 - Tashkent: State Scientific Publishing House, 2005]. Furthermore, according to the explanatory dictionary of literary terminology: "Qissa... 1. Works of folklore and written literature widely spread in the Near and Middle East. Stories and narratives depicting the lives and adventures of prophets and saints. For instance, Rabg'uziy's "Qissas ul-anbiyo" ("Stories of the Prophets") 2. In Uzbek prose, works that have emerged in the last decade that are larger than short stories and smaller than novels, based on the adventures of the main characters, are also called qissa" [Hatamov N., Sarimsokov B. Explanatory Dictionary of Literary Studies Terms from Russian to Uzbek. – Tashkent: O'qituvchi, 1983, pp. 169].

In the literature of literary studies, qissa is given a more detailed definition: "Qissa (from Arabic — story, adventure) is a narrative work of folk creativity that narrates events, the life, and adventures of the character. Folk narratives are orally performed and have the characteristic of variability typical of other genres of folklore. Subsequently, many folk narratives were literarily processed by talented individuals (often remaining anonymous) and began to be preserved in written form as popular books (e.g., 'Qissai Mashrab,' 'Ibrohim Adham qissasi,' 'Zufunun qissasi'). In Uzbek literature, narrative works telling about the lives of prophets and saints are also referred to as qissa (e.g., Rabg'uziy's "Qisas ul-anbiyo"; A. Navoi's "Tarixi anbiyo" [Quronov D., Mamajonov Z., Sheraliyeva M. Literary Studies Dictionary. – Tashkent: Akadernashr, 2010, pp. 380-381]. From the content of the text, it is evident that literary scholars associate the emergence of the narrative genre in Uzbek literature with folk storytelling, suggesting that literary narration has survived over the centuries and constitutes a significant foundation for modern Uzbek storytelling.

In conclusion, it is worth noting the views of another literary scholar who has conducted research on narrative studies. "Although the qissa is considered an ancient genre, it could not shape itself as a distinct genre due to its nature. Past creators understood the qissa as narratives, events, and situations. People like Koshg'ariy, Qutb Khorezmiy, Navoi, Muhammad Solih, Babur, Nishotiy, and Ogahiy considered well-known plots of the East as qissa. For example, the plots of 'Layli and Majnun,' 'Farhod and Shirin,' and 'Yusuf and Zulayho' were the themes of many works. Depending on the creative form, they were also referred to as qissa, rivoyat, hikoya, and doston. If the work was written in masnavi form, it was referred to directly as masnavi. In Eastern literature, when qissa is mentioned, it usually refers to a story about one person's adventures" [Yuldoshova Saodat. Poetics of Artistic-Biographical Narratives (based on the works 'Qissai Ibrohim Adham,' 'Qissai Sayid Nasimiy,' 'Qissai Mashrab'). – Samarkand: SamDU, 2018, p. 9].

In the "Dictionary of Literary Studies Terms," it is defined that "Qissa is a literary and historical legendary work created in a narrative style. For example, 'Qissai Sayfulmuluk.' The creators of such works are called qissanavis, and those who read and narrate them to the people are referred to as qissaxonlar" [Homidi H., Abdullayeva Sh., Ibragimova S. Dictionary of Literary Studies Terms. – Tashkent: O'qituvchi, 1967, p. 266]. Based on the above, one can say that Nosiriddin Rabg'uziy's "Qissas ul-anbiyo" is a significant narrative work created in the Turkic language, and the author initiated a lineage of narratives with his qissa. "The emergence of this work in Turkic language is primarily due to the fact that poetic forms were not yet developed in Turkic, and the information regarding the Islamic faith, the Prophet Muhammad, and other revered saints was not widely disseminated among Turkic peoples, which was an important spiritual necessity of that time" [Quadratullaev H. History of Prose Works and Genre Issues // Uzbek Language and Literature. 2000, No. 4, pp. 4]. The qissa includes a collection of stories and fables arranged sequentially regarding the lives and activities of prophets. Thus, it does not contain a main storyline and does not focus solely on one character.

The number of events related to the main character increases due to the description of a specific quality or action of an individual, enhancing the narrative line. In Navoi's "Sab'ai Sayyor," seven stories of the "Bahrom and Dilorom" plot are incorporated [Navoi A. MAT. Sab'ai Sayyor. Volume V. –

Tashkent: Fan, 1991, p. 544]. All the stories end positively, similar to fairy tales. This characteristic of traditionality is reflected in other genres and thus transitioned to narratives. In this structure-forming work, the connection between two genres is observed. Inside the poem, emerging forms of the "narrative" genre can be seen. The events are presented through narrative style. In "Qissasi Rabg'uziy," however, the stories are narrated in a sequential manner. The forms in these works can be considered indications of the evolving features of the narrative genre. As can be observed, "Qissa is a genre that has traversed a long literary-historical process and achieved artistic perfection" [Holdorov D. The Problem of Artistic Style in Contemporary Uzbek Narratives (with examples from the narratives of Shoim Botayev and Nazar Eshonqul): Philological Science, Dissertation - Tashkent, 2017, p. 11]. Compared to other literary genres, qissa has attained significant perfection chronologically.

Now, let us turn to the issue of the factors leading to the emergence of religious-educational narratives in Uzbek classical literature. It is known that the widespread dissemination of Islam in Central Asia has notably played a significant role in the emergence of religious-educational narratives. Indeed, Islam has profoundly permeated people's lives, not only as a religious doctrine but also as a source of high morality and spirituality, and it can be observed that the narratives mentioned in the Quran and hadith have a strong influence on the people's consciousness. Overall, a number of historical, social, and literary factors have played an important role in the emergence of religious-educational narratives:

1. Influence of Islam and the teachings of the Quran

Although various factors influence the emergence and development of religious-educational narratives, the foremost factor is the religion of Islam and the teachings of the Quran. This is because "... the qissa originally contains reports about human creation, information that has been condensed onto the pages of the Quran, where it is used for the first time and conveys divine messages about the destinies of prophets. Furthermore, the 28th sura of the Quran is named 'Qasas,' meaning 'narrative'" [Rasulova U. 20th Century Uzbek Narrative Literature (Poetic Explorations and Development Principles): Dissertation in Philology Sciences (DSc) – Tashkent, 2020, p. 22]. The stories of the prophets mentioned in the Quran embody crucial ideas about human life, faith, patience, justice, and spiritual purity. These narratives later significantly influenced the development of religious-

educational narratives through oral folk creativity and written literature, laying the groundwork for their emergence. Indeed, Islam is a great doctrine that calls humanity to spiritual purity, moral perfection, and goodness. Concepts such as acquiring knowledge, humanity, compassion, patience, and justice hold special value in Islam. For this reason, religious and ethical themes occupy a leading place in the literature of Muslim peoples. With the widespread dissemination of Islam in Central Asia, works of religious nature also began to develop. Mosques and madrasas served not only as centers of religious knowledge but also as hubs of literature and enlightenment. In this milieu, religious narratives served as a means of elevating the national spirit. Since Islam calls individuals to refrain from desires, lead a righteous life, and achieve spiritual purity, these ideas also lead the way in religious-educational narratives. From this perspective, many narratives concerning the spiritual purification of individuals, particularly stories about prophets such as Joseph (Yusuf), Noah (Nuh), Moses (Musu), Jesus (Iso), and Abraham (Ibrohim), later served as foundations for artistic works and subsequently provided the main factors for the formation of religious narratives in the literature of Turkic peoples. Thus, the divine book of Islam, the Quran, is connected with religious narratives mentioned in several suras. The suras and verses of the Quran include stories about the prophets. The narratives reflected in these suras may also be studied as ancient roots of the modern narrative genre in Uzbek literature. For instance, the narratives of "Yusuf and Zulayho," "The Story of Solomon and Bilqis," "The Story of Namil," "Events about Zayd and Zaynab," and others can be examined as roots of the narrative genre in religious sources" [Eshmatova Yulduz. *Artistic Interpretation of Women's Psyche in Contemporary Uzbek Narratives: Dissertation in Philology Sciences – Tashkent, 2020, p. 15*]. Additionally, hadiths and teachings related to Islamic ethics also spread widely among the people and permeated the content of literary works.

Regarding the reflection of Quranic narratives in Uzbek religious-educational narratives, as previously emphasized, we can claim that Nosiriddin Rabg'uziy's "Qisasi Rabg'uziy" can be considered the first significant written example of religious narratives. This work was produced by Nosiriddin Rabg'uziy, who lived and created in the 13th-14th centuries, and is recognized as a prominent example of religious narratives in Turkic literature. The work is considered one of the most refined examples of the "Qisas ul-anbiyo" tradition in Turkic literature, and it was primarily written with reference to the

Quran, hadiths, and Islamic narratives. The author attempted to narrate the stories of the prophets in a simple and comprehensible language for the people. In this regard, the work not only holds religious but also educational and moral significance. It artistically interprets the stories of prophets such as Joseph, Noah, Moses, Jesus, and Abraham. The history of the prophets mentioned in the Quran, human perfection, moral upbringing, and spiritual purity are all illuminated in this work. The history of the prophets as presented in the Quran is delivered in an artistic style. The author endeavored to convey religious narratives in a clear and impactful manner. He also skillfully utilized elements from folk creativity. It is worth noting that "Qisasi Rabg'uziy" is not only a religious work but also a source of significant importance in the development of Uzbek prose.

The most important feature of "Qisasi Rabg'uziy" is its deep moral and ethical content. Each narrative promotes central ideas of honesty, patience, fortitude, contentment, goodness, justice, fairness, self-restraint, compassion, kindness, faith, and love for God in relation to the moral perfection of humanity. The primary significance of the work lies in its service to the formation of the national spirit. Through "Qisasi Rabg'uziy," readers became acquainted with religious knowledge, ethical upbringing, spiritual perfection, and the ideals of humanity. It is evident that "Qisasi Rabg'uziy" was taught in madrasas and widely circulated among people in handwritten form. This shows how high its educational significance has been. Furthermore, the work signifies an important phase in the evolution of Uzbek prose. It formed the storytelling style, the art of creating characters, and the traditions of artistically expressing events.

2. Traditions of Oral Folk Creativity

The formation and development of religious-educational narratives were significantly influenced by the tradition of oral folk creativity alongside Islam and the teachings of the Quran. Oral folk creativity has lived on through the centuries as an expression of the spiritual essence, lifestyle, and worldview of the people. Myths, tales, legends, epics, and stories played a crucial role as a basis for the emergence of religious-educational narratives. In traditional Uzbek oral creativity, themes such as good and evil, justice and truth, and human perfection have taken a leading role. These themes have since permeated the content of religious-educational narratives. Oral tales about prophets, stories about saints, legends about wonders and lessons, along with epics containing moral

content, are widely disseminated among the people. Thus, one of the most important sources in shaping religious narratives is stories about the prophets, with these narratives being orally transmitted from generation to generation and eventually transcribed into written literature. This has resulted in the development of a folk and impactful style in religious-educational narratives. Among the people, tales about saints, prophets, and righteous individuals spread orally.

Overall, epic storytelling holds a special place in Uzbek folk creativity. In the epics performed by the folk bards, themes of heroism, patriotism, justice, and spiritual purity are promoted. Religious-educational narratives have also been influenced by the tradition of epic storytelling, particularly characteristics such as sequential narration of events, glorifying heroic imagery, and drawing ethical conclusions—all of which have been manifest in religious narratives. This has made these narratives relatable and comprehensible to the public. Therefore, epics with moral content have reinforced the ideological basis of religious-educational narratives, playing a vital role in establishing elevated spiritual and ethical values within society. They are esteemed as artistic-educational sources calling individuals towards perfection, goodness, and enlightenment.

3. The Development of Sufi Teachings

The widespread dissemination of Sufi teachings in Central Asia has also greatly influenced the development of religious-educational narratives. Sufism promotes the purification of the human heart, overcoming and controlling the soul, patience, and humility. Thus, Sufism, as a doctrine that promotes moral perfection in individuals, the purification of the soul, love for God, and spiritual upbringing, has exerted a strong influence on the content and ideas of religious-educational works. Elements of oral folk creativity also play an important role in Sufi literature. Consequently, Sufi poets have expressed their ideas through narratives and tales that resonate with the people. The main aim of Sufism is to lead individuals to spiritual maturity, to cleanse their hearts from sinful ailments, and to elevate them to the level of the perfect human. For this reason, Sufi teachings regarding patience, contentment, repentance, remembrance, piety, compassion, and self-control are extensively highlighted in religious-educational narratives. Through these works, the inner world of a person and their spiritual struggles are depicted through artistic imagery.

The doctrine of Sufism has entered religious narratives

primarily through imagery and plots. Tales about saints, sheikhs, dervishes, and sages have become widely propagated among the people, and their lives, wonders, and wise sayings have turned into key themes of religious-educational narratives. This aims to invite individuals to goodness, righteousness, and faith. In particular, the teachings of Ahmad Yassaviy have had a substantial impact on the development of Sufi narratives in Turkic literature. His maxims articulate themes like the struggle against desires, poverty, patience, and love for God. Similarly, Bahouddin Naqshband's doctrine glorifies both spiritual and social activism among individuals through the idea of "the heart with the beloved, hands to the work." In Uzbek classical literature, the works of Alisher Navoi are also closely interconnected with Sufi ideas. His work "Lison ut-tayr" [Navoi Alisher. Complete Works in Twenty Volumes. Volume Twelve. Lison ut-tayr. – Tashkent: Fan Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 1996, p. 357] articulates the road to spiritual perfection through symbolic and philosophical imagery. Sufi concepts regarding love, enlightenment, and truth are illustrated with great artistic achievement.

The doctrine of Sufism has influenced the content and style of religious-educational narratives. Symbolic images, wise sayings, mystical interpretations, and spiritual-ethical conclusions have defined the artistic attributes of these works. Notably, in the works of creators such as Ahmad Yassaviy and Sufi Allohyor, moral-educational ideas are expressed while relying on the Quran and hadiths. In Sufi narratives, the struggles against desires, patience and repentance, compassion, and the renunciation of worldly greed hold significant places. This, in turn, has enriched the spiritual meaning of religious narratives. Ahmad Yassaviy's maxims promote religious and educational ideas through a public style, simple language, and instructive tales. Likewise, the communal narrative style is strongly evident in the works of Sufi Allohyor. This indicates the intrinsic connection between religious narratives and the spiritual life of the people. Consequently, the narratives have become an important means of shaping the spiritual education and religious worldview of the populace.

4. Moral-Educational Needs

The emergence and development of religious-educational narratives have significantly been shaped by the moral-educational needs of society. Inviting individuals toward goodness and fulfilling the need for enriching their spiritual

worldview and providing moral education have become one of the primary tasks of religious-educational narratives. As society has developed, the desire for qualities such as justice, honesty, kindness, patience, contentment, knowledge, and enlightenment has remained high. Since religious-educational narratives respond to the spiritual needs of the people, they have gained widespread acceptance over the centuries. These works have been read by storytellers during folk gatherings, in madrasas, and educational circles, serving to enhance people's religious and ethical knowledge. The moral-educational needs highlighted in these works harmonize not only with religious teachings but also with practical life experiences. The challenges of life, the struggle between good and evil, and issues of desire and conscience are expressively articulated through artistic imagery. Therefore, religious-educational narratives have become key means of shaping the spirituality of the people. These narratives were created to meet that need, providing the community with practical life lessons and moral guidance. In such works, the good and bad deeds of individuals are compared, and virtuous qualities are exalted. The moral-educational need is prominently manifest in the content of religious narratives. In these narratives, the lives of prophets, saints, scholars, and righteous individuals are presented as examples, depicting their patience, justice, and faith as lessons for the audience. This aims to guide individuals toward spiritual perfection.

5. Influence of Eastern Literature

The shaping and development of religious-educational narratives have been significantly influenced by Eastern literature. Particularly, Arabic, Persian-Tajik, and Turkic literary traditions have contributed to the enrichment of the content, ideas, and artistic style of religious-educational works. The religious, ethical, and Sufi ideas found in Eastern literature have deeply permeated Uzbek narratives. The influence of Eastern literature is first realized through the system of plots and characters. Narratives about the lives of prophets, tales of saints, and stories about righteous individuals have entered Turkic literature through Arabic and Persian sources. These works have taken the call for humanity toward goodness, patience, justice, and faith as their primary objective. In particular, the narratives in the Quran and the events in the hadiths are regarded as critical sources for religious-educational narratives. The stories about the prophets in the Quran have later undergone various artistic interpretations in oral folk creativity and written literature. The

narratives concerning Yusuf and Zulayho [Durbek. Yusuf va Zulayho. Tashkent: Fan; Olim Ravshan. Turkic Yusuf-Zulayho. Tashkent: Publishing House Named after Abu Ali ibn Sino, 1995; The Interpretation Book of Yusuf, Tashkent: Uzbek Maskan, 1990; Irisov A. Ibn Sina's "Yusuf qissasi" // Uzbek Language and Literature. Tashkent, 1971, No. 2, pp. 55-59; Safarova H. Sources of Rabg'uziy's "Qissai Yusuf Siddiq alayhissalom" dissertation written to obtain the scientific degree of candidate of philological sciences, 2001.] and the patience and steadfastness of Ayyub [Sheikh Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf. "Hadith and Life. Vol. 20. Stories of the Prophets," Tashkent: Sharq NMK, 2007, p. 284; Sheikh Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf. History of Islam. Hilol Publishing. Tashkent, 2018. P. 65.] serve as examples. Persian-Tajik literature has also significantly influenced Uzbek literature, including the tradition of religious-educational narratives. In particular, the works of thinkers like Fariddin Attar, Jalaliddin Rumi, and Saadi Sherozi discuss extensively topics related to human perfection, Sufism, and moral upbringing. Additionally, their works have caused the emergence of symbolic images, wise thoughts, and spiritual themes in religious-educational narratives. In Turkic literature, the works of Ahmad Yassaviy have also played an important role in the development of religious-educational narratives. His maxims promote such themes as spiritual purity, the struggle against the desires, and love for God. These ideas continued in the subsequent narratives.

The influence of Eastern literature also manifests in the artistic language and style of religious-educational narratives. Metaphors, symbols, spiritual figures, wise sayings, and moralistic styles have increased the impactful nature of these works. This has facilitated the widespread dissemination of religious narratives among the people and their transformation into a means of spiritual upbringing.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Eastern literature has served as a significant source in the formation and development of religious-educational narratives. Its religious, ethical, and Sufi ideas have enriched Uzbek literature, laying the foundation for creations that uplift human spirituality. Religious-educational narratives in Uzbek literature have shaped the moral education and elevated the spirituality of society, under the influence of Islam, Quranic narratives, oral folk creativity, Sufi teachings, and Eastern literary traditions. These works have played an essential role in enriching the spiritual heritage of the people

and inviting them toward goodness and perfection.

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