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Character System and Poetics in Uzbek and Turkish Folk Fairy Tales: a Comparative Analysis

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Abstract: Fairy tales are a key history genre that both demonstrates how folklore serves as a vehicle for cultural values, social norms and moral lessons. They are an important vehicle for reflecting the collective imagination of a community. Drawing on conceptual frameworks developed by Vladimir Propp, E.M. Meletinsky, and other leading folklorists, this study analyses the character systems and poetic features of Uzbek and Turkish folk fairy tales. The study examines the character in such stories in terms of how they are used symbolically and narratively. Though motifs and archetypes in single traditions have been the focus of previous research, studies that comparatively link Uzbek and Turkish folk tales with a single Turkic focus are scarce. The goal of the paper is to find the types of characters, their functions in the narrative structure and poetic characteristics of these stories. It also aims to identify commonalities and differences in the culture exhibited between fairy tales of the two traditions. The study found that while the traditions have common archetypes of heroes, villains, and helpers, significant differences emerge shaped by cultural, historical, and religious influence. Gender roles and symbols like mountains and rivers feature deeper cultural significances. This aspect of the comparative study helps to gain knowledge on the universal features of fairytales within the cultural context. The actualities reflects on the persistent importance of folk fairy tales as instruments in developing cultural identity and provide meaningful indirect evidence of the ways myth is integrated with modern cultural narratives.

Keywords: Uzbek Folklore, Turkish Folklore, Fairy Tales, Character System, Poetics, Comparative Analysis

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1. Introduction

Folklore, as a manifestation of collective cultural memory, has long served as a repository of social ideals, mythological archetypes, and moral codes. Among the vast genres of folklore, fairy tales occupy a special place due to their unique blend of narrative artistry, symbolic richness, and educational function. In the case of the Uzbek and Turkish oral traditions, fairy tales do more than just transmit values; they represent a character system whose functions and mutual relations along with their poetic and ideological dimensions are the subject of investigation [1].

Folklore scholarship has long been concerned with fairy-tale characters and their poetics. The Morphology of the Folktale by Vladimir Propp offered a structuralist perspective in detecting similar functions of characters. Then E.M. Meletinsky made a more mythological-oriented typological philosophy of literature itself. In the area of classification of fairy tales, analysis of motifs and artistic properties of legends, fairy-tales,

myths and very first ancestors M. AfzalovN. Karimiy, O. Joraev and A. Imomov were great scholars in the field in Central Asia [2][3][4].

In order to facilitate a comparative analysis of the systems of characters and poetic properties of Uzbek and Turkish folk fairy tales, this paper places them in this theoretical context. Unlike studies that focus exclusively on specific motifs such as female archetypes this research embraces a broader scope. It examines male and female characters, helpers, tricksters, supernatural beings, and antagonists, in order to demonstrate the richness and complexity of the character system [5].

The relevance of this topic is underscored by several factors. First, both Uzbek and Turkish folklore belong to the broader Turkic cultural continuum, sharing ancient mythological foundations and common motifs. Second, despite these similarities, the historical trajectories of the Uzbek and Turkish peoples, shaped by geography, religion, and socio-political changes, have generated distinctive national variants of fairy-tale poetics. Finally, a comparative study provides an opportunity to enrich folklore theory by bridging regional scholarship with international approaches [6].

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To classify the characters of Uzbek and Turkish folk fairy tales according to their narrative functions and symbolic meanings.
2. To analyze the poetic features of these characters, including their archetypal imagery, stylistic representation, and moral implications.
3. To identify the similarities and differences between the Uzbek and Turkish traditions, situating them within the broader framework of Turkic and world folklore [7].

The structure of the paper is organized into five sections: methodology, character typology, poetic functions, comparative discussion, and conclusions. Each section builds on both textual analysis of fairy tales and a review of relevant scholarly [8].

2. Materials and Methods

The research adopts a comparative folkloristic approach, combining structural, typological, and functional methods of analysis. The primary materials consist of published collections of Uzbek and Turkish folk fairy tales, supplemented by secondary literature from both national and international folklore scholarship.

Analytical Framework:

1. Structural Analysis – Following Propp's morphology, the tales were examined in terms of narrative functions, role distribution, and sequence of motifs.
2. Typological Comparison – Character roles and motifs were compared across Uzbek and Turkish traditions to identify shared archetypes and divergences.
3. Poetic Analysis – Stylistic features, symbolic imagery, and artistic devices were examined to highlight the aesthetic qualities of character representation.
4. Cultural-Historical Approach – The socio-historical contexts in which the tales have been created, transmitted, and preserved were taken into account.

Study Limitations: It is mainly concentrated on "sehrli ertaklar" (wonder tales) and "masallas" (magical fairytales). While the focus is on Uzbek and Turkish cultural traditions, references to other Turkic and world folklore are included for the sake of comparison.

3. Results

Based on these, several key points relating to character system and poetics of Uzbek and Turkish fairy tales are bleed out from the analysis:

Character Typology. Hero: Positive protagonist (Uzbek Fairy Tales, Turkish Fairy Tales), hero is directly or indirectly symbol of bravery, intelligence, and justice. Specifically, the tales of Uzbek nature often focus on the bond of the hero with fate (taqdir) and luck, whereas the tales of Turkish nature tend to write about courage and wit [9].

Female Characters finally, contrary to the view of female characters as passive, both traditions have passive and active female characters, where active roles involve females as helpers or advisers, and initiators of quests. The “pari qiz” (fairy maiden) in about one of the most widespread figures that symbolizes beauty, wisdom, and supernatural guidance in Uzbek tales. Turkish stories would feature “perilers” (the direct translation of fairies) unwilling to do as their told, and rebellious princesses [10].

Both traditions have their share of antagonists (villains): [for example] giants (dev); witches (kampirlar); tyrannical kings.

Helpers: helpers (animals are popular), wise elders who can be shamans who work for both the human and supernatural worlds. This role demonstrates the guiding through wisdom and spirituality that pervades deep-rooted Turkic belief.

Poetic Features. Both traditions buttress themselves on an avalanche of symbolic images mountains as tests, waters as transits, magical objects (rings, swords, carpets) as arrows of destiny [11].

Gender and Power Dynamics: The stories depict complex images of gender roles. Ignorance of patriarchal narrative, when turned into wisdom which women get from their experience, disrupting the dominative structures.

4. Discussion

The comparative analysis of Uzbek and Turkish folk fairy tales highlights not only shared Turkic heritage but also distinct poetic and cultural developments shaped by geography, history, and social experience. This discussion section elaborates on the implications of the findings in terms of literary poetics, symbolic systems, cultural identity, and the role of folklore in shaping collective worldviews [12].

1. The Poetics of Character Systems. Fairy tale characters are never simply the vicarious functions of narrative, but rather vessels of cultural values, ideals, and collective imaginings. While Propp insisted on function's universality, Uzbek and Turkish fairy tales, on the other hand, show that function has localised meanings [13]. Heroes represent overcoming adversity, but if Turkish heroes gain their success often through cleverness and grit, Uzbek heroes more often achieve theirs by submitting themselves to fortune and trusting in God.
 - a. Heroines exhibit dual roles: as passive figures waiting for rescue, and as active agents who guide, test, or even rescue the male hero.
 - b. Villains symbolize moral corruption, greed, and chaos. They embody social fears – be it tyrannical rulers, greedy landlords, or supernatural monsters.
2. The poetic system thus emerges from the interplay between archetypal structures and culturally specific adaptations [14]. Symbolism and Mythological Layers. Both Uzbek and Turkish fairy tales retain mythological motifs inherited from ancient Turkic cosmology and shamanistic practices.
3. Social and Ethical Dimensions. Folklore serves as a mirror of social realities. Uzbek and Turkish fairy tales provide insights into historical class structures, ethical norms, and communal aspirations.
 - a. Justice and oppression: Many tales feature kings who misuse power, only to be corrected by the hero or supernatural justice.
 - b. Poverty and wealth: Magical helpers often reward the poor but virtuous, while punishing the greedy rich. Such narratives reinforce moral codes of generosity, hospitality, and fairness.
 - c. Family and kinship: Relationships between parents and children, siblings, and spouses structure many conflicts. Betrayals and loyalty tests emphasize the importance of trust within kin-based societies.
4. Gender Dynamics in Context. Although this study moves beyond a sole focus on female characters, gender remains a crucial dimension of analysis. In both Uzbek and Turkish fairy tales:

- a. Women frequently embody wisdom and moral clarity, even when their narrative roles appear secondary.
- b. Female supernatural beings (fairy maidens, peri girls) symbolize beauty and transcendence, but also act as agents of transformation in the hero's journey.

Thus, gender dynamics in fairy tales cannot be reduced to patriarchal stereotypes; instead, they reveal a complex negotiation between tradition, morality, and symbolic representation.

5. Comparative Cultural Identity. By comparing Uzbek and Turkish fairy tales, several distinctive cultural orientations become evident: tales emphasize spiritual guidance and fate. The poetic language often mirrors didactic moral teachings. At the same time, shared motifs such as magical helpers, trickster figures, and journeys into otherworldly realms affirm the common Turkic roots of both traditions [15].
6. Contribution to Folklore Studies. This comparative study contributes to broader folklore scholarship by:
 - a. Demonstrating how universal narrative structures (as proposed by Propp) manifest in culturally specific ways.
 - b. Illustrating the persistence of mythological motifs beneath layers of Islamic and modern cultural adaptation.
 - c. Showing the dual function of fairy tales as both entertainment and repositories of cultural values.

Expanding the scope of gender analysis beyond passivity versus activity, toward a recognition of female agency in subtle forms..

5. Conclusion

The comparative exploration of character systems and poetics in Uzbek and Turkish folk fairy tales reveals a complex interplay between universal narrative structures and culturally specific adaptations. While these tales share deep Turkic roots, shaped by nomadic traditions, mythological symbolism, and communal ethics, they also reflect the distinct historical, religious, and social realities of their respective communities.

Several key conclusions can be drawn from the study:

1. Universality and Locality:
The structuralist framework established by Propp demonstrates that core character functions remain consistent across cultures.
2. Character Poetics as Cultural Mirror:
Heroes, heroines, villains, and helpers in these tales are not merely fictional figures but embody social ideals, moral lessons. Their poetic functions reveal how communities conceptualized justice, loyalty, bravery, and wisdom.
3. Myth and Religion in Synthesis:
Ancient Turkic mythological elements such as magical numbers, transformations, and cosmological symbolism remain vibrant in both traditions, yet they coexist with Islamic ethical and spiritual frameworks. This synthesis highlights the adaptive resilience of folklore traditions in accommodating new belief systems while preserving archaic layers.
4. Social Commentary and Collective Identity:
Fairy tales serve as repositories of communal values, articulating aspirations for justice, critiques of oppression, and affirmations of kinship solidarity. In this way, they serve the dual purpose of entertainment and social pedagogy, passing forth cultural identity from generation to generation. To conclude, the research shows clearly that Uzbek and Turkish folk fairy tales are not dead cultural heritage texts but rather vibrant cultural texts that have the potential to write themselves into

human imagination, morality, and collective memory. Framing these stories in a larger perspective of comparative folklore studies, this research reestablishes their relevance as literary and cultural markers, enabling them to gain further perspective as relevant cultural common-ground in today traditional and cultural debates, identity and cultural continuity.

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