Some Reflections on the "Kelin Tushdi" Ceremony and the Yor-Yor Songs in the Folklore of the Fergana Valley

Mashrapova Gulsanam Axadovna, Doctor of Philology
mashrapovag83@mail.ru

Annotation: Wedding ceremonies hold a significant place in Uzbek ethnoculture and folklore. This grand system, which encompasses numerous rituals observed in a strict sequence and complementing one another, preserves the ancient traditions and beliefs of the people. The songs, recitations, and blessings performed during these ceremonies have always captured the attention of folklore researchers. This article discusses the "Kelin Tushdi" ceremony in the folklore of the Fergana Valley and the *yor-yor* songs performed during it.

Keywords: ritual folklore, wedding, *yor-yor* songs, "Kelin Tushdi," poetic parallelism, local characteristics.

Introduction. Wedding ceremonies from various regions of Uzbekistan have been thoroughly studied from a local perspective.[1] In the Fergana Valley, which has well preserved examples of oral folk creativity, wedding folklore holds a significant place. The scope and genre diversity of these ceremonies are so vast that encompassing all of them within a single study is impossible. Therefore, in this article, we focus solely on the "Kelin Tushdi" ceremony and the oral folklore associated with it.

Main Part. If we consider the wedding ceremony as a complete system, *yor-yor* songs undoubtedly hold a central place in this system. In the Fergana Valley, specific *yor-yor* songs are performed at each stage of the wedding ceremony. In some villages, even the groom's attendants (*kuyovnavkarlar*) accompany the groom into the bride's house on the wedding day, rhythmically clapping and chanting the following two lines in unison:

Tog'da toychoq kishnaydi-yo
Ot bo'ldim deb yor-yora, ot bo'ldim deb.

(The song reflects a symbolic transformation, comparing a young colt growing into a strong and mature steed. It metaphorically represents the groom's readiness and pride as he steps into a new phase of life, embracing his role as a husband with confidence and joy. The *yor-yor* refrain underscores the celebratory and traditional essence of the moment.)

The *yor-yor* text actually has a continuation (*The bride weeps at home, saying "I have become a stranger, *yor-yor*"). However, only the initial two lines are repeated and performed exclusively by the young men, adhering to artistic logic. According to folklorists, the colt's neighing, claiming "I have become a steed," serves as a symbolic expression of a young man reaching maturity and being ready for marriage.[2] It is appropriate for these lines to be performed by young men. In the subsequent lines, poetic parallelism reflects the feelings and state of the young woman, naturally performed by the bride's friends, bridesmaids, or married women (*yangas*). It is believed that the original couplets, structured as an exchange of verses, eventually merged into quatrains and became exclusively performed by women and girls. This *yor-yor* served as a kind of "signal," indicating that the time to take the bride away was approaching. After the groom's party (*kuyovnavkarlar*) had been hosted at the bride's house, the married women (*yangalar*) entered the room where the bride was seated to prepare her for departure. The "Kelin Tushdi" ceremony refers to the process of escorting the bride to the groom's house. Along the way, the bride's friends sing sorrowful *yor-yor* songs, evoking memories of her parental home. Since these *yor-yor* songs have been analyzed in depth in numerous studies, we have chosen not to delve into them further. According to F. Abdurahmonova, "The *yor-yor* songs of Fergana and Andijan are livelier compared to those of Namangan, characterized by a mood of celebration and festivity."[3] These *yor-yor* songs are sung continuously by women and girls from the time the bride says farewell to her parents at her home until she reaches the groom's house. Along this journey, two additional rituals are performed. In the first, the driver of the vehicle (or cart) transporting the bride stops midway, claiming, "My vehicle has broken down." He refuses to proceed until the bride's relatives—sisters, aunts, or cousins—offer him gifts of his choosing (such as food, fabric, or occasionally a robe). Only after receiving these offerings does the driver "relent" and continue the journey. The second ritual, known as the *yolto'sar* ("road-blocker") ceremony, takes place upon entering the groom's neighborhood or street. Here, 4-5 children (sometimes adults) stand on either side of the road, holding a long rope, scarf, or piece of fabric stretched across the bride's procession route, symbolically "blocking" the way. The "blockers" demand certain items—usually a sum of money—before allowing the group to pass. This practice, in our view, traces back to historical instances of banditry, where bridal caravans traveling long distances would be ambushed and robbed. Once the bride safely reaches the groom's house, her family resists handing her over too easily. The bride's young male relatives demand small knives from the groom's side, and until these are presented, they refuse to allow

the bride to alight. This tradition carries symbolic meaning, as knives are considered magical objects in folklore. For example, due to the belief that knives repel malevolent spirits, practices like drawing a knife in the air or swiping it near someone exist.[4] Similarly, to protect an infant from such evil forces, a knife was placed at the head of the cradle or under the pillow. In Uzbek folk tales, there are also details of magical knives and weapons such as swords and sabers that represent the hero's life force (examples include the tales *Qilichbotir* and *Shamshirboz*). Until recent years, it was customary for Uzbek men to carry a knife attached to the edge of their belts. Every man had a special knife that was not used for household tasks, and it was considered inauspicious to use it for other purposes, leave it unattended, or lose it. As a result, knives were regarded as the best gifts for young boys, who were future men. After this ritual, the bride was offered sweet water to symbolize wishes for a sweet life. The groom was then granted permission to help the bride down from the vehicle (or cart). The groom would carry the bride in his arms as he helped her descend and sometimes even carried her all the way into the house she was to enter. During this moment, the groom's friends (*kuyovjo'ralar*) sang supportive *yor-yor* songs to encourage him:

"Ko'taring, ko'taring" deganda bardam bo'ling, yor-yor,
Yor-yora, yor-yora, bardam bo'ling, yor-yor.
Kuyov bola kelinga hamdam bo'ling, yor-yor,
Yor-yora, yor-yora, hamdam bo'ling, yor-yor [5]

Amid cheers, clapping, and the sound of songs, once the bride was helped down, the following song was performed with great enthusiasm by the bride's side before she entered the groom's home:

Quda xola, xoloyi,
Himmatingizga balli
Ikki yoshning to'yini qilganingizga balli!
Quda xola, xoloyi,
Himmatingizga balli
Keliningizga oyog'iga
Baxmal poyondoz qani? [6]

In the first verse of this song, the spirit of praise for the groom's mother dominates. It is natural that there are both emotional and material hardships in the process of organizing the wedding of the two young people. Therefore, the song begins by expressing gratitude to the person who is leading the ceremony and performing the role of the main "organizer." In the next quatrain, this praise turns into irony. Our wise

people were so skilled with words that they often used phrases with dual meanings in a single utterance. If you pay close attention, the phrase “himmatingizga balli” in the first verse is a compliment for organizing the wedding, while in the second verse, the same phrase is used in a completely opposite sense, meaning “you didn’t put in any effort,” as clarified in the next line: "Where is the velvet slipper for your bride?" Velvet, being a luxurious fabric, when placed at the feet of the bride or groom, was a symbol of high respect. In Fergana, it is a tradition to place a slipper at the feet of a guest visiting for the first time, and depending on the type of fabric, women could subtly discern the host’s attitude toward the guest. Therefore, the lack of a velvet slipper when the bride first enters the groom’s house led to the use of the phrase “himmatingizga balli” in an ironic context.

The term "xoloyi" used in addressing the bride’s mother-in-law, i.e., the groom's mother, is a word commonly used in the Fergana Valley, particularly in the Margilan dialect. It is formed by combining the words "xola" (mother's sister) and "oyi" (a term for mother). From a kinship perspective, in the valley, "xola" refers to a close relative, specifically the mother’s sister. Therefore, the term "xola" is also used to address older women or women from the neighborhood, or any older, unfamiliar woman being addressed for the first time, ensuring a sense of closeness. The term "oyi" used for women other than the mother expresses an even closer relationship. For example, in other regions of Uzbekistan, the wife of an older brother or uncle is referred to as “yanga,” while in the Fergana Valley, this person is addressed as “kelinoyi.” Thus, calling the bride's mother-in-law first "xola" and then "xoloyi" symbolizes a double closeness, both as a "xola" (mother’s sister) and "oyi" (a term of greater intimacy).

Following this, the following *yor-yor* song was sung:

Kelinposhsho / qaynotasin / “ota” bilsin,
Hay, yor, / yora, / “ota” bilsin,
Qaynonasin / “onam” debon, / hurmat qilsin
Hay, yor, / yora, / hurmat qilsin![7]

This quatrain is aimed at advising the bride, urging her to recognize and respect the new household’s head as “father” and “mother.” The structure of the quatrain follows a 12/8/12/8 syllable pattern, and in the first line, strict adherence to phrasing is observed. Therefore, in the phrase "ota deb bilsin" (she should consider as father), the word “deb” is omitted, but the meaning remains intact. In conclusion, the Fergana Valley folklore contains long-standing and unique traditions related to marriage ceremonies, including songs, beliefs, and expressions. The “kelin tushdi” (bride procession) ritual, in particular, includes various *yor-yor* songs that are sung at each

stage of the ceremony, each reflecting the situation at hand. Collecting, categorizing, and analyzing these songs is an important task for future folklorists to undertake.

REFERENCES:

1. Alaviya M. Uzbek Folk Songs of Rituals. – Tashkent: Fan, 1974; Sarimsoqov B. Uzbek Ritual Folklore. – Tashkent: Fan, 1986; Davlatov S. The Folklore of Uzbek Wedding Rituals in the Kashkadarya Region: PhD Dissertation in Philology. – Tashkent, 1996; Kuronboeva N.R. Khorezm Wedding Songs: PhD Dissertation in Philology. – Tashkent, 1998; Ismonova O. The Genre of "Bride's Greeting" in Uzbek Wedding Ritual Folklore (Genesis, Specific Features, and Poetics): PhD Dissertation in Philology. – Tashkent, 1999; Khudoykulova L. Songs of Surkhandarya Wedding Rituals: PhD Dissertation in Philology. – Tashkent, 2011; Murodova M.Sh. The Genre Structure and Aesthetics of Uzbek Wedding Folklore (Based on the Materials of the Middle Zarafshan Region): Doctor of Philology Dissertation. – Tashkent, 2018.
2. Musaqulov A. "Uzbek Folk Lyricism." – Tashkent: Fan, 2010. – P. 246.
3. Abdurahmonova F. Classification of "Yor-yor" Songs Based on Their Areal Features. – News of the National University of Uzbekistan, 2024, [1/6] ISSN 2181-7324. – P. 284-287.
4. Sarimsoqov B. Uzbek Ritual Folklore. – Tashkent: Fan, 1986. – P. 193.
5. Author's field notes. Kuva district, 2016.
6. Speaker: Munavvarxon Sotqinova, 65 years old. Kuva district, Akbarobod village, Fergana region. Collector: G. Mashrapova. 27.10.2021.
7. Speaker: Shahodatxon Turdaliyeva, 55 years old. Fergana city, Qirguli township. Collector: G. Mashrapova. 5.11.2022.