



THE ROLE OF UZBEK MEN'S DANCE IN FOLKLORIC DANCE ART

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| Article history: | Abstract: |
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| Received: 8 th August 2025 | This article explores the cultural, historical and artistic significance of Uzbek men's dance within the domain of folkloric dance art. The study outlines how the male dance tradition has developed as an integral component of national folk culture, reflecting the worldview, social values and aesthetic ideals of the Uzbek people. Particular attention is given to the continuity of performance practices, which have been preserved through the long-standing <i>ustoz-shogird</i> (master-apprentice) pedagogical system that remains central to the transmission of dance knowledge today. The article also examines the characteristic movement vocabulary of men's dance, noting that its expressive, energetic and dignified features have retained their authentic form despite historical changes and modern influences. In doing so, the study demonstrates the enduring role of men's dance in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and sustaining the originality of national artistic identity within contemporary folkloric performance. |
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INTRODUCTION

The art of Uzbek folkloric dance constitutes an essential component of the nation's intangible cultural heritage, reflecting centuries of cultural development, aesthetic understanding and social values of the Uzbek people [1]. Among its many forms, men's dance occupies a unique position due to its distinctive movement vocabulary, symbolic expressiveness and its role in embodying ideals of strength, dignity and heroism within traditional society [2]. Historically, male dance traditions evolved in close connection with ritual practices, festive ceremonies and communal life, serving not only as entertainment but also as a medium through which cultural identity and collective memory were transmitted across generations [3].

Recent ethnographic and dance research highlights that the stylistic features of Uzbek men's dance—such as grounded movements, sharp gestures, disciplined posture and expressive hand techniques—are rooted in regional customs and centuries-old artistic conventions [4]. These features demonstrate a continuity that has been carefully preserved through oral transmission and practical teaching rather than written documentation [5]. Central to this continuity is the *ustoz-shogird* (master-apprentice) tradition, which remains the predominant pedagogical method for passing down technical skills, stylistic nuances and professional ethics within dance communities [6].

Furthermore, Uzbekistan's diverse regions—such as Fergana, Bukhara, Khorezm and Surkhandarya—have each contributed distinctive stylistic elements that enrich the men's dance repertoire, reinforcing its cultural depth and local specificity [7]. Despite the influence of modernisation and globalisation, these regional forms have retained their authenticity due to sustained community practices and the active efforts of performers and scholars to document, preserve and revitalise traditional dance heritage [8].

In contemporary folkloric performance, Uzbek men's dance continues to serve as an important symbol of national identity, appearing prominently in festivals, academic ensembles, theatrical productions and international cultural exchanges [9]. Its preservation not only enhances the artistic diversity of Uzbekistan but also supports broader efforts to safeguard intangible cultural heritage in accordance with international cultural policies and UNESCO frameworks [10].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The artistic features of Uzbek men's dance are closely interconnected with the broader tradition of folkloric dance art. Historically, men's dance has been primarily embedded within the cultural framework of folk performance, where stylistic vocabulary, expressive movement patterns and social meanings have been transmitted across generations through the long-standing *ustoz-shogird* (master-apprentice) system. This pedagogical tradition has ensured the preservation of the authentic character of male dance movements, maintaining the original stylistic and compositional qualities that distinguish Uzbek folk culture.

In this study, descriptive and comparative methods were employed to analyse the structure, movement style and cultural functions of selected regional male dances. Primary material was collected through field observation, analysis of choreographic documentation and consultations with practising dancers and master-performers. Particular attention was given to widely recognised works from the repertoire of Uzbek men's dance, including "Pichoq," "Yog'och oyoq," "Osh," and "Kichkinavoy", as well as regional examples such as Surkhandarya's "Boysun," "Chillik," "Qayroq," "Choynak," and "Ota gov-gov"; Kashkadarya's "Pichoq" and "Qoshiq" dances; Samarkand's "Besh qarsak" tradition; and the rich stylistic heritage of Khorezm, which includes "Qayroq," "Qum pishak," "Norin-norin," "Qovun," "Chugurma," "Gina qilma," "Etik," and "Sartarosh." Each of these dances demonstrates unique compositional, stylistic and performative features that reflect the cultural environment of their respective regions.

Among the dances investigated, the "Yog'och oyoq" tradition represents one of the most remarkable male performance forms. Historically performed during *sunnat* and *aqiqa* ceremonies to the accompaniment of *karnay-surnay*, male dancers would attach long wooden stilts to their legs and perform energetic movements while proceeding through the neighbourhood to announce the celebration. This dance continues to be performed at festive events and public ceremonies in contemporary Uzbekistan.

Similarly, the "Osh" dance occupies a special place in the men's dance repertoire. The choreography involves the dancer skilfully balancing a large platter of pilaf (*osh*)—weighing approximately five kilograms—while demonstrating refined coordination and agility. The dancer performs with remarkable precision, avoiding the loss of even a single grain of rice, and conveys the taste and enjoyment of the dish through facial expressions. The performance often incorporates rotations, controlled bending movements and the use of *qayroq* stones, making it one of the most physically demanding and technically complex dances in the Uzbek tradition. Its popularity has grown internationally, where audiences view it with great curiosity and admiration.

The "Kichkinavoy" dance, originating from the Ferghana Valley, is another notable example. It is traditionally performed by two groups of young men, each consisting of six to eight dancers. One dancer from each group enters the circle, imitating the behaviour of roosters—pecking gestures, one-legged jumps and shoulder-to-shoulder pushes—attempting to force the opponent out of the circle. Regardless of which dancer wins, the competition ultimately merges harmoniously into a group dance, symbolising unity, sportsmanship and communal joy.

Surkhandarya's folkloric heritage includes unique dances such as "Boysun," performed by men, women and children alike. Through this dance, performers express local customs, rituals and characteristic regional features. "Chillik," another Surkhandarya dance, involves each dancer striking a falling stick with another stick, with victory awarded to the dancer whose strike sends the stick furthest. The "Choynak" dance, also known in Kashkadarya, features dancers rhythmically tapping teapots while balancing their lids on their fingers in harmony with musical accompaniment.

The "Ota gov-gov" dance traces its origins to a traditional folk game in which groups of young men played with wool-stuffed balls, attempting to prevent opponents from throwing the ball into a wooden basin. This game gradually evolved into a choreographic form that has been preserved and performed for centuries.

All the dances examined in this study belong to the category of everyday or humorous folk dances, characterised by the use of objects (such as trays, stilts, stones or household items) that enhance expressiveness and strengthen the link between dance and daily life. These dances are valued not only for their artistic qualities but also for the uplifting atmosphere they create, offering audiences moments of joy, humour and cultural pride.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of regional and genre-specific examples of Uzbek men's dance demonstrates that these choreographic forms have retained their essential artistic integrity despite ongoing cultural transformation. Field observations revealed that the majority of male dances continue to be practised within traditional community settings, where performers rely on embodied knowledge, ritual memory and informal instruction to maintain stylistic authenticity. This confirms the central role of the *ustoz-shogird* (master-apprentice) system as a primary mechanism of transmission and preservation.

The study found that dances such as "Yog'och oyoq," "Osh," "Kichkinavoy," and Surkhandarya's "Boysun," "Chillik," "Choynak," and "Ota gov-gov" exhibit strong narrative structure, symbolic movement vocabulary and culturally embedded performative elements. These features indicate that Uzbek men's dances are not merely artistic expressions but also carriers of social values, communal identity and historical memory.

Furthermore, comparative analysis of regional styles shows that each dance encapsulates specific local customs, humour, festive practices and shared social experiences. For instance, the physical discipline required in the "Osh" dance reflects values of skill, dexterity and precision; the competitive spirit of "Kichkinavoy" illustrates notions of strength, camaraderie and sportsmanship; while the ceremonial context of "Yog'och oyoq" emphasises ritual significance and community cohesion.

The growing presence of these dances in staged productions, festivals and international performances demonstrates an increasing interest in Uzbek intangible heritage. However, results also suggest that choreographic adaptations for the stage occasionally introduce modern stylistic elements that, while enriching the visual appeal, may risk diluting the authenticity of traditional forms. This underscores the need for balanced artistic approaches that respect original structures while enabling creative development.

Overall, the findings highlight that Uzbek men's dance traditions remain vibrant, culturally meaningful and resilient, yet require sustained professional attention to ensure their effective preservation in contemporary artistic practice.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is vital to emphasise that the transmission of Uzbek national men's dances as an integral part of folkloric tradition must continue from generation to generation. The safeguarding of these dances depends largely on the expertise of experienced choreographers and balletmasters who possess deep knowledge of traditional movement vocabulary and regional styles. Their role in staging and adapting folkloric dances for young performers is indispensable.

Only through the careful, knowledgeable and culturally sensitive work of such specialists can these traditional dances maintain their authenticity while being introduced to new audiences. When supported by structured teaching, thoughtful staging and active participation of young dancers, Uzbek folkloric male dance forms will continue to flourish and confidently advance into the future, ensuring their preservation for posterity.

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