

## COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CEREMONIES CONNECTED WITH THE CULT MOMO AND ETHNOGRAPHISMS

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### ABSTRACT

The topic is based on the studies of the well-known Uzbek and Foreign folklorists. The cult momo has existed since the ancient times and it is well kept among the Uzbeks. Genesis of the traditions of Bibi Seshanba and Bibi Mushkulkushod rituals are connected with the beliefs of cult momo as well. They have attracted many scientists throughout the world. All in all, interests of not only local scientists, but also foreign ethnologists and anthropologists in the beliefs and traditions of Turkic people became a basis of the translations of these ceremonies. In general, English translations of ethnographic information about ceremonies connected with the cult momo will be comparatively studied in the article.

**KEYWORDS:** Cult Momo, Performed Rituals, Foreign Anthropologists, Comparative Study

### INTRODUCTION

Famous Uzbek folklorist B. Sarimsoqov declares that the cult “Momo” has existed since the ancient times and such cults have been preserved well among the Uzbeks [4,161]. It has become a typical tradition to honour mother Anbar or momo Anbar – the patron of newborn babies, Sust khotin – the divinity of water, Choy momo – the divinity of wind, momo Havo – the first woman that represents the belief to the cult momo among our nation [6, 50-53]. Genesis of the traditions of Bibi Seshanba and Bibi Mushkulkushod rituals are connected with the beliefs of cult momo as well.

Uzbek folklore scientists have paid great attention to the aim and traditions of the rituals Bibi Seshanba and Bibi Mushkulkushod. The essence of these rituals has been widely depicted in Mahmud Sattor’s book “O`zbek udumlari” (Uzbek customs) [3, 188-190], whereas in the book “Oila ma’naviyati” (Family spirituality/values) written by O.Safarov and M.Mahmudov the rituals are considered as folk book reading ritual [5,106]. Speaking about the ancient beliefs and rituals of Uzbek people the ethnologist A. Ashirov declares that the genesis of these rituals are connected with the belief in reverence for the cult “Momo”[1, 199-205].

All in all, interests of not only local scientists, but also foreign ethnologists and anthropologists in the beliefs and traditions of Turkic people became a basis of the translations of the ceremonies Bibi Seshanba and Bibi Mushkulkushod. There is a special unit called “Doing Business with Bibi Seshanba” in the book “Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia” [9,153] of a Danish scientist Maria Elisabeth Louw, which is included in Central Asian Studies series. The chapter reveals the idea of the author about the nation’s belief related to Bibi Seshanba and organization of this ceremony.

Bibi Seshanba and Bibi Mushkulkushod ceremonies are usually held in honour of female saints, aunts of Bahouddin Naqshband. Maria Elisabeth Louw also gives the same information and translates the names of these saints into

English: “**Bibi Seshanba**, in honour of whom the **Osh Bibiyo** is held, is regarded as a protector of home and family life, and of women in particular. She is considered the aunt of Bahouddin Naqshband and the sister of another female saint, **Bibi Mushkul Kushod** (“**Lady Problem-solver**”), in whose honour another related ritual is held [9, 153-167]. Besides, the author tries to explain the variation in the name of saints. It is said that this ceremony is called as “**Oshi bibiyo**” among tadjik speaking people of Bukhara and among Uzbeks as “**Oshi bibi seshanba**”. The extract includes ethnographisms as **Bibi Seshanba**, **Osh Bibiyo**, **Bibi Mushkul Kushod**, **Oshi bibi seshanba** which are unique to Bukhara region. Translation of the words typical to each nation always causes difficulties. But inspite of this the scholar attempts to use possible ways. She keeps ethnographisms as in the original version (**Bibi Seshanba**), gives definitions, and in some cases translates them (**Lady Problem-solver**).

Also, in the article of “The communal and the sacred: women’s worlds of ritual in Uzbekistan” [8, 327-340] by D. Kandiyoti and N. Azimova published in 2004 the origin of **Bibi Seshanba**, the translation of names, how to arrange the ritual, the information about the stories narrated in it are given. As it says that once in ancient times seven sisters came down on the earth. Two of them were **Bibi Seshanba and Mushkulkushod**. The other sisters disappeared and nobody knows anything about them. Names of these ceremonies are kept as proper nouns in translation. The authors referring to the work of M.A.Mills confirm that despite some versions, this story displays striking similarities with the wicked stepmother motif in connection to the **Ash-e Bibi Murad**, an all female Ismaili Muslim ceremony performed in Eastern Iran and western Afghanistan. The **Ash** is a food offering and ritual meal conducted by women in honour of **Bibi Fatimeh (Bibi Murad, 'Lady of Wishes')** the daughter of Muhammad and wife of Ali. The similarities to women's **sofreh** in Iran, gatherings around a votive meal, are quite clear [8, 341]. Use of ethnographisms can be observed in the work of D.Kandiyoti and N.Azimova too. They prefer to utilize two ways: transliteration (**Bibi Murad**) and translation (**Lady of Wishes**) of the proper nouns according to their meaning.

Kathryn Spellman who had carried a research on Iranian women's networks in London writes that there exist variations of the **Sofreh Bibi-se-shambe** which include **Bibi Nur** and **Bibi Hur** ceremonies [11]. Besides, she gives information about two networks: The Central London Network and The North London Network, which are important in comparison of these rituals. Social networks held in these places differ from each other. One is held on Thursday evening in the Holand Park Majma’(the Central London Network), whereas the second is called ‘invite-only’ sofrehs and the calendar sofrehs (the Central London Network and the North London Network). National words **sofreh, halva, khorma, ghosl, Khaneqah** and others associated with these rituals are used without translation.

D. Kandiyoti and N.Azimova who had carried their research in Fergana valley explain the process of the ritual in the following way: In Ferghana, these occasions are usually small gatherings to which widows and elderly women are invited. The invitation of widows relates to the tale of the orphan girl who received help from **Bibi Seshanbe**. The hostess places bread, grapes, almonds, and nuts on the tablecloth and after soup has been served and consumed everything is removed. A rectangular pastry board is laid out, on the four corners of which are placed seven pieces of **chavat** (fried flat bread), one big dish containing flour, umoch (milk pudding), and seven bowls. The large dish with flour and one headscarf are given to the **otin** after she has recited suras from the Qu’ran. Seven wicks soaked in oil (for the reading of **bibi seshanbe**) or candles (for **Mushkul Kushod**) are lit. After the reading, the pastry board is removed and put on a shelf facing the **kibla** (the direction of Mecca).The widows drink the milk pudding first, followed by the other women. The hostess licks the empty bowl [8,342]. It becomes evident that first soup has been served and then the pastry board is laid in order to

hold the ceremony. But in Bukhara this is done in a different way. On the one hand soup has never been served in these rituals. On the other hand supra is laid before rather than after serving the meal.

The host of the family must ask seven neighbors for flour, or must put flour in the four corners of the room and then use from it. The flour is used to cook a special meal (**umoch**). Maria Louw explains the meal as follows: "This flour is to be used as the base for preparing a special ritual meal, o`moch: a kind of stew from flour, rice, milk, lentils, chickpeas and dried apricots" [9, 156].

The scientist explained the umoch as being prepared with flour, rice, milk, pea, dried apricot by steaming. In the ritual seven widows, poor and parentless women are invited, but this rule is not always followed. While some people think that only married women should be invited, others consider that any woman should participate in the ritual. The participation of men is strictly forbidden. They mustn't even see the flour of umoch. Neither should pregnant women as the fetus might be a boy.

It is known that the rituals in honor of worshiping the spirit of Bibi Seshanba and Bibi Mushkulkushod are held on certain days of the week. Mainly, a strict connection between Bibi Seshanba and the calendar can be seen in its name. According to these features the rituals of Bibi Seshanba and Bibi Mushkushod can be called calendar rituals. Tuesday and Wednesday are also called as "days of grannies" among people. If paid attention to the sofrehs held in Central London and North London one can see difference on the days of these rituals. They hold these rituals on Thursday evenings. Besides there exist 'invite-only' sofrehs and the calendar sofrehs.

Maria Louw pays attention to the preparation process and succession of the events. She stated that Bibi Seshanba was held in the private families, sometimes in a small party with relatives, sometimes with all neighbors and relatives at noon on Tuesday. The ritual was usually meant to express gratitude to Bibi Seshanba at the expense of hoping to the realization of the problems or after the realization of the problems.

In the ceremony of Bibiseshanba there is laid a special supra before **otinoyi** who tells the history and the origin of the ceremony. Maria Louw describes the supra and the things that are put on it as follows: "We were seated on the floor around a big **dasturxon**. The oldest and most honoured guests were seated close to the 80-year oymullo who had been invited to lead the ceremony. Those of us who had not already covered our hair with a scarf were handed one. The ceremony started when Gulnora came into the room carrying a folded **dasturxon** above her head, walking slowly and bowing three times on her way. The dasturxon was then unfolded in front of the oymullo, and on it were placed **two burning candles**, a bowl with sweetened milk and a bowl with sweetened water, a plate with **wild rye**, a plate with some of the flour from which the **o`moch** had been prepared, covered with a handkerchief, and two bowls filled with o`moch".

In this translation the word **dasturxon** is used instead of "supra", but they are the objects of different kinds. While supra is used to make dough and roll it, dasturxon is used during the meal time. In the Uzbek families when a family has meals or a guest visits dasturxon is usually laid and things to eat are put on it for the visitor. Dasturxons usually have two sides: front and the back sides. The front side is made of beautiful cloth, and the back part is made of simple cloth matched with the color of the front part, designing the edges with embroidered band used as a border on clothing. Supra is usually without any decorations. It is made of either cheap cotton material or simple calico or from the skin of a slaughtered animal. Therefore, supra is also called as "**po`stak**" in some places. Though dasturxon and supra are used for the same

purpose not to spill the flour and the bread crumbs (as they are considered our daily subsistence) on the ground, mostly supra is used in the ceremonies. Although the scientist tries to give the word dasturxon as it is, she calls it “tablecloth” everywhere: “Dasturxon means “*tablecloth*”. The English translation is, however, somewhat confusing in that the dasturxon is usually placed on the floor – and is used as a general term for hospitality offered at the table/floor” [9, 194].

It is not difficult to comprehend that she is trying to give the word dasturxon with its equivalent “tablecloth”. Yet in the translation the scientist gives the word dasturxon in the very original version. Also, she preferred to give the word umoch in English as in Uzbek. Therefore, the words dasturxon, umoch are the words which are typical to the social life of the Uzbek nation, so it is natural that in the English language there are no translations or equivalents of these words. Taking these things into consideration it is not considered a mistake to give the names of the things typical to a certain nation in their original version.

In the article of D. Kandiyoti and N. Azimova the word “**supra**” is given as a rectangular pastry board which means flat wood for dough. It seems vague to the reader. Because flat wood cannot be laid or wrapped like supra. We think that it would be desirable if the explanation was used as “a leather mat used for making dough upon” [12,298] which is given in the Uzbek – English dictionary by William Dirks. Kathryn Spellman prefers to give this word as sofrehs which indicate to the plural form of supra: supra + s (N+Pl.f) = sofrehs.

During the ritual there lit a candle in honour of Bibi Seshanba, yet Maria Louw describes it differently: “The candles were typically explained as reflecting women’s wish to “live in light” – happily and according to the will of God – while one *oymullo* more prosaically explained that it was a good device for having children. The bowls with sweetened milk and water were commonly interpreted as reflecting the wish that everything at home should be “sweet” – also with a couple of more prosaic variants, namely that drinking the milk and the water would make one healthy, or that it would make a woman’s husband love her in case he did not [9, 194]. There is no information about lightening the candles and sweet milk in the book of Kathryn Spellman. She mostly describes the process of sofrehs rather than things or objects used in them.

It is known that **aytims** sung in folklore genre, and ceremonies appear in several forms and versions. The story of Bibi Seshanba also has various versions. While giving the detailed description on holding the ritual in the English language, Maria Louw mentions the Bibi Seahnba ritual narrated by *otin* as well. In this version Bibi Seshanba tells the orphan girl: *She only needed to feed the cow with the cotton, then it would make yarn that she could draw out from its behind*, but in the research of D. Kandiyoti and N. Azimova they describe as: *The old woman told the girl to feed the cow and milk her and that a thread would appear in the milk.*

In the book written by Maria Louw the parentless girl’s cooking the meal in honour of Bibi Seshanba for her husband’s safe return from hunting, and Akobir’s spilling the meal being cooked and making her angry about that and then regretting having done that while he was bringing three small melons, he was suspected of the murderer of the padishah’s sons, and asking for permission he heard about the event he accomplished a ritual pray consisting of two sets of prostrations, devoting to Bibijon and prayed to God for remission for his deeds are described, but in the article of D. Kandiyoti and N. Azimova Akobir’s realizing his faults and his sacrificing ten rams to honour Bibi Seshanba are told.

In short, it is obvious that the extended story of the ceremony is described not only by Maria Louw, but also by D.Kandiyoti and N. Azimova. Yet Kathryn Spellman does not narrate the story at all.

It is also observed that in the translations of Maria Louw **tandir** - the cooking object typical to Uzbek mentality is used as “stove”: “When he came to the girl’s house, the stepmother hid her **in the oven** and hoped that the shoe would fit her own daughter. The shoe, however, was too small for her. The man was just about to leave, but then the hen disclosed the girl’s hiding place. The girl tried on the shoe, and it fit her. She was very beautiful. Then the man said that he wanted to marry her. And a big wedding was held” [9, 194].

“Oven” is used to cook a meal; everybody knows that it consists of two parts. Tandir, which is found in the Uzbek families, is made of clay, and bread and patir (fancy raised tandoori bread) are baked in it. Therefore, the parentless girl’s being hidden in the shelf by her stepmother shades the information about the story, which is considered the verbal component of the ceremony created several centuries ago passing from mouth to mouth.

Some times when the ceremony of Bibi Seshanba is over, Bibimushkulkushod is held. This ceremony is described in English as follows: “After that, the reading of Mushkul Kushod begins. The otin distributes *seven grapes* with their stems attached to each woman present. During the reading, one woman after another tears off the stems and places them on a piece of cotton wool. After the reading is completed, the piece of cotton wool with the stems on it is thrown into the canal and is allowed to float away, symbolizing the problems and cares of which the women rid themselves. Then rice (**plov**) and refreshments are served. The hostess gives the **otin** a headscarf and a piece of fabric for carrying out the ceremony” [8, 327-349].

As we know supra is laid also in Mushkulkushod. There put **isiriq**, tea, salt, raisin, pea on it. Otin distributes the raisin and pea to the women participating in the ceremony. While the ceremony aytims are being sung the raisin is put on the cotton splitting off its tiny tail. After the ceremony ends the tiny tails are thrown into the running water. In the abovementioned English translation the word raisin is given with the word “grapes”. However, it is translated as “raisin” in the English language.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Comparative study of rituals associated with the cult Momo shows that these ceremonies and rituals performed in them differ from each other.
- There are special days of holding these ceremonies: Tuesday/Thursday. Anyway they are considered the calendar rituals.
- The process of the ceremony: meal is served before and after the rituals. Different national meals as soup, umoch and plov are mentioned which indicate the geographical location.
- Objects needed for the ceremonies are also of various types.
- The stories read in the ceremony vary as the works of folklore pass from mouth to mouth.
- The words dasturxon, umoch, sofreh, halva, khorma, ghosl, Khaneqah, chavat (fried flat bread), Qu'ran, the kibra (the direction of Mecca), tandir, supra, and etc. are the words which are typical to the social life of the nation, so it is natural that in the English language there are no translations or equivalents of these words.
- Taking these things into consideration the ethnologists and translators utilize three ways of depicting

ethnographisms: transliteration, giving definitions, and translations.

So, with the efforts of foreign ethnologists and translators readers get the information about these ceremonies in the English Language. It is delightful that not only local but also foreign scientists, ethnologists and anthropologists are interested very much in our nation's beliefs and customs.

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