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SOI: [1.1/TAS](https://doi.org/10.1177/1077546719874444) DOI: [10.15863/TAS](https://doi.org/10.15863/TAS)

## International Scientific Journal Theoretical & Applied Science

p-ISSN: 2308-4944 (print) e-ISSN: 2409-0085 (online)

Year: 2019 Issue: 06 Volume: 74

Published: 17.06.2019 <http://T-Science.org>

QR – Issue



QR – Article



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SECTION 29. Literature. Folklore. Translation  
Studies.

## A METAMORPHOSIS OF A DECENT VIRTUE INTO FOLK VALUE

**Abstract:** The article is devoted to generosity which is considered as the part of national identity of Uzbeks. Throughout the centuries it has been handed down from generation to generation. The author believes that it became as national character of Uzbeks because they were brought up almost 10 centuries according to didactic literature and oral folk tradition which were watered with generosity, hospitality philanthropy.

**Key words:** generosity, hospitality philanthropy, open-handedness, benevolence, didactic poetry, proverbs.

**Language:** English

**Citation:** Makhsudova, N. A. (2019). A metamorphosis of a decent virtue into folk value. *ISJ Theoretical & Applied Science*, 06 (74), 284-287.

**Soi:** <http://s-o-i.org/1.1/TAS-06-74-34> **Doi:**  <https://dx.doi.org/10.15863/TAS.2019.06.74.34>

### INTRODUCTION

Today, generosity is being considered as the first mark of a good person. Generosity expresses itself in various forms; for example, *hospitality, kindness, giving material aid or offering help by giving time or skill* (that we call now charity). When we picture national identity of Uzbeks, the first two notions that spring to our mind are hospitality and generosity. They have been inherited to Uzbeks from their ancestors. To put another way, these inherent virtues are in their blood.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Uzbeks like all other Turkic peoples trace their historical roots to their nomadic ancestors of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, who commanded a huge territory from northwestern Mongolia to an area close to the Caspian Sea. Their descendants of the 8<sup>th</sup> century left us funeral inscriptions chiseled onto large stones. The author of one of these inscriptions, Bilga Kagan (d.734), not eloquently eulogizes his younger brother Kul Tegin's life (d. 731), but also gives information about his own life. The words of Bilga Kagan express a high notion of his obligations towards his people. For example, he states: "*for the sake of the Turk people, I didn't sleep at night, I didn't rest by day.*" Other lines describe his generosity:

"*Having been seated (i.e. elected) as Kagan, I gathered all the poor and destitute people together. I made the poor people wealthy and the few people numerous,*" and then he humbly adds: "*or, is there any*

*falsehood in these words of mine?*" [1, p. 52-54]. Giving reasons for his many campaigns, he states: In order to nourish the people, I, with the great armies, went on campaigns twelve times.....Since I had fortune.....may Heaven be gracious!- I brought the people to life who were going to perish, and nourished them, I furnished the naked people with clothes and made the poor people rich the few people numerous [2, p. 268]. Similar words can be found in Central Asian Turkic epic songs. On a hero's return from his campaigns, he distributes all the booty among his people. For example, the Kazakh epic *Qaradon* closes with the words: "*He (= Qaradon) gave everything to his people and he made the poor equal to the rich*". Like in the *Kul Tegin* inscription, a favorite phrase in the epic songs, symbolizing generosity is: "*.... And he (the hero) gave clothes to those without clothes and horses to those without horses*" [1, p.52-54] Unlike in the Old English epic song *Beowulf* of the 8<sup>th</sup> century where we hear of a king who gathered great treasure but "was unable to extend generosity and concern for his people's welfare". The Central Asian Turkic-nomadic tradition of generosity leaves us no doubt about a hero's or a leader's obligation [3, p. 10].

It is noteworthy that to be generous an absolute obligation for the hero of the Central Asian Turkic heroic epics. For instance, in the Uzbek epic *Ravshan*, the singer (dastanchi) *Ergash Jumanbul oqli* (1868-1930) describes the generosity of the hero *Hasanxon*: "Now the hero *Hasanxon* had the treasuries of the *Padishah Qoraxon* emptied, then he let the people

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gather, had the hungry fed and clothed those without clothes". Similarly, in the Uzbek epic Nurali, the hero Gorogli gives a feast upon the safe return of his comrades: "He informed the Turkmen people an osh/feast will be given now. How many sheep, how many cattle they slaughtered, all hungry were full, and naked were dressed" [3, p. 9]. Such feast could go on for several days. Likewise, feast giving and proceeding of it for forty days is traditional ending in many Uzbek fairy tales.

This priceless tradition of generosity didn't cease to exist then, but it proceeded in the next centuries. For instance, samanid rulers and affluent samanids competed with each other to pay yearly kharaj (Tax on agrarian land owned by non-Muslim) of folk [4, p. 9]. Likewise, great folk hero across the Asia Tamerlane outscore others in the competition on generosity. His following statements prove abovementioned thought: "*I donated a lot to help poor people and to build mosque, madrassah, hospice, caravanserai (caravan site) along the roadsides in order for travelers to rest and recover from the day's journey. I checked out every problematic issue thoroughly and I put all my effort to solve it impartially*" [5, p. 54].

In regard with benevolence not only rulers but ordinary people also gained recognition and popularity among folk. For instance, according to sources a prominent savant, the founder of the Naqshbandiya Order Muhammad ibn Muhammad Bahouddin Naqshbandi al-Bukhari used to donate all his earnings to beggars and orphans. Another representative and successor of Naqshbandiya Order Khwaja Ahrar, who was one of the richest men of Central Asia in 9<sup>th</sup> century used to spend most of his money on the needy. Most of his wealth was invested in *Waqf* (religious endowments) and was used for the poverty-stricken people. Furthermore, historians contend that when Umar Shaykh Mirzo demanded from residents of Tashkent to gather the amount of money equaled to 250000 dinars, Khwaja Ahrar payed all sum of money by himself. Apart from it, he gave away 70000 dinars to tax collectors. What is more, many madrassahs in Tashkent, Kabul and Samarkand were built under his sponsorship.

There are a number of reasons for formation such kind of formidable conduct and behavior in Uzbeks

Firstly, many aspects of the code of conduct as well as customs and traditions still practiced today is rooted in the pre Islamic nomadic Turkic culture. Then it was strengthened by Islam and Islamic perceptions of adab "good behavior". Islam was introduced into Central Asia by the Arabs in the second half of the seventh century. The religion soon took root in the great cities of the region and then more gradually spread out to the remoter areas. Within relatively short period an institutional infrastructure was set in place. And the written word was Islamicized too as the Arabic script came to replace the various writing systems that has been used previously for local

languages. Many Arabic words were adopted, extending existing vocabularies in new directions. Within Arabic words, proverbs which origin trace back to Arab language began to be used by common people.

From the eighth century onwards the Mavarranahr saw a remarkable economic, scientific and cultural development. World-known scholars as Imam al-Bukhari, Ibn Sina, Beruniy and Khorazmiy lived and worked in this period. Arabic was the language of composition for many Turkish scholars, notably in the field of religious and philological studies. From ninth and tenth centuries the science and learning developed at an increasing pace in Mavarranahr. In early medieval centuries in Mavarannahr the science developed in two directions:

1. Rational science which comprised mathematics, natural sciences, logics and metaphysics [6, p. 44].

2. Humanitarian science which included methods, fundamentals of Arabic, language of Koran and norms of Islam as well as hadith studies;

It is known Koran and hadiths of Prophet Muhammad had a significant place in the life of people of Central Asia as well as they were the ultimate source of legal authority for many centuries. Besides their legislative and theological value, Koran and hadiths of Prophet Muhammad have also served as a source of spiritual guidance for them. Being considered not only religious sources but also the reflection of the complexity of moral virtues which is regarded as universal value, hadiths and quotations of Koran spread among the people of Central Asia. In the medieval centuries Mavaraunnahr was the center of excellence for studies of the Holy Koran and Hadith. As the result of it, many world-known scholars in Islamic theology such as Imam Bukhari, Imam Termizi, Imam Maturidi, Abu Laith Samarqandi were brought up in Mavarannahr.

After converting to Islam radical changes occurred in the social life of people of Central Asia and of course, these changes were reflected in the literature. Thus, masterpiece works of literature were created under the influence of Islamic culture as well as fiction of regional traditions.

Generosity is considered one of the good qualities of a person in Islam. Islam encourages the concept of generosity so much so that it is embedded in one of the five pillars of Islam, the obligatory charity known as Zakaat. In Arabic, the term zakaat literally means purification of the heart however; it is also the payment, from surplus money, of an obligatory charity designed by God to provide for all the needy members of the community. It is a fixed calculable amount.

There is also another form of generosity in Islam called *sadaqa*. Linguistically, *sadaqa* means truthfulness, and some scholars have described it as the heart being truthful to its Creator. Anything given

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generously - freely to others - with the intention of pleasing God is *sadaqa*. *Sadaqa* can be as simple as a smile, helping an elderly person with their groceries or removing objects from the road or path.

Generosity can be viewed as a wise investment in the future. Generosity or *sadaqa* may pave the way to Paradise because with every generous act comes great reward from God. However, being generous does not only mean giving freely from what you have in abundance. Generosity does not lie in giving away something that is no longer useful but in giving freely from the things we love or need.

Another reason why Uzbeks are so generous and hospitable is that for many centuries they have been grown up and brought up by reading literature and oral folk tradition in which such invaluable moral features exalted. If we take a glimpse at literature of this nation in ancient and medieval centuries, we can surely notice that it was based on a cannon of wisdom literature, generally called didactic literature. We can refer to such kind of literature Yusuf Has Hajib's unique "Qutadgu Bilig", a long didactic poem and the oldest monument of Islamic Turkic literature, written in 1069/1070; Makhmud Yugnakiy's "Hibatul haqayiq", Alisher Navoiy's "Mahbubul-qulub", "Hayrat-ul abror", works of Munis, Khorasmi and etc.

The most admired and desired qualities which had earned unequivocal admiration of Central Asian thinkers were generosity and magnanimity. Therefore, generosity praised a lot and shown as an example of virtuous conduct in abovementioned books. Not surprisingly benevolence, generosity and magnanimity were first and foremost features that ennobled Turkic ruler (king, prince or kagan). It was mentioned in Qutadgu bilig by Yusuf Has Hajib: "*The prince should be generous, yet keep a humble and quiet demeanor. It is through generosity that the prince acquires a good name, and it is through his name that the world becomes secure*". At the end of his work, Yusuf Has Hajib summarizes his thoughts in an address to his readers: "...I have briefly expounded the various modes of proper conduct, so you (who read and understand), may gain a firm foundation for your life" [7, p. 77].

Another masterpiece of Central Asian Turkic literature which offers many pieces of advice bearing on all kinds of conduct is Hibatul haqayiq (A Gift of Truths). It was composed by Ahmad binni Makhmud Yugnakiy who came from the village of Yugnak, near Samarkand (some say Fergana or Turkistan) in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. The work of Ahmad Yugnakiy is devoted to morality that adorns a person. Prominent among them is generosity: "if thou must praise, do praise the generous man" and generosity, both the great and small will praise". Ahmad exhorted reader to shun stinginess. The following Uzbek proverb conveys it this way: "If a generous person finds something, everyone eats it, If a stingy one find something, he will cover it up and

eat it alone. Ahmad Yugnakiy also felt that the person wealthy enough to be generous had to guard against the sin of pride: "No one like arrogance, neither populace nor God himself", he wrote. The proper counterparts to wealth, power and position, Ahmad Yugnaki believed, could be only kamtarlik (modesty) or humility [8, p. 20-21 ].

Morality that saturated with ideology of benevolence, generosity, kindness, magnanimity place consequential role in the works of Alisher Navoi who is reputed as the founder of Uzbek literature. The fifth chapter of his book Mahbub -ul-qulub (Wonders of good people) is devoted to open-handedness and generosity. According to him *benevolence is great virtue and crown on the affluent person's head. The jewels that embellish the crown can be imagined as generosity. If God makes you rich, you shouldn't be greedy-on the contrary share the wealth. God wants us to be generous, gracious, kind-hearted and compassionate* [9, p. 64]. To top it off, there are lot of information that proves he himself was cultivated and generous person. During 1480 he built a number of madrasahs, 40 robots (the place where Karavan could have a little rest), 17 mosques, 10 honaqqohs, 9 bath-houses, 9 bridges, 20 pools in Herat and in other parts of the country for his own money (from his own account). When time allowed, he was patron of scholarship and arts.

Next source that contributed to shape Uzbek national identity is proverbs and sayings. It is obvious that proverbs and sayings have been widely used among the folks because of its didactic content. Certainly many proverbs exhibit either direct didactic tendency as items of advice *Put your best foot forward* or indirect didactic tendency as potential advice summarizing past experience as in *First come first served*. Others can be used with didactic intentions under appropriate conditions, for instance *Little pitchers have big ears* as advice about danger of exposing children to adult talk generally rather than as specific warning that children are listening [10, p. 35]. Therefore, it is not said in vain that proverbs contain wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views.

Currently, there are a lot of dictionaries of Uzbek proverbs. But we borrowed materials for analysis from "Ozbek xalq maqollari" (Uzbek folk proverbs) compiled by T. Mirzayev, A. Musakulov and B. Sarimsoqov (2003) and "Ma'nolar maxzani" (The treasure of meanings) by Sh Shomqsdov and Sh Shorahmedov (2001). According to analysis of two sources 147 proverbs devoted to generosity and greediness are found. In all of them generosity, open-handedness, benevolence is emphasized as exemplary conduct, whereas stinginess is reputed as a repugnant vice:

*Nothing grows on stingy man's land;  
It is better to ask for bread from mendicant than  
corn from greedy man;  
Generous man be praised*

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*Greedy man be neglected;  
He who is noble has high authority among  
people;*

*The symbol of mountain is rock  
The sign of wealthy man is generosity;  
Good things come to those who are generous;*

### CONCLUSION

Regrettably, none of abovementioned literature and oral folk tradition could have appeared on the pages of Uzbek schoolbooks during the Soviet period. Any education in ethics, whether in a religious or secular context, was strictly controlled by communist ideology. The former Soviet colonial rulers systematically tried to impose everywhere their own “value system” which totally contradicted not only that of the Uzbeks but also that of the Central Asian Turkic peoples.

In the case of the Uzbeks, they quietly resisted. They continued to teach their children the values of their ancestors in the privacy of their own homes. The teachers were elders, grandmothers, grandfathers and parents. Using folktales, proverbs, and the general knowledge they had of books of wisdom, they taught their children and grandchildren the values listed above. Some were courageous Uzbek writers at the forefront in the transmission of Uzbek culture and values. They used every chance they could detect in the system to have their works pass from censorship to publication. Often they had to pay with their lives for their courage and national commitment. One should also mention numerous Uzbek scholars, who played an important role in the transmission of the past knowledge and, like all the elders, contributed to the process of sustaining and reviving Uzbek traditional values.

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