

Uzbek askia – an expression of wit and wisdom

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Abstract. This article states that Uzbek askia is a traditional form of verbal art that embodies the wit, linguistic creativity, and cultural richness of Uzbekistan. Rooted in Central Asian oral traditions, askia involves improvisational verbal duels where participants engage in witty exchanges through poetry, wordplay, and cultural references. Historically performed during social gatherings, askia serves as a medium for entertainment, intellectual engagement, and cultural preservation. Its themes range from humor and satire to philosophical musings and social commentary, highlighting the depth and versatility of this art form.

Keywords: askia, wit, wisdom, cultural exchange, storytelling, cultural literacy, cultural heritage, linguistic agility

Introduction. The art of askia is one of Uzbekistan's most celebrated oral traditions, embodying the wit, creativity, and cultural depth of the Uzbek people. Askia is a form of verbal duel or poetic improvisation where participants engage in witty exchanges, showcasing their linguistic agility, cultural knowledge, and quick thinking. Deeply rooted in Uzbek history, askia continues to thrive as both a form of entertainment and a reflection of the nation's rich heritage.

Origins and Historical Context. Askia traces its origins to the oral traditions of Central Asia, where verbal and poetic skills were highly esteemed. Historically, it served as a form of communal entertainment during weddings, festivals, and social gatherings. Askia reflects the ancient nomadic lifestyle of Uzbeks, where oral storytelling and quick wit were essential for sharing knowledge and fostering social cohesion.

Throughout history, this art form has been shaped by the linguistic and cultural influences of the region, including Persian, Arabic, and Turkic traditions. The Silk

Road, which passed through Uzbekistan, further enriched askia by exposing its practitioners to diverse cultural exchanges.

What is askia? Askia is an improvisational art where participants, often poets or skilled speakers, engage in a rapid exchange of questions, statements, or verses. These exchanges are marked by:

1. **Wordplay:** Clever manipulation of language to create double meanings or humorous effects.
2. **Rhyme and Rhythm:** Participants often compose their responses in poetic form, adhering to specific rhyming patterns.
3. **Cultural References:** Use of proverbs, idioms, historical anecdotes, and folk wisdom to demonstrate knowledge and creativity.
4. **Challenge and Response:** One participant poses a challenge—usually a question or statement—and the other must respond in a manner that is both relevant and witty.

For example:

- Person 1: “Why does the river keep flowing?”
- Person 2: “It seeks the sea, as the poet seeks his muse.”

Themes (payrovlar) in askia. Askia is versatile and can cover a wide range of topics, including:

- **Humor and Satire:** Playfully mocking societal norms, personal quirks, or current events.
- **Philosophy and Morality:** Exploring themes of life, love, destiny, and virtue.
- **Cultural Pride:** Celebrating Uzbek identity, traditions, and values.
- **Social Commentary:** Critiquing issues such as inequality, corruption, or hypocrisy.

This thematic diversity makes askia not only entertaining but also intellectually stimulating. Participants in askia require several key skills to excel:

1. **Quick Thinking:** The ability to craft clever responses on the spot.
2. **Linguistic Mastery:** A deep understanding of Uzbek language, including idioms, metaphors, and poetic forms.
3. **Cultural Literacy:** Familiarity with Uzbek history, folklore, and social norms.

4. Confidence and Charisma: Engaging the audience with humor, expression, and delivery.

While askia remains a traditional art form, it has adapted to the modern era:

- Media and Competitions: Television programs and live events regularly feature askia contests, drawing large audiences.
- Education: Schools and cultural organizations incorporate askia to teach language, literature, and critical thinking skills.
- Cultural Preservation: Efforts by the Uzbek government and UNESCO have ensured that askia is recognized as an intangible cultural heritage.

Here are some samples of Uzbek askia to illustrate the wit, humor, and poetic nature of this unique oral tradition. These examples demonstrate the quick thinking and creativity required to excel in an askia exchange.

Sample 1: Playful Wordplay

Person 1:

Daryoning suvi qayga oqadi?

(Where does the river's water flow?)

Person 2:

Dengizni izlab, o'sha tomonga!

(It flows toward the sea, searching for it!)

Sample 2: Philosophical Wit

Person 1:

Odamning eng katta dushmani nima?

(What is a person's greatest enemy?)

Person 2:

O'zining dangasalik odati!

(Their own habit of laziness!)

Sample 3: Humor and Satire

Person 1:

Boylar nimani xohlaydi, deysan?

(What do the rich want, do you think?)

Person 2:

Yana-da ko‘proq boy bo‘lishni, albatta!

(To become even richer, of course!)

Sample 4: Cultural References

Person 1:

Qishloq odamining boyligi nima?

(What is the wealth of a villager?)

Person 2:

Yer, suv va mehnatkash qo‘llari!

(Land, water, and hardworking hands!)

Sample 5: Friendly Mockery

Person 1:

Sening yoshi nechada?

(How old are you?)

Person 2:

Yoshim kam emas, lekin sochlarimda oqar ko‘p!

(My age isn’t small, but my hair is full of gray!)

Sample 6: Proverbs in Action

Person 1:

Daraxtni mevasidan bilishadi, deysan?

(They say a tree is known by its fruit, right?)

Person 2:

Ha, shuning uchun achchiq meva yeyilmaydi!

(Yes, that’s why bitter fruits aren’t eaten!)

Sample 7: Romantic Humor

Person 1:

Yuragingni zabt etdi kim?

(Who has captured your heart?)

Person 2:

Bir ko‘rishda sevgi deb aytishadi!

(They call it love at first sight!)

Sample 8: Contemporary Satire

Person 1:

Telefoningni nima uchun ishlatasan?

(What do you use your phone for?)

Person 2:

Salomlashib, yana Wi-Fi qidirmoq uchun!

(To say hello and then search for Wi-Fi!)

Sample 9: Observational Humor

Person 1:

Shaharning ovozi nimadan keladi?

(What makes the noise of the city?)

Person 2:

Mashinalar va odamlarning shovqini, yana bekorchi g'iybat!

(Cars, people's chatter, and idle gossip!)

Sample 10: Wisdom in Wit

Person 1:

Bilim odamni nima qiladi?

(What does knowledge do to a person?)

Person 2:

Chiroyli so'zlaydi, lekin amalda ko'proq bo'lsa yaxshi!

(It makes them speak beautifully, but it's better if they act on it too!)

These examples of Askia showcase its variety, from playful exchanges to profound reflections and humor-laden observations. This tradition highlights not only the quick wit of the participants but also their deep cultural and linguistic knowledge.

Askia's role in contemporary society highlights its enduring appeal, bridging generations and keeping the Uzbek language vibrant.

Global Recognition. In 2014, UNESCO recognized askia as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This recognition underscores the art

form's cultural significance and its contribution to the global appreciation of oral traditions.

Askia stands alongside other Central Asian cultural expressions, such as epic storytelling and traditional music, as a testament to the region's artistic richness.

Conclusion. Uzbek askia is more than just a verbal duel – it is a living embodiment of the nation's wit, wisdom, and cultural pride. From its historical roots to its modern manifestations, askia continues to inspire, entertain, and educate. As it adapts to new contexts and audiences, this timeless art form ensures that the Uzbek spirit of creativity and intellect remains as vibrant as ever.

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