



THE FIGURE OF THE TABIB AND TYPES OF HEALING IN THE WORLDVIEW OF THE SURKHAN VALLEY POPULATION

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an ethnographic analysis of the figure of the healer (tabib) and the types of folk medicine within the traditional worldview of the population of the Surxon Oasis. The study examines the formation of healing practices, the master-apprentice tradition, and significant customs such as “qo‘l olish” (initiation), the chilla ritual, and related rites. In addition, the healing methods employed by domlas, qushnochs, and healers—such as qaytarma, alaslash, kitob ochirish, boqin, and qoqin—are described on the basis of local field materials. The article reveals the close interconnection of folk medicine forms preserved in the Surxon Oasis with religious beliefs, superstitions, and ritual elements, and substantiates their socio-cultural significance in the life of society. The research findings are of considerable scholarly importance for the study of regional ethnography, folk medicine, and systems of traditional knowledge.

KEYWORDS

Surxon Oasis, folk medicine, healer (tabib), domla, qushnoch, chilla, qaytarma, alaslash, boqin, qoqin, traditional worldview, ethnography.

Introduction

The Surkhan oasis is distinguished by its ethnographic diversity and the relatively well-preserved nature of its ancient customs and rituals. In this region, individuals such as tabib (traditional healer), domla (religious scholar), and qushnoch were recognized not only as healers but also as figures with a specific socio-cultural status within society. Their activities were formed through the integration of religious beliefs, superstitions, rituals, and empirical knowledge, and were transmitted from generation to generation through oral and practical means.

The term tabib is of Arabic origin and is used in the sense of “remedy” or “treatment.” The word tibb itself also carries the meanings of “to reform” or “to correct.” Thus, the expression “tibb qildi” was understood to mean “he reformed” or “he corrected.” Another meaning of tibb is “skill” or “expertise” [1:6]. Among Uzbeks, specialists in the field were generally referred to as tabib, while highly accomplished scholars were called hakim [2].

Results and Discussion

A tabib is a person who has thoroughly mastered the empirical knowledge related to health specific to their ethnic group and has transmitted this knowledge to subsequent generations orally and in writing, thus establishing tradition. It is worth noting that anyone who wished to treat others had to first become an apprentice to a master and receive a blessing (duo). This ceremony is called qo'l olish. Only after completing it was a person allowed to treat others.

People engaged in health care were divided into the following groups:

Domlas — These are literate individuals who treat people using verses from the Qur'an. Before starting treatment with specific verses, they had to undergo a period of seclusion (chilla) with the blessing and permission of their master. During chilla, a task was assigned based on the abjad (numerical value) of the letters. For example, a person intending to heal with Surah Al-Fatiha had to recite it 25,000 times according to the abjad count. Since Al-Fatiha consists of 9 verses, each letter corresponds to a specific number in the abjad system. The duration of chilla ranged from 5 to 25 days depending on the individual's capacity. For a 5-day chilla, the verse would be recited 5,000 times daily; for a 25-day chilla, 1,000 times daily. During this period, the individual remained in a room where no one could enter, consuming only a cup of water, a small handful of raisins, and half a piece of bread each day. At the end of the chilla, the master would bless the apprentice and grant permission to heal with Surah Al-Fatiha. If other surahs were to be used, the same procedure was followed with the relevant surahs added to the abjad calculation.

After completing chilla and receiving permission, the healer would use the verses to provide blessings (dam solish), or write them according to the abjad on paper, which would then be dipped in hot or spring water and given to the patient to drink. According to local understanding, if the abjad was miscalculated, the treatment would not be effective [3].

Mullahs who treated bites from snakes, scorpions, or spiders underwent a simpler chilla. They could complete their assigned task in one or several days and move freely among people during this period. Only after that were they permitted to practice medicine. These mullahs recited a specific prayer at least 11 times and up to 33 times in one breath and then performed dam solish. They maintained constant ritual purity and diet restrictions, avoiding prohibited foods such as certain ceremonial dishes, street food, raw onions, or garlic. Each day they recited assigned prayers a certain number of times. Since some of these prayers protected against the poison of insects and snakes, they were practiced continuously. Mullahs sometimes struggled to treat certain patients, such as those with scorpion or calf-head bites or diseases like jaundice, due to the absence of protective prayers, and often referred such patients to physicians. Those who recovered from jaundice were treated further with prayers to eliminate residual liver problems [4].

Qushnochs — These were the most frequently consulted healers in the community, performing a practice that originated from seven generations. Sometimes they were also called chiltonkash or moma. According to tradition, if someone had a qushnoch in their lineage, they were expected to continue the practice, otherwise, they might become sick or weak. If a qushnoch became ill, they were asked whether any lamps were lit behind them. Therefore, qushnochs often trained their daughters or grandchildren for this role and granted them permission to heal [5].

Qushnoch practice was not limited to hereditary chiltonkash families. If someone was interested in becoming a qushnoch, a master would train them, and upon blessing them, they could begin seeing patients.

Tabibs in this group used various herbs, waters, and animal or plant oils for treatment. Highly skilled tabibs also treated broken or displaced bones, performed minor and relatively complex surgical procedures, and treated eye diseases.

Mullahs and qushnochs used methods such as qaytarma, alaslash, kitob ochish, uqalash, tomoq bosish, boqin, and qoqin for healing.

Qaytarma — This method was used for treating colds, serious illnesses, persistent ailments, resentment, mental disturbances, fear, visual illusions, or magical afflictions. The person reciting the qaytarma had to be literate, have completed chilla, and received blessings from a master. Before reciting, specific items such as water, animal fat, needles, and soap were placed in front of the mullah depending on the type of illness. Water infused with prayers was believed to have healing properties. Forty-one names of harmful items were written on needles and inserted into soap before treatment. Qaytarma often employed Surah Yasin. For serious cases, four mullahs would perform chillyasin, reciting Yasin 40 times to ensure swift recovery or relief [3].

Alaslash — This involved creating a small charm from cotton or cloth, passing it through fire, and moving it over or around the patient. Only qushnochs from chiltonkash lineages practiced this. The term alas means “deliverance” [6].

Kitob ochish — This method used the book Kanzul Husayniy, written according to abjad calculations, to diagnose the patient’s illness. The patient’s eyes were covered, and a finger placed on the book to determine the ailment. Healing prayers corresponding to the diagnosis were then applied. This method was practiced by azayimxon mullahs and soothsayers (folchilar) [3].

Boqin — A traditional Surkhan Valley ritual performed by qushnochs and dervishes. Patients remained in seclusion for one week or longer, avoiding oily foods and contact with outsiders [6].

Jahr zikr — Patients were treated by surrounding them with dervishes, covering their faces with white cloth, and performing ritual chanting and prayer. Sometimes the patient was lightly whipped. Preparatory sacrifices were made if needed [7–9].

Qoqin — Conducted by qushnochs, this involved rituals using a black chicken’s blood, cotton, and fire for healing or fertility. The ceremony included reciting prayers and symbolic actions [5,10].

Qushnochs observed specific rest days, refraining from seeing patients during these periods out of religious respect and tradition. They maintained ritual purity and careful conduct even when attending funerals [3].

All qushnochs and domlas periodically renewed their knowledge and observed chilla for 1–3 days before resuming practice [12].

Healing styles varied among mullahs. A regular mullah might spend 30–60 minutes treating a patient, while those of saintly status might require only 1–2 minutes. Saints often used whips to treat ailments such as visual or mental disturbances, striking the patient lightly three times on the head while covering it with a cap [13].

Conclusion

In conclusion, in the traditional worldview of the Surkhan Valley population, the figure of the tabib and the various forms of healing constituted an important socio-cultural institution. The activities of tabibs, domlas, and qushnochs were not limited to treating illnesses; they also served to maintain spiritual stability in society and to balance the mental and emotional state of individuals. Their practices

developed in harmony with the community's centuries-old empirical experience, religious beliefs, and ritual traditions.

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