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### UZBEK PEOPLE'S DEMONOLOGICAL BELIEFS

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#### Abstract:

This article examines the demonological beliefs of the Uzbek people as an integral component of their traditional worldview and spiritual culture. It analyzes mythological and folkloric representations of supernatural beings such as jinn, pari (fairy spirits), alvasti, and other invisible entities within oral traditions, legends, ritual practices, and everyday beliefs. The study explores the dualistic perception of benevolent and malevolent spirits, their symbolic functions, and their role in explaining unexplained natural and social phenomena. Particular attention is given to the interaction between pre-Islamic mythological layers and later Islamic interpretations, revealing the continuity and transformation of demonological concepts in Uzbek cultural consciousness. The research highlights how these beliefs reflect moral norms, social values, and collective identity within traditional society.

**Keywords:** Uzbek demonology, folk beliefs, jinn, pari, mythology, folklore, traditional worldview, spiritual culture, dualism, oral tradition.

Many ancient religious beliefs, including shamanism, assign a central place to the concept of spirits. In shamanic practice, special attention is given to spirits, and belief in them constitutes one of the fundamental features of shamanism. Among the Uzbek people, due to a dualistic perception of spirits and depending on their attitude toward humans, they were traditionally divided into two categories.



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The first category includes protective or benevolent spirits such as *peri* (fairies), *chilton* (saintly spirits), and *momo* (mother-spirits). The second category consists of malevolent spirits such as *alvasti*, *jinn*, and harmful entities known as “suq” and “ziyon.”

Among the Uzbeks of the Fergana Valley, one of the most widespread benevolent or patron spirits is the symbol of the *peri*. The earliest references to fairies can be found in the sacred Zoroastrian text *Avesta*, where they appear in the form “pairika.” In that context, they were considered evil spirits and were depicted as beautiful women. The function of the *pairikas* was to mislead people and prevent them from believing in Ahura Mazda, the god of goodness [1, p. 42].

Some researchers note that the name of the fairy in the *Avesta* is also encountered in the form *pairaka*. In particular, the folklorist K. Imomov emphasizes that in the *Avesta* fairies are referred to as *pairaka* and are portrayed as symbols of evil. Water fairies are described as beautiful, graceful, and sometimes compassionate maidens; however, according to their magical essence and function, they appear in two distinct types. One type is wise, modest, and merciful, while the other is cruel and merciless. The water fairy represents the element of water, which is manifested in its ability to emerge from water and disappear back into it [5, p. 70].

A. Bertels writes about fairies as follows: in one of the *Avesta* texts, perceptions of the fairy are interpreted in connection with irrationality and madness. In all texts, this image is depicted exclusively as an evil spirit. As stated in the *Avesta*, only certain individuals believed that fairies could perform good deeds. This suggests that the cult of the fairy and related worship practices persisted in certain regions even during the period when Zoroastrian doctrine was widely established as a dominant religious belief [2, p. 126].



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Fairies are generally anthropomorphic in form (imagining deities and supernatural beings in human likeness). They possess the ability to assume the appearance of a beautiful girl or young man. In addition, they may sometimes manifest in the form of animals, birds, or flames. According to folklorist K. Imomov, in ancient sources fairies were depicted in both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms; in works of art they were portrayed as half-woman and half-fish, half-serpent, or as beings with a woman's head and a bird's body. Fire occupies an important place in their genesis. The fairy that appears like glowing flame is considered extraordinary, and its historical roots are associated with the cult of fire and the cult of mother-spirits who controlled fire [5, p. 247; 6, pp. 36–38].

Mythological legends about fairies incorporate elements of primitive beliefs, ancestor worship, ancient demonological phenomena, dualism, taboos, and certain aspects of spirit veneration. In such legends, events are constructed on imaginative foundations, and their content symbolically reflects moral norms such as beauty, purity, honesty, and justice, as well as the rejection of evil spirits. In the image and actions of the fairy, the influence of the water deity Anahita can be discerned. The fairy is an imaginary figure depicted in anthropomorphic form and serves as a demonological symbol expressing features associated with the cult of water.

According to I. Jabborov and G. Dresvyanskaya, fairies constitute a distinct category within the broader classification of spirits and devils. Fairies may be not only hostile toward humans but also protective patrons. This image, which has been widespread throughout Central Asia—especially in regions historically engaged in agriculture—possesses a distinctive fantastical character. Fairies are closely associated with various conceptions of gods, spirits, and deities. They appear at many stages of religious development. Among the agricultural



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populations of Central Asia, until relatively recently, there existed a belief that “a fairy chooses a particular person” [3, pp. 64–67].

Different ethnic groups classify fairies into various types: Muslim fairy, infidel fairy, serpent fairy, maiden fairy, water fairy, heavenly fairy, bread fairy, star fairy, flower fairy, and others. For example, star fairies are believed to observe from the sky and reveal the hidden secrets of a person who consults a fortune-teller. Flower fairies may fall in love with a human, enchant him, and learn his inner secrets, yet they do not cause harm. The bread fairy accompanies each individual and punishes wastefulness; it is believed to inform the fortune-teller if a person is excessively prodigal.

Folklorist O. Qayumov emphasizes that water fairies occupy a significant place among all types of fairies [11, p. 44]. Water has long symbolized life and continuity. Water fairies are said to emerge from waves and control the flow of water. They attract human attention and often protect innocent people who fall into water from drowning. According to belief, only those who are drowning can see the water fairy. Like other fairies, water fairies captivate people with their extraordinary beauty.

As in all professions, shamanism also has its spiritual patrons and protectors. Ethnographer P. Komarov notes that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the main protector and patron of shamans in Tashkent was known as Abdurahmon Pari, to whom shamans performed annual sacrificial rituals [7, p. 4]. O. Murodov, in his research, refers to Abdurahmon Pari as the “King Fairy” and identifies Mount Qaf as his dwelling place [8, pp. 114–115].

Beliefs about fairies appearing in the form of beautiful women are still found among the Uzbeks of the Fergana Valley. For example, according to Sumbula Bakhshi, a resident of Soyshildir village in the Dangara district of Fergana region,



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her fairies sometimes appear at night in the form of a beautiful woman or a young girl (Field materials: Soyshildir village, Dangara district, Fergana region, 2009). In oral folk tradition, the dev (giant or demon) is portrayed as a malicious and evil creature, whereas fairies are animated as symbols of beauty and grace [11, p. 43]. Such perceptions of fairies are also reflected in historical sources. For instance, in Nasiruddin Burhanuddin Rabguzi's *Qissasi Rabguzi*, it is written: "Know that the Almighty created the angels from the light of fire, and the fairies from the flame of fire. Their origin is one, yet they differ in three aspects. First, angels are from light, fairies from flame. Second, angels are called 'farishta,' fairies are called 'jinn.' Third, angels dwell in the high heavens, while fairies dwell on earth" [10, p. 13].

According to Rabguzi, fairies were created by God and live on earth [10, p. 13]. Ethnographer G. Snesev notes that the image of the fairy belongs to Iranian mythology and entered Turkic mythology as a result of religious interaction between Iranian and Turkic peoples [9, p. 286]. However, this view is only partially accurate, since the image of the fairy has long been widely used in historical and ethnographic sources related to the peoples of Central Asia.

Among the population of the Fergana Valley, belief in fairies still persists. For example, Havokhon Bakhshi, a resident of Shomirza village in the Quva district of Fergana region, emphasizes that fairies are more likely to attach themselves to women. If such a situation occurs, the affected woman may begin to behave strangely and lose affection for her husband (Field notes: Shomirza village, Quva district, Fergana region, 2009). According to Rustam Bakhshi, who lives in Dam village of Chust district in Namangan region, the names of fairies may only be mentioned if they grant permission or show their consent (Field notes: Dam village, Chust district, Namangan region, 2008).



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Some informants highly evaluate the influence of fairies on ordinary people. For example, according to Tuhfatillo, a traditional healer living in Chartak city of Namangan region, a person affected by the “Snake Fairy” (Ilon pari) tends to fall into an aggressive or combative mood. Therefore, immediate measures are taken to treat a person believed to be influenced by the snake fairy (Field notes: Chartak city, Namangan region, 2010).

Among the population of the Fergana Valley, specific perceptions about the attire of fairies have also been preserved. According to Dilorom, a fortune-teller living in Urganji village of Dangara district, Fergana region, fairies usually dress like young girls, which makes it easier for them to attach themselves to people. In her view, any beautifully dressed girl may attract the attention of fairies. The informant emphasized that a girl affected by a fairy may become overly playful, constantly letting her hair loose and dancing involuntarily. Such patients are believed to show a strong inclination toward sexual disorders. To cure this condition, it is considered necessary to perform a ritual sacrifice of an animal and use its blood as part of the healing process (Field notes: Urganji village, Dangara district, Fergana region, 2007).

Thus, fairies have historically been perceived as symbols of beauty and goodness. Water bodies and the underwater world have been imagined as their primary dwelling places. In periods when matriarchal elements were dominant in society, positive transformations in people’s worldview led to the sacralization of women, and stone statues representing female figures were created. This practice later evolved into the veneration of female statues. The gradual deification of women contributed to the emergence of the fairy image. Initially, fairies were envisioned in female form, and later in male form as well. This transformation reflects broader social and philosophical changes within society.



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