

Darveshona In the Ceremonial Culture of Uzbeks

Bobojonov Shavkat Ulugbekovich

Independent researcher (DSc) at Termez State University,
Associate Professor at the Department of World History, Tashkent State Pedagogical University named after Nizami, PhD in History,
Tashkent city, Uzbekistan

Corresponding Author: Bobojonov Shavkat Ulugbekovich, Independent researcher (DSc) at Termez State University, Associate Professor at the Department of World History, Tashkent State Pedagogical University named after Nizami, PhD in History, Tashkent city, Uzbekistan

E-Mail: bobojonovsh2020@gmail.com <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1607-3911>

Introduction

Introduction: The article explores the formation history and etymology of darveshona, one of the ancient rituals, as well as the procedures of its performance, its purposes and functions, regional similarities and differences, and the issues of tradition and modernity within the ritual, based on historical sources and field materials.

Materials & Methods: Historical sources such as the writings of Abu Rayhan Biruni, waqf records of the Bukhara oasis's pilgrimage sites, folk oral histories, and current observations serve as the foundation for this study. Ethnographic, comparative, and historical-critical analysis techniques were used to examine the data. The history, regional features, social roles, and contemporary forms of the dervish ceremony were all studied, along with the regional variations and their relationships to shared values.

Results: According to the results, villagers and communities would gather food or cash for charitable purposes and hold a khudoyi-darveshona ceremony at the start of every spring. National foods like osh, yorma, and halim were prepared everywhere. It was believed that the foods had therapeutic qualities, particularly yorma, which was made from a variety of grains and legumes. Everyone shared the food during the outdoor ceremony, and any leftovers were either thrown into the water or fed to animals. The darveshona concluded with the election of key village positions, including cook, shepherd, and coordinators of weddings and festivities.

Conclusions: In the Uzbek people's social and spiritual lives, the darveshona ceremony is particularly significant. It has endured through the ages, reflecting human values, compassion, and unity. This custom is crucial in preserving the ancestors' spiritual legacy for future generations.

Keywords: darveshona, tradition, community, ceremony, festival, charity, ritual, honor, unity, cooperation.

SDES- International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research is a journal of Open access. In this journal, we allow all types of articles to be distributed freely and accessible under the terms of the creative common attribution- non-commercial share. This allows the authors, readers and all scholars and general community to understand, use and to develop non-commercially work, as long as appropriate credit is given and the newly developed work are licensed with similar terms.

How to cite this article: Ulugbekovich BS. Darveshona In the Ceremonial Culture of Uzbeks. SDES-IJIR; 2025; 6-2: 985-991

Submitted: 10-April-2025; **Modification:** 28-April-2025; **Accepted:** 01-May-2025; **Published:** 08-May-2025

Introduction

In the social and spiritual life of Uzbeks, alongside religious, wedding, and calendar rituals, collective ceremonies – especially darveshona – hold a special place. It is known that the word darvesh in Persian means poor, destitute, or humble, and refers to a representative of the Sufi order [1]. Additionally, the word darvesh is derived from dar-o-vez, conveying the idea of someone who goes door to door in search of sustenance.

Dervishes renounced the pleasures and desires of the material world in order to attain closeness to the Truth (Allah) and strived for the bliss of the eternal world. They were content with what they had, relied on Allah, and engaged in spiritual remembrance (dhikr). Dervishes were often found at sacred sites and the tombs of saints, usually residing in khanqahs and other religious buildings. Wherever the dervishes, who traveled in groups, passed – be it a village, neighborhood, or caravanserai – they were offered water, food, and meals. This ritual, traditionally held as a charitable act for passersby, travelers, and local residents, has thus been called Darveshona. Some scholars interpret this traditional custom as a festival that originated from the community of dervishes [2].

Materials & Methods

Using historical-ethnographic methods, this study investigated the origins, evolution, and social roles of the darveshona ceremony, which is significant to the Uzbek people's social and spiritual lives. Historical sources and oral historical recollections from the Bukhara, Qashqadaryo, Surkhandaryo, and Andijan regions were examined, along with the works of Abu Rayhan Biruni and waqf documents. The contemporary forms of the ceremony and their regional variations were discovered through ethnographic observations and interviews with senior citizens of the community. Regional names, timing, primary goals, and food types related to the darveshona ceremony were compared and contrasted using a comparative-analytical method. Additionally, a sociological approach was used to analyse the ceremony's role in fostering generosity, charity, and community solidarity. These techniques shed scientific light on the darveshona ceremony's historical origins and the factors that have kept it alive to this day.

Results

Information about communal ceremonies organized for the people can also be found in Abu Rayhan Biruni's work "Monuments of the Ancient Peoples". The encyclopedic scholar provided accounts of rituals and festivals arranged for the public, especially for the poor. He regarded festivals held for worldly affairs as honorable and significant days, noting that they were organized by kings and leaders. Through these ceremonies, they sought to bring joy to their desires, uplift their spirits, gain the love of the people, and receive their prayers. On such days, they also introduced various rituals for the common people. The ordinary people, by participating in these ceremonies, joined in the celebrations of kings and emirs, expressing their loyalty and devoted service to them. These festivals became one of the means to turn the hardships of the poor into relief, to fulfill the hopes of the hopeful, and to deliver the afflicted from danger and sorrow [3].

According to waqf documents related to the shrines of the Bukhara oasis, food was constantly prepared in cauldrons at these sites, and the poor and needy were regularly provided with meals, bread, and water. In the waqfnama of the shrine of Shaykh Sayfiddin Boharzi (Shaykh al-'Ulama), it is stipulated that bread and food be prepared daily in the khanqah kitchen – meat dishes on six days and vegetarian dishes on one day – and that these meals be distributed to the local residents, the poor, and pilgrims. Additionally, during the winter months, on Mondays and Fridays, it was required to provide all dervishes with a sweet dish or halva [4]. At the Bahouddin Naqshband shrine in the village of Qasri Hinduvon, a waqf was established by Subhanquli Khan to ensure that a cauldron of food would be kept boiling throughout the year. In the saqokhona (refreshment house) of the shrine, nourishing and energizing sherbet was prepared and distributed to visitors [5]. The city's inns and dervish hospices also welcomed the hungry and homeless. At the Chor Bakr shrine in the village of Sumiton, two cauldrons were kept boiling throughout the year, and passersby would stop to eat a bowl of food before continuing on their way [6]. Unlike the aforementioned charitable meals, the darveshona was held once a year at a designated time.

There is no description or information about this traditional ceremony in Islam. However, the core essence of this ritual in our religion lies in the importance of sila-yi rahim (family ties). In the southern regions of our country, primarily in Surkhandarya, Kashkadarya, and certain areas of Samarkand, the darveshona ceremony is held during the first half of each spring season. The darveshona, held at the end of winter and the arrival of early spring, is known by various names, such as darbishona, darshana, darnishona, davrshona, davra osh, yil boshi, xalqona, ko'cha osh, ehson osh, el osh, and eshon davrasi. Additionally, the ritual is referred to as oshi darveshoni in Bukhara city, oshi darveshon in the Navmetan region of the oasis, elomon osh in the Qorako'l district, darshana in Andijan, and varushona in Langar, Qashqadarya. Our people also call this time ilikuzildi (the period of transition). The saying "the thick stretches, the thin breaks" was not created without reason.

The ritual performed social functions such as welcoming spring, preparing spiritually for the new harvest year, making sacrifices for a good cause, celebrating with festivities and joy, and getting ready for the labor season [7]. The darveshona was primarily organized with the following goals. Firstly, it served as an example of gratitude from the people who endured the harshness and hardships of winter with strength and patience, reaching the spring. Some, however, could not survive until the spring due to the difficulty of the season. The elders prayed for them to reach the sweet harvest of spring. Secondly, charity was distributed to protect the village or neighborhood from calamities and disasters, to bring relief, and to prevent misfortunes. Especially, the villagers, who had suffered from plague, sweating sickness, and other various diseases, gave such donations and distributed food to those without breakfast or a home. Thirdly, since it marked the beginning of the farming season, farmers and cultivators prayed for a good harvest and wished for a prosperous year. This ritual was performed in the Uzbek Qarluqs during years of drought. After the crops were sown, if rain did not come, they would make supplications to Allah, asking for rain [8]. The end of the old year and the beginning of the new year was symbolized by the darveshona. Our people, who had a good understanding of the calendar, considered February 5th as the beginning of the livestock month and February 15th as the beginning of the farming month. Fourthly, by gathering the community of the neighborhood or village around a single table or cauldron, they ensured mutual love, unity, cooperation, and sharing. The participation of many people in the darveshona, with everyone raising their hands in prayer for good intentions, reflects the belief that Allah hears the prayers and wishes of the many [9]. For this reason, it was essential for both the young and the elderly of the village to participate in the ceremony, and according to the ancient belief of the Turks, a sacrifice was made in honor of the deities of the harvest.

In some regions of our country, the darveshona was held in two forms. The small darveshona was organized on March 23-24, while the large darveshona took place on March 26-27. During the small darveshona, the organizational matters of the large darveshona were discussed, and the food to be prepared and the dishes to be brought were distributed among the women. In the large darveshona, men and women participated at different times. Men attended before noon, while women participated in the afternoon [10].

In Bukhara, since the Middle Ages, it has been a tradition to hold oshi darveshona and oshi harifona. The purpose of the term oshi darveshona was to organize a charitable feast for those who had renounced the world in the path of Allah – such as dervish-like individuals, orphans, the homeless, the poor, and the destitute. The second, oshi harifona, was a gathering among friends to ensure that love and compassion remained among them. Friends would collectively raise funds and gather on weekends or holidays to engage in friendly conversation, acts of kindness, and learning.

In the oshi darveshon (dervish gathering) held in the Novmetan region of Bukhara district, people ranging from 7 to 70 years old participated. Depending on the available resources, everyone contributed whatever they had to the communal table, and together they performed a khatmi Qur'on (a Quranic recitation). The food prepared, such as moshkhorda or other legume-based dishes, was based on the ingredients that the households provided. The charitable food was prepared in the mosque area and shared together. The food was distributed to orphans, the severely ill, the elderly, and widows. According to the elderly informants of the neighborhood, in the 1950s and 1960s, the ritual was held with the participation of representatives from the guzar or street, and primarily oshi sofi and oshi qobuli dishes were prepared. During these days, the community members discussed issues such as providing assistance to needy families, the construction of a new mosque, and

addressing other shortcomings [11]. In 2012-2014, the people of Khoshun neighborhood held the ritual after a series of misfortunes in the neighborhood, asking the people to pray for relief from these troubles.

Those gathered for the ritual contribute a certain amount of money based on their means. In some cases, people go door to door saying things like, “We are collecting for a sadaqa porridge”, “Charity wards off coming misfortunes, please add your offerings”, or “We are organizing a darveshona in honor of the spiritual elders”, to form a group of participants. The collected funds are mainly used to prepare the food for the ritual. For the darveshona ceremony, community representatives collect money from the villagers based on their financial means. It is usually around ten or twenty thousand per person – not more than that. Wealthier families and well-off households contribute more, and in some cases, cover all the expenses of the ceremony as an act of charity, hoping for spiritual reward. Another distinctive aspect of the darveshona ritual is the desire to perform good deeds. On the eve of Navruz, the funds collected from the public are used to repair damaged roads, renovate mosques, or distribute gifts (such as bicycles or clothing) to children from low-income families.

In some regions, there is a tradition for individuals reaching the age of 36, known as the muchal year, to organize the darveshona ceremony. In the village of Edilbek, those celebrating their muchal year prepare a communal meal for the villagers. In the village of Chimqo’rg’on, every year men who turn 40 organize the darveshona [12]. Festive performances and stage shows are organized during the event. Traditional sports games such as tug-of-war (including among women), stone lifting, and wrestling are held.

The Darveshona ceremony is organized by village elders and respected seniors with the saying: “May we always have peace and never see misfortune”. Those who lead the ceremony are called *guzarvakil* in Bukhara, *rais*, *eshon bova*, or *ko’cha boshi* in Qashqadarya, *oqsoqol* in Andijan, and in some villages they are popularly known as *domkom*. In Jizzakh, it was the responsibility of the village imam to determine the date of the ceremony and announce it to the people.

There is no specific dish strictly designated for the Darveshona ceremony; instead, various meals are prepared depending on the ethnic, geographical, demographic, economic, and social characteristics of the region. While “Darveshona” literally means “a meal given to dervishes”, both liquid (soupy) and solid dishes have been cooked for the occasion. A special cauldron is used for the ceremony, known as the “Darveshona cauldron” or “the dervishes’ pot”, because the food prepared in it primarily serves travelers, the needy, and the poor.

Every year in early spring, 2–3 people would go door to door in villages and city neighborhoods collecting money or food. In the past, the dish *halim* was usually cooked in someone’s yard or at a mosque. The charitable feast, known as *khudoyi-darveshona*, was organized using the donations collected from households by the organizers [13].

For the ceremony, hearty dishes such as *moshova*, *go’ja*, or *yorma*, and *halim* were chosen [14]. The modest meal served at the table typically consisted of *yorma osh* (a dish made with lamb, chickpeas, and wheat) and bread. Additionally, in Shahrizabz (Qashqadarya), *shurva* was prepared; in Yakkabog’, *halim*; in other areas of the region, *plov* (rice pilaf); in Andijan, both *shurva* and *osh*; in Dehqonobod, *yarma*; in Khorezm, *shovla*; and in Bukhara, *umoch* and *moshova*. The dish *yorma* or *yarma* is named for its mixture of seven ingredients – crushed wheat, mung beans, kidney beans, rice, pearl barley, chickpeas, and red beans – which, when cooked, burst open, giving the dish its distinctive texture and name. The wheat is traditionally ground by hand by women using millstones [15]. Various spring greens, vegetables, and even dried apricots (*qoq*) were added to the dish. In some regions, a thick dough-based dish was also prepared, where strained yogurt (*suzma*) was poured over the dough and eaten [16]. For the feast of this ritual, donations in the form of sacrifices were made, such as a rooster, ram, large cattle, horse, or camel. In the village of Niholzor in Surxondarya, if the number of deaths increased during the year, a camel would be sacrificed [17]. The food was considered healing and a remedy for many diseases. People from Andijan believed that this dish could cure dental problems. In the village of Maylijar in Qashqadarya, a fat sheep would be selected for the feast. After boiling its meat overnight, a soup was made with the meat and cracked wheat from the mill, and then the dish called “*yarma*” was prepared.

Each household, based on its capabilities, prepares various national dishes such as atala, green somsa, fried pastries, tough pilaf, and other traditional foods for the Darveshona feast. One day before the event, women would bake sumalak and distribute it at the Darveshona. As spring's first greens appeared, pastries made from jag'jag herbs were prepared. In Jizzakh, the table would include talpiq [18], green dumplings, and burrak [19]. In some regions, the feast table was not complete without the stretched dough. The dough pieces were divided into odd numbers, such as 9, 11, or 13. Then, they were rolled thin, shaped into small bread, and fried in hot oil. When it came to the final stretch, half a spoonful of oil was thrown into the fire, with the belief that "the dead will feast, and the living will be blessed" [20]. The dough was mainly prepared by childless women, who sought the blessings of the people. Everyone would share their dishes with each other. Sweets made of sugar and flour were spread on the table for newborn babies born in the village [21]. Once the ritual food is prepared, the announcers would call out, "The community gathers for the darveshona, the pot is open!" to invite the villagers. The announcers for the ceremony were called the "herald" or "crier", and in the Kumushkon village of Jizzakh, they were referred to as "tavachi". When the food was ready, the elder would open the pot, and the Quran would be recited at the head, after which the food was served.

Although the darveshona is rarely held in the Bukhara region, some households in the city still organize small darveshonas. The Tajiks call it "qo'raba oshi darveshi mekunem", which means "we prepare darvesh's food for the community". They announce, "We will cook darvesh's food in the oven, serve food for the guests, and play the drum". Typically, 10 kg of rice is cooked, and the food preparation is mainly carried out by a group of women.

The darveshona ceremony was held in a large festival style. Each household in the village would bring necessary bedding, food, and utensils for the event. In the winter, people would gather near the river or canal to dispose of the diseases accumulated during the season, and they would have a meal together. In some villages of Kashkadarya, the ceremony was held at a place called Zovur Yoka, located along the riverbanks. It was believed that flowing water would wash away illnesses. According to information from Biruni, one of the ancient traditions of Navruz was that people would go to canals and ponds at dawn, stand in front of the flowing water, and pour water over themselves to ensure blessings and ward off misfortunes [22]. To forget bad pain, suffering, illnesses, and difficult days, people would wash their hands and faces in flowing water, and they would also wash the ritual dishes in fresh water.

In other regions, the darveshona ceremony was held in the central square of the village, a large field, or the school football field. Efforts were made to choose a location that was easily accessible to everyone. In Nurobod village of Qashqadarya, the ceremony has been held for generations at a place with five traditional hearths, which were cleaned every year. This area was revered as a sacred and martyrdom site, so the people of Nurobod hung their ceremonial pots in this very field [23]. In the village of Loyqasoy, there is the ancient Tulkitepa, where according to tradition, the people gather at this place and hang four pots to prepare the ceremonial meal [24]. In Khorezm, the organizers of this ceremony held it at the cemeteries where their ancestors and forefathers were buried [25].

In large cauldrons built along main roads or riverbanks, the food being cooked was considered to hold everyone's share and right. People would stand attentively along the path of passersby, and anyone who appeared was respectfully invited, offered a bowl of food, and shown hospitality. Young people stood ready to serve. At large Darveshona ceremonies in the oases, the front of the ceremonial table was reserved for the poor, widows, and the needy. Special efforts were made to comfort and honor them. The Darveshona meal was first sent to the households of those mourning, as a sign of remembrance and condolence. Street elders or local representatives of the village went door-to-door to distribute the ceremonial food [26]. Additionally, the remaining "yarma" dish in the cauldron was sent to those who lived far away or were unable to attend the gathering, delivered by the youth. In some regions, if any ceremonial food was left over, it was distributed to passersby, and in certain cases, it was released into the water as feed for the fish [27].

One of the important rules of the ceremony is that the food must be eaten outdoors and not taken home. Since the offering is considered public and communal, it is not appropriate to consume it at home. In general, food

and items used during the ceremony are not taken back home. To avoid wasting leftovers from the table, they are given to animals. Even surplus firewood is either completely burned or stored in that area for use the following year [28].

At the end of the Darveshona gathering, a community council is also held. In Qashqadaryo, they elect a shepherd to look after the village's livestock, as well as community leaders and workers who will serve during weddings, ceremonies, and other events, including the village cook. This tradition is still observed today. During the annual Darveshona, these roles are discussed, selected, and agreed upon, and the community also consults on how to celebrate the upcoming Navruz holiday [29].

Conclusions

Overall, "Darveshona" is a ceremony that holds a special place in the social and spiritual life of the Uzbek people. Although it is held in various forms and styles across the regions of our country, it has preserved values such as compassion, unity, cooperation, organization, and community spirit. There is a saying among our people: "Only a person can understand another person's pain". Wherever there is a human being, there is always a need for love, kindness, and connection. The "Darveshona" ceremony stands out for reflecting pure human virtues, eternal values, and historical traditions. In the past, "Darveshona" meals were mainly distributed to dervishes, wandering mystics, travelers, and beggars. Nowadays, it is primarily attended by local villagers. Nevertheless, its overall function and core purpose have not changed. Studying the history of the ceremony in depth and highlighting its role in the life of our people helps to pass on the rich spiritual and moral experiences of our ancestors to future generations and ensures the continuity of centuries-old values.

Financial support and sponsorship: Nil

Conflicts of interests: There is no conflict of interest

References

1. Islam. Encyclopedic Dictionary. – Moscow: Nauka, 1991. – p.56.
2. Qoraboev U. Holidays of the Uzbek People. – Tashkent: Sharq, 2002. – p.55.
3. Beruni. Monuments Left by Ancient Peoples. – Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 2020. – p.238.
4. Asrorova L. The One Who Honored Bukhara – Sayfiddin Bokharzi. – Tashkent: International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, 2021. – pp.104–105.
5. Bobojonov Sh. The Bahauddin Naqshband Historical-Architectural Complex. – Tashkent: Navruz, 2019. – p.81.
6. Husenov S., Rajabova I. Chor Bakr. – Tashkent: Sharq, 2001. – p.32.
7. Qoraboev U. Holidays of the Uzbek People. – Tashkent: Sharq, 2002. – p.55.
8. Shaniyazov K. Uzbeks-Karluqs (Historical-Ethnographic Essay). – Tashkent: Nauka, 1964. – pp.51–52.
9. Qurbonova M. Traditional Cuisine of Uzbeks and Tajiks in the Bukhara Oasis (Late 19th – Early 20th Century): PhD Thesis in History. – Tashkent, 1994. – p.30.
10. Field notes. Jizzakh region, Sharof Rashidov district, Uchtepa area. February 2024.
11. Recorded from Roziya Odilova, born in 1950, resident of Novmetan.
12. Field notes. Kashkadarya region, Yakkabog district, Edilbek and Chimqorgon villages. February 2024.
13. Qoraboev U. Holidays of the Uzbek People. – Tashkent: Sharq, 2002. – p.55.
14. Abdullaeva Kh. Folk Customs. Darveshona – a Ceremony of Charity and Benevolence // Kashkadarya Newspaper. March 18, 2017. (Electronic resource) <http://qashqadaryogz.uz> (Accessed: 24.03.2024).
15. Field notes. Kashkadarya region, Yakkabog district, Langar village. January 2024.
16. Field notes. Kashkadarya region, Dehkanabad district. February 2024.
17. Field notes. Surkhandarya region, Sariosiyo district, Niholzor village. February 2024.

18. Talpiq – dough rolled out flat, filled with greens, and fried in oil.
19. Burrak – square-shaped green pastry baked in a tandoor.
20. Field notes. Jizzakh region, Sharof Rashidov district, Uchtepa area. February 2024.
21. Field notes. Kashkadarya region, Kukdala district, Maylijar village. November 2023.
22. Beruni. *Monuments Left by Ancient Peoples.* – Tashkent, Vol. 1, 1967. – p.257.
23. Field notes. Kashkadarya region, Guzar district, Fayzobod neighborhood, Nurobod village. February 2023.
24. Field notes. Kashkadarya region, Kamashi district, Loyqasoy village. February 2024.
25. Abidova Z. *Shrines and Sacred Places of the Khorezm Oasis (Historical-Ethnological Study): Doctoral Thesis in History.* – Tashkent, 2018. – p.109.
26. Field notes. Kashkadarya region, Koson district, Gishmon village. April 2022.
27. Recorded from Imsim Abduvosiyeva, born in 1947. November 2023.
28. Field notes. Kashkadarya region, Yakkabog district, Serob village. January 2024.
29. Abdullaeva Kh. *Folk Customs. Darveshona – a Ceremony of Charity and Benevolence* // Kashkadarya Newspaper. March 18, 2017. (Electronic resource) <http://qashqadaryogz.uz> (Accessed: 24.03.2024).