



KHIDR'S IMAGE IN CLASSICAL AND MODERN LITERATURE AND FOLK ORAL TRADITION

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Abstract

This article analyzes the interpretation of the figure of Khidr (peace be upon him) in religious, philosophical, and literary sources based on the Qur'an and Islamic narratives. It highlights how the image of Khidr has been shaped in Uzbek classical and contemporary literature, as well as in folk oral tradition, and what ideological and aesthetic significance it carries.

Keywords: Khidr (peace be upon him), Qur'an, artistic image, symbol, classical literature, folk oral tradition.

Introduction

Among the figures who hold a special place in Islamic thought, the image of Khidr (peace be upon him) occupies a distinct position. He is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an in Surah al-Kahf, verses 60–82. There, through three episodes with Moses (peace be upon him), it is revealed that Khidr is a possessor of divine knowledge and has been granted special knowledge — 'ilm ladunni' — by Allah. Khidr's views on life, his approach to human destiny, and his actions rooted in divine wisdom have had a strong impact on literary thought. Therefore, for centuries, he has been depicted in folk oral tradition, classical poetry, modern prose, and drama as a symbolic guide, a sign of eternity, and a knower of lost truths.

Khidr (peace be upon him) is not mentioned directly by name in the Qur'an but rather described through his qualities. He journeys with Moses (peace be upon him) and performs three mysterious actions: he damages a boat, kills a boy, and repairs a collapsing wall. Though each act appears strange and incomprehensible to Moses,



each is in fact based on divine wisdom. Here, Khidr appears as a possessor of the special knowledge granted by Allah — ‘ilm ladunni’ (Qur’an, al-Kahf, 18:65–82). His statement, “What I am doing is not of my own accord, but by the command of my Lord,” introduces him as a divine agent guided through revelation. In Islamic commentaries (such as those by al-Tabari, al-Qurtubi, and Ibn Kathir), there are different opinions about whether Khidr was a prophet. Most scholars view him not as a prophet but as a saint (wali) endowed with divine knowledge. According to many narratives, Khidr is alive and appears from time to time, guiding those who have lost their way and providing water to travelers in the wilderness.

In Uzbek classical literature, the image of Khidr carries deep symbolic meaning. He is portrayed as a source of life-giving enlightenment, a symbol of eternity, and a saintly guide. For example, in Alisher Navoi’s *Hayrat ul-abror* (The Wonder of the Righteous), Khidr is mentioned as a symbol of divine spirituality. In epics such as *Saddi Iskandariy* and *Farhod and Shirin*, he is depicted primarily as the immortal being who discovered the water of life (obi hayot) [3].

In many of Navoi’s ghazals, lines such as:

"My heart is lost, O Khidr, come, lead me back to the path!

I need you, O guide of the road!"

portray Khidr as a spiritual savior, a helper to one who cannot find their way within their soul. Classical literature often presents a dual figure of Khidr and Ilyas: one travels the earth, the other the sea; one shows the path of life, the other the realm of the spirit.

Among the people, numerous legends, tales, and epics have formed about Khidr. One of the most famous is the tale “The Young Man Who Sought the Water of Life.” In it, the protagonist overcomes long and dangerous journeys, meets Khidr, and finds the water of life. In such folk versions, Khidr appears more as a tester and teacher of spiritual trials. Even today, in Uzbek popular belief, when someone unexpectedly receives help, they say, “He came like Khidr,” or “Khidr helped him.” Additionally, there is a widespread folk belief that Khidr appears on Fridays, especially on the Night of Bara’at (Shab-i Barat), to any powerful person. In some regions, such as Bukhara and Qashqadarya, there are springs, trees, and shrines associated with his name.

In modern Uzbek literature, Khidr is approached not as a historical or legendary figure but as a symbolic psychological character. In the prose and dramatic works



of writers such as Erkin Vohidov, Aziz Qayumov, Muhammad Ali, and Said Ahmad, Khidr symbolizes the divine energy and inner spiritual awakening needed for a person to understand themselves and find their path in life.

In particular, in the poetry of Erkin Vohidov, the image of Khidr symbolizes not only sublimity and spirituality but also the nation's attempt to find a lost path. His patience, the wisdom in his eyes, and his calm voice artistically express the lost tranquility in today's uncertain times [4].

The image of Khidr (peace be upon him) in Uzbek literary thought has developed as a multi-layered symbol in terms of both stages and ideas. Starting with his depiction in the Qur'an as the possessor of 'ilm ladunni,' he gradually transformed in literature into a symbol necessary for a person's conscious search, spiritual awakening, and discovery of a moral path in life. This multifaceted nature means that each era has interpreted Khidr according to its own aesthetic, philosophical, and spiritual needs.

In literary studies, Khidr is often interpreted as a "metaphysical guide" — an invisible but spiritually transformative force in a person's life. He does not know only external reality but understands inner truth, makes wise rather than merely rational decisions, and comprehends fate and destiny beyond human intellect [5].

Modern literature emphasizes this philosophical layer. For example, in the works of Muhammad Ali or O'tkir Hoshimov, the image of Khidr appears at turning points in life, manifesting in the imagination of a person who has lost inner peace, guiding them to find their way through inner monologues. Here, Khidr's artistic power is not as an event but as an illuminating consciousness restoring lost spiritual balance. This approach is similar to the Western concept of the "archetype": Khidr is the inner sage living within every person, the starting point of spiritual awakening.

The many literary interpretations of Khidr closely link him with the concepts of path and loss. This is especially evident in classical Sufi literature. In the poetry of thinkers such as Jami, Attar, and Navoi, Khidr appears as a guide to a dervish lost in the desert, emerging when there is a danger of straying from the spiritual path — an elusive yet guiding force.

In modern fiction, this symbolic layer is expanded and interpreted in the context of societies that have lost their way or forgotten their purpose. For example, in some stories by Erkin A'zam, characters who are lonely recall or imagine ambiguous,



spiritually salvific figures resembling Khidr. This shows that Khidr has become a stable universal spiritual savior, not just a religious figure.

In folk oral tradition, Khidr often appears at the center of the struggle between good and evil, truth and falsehood. He is portrayed as a figure who warns those at risk of going astray and tests them. In some folk tales, Khidr wanders among people disguised as a beggar or traveler, testing their character and revealing himself only to the pure of heart. Through these stories, Khidr shines in popular consciousness as a measure of inner purity and a guardian of folk moral values.

At the same time, this image exists in folk belief as timeless and placeless. People say, “He arrived like Khidr,” “I met Khidr,” or “Khidr appeared in the blink of an eye,” expressing him as a force of goodness that can appear at any moment. This spiritual and artistic power has turned Khidr into a dynamic image adapted to the spirit of evolving times in the popular consciousness.

The artistic formation of Khidr’s image in the people’s mind has expanded from his primary Qur’anic role as a possessor of knowledge and wisdom to encompass life tests, an inner compass, and a miraculous savior. In popular imagination, Khidr is not a chance helper but a supreme knower who understands causes and consequences through Allah’s knowledge. On this basis, in Uzbek folk creativity, Khidr is interpreted as a just judge, a keyholder to the secrets of creation, and a savior from spiritual crises. This approach has gained high symbolic power across various literary genres.

In modern Uzbek literature’s intersection with the performing arts, Khidr’s dramatic significance is especially noteworthy. For example, in the internal drama of works like G’afur G’ulom’s *Yodgor* and Tog’ay Murod’s *Ot kishnagan oqshom* (The Night the Horse Neighed), while Khidr is not directly mentioned, the symbols of moral trial, mental awakening, and miraculous resolution evoke Khidr’s spiritual essence. This leads to the emergence of characters in stage works who embody Khidr’s essence rather than Khidr himself.

In Islamic sources, Khidr (peace be upon him) is described as a possessor of divine knowledge and wisdom, a knower of Allah’s hidden secrets. In Uzbek classical poetry, he is a symbol of enlightenment and eternity; in folk oral tradition, a guiding saint and protector of goodness; in modern literature, he is reinterpreted as spiritual awakening, inner light, and the power of consciousness and reflection. The artistic expression of Khidr’s image in every era has developed in harmony with the spirit



of the times, the people's imagination, and humanity's spiritual quests, remaining a relevant symbolic figure in contemporary literary thought.

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