

# The Queen Of Uzbek Theatre

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**Received:** 24 September 2025; **Accepted:** 16 October 2025; **Published:** 21 November 2025

**Abstract:** By the mid-20th century, women in Uzbekistan had undergone their own stages of development in the field of arts. During this period, many women participated in creating stage works for adults and children that could serve as examples, as well as in dramaturgy and the art of acting. These women made a major contribution to the preservation and development of art through their creative works and theatrical performances, and through their active roles in education and upbringing processes they significantly contributed to the development of our national culture. This article historically highlights the life and work of Ma'suma Qoriyeva, one of the women active in the arts in Uzbekistan, and the aspects of her legacy that can serve as an example for today's women.

**Keywords:** Art, women, theatre, dramaturgy, acting, education and upbringing, national culture.

**Introduction:** By the twentieth century, numerous female writers, poets, dancers, and actresses working in the field of art in Uzbekistan had demonstrated their talents. Their works played a significant role in enriching the culture of Uzbekistan and securing its place in world art. Women engaged in the arts in Uzbekistan also actively participated in educating future generations. They served as teachers in various art schools, imparting not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills. Through their pedagogical activities, these women contributed to the development of the arts. We cannot deny that there were serious social and political issues in Uzbekistan during the twentieth century. In the midst of these transformations and challenges, women used art as a platform to address social issues and promote ideas of justice and equality. Their contributions were not limited to the arts; they also worked tirelessly for the advancement of national culture. The achievements of Uzbek women in the arts continue to serve as a powerful source of inspiration for future generations. After many years of displacement, the founder of modern Uzbek theatre, director Mannon Uyg'ur, recognized Ma'suma Qoriyeva's talent and invited her to join the theatre. Ma'suma was an actress of pure

heart, whose artistic spirit seemed to soar skyward whenever she appeared on stage.

The tragedies of the period of repression—during which hundreds of intellectuals were persecuted and thousands of families suffered—did not spare the household into which Ma'suma became a bride. Who was Ma'suma Qoriyeva? According to historical sources, Abdulhamid Cho'lpon referred to her as the "Queen of Uzbek Theatre," and she is regarded as one of the first Uzbek actresses to perform on the national stage. Unfortunately, her life was marked by numerous hardships and tribulations. Historical records indicate that Ma'suma's father-in-law, Abduvohid qori Abdurauf qori o'g'li, was one of the prominent scholars and religious leaders of Turkestan. He served as the head of the societies "Sho'royi Islomiya" and "Mahkamai Islomiya," and played a key role in the return of the sacred relic—the Uthman Qur'an—after it had been taken to Ufa by the occupying forces. He is also recognized as one of the active representatives of the Jadid reformist movement.

## METHODOLOGY

At present, the creativity and activities of women in the history of Uzbek theatre are being studied by numerous researchers and historians. In particular, the works and

contributions of women active in theatre during that period have been discussed in monographs and scholarly articles on the history of Uzbek theatre [1, pp.1–2]. Additionally, this article employs information from Toshpo'lot Tursunboyev's "The History of Uzbek Theatre in the 20th Century" and T. Jalolov's "Uzbek Poetesses," Volume 1.

## RESULTS

One of the leading figures in the development of Uzbek theatre art was Ma'suma Qoriyeva (1902–1946), who was born into an educated family in Tashkent. Her birth name was Sa'diya Nizomiddinova. Although she was ethnically Tatar, she grew up among Uzbeks. In 1916, the 15-year-old Ma'suma Qoriyeva attended a performance of "Layli and Majnun" staged by a troupe visiting from Baku. One of the actors in this troupe was Bosit Qoriyev, who later became her husband [2, pp.3–4]. This performance awakened in Ma'suma a deep passion for art, leading her gradually into the world of theatre. She first gained recognition by participating in amateur theatre groups. Noticing her talent, the Turon troupe invited her to join them in 1919. Owing to her strong passion and dedication to the arts, Ma'suma Qoriyeva soon achieved success in her career [3, pp.172–173]. Ma'suma performed roles in both dramatic and musical-dramatic productions. Together with Abror Hidoyatov, she played Halima ("Halima"), Layli ("Layli and Majnun"), and Shirin ("Farhod and Shirin"). Her performance in "Halima" was especially significant, as it was one of the first major female roles portrayed on the Uzbek stage by a woman, earning her widespread admiration. She became the leading performer of women's roles in dramatic productions, largely because there were no other actresses in the troupe with her talent and skill. Therefore, until the actresses studying in the Moscow studio returned, Ma'suma Qoriyeva performed virtually all leading female roles. From 1928, after passing the stage to younger actresses such as Tursunoy Saidazimova and Sora Eshonturayeva, she continued to portray leading roles. Some of these included Adelma in "Turandot," Malika in "In the Village of Qozibuloq," Gertrude in "Hamlet," Emilia in "Othello," Kseniya in "My Friend," Varvara in "Yegar Boylichyov," and Xojar in "Kholiskhon."

In every respect, she was a woman of great spirit—knowledgeable, principled, selfless, and compassionate, much like her husband, Bosit Qoriyev. However, tragedy struck when her husband was executed. To protect her two sons from slander and persecution, she sent them to the front during World War II. After the war, she went to Moscow seeking justice, appealing to every possible institution, but her pleas were not heard. To make matters worse, she

learned that both of her sons had died in the war. These devastating losses deeply affected her, and Ma'suma Qoriyeva passed away in Moscow [3, pp.173–174].

Ma'suma Qoriyeva's husband, Bosit Qoriyev, served as the Head of the Arts Department under the Ministry of Culture, while their middle son, Bois Qoriyev—known by his literary pseudonym Oltay—was a "reformist" poet and a responsible official within the Ministry of Education. However, as a result of the repressive policies of the totalitarian regime, the poet Oltay was arrested and sentenced to ten years of exile. Shortly thereafter, the elderly Abduvohid qori and Bosit Qoriyev were also imprisoned. As a relative of those labeled as "enemies of the people," the actress Ma'suma Qoriyeva was socially ostracized, deprived of artistic opportunities, and her creative potential was effectively stifled. When the Second World War broke out, the government announced a general amnesty for prisoners, promising that accusations would be lifted from anyone who voluntarily joined the front and demonstrated valor. Ma'suma Qoriyeva's sons—Botir and Shavkat, two young men who had long endured social humiliation and moral pressure—volunteered to join the war effort. In 1938, Ma'suma's father-in-law and husband were executed, and during the war her two sons were killed in the fight against fascism. Although the war eventually ended, Ma'suma received no news about her children. The grieving mother traveled to Moscow in search of information, where she discovered that both of her sons had died in combat. Later records reveal that Shavkat Qoriyev was awarded the Order of the Red Banner for bravery, while Botir Qoriyev was decorated with the Order of the Red Star. Tragically, Ma'suma Qoriyeva remained unaware of these honors during her lifetime. Unable to endure the immeasurable grief of losing her entire family, Ma'suma Qoriyeva passed away in Moscow in 1946. Permission was denied to transport her body either by plane or by train. Ultimately, her remains were cremated, and a small urn containing her ashes was transported to Tashkent. In 2022, the novel "Ma'suma" by the People's Writer of Uzbekistan, Isajon Sulton, was published. The novel masterfully portrays the actress's life, career, and tragic fate. In November 2024, as part of the celebration of the 110th season of the Uzbek National Academic Drama Theatre, the premiere of the drama "The First Swallow" (Ma'suma)—based on Sulton's novel and adapted by Asqar Xolmo'minov and Shahboz Fayzullayev—was staged. The steadfastness and moral courage demonstrated by Ma'suma Qoriyeva serve as a profound educational example for the upbringing of today's younger generation[4, https:].

By the 1930s, M. Qoriyeva had begun to test her talent

and artistic prowess in works such as A. Fayko's *The Man with the Portfolio* (Buvi), N. Pogodin's *My Friend* (Kseniya), and M. Gorky's *Yegor Bulychev and Others* (Varvara). The three markedly different characters in these plays became increasingly refined and vivid through her performances. Reflecting on those years, our beloved artist Sora Eshonturayeva recalled: "I consider M. Qoriyeva my mentor; she played a significant role in my debut on stage. I also relied on her guidance in developing various roles. In *The Man with the Portfolio*, I played the role of Gogo, while Qoriyeva performed the part of my grandmother!". To prepare for the role of Gertrude, Hamlet's mother in Shakespeare's tragedy, the actress devoted many years to practice. She memorized lines meticulously and explored the character in depth. As a result, Gertrude emerged on stage as a passionate yet caring and loving mother, particularly evident in the play's final scenes, where her sense of guilt before her son evokes empathy in the audience. Besides M. Qoriyeva, this role has been performed by many actresses, including her students.

Reflecting on the period when I joined the theater, it was a time of turmoil. News arrived daily about the arrests of acquaintances and relatives. When actors met, they would quietly ask, "Is it peaceful?" Team members were particularly concerned about Mannon Uyghur; when he entered the theater, everyone felt relief and joy, knowing that his comrades had already been imprisoned. We feared that the arrest of the renowned writer, playwright, and theater director Ziyoy Said might affect Mannon Uyghur's fate. His visible sorrow during those times was palpable. Each day, upon entering the theater, we – the younger members – would notice the increasing streaks of gray in his hair and feel our hearts ache. His grief had visibly bent his back, and I even remember having to help him onto the stage one day.

On one occasion, as we were about to start rehearsal, Ma'suma Qoriyeva approached him directly and threw herself into his embrace. We later learned that she was also troubled—her husband, a respected intellectual and leader in a government office, had been taken away during the night. After a brief silence, Mannon Uyghur placed his hand on M. Qoriyeva's shoulder in a gesture of encouragement, signaling her to remain courageous. During those years, even expressing sympathy could be dangerous. We were all aware that actor Muhsin Hamidov had been interrogated for several days simply for sending a note expressing concern about an imprisoned writer. Families of detainees—spouses, children, and even close acquaintances—were placed in precarious situations, often being ostracized. Ma'suma Qoriyeva herself was

subjected to such tragedy. For an artist, being deprived of creative work is one of the harshest misfortunes. Ma'suma Qoriyeva's old sorrows seemed to resurface anew. Now, not only her husband's worries, but also the concerns of her two sons caused her hair to turn gray. On several occasions, we went to her home but could not find her there. Even entering her own house had become unbearable for her, and the residence appeared deserted. Eventually, Ma'suma Qoriyeva brought her bedding and began living at the theater. The theater troupe, hoping that staying busy with work would ease her grief, entrusted her with the affairs of the labor union.

The Party organization secretary strongly opposed Ma'suma Qoriyeva becoming the chairperson. However, the theater team stood firm. The combined strength of the majority was palpable. During these difficult years, Ma'suma Qoriyeva, as the local committee chairperson, provided motherly care to the troupe. At a time when artists faced severe hardships, she committed herself to improving their economic conditions. Ma'suma Qoriyeva would procure food wherever she could, pleading if necessary, and ensured that hot meals were provided at the theater daily. During the same years, Sobir Azizov, who had a solid understanding of economics and cared deeply for the actors, served as the theater director. Together, they brought numerous benefits to the troupe. Notably, a large garden on Qorasaroy Street was acquired, and a store supplying food was opened.

A curious incident occurred during those years. Eggs imported from America had arrived, and M. Qoriyeva managed to obtain two sacks of them from somewhere. She then exchanged the eggs for beef, and subsequently traded the beef for live cattle to distribute among the actors. I personally witnessed that, due to Ma'suma Qoriyeva's care and resourcefulness, around twenty cows were tied in the theater courtyard. The distribution process was also interesting. The families of senior members were listed to ensure fairness, and checks were issued accordingly. As a result, nearly twenty actors received cows and calves. Even those who were reluctantly included in the list were provided for; after issuing the checks, Ma'suma Qoriyeva allocated a cow to Azim Aka, a stage worker with many children [5. <https://>].

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Ma'suma Qoriyeva was a strong and admirable woman whose achievements and courage continue to serve as an example for Uzbek women even today. Despite the severe hardships of the Soviet era—including the loss of her husband and both sons—she persisted in her artistic pursuits. At a time when access

to education and participation in theatre for women was extremely difficult, she overcame great obstacles and made significant contributions to national consciousness and the development of the arts. Today, numerous reforms are being implemented to ensure equal educational opportunities for women. For example, the equality of women and men is guaranteed in the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Article 46 clearly states that “Women and men have equal rights.” The Constitution ensures the full range of personal, social, political, cultural, and economic rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [6. <https://>]. It guarantees that no one has the right to infringe upon or restrict these rights. At present, the increasing number of women in high-level positions in Uzbekistan is evidence of this equality. Their success is the result not only of the reforms but also of their dedication, diligence, and intellectual capability.

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