

## **Hospitality Between Tradition and Truth: A Literary Analysis Based on Tohir Malik's *Shaytanat***

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the portrayal of hospitality in literature from socio-cultural and ethical perspectives, focusing on how traditional values are interpreted in the context of modern society. Using the prominent Uzbek author Tohir Malik's novel *Shaytanat* as a case study, it analyzes a wedding scene to reveal how hospitality is expressed, how guests are received, and what hidden motives may lie behind such seemingly generous behavior. The article also compares this with other literary depictions of weddings, emphasizing the transformation of hospitality from a symbol of sincerity into a tool of influence and status. Ultimately, the study calls for preserving the authenticity of hospitality as a marker of human kindness rather than a performance of power or gain.

**Keywords:** Hospitality, tradition, sincerity, power, interest, etiquette, social values

### **Introduction**

Hospitality has long been a defining element of human culture and interaction. In many societies, it represents mutual respect, generosity, and the readiness to serve others with a sincere heart. In Uzbek culture, hospitality is often considered one of the highest expressions of national values. However, it is not always driven purely by affection or moral duty. At times, hospitality may serve economic, political, or reputational interests—blurring the line between genuine generosity and calculated courtesy. Literature, as a reflection of social consciousness, provides a valuable lens through which we can observe these shifts in meaning and intent.

### **The Social Role of Hospitality:**

Traditionally, hosting guests is considered an important social function, strengthening interpersonal bonds and reinforcing community identity. In Uzbek culture, guests are treated with honor; lavish meals and respectful treatment are standard. Yet, in some contexts, hospitality is not rooted in sincerity but rather used as a means of social maneuvering or status elevation.

In Tohir Malik's *Shaytanat*, we find a vivid portrayal of this duality. The wedding hosted by Asadbek, a central character in the novel, serves not only as a cultural ceremony but also as a calculated performance of influence.

### **Depiction of Hospitality in *Shaytanat*:**

The wedding in *Shaytanat* superficially appears to follow tradition. However, the presence of certain guests—figures of questionable repute arriving in white “Volga” cars, individuals seeking favor, and the abundance of voluntary but strategically present attendees—exposes the transactional side of hospitality. The protagonist Zohid, observing the event, quickly realizes the manipulative undercurrents.

"The city's largest restaurant served Asadbek for two days. Everyone from petty gamblers to those in luxury white Volgas were present... Although Zohid had not been invited, he attended out of curiosity, observing from a distance... Most of the guests were there not for celebration, but to be seen by Asadbek, to strengthen ties, or to seek opportunity."

This passage underlines that many participants were motivated by self-interest rather than celebration. The wedding functions as a social stage where loyalty is performed and power dynamics are negotiated.

### Types of Hospitality in Society:

From this case, two distinct types of hospitality emerge:

Sincere Hospitality – Based on genuine affection and respect, where the guest is valued for who they are, not what they represent.

Instrumental Hospitality – Where hosting serves an ulterior motive: prestige, political leverage, or financial advantage.

In Shaytanat, we predominantly observe the latter form. Many guests use the event to affirm allegiance or to gain personal benefit, turning hospitality into a symbolic currency.

### Comparative Literary Perspective:

To enrich the discussion, it is useful to compare Malik's portrayal with Abdulla Qodiriy's depiction of a wedding in *O'tkan Kunlar*, a classic Uzbek novel.

Work	Function of the Wedding	Literary Tone and style	Underlying themes
<i>Shaytanat</i>	Dramatic turning point	Suspenseful, symbolic, ironic	Social decay, corruption, manipulation
<i>O'tkan Kunlar</i>	Romantic and traditional	Aesthetic, lyrical, cultural	Love, heritage, tradition

While Qodiriy's wedding scene celebrates romantic union and traditional beauty, Malik uses the wedding as a narrative device to expose moral ambiguity and socio-political distortion.

### Contemporary Shifts in Hospitality:

In modern times, hospitality has undergone significant transformation. Where it once symbolized sincerity, it now often serves as a tool for social competition or image management. Events like weddings and formal receptions are sometimes more about public display than private sentiment.

Today, hospitality can be categorized as:

Family-oriented – Centered on close relationships and sincerity.

Official/Corporate – Based on diplomacy, business, or political interests.

Prestige-oriented – Luxurious and performative, aimed at social validation.

Such shifts reflect broader changes in society, where appearance and influence often overshadow tradition and sincerity. Hospitality has historically served not just as an expression of individual generosity, but as a cultural code shaping collective identity. In traditional Uzbek society, a guest is regarded as "mehmonga hurmat – Allohga hurmat", implying that serving a guest is a sacred duty. This deep-rooted sentiment reinforces family honor, community solidarity, and interpersonal ethics. However, as social structures shift under the pressures of modernization, urbanization, and globalization, the meaning of hospitality is also evolving.

In *Shaytanat*, this transformation is starkly illustrated. While the form of the celebration adheres to tradition—lavish meals, large crowds, respectful gestures—the intention behind these rituals often lacks sincerity. The wedding becomes an arena where power is displayed, not love; loyalty is negotiated, not celebrated.

### **Hospitality as a Reflection of Social Hierarchy**

The distribution of attention during the wedding scene in *Shaytanat* mirrors the power dynamics embedded in Uzbek society during a time of moral transition. Guests are not treated equally; those with influence or potential benefit to the host receive special regard, while others are mere background. Zohid's character, with his outsider perspective, enables the reader to see through the facade of equality and unity.

Moreover, Asadbek's dominance over the event shows how hospitality becomes an extension of his control. The act of hosting is no longer merely a personal choice but a political gesture. Through food, space, and interaction, the host signals who belongs to his inner circle and who remains on the periphery.

This dramatization underlines a key question in contemporary cultural studies: Can traditional values survive within systems driven by hierarchy and material interest?

### **The Psychology of “Being Seen”**

A subtle but powerful theme in *Shaytanat* is the psychology of social visibility. Many guests attend not to celebrate, but to "be seen" by Asadbek and his network. This reflects a modern behavioral pattern where public presence in influential circles is more valuable than personal relationships.

In this context, hospitality becomes performative: not about making someone feel at home, but about being part of a scene that projects power and belonging. This shift also indicates a loss of intimacy, as the meaning of a "guest" transforms from a trusted visitor to a strategic participant in one's public image.

### **Symbolism and Subtext in the Wedding Scene**

Tohir Malik masterfully employs **symbolism and irony** to emphasize the contrast between appearance and reality in modern hospitality:

**White Volgas:** Once a symbol of prestige, now they silently imply connections to underworld power. Guests in these cars are not honorable elders but potential allies or rivals in Asadbek's network.

**Restless movement and uninvited guests:** Symbolize the erosion of structure and boundaries in social life. Even the sacred nature of a wedding becomes a site of negotiation and tension.

**Zohid's passive observation:** His role is almost like a literary conscience. He represents the few who still perceive hospitality as a moral act, not a transaction.

## Linking Fiction with Reality: Hospitality in Post-Soviet Context

In post-Soviet Uzbek society, especially in the 1990s—the period depicted in *Shaytanat*—there was a rapid shift in moral values due to political change, economic instability, and the rise of informal power networks. Traditional practices like hospitality were not immune. They were often adapted or appropriated by elites to **maintain influence** and **control public perception**.

Malik's work acts as a social critique, warning that when hospitality is reduced to a display of wealth or loyalty, its ethical foundation erodes. This tension remains relevant today, as economic inequality and the pursuit of status continue to reshape cultural norms.

### Conclusion:

Hospitality remains a cornerstone of cultural identity and human connection. However, as illustrated in *Shaytanat*, it can lose its integrity when driven by self-interest rather than sincere values. Literature allows us to critically examine such transformations and serves as a mirror to evolving societal norms. The challenge is to preserve hospitality as a symbol of human warmth rather than allow it to be reduced to a transactional performance.

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