

## **Lost Tradition of Balkanian Drama of the Ottoman Era**

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Academic and 'traditionally' modern histories of drama in the Balkans, when it comes to the safe estimates based on scientific surveys and historical evidences, go back to the late 19th and early 20th century. The Balkan peninsula, however, includes Greece<sup>1</sup>, the motherland of European fine arts and highly sophisticated cultures of medieval Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina among other parts of the Ottoman Empire constitute its boundaries, an 'unscholarly' assertion can be made that the origin and the development of theatrical arts in the region go far beyond the recorded and documented history.

It is obviously true that the modern theatrical performances coincide with and date back to the construction of the modern theatrical auditoriums in the region<sup>2</sup>, the presence of some sort of 'folk drama' (highly arguable term though) is sensed at a much earlier time with the arrival of the Ottoman establishment. Besides, 'dramatic' development of shadow theater through out the region urges us to believe that there was a reasonably mature audience, trained entertainers and somewhat skilled writers of these plots, performed in areas suitable for any other kind of modest theatrical venture as well. The specific technique in shadow theater that helps the puppeteer to move the figures (mainly two dimensional figures) depends entirely on the numbers and locations on the joints on the puppet's body; it is a skill that requires years of training under watchful supervision. Exceptionally sharp reflexes and tough exercises for the swift movement of wrists and fingers also need natural talent and academic rehearsals to bring in to harmony the movements with the background voices. These techniques are serious artistic occupations and without professional insight cannot help in creating illusions and all the characteristic fascinations associated with the shadow theater. To understand the depth of seriousness of the art involved in shadow theater one simply needs to study the similar techniques widely used in present day art theater and children's card theater.

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The origin of shadow theater has a lot to do with the mystic and Sufi cults of India and North Africa. Its mystical roots can be easily located in the ancient drama of the East Asia as well.<sup>3</sup> It seems that there is a historical bond, as established by numerous scholars of theatrical art, between the development of early Asian drama as a divine art form and the evolution of its offshoot, the shadow theater. If this connection is already established as an artistic fact, how the Balkans failed to record the existence of oriental form of drama in its socio-religious-cultural life while the highly evolved form of oriental shadow theater kept on dominating public life for centuries since the invasion of the Ottomans in the 16th century.

The origin of the shadow theater is by no means European. Arguably, it is ancient South Indian art form which traveled through the Arab traders to the Middle East and to the North Africa. With the expansion of the Ottoman empire, it reached the Balkans and prospered for several centuries before fading out in the early twentieth century. It is also a misconception that the shadow theater was mainly confined to 'seraglio' where the ladies of the court and harem could watch it on special occasions. In the Balkans, back in Istanbul as well, there are reports of these shows being held in coffee houses where special staging areas were dedicated to the performances on regular basis. A French traveler Jean de Venot, made an interesting observation during his journey to the Ottoman Turkey in mid-seventeenth century. He observed, firstly, that these shows were a regular feature of entertainment in coffee houses of many *mehallas* and, secondly, that most of the artists associated with the performances of the shadow theater were actually Jews working under Muslim patronage. This opens up an entirely new horizon of research in front of us. Since the Balkans was among the major seats of the Jewish immigrants after the Spanish inquisition, this art among others as trade in their hands could have had limitless possibilities. The Jewish community is considered by every single Ottoman account as the most skilled experts in all sorts of arts and trade with natural bend of mind to improvise and innovate. The argument, thus, can always be launched that if there was a Jewish interest involved in the development of the shadow theater, there had to be a reasonable theatrical activity as a logical consequence of it in the Balkans as well, the way it was in Turkey or in the mother lands of the shadow theater, the Sub-continent, China and Egypt.

The thrill of the shadow theater had captured all rank and file. According to Dragoslav Antinovic, the most celebrated critic of the shadow theater in the Balkans, these shows were performed in all the major countries of the Medieval South East Europe (the Ottoman, Rumeli), all the way from Greece to Bosnia Herzegovina. South Danubian region of Serbia and the cities like Skopje, Sarajevo, Belgrade from early seventeenth century had been the centres of this theater and continued witnessing its popular growth until the end of the 19th century.<sup>4</sup>

It is however interesting, though pretty much Balkanian in social attitude, that the writers of the plots of these shows, directors, troupes, names of the actors, nothing has survived the trial of time. If such a developed and popular art like shadow theater failed to preserve names of its promoters, early drama had even lesser a chance. Even Croatia, a nation which has serious claims over developed theatrical art in the 16th century, has a very few names and handful of the works available to establish that there was a considerable theatrical activity.<sup>5</sup>

Nations, aware of their cultural features maintain distinctions. They keep their coming generations informed of those great men and women of the past whose intellectual commitment, spiritual power of creativity and imaginative versatility help in defining people their own truth of existence. Apart from a few exceptions in the Balkans, the concept of nationhood and the idea of spiritual-cultural heritage remains mainly political eyewash. It is easier to trace out the names of political spearheads, feudal lords and politically ambitious warriors beyond 19th century but names of secular philosophers<sup>6</sup>, academics, litterateurs, artists, actors, sportsmen and entertainers are hardly registered by history books in the region. When history as seen by those who live through it both as its subject and object becomes an academic rarity the abundance of political jargon in the name of history prevails. It is, as a matter of fact, not just an art form or a particular genre that we loose, we loose the entire social attitude that nurtures it. Political jargon do not construct the social mind set; consequently, the socio-cultural-psychological experience is lost and the true social features, psychological complexion of a nation can never be determined and systematized. Out of necessity, to find some direction in cultural life, the coming generations have to consult pseudo historical sources which until recently have been power oriented. Deprived of deep critical survey of its developed arts, or at least

at the attempts to mark their initial evolutionary process, communities are forced to take refuge in their elementary folklore and occasionally affiliate with some other grand cultural happening in their neighbourhoods. It is not without reason that we find unprecedented growth in the number of web-sites appearing on regular basis to establish that the Balkans also had (even if partially) experience and influence of Western European Renaissance. The art critics are putting their best efforts in proving the 'fact' with evidence in sculptural design and architectural pattern the possible Renaissance in Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia and elsewhere.

'The Balkan spirit' is, on the other hand, a grand continuity. It remains unhampered by the ages long historical adventurism of the political super-powers, dominating foreign cultural strains and all sorts of alien religious or secular ideologies. It is possible even today, despite all the effortless globalization, to mark in the air something distinctively, rustically genuine and a particular kind of fluency in the bearing, a specific kind of comport (for instance in Bosnia Herzegovina) which makes us believe that we are away from the Orient and even farther from the land of the western boundaries of Europe. This spirit reflects in every walk of life. From politics to trade, from fine arts to folk and from social ideologies to religious creeds we can use without any discomfort the term, 'Balkanian' to describe a set of social-psychological attitude which is evidently original, charmingly rustic and fearsomely intense.

The layers of perception are blurring though. It is easier to divide regions in the Balkans (an ideal example is the nations of the former Yugoslavia) in the name of 'ill-defined' term, ethnicity. However deep down, the roots of these ethnic groups in the form of their languages, folk cultures, basic food habits, granary houses, farming tools, housing scheme, dressing manner, remain 'forensically' entangled. The chaotic history of the region has left few traces to locate the truth behind every claim but the rich oral tradition dating back to 15<sup>th</sup> century and the intensity of expression reflected through body gestures give us some insight into the nature of social happenings of the last six centuries. These intense body movements helped in evolving remarkably unique features of folk dances in the region and with the arrival of the twentieth century art schools and academies it evolved into present day sophisticated tradition of ballet throughout the region. Bulgaria and Serbia, for instance, are among the most celebrated,

admired ‘dancing nations’ in Europe. Obviously their neighboring countries, Bosnia Herzegovina and Croatia cannot be considered lagging far behind as the potential in terms of growth in this art remains pretty much the same as in any other walk of life.

Take a look at the following passage that appeared in the *New York Times*, on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2009 about the success of the Bulgarian troupe that toured the United States and mesmerized the spectators throughout the country. This passage is also a reference of the impact that the Balkans has on the development of certain arts around the world:

Complex and richly varied, those rhythms are indeed wondrous, as are the stamping line and circle dances, in which the performers, dressed in traditional, colorfully embroidered costumes, hook on to each other’s belts and wend their way across the stage like one giant organism. Just ask Mark Morris<sup>7</sup>: he studied Bulgarian dance when young, and it continues to influence his choreography.<sup>8</sup>

Appreciations, of a similar note, for the world famous Belgrade dance festival have made the city in many ways the dance capital of contemporary Europe. It is only natural to assume that if an art form exists in a certain culture for a considerable period of time, even if in its rudimentary form, it would possibly survive the prangs of time by having roots among the people and evolve in to ‘fine’ arts. Development of dance in the Balkans is an amazing example of natural growth of an art form when it finds its roots among the people. We can find many parallels to this miraculous growth of a particular kind of arts in other cultures of the world as well. Development of dance and folk lore in Ireland and astonishing evolution of Ghazal (classical form of Urdu poetry) in the twentieth century Sub-continent are only but two out of scores of such developments that history has recorded.

One of the most important artistic dance festivals in the world, the Belgrade Dance Festival will showcase an exceptional programme at this year’s, 15th edition.... A total of 15 dance troupes, from Israel, Greece, the Netherlands, China, Norway, Australia, Great Britain, the USA, Denmark, Poland, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Canada, will reveal 24 new choreographic creations at their guest appearances in Belgrade and Novi Sad. Prior to

the Festival, the audiences will be able to see the screening of several films under the slogan The Dance Days at Film Archives (from 24<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> January), numerous workshops, master classes, exhibitions and presentations.

Thanks to the festival, Belgrade has become an important entry in professional biographies of artists who are trendsetters in the world of artistic dance and theatre, as well as a place where new productions are discovered and where both the newcomers and established artists are given the same amount of attention. The contemporary character of the festival's programme has positioned this event on the international map, while, concurrently, the high standards and bold introduction of new forms, choreographic manuscripts and aesthetics have raised the expectations of the audiences and are dictating the challenges in creating content.

What Biljana Milanović has written about the dance phenomenon in the Balkans is actually applicable to many other existing or lost art forms in the region as well. The Balkan history is marked with the political images of 'domination, exploitation and marginalization'. But the inner social truth is more impressive and for many historians devastating since the life of the people of the Balkans is not highly politically charged; they can live in peace infinitely the way they can enter for indeterminate period of time, a senseless war. Until dragged in to a conflict, these people remain self-contained in their poverty or at best in their middle-class modesty. Their dreams are modest and their claims to glory are also within the range of practical life of daily routine. If not needed these people will go on with their lives uninterrupted till eternity but once invoked in the name of some ancient 'not fully/correctly recorded event', it is the hardest thing in the world to bring them back to sanity.

In the investigation of such collective identifications we cannot ignore the interpretative strategies in the Balkans which have, owing to positions of power and cultural ideology drawn on the idea of progress, set up by the West as a norm of objectivity. This essential system of knowledge and stereotyped images has been the subject of

different concepts which were initially inspired by Said's Orientalism and as discourses on the ideology of domination, exploitation and marginalization they represent an interdisciplinary academic genre which more or less overlaps with postcolonial studies of culture.

Briefly, from the Western point of view, the Balkans has been characterized as the 'inner otherness' of Europe where it belongs geographically but is defined by the lack of European values and tradition. It is, actually, an extreme example of the strategy of 'including' and 'excluding' in European value rankings based, according to Hobsbaum, on the psychological mechanism of superiority and inferiority.

Marija Todorova attributes this negative inventing of the Balkans to the Ottoman heritage, and indicates a special rhetorical arsenal of Balkanism, positioning the images of region in a bastard, transitional world between East and West which actually corresponds to attitudes on life at the crossroads or border where Balkan peoples themselves established a sense of identity and importance in the preservation of European values. Therefore Milica Bakić-Hayden claims convincingly that such a perception, blurring the categories of 'East' and 'West', demands a more comprehensive approach appropriate to the region's liminal position.<sup>9</sup>

This is, in a nut-shell, the Balkan crisis. There is an urgent need for this comprehensive approach and the step one towards this approach teaches us to think that it is illogical a proposition to hold a particular kind of regime responsible for this image of the 'bastard', the image that we have always debated and argued infinitely as conquerors or victims of the Balkan saga. I personally think, the Balkan is not a land between East and West. If it is considered East because of the oriental elements in its architecture and food habits, many parts of Italy, France, Germany and Great Britain perhaps have more elements visible today and population wise more numbers to claim this status. In a similar manner, if it is partially considered to be a part of European tradition again because of the

architectural patterns of monasteries and the long lasting trade relations and religious ties, there are areas in India and in Turkey as well where these ties seem to display stronger features than, let's say, back in Bosnia Herzegovina.

The Balkans has definite influences from all around the world but then which part of the world does not have this amazing mosaic of human cultures. We need to shift our emphasis from political jargon to the world as it could have been before specific set of phrases and ideas gained currency. It is only through this 'cultural paleontology' that we can finally become capable of reconstructing a 'grand' structure of our lost past. It is a systematic, piece by piece reconnecting the broken chains which can lead us to rediscover the hidden and the unseen face of our own self. If we start digging, for instance, a hypothetical area called 'epic', we will find enormous material within to reestablish the fact that epics do not evolve in isolation. Where there is an epic, we ought to find drama as well. The great classical cultures of Greek and the Sub-continent bear witness to this claim. The differences between the two art forms are mainly connected to the art of representation. Drama is the art of action while epic is designed around narration. However, if we ever had an opportunity to listen to an Indian, Persian, Greek epic in the traditional ancient style of narration which has survived to our age, we would find ourselves in the midst of an 'action-ridden' world. It can be a one-man show, or sometimes two even three 'men-show' with the help of which these epics are narrated even today. Action is the soul of epical literature as well and narration as an essential ingredient is found in every play of antiquity and Renaissance.

For Aristotle, the difference between epic and dramatic literature centres on their mode of representation: mimesis, in his word. Greek drama is acted; Greek epic is narrated, albeit sometimes narrated with, or as, direct speech, which, for Aristotle and other Greeks, is seen as a kind of impersonation. Greek drama, tragic drama, is also characteristically more unified (more concentrated, in Aristotle's terms), so that, as he puts it (*Poetics* xxvi), 'from any one epic' you can make 'several tragedies'. There are also hints in the *Poetics* of other major points of affinity

and contrast between Greek epic and the tragic drama of Athens. Both forms tend to focus on central individuals. Both tend to centre on conflicts - conflicts between one individual and another or one group and another, or both (or even, arguably, between one individual and him/herself, though this last kind of conflict, in particular, is hardly one of Aristotle's concerns). The scale of epic (we might add) is characteristically grander (though Aristotle never quite spells this out); and epic poetry and tragic drama in their Greek embodiments tend to involve tensions and confrontations between mythological heroes.<sup>10</sup>

This entire article and the crux of the argument deal with only one hypothetical question, if the Balkan cultures could evolve sophisticated form of narrative poetry and shadow theater, why drama does not emerge on this territory before the late nineteenth century? Drama and epic are mainly complementary art forms; epics have been enacted in all the cultures of mankind since the time unknown then why drama and the heroic poems<sup>11</sup> do not go side by side in this region? Perhaps they did go side by side for a very long period of time and the art historians ignored the one considering it only as an offshoot of the heroic poem and despite its long presence in the region the dramatic art slowly starting fading out and by the mid nineteenth century, in the wake of the freedom wars when the need of the heroic poem as war slogan was even more intense, the process of enactment completely stopped.

But did it completely stop? In 2004 uphill Iljaš (around 10 kilometers away, in the suburbs of Sarajevo), I experienced my first ever thrill of 'igranka' (local village festival). Among many other things offered as entertainment to the local crowd, a group of peasants performed a short play about the issues of the town council wherein the actors suggested several funny solutions to the council's head to improve the quality of the work related to collect garbage. It was a play with little action involved but the way these actors used the ongoing real crisis as source for their dark humour was an outstanding feeling of watching theater in its most original and most efficient form. While experiencing it, I was constantly thinking about Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, where a group of peasants performs a play that bypasses many other well equipped and well trained troupes. It is the power of enactment of subtle

wit, the art of presenting tragedy with a streak of comedy and the sense of the grandeur within a performance of the cosmic event which makes and unmakes us that gives drama its real social value. And that was captured by Quince<sup>12</sup> and his peasants with an ease of conduct since they enacted only what they truly felt. A very similar ease of conduct I have witnessed among all the volunteer actors of this country in various villages and towns. I myself run an amateur drama club since 1999 called, Shakespeare Drama Club and every year approximately fifteen to twenty students join the club to perform as volunteers. I cannot recall any other example of the sort; on this earth of charitable deeds and money mantras there are not many young girls and boys that do volunteer work purely for the sake of artistic satisfaction. Drama in the Balkans, with specific emphasis on Bosnia, is in the roots of the cultural life of the people. Since 2004, I have witnessed dozens of street plays performed by many amateur groups both in villages and small towns, comprising of actors of all ages and this makes me believe that wherever social injustice and economic uncertainties haunt people, drama prospers in the streets as a public movement.

Sometimes ago (in the year 2000), while working as a guest professor at Džemal Bijedić University of Mostar, I was introduced to a professor by the name of Dr. Emir Humo. He was by profession a mechanical engineer and a former diplomat. He served the Republic of Yugoslavia and after the independence the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as ambassador to Panama in 1990's. This professor came from the celebrated Humo family of Herzegovina and was direct descendant of the renowned Bosnian poet and scholar of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hamza Humo. His son Amir, joined the department of English as an assistant and I had an opportunity on regular basis to visit the Humos at their residences both in Mostar and in Sarajevo. Professor Humo's apartment, became for a year or so the headquarter for both our 'intellectual discourses' and chess. This apartment was mainly filled with books of all sorts. Professor Humo maintained in his custody several ancient manuscripts, mainly decrees, account books and a few literary works of his ancestors. During one chess session, he showed to me a handwritten invitation card from 1862 from one of his ancestors in Mostar. He did not know himself what the card was about but assumed it to be some sort of a greeting for some important occasion. The ground shivered under my feet, when after some efforts I managed to read the Arabic script of 'Persianized' Turkish. It seemed that many such letter

were send to several nobles and this perhaps was among those additional copies which either was never delivered or was made especially for the archives of the family library. The letter invited 'the recipient' to an 'evening to be remembered till the earth exists' as the noble household was staging a play called *Hamlet*, by 'the noblest of the writers' William Shakespeare. The entire following night I reflected upon in shock and since then every time I introduce Shakespearean drama to my students I share with them my amazement, in which language the play was performed? India, Persia, the Ottomans had already translated many works of Shakespeare, giving the bard an oriental complexion, but could this particular performance be in local language! The first ever Serbian translation (thus Bosnian as well since these languages have as much difference as we have between Urdu and Hindi) of Shakespeare's works dates back to 1890 but this happens to be an official version and the Serbian texts existed for quite sometimes prior to 1890's. Who were the actors, local or a foreign troupe? Costumes, spectacle, stage and hundreds of other things needed for a theatrical performance of a play like *Hamlet* were provided by whom? Life dragged me in the meantime to address other academic issues and after the sudden tragic death of young Humo, Amir; I lost contact with the Humo family. Then one day, I heard Professor Humo passed away as well. The only survivor, Professor Humo's elder son, now lives in Panama. Property and assets are shared by many but the books always, like the books of the private library of my grand uncle Dr. Ebadat Brelvi after his passing away in Lahore, went to schools and colleges in charity. I have tried to contact in the meantime some relatives of the Humo family in Mostar but no one has any accurate account regarding the books. Some are sold, some given to various schools but no one knows where the invitation card lies today. Apart from one poor quality image all is lost. But for the past six years or so, since I have been trying to locate this piece of evidence which Nature threw into my lap and I just let it slip into oblivion, I have come up with enough evidence that in villages and towns of Bosnia some sort of drama, similar to the one we see in *Predstava Hamleta u Mrduši Donjoj* (Bosnian classic, a film from 1980's), has survived well up to our days. We need to document the pattern and specific structural design of the plots of these plays and the way humour and tragedy run side by side should be contrasted with the other more evolved theatrical traditions of the mid twentieth century. This will help us to establish that drama as an oriental-mystical, social art form never stopped playing a major role in the region but it never evolved in to

proper public theater either. We must look for the causes of its failure in emerging in to a profitable product of a systematic institution and the reasons for its survival as an expression of Balkan style, sullen, mystical and bold public protest against illogical socio-political free for all comedy. We need to launch a research project on the lost roots of this drama and we also need to locate the psychological reasons for this form of public 'mysticism' to survive and in turn how it helped the people to survive the life which in the Balkans keep on losing, every now and then, its meaning.

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### ENDNOTES

- 1 There are long withstanding arguments on both sides whether Greece was part of the loosely applied term, the Balkans, as a reference to the countries of the Southeast Europe or not. Greece is widely known as a Balkan country but since the days of the cold war there has been an attempt to draw a line of distinction between the Greeks and the former Yugoslav states, Albania and Bulgaria. The issue is not just geo-political though, it is within the cultural psyche of the Greeks that forces them to see themselves as a nation state (as contrast to the Balkan nations emerging in the medieval times) which happens to be the direct descendants of the Ancient Greeks. Though the similarities are much easier to note, there is 'distaste' among many Greeks for the 'Eastern Romans' leading to lean more towards the Western European views. To a large extent the descendants of Socrates and Plato, find the Balkans as the 'barbarous lands' of the Illyrians and the Dardanians.
- 2 For example the first professional Bulgarian (state repertory theater), the Plodiv Drama theater, founded in 1881; The Sarajevo National Theater founded in 1921; the National Theater Belgrade, built near the demolished site of the Ottoman monument, Stambol Gate, staged its first performance in 1868.

- 3 Justus F. van der Kroef: *The Roots of Javanese Drama: The journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, (1954), pp. 318-327.
- 4 Dragoslav Antonijević, »*Karadoz*«, *Gradska kultura na Balkanu (XV–XIX vek)*, Belgrade 1984 (Balkanološkog instituta SANU, 21) 395–412
- 5 Marin Drzic (1508-1567) for example, is the most celebrated Croatian writer, the only popularly known playwright, of the age with only a handful of the works available to determine his greatness as a serious writer.
- 6 Secular in the sense that the philosopher did not represent some religious institute or clerical ideology.
- 7 Mark Morris is reputed to be the most influential dancer and choreographer of our age (see for more information, <https://markmorrisdancegroup.org/the-dance-group/mark-morris>)
- 8 Claudia La Rocco, *All Bulgaria, All the Time, is One Troupe's Watchword*. *The New York Times*, 12.04.2009.
- 9 Biljana Milanović. *The Balkans as a Cultural Symbol in the Serbian Music of the First Half of the Twentieth Century* (<http://www.doiserbia.nb.rs/img/doi/1450-9814/2008/1450-98140808017m.pdf>)
- 10 <https://www.didaskalia.net/issues/vol5no2/silk.html>
- 11 In my opinion an epic is meant to be the scrambled record of nation's political and cultural history. It uses symbolic figures whose psychological potency keeps on dragging them from the verge of evil to the bounds of good. An epic is not just an outer clash between the forces of good and evil; it is the inner battle personified as well. When I look from this particular perspective, I don't see any epic of the Medieval Balkans that fulfills this definition. Good and evil as two distinctive nations (such as in Serbian poems) are deviations from the purpose of the great epical literature. I therefore, prefer to call these 'epics', heroic poems. These have definitive national agenda behind them which is fully justified in the light of the freedom movements about to surface in the region but these cannot be categorised as proper epics. These are not scrambled records, these are part of imaginative history composed or later written by men of national fervour and great literary potential. These poems, unarguably, match in the power of narration great epics of the world and it is this very quality because of which I consider that the scope of enacting these in villages and towns of Medieval Balkans is almost certain.
- 12 The character in *Midsummer Night's Dream* who encourages the peasants to perform the play and becomes its director.

**Abstract**

This article aims at highlighting the lost tradition of Balkanian drama of the Ottoman era, dispelling the misconception that the shadow theater was mainly confined to 'seraglio' where the ladies of the court and harem could watch it on special occasions. The highly evolved form of oriental shadow theater kept on dominating public life for centuries since the invasion of the Ottomans in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the Balkans, back in Istanbul as well, there are reports of these shows being held in coffee houses where special staging areas were dedicated to the performance on regular basis. The thrill of the shadow theater has captured all rank and file. Dragoslav Antinovic, the most celebrated critic of the shadow theater in the Balkans, shared that these shows were performed in all the major countries of the Medieval South East Europe (the Ottoman Rumeli) all the way from Greece to Bosnia Herzegovina. There is a need to look for the causes of its failure in emerging in to a profitable product of a systematic institution and the reasons for its survival as an expression of Balkan style.

**Keywords:** Shadow theater, drama, oriental drama.