
CONFERENCE ARTICLE**Uzbek Folk Oral Tradition (Folklore) As An Art: A Retrospective Analysis****Sadullayeva Farangiz Saparovna**Head of the Department of Academic Activity Coordination, Jizzakh Regional Center for Pedagogical Mastery, Uzbekistan

Abstract: This article examines the historical development of Uzbek folk oral tradition (folklore) from ancient times to the present through a retrospective approach. Particular attention is paid to the main historical stages, genre diversity, epic traditions, regional schools of bakhshi performance, and the master-apprentice tradition. The study also considers contemporary challenges related to the preservation and transmission of folklore heritage in the context of globalization and digital technologies. The findings emphasize the importance of scholarly research, digital preservation, and educational integration of Uzbek folklore for safeguarding national cultural heritage and transmitting it to future generations.

Keywords: Uzbek folklore, folk oral tradition, retrospective analysis, intangible cultural heritage, epic tradition, bakhshi performance, folklore genres, cultural heritage, digital preservation.

Introduction

Folk oral tradition represents a unique creative heritage that has expressed the spiritual and cultural life of the nation throughout the centuries. It embodies the historical consciousness, worldview, moral values, and aesthetic perceptions of the people. As an integral component of the spiritual heritage of the peoples of Central Asia, Uzbek folklore has a history spanning thousands of years, with its roots extending to the ancient civilizations of Sogdiana, Khorezm, and Bactria. The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that, in the context of globalization, the preservation of national oral traditions and their transmission to younger generations have acquired particular importance. In this regard, it is appropriate to analyze the history of Uzbek folklore art in successive stages through a retrospective methodological approach. Such an approach makes it possible to trace not only the folklore examples themselves, but also the processes of their creation, transmission, existence, and transformation within a historical continuum.

The history of the formation of Uzbek folk oral tradition can conventionally be divided into several stages. During the ancient period, from prehistoric times to the eighth century, mythological beliefs, legends, ritual songs associated with magic, and texts related to totemistic beliefs were formed. The earliest layers of heroic epics such as Alpomish and Gorogly, which emerged during this period, were preserved in collective memory for centuries and subsequently enriched and transmitted to the present day. During the medieval period, from the ninth to the eighteenth centuries, folklore genres acquired new meanings under the influence of Islam. Narratives, anecdotes, proverbs, and riddles became widespread, while the art of bakhshi performance developed and the tradition of epic storytelling became established as a coherent creative system [1; 2; 3].

During the modern period, from the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, efforts to record and collect folklore materials began. However, these activities were often descriptive rather than based on systematic scholarly analysis. During the Soviet period (1920–1991), the institutionalization of folklore studies as an academic discipline resulted in the extensive recording and systematic classification of the Alpomish

and Gorogly epic cycles, fairy tales, songs, and ritual folklore. At the same time, due to ideological censorship, many examples containing religious and ritual elements were excluded from scholarly attention and regarded as remnants of the past. Since the years of independence, a new period has emerged, characterized by the restoration of national values, comprehensive reassessment of folklore heritage, and its broader promotion. The art of bakhshi performance, national celebrations, and ritual folklore have received state-level support, while the number of Uzbek cultural elements included in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage framework has continued to increase [1; 2; 4]. This periodization clearly demonstrates that folklore has adapted to the needs of society at every historical stage and has been enriched with new meanings.

From a genre perspective, Uzbek folklore constitutes a rich and diverse system. Prose genres include fairy tales, narratives, legends, and anecdotes; poetic genres include songs, yor-yor, lapar, and alla as lyrical forms; while epics occupy a special position among the epic genres. Ritual folklore—including songs and prayers associated with Navruz, weddings, circumcision ceremonies, and mourning rituals—serves as a reflection of the traditional way of life of the people.

Proverbs, sayings, and riddles represent concise expressions of folk wisdom and possess significant educational value. Alla (lullabies) and children's folklore are among the important genres that introduce individuals into the national system of upbringing from the earliest stages of life. Through them, the mother tongue, national musical intonation, and moral norms are transmitted to children from infancy. Each of these genres performs a specific artistic and aesthetic function and has been transmitted from generation to generation while retaining its educational significance [2; 4; 5; 6].

An examination of the history of the scholarly study of folklore demonstrates that the foundations of Uzbek folklore studies were established in the 1920s and 1930s. During this period, field expeditions were organized and efforts to collect and publish folklore materials were initiated. In the 1940s–1960s, folklore studies became institutionalized as an independent field of scholarship, and substantial research was conducted on epic storytelling, schools of bakhshi performance, and genre typology.

During the 1970s and 1980s, systematic publication of folklore texts and the preparation of multi-volume collections intensified. During the years of independence, folklore studies adopted new methodological approaches, including comparative-typological, ethnolinguistic, and cognitive analysis. Today, the digitization of folklore heritage, the creation of electronic archives, and its study within the framework of international scholarly cooperation have become among the major priorities, particularly because many oral texts are at risk of disappearing together with the older generation of bakhshis and terma performers [1; 2; 6].

The art of epic storytelling can be divided geographically into several major schools. The Khorezm school of bakhshi performance is characterized by a fluent performance style accompanied by the *dutar* and *gijak*; the Surkhandarya–Kashkadarya school is distinguished by a powerful and dramatic performance style accompanied by the *kobyz*; while the Fergana–Tashkent Valley school demonstrates its distinctive character through a tendency toward a lyrical–epic synthesis. Different regional variants of epics such as *Alpomish* and *Kuntugmish*, despite sharing similar plots, differ in the names of characters, the sequence of events, and artistic details. This circumstance necessitates comparative and variantological research. Each school possesses its own repertoire, performance techniques, and musical traditions, and this diversity constitutes an essential part of the overall artistic richness of Uzbek epic storytelling. The transmission of this art through the master–apprentice tradition has been one of the principal factors ensuring its preservation as a living heritage. International festivals of bakhshi performance and scholarly-practical conferences organized today also serve this purpose [1; 3].

At the same time, the rapid development of mass media and digital technologies in contemporary society is transforming the traditional environment in which folklore exists. The decline of live performance spaces, such as village weddings and ritual gatherings, has created a risk that many folklore examples may survive only as archival materials. One of the principal ways to address this problem is to record folklore materials using contemporary audiovisual technologies, establish electronic databases, and integrate these materials into general and higher education curricula. In addition, measures aimed at providing material and moral incentives for the creative activities of bakhshis and terma performers, including granting them the status of “folk master,” may play an important role in transmitting this art to future generations.

International projects implemented within the framework of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage contribute to the recognition of Uzbek folklore at the global level and further strengthen the relationship between national and universal cultural values.

Uzbek folklore shares common historical roots with the folklore of other Turkic peoples, including Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Turkmens, and Karakalpaks. Certain epic plots, such as those associated with *Alpomish*, are widespread among Turkic peoples in forms including *Alpamis* and *Alip-Manash*. At the same time, each people has adapted common plots in accordance with its historical experience, way of life, and natural-geographical environment, creating artistic works with distinct national characteristics. This aspect further increases the scholarly significance of studying Uzbek folklore from a comparative-typological perspective, since such research enables a deeper understanding not only of national but also of regional cultural processes [1; 3; 6].

Conclusion

In conclusion, the history of Uzbek folklore art has undergone a long and complex evolutionary process and has played a decisive role in shaping the spiritual and cultural identity of the people. Retrospective analysis demonstrates that folklore has adapted to the needs of society during every historical period while becoming enriched with new forms and meanings. At present,

the scholarly study of folklore heritage, its preservation through digital technologies, and its transmission to younger generations constitute important conditions for safeguarding the future of national culture.

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