

Bakhshi Performance and Globalization: The Problem of Tradition and Renewal

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Abstract: This article analyzes the processes of transformation and development of traditional epic performance art under the conditions of globalization, using the example of Karakalpak bakhshi performance traditions. The study highlights the historical foundations of bakhshi art, its performance traditions, and its role as a form of cultural heritage. It also examines the positive and negative impacts of globalization on the art of bakhshi performance and provides a scholarly explanation of its adaptation to contemporary conditions. The article emphasizes that bakhshi art is not disappearing; rather, it continues to evolve and develop in new forms.

Keywords: Bakhshi performance, Karakalpak folklore, epic performance, epic storytelling, globalization, intangible cultural heritage, tradition and renewal, improvisation, cultural transformation.

Introduction: Bakhshi performance is a unique form of epic performing art that occupies an important place in the spiritual heritage of the peoples of Central Asia, particularly the Uzbek and Karakalpak peoples. It serves as a significant cultural medium through which the historical memory, national values, customs, traditions, and worldview of the people have been transmitted from generation to generation. For centuries, bakhshis have performed epics that evolved within the folk tradition, combining music and poetry, thereby contributing to the preservation of national identity in the public consciousness.

Karakalpak bakhshi performance is an integral part of the epic traditions of the Turkic peoples and is distinguished by its rich epic heritage, traditions of musical accompaniment, and unique performance style. In particular, the performance of epics accompanied by the dutar, as well as a broad repertoire of works dedicated to heroism, love, and historical events, are among the defining characteristics of this art form [1]. Karakalpak bakhshis are valued not only as performers but also as custodians and promoters of the people's oral history and spiritual wealth. Today, the processes of globalization are exerting a significant influence on the cultural life of peoples around the world. The development of information technologies,

the expansion of mass culture, and the intensification of cultural exchange have brought about certain changes in the content and form of traditional art forms. This situation presents both new opportunities and a number of challenges for the art of bakhshi performance. On the one hand, digital platforms and international festivals have enabled bakhshi performance to reach wider audiences. On the other hand, the preservation of traditional performance styles has become an increasingly important issue. In this context, the present article examines the relationship between tradition and renewal through the example of Karakalpak bakhshi performance. The main objective of the study is to investigate the transformation processes of bakhshi art in the context of globalization, to identify ways of preserving its national characteristics, and to explore its adaptation to contemporary cultural and social demands. Karakalpak bakhshi performance is a unique art form that has developed over centuries within the tradition of epic performance culture, embodying the historical memory, spiritual values, and aesthetic perspectives of the people. This art form is recognized not only as a manifestation of artistic creativity but also as an important element of cultural heritage that reflects the social life, customs, traditions, and worldview of the Karakalpak people. In Karakalpak bakhshi tradition, the

bakhshi simultaneously fulfills the roles of poet, performer, and musician. The performer not only recites the epic text from memory but also employs elements of improvisation during the performance, adapting to the development of events within the narrative. This ensures that each performance is distinctive and unique.

Among the Karakalpak people's epic heritage, such epics as Qirqqiz, Alpamis, Edige, and Sharyar occupy a special place. These works embody universal ideals such as the struggle for freedom, heroism, patriotism, loyalty, and justice [2]. Therefore, epics are significant not only as literary works but also as valuable historical and spiritual sources. The performance traditions of Karakalpak bakhshis are characterized by the following key features, performing epics accompanied by the *dutar* or *qobiz*, reciting and singing epic works from memory with a strong element of improvisation, acquiring professional mastery through the master-apprentice tradition, preserving the traditional methods of oral folk creativity and transmission. These characteristics have enabled Karakalpak bakhshi performance to maintain its authenticity and continuity across generations.

The master-apprentice tradition plays a particularly important role in the continuous development of Karakalpak bakhshi performance. Young bakhshis learn not only the texts of epics from experienced masters but also performance techniques, musical styles, and stage culture. For centuries, this system has ensured the transmission of oral heritage from one generation to another and has contributed significantly to the preservation of the art of bakhshi performance [3]. Thus, the traditional foundations of Karakalpak bakhshi performance are closely connected with the people's rich epic heritage, musical culture, and the master-apprentice school. These factors have played a crucial role in ensuring the survival and continuity of this art form up to the present day. In the twenty-first century, the acceleration of globalization has further strengthened cultural interactions among the peoples of the world. The development of modern information and communication technologies, internet networks, and mass media has created new opportunities for the dissemination of national cultures. This process has also had a significant impact on the art of Karakalpak bakhshi performance, initiating a new stage in its development. Under conditions of globalization, bakhshi performance has expanded beyond its traditional performance environment and has begun to appear within the international cultural arena. As a result, this art form has gained opportunities to reach wider audiences, adopt new creative experiences, and receive recognition as a valuable element of cultural

heritage. The positive impacts of globalization on the art of bakhshi performance can be observed in the following ways, International recognition and promotion. Bakhshi performance is regularly presented at international festivals, conferences, and competitions. This contributes to the global recognition of Karakalpak bakhshis and promotes national culture on an international scale. Expanded audience through digital media. Audio and video recordings of epics are now widely accessible through the internet, television, and social media platforms. Performances that were once intended only for local audiences can now be viewed by people from different countries around the world. Preservation through digital technologies. Modern technologies have significantly expanded opportunities for recording, digitizing, and archiving the repertoires of bakhshis. This plays an important role in preserving examples of oral heritage and transmitting them to future generations [4]. As a result of increasing cultural exchange, the number of scholarly studies devoted to the art of bakhshi performance has grown, and the extent of its international academic exploration continues to expand. Consequently, the place and significance of Karakalpak epic heritage within world culture are being examined in greater depth.

Thus, globalization has become one of the key factors contributing to the popularization, preservation, and international recognition of the art of bakhshi performance. However, this process is also associated with certain negative consequences, which will be discussed in the following sections. Although globalization contributes to the development and wider dissemination of bakhshi performance, several factors have also exerted a negative influence on its traditional forms. In particular, the spread of modern cultural processes and mass culture has led to changes in the historically established performance environment and traditional characteristics of bakhshi art. First, the gradual decline of traditional venues and occasions for performance—such as weddings, folk festivals, gatherings, and various community events—has affected traditional performance practices. In the past, bakhshis would perform epics before large audiences for several hours or even several days. Today, however, such traditional settings are becoming increasingly rare.

As a result, opportunities for the complete and authentic performance of epics are becoming more limited, making it more difficult to preserve the original scope and richness of the tradition. In addition, the growing interest among young people in modern popular music, pop culture, and global musical trends has contributed to a decline in attention toward the art

of bakhshi performance. The increasing popularity of fast-paced and short-form content on digital platforms has reduced audiences' interest in listening to lengthy epic narratives. This situation may pose a certain risk to the continuity of bakhshi traditions in the future. Another important issue is that bakhshi performance is increasingly being adapted into staged and entertainment-oriented formats. Due to time constraints at festivals, competitions, and concert programs, shortened versions of epics are often performed. As a result, some of the essential characteristics of bakhshi art—such as natural improvisation, creative freedom, and direct interaction with the audience—are gradually diminishing [4]. In some cases, greater emphasis is placed on visual presentation and entertainment value than on the artistic content of the performance itself.

Furthermore, under the influence of mass culture, some bakhshis have begun to address contemporary themes in their repertoires rather than focusing exclusively on traditional epics. However, under the conditions of globalization, Karakalpak bakhshi performance is not moving toward complete disappearance; rather, it is undergoing a process of adaptation and transformation. This process can be understood as the harmonization of a traditional cultural form with contemporary realities. As a result, bakhshi performance is adopting new means of expression and new performance formats while preserving its essential character.

Today, some bakhshis actively utilize modern technical possibilities of stage culture, incorporating contemporary sound, lighting, and presentation techniques into their performances. In particular, the use of microphones, sound amplification systems, professional stage lighting, and studio recordings has improved the quality of epic performances and enabled them to reach wider audiences. This demonstrates that the art of bakhshi performance is adapting to a new technological environment. At the same time, various educational initiatives are being implemented to attract younger generations to this art form. These include, the establishment of specialized schools and creative clubs for young bakhshis, the adaptation of epics into audio and video formats and their dissemination through digital platforms, the continuation of traditional training systems in which master bakhshis pass on the secrets and techniques of performance to their apprentices.

Furthermore, international initiatives aimed at preserving and promoting intangible cultural heritage, particularly those supported by UNESCO, have become increasingly important. This organization implements extensive programs to support traditional art forms in

various countries, document them, and ensure their transmission to future generations. From this perspective, the contemporary changes occurring within the art of bakhshi performance should not be interpreted as signs of its disappearance. Rather, they demonstrate its ability to survive by adapting to new conditions. In other words, while traditional forms of performance are being preserved, they are simultaneously becoming integrated with modern technologies and contemporary cultural environments.

Karakalpak bakhshi performance is undergoing a complex process of transformation in the context of globalization. On the one hand, the traditional performance environment and the oral transmission system are gradually weakening. On the other hand, technological advancement and cultural integration are contributing to the preservation of bakhshi art in new forms. Thus, the future of bakhshi performance depends on maintaining an appropriate balance between tradition and innovation. Preserving its authentic artistic and cultural foundations while adapting to contemporary social and technological realities will be essential for ensuring the continued vitality and development of this unique cultural heritage.

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