

# Historical Roots and Modern Development Trends of The Art of Bakhshi And Epic Storytelling

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**Abstract:** This article provides a scholarly analysis of the stages of formation of the art of bakhshi and epic storytelling, their role in Uzbek oral folk творчество (folklore), and their modern development trends. It also highlights the performance schools of bakhshis, the genre characteristics of epics, and their significance in the upbringing of the younger generation. In addition, the article examines the integration of the art of bakhshi into global cultural processes.

**Keywords:** Bakhshi art, epic storytelling, folklore, epic creativity, bakhshi, oral tradition, national heritage, culture, performance school, epic genre.

**Introduction:** In the centuries-long historical and cultural development of the Karakalpak people, oral творчество (folklore) holds an important place. In particular, the art of bakhshi is a unique phenomenon that embodies the spiritual world, historical memory, and values of the people. Bakhshi art is an invaluable form of творчество that combines poetry, music, and performance mastery. There is abundant evidence in historical sources, as well as in the works of great scholars such as Mahmud Kashgari and Alisher Navoi, that our ancient epics date back to very distant times. As noted, “Eastern music is Eastern philosophy; the place of Eastern music in the world cultural heritage is great.” [1, p. 308] The art of bakhshi is based on the effective use of various forms of oral folklore, wordplay, wit, and proverbs of the people. The captivating melody enchants the listener and makes the epic engaging and interesting. This, in turn, requires great talent, strong skill, an excellent memory, and constant practice from bakhshis. The heritage of our bakhshis is extremely rich and diverse. For example, folk poets were known to memorize more than seventy epics. Considering that each epic may contain ten to fifteen, and even up to twenty thousand lines of poetry, the remarkable memorization ability and performance mastery of folk bakhshis become evident. Epics have been published in various languages, and monuments

have been erected in their honor. In particular, the epic Alpomish has survived to this day and has become part of the world’s cultural heritage and spiritual wealth precisely thanks to the oral art of bakhshis. Bakhshis are recognized not only as performers but also as artists who convey history, traditions, and the spirit of the people. The development of the art of bakhshi among the Karakalpak people, especially after their migration to Central Asia and particularly in the 18th century following their settlement in Khorezm, has been confirmed in the works of scholars. Among the Karakalpaks, performers who sing while playing the dutar are called “bakhshi.” They differ significantly from jirovs in terms of repertoire, melodies, voice, and singing style. [2, p. 92]. The roots of the art of bakhshi trace back to the ancient oral traditions of Turkic peoples. Through the performance of epics, songs, and legends, the life of the people was vividly depicted. When we think of a bakhshi, we often imagine a wise, eloquent, quick-witted elder with a venerable appearance. Today, thanks to the attention given in our country, the art of bakhshi is developing активно: more and more young men, and even girls, are participating in festivals and competitions, performing epics and songs while playing the dutar. Bakhshi art in our country has become a well-established tradition with its own schools and promising future. In recent years,

special emphasis has been placed on deeply understanding national identity, strengthening young people's pride in national values, and presenting to the global community the idea that our homeland is one of the earliest cradles of human civilization. This initiative, actively promoted by the state leadership, deserves recognition.

Bakhshis traditionally perform epics accompanied by instruments such as the dutar or kobyz, passing them down from generation to generation. Historical sources note that bakhshis held a special status in society, and their творчество played a significant role in shaping the public consciousness. The art of bakhshi was formed on the basis of the ancient oral traditions of the peoples of Central Asia, and its roots go back to very distant historical periods. This form of art first emerged in the life of Turkic tribes and developed as an important means of expressing their worldview, customs, and social life. In ancient times, bakhshis were recognized not only as performers but also as wise individuals who preserved legends and history. They conveyed events, heroic deeds, and myths that occurred among the people through songs and epics, passing them down from generation to generation. In this sense, bakhshi art also functioned as a form of oral historical memory. Elements related to shamanism (ancient forms of religious belief) also played an important role in the emergence of bakhshi art. Early bakhshis participated in rituals, influencing people spiritually through songs and melodies. Later, these traditions evolved into an artistic form and developed into the art of epic storytelling. By the medieval period, the art of bakhshi had significantly developed and reached a higher level of совершенство. During this time, major epic works such as "Alpomish" and "Gorogly" were formed and widely disseminated. Bakhshis performed these epics accompanied by national musical instruments such as the dutar and kobyz, creating distinctive schools and performance styles. Regionally, the art of bakhshi was divided into various schools (for example, the Khorezm, Surkhandarya, and Kashkadarya traditions), each distinguished by its unique style of performance, melody, and repertoire. The art of bakhshi, formed through the harmony of ancient beliefs, historical experience, and artistic thinking of the people, is a unique cultural heritage that has developed over centuries and has been preserved to this day. Bakhshi art is characterized by several important features: it is based on oral tradition, meaning that works are performed from memory rather than written texts; it involves improvisation, where the performer enriches events according to their own mastery; it reflects the harmony of music and poetry, as epics are performed with

melody; and it combines historical and artistic elements, where historical events are interpreted in a creative form. Among the most famous epics are "Alpomish" and "Gorogly." In different historical periods, the art of bakhshi developed in various forms. Especially after independence, attention to national values increased, leading to the revival and further development of bakhshi art. Today, bakhshis активно participate in national and international festivals and competitions. To promote the development of bakhshi art, specialized schools and clubs have been established, and young talents are being actively supported. The art of bakhshi serves as an important means of educating the younger generation in the spirit of patriotism, bravery, loyalty, and humanity. The ideas of heroism, friendship, and love reflected in epics have a positive influence on the minds of young people. Moreover, this art form plays a significant role in fostering national identity and preserving cultural heritage. In today's era of globalization, safeguarding national culture and traditions has become one of the most pressing issues. The art of bakhshi and epic storytelling holds a special place in the invaluable spiritual heritage of the Uzbek people. For centuries, this art form has reflected the historical memory, spiritual values, and social life of the people. In the context of globalization, the preservation of young people's national identity, their spiritual resilience, and their respect for cultural values is of great importance. [3:46] The art of bakhshi is not only an aesthetic and artistic phenomenon but also holds significant social and cultural importance. For this reason, its scholarly study and the identification of its development trends are among the key tasks today. The roots of bakhshi art trace back to the oral traditions of ancient Turkic peoples. In its early stages, bakhshis acted not only as performers but also as poets, musicians, and wise leaders of the people. They performed epics from memory, enriched them through improvisation, and expressed the spiritual state of the community. Historical sources note that bakhshis held an important position in society, being recognized as moral and spiritual guides among the people. Epic storytelling is an important form of the epic genre, distinguished by its performance with melody and rhythm. Epics often focus on themes such as heroism, love, patriotism, and social justice. Among the Karakalpak people, epics such as "Alpomish" and "Gorogly" occupy a special place. The distinctive features of these epics include oral transmission from generation to generation, musicality and rhythm, the prominence of epic heroes, and the reflection of national mentality.

In Karakalpak bakhshi art, various regional schools have developed, each differing in performance style and

repertoire. For example, the Karakalpak traditions of bakhshi art are diverse, with each school distinguished by its unique vocal style, instrumental performance, and interpretation of epics. Regarding the educational and spiritual significance of bakhshi art, it serves as an important means of nurturing the younger generation. The values promoted in epics—patriotism, bravery, loyalty, honesty—positively influence the moral development of youth. Furthermore, bakhshi art strengthens national identity, preserves historical memory, and continues the cultural heritage. Today, bakhshi art is entering a new stage of development. With state support, international bakhshi festivals are being organized, young bakhshis are being trained, and scientific research is being conducted. In the context of globalization, the preservation of national cultures has become a pressing issue. Bakhshi art is thus of great importance as a tool for maintaining national identity and promoting cultural diversity. At the same time, a process of integration with contemporary art is also observed. Some bakhshis are combining traditional performance with modern music, creating innovative forms while maintaining the essence of the oral tradition.

Bakhshi and epic storytelling are an invaluable part of the Uzbek people's cultural heritage, with unparalleled historical and contemporary significance. The development of this art, its scholarly study, and its transmission to younger generations are urgent and important tasks. In the future, it is essential to digitize bakhshi art, expand scientific research, and promote it on an international scale.

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