

ORAL FOLKLORE IN UZBEKISTAN :FOCUSING ON NARRATIVE ART

URAZALI TASHMATOV

State Institute of Art and Culture of Uzbekistan

The people inhabiting the present territory of Uzbekistan have their rich folklore, like any other nation on the earth. Dastans are special among the genres of folklore epics in terms of volume and variety of the means of expression. Like other major genres of folk art, they arise on the basis of archaic folklore and ancient national history and incorporate both ancient cultural traditions and the memory of the formation of the people, their spiritual world and historical destinies, their civil, moral and aesthetic ideals. *Dastan* (in Persian داستان), means 'story'. It is the epic folklore and literature of the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Dastans are either folklore or literary interpretations of heroic myths, legends and fairy stories.

Uzbek national dastan has gone a long way of historical development. The epoch of ancient Turkic epic is almost the same era as the period of the Saka and Massagetae. The epic work of Turkic folklore *Alpamysh* could coexist with other epic works of those times, such as *Tamaris* and *Shirak*, *Siyavush*, *Iskander*; today there is only a small part of those epic works left.

Folklorists usually define dastan in several ways:

- Heroic epics (*Alpamysh*, *Yadgar*), whose epic essence is closely related to the patriarchal-tribal relations, with the life and manners of Turkic tribes, which in the distant past were nomadic or semi-nomadic

- martial dastans (*Yusuf and Ahmed, Alibek and Balibek*);
- heroic-romantic dastans (*Lonely Ahmed, cycle Rustam, cycle Gorogly*);
- romantic dastans (*Kuntugmysh, Ravshan, Khorezm dastan*);
- dastans of social medium (*Sahibkyran, Arzigul, Shirin and Shakar*);
- book epics (*Farhad and Shirin, Layla and Majnun, Bahram and Gulandan* etc.).

There are also historical dastans, where themes, images and ideas are related to historical events and historical fiction dastans - *Tulumby* (15th century) *Shaybanikhon* and *Aychinar* (16th century). They describe the fates of individuals who are historical, with real events and facts, for example, the relationship between Shaybanikhon and Babur, Babur's campaign in Afghanistan etc. However, the task of folklore authors is obviously in propagandizing history through fiction.

The repertoire of the leading Bakhshi also includes autobiographical dastans. (*Autobiography* by Eragasha Dzhumanbulbul-oglu, *My Days* by Fazil Yuldash, 'Happy Generation' by Nazar Islam oglu, 'My days are' by Abdulla oglu Nurali and others). In the past every ruler had their own *bakhshi*. For example, Chenghis Khan had Ulugh Zhirchi bakhshi, Tuhtamish had Kamolzoda and Zhakhon Mirza bakhshi, Muhammad Rahimhon II (a Khiva khan) had Riza Bakhshi, Nasrullo, emir of Bukhara, had Ernazar Bakhshi. Bakhshi in the courts of rulers told not only traditional dastans, but also created works praising their rulers. The folklorists distinguish the following bakhshi schools in the territory of Uzbekistan: Bulungur school, Kurgan school, Shakhrizyabs school; Kamay school; Sherabad school; Kharezm school; Karakalpak school.

The most famous representative of *Bulungur school* is Fozil Yuldosh ogli (1872-1955). He performed the following dastans: *Alpomish, Yodgor, Yusuf and Ahmad, Zulfizar, Malikai ayer, Nurali, Murodhon, Shirin and Shakar*

and others, *Mukhammad shoir* who lived in the second half of the 18th century was a teacher of *Yoldosh bulbul* (father of *Fozil Yoldosh ogli*). This school prepared some outstanding bakhshi, such as Chinni shoir, Rakhim bulbul, Zhora, Fozil shoir, Yorlaqab and others.

Ergash Jumanbulbul ogli (1868-1937) and Polkan shoir (1874-1941) are representatives of *Kurgan school*. They performed the following dastans: *Alpamish*, *Yakka Ahmad*, *Oysuluv*, *Kuntugmish*, *The birth of Gorogli*, *Yunus pari*, *Miskol pari*, *Avazkhon*, *Khasankhon* and others.

The bakhshi living in the south of Uzbekistan consider themselves representatives of the Sherabad school. Representatives of this school are Shernazar Beknazar ogli and his apprentices are Mardonkul Avliyokul ogli, Normurod bakhshi, Nurali Boymat ogli, Boriboy Ahmad ogli. Nowadays the representatives of this bakhshi school are safeguarding and continuing the traditions of this school.

The bakhshi performers can be classified according to the manner of performance and use of musical instruments.

Use of musical instruments: *Karakalpak dutar* (Karakalpakistan)

Tar, accordion (bulaman) and *doira* (Khorezm)

Kobiz (Karakalpakistan)

Dombira (all other regions)

The Karakalpak performers of dastans are called *baksy* or *jirau*, depending on their repertoire, use of musical instruments and manner of performance.

Baksy performs to the accompaniment of Karakalpak dutar, singing in traditional voice and performing only dastans of a romantic nature. *Jirau* plays *the kobyz*, sings in throaty voice and performs only heroic dastans.

The dastan performers of Khorezm region accompany on the dutar and bulaman. Transcaucasian tar and Russian accordion became very popular in the middle of the last century in Khorezm region. Nowadays, *the bakhshi*

of Khorezm region use tar, accordion and doira. They sing in traditional voice. Moreover, songs from dastans are very popular in Khorezm region in contrast to other regions and they are used almost everywhere.

The ancient traditions are preserved in all the other regions of Uzbekistan, which means they use archaic musical instruments, such as dombira, and throaty voice.

Dastans are not only an oral performance. The performer must sing it and perform like a theatrical actor. Thus the performer must be talented in many ways. A *bakhshi* (performer of dastans) must know the texts of several dastans and have the following skills:

- play folk instruments;
- narrate in an interesting way;
- sing (often in a radically different way from modern singers with traditional vocals);
- interpret (Bakhshi can narrate the same story in different ways);
- be a poet (compose verses without preparation);
- be an actor and be able to do many other things.

Most often the poetic part of dastans is the main text of the performance in the form of seven to eight syllabus or hendecasyllable poems. In addition to poems *saj* rhythmic or rhymed prose is used in dastans.

Bakhshi usually begins his speech with the tuning of an instrument and playing of short tunes and usually he asks ‘What do you want me to sing?’ in all regions, except Khorezm. Often this question is asked in a singing voice, and only then bakhshi starts performing. The full performance of dastan takes a lot of time and thus bakhshi needs to have a rest: he stops and holds tradition *dumbira tuntarmok* (turn over the dombira). Then bakhshi turns his dombira over and reads a poem:

I took you from the house,
and you are looking for your friend. Now I will turn you
over,
because it is midnight
you have gathered all your friends,
now I need to have a rest. After the rest I will narrate
the rest of the text, now it is time to spread a belbog¹

Then bakhshi takes off his belbog, chapan and goes out. At this point, some of those participants spread belbog in the middle of the room and anyone in the room leaves money as a reward for the excellent performance.

However, in the Khorezm region bakhshi performs the melody ‘Tuyingda kaytsing’ (Let all return to your wedding party). And at this point the listeners reward and thank bakhshi financially.

Folklore expeditions have a great value, safeguarding and protecting dastans. The huge amounts of dastans were recorded during the expedition organised by the Museum of Literature named after Alisher Navai and faculty of philology of Karshi State Pedagogical Institute in 1969. The expedition was led by folklorist M. Muradov and A. Kahharov.

The expedition consisted of more than thirty bakhshi poets - Kadir Bakhshi Rakhimov, Yusuf Utagan-oglu, Tangier Safarov Enchantment Kiyomi-oglu Mamarayim youzbashi, Tashmurada Tourogli, Eshmurada Sherdan-oglu Normurod Poyon-oglu Khushvaktov Mardanakulova, Eshkobila Sash-ogly, Gayima bakhshi, Hayitnazara Alisayd-oglu, Cora and Chora Umirova, Hazratnula bakhshi, Rajab Normurod-oglu Khushvaktov Satarova, Kuzya Ruzieva, the last person having recorded more than a dozen original folk dastans, which had not been previously recorded.

Great attention is paid to the safeguarding and protection of dastans in

the period of independence. There is the *National Bakhshi of Uzbekistan* award and very famous representatives of narrative art are awarded. Moreover, the most talented young dastan performers are awarded with the *Nikhol* award.

The department of folklore teaches the skills of playing musical instruments and singing excerpts from dastans in many musical and art schools of Khorezm, Karakalpakstan, Surhandarya. The adoption of the State Programme for protection, safeguarding and use of the intangible cultural heritage opens up new horizons in the safeguarding of all kinds of folk art.

The State Programme supports the publication of the masterpieces of Uzbek folklore. The largest part of this edition must consist of dastans.



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