

THE CURRENT STATE OF TEACHING FOLKLORIC WORKS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

This article analyzes the current state of teaching folkloric works in higher education institutions, with a focus on existing pedagogical approaches and the challenges encountered in practice. In particular, it examines the role of oral folk literature in academic curricula, the application of innovative teaching methods in conveying such materials to students, and the means of enhancing educational effectiveness. Additionally, the article highlights the educational significance of folklore materials in shaping national identity and spiritual values. Based on the analysis, recommendations and proposals are offered to improve the quality of folklore instruction in the higher education system.

Keywords: Folklore, higher education, oral folk art, teaching methodology, learning process, cultural heritage, student, national identity, spiritual education.

Introduction

In New Uzbekistan, where extensive efforts are being undertaken to promote and study spiritual values on a large scale, there has been a firm commitment to the in-depth exploration of oral artistic folk literature, systematic collection and archiving of previously undocumented folkloric works, and comprehensive scholarly investigation of folk creativity as a treasure of artistic thought. Presidential Decree No. PQ-3990 dated November 1, 2018, “On Holding the International Festival of Bakhshi Art,” Decree No. PQ-4320 dated May 14, 2019, “On Measures for the Further Development of Bakhshi Art,” and Decree No. PQ-5070 dated April 10, 2021, “On Additional Measures to Prepare for the Second International Festival of Bakhshi Art and to Create Favorable Conditions for Its Advancement,” along with relevant resolutions from the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan—such as Resolution No. 304 dated April 24, 2018, “On Further Development and

Improvement of the Art of Bakhshi and Epic Performance,” and Resolution No. 228 dated April 21, 2021, “On Amendments to the Regulation on Holding the International Festival of Bakhshi Art”—collectively represent a legal and policy framework aimed at fully developing oral artistic folklore. These documents also emphasize the importance of nurturing young talent in this field. As a result, significant opportunities have been created for the wide-scale promotion of noble values reflected in the traditions of folklore.

In our country, scientific and creative efforts in the collection, publication, and scholarly study of folklore works have reached international standards. As a result, there has emerged an urgent need to synthesize these achievements and develop a new generation of textbooks, manuals, and educational complexes dedicated to Uzbek folklore. Such instructional materials are intended not only to embed the eternal values of our nation's poetic thinking into the consciousness of the younger generation but also to nurture them in the spirit of the noble ideas expressed in Uzbek oral traditions—ideas that have made a worthy contribution to world cultural heritage through their unique artistic power.

Since the very first days of independence, special attention and pride have been directed toward Uzbek customs, traditions, epics, fairy tales, songs, and proverbs—spiritual sources of the nation’s identity, history, and values formed over the centuries. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the spirituality, culture, literature, and historical civilization of the Uzbek people have long served as a cradle of development. The wisdom of our people has flourished through the peaceful lullabies of oral literature, in genres that instill enlightenment in both the young and the old, and in epics that reflect the dreams and aspirations of past and future generations through the image of national heroes.

Every individual, in addition to being a specialist in a particular field, must also be a true child of their nation. In the recent past, it was rare to find an Uzbek bride who did not know a lullaby, a youth who had not heard an epic, or someone who had not lightened the mood with a witty askiya (verbal folk game). The development of human society has found rich expression in diverse images and symbols, flourishing through the artistic brilliance and cleverness of poetic debates and satirical verse. As President Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated during his speech at the ceremony marking the 27th anniversary of Uzbekistan’s independence:



“Relying on the achievements of the independence years, we are confidently moving from national revival to national progress.”

This means that, in today’s era of globalization, it is an undeniable necessity to widely study and apply samples of oral folk literature as a key to preserving and promoting our cultural values. In recent years, we have restored the names of national heroes such as Alpomish, Shiroq, and Tomaris; now, it is our task to elevate these ancient figures in the consciousness, identity, and moral imagination of our people.

The oral verbal art created by the Uzbek people over centuries constitutes an integral part of our national culture. Just as every nation has its own oral literature reflecting its historical ideals, the Uzbek people—possessing a rich history—are also the creators of a vibrant and diverse oral literary heritage.

Uzbek folk oral creativity encompasses a wide range of genres such as legends and myths, proverbs and sayings, blessings and prayers, riddles and songs, anecdotes and maxims, fairy tales and epics—works created by the masses and refined through the performances of talented folk representatives, passed down from generation to generation.

As Uzbekistan embarks on building the foundation of a New Renaissance—the Third Renaissance—the foundations for this process are being defined. In the words of our President,

“Our native land, located at the crossroads of the Great Silk Road, has long been a center of advanced civilization and culture. The rich scientific and cultural heritage of our people, ancient inscriptions carved in stone, invaluable architectural monuments, rare manuscripts, and various antiquities all testify to the deep three-thousand-year-old roots of our statehood.”

The influence of the first two Renaissance periods introduced Islamic and Sufi traditions into both the oral and written forms of literary expression. Elements of Islamic motifs were incorporated into the genre development and aesthetic refinement of folk creativity. Accordingly, oral literary sources—treasuries of artistic elegance and timeless wisdom—also contain vivid reflections of our ancestors’ customs and traditions, morals and ethics, culture and history, national values, socio-political, legal, artistic-philosophical, and religious worldviews.

The works created by the people serve as authentic sources for studying the ancient beliefs and worldview of the Uzbek people. They also provide deep insights into



the advanced ideas expressed in folklore and help illuminate values of universal human significance.

The experience of both ancient and modern literature has shown that folklore, with its essential features, remains a valuable and significant source of inspiration for literary creativity. The deeper Uzbek writers have explored and drawn upon folkloric works, the more the interaction between folklore and written literature has developed and yielded fruitful results. Folklore has served as a powerful creative school for poets and writers, contributing to their ideological and artistic growth as well as stylistic diversity. Folkloric plots and motifs, expressed anew through the craftsmanship of writers, have been refined and incorporated as original works within the domain of written literature.

In recent years, significant reforms have been implemented in Uzbekistan to study folklore, ensure its continuity, and transmit it to future generations. Among these efforts are various festivals dedicated to tourism, culture, and the preservation of cultural heritage. A notable example is the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated May 24, 2018, on the organization and holding of the “Great Silk Road” International Folklore Music Festival. This resolution aims to widely promote and preserve unique examples of cultural and artistic heritage, while also fostering love for folklore among youth and strengthening international friendship and brotherhood.

According to its official statute, the Folklore Music and Art Festival is held biennially. This festival offers a broad platform to present Uzbekistan’s national heritage and identity on the international stage. The organization of competitions in categories such as folk singing, ancient national instrumental music, and dance, along with scientific and creative conferences within the framework of the festival, underscores the crucial importance of folklore development.

The increasing interest in preserving folklore as a form of spiritual wealth and the regular holding of such festivals are giving powerful impetus to the advancement of this field. Moreover, in accordance with the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated November 22, 2018, “On Measures for Organizing the International Festival of Bakhshi Art,” a wide range of initiatives are being carried out. These include in-depth study of the history of bakhshi and doston (epic) performance—leading genres of folklore—systematic collection of

oral traditions, and the cultivation of interest, respect, and love for this artistic form among the younger generation.

Efforts to pass on folkloric works to youth also play an essential role in nurturing their interest in the art of bakhshi performance, and in shaping values such as courage, honesty, respect for national and universal ideals, and devotion to the motherland and ancestral legacy.

The organization of the Bakhshi Art Festival in Surkhandarya region, with participation from foreign countries and solo concerts by master bakhshis, adds substantial momentum to the development of this field. The participation of renowned international folklorists, poets, bakhshi, and jiravs (epic performers) in this festival provides a unique opportunity to conduct comparative analysis and exchange scholarly perspectives.

The inaugural Bakhshi Art Festival, held on April 6, 2019, was a historic event, drawing more than 160 representatives from 74 countries. This marked a significant step in elevating Uzbekistan's position in the global cultural arena and further reinforced the importance of folklore in international academic and artistic dialogue.

This art form is treasured for its deep antiquity. We have all witnessed how, for many years, the bakhshi tradition received little to no support and was often left on the periphery. Yet, bakhshichilik (epic performance) is a unique cultural phenomenon that reflects the historical depth, cultural values, and artistic richness of our nation—it is a distinctive feature that can undoubtedly serve as evidence of our ancient roots to the entire world. For this reason, preserving and transmitting this art form in its entirety to future generations is essential. In line with broader reforms, the organization of this festival has served precisely that purpose. As a result, the bakhshi tradition has begun to experience a revival on a global scale, contributing to greater cultural unity among peoples.

It is well known that many of humanity's most valuable cultural treasures have been preserved primarily through the folklore of each nation. The bakhshi tradition—expressive of a nation's language, lifestyle, customs, and traditions—is a respected part of universal culture. Indeed, bakhshichilik serves as a safeguard of historical memory and national identity. In the face of today's growing threats from mass culture and the negative effects of globalization, it is essential to strengthen and further develop folklore as the nucleus of national culture.



The development of bakhshi art and the deep study of its theoretical foundations serve as a basis for preserving and enhancing national culture. In Uzbekistan, special schools dedicated to bakhshichilik are being established; the revival and advancement of the master-apprentice tradition is being actively pursued. Creative and scholarly activities of bakhshi poets, folklorists, teachers, and specialists are widely supported. Folklore clubs are being organized under cultural centers, opportunities for bakhshi artists are expanding, and their participation is being ensured in weddings, festivals, and cultural events. International cooperation in this field is also being developed, along with platforms for mutual exchange of experience. Moreover, the active promotion of bakhshi art through mass media and communication channels, supported by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, testifies to the high importance assigned to folklore arts in our country. To further develop folklore and expand its influence, the use of digital platforms is recommended—especially for producing audio and video recordings of folk works. Significant initiatives have already been undertaken in this area, such as the wide-scale celebration of the 1,000th anniversary of the Alpomish epic and the installation of its monument, which have provided momentum for further advancement. The establishment of a commemorative square in Samarkand in honor of prominent bakhshi artists and the creation of the honorary title "People's Bakhshi of Uzbekistan" are also among the major milestones in this field.

According to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the establishment of the Republican Center for Bakhshichilik Art and its supporting foundation, a specialized boarding school dedicated to bakhshichilik was established in Termez city (Surkhandarya region), based on the existing School No. 21.

Since the 2020/2021 academic year, the State Institute of Arts and Culture of Uzbekistan has introduced a formal educational program in bakhshichilik and epic performance. A regulation was also adopted regarding the formation and use of funds allocated for the Bakhshi Art Development Foundation. The foundation's main mission is to support the growth of bakhshi art and provide all-around support to bakhshi poets and performers.

One of the most important developments in the study of folklore in Uzbekistan has been the publication of the 100-volume collection titled "Monuments of Uzbek Folk Creativity." Of these, 59 volumes are devoted entirely to Uzbek folk epics.



Furthermore, the publication of the "Karakalpak Folklore Collection" underscores the role of this precious art in strengthening youth's spiritual development and its ongoing relevance.

In parallel, the documentation and scholarly analysis of works performed by bakhshi poets continue regularly. Television programs, albums, and other media productions are being created in support of this work. All of this is the result of a well-grounded and timely cultural policy.

In 2020, Uzbekistan participated for the first time in the International Folklore Festival held in Brazil. The event was organized by the Brazilian Association of Folklore and Popular Arts Festival Organizers (ABrasOFFA), marking a significant step forward in the global recognition of Uzbek folklore.

Research by scholars on folkloric texts demonstrates that Bakhshichilik Art of Uzbekistan has now been officially inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

All of these reforms and achievements indicate that there are extensive opportunities in Uzbekistan for the study and promotion of folklore. One of our key tasks moving forward is to enrich the curriculum for folklore education and to ensure the continuity of this cultural legacy. Thanks to the festivals organized in our country, bakhshichilik can now be promoted internationally through UNESCO. The wide-ranging reforms, innovations, and transformations that have taken place serve as a firm foundation for the continued growth of this ancient and noble art.

In the 21st century, the reforms taking place in the education system require a renewed approach to national spiritual heritage, as well as the modernization of the study and teaching of oral folk literature based on contemporary scientific and methodological foundations. Today, the teaching of folkloric works in higher education institutions is of great importance not only as part of philological knowledge, but also as a powerful tool for moral and aesthetic education and the development of national identity.

Currently, in philology, art studies, and pedagogical disciplines at higher education institutions in Uzbekistan, special attention is being paid to the study of samples of oral folk literature within subjects such as "Folkloristics," "Oral Folk Literature," "Literary Theory," and "History of Literature." During classes, various genres of folklore—including fairy tales, legends, myths, epics, anecdotes, proverbs and

sayings, riddles, and lyrical genres (songs, traditional chants)—are analyzed in depth in terms of their genre characteristics, artistic devices, and ideological and thematic orientation.

The instructional materials currently used in teaching folklore include academic textbooks, monographs, scholarly articles, model curricula, and bibliographies. However, in many higher education institutions, traditional teaching methods still dominate, and the integration of modern pedagogical technologies, innovative approaches, multimedia platforms, and interactive learning sessions remains limited.

The most methodologically active universities promote creative approaches aimed at developing students' analytical skills in examining artistic imagery, national values, customs, and rituals reflected in folklore. For example, regional folklore expeditions, stage performances by student interns, and interactive seminar-trainings are being implemented in some institutions.

Most instructors teaching folklore subjects in higher education institutions hold advanced degrees in philology and pedagogy and are engaged in the production of monographs and scholarly articles on oral folk literature. At the same time, integrative approaches connecting folklore with modernity—such as folklore pedagogy and folklore in intercultural communication—remain underdeveloped. According to surveys conducted among students, there is significant interest in folklore works, particularly in understanding the wisdom, ethical norms, and educational values expressed through epics and fairy tales. Students are developing practical analytical skills through the preparation of course papers, reports, and presentations based on folkloric materials. Nevertheless, a systematic approach to encouraging independent research and providing methodological guidance from academic supervisors has yet to be fully established.

Scientific research in folklore within higher education is most commonly manifested in bachelor's theses, graduation papers, master's dissertations, and doctoral studies. These include systematic analyses of regional folklore, studies on folklore and gender, children's folklore, ritual folklore, and creative works related to seasonal traditions. However, these scholarly works are not yet sufficiently integrated into the practical teaching process, and their findings are not widely disseminated in classroom instruction.

Although a certain structure has been established for teaching folklore in higher education institutions, this system still requires significant improvement in accordance with modern pedagogical standards. This can be achieved through the following measures:

Strengthening the system of teaching folklore subjects using interactive and contemporary methods;

Updating teaching materials and enhancing education through digital resources;

Promoting an approach that considers folkloric works not only as historical texts but also as sources of cultural and moral enlightenment;

Encouraging students' independent research and supporting regional folklore expeditions;

Integrating research findings into practical education.

In conclusion, the teaching of folkloric works in higher education is essential not only for fostering literary knowledge, but also for nurturing national identity, moral development, and aesthetic education.

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