

THE EVOLUTION OF THE DASTAN GENRE IN INDEPENDENCE-ERA KARAKALPAK LYRO-EPIC POETRY: SYNTHESIS OF CLASSICAL TRADITIONS AND MODERN RELIGIOUS-PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This study examines the genre-stylistic evolution of the dastan (epic narrative poem) in post-independence Karakalpak literature, demonstrating how contemporary poets synthesized traditional Eastern khamsa conventions, folkloric epic motifs, and Islamic philosophical aesthetics. Historical literary analysis indicates a major shift in Karakalpak literary scholarship during the 1990s: major lyro-epic works previously labeled as Westernized poems were re-evaluated under the native genre terminology of dastan. Focusing on key works such as A. Otepbergenov's *Allan'di Umitpa! (Do Not Forget Your Allah!)* and *Khamsa* cycle, R. Ernasheva's *Khamsa*, N. Toreshova's *Yalganshi (The Deceiver)*, and I. Yusupov's *Watan Topiragi*, this paper analyzes how independence enabled free artistic expression, autobiographical reflection, and religious-philosophical inquiries into moral accountability, divine justice, and ecological preservation.

Keywords: Karakalpak poetry, dastan genre, lyro-epic poetry, A. Otepbergenov, N. Toreshova, Islamic philosophy, independence-era literature.

Introduction

Karakalpak literature possesses an extraordinarily rich oral epic tradition, counting approximately fifty distinct folk dastans handed down through generations. Works such as *Alpamys* and *Qoblan* survived in multiple regional variants, demonstrating the deep cultural roots of narrative verse in the Karakalpak worldview. This oral heritage served as the foundational bedrock for 19th-century classical poets like Berdaq, whose extensive narrative poems established formal written traditions. Throughout the 20th century, prominent literary figures including A. Dabilov, S. Nurimbetov, and T. Jumamuratov adapted these classical narrative structures to reflect the social dynamics of their respective eras.

However, the theoretical framework applied to long-form Karakalpak verse underwent a major transformation in the post-Soviet era. Under 20th-century Soviet literary dogma, classical narrative works by Berdaq and Abbaz were systematically labeled using the Europeanized term poem. Beginning in the 1990s, Karakalpak literary scholarship initiated a methodological revision, re-establishing the term dastan to analyze these large-scale lyro-epic compositions according to their native genre dynamics and Eastern poetic lineage.

With the onset of national independence, Karakalpak lyro-epic poetry experienced an unprecedented artistic revival. Writers gained the freedom to integrate religious-philosophical concepts, Islamic ethics, and Eastern literary forms previously suppressed by Soviet state



censorship. This paper analyzes the genre-stylistic evolution of the dastan in contemporary Karakalpak poetry, evaluating how post-independence authors synthesized oral folklore structures with modern socio-philosophical inquiries.

Ideological and Structural Renewal in A. Otepbergenov's Allan'di Umitpa!

A pivotal milestone in the post-independence revival of Karakalpak lyro-epic poetry was marked by Abilqasim Otepbergenov's dastan titled Allan'di Umitpa! (Do Not Forget Your Allah!). Composed of 608 stanzas written in ten-line verse structures (masnavi rhyming couplets), the work represents a deliberate structural innovation drawing upon classical Eastern poetic traditions.

Unlike traditional hero-centric epics, Allan'di Umitpa! lacks a linear plot centered around a single heroic figure. Instead, the work is organized around episodic real-life vignettes, autobiographical reflections, historical anecdotes, and philosophical monologues. As noted by the folklorist Q. Maqsetov, Otepbergenov surveys his life from birth to the present, evaluating human morality, social justice, and personal accountability with unfiltered honesty.

Otepbergenov incorporates folkloric motifs of miraculous birth and parental longing—common in traditional epics—converting them into personal spiritual reflections. The narrative shifts dynamically between hospital bed monologues, memories of parental devotion, historical depictions of regional saints (such as Najmetdin Qubra), and philosophical warnings regarding global ecological degradation, including the Aral Sea catastrophe and chemical defoliant usage. By intertwining individual suffering with systemic social critiques, Otepbergenov constructs a multi-layered artistic reality anchored in Islamic spiritual values.

Genre Hybridity: N. Toreshova's Yalganshi as a Dastan-Drama

The post-independence era also witnessed structural experimentation resulting in hybrid genres. A prime example is Nasiyba Toreshova's Yalganshi (The Deceiver), subtitled as a dastan-drama. This work fuses the narrative breadth and symbolic-metaphorical language of the traditional dastan with the dialogue-driven tension and stage-oriented conflict of dramatic theatre.

The central narrative follows Ahmed, an idealistic poet struggling against bureaucratic corruption, literary rivalry, and political suppression across three historical periods: Soviet rule, the Glasnost era, and early National Independence. When Ahmed is stripped of a rightful competition prize and physically assaulted by corrupt literary rivals (Sherbek and Bekqul), his wife Aliyma provides spiritual resilience through her unwavering Islamic faith.

Yalganshi utilizes classical epic techniques such as divine visions (ayan), hyperbolic characterizations, and moral retribution. Aliyma receives spiritual signs predicting eventual justice, while the antagonist Bekqul suffers fatal exposure during a drunken winter blizzard—an event interpreted within the text as divine retribution (qisas). Through the interplay of dramatic dialogue and authorial commentary, Toreshova demonstrates how traditional spiritual paradigms serve as structural mechanisms for resolving modern ethical conflicts.



Comparative Synthesis of Post-Independence Dastans

The post-independence Karakalpak dastan landscape displays diverse artistic approaches while sharing core thematic imperatives:

Author & Title	Genre Classification	Primary Structural & Poetic Innovation	Core Ideological Theme
I. Yusupov Watan Topiragi	Lyro-Epic Poem / Qissa	Classical lyro-epic synthesis with deep patriotic lirism.	Devotion to the native land and ancestral heritage.
A. Otepbergenov Allan'di Umitpa!	Dastan (Part of Khamsa cycle)	10-line stanzas (masnavi style), non-linear episodic plot, autobiographical-philosophical synthesis.	Islamic ethics, moral repentance, environmental and humanistic preservation.
R. Ernasheva Khamsa cycle	Dastan Cycle	Re-activation of Eastern Khamsa tradition focusing on modern psychological-moral dilemmas.	Psychological conflict between true love, marital responsibility, and social duty.
N. Toreshova Yalganshi	Dastan-Drama	Hybridization of theatrical drama and epic verse; use of divine visions (ayan) and authorial commentator.	Victory of spiritual integrity and divine justice over socio-political corruption.

These works collectively demonstrate that modern Karakalpak poets transformed the dastan into a flexible medium capable of processing complex contemporary realities.

Conclusion

The post-independence evolution of the Karakalpak dastan reflects a profound synthesis of traditional national art forms and modern philosophical inquiries. The formal theoretical shift during the 1990s—restoring the native concept of dastan over Soviet-imposed terminology—provided the methodological foundation for poets to explore Eastern classical traditions such as the Khamsa.

Through the groundbreaking works of A. Otepbergenov, N. Toreshova, R. Ernasheva, and their contemporaries, the dastan expanded beyond simple historical narration. By incorporating autobiographical elements, environmental warnings, Islamic moral philosophy, and hybrid dramatic structures, these authors elevated Karakalpak lyro-epic poetry, demonstrating its continuing vitality as a vehicle for national self-awareness and aesthetic innovation.

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