

THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE ORAL TRADITION AND DASTAN AS ELEMENTS OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF CENTRAL ASIA

RUSTAMBEK ABDULLAYEV

The State Conservatory of Uzbekistan

The artistic world of traditional culture of Central Asian peoples is determined by contents that lie in certain historical periods and, at the same time, remain outside history. Contemporary science allows us to study the originality of the art of people in Central Asia, which is important for an objective reconstruction of the general picture of the art's evolution. Historical and social changes cannot be studied without a clear understanding of cultural integrity and the perception of the artistic laws of culture and its context in this or that socio-historical period.

Each civilisation, each social system is characterised by the special way it perceives the environment, which determines the understanding of reality by a society and individual during a long period of time. Exploring the world, man creates ideal models of his environment, reflecting it actively with the purpose of making practical changes to it. As we know, this process is associated with the socio-historical practice and conditioned by the specificity of the man interacting with nature and society. The established system of interpretation, systematisation and generalisation on the cultural level is the unity of objective and subjective experiences, that

is, the synthesis of the spiritual and individual continuum with the cultural and historical one, when the resultant system does not only correct the behaviour of an individual and society through control over the acquisition and preservation of knowledge, but also ensures the transmission of selected models.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Central Asian countries were revising their material and spiritual values, reconsidering historical events and seeking ways to discover the true abilities of a person. A traditional-oriented approach became the key element for the understanding of the changes that had been taking place in the regional culture in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Therefore, the people are seeking to revive the culture - its various genres, styles and performing methods. The word 'tradition' means the tradition that has been transformed influenced by time.

In this respect the artistic heritage or, in a broader sense, the intangible cultural heritage of the Central Asian peoples is highly valuable. The region is the place where for many centuries the perfect art models have been polished and the most effective approaches to the solution of different artistic problems have been tested. The artistic problems consisted in the creation of new images and styles and development of existing genres, when optimal ways of preservation, transmission and changing of initial characteristics of this or that artistic phenomenon were selected and a wider conception of ethnocultural originality and the idea of revival of the national heritage was formed against the background of people's growing self-consciousness.

The 'oral tradition' concept

The question of realisation of the place and role of the traditional art wants special consideration. We regard the traditional culture as a

system of relations connecting a number of different forms, types, genres and traditions, which in combination reflect the integral artistic system of different types of culture (music, dance, applied arts, theatre and others). This conception embraces different functioning spheres of intangible cultural heritage, the basic features of which are the oral art (the element of cultural heritage transmitted orally from memory), variance (the main form of certain art) and collectivity. According to composer I. Stravinsky, 'a real tradition is not a symbol of the past that has disappeared; on the contrary, this is live force vivifying and informing the present.' Hence, intangible cultural heritage is a special sphere of people's spiritual and material life, which forms a stable and understandable system. The heritage's contents reflect in an artistic way a nation's concepts and psychology, forming an unbreakable link with its life.

Intangible cultural heritage (oral poetry, music, dance, theatre, rituals, holidays and applied arts) is the spiritual, philosophic and aesthetic culture traditional for the everyday life of a people, reflecting its mentality; it has formed during the many centuries of collective creativity through oral communication and is embodied in the endless multiplicity of individual and personal variants.

Oral tradition is a broad concept. Contemporary linguistics regard the language of oral communication as the most important aspect, giving it a special place in its systematic descriptions of the linguistic situation. Both the systematic and structural method, which is essential today for a proper analysis of different aspects of traditional culture, and the semiotic approach, which interprets the verbal or musical language as a special variation of a wide range of symbolic systems, are rooted in the structural linguistics, which means that a language is studied as an integral system contributing to a better understanding of the phenomena under study. The oral character

is universally recognised as the main constituting property of people's art opposite to the written culture.

The language of oral tradition is presented as a special, specific language making the bearers of people's epic traditions - the Kyrgyz *manaschi*, Turkmen and Uzbek *bakhshi* and Kazakh and Karakalpak *zhyrau*, - reciting and singing from memory tens and hundreds of thousands of lines of complex poetry absolutely exclusive and possessing unusual capabilities. The same can be said about the bearers of the *makom* artistic traditions, such as *Shashmakom* in the Uzbek and Tajik cultures, *mukam* in the Uygur culture or *mugam* in the Azerbaijani one, who keep in their memories a large number of poetical texts and tunes, rhythms (*usul*), artistic forms and specific culminations at high pitch (*auji*). It means that the performer does not simply learn linear (written) text by heart, which can be observed when the epic tradition is degrading. The performance of the heroic epic *Alpamysh* (*Alpamys*), which nowadays consists in reciting canonised text learnt by heart - the test of the volume of mechanical memory - is a good example, as well as the dastans from the epic *Gorogly* (*Gyorogly*, *Kyorogly*, *Gurugli*), which are narrated today in small fragments following a text from a book.

The live epics and other genres of oral tradition suggest algorithms other than linear texts, which means the texts should be learnt and recited more productively, using the artistic memory of the singer or narrator. The intuitive or conscious mastering of these linear algorithms gives the masters of oral tradition immense opportunities, when they can fold and unfold large epics, such as *Manas*, *Alpamysh*, *Yer targyn* and others, or musical cycles, such as *makom*, *mugam*, instrumental *kyui* or *raga*.

The written texts or music sheets in these large forms of the musical and poetic arts of oral tradition cannot reflect or disclose the inner mechanisms

of their functioning (hence the 'tradition of misunderstanding' of large areas of intangible cultural heritage). The processes of oral tradition are based on the differentiation of various spheres or on the distinguishing of different types of arts, constantly growing in number, when all the branches of intangible cultural heritage are taken into consideration, as well as on the formation of certain styles and types of creative thinking (verbal, musical, poetical, theatrical and so on). This factor influences the formation of its creators, who are the bearers of the tradition.

1. The folk sphere of culture includes people's collective arts (verbal, musical, dancing, the atrical, entertaining and applied arts), links with customs, rituals and holidays or amateur art in an oral tradition.

2. The professional people's art with a rather high oral performing culture (reciting of dastan and makom, vocal and instrumental music, the art of bastakor, cultic and ritual music, performances with the participation of ropewalkers, wits, puppeteers and maskharaboz, and various artistic crafts) - professionals in oral tradition.

3. Amateur activities or amateur movements following the oral and written cultures, which were formed in the 20th century (folk, family, instrumental and makom bands; hobby groups, studies and women's workshops specialising in various crafts, such as embroidery, carpet weaving and others), - that is, organised amateur art, through which artistic ideas returned to people and then came back again in an oral form (for instance, centres for culture and recreation in Uzbekistan). The same can be said about artistic crafts, which demonstrate certain transformation and change of the former principles of craft production on the basis of the new socio-economic and ideological conditions, uniting masters into artels. In the past, when artistic crafts were developing naturally and actively, the masters' items satisfied completely the local people's demand for household and ritual articles;

however, today they are kitch and mass consumption goods.

The oral folk sphere of the traditional culture becomes the basis for the appearance and development of most of the original forms, types and genres of intangible cultural heritage, which can be seen in the art of folk singers and musicians, masters in epic and makom art, virtuoso instrumentalists and craftsmen. The socio-cultural stratigraphy of contemporary musical environment becomes highly mobile. On the one hand, the degradation of the professional oral art, when it returned to the folk area of culture or to the amateur art; on the other hand, professional musicians working with written material try to come to the norms of oral music following the canons of the traditional culture (for instance, folk bands under professional artistic organisations). Hence the two types of activity: the first one is anonymous, impersonal folk art; the second type is personal art. This classification demonstrates the most natural succession of signs of oral tradition: social conditions - psychological realisation - artistic result. The moment of realisation is a crucial link in this chain. The artistic level only gives the final fixation of the result, which is an object of cultural heritage.

This sphere connected with the musical art would synthetise the best achievements in all are as of musical practice. It was the sphere where different types of performing music formed (solo and group music playing) and various artistic methods of understanding the reality - the traditional language and style - appeared. The diversity of genres and types in this system is connected with both cyclic works and separate ones, which took into account the social, ethical and psychological guidelines, criteria of values and norms of the consumers of this sphere of the performing culture. At the same time the people's professional musical art originates from the canons and norms of the guilds of musicians, mourners and

narrators within the structure of corporations of urban workshops, which performed the functions associated with the satisfaction of the needs of the people in towns and villages. Specific genres and forms and related vocal and instrumental musical performing practice developed within the people's professional musical art. From the experience we see that these traditions are highly valuable and have a humanistic and democratic potential for further development. This structural stratification of musical practice indicates the existence of regulated social relations. The latter also caused the appearance of normative and functional spheres in the musical art, which were reflected in special musical treatises ('The treatise on music' written by medieval scholars in Arabic, Farsi and Turkic) and classical oriental literature, works on philosophy and musical terms.

The preservation, transmission and mastering of traditions

Various principles of artistic understanding, traditional schools, the specific *ustoz (ustod, khalypa)-shogird* (masterstudent) teaching system and historical and theoretical conceptions connected with the artistic, cosmological and ethic canons and norms, which reflected the socio-historical experience of the Central Asian peoples, developed in the functioning spheres of intangible cultural heritage. In the traditional culture of the Central Asian peoples the oral transmission of artistic styles, skills and knowledge and styles of performance were directly and indirectly connected with the learning of poetical texts and their principles, when the student or apprentice developed under the influence of the school of his master after the master had died. This indirect succession makes it possible to elongate the link of the chain and thus see a clearer picture of the life of this or that tradition and determine the retrospective series of direct and indirect links that existed between the masters and students.

The traditional cultures of the Central Asian peoples have in them mature schools of crafts and performance, which have been transmitting for many generations the oral musical, theatrical and artistic traditions with the help of an elaborate system. In the contemporary language these are pedagogical methods featuring all the signs of the developed pedagogical process *ustoz-shogird* (master-student) - from the regular system of theoretical knowledge (developed in the medieval 'treatises on music' and regulations *Risola*) through to special technical guides, which make it possible to master singing techniques or techniques for playing a musical instrument, learn verbal vocabulary and poetic rules, study the material and technological peculiarities of crafts and acquire knowledge and skills in producing an article. For instance, *bakhshi* or *zhirau* possessed such high technique in playing the *dutar*, *dombra* or *kobuz* while the society valued music so high that a student was allowed to spend one year on learning only one technical device. Traditionally the master (*ustoz*) passes his knowledge to his student by demonstrating his own skills. Usually these knowledge and transmission methods were concealed from other people. The student had to follow the accepted canons; however, to become a master he was to create a masterpiece - a piece of art that no one has done before. The beginning student or *bakhshi* had remained many years with his master, communicating with him every day, before the former was blessed by the latter (received blessing - *fotikha* or *pata*), which was unofficially equivalent to a 'certificate' allowing the student to create and perform independently.

For instance, the mastering of the traditions of epic stories consisted of the following stages. The early stage consisted in learning to play a musical instrument and learning poetical texts *terma* (*tirme*) or songs; later the student sang some of the *terma* or songs from an epic. At the middle stage,

the student was initiated into the secrets of performing dastans, learnt the manner and style of singing and narrating a certain dastan. The student became the companion of his master in all of the latter's performances at wedding parties and national holidays and at parties held by noble people. He accompanied his master and even performed by himself some of the simplest terma while the ustoz performed the whole dastan. Thus, the student imitated his master. The duration of this stage depended on the student's abilities and skills, as to receive blessing (*fotikha* or *pata*) from his master enabling him to become bakshi-dastanchi and perform independently, he was to learn by heart and be able to perform several dastans. At the advanced stage the student was to have his own repertoire and perform independently, being his master's partner at the same time. The performer was estimated by his ability to follow the canons and use them freely. It was similar to mastering a musical instrument and being able to use its finest technical characteristics.

It should be noted that the traditional *ustoz-shogird* teaching system, which had been used for many centuries, was rejected in the 20th century. This gradually led to the degradation and loss of that unique oral teaching system, in which the professional art of oral narration and artistic crafts of Central Asia had developed since ancient times. Most of the canons have oral forms in the context of protection, preservation and development of intangible cultural heritage. It means that all 'learning rules' are passed through the master-student teaching system, as the traditional *ustoz-shogird* system took into account only the abilities and talent, good voice, ability to play a musical instrument and memory - ability to remember poetical and musical text. For instance, the *Shamshakom* school was guided only by *bayaz* - collections of poems written by the classical oriental poets, where each poem (*gazel*) was accompanied by a definite tune. It means that the

ustoz-shogird system reached its peak in the period of the flowering of the makom art. Therefore, one of the problems of the 21st century is to restore the traditional school system, which will surely ensure further development of professional oral performing art and artistic crafts in present-day conditions.

Dastan, an element of intangible cultural heritage

The art of epic story, dastan, which occupies one of the most important places in the traditional culture of Central Asian peoples, originated in the most ancient times. Its appearance and development conditioned by the artistic and aesthetic needs of ordinary people was connected directly to the ethnogenesis, history and spiritual culture of the region's peoples. *Dastans* reflect, in the best way, a people's history, life, psychological aspects and worldview as well as people's sorrows and joys, troubles and concerns, moral conceptions, dreams about their future and their struggle for the liberation of their land. Hence the main subjects of dastans are mainly of a patriotic and humanistic character. Forming on the basis of people's musical and poetic art characterised by dividing into numerous genres and developing in close relation with the traditional and, to some extent, eastern classical poetry, the art of epic storytellers have always been democratic in character and served ordinary people. The traditional dastans and the musical and poetical genre *terma* (*tirme*) are deep emotionally and valuable from the musical and poetical aspects, having always been real pleasure for their listeners. This is why the epic art of the *bakhshi* storytellers is so viable and popular among people, remaining so for many centuries. The art of *bakhshi* has performed the socio-historical, artistic and aesthetic functions for a very long period of time.

Traditional epic is a great heritage of the Central Asian peoples, playing

a significant part in their lives. Epic traditions originated in old times, but continue to exist and function in many places up to this day. The phenomenon of live epics in the late 20th century is an important factor for the history of the human culture. Meanwhile, the epic is alive as long as it exists in musical form. This fact alone makes epic music a highly important object of research.

Epics and epic storytelling are represented in Central Asia by *dastan* (the word *dastan* translates as 'story,' 'praise,' or 'adventure'), which include both poetical and prosaic elements accompanied by music. *Dastan* is the largest, monumental genre of the traditional culture representing the musical and poetical history of people and describing the real historical events of the ancient time. However, these events have an ideal musical, verbal and poetic form, where the word, poem, music and singing merge into a single monumental musical and poetical genre with its special subjects and performing style. Most of the traditional dastans have come to us from relatively old times (the 12th-century treatise *Kitabul Korkut* ("The book by my grandfather *Korkut*") indicated the formation of the epic genre, mentioning that *Korkut* was an ideal *bakhshi*, whose performance was accompanied on the musical instrument kobuz; he was 'a wise singer and advisor, the keeper of the tradition of the steppe life and follower of the military traditions coming from the antiquity'), unlike the literary works (the poems *Farkhad and Shirin*, *Leyli and Mejnun* and *The seven beauties* by Alisher Navoi and some poems by Firdavsi, Nizami Ganjavi, Abdurakhman Jami and others are also called dastans). During all these centuries they have lived in people's memory, lived their own active artistic lives in the heads and mouths of innumerable generations of performers, as storytellers often participated in the composition of dastans. Trying to leave unchanged the main plots and the artistic base, they nevertheless had to give their

interpretation of some lines and sections, as improvisation was an inherent element in the performance of immense texts from memory. In this process some details were substituted by other ones, more usual and natural for the performer and his listeners. It explains why the dastan texts that have reached our time are so diverse depending on the historical period they belong to.

Dastan is a multicultural phenomenon. The traditional epic as a part of the intangible cultural heritage of Central Asia spreads over the territory of this region. We can distinguish several schools based on geographical location, each with its own musical and poetical language style. Most of these schools continue to function.

The singers and musicians of the makom art and cultic and ritual music are the main bearers of professional oral music in settled populations while those in nomadic groups were represented by epic storytellers - *bakhshi-shair* and *termachi* (the latter performing only in the musical genre of *terma* in dastans), - who accompanied their narrations on the *dombra*, *dutar* or *kobuz*. The nomadic lifestyle certainly influenced the contents and images of the poetical and musical epic art. For instance, the image of a runner, which is a permanent companion of a nomad (*Gorogly*, *Alpamysh*, *Manas*, *Edige*, *Rustam* and others) is one of the most popular ones in the art of the *Kazakh akyn*, *Uzbek bakhshi-shair* or *Turkmen bakhshi* as well as in the recitative art of *gyrau*. This is why the heroic epic *Alpamysh* (*Alpamys*) is the most popular dastan, the 1000th anniversary of which was celebrated widely in 1999. The Turkic-speaking nomadic tribes feature an original style of singing dastans - guttural recitative accompanied on the *dombra* (Uzbeks, Tajik and Kazakhs), a string instrument played by plucking, or the *dutar* (Turkmen, Uygur and Karakalpak) and the *kobuz* (Uzbeks, Karakalpak and Kazakh), a string instrument played with the help of a bow. This original

and inimitable art formed in the medieval period as a result of adoption of old artistic traditions (myths, legends, fairy tales, and historical psalms) and their further development in the live performing practice.

We should remember that dastan is a monumental musical and poetical composition performed by an epic storyteller. Dastan is a combination of different genres and forms of the traditional culture. Some dastans include tens of forms and genres, their performance continuing for hours and even days, depending on the narrator's skills and the audience's mood. Some dastans, such as *Gorogly* (*Gyorogly*, *Gurugli*, *Kyorogly*), form a whole cycle, various versions of the abovementioned work consisting of 40 to 100 dastans. The listeners' approval inspires the storyteller, without which he could hardly perform his epic. Narrating an epic, the storyteller usually uses several tunes, his speech sounding excited and melodic. The recitative is sometimes interrupted by a prosaic story, which is then followed by the next stage of recitative.

The traditional epic stories, dastans, developed from the archaic Turkic folklore and the ancient national history of the Central Asian peoples. They absorbed ancient cultural traditions and the information on the formation of the people they belonged to, including its history and spiritual world and its civil, moral and aesthetic ideals. The original traditional epic poetry and music of the Central Asian peoples created highly powerful artistic images, such as *Alpamysh*, *Gorogly*, *Manas*, *Yer Targyn*, *Edige*, *Yodgor*, *Koblady* and others. The plots and contents of the dastans that exist in the region are very numerous and diverse. They reflect the socio-economic, legal, philosophical and aesthetic ideas of a nation, showing its incessant movement, development and struggle. Dastans can be divided into heroic, historical and romantic dastans, which have developed constantly, interacting and intertwining with each other. In addition, traditional epic storytellers

often narrated military, social, mythological, religious and autobiographic dastans as well as dastans on topical subjects.

The contents and forms of dastans are based on traditions that had developed for many centuries. The events described in dastans are not limited to one particular tribe; they reflect the ideas and concerns of a whole nation. Heroic struggle for the land or freedom with enemies, salvation of fellow tribesmen or the lover, revenge for robbery or an insult, which finally resulted in a struggle for their people, are the main subjects of dastans, although they often start with a love story, the life of a young hero or some other topic of a similar type. This important subject of dastans determines the inherent elation and pathos of the stories and hyperbolism in the images of the heroes and their physical and moral abilities, on the one hand, and the severe disparagement of their enemies, on the other hand. Certainly, the works are based on the idealisation of the past, which is natural for national and individual consciousness; however, the freedom of imagination, which often makes a plot absolutely fabulous, creates that power of aesthetic generalisation that is typical of the best of dastans and of epic stories in general, that is, of the artistic expression of people's ideal.

The comparative analysis of the epics of Central Asian peoples demonstrates that common plots, motifs and images can often be found in their art. Similar motifs develop mostly on the typological commonality based on the commonality of lifestyles, ideals, dreams and expectations. This is clearly visible from the comparative analysis of the traditional musical and poetical texts of our neighbours - the Mongols, Altaians, Turkmen, Kazakhs and Uzbeks. The commonality of the Central Asian epics rests on the nomadic lifestyle and the religious and philosophical ideas of their creators - the bearers of the tradition, as well as on the commonality of the languages used by the tribes and peoples and relations

between these languages. The interaction and interpenetration of the elements of the archaic epics were caused by their existence in the common ethnocultural space and, therefore, by the commonality of historical, social, cultural, religious and linguistic factors; however, the typological similarity of the cultures of the peoples living at large distances from each other and having no close relations also plays an important role in this respect.

What is the mechanism for the long process of the development of the traditional epic? At early stages epic plots were based on mythology - animism, totemism, fetishism, magic and fairy tale. The next stage is characterised by the development of the mythological material into heroic stories; the role of heroism in the actions of personages rose, which led to the formation of the heroic epic with typical elements, such as the birth of the hero, his feats, wedding, birth of children, his becoming old, - that is, against the background of symbolic universal conceptions. The last stage of the epic's development coincided with the end of the primitive tribal system, which led to the diversification of the dastans' subjects. The period between the late 17th and 20th centuries was characterised by an intensive evolution of the traditional epic with stable forms, stylistic devices, plots and ideas. At the same time, hundreds of storytellers who were the authors of this process were developing the traditions they had inherited in the changing socio-economic environment, bringing their poetical innovations and developing their system of images and range of poetical and musical techniques to canonical forms. Therefore, the dastas was divided into genres, uniting into thematic cycles, sometimes truly immense.

Dastan's performing characteristics

The word *bakhshi* (bagshy, bakshi, baksy, bakhshy) can be found in the languages of many peoples. However, according to numerous sources, it

had different semantics in different historical periods: shaman, magician, sorcerer, Buddhist monk, foreteller, healer, clergyman, secretary and treasurer. In the 13th century Marco Polo wrote about healer-sorcerers who worked for the court of a Mongolian khan and were called *bakhshi*. V. Bartold and A. Samoylovich consider that the word *bakhshi* in Turkic and Iranian languages meant 'teacher'. *Bakhshi* was the name for the healers at the Mongol court, Turkic scribes in the Timurid state, high officials responsible for military troops in the Baburid state and shamans fighting with evil spirits with the help of magic songs accompanied by a musical instrument. When shamanism had been supplanted by Islam, the word 'bakhshi' began to refer to the epic singer, musician and narrator who created and preserved the traditional epic in the history of the culture of Central Asian peoples.

In the old times the Turkic peoples used to call the performer of epic stories *ozan* (poet), *zhyrau* (poet, musician, elder), *ashyk* (epic poet and narrator) and *bakhshi* (teacher and later - narrator, who was called 'bagshy' or *bakhshi* by the Turkmen, 'baksy' by the Kazakhs and Karakalpak and 'bakhshi' by the Kyrgyz, Uygur and Uzbeks). The word *bakhshi* became a strict term for professional singers when they began to perform at national events and holidays and at wedding parties and traditional *saila*, glorifying ancient heroes and their lovers. Continuing the artistic traditions of their predecessors, they made a great contribution to the further development of traditional epic. Uzbeks call the narrators of dastans in different ways: *dastanchi* or *bakhshi* (the term *khalfa* was used with reference to female performers) in *Khoresm*, *yuzboshi*, *bakhshi* or *shair* in Kashkadrya, Surkhandarya and Samarkand, *soki* or *sozanda* in Khujand or Osh provinces, *bakhshi* or *sanovchi* in the Fergana Valley and *baksy* or *jyrau* in Karakalpakstan, *Shair* (poet and narrator) and *bakhshi* (singer and narrator)

are the most common terms.

With monumental plots, dastans require huge improvisational, musical and poetic gifts and skills from the performers. Therefore, *bakhshi*, *dastanchi* and *jirau* are professional performers possessing the art of narration, improvisation and poetic and musical composition and even the dramatic art and the art of mimicry and gesticulation, which they used to deeper impress their listeners. The art of *bakhshi* reflects in the best way the peculiarities of the traditional culture of Central Asian people, with the formation of different local styles with their artistic and aesthetic traditions and ideas and practical *purposes* and objectives on the basis of local performing traditions. *Bakhshi* are the creators and keepers of the traditional epic who also popularised the classical oriental poetry. The local styles that appeared within the uniform art of *bakhshi* were called *yul* by the Uzbeks and *yol* by the Turkmen (the word meaning a 'road,' 'style,' 'direction,' 'school') in combination with the name of a region (for instance, *Khiva yuli* or *akhal yoli*) or a tribe, genre or trend in art in combination with the names of the best bearers of the tradition. Some expert *bakhshi* (masters - *ustoz*, *ustod*) played an important part in the development of local styles: they were able to synthesise the best achievements of local traditions in their art and create their own styles. Such masters were always surrounded by an increasing number of like-minded persons, students and followers, who based their performance art on the main stylistic principles of their leader and created some types of corporation or schools. Within such groups beginning performers learnt the repertoire, adopted the singing skills, experience and traditions and studied following the conventional *ustoz-shogird* (*khalypa-shegird*) system, which ensure transmission of art to other generations both within local styles and within the *bakhshi* art as a whole.

The live epic tradition of Central Asia consists of performing ancient

stories or creating new poems. However, the most important thing is that the unique and complex performing style requiring musical, poetic and dramatic talent, excellent memory and outstanding stamina is preserved and transmitted within the tradition. Ordinary people have always had a special attitude towards storytellers, considering that they possessed magic abilities. Let us remember the Altaian heroic epic performed using the most ancient guttural technique of singing in one tone (*kay*). The Kazakh epic styles are quite diverse. *Dombra* is the leading instrument in the art of *baksy*, *gyrau* and *akyn*, the performers of epic stories and masters of poetry. The poetic texts are performed in melodic recitative; the music helps the *akyn* or *gyrau* concentrate, tuning him to a certain rhythm and making his speech flow, which means the use of recitative makes the performance musical and expressive. Most of the Kazakh epics are instrumental, illustrative and melodic. The performance styles from the Aral Sea, Karmakchi and Mangystau are the most unique and original.

The universally known Kyrgyz epic *Manas* is performed very emotionally without accompaniment; it has a poetical form from beginning to end and its performance is characterised by gesticulation and mimicry. The performers of *Manas* belong to four schools: the Issyk Kul, Talas, Naryn and Chu schools. Smaller epic dastans are also very popular, the poems performed to the accompaniment of the three-string komus. The art of the Turkmen bakhshi comprises five schools, the most popular one being that from Dashauz, which is distinguished by recitative and specific guttural declamation. The musical aspect of the Turkmen dastans is characterised by rich melodies, which are often linear, and the dutar or gijak accompaniment.

Gurugli is the main genre of the Tajik storytellers. They are often accompanied by the dombra while their poetic parts are performed in

recitative.

The poetic forms (which usually consist of seven, eight or eleven syllables) that lie in the foundations of most of the texts of the dastan, usually reproduce the heroes' monologues and dialogues, their emotions and mood, battle scenes, descriptions of nature and so on, all of which sounds more emotional when recited to music. Hence the two forms of singing of dastans. The first one is *bugic ovoz* (in closed voice), which consists of guttural singing in recitative to the accompaniment of the dombra (a string instrument played by plucking) characteristic of Samarkand, Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya and of Karakalpak *jyrau*. From 5 to 15 tunes (*nagma*), which may repeat themselves, are used in each dastan. The tunes are short and repetitive. Their character is lyrical and dramatic, bright or vivid depending on the plot. The bakhshi narrate in a usual voice and sing in a guttural tone, which they develop in the course of the training. The second form is *ichki ovoz* (singing in inner voice), which is a more song-based type of singing accompanied by an instrumental band. This form is characteristic of Khoresm and Karakalpakstan. From 15 to 72 tunes (*nagma* or *bakhshi kuy*) are used in each dastan. They are accompanied by an instrumental band (consisting of the dutar, bulaman and gijak or dutar and three-string gijak in Karakalpakstan and in Khoresm until the 20th century and the *tar*, *koshnay* and *doira* in Khoresm since the 20th century). Dastans in the style of *jyrau* are accompanied on the *kobuz*. Khoresm features two trends - *shirvoni* and *ironi*, which differ in repertoire, performance style and instruments.

Local features of dastans are often visible in the performance style, repertoire and range of accompanying instruments. Sometimes local features can be seen in the melodic patterns of bakhshi's terma songs; however, most often they show themselves in the musical language and dialect.

All these local features make the art of *bakhshi* highly diverse from the musical and stylistic aspects, enriching it with special musical and poetical 'colours'. At the same time, the interaction of poetry and singing, the metre and the forms have more common features than different ones in all the existing *bakhshi* schools. This fact indicates that all the local schools of the *bakhshi* art have common historical roots and that they have influenced each other during the long history of their development. The repertoires and techniques characteristic of each people in the region, as well as the musical languages and dialects and diversity of dastans have the same ideological and emotional effect in the contemporary environment. They have truly huge potential. Dastans, the wonderful epics of Central Asian people, have become part of the world culture as elements of intangible cultural heritage.