

Distinctive Features of Didactic Songs in Khorezm Vocal Art

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Abstract

This article provides a scholarly analysis of the genre characteristics, poetic structure, and educational functions of didactic songs formed within the framework of the Khorezm musical style. Particular attention is paid to musical and performance-related features specific to the Khorezm tradition, such as melody, pronunciation, and modal-rhythmic structures.

Keywords: Didactic, cultural-aesthetic, song, singer, khalfa, bakhshi and hafiz, epic, maqom, suvara.

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1. Introduction

Within the system of Khorezm musical traditions, songs based on hymns (hamd), supplications (munajat), and eulogies (na‘t) rich in moral instruction, wisdom, and exemplary content occupy an important place. Songs characteristic of this style represent a unique cultural and aesthetic heritage and differ from other musical schools in several distinct aspects. Through these songs, vital wisdom, norms of etiquette, and the culture of social relations have been transmitted from generation to generation over centuries.

A comprehensive analysis of the genre and stylistic features, poetic structure, and educational significance of didactic songs in the regional musical tradition is one of the most pressing tasks of contemporary scholarship. These songs are characterized by the simplicity of their poetic structure and their richness in parables and wisdom. They promote life lessons derived from experience, moral principles, compassion, and ethical values.

Didactic songs are widely represented across various genres of musical art, encompassing themes such as encouragement toward labor, respect for elders, and advocacy of honesty and integrity.

The formation of such songs has been significantly influenced by folk oral creativity—proverbs, sayings, and aphorisms—as well as by traditional musical heritage and ritual melodies. In particular, melodic and rhythmic systems have played a crucial role in shaping the artistic musical structure of didactic songs.

In Khorezm vocal art, singers known as bakhshi, khalfa, mughanni, ashulachi, goyanda, and hafiz have widely incorporated songs of moral instruction into their repertoires. The principal performance style of these singers is also referred to in popular usage as “talqinchi.”

2. Literature Review

In the explanatory dictionary of the Uzbek language, the term “talqinchi” is used in three meanings depending on context:

in the religious sphere—as a preacher or moral exhorter;

in secular usage—as an interpreter or commentator;

in dialectal usage—as a singer or performer.

Musicologist Otanazar Matyoqubov, in his work *Maqomot*, notes:

“Talqin is essentially a concept directly connected with the logic of maqom... The Sarakhbor or the Tanimaqom section marks the beginning of the cycle and represents the deepest semantic point—a state of ‘spiritual devotion’ and sacred emotion. Talqin (admonition) is a continuation of worship, a distinct spiritual condition.”

In *Qobusnoma*, an ethical and didactic work by Kaykovus, it is emphasized that innate talent alone is insufficient for becoming a true artist; continuous self-improvement is essential. The author also explains that selecting appropriate melodies and songs according to the age and social background of the audience ensures greater effectiveness.

Over centuries, didactic vocal performances survived as elements of intangible cultural heritage; however, by the 1930s–1940s of the twentieth century, they began to be restricted under the influence of contemporary ideological demands. Concert programs were strictly regulated, and performances of songs with moral-admonitory content were prohibited. Singers and performers were required to select and perform repertoires aligned with the prevailing political spirit.

Nevertheless, in response to audience demand, didactic songs continued to be performed covertly at private gatherings such as home festivities. As a result, some performers faced moral and ideological persecution.

Despite these constraints, renowned masters such as Madrahim Yoqubov (Sheroziy), Qalandar Yoqubov, Hojikhon and Nurmuhammad Boltaev, Komiljon Otaniyozov, Qutlimurod Hojiev, Quvondiq Iskandarov, Rozmat Jumaniyozov, Abdusharif Vapaev, Sharif Boltaev, Otajon Khudoyshukurov, Qalandar (bakhshi) Normatov, and their disciples preserved didactic songs within their performance traditions and transmitted them across generations.

Songs performed by these masters contributed to the formation of spiritual and moral maturity, the preservation of national identity, the strengthening of respect for cultural values, and the promotion of ideals of goodness.

3. Methods

The study draws upon historical and scholarly literature, ghazals by classical poets (Navoi, Munis, Ogahiy, and others), and materials related to folk oral traditions (proverbs, sayings, and aphorisms).

The research methods employed include textual analysis, musical-performance analysis, and archival research. Interviews were also conducted with contemporary singers and instrumentalists.

4. Results

Our research and observations indicate that the primary venues for the promotion of spiritual performances are weddings, folk festivals, and public celebrations. In particular, regional wedding ceremonies function not only as entertainment events but also as important traditional systems for imparting moral values, family ethics, humanism, and social education. During wedding ceremonies, singers, khalfa, and bakhshi-hafiz traditionally performed songs formed on verses promoting moral instruction and humanistic ideals.

In epic performances, bakhshi recited *terma* songs emphasizing justice, honesty, avoidance of immoral behavior, keeping one’s word, and fidelity to promises. In the Khorezm version of the *Goroghli* epic, *Goroghli* offers moral advice to young men, especially *Avazkhan*. Such didactic elements are found in many romantic epics belonging to the *Goroghli* and *Ashiq* cycles.

Didactic (educational-admonitory) content occupies a prominent place in *khalfa* creativity. Their songs typically promote values such as humanism, diligence, and ethical conduct. In particular, *khalfa* songs emphasize modesty, decency, and chastity among young women. For example, during wedding ceremonies, as a bride prepares to leave her parental home, ritual *khalfa* performers sing advisory verses addressed to the bride. Through songs in the mother tongue, blessings are conveyed wishing her patience, well-being, and happiness in her future life.

In addition to these traditions, the performance of the “*Yor-yor*” song during wedding ceremonies further intensifies the spiritual and emotional impact of the ritual.

The textual content of the *Talqin* and *Nasr* sections of Khorezm *maqoms* is primarily based on philosophical, didactic, and ethical ghazals by poets such as Navoi,

Munis, Ogahiy, and Feruz. Within the Rost maqom cycle, the song “Talqini Rost,” based on a ghazal by Navoi, stands out for its refined performance, artistic depth, and expressive musical melody.

The widely popular song “Majnundali” emerged from the “Qoradali” melody of the Khorezm dutar maqoms and uses a ghazal by the poet Orzu as its text. This poem emphasizes moral instruction, preservation of national identity, respect for values, and the glorification of goodness.

Composed in accordance with the laws of ancient maqom traditions, this song consists of six sections. It begins with an upbeat and is performed in a 6/8 meter using the ufar rhythmic pattern.

Among Khorezm’s spiritual song heritage, suvara songs hold a special place. Traditionally performed at folk festivals and weddings—especially during the second phase of wedding ceremonies—suvara performances follow the “Diyralishma” style upon audience request. In such gatherings, which may last two to three hours, singers connect ghazals by two or three poets within a single suvara cycle, sometimes repeating sections multiple times to enrich the musical scope.

Regardless of the ceremonial context, audiences have consistently demanded the recitation of sacred words in suvara performances. Even today, singers continue to select didactic ghazals by classical poets such as Navoi, Munis, Ogahiy, and Devoniy, as well as later poets like Partav and Orzu.

Didactic songs and chants of the Khorezm region have traditionally been performed at engagement ceremonies, girls’ gatherings, wedding rituals, childbirth celebrations, circumcision ceremonies, meetings of in-laws, and festive entertainments. Their ultimate aim has been to enhance the spiritual life of society through music and to promote respect for cultural values.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the stable continuity of traditions testifies to their vitality. Understanding tradition does not mean mechanically reproducing the past; rather, it involves engaging with it creatively and ensuring its development under new historical conditions. The continued preservation of didactic songs and the sustained demand for them today clearly demonstrate an enduring need for classical and traditional musical and poetic values.

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