

RELIGIOUS-PHILOSOPHICAL RENEWAL AND ISLAMIC ETHICS IN POST-SOVIET KARAKALPAK NARRATIVE VERSE: AN ANALYSIS OF A. OTEPBERGENOV'S ALLAN'DI UMITPA!

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Abstract

This paper investigates the thematic, structural, and ethical transformations in Karakalpak narrative poetry following national independence, focusing on Abilqasim Otepbergenov's landmark dastan titled *Allan'di Umitpa!* (Do Not Forget Your Allah!). Emerging after decades of Soviet-era atheistic constraints, the work represents a pioneering effort to integrate Islamic theology, moral philosophy, and Eastern masnavi poetic forms into written Karakalpak literature. Through a systematic analysis of its 608 ten-line stanzas, this study demonstrates how Otepbergenov synthesized personal autobiographical trauma, folkloric motifs of divine intervention (ayan), historical accounts of Sufi saints like Najmetdin Qubra, and modern social critiques regarding environmental degradation and moral decay. The findings establish that Otepbergenov elevated Islamic ethics to a primary structural principle, establishing a new conceptual trajectory for contemporary Karakalpak lyro-epic poetry.

Keywords: Karakalpak literature, Abilqasim Otepbergenov, Islamic philosophy, dastan, moral ethics, post-Soviet literature, spiritual revival.

Introduction

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the establishment of national independence in Uzbekistan inaugurated a profound spiritual and aesthetic revival in Karakalpak literature. For over seven decades, state-enforced ideological censorship strictly regulated literary expression, banning religious themes, suppressing Islamic philosophical concepts, and penalizing written works that addressed spiritual morality (Ahmedov, 1988). The advent of independence granted writers the artistic freedom to re-examine national history, reintegrate Islamic heritage, and explore moral-philosophical dimensions previously excluded from official discourse.

In written Karakalpak verse, this intellectual paradigm shift was led by Abilqasim Otepbergenov, whose monumental work *Allan'di Umitpa!* (Do Not Forget Your Allah!), published in 1997, served as the founding text for a new wave of religiously grounded lyro-epic poetry. As literary scholar K. Qurambaev (2018) noted, Otepbergenov successfully packaged modern moral-ethical categories within the framework of traditional Islamic values. This study analyzes the structural architecture, poetic devices, and philosophical implications of Otepbergenov's *dastan*, illustrating how Islamic ethics transformed the structural mechanics of modern Karakalpak narrative verse.



Structural Mechanics and Poetic Organization of *Allan'di Umitpa!*

Allan'di Umitpa! is organized into 608 ten-line stanzas, reflecting a deliberate formal experiment inspired by Eastern classical *masnavi* rhyming couplets. Otepbergenov departs from the rigid linear plotlines characteristic of Soviet socialist realism. Instead of constructing a narrative around an idealized socialist hero, the poet organizes the work into a non-linear composite structure comprising autobiographical episodes, lyrical reflections, historical legends, and parabolic allegories.

The work opens with a symbolic prologue invoking the classical legend of Ayaz Khan, a humble shepherd who rose to kingship but hung his original leather shoes before his throne as a perpetual reminder of humility:

*He hung those shoes so he would not forget,
When pride swells up and human hearts grow blind,
Each time he hears: "Ayaz, look at your shoes!"*

His former poverty returns to mind. (Otepbergenov, 1997, p. 8)

This foundational allegory establishes the central thesis of the *dastan*: the necessity of human humility (*qanaat*), spiritual self-examination, and unwavering awareness of the Creator in the face of worldly temptations (*napsi*).

Autobiographical Realism and Folkloric Motifs of Divine Intervention

A prominent feature of *Allan'di Umitpa!* is its deep autobiographical orientation. Otepbergenov grounds the narrative in personal existential crisis, describing a severe illness that confined him to a hospital bed. This physical suffering becomes the catalyst for spiritual awakening, leading the lyrical hero to reflect upon past errors and embrace religious repentance (*tawbe*).

[Physical Trauma & Illness] ---> [Existential Reflection] ---> [Spiritual Awakening & Repentance]

To depict his personal journey, Otepbergenov integrates traditional folkloric motifs into his contemporary life story. In traditional Karakalpak oral epics (such as *Alpamys*), a central typological motif is the childless couple who prays for offspring, receiving a divine vision (*ayan*) through saintly figures like Qidir Ata before the birth of a heroic child (Dawqaraev, 1977; Sagitov, 1974). Otepbergenov adapts this epic motif, describing how his own father, Otepbergen, endured years of childlessness, prayed fervently to Allah, and was granted a child. In the hospital, as the poet lies immobilized on a hard wooden bed, he uses the anaphora "*Sonda bildim*" (Then I knew) to articulate his moral realization:

*Then I knew the narrowness of this world,
The sighs and cries of man to fellow man.
Then I knew the white and knew the black,
Then I knew the rich man and the poor,
Then I knew the shameless and the pure...*

Then I knew, O Allah, Thy holy name! (Otepbergenov, 1997, pp. 8–9)

Through this poetic device, Otepbergenov elevates personal biography to universal moral truth, demonstrating how individual suffering serves as a pathway toward spiritual enlightenment.



Historical Hagiography and Civic Critiques: Najmetdin Qubra and Global Ethics

The narrative scope of *Allan'di Umitpa!* expands significantly through the inclusion of historical and hagiographical episodes. A major climax occurs during the hero's pilgrimage to Old Urgench (Gwne Urgenish), a sacred site associated with three hundred and sixty Sufi saints. Otepbergenov focuses on the legendary martyrdom of Sheikh Najmetdin Qubra, who led the defense of the city against Mongol invaders in the 13th century.

Otepbergenov rejects simplistic historical interpretations, viewing the devastation of Urgench through an intense philosophical lens:

Why do they call this place 'Three Hundred Sixty'?

Many say 'It is the number of the saints.'

In a whisper, I say: 'No, that is not true!'

It was three hundred sixty days of grief,

Where darkness fell and mourning clothes were worn... (Otepbergenov, 1997, p. 24)

By depicting Najmetdin Qubra's patriotic sacrifice, Otepbergenov blends Islamic martyrdom with national civic duty, presenting spiritual faith as the ultimate source of moral strength during times of historical catastrophe.

Furthermore, Otepbergenov applies this ethical framework to contemporary global crises. The *dastan* includes sharp critiques of modern social vices—such as alcoholism, domestic violence, judicial bribery, and bureaucratic corruption—resembling the social realism of Sh. Seytov's novels. Crucially, the poet addresses environmental degradation, explicitly condemning the chemical defoliation of cotton fields and the destruction of the Aral Sea basin as sin against the Earth:

Mothers left their cradles and their stoves,

Girded their waists and went into the fields,

Throwing themselves beneath defoliant clouds...

How many innocent lives were stolen away? (Otepbergenov, 1997, p. 120)

In these passages, the Earth is personified as a long-suffering living entity (*sorli qara jer*) enduring human arrogance, transforming ecological stewardship into a direct religious obligation.

Theoretical Comparison: Soviet Narrative Verse vs. Post-Independence Dastan

The artistic paradigm established in *Allan'di Umitpa!* marks a distinct departure from earlier 20th-century Karakalpak narrative poetry:



Analytical Category	Soviet-Era Narrative Verse (e.g., A. Dabilov, S. Nurimbetov)	Post-Independence Dastan (Allan'di Umitpa!)
Genre Labeling	Classified under Western terminology as a <i>Poem</i> (<i>poema</i>).	Restored under native Eastern terminology as a <i>Dastan</i> .
Structural Design	Linear, chronological plot focused on social labor and class struggle.	Composite, non-linear architecture using 10-line <i>masnavi</i> stanzas.
Protagonist Model	Externalized, idealized hero serving state ideological goals.	Lyrical, introspective hero engaged in moral repentance (<i>tawbe</i>).
Philosophical Base	Marxist-Leninist historical materialism and state atheism.	Islamic theology, Sufi hagiography, and universal ethical humanism.
Social Critique	Target focused on pre-revolutionary feudalism or foreign enemies.	Internal critique of modern corruption, alcoholism, and ecological crisis.

Conclusion

Abilqasim Otepbergenov's *Allan'di Umitpa!* represents a major turning point in modern Karakalpak literature. By restoring the native concept of the *dastan* and adopting the classical *masnavi* stanza, Otepbergenov constructed a poetic framework capable of addressing complex spiritual and social realities.

The work's enduring significance lies in its synthesis of personal confession, oral folk motifs, Sufi history, and urgent environmental commentary. By establishing Islamic ethics as the guiding foundation for artistic truth, Otepbergenov opened new conceptual horizons for written Karakalpak poetry, demonstrating that traditional spiritual values remain vital for processing the moral challenges of the contemporary world.

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