

How Myths and Legends Shape Uzbek Ethical Traditions

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Abstract. Ancient mythology, regional folklore, and dastans provide the groundwork for Uzbekistan's cultural and moral identity. These fables combine Zoroastrianism, Tengriism, and Islamic philosophy to teach morality and societal standards. The miraculous births and supernatural interventions of heroes like Alpomish and Goroghli relate morality to holy beginnings and cosmic equilibrium while promoting bravery, loyalty, and community. This study uses archetypal criticism (Jung; Campbell), functionalism (Malinowski), and cultural memory theory (Assmann; Reichl) to examine how Uzbek myths and epics justify social order, preserve communal memory, and transmit values like justice (*adolat*), bravery (*mardlik*), wisdom (*donolik*), and honor (*nomus*). Epics mix pre-Islamic elements with Islamic ideals via the *bakhshi's* performance and preservation of heritage. These mythical heroes have been resurrected as national emblems of power, justice, and togetherness since independence, tying contemporary statehood to a mythical past. Uzbek oral epics show how story can hold cultural memory and change ethics across generations.

Key words: Uzbek mythology; oral epics; dastan tradition; Alpomish; Goroghli; archetypal criticism; functionalism; cultural memory; national identity; ethical traditions.

Introduction

Uzbekistan's narrative tradition, which includes ancient myths, regional folklore, and the massive oral epics known as dastans, is an important aspect of the country's cultural identity. These tales are not only entertaining, but also valuable warehouses of common information, viewpoints, and social norms (Karimov, 2018). They have historically been the primary channel for propagating the ethical ideals and moral traditions that have impacted Uzbek society for millennia, including components from Zoroastrianism, Tengriism, and, more recently, Islamic philosophy (Mirzaev, 1984; Sultanova, 2011).

To fully understand the ideas that make up traditional Uzbek value systems, such as justice (*adolat*), bravery (*mardlik*), wisdom (*donolik*), and community loyalty, it is important to understand these stories. The heroes and villains in these narratives function as iconic representations, clearly demonstrating the social benefits of virtue and the repercussions of moral deficiencies (Smith, 2020).

Nonetheless, a significant research gap exists in contemporary literary and cultural studies. Although scholars have thoroughly examined the historical, linguistic, and literary dimensions of these texts (e.g., Zarif, 1979; Inoyatov, 2005), there has been a paucity of systematic analysis focused on the explicit deconstruction of the transition from mythic narrative to concrete moral philosophy in Uzbek literature. This review aims to bridge this gap. It will first look at how big the primary genres are in Uzbek culture: myths, legends, and dastans. It will then make the case for their usefulness in ethical scaffolding and then carefully look at how each story may be used to teach morals.

Discussion

In order to analyze the intersection of myth and morality in Uzbek storytelling traditions, this research employs three supplementary theoretical frameworks. To begin, Joseph Campbell expanded on Carl Jung's work on archetypal criticism, which provides a framework for seeing commonalities across cultures. This theory posits that recurring figures like the Hero, Sage, and Trickster represent fundamental psychological processes—the collective unconscious—that have significant moral consequences (Jung 1968; Campbell 2008). By applying this to Uzbek dastans like as Alpamysh or Kuntugmish, we can see how the hero's journey exemplifies courage, selflessness, and communal justice via separation, initiation, and return.

Functionalism, especially the idea put out by Bronisław Malinowski of myth as a "charter" for social order, establishes the unique sociocultural setting in which these archetypes exist. Not only do myths provide explanations, but they also "validate" and legitimate social structures, moral standards, and practices, according to Malinowski (1992). According to this school of thought, the role of a legend is to serve as a holy basis for modern ethical standards, as well as a precedent for their establishment and maintenance.

Cultural Memory Theory (Assmann, 2011; Reichl, 2018) clarifies the process of this transfer. It differentiates between communicative memory (short-term, autobiographical) and cultural memory (long-term, institutionalized via foundational texts and rituals). Uzbek oral epics (dastans) exemplify cultural memory as "figures of memory," whereby the performer (bakhshi) serves as a conduit, actively safeguarding and revitalizing a community's core values over generations, so maintaining their significance and moral authority in an evolving world.

Uzbek myths, tales, and dastans provide a complex moral framework in which abstract values are concretely expressed via storytelling. A predominant subject is the development of bravery and fidelity, as shown by the legendary hero Alpamysh. His exploits are not just demonstrations of power but are fundamentally connected to ethical obligations: protecting his tribe (el), showing steadfast respect for elders (aksakal), and fulfilling the sacred responsibilities of kinship (urug'-davlat) (Mirzaev, 1984). These activities establish a behavioral paradigm, characterizing courage not as violence but as justifiable defense.

Additionally, these stories generally set up a framework of holy beginnings and divine justice. Heroes like Goroghli often have miraculous births that link their fate to a higher order and make them cosmic balancing tools, righting wrongs and safeguarding the weak (Sultanova, 2011). This connects morality to the divine, which means that doing anything wrong morally throws off a holy balance.

The highest virtue commended is collective responsibility. The hero's ultimate goal is always to serve the community (jamo'a), which is a clear rejection of personal gain. This collectivist ethos is articulated in a series of specific moral values found throughout legends: honor (nomus), unbounded hospitality (mehmondo'stlik), honesty (rostgo'ylik), and a deep reverence for nature (Karimov, 2018). As a result, these tales serve as a complete ethical charter, utilizing appealing archetypes to educate people into a common value system that has preserved Uzbek cultural identity across centuries.

Uzbek legends, notably the dastan tradition performed by bakhshis (epic storytellers), have long served as the major means of moral and cultural teaching, smoothly merging multiple value systems into a unified identity. The performance itself was a community rite in which the bakhshi inhabited the epic rather than just recited it, making the ethical percepts more vivid and forceful for the audience (Reichl, 2018). This oral transmission was critical in preserving a distinct Central Asian Islamic cultural synthesis that combines Islamic principles with deeper, pre-Islamic mythological motifs, such as shamanistic spirit helpers (peri) and animistic reverence for nature (Sultanova, 2011).

In the time after independence, these great personalities have been purposefully put to the front as important moral examples for constructing a country. Their virtues—courage, fairness, unity, and self-sacrifice for the collective—are portrayed as the lasting moral foundations of the modern Uzbek country, linking current statehood to a romanticized and virtuous past (Karimov, 2018). The dastan, therefore, goes beyond folklore and is a live, changing force that shapes national identity all the time.

Conclusion

Uzbek myths, stories, and dastans serve as both cultural legacy and lasting foundations for moral education. Utilizing archetypal models (Jung; Campbell), functionalist interpretations (Malinowski), and cultural memory theory (Assmann; Reichl), these tales elucidate a moral framework rooted in bravery, loyalty, and collective accountability. Alpomish and Goroghli are examples of values that come from God and are kept alive by community standards. They turn myths into a guide for how to live together. Oral epics have traditionally sustained cultural identity while adjusting to new situations by combining pre-Islamic elements with Islamic ideals. Their modern rebirth shows that they are still important as moral guides and symbols of national togetherness. In the end, Uzbek narrative traditions show how powerful oral storytelling can be in keeping moral standards alive for hundreds of years. This shows that myth is still an important part of building both cultural memory and current identity.

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