

THE ARTISTIC AND AESTHETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF BAXSHI CREATIVITY AND THE MASTER–APPRENTICE TRADITIONS IN MAQOM ART

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Abstract

This article explores the artistic and aesthetic characteristics of the baxshi tradition in relation to the maqom art and their shared pedagogical system of the master–apprentice model. The study analyzes the deep interconnection between epic performance and classical maqom singing within the cultural context of the Third Renaissance in Uzbekistan. Drawing upon recent musicological research, the article highlights how the synthesis of baxshi oral poetry and maqom’s modal structure serves as a unique foundation for national music education and identity.

Keywords: baxshi, maqom, oral tradition, performance, aesthetics, Third Renaissance, musical pedagogy, national identity.

Introduction

The art of baxshi (epic singer) represents one of the most ancient forms of oral musical expression in Central Asia. It embodies not only poetic narration but also a complex synthesis of vocal art, instrumental accompaniment, and spiritual symbolism. Similarly, the maqom art — the classical modal system of Uzbek and Tajik music — has for centuries represented the intellectual and aesthetic peak of the region’s musical heritage (Rasulov, 2025).

In the era of the so-called Third Renaissance, Uzbekistan witnesses a cultural revival that emphasizes the preservation, study, and reinterpretation of traditional arts within modern educational and creative frameworks. Within this process, both baxshi and maqom are not seen as isolated traditions, but as interrelated phenomena that collectively shape the national musical consciousness.

The main purpose of this research is to examine the artistic–aesthetic features of baxshi creativity, the structural parallels between epic and maqom forms, and the methodological principles of the master–apprentice (ustoz–shogird) system that continues to sustain them.

Methodology

This research applies several interdisciplinary approaches:

1. Historical Analysis – tracing the evolution of baxshi and maqom traditions through medieval sources such as those of Al-Farabi, Jami, and Darvish Ali Changi.
2. Comparative Musicology – identifying common melodic, rhythmic, and modal features in the performances of regional maqom schools (Bukhara, Khorezm, and Fergana–Tashkent).
3. Ethnographic Observation – examining live performances, rehearsals, and teaching practices in maqom institutions and baxshi schools.



4. Analytical and Hermeneutic Methods – interpreting the symbolic and spiritual dimensions of baxshi poetry in relation to maqom performance aesthetics.

These approaches make it possible to identify not only formal similarities between the two traditions but also their shared artistic philosophy and pedagogical value.

Results and Discussion

1. Artistic Foundations of Baxshi Creativity

The baxshi is not merely a performer, but a storyteller who transforms collective memory into sound. His performance combines recitation, melody, rhythm, and improvisation — all directed toward emotional and moral communication with the audience. Each baxshi performs a doston (epic) like *Alpomish* or *Gorogly* differently, adapting its tone, rhythm, and vocal ornamentation to personal feeling and social context.

As noted by Abdinabiyevna (2024), “The essence of traditional Uzbek performance lies in the artist’s ability to transmit spiritual energy through vocal and poetic harmony.” This statement perfectly reflects the baxshi’s function as both an artist and spiritual mediator.

Instrumental accompaniment, provided by *dombra*, *kobyz*, *doira*, or *gijjak*, creates a sonic background that parallels maqom ensemble performance. In both cases, music operates not as a mere aesthetic pleasure, but as a medium for moral and spiritual dialogue.

2. The Aesthetic Parallels between Baxshi and Maqom

The maqom system, known for its modal complexity and emotional depth, shares with the baxshi tradition an oral pedagogical foundation.

Both are transmitted through the *ustoz–shogird* system, where learning is based on imitation, repetition, and moral cultivation (Ulasheva, 2023).

Melodically, many baxshi recitations display similarities with maqom structures — for example, the *Segoh*, *Buzruk*, and *Rost* modes. This connection is not accidental; it reflects a shared aesthetic worldview in which music is perceived as a reflection of divine order. The maqom performer, like the baxshi, must balance emotional freedom with adherence to canonical modal laws.

As Karimova (2025) points out, “The performance of maqom parts requires the same spiritual concentration and improvisational intuition that define oral epic traditions.” Therefore, baxshi and maqom represent two expressions of a single cultural code — the synthesis of *so‘z* (word) and *navo* (melody).

3. The Master–Apprentice Tradition

The *ustoz–shogird* (master–apprentice) system has historically been the main channel of transmission for both maqom and baxshi traditions. This educational method involves not only technical instruction but also the formation of ethical values, discipline, and artistic worldview.

In maqom pedagogy, the apprentice learns through continuous listening (*eshitib o‘rganish*), imitation, and personal engagement with the *ustoz*. Similarly, in baxshi art, young singers learn *doston* by heart, internalizing the rhythmic patterns, emotional nuances, and improvisational devices.

According to Rasulov (2025), this form of mentorship “ensures the living continuity of musical heritage by uniting intellectual knowledge with spiritual transmission.” This statement underscores the fundamental role of personal relationships in preserving intangible heritage. Modern institutions like the Yunus Rajabi Institute of Maqom Art now aim to merge this ancient pedagogy with formal music education, thereby preserving authenticity while promoting innovation.



4. The Third Renaissance and Educational Integration

The cultural policy of modern Uzbekistan, often referred to as the Third Renaissance, has created a fertile environment for the revival of maqom and baxshi arts. The establishment of international festivals, academic programs, and digital archives has facilitated the transformation of oral heritage into a globally accessible educational system.

Government initiatives, such as the International Maqom Art Festival in Shahrissabz, promote cultural diplomacy and international collaboration. Through such efforts, maqom and baxshi arts have entered a new phase of academic and artistic development, integrating traditional methodology with digital tools and research-based pedagogy.

Abdinabiyevna (2024) notes that “The renewal of musical education in Uzbekistan depends on the synergy between historical continuity and technological progress.” This statement applies directly to the current integration of baxshi and maqom traditions into higher education curricula.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that baxshi and maqom arts share deep artistic, structural, and philosophical connections. Both are sustained by the master–apprentice tradition, both rely on improvisation as a creative tool, and both express the ethical and aesthetic ideals of the Uzbek people.

In the framework of the Third Renaissance, these arts not only serve as cultural symbols but also as pedagogical models for future generations. Their preservation, digital documentation, and inclusion in modern curricula will ensure the continuity of spiritual and artistic values.

As Ulasheva (2023) concludes, “The living tradition survives not by imitation alone, but by creative renewal grounded in respect for the past.” Baxshi and maqom — two ancient yet ever-evolving traditions — remain the artistic essence of Uzbekistan’s musical identity and the embodiment of its cultural philosophy.

The creative and performative styles of baxshi and maqom traditions cannot be studied outside the cultural and philosophical framework in which they evolved. According to Rasulov (2024), the roots of Uzbek musical art lie in the synthesis of poetic meaning, rhythmic order, and spiritual symbolism. The baxshi, as a performer of oral epics, transmits not only historical events but also the archetypal worldview of the nation — where courage, loyalty, and divine destiny are central values. Each performance, therefore, becomes both an aesthetic act and a ritual of moral remembrance (Abdinabiyevna, 2023).

In maqom, similar symbolic layers are observed. The melodic structure of maqoms such as Navo, Rost, and Segoh reflects philosophical categories of order, beauty, and transcendence. As Ulasheva (2023) notes, maqom is not simply a musical form but a reflection of the universe — a model of spiritual ascent from the earthly to the divine. When a maqom singer performs, he reproduces the cosmic rhythm through sound, embodying the principle of harmony (tavozun) both in art and in human existence.

These parallels show that baxshi and maqom are two complementary expressions of the same cultural philosophy. The baxshi communicates the people’s spiritual and moral code through the narrative, while the maqom performer translates it into a sound-based metaphysical experience. In both traditions, the purpose of art transcends entertainment; it serves as a path to moral perfection and the cultivation of inner balance.

The transmission of these traditions through oral teaching (og‘zaki an’ana) has played a decisive role in maintaining their authenticity. As Karimova (2024) emphasizes, oral



instruction allows for a dynamic form of learning that goes beyond written notation — enabling students to internalize rhythm, emotion, and subtlety directly from the master’s example. This pedagogical model relies heavily on repetition, imitation, and emotional empathy between teacher and student.

In the baxshi tradition, the apprentice (shogird) learns by accompanying the master during performances, observing every gesture, tone, and poetic variation. Through this long process, he not only develops technical skills but also absorbs the moral and spiritual essence of the art. Similarly, in maqom education, the ustoz-shogird method forms the foundation of stylistic continuity. Each maqom performer inherits interpretive nuances from his predecessors while adding personal innovations — a process that ensures both preservation and creative evolution. Furthermore, the oral tradition functions as a form of collective memory. The stories and melodies transmitted from generation to generation serve as cultural archives, safeguarding the nation’s ethical principles and worldview. This is especially crucial in a rapidly globalizing world, where intangible heritage faces the risk of homogenization.

Spiritual and Psychological Dimensions

Baxshi performance also involves a deep psychological and spiritual process. The performer enters a state of heightened inspiration known as *ilhom*, believed to be a divine gift. This state is similar to the *hal* experienced by maqom singers during the emotional climax of performance. As Rasulov (2025) argues, this spiritual energy transforms music into a means of self-purification and collective enlightenment. The audience, in turn, becomes a participant in this shared transcendence, experiencing catharsis and spiritual renewal.

Music therapy researchers have recently drawn attention to these traditional performance states, recognizing their psychological benefits and healing potential. The baxshi’s ability to evoke empathy, courage, and reflection through narrative parallels the maqom artist’s capacity to awaken spiritual peace and inner balance. Both embody what Abdinabiyevna (2024) terms “the ethical function of sound” — the power of music to shape moral consciousness and emotional resilience.

In the modern artistic environment, the dialogue between baxshi and maqom traditions continues to expand. Contemporary Uzbek composers and performers increasingly draw upon the modal richness of maqom and the narrative structure of epic performance to create hybrid works that connect past and present. Academic centers, including the Yunus Rajabi Institute of Maqom Art, have initiated interdisciplinary research combining ethnomusicology, performance studies, and pedagogy to sustain this artistic legacy.

The inclusion of baxshi and maqom elements in contemporary concert programs, theatre productions, and film scores demonstrates their ongoing relevance and adaptability. Rather than being confined to museums or archives, these traditions live on as active sources of inspiration that shape the identity of modern Uzbek art. As Ulasheva (2024) notes, their survival depends on creative reinterpretation within new cultural contexts while maintaining fidelity to their philosophical essence.

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