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CLASSICAL RENAISSANCE TRADITIONS AND MODERN MORAL REALISM IN WRITTEN KARAKALPAK POETRY: THE REVIVAL OF THE KHAMSA CANON

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Abstract

This study investigates the post-independence revival of the classical Eastern *Khamisa* (Quintet) poetic tradition within written Karakalpak lyro-epic poetry. Focusing on the contemporary cycles composed by Abilqasim Otepbergenov and Raya Ernasheva (writing under the literary pseudonym Raziya Begim), this paper examines how modern Karakalpak authors adapted classical Eastern narrative architectures—originally established by figures such as Alisher Navoiy, Nizamiy Ganjaviy, and Yusup Has Hajib—to explore pressing moral, social, and psychological issues. Through an analytical evaluation of Otepbergenov's multi-volume *Khamisa* series and Ernasheva's 2020 *Khamisa* publication, the research demonstrates how traditional Eastern forms were repurposed to address modern dilemmas, including early marriage, marital responsibility, ethical hypocrisy, and spiritual duty. The findings confirm that the revitalization of the *Khamisa* canon represents a major aesthetic development, bridging classical Turkic literary heritage with post-Soviet moral realism.

Keywords: Karakalpak literature, *Khamisa* tradition, Abilqasim Otepbergenov, Raya Ernasheva, classical Turkic poetry, moral realism, Eastern Renaissance.

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Introduction

The *Khamisa* (a cycle of five monumental narrative poems or *dastans*) represents one of the highest monumental genres in classical Eastern and Turkic literatures. Originated by Nizamiy Ganjaviy and brought to its pinnacle in the Turkic language by Alisher Navoiy in his 15th-century *Khamisa* (including *Hayrat ul-Abror*), the quintet model historically served as a comprehensive artistic canon for exploring theology, statecraft, philosophy, and romantic ethics (Kurambaev, 2018). For centuries, written poetry across Central Asia evaluated a poet's mastery by their capacity to engage with or produce a response (*nazira*) to the *Khamisa* tradition.

In Karakalpak literature, while 19th-century classical bards such as Berdaq drew heavily upon Eastern narrative techniques, the formal written adoption of the complete *Khamisa* structure remained unfulfilled due to 20th-century political shifts and Soviet ideological constraints (Bayniyazov, 1999; Paxratdinov, 1987). Following national independence, Karakalpak poets gained the artistic autonomy necessary to reconnect with classical Eastern paradigms. This paper analyzes the modern revival of the *Khamisa* canon in written Karakalpak poetry, examining how Abilqasim Otepbergenov and Raya Ernasheva modernized this classical framework to address contemporary moral and psychological realities.

The *Khamisa* Model of Abilqasim Otepbergenov: Structural Expansion and Philosophical Synthesis

Abilqasim Otepbergenov's multi-volume *Khamisa* project represents one of the most ambitious lyro-epic undertakings in post-independence Karakalpak literature. The cycle includes major narrative works such as *Allan'di Umitpa!* (Do Not Forget Your Allah!), *Allada Esap Bar* (Allah Keeps Account), *Alla Janilmas* (Allah Makes No Mistakes), *Allanin Rasuli* (The Messenger of Allah), and *Alla Jarilqawshi, Keshirimli* (Allah is Merciful and Forgiving) (Kurambaev, 2018; Otepbergenov, 2018).

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As literary scholar K. Kurambaev (2018) observes, Otepbergenov's *Khamisa* cycle draws direct compositional inspiration from foundational Eastern didactic epics, including Alisher Navoiy's *Hayrat ul-Abror* (Confusion of the Righteous), Yusup Has Hajib's *Qutadgu Bilig* (Wisdom of Royal Glory), Khwarizmi's *Muhabbatnama*, and the classical prose treatise *Qabusnama*.

Otepbergenov adapts the classical *Khamisa* structure by substituting traditional romantic plotlines with a non-linear, composite architecture. Rather than relying on a singular central hero, Otepbergenov structures his *dastans* around interlocking episodic chapters, didactic reflections, and moral parables. The work addresses modern societal challenges—including bureaucratic corruption, judicial dishonesty, and environmental degradation—evaluating them through Islamic ethical categories (*napsi* vs. *qanaat*, *harom* vs. *halol*). By embedding contemporary social realism within classical Eastern verse structures, Otepbergenov demonstrated the continuing versatility of the *Khamisa* framework.

Moral Realism and Psychological Dramatizm: Raya Ernasheva's 2020 *Khamisa*

A distinct stage in the evolution of the Karakalpak *Khamisa* occurred in 2020 with the publication of Raya Ernasheva's (writing as Raziabegim) cycle titled *Khamisa*. Ernasheva's cycle comprises five distinct narrative parts: *Kesh Kelgen Muhabbat yaki Er Jigitler Jilamaydi* (Late Love, or Brave Men Do Not Cry), *Kutiw* (Waiting), *Tolgw* (Reflection), *Analar Tariypi* (Eulogy of Mothers), and *Payghambarlardin Qasiyetleri* (Virtues of the Prophets).

Ernasheva's contribution lies in her application of classical lyro-epic forms to intricate psychological and interpersonal conflicts previously unexplored in Karakalpak narrative verse. In *Kesh Kelgen Muhabbat*, Ernasheva examines the dramatic dilemma of a young man who enters an early, unconsidered marriage without emotional maturity, only to encounter true, profound love later in life.

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The work depicts the inner psychological turmoil of the protagonist, caught between personal passion and moral obligation toward his family and society. Rather than offering superficial solutions, Ernasheva uses the structural weight of the *dastan* to explore accountability, duty, and human dignity, demonstrating that the *Khamsa* tradition can effectively address intimate modern psychological realities.

Comparative Structural Analysis of Post-Independence Karakalpak Khamsas

The revitalization of the *Khamsa* canon by Otepbergenov and Ernasheva reveals complementary approaches to modern lyro-epic composition:

Analytical Category	Abilqasim Otepbergenov's Khamsa Cycle	Raya Ernasheva's (Raziyabegim) Khamsa Cycle
Primary Focus	Theological ethics, social critique, and environmental awareness.	Psychological realism, moral accountability, and romantic ethics.
Structural Design	Composite 10-line <i>masnavi</i> stanzas; non-linear episodic layout.	Narrative lyro-epic verse structured across five distinct thematic <i>dastans</i> .
Intertextual Anchor	Navoiy's <i>Hayrat ul-Abror</i> , <i>Qutadgu Bilig</i> , and <i>Qabusnama</i> .	Classical Eastern romantic epics (<i>dastans</i>) and modern social drama.
Ethical Matrix	Universal human humility (<i>qanaat</i>) vs. worldly greed (<i>napsi</i>).	Duty, marital fidelity, family honor, and spiritual integrity.
Narrative Tone	Introspective, sermonic, and socio-philosophical.	Empathetic, psychologically intense, and dramatic.

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Conclusion

The post-independence revival of the *Khamisa* canon in Karakalpak poetry demonstrates the dynamic vitality of classical Eastern literary traditions when integrated with modern artistic requirements. Rather than treating the *Khamisa* as an obsolete historical artifact, contemporary poets such as Abilqasim Otepbergenov and Raya Ernasheva successfully adapted its structural and ethical frameworks to process complex contemporary realities.

Through Otepbergenov's theological-philosophical cycles and Ernasheva's psychologically nuanced moral narratives, the written Karakalpak *dastan* achieved a higher level of aesthetic maturity. By bridging classical Turkic poetic heritage with post-Soviet moral realism, these authors enriched national literature, proving that traditional forms remain deeply relevant for exploring the human condition in the contemporary era.

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