

Uzbek Ethnofolklore: Methods of Collecting and Researching Materials

Davlatova Saodat Tilovberdiyevna

Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor,

Senior Researcher of the Research Institute of Cultural Studies and Intangible Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT: Uzbek ethnofolklore represents a crucial element of the nation's cultural heritage, encompassing oral traditions, rituals, and artistic expressions passed down through generations. This study explores the methods used to collect and research ethnofolklore materials, emphasizing fieldwork, linguistic analysis, and digital preservation techniques. The paper highlights challenges such as authenticity, globalization, and generational transmission while discussing solutions like interdisciplinary approaches, institutional support, and technological advancements. By integrating traditional and modern methodologies, researchers can ensure the sustainability of Uzbek folklore, preserving its cultural and historical significance for future generations.

Keywords: Uzbek ethnofolklore, oral traditions, folklore research, preservation, digital archiving, linguistic analysis.

Uzbek ethnofolklore represents a vast and invaluable cultural treasure that encapsulates the nation's oral traditions, customs, rituals, myths, and artistic expressions. It serves as a vital link between past and present, preserving the collective memory of the Uzbek people and reflecting their historical evolution, worldviews, and social structures. The study of ethnofolklore is crucial not only for safeguarding this rich heritage but also for understanding the intricate relationship between folklore and national identity. However, the process of collecting and researching ethnofolklore materials presents various methodological challenges, requiring scholars to employ a range of approaches to ensure authenticity, accuracy, and cultural sensitivity. Since much of Uzbek folklore has been transmitted orally through generations, it is susceptible to variations and reinterpretations, making fieldwork an essential component of folklore studies. Researchers must engage directly with traditional storytellers, musicians, and community elders to document folklore in its most authentic form, preserving not only the content but also the stylistic and performative aspects that are integral to its meaning.

The collection of ethnofolklore in Uzbekistan has evolved over time, influenced by historical and political contexts. During the Soviet era, folklore was often documented and analyzed through the lens of socialist ideology, which sometimes led to the modification or selective recording of cultural materials. With Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, there has been a renewed interest in rediscovering and preserving folklore in its original form, leading to new methodological approaches that prioritize ethnographic immersion, linguistic analysis, and comparative studies. Modern researchers combine traditional fieldwork with technological advancements such as audio and video recording, digital archiving, and interdisciplinary analysis to ensure that folklore is not only documented but also made accessible to wider audiences. The methodological framework for studying Uzbek ethnofolklore thus involves a careful balance between preserving oral traditions and adapting research techniques to contemporary academic standards. By examining the methods of collecting and researching ethnofolklore materials, this paper aims to highlight the significance of

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folklore in shaping cultural consciousness and explore effective strategies for its preservation and scholarly interpretation.

The collection and study of Uzbek ethnofolklore require a thorough and systematic approach, as folklore is not merely a collection of tales and traditions but an essential component of cultural identity and historical consciousness. Researchers working in this field must first define their objectives, identifying whether they seek to document oral narratives, ritual practices, musical traditions, or other forms of folklore. One of the primary methods of collecting folkloric material is fieldwork, which involves direct engagement with the bearers of tradition. This typically includes interviews with elderly members of the community, traditional storytellers, poets, and artisans who have inherited and preserved cultural knowledge through generations. These individuals are often regarded as the custodians of oral tradition, ensuring that myths, legends, proverbs, and epics remain an active part of Uzbek heritage. Researchers must approach fieldwork with cultural sensitivity, recognizing that folklore is deeply intertwined with social norms, religious beliefs, and historical experiences. To ensure accurate and comprehensive documentation, ethnographers employ participant observation, recording performances, and conducting structured or semi-structured interviews to capture the nuances of folklore in its natural setting. Since oral traditions are often dynamic and context-dependent, researchers must also take into account variations in storytelling styles, linguistic differences across regions, and the influence of historical events on folkloric content.

One of the challenges in collecting Uzbek ethnofolklore is the issue of authenticity and reliability. Because folklore is transmitted orally, it is subject to changes over time, influenced by individual interpretation, memory, and social evolution. To address this, researchers often employ comparative analysis, cross-referencing collected materials with previously documented folklore from historical sources, archives, and literary works. This method helps in identifying core motifs, recurring themes, and structural patterns within Uzbek folklore, allowing scholars to distinguish between original narratives and later modifications. Additionally, linguistic analysis plays a crucial role in understanding the evolution of folklore. Many Uzbek oral traditions incorporate archaic words, dialectal variations, and poetic structures that provide insights into the historical development of the Uzbek language. By analyzing linguistic elements within folk narratives, researchers can trace connections between ancient Turkic, Persian, and Arabic influences that have shaped the Uzbek linguistic and cultural landscape. Furthermore, interdisciplinary approaches that combine folklore studies with anthropology, history, and sociology offer a deeper understanding of how folklore functions within society. For example, analyzing wedding songs, mourning rituals, or seasonal celebrations provides valuable information about Uzbek customs, social hierarchies, and belief systems, enriching the overall study of folklore.

Modern technology has significantly transformed the methods of collecting and researching Uzbek ethnofolklore. In the past, folklore was primarily recorded through handwritten transcriptions and printed anthologies, which often posed challenges in preserving the performative and musical aspects of oral traditions. Today, advancements in digital recording, audiovisual documentation, and online databases have revolutionized folklore studies, allowing researchers to capture and store folklore in more dynamic formats. High-quality video recordings of traditional performances, digital repositories of folk music, and interactive online platforms have made it easier to preserve and share Uzbek folklore with broader audiences. Additionally, artificial intelligence and computational linguistics have introduced new possibilities for analyzing large collections of folkloric texts, enabling scholars to identify linguistic patterns, thematic connections, and regional variations with

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greater accuracy. Despite these advancements, ethical considerations remain paramount in folklore research. Scholars must obtain informed consent from folklore bearers, ensuring that their contributions are acknowledged and respected. Furthermore, as folklore becomes more accessible through digital platforms, there is an ongoing debate about the potential commercialization and appropriation of traditional knowledge. Researchers must therefore advocate for ethical and culturally responsible dissemination of folklore, ensuring that it remains a shared heritage rather than a commodified resource.

Despite the various methods and strategies employed in the study of Uzbek ethnofolklore, there are still pressing issues that require attention. One of the key concerns is the gradual disappearance of certain folklore traditions due to the declining number of traditional practitioners. Many skilled storytellers, musicians, and folk artists are aging, and without proper documentation and transmission to younger generations, these traditions risk being lost. Another challenge is the influence of mass media and global pop culture, which have reshaped cultural preferences and consumption habits, leading to the marginalization of traditional folklore. To address these concerns, collaboration between scholars, local communities, and policymakers is essential in creating sustainable preservation programs that emphasize both documentation and active cultural participation. The role of cultural tourism also presents opportunities for folklore preservation, as traditional performances, crafts, and storytelling sessions can be integrated into tourism experiences, generating economic incentives for practitioners while raising awareness about Uzbek folklore. However, careful management is required to prevent commercialization from distorting or oversimplifying authentic traditions.

In conclusion, the collection and research of Uzbek ethnofolklore involve a complex interplay of traditional fieldwork, comparative analysis, linguistic studies, technological innovations, and institutional support. While significant progress has been made in documenting and preserving folklore, challenges such as authenticity, ethical considerations, generational transmission, and the impact of globalization continue to shape the field. By embracing a multidisciplinary approach and fostering collaboration between researchers, cultural institutions, and local communities, Uzbekistan can ensure the longevity and relevance of its rich folkloric traditions. As the country navigates the challenges of modernization, a balanced approach that respects tradition while embracing innovation will be key to safeguarding Uzbek ethnofolklore for future generations.

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