

## THE TERM "ALLA" AND ITS ETYMOLOGY

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In the national development and social, economic, and spiritual ascension of our people, folklore — indeed, the art of poetic word generally — has always served as a cornerstone. For folklore is the strength, vitality, and greatness of a nation.<sup>1</sup> The linguistic richness of a people first manifests itself in their oral folk creations. Whenever there arises a need to become acquainted with the culture of a nation, one must first become acquainted with that people's folklore. In folklore shall be revealed the language capacities of the people, their style of reflection, their creative power. Folklore is not merely a sample of verbal art, but rather the people's repository of language, their ways of conception and thought, mirrored in full stature; it is the history and culture that, from remote antiquity to the present day, have lived in a living form, moving in constant motion together with the people themselves. But if folklore, whatever its era or form, does not to a certain degree respond to the needs of the people, it eventually falls from the stage of life. Nevertheless there are specimens of oral creativity from humanity's beginnings to its ends which surely accompany it — among them is the alla.

**Alla** is a lullaby sung from the time of birth until about three years old, primarily by the mother, father, or close relatives, for the purpose of putting a child to sleep or soothing them: held in arms, on the lap, in a cradle or swing, gently rocking, with lines that express a world of love, joy, thankfulness or sorrow, anxiety, and unrest. According to M. Gorky, allas emerged at the conjunction of the mother-poet and the working caregiver, as original, immortal poetry, and are the beginning of all literatures. In that sense, the history of the alla in any people can be considered the history of that people's children's folklore.<sup>2</sup> The earliest recorded source of an alla text is believed to be the alla sung 4,000 years ago by the Sumerian queen. It was sung by Queen Abisimit to her ill child, expressing her grief and anxiety through the alla text.<sup>3</sup>

“May my song full of love raise you as you grow,  
May my song full of love raise you prosperously.  
May you grow, nourished like the tree Irina by its fragrance,  
May you grow unmatched, like a crown among the Shakir.” (Sleep)

“She opens her bosom to you,  
Protects you,  
My son, sleep takes you,  
You go off to sleep again,  
Come sleep, come sleep, come to my son.  
Come quickly, sleep,  
Let fatigue cover his eyes,  
Place your hand over his eyes,  
Stop his cry,

<sup>1</sup>Tilovov, A. (2020). *Theory of Folkloristics: Lecture Notes*. Tashkent. p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Safarov, O. (2010). *Uzbek Oral Folk Literature*. Tashkent: Musiq. p. 333.

<sup>3</sup> Uğurlu, E. (2012). *Lullabies in the Turkic World* (Doctoral dissertation). Ankara. p. 15.

Let me lull him to sleep in your slumber,  
I will fill your arms with dreams,  
Make sweet things from cheese for you.  
Cheese is a cure for a person,  
A cure for a person, a cure for my son,  
A cure for the son of Sultan Shughli.”<sup>4</sup>

From the above, in this most ancient example of *alla*, we see that upon a child’s birth, there is not just a need for the mother’s milk, but for the child to feel protected and secure, to sense some of the love and kindness they will have in the future — for this, the mother’s *alla* is needed. *Allas*, as examples of humanity’s most ancient and universal mode of relation, not only demonstrate the power of poetic speech, but also, by their psychological, social, and aesthetic functions, show the gradual development of society and humankind.

In poetic forms sung in mothers’ tongues — such as *alla*, *aytimlar* va *olqishlar*, *erkalamalar*, *ovutmachochlar*, *qiziqmashoch* va *qaytarmachoch* — the motif of pampering / caressing (*erkalash*) is primary. Works in the pampering position are created by adults, uttered in the voice of mothers, grandmothers, aunts. Even songs of pampering performed by men are found. Oxunjon Safarov classifies such examples, by period, place, and character, into two groups:

1. Cradle songs: *allas*, *aytimlar*, *olqishlar*.
2. Pampering songs: *erkalamalar*, *ovutmachochlar*, *qiziqmashochs* and *qaytarmachochs*.

The authors and composers of *aytim-olqishs* as well as *allas* are the folk mothers. For the child, it is not only the words of the *alla* that matter, but the melody. In that melody’s tone the child finds comfort. The monotony in an *alla*, the specific measure of the melody, serve for the child as the criterion calling sleep. But this monotonous tone is deeply connected with the mother’s state and mood in performance. Some specialists consider *alla* as an integral part of children’s folklore; others in folklore studies believe it should be studied separately as mothers’ folklore. Because it expresses motherly creativity and imagination. Mothers’ cleverness, their sense of the power of word lead to *allas* being evaluated as entirely perfect poetic works. The Tatar collector of children’s folklore, N. Isenbet, while admitting these genres are mostly performed by mothers, takes as basis that they are directed solely at children, and thus considers such songs to be examples of children’s folklore. Given that *alla* is sung to call sleep, its belonging to children’s folklore becomes even more apparent. *Allas* are a component of cradle songs. Songs sung by mothers for their child from birth until about three years of age are known as **cradle songs**. Songs of this group are deeply tied to the child being in the cradle. For this reason they are called cradle songs. *Allas* and many ethnographic poetic fragments, *aytim-olqishs* have this character. Cradle songs are sung while the child is up to three years old. Pampering songs — *erkalamalar*, *ovutmachochlar*, *qiziqmashochs*, *qaytarmachochlar* — are performed from the child’s

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<sup>4</sup> Çiğ, M. İ. (2002). *The Legacy of Middle Eastern Civilizations*. Istanbul: Kaynak Publishing. p. 213.

birth until the age of twilight (i.e. early infancy). They serve as important means in forming the aesthetic-artistic taste of children.<sup>5</sup>

Many specialists evaluate the term *alla* itself as connected to the name of Allah, believing it to be a phonetic transformation of the word Allah. Among the people there is an opinion that the word *alla* arose from the name Allah, said in the baby's ear in order to implant the name Allah there. The People's poet of Uzbekistan Usmon Azim emphasizes that mothers' *allas* contain the word Allah. But in Sh. Rahmatullayev's Etymological Dictionary of the Uzbek Language it is explained: \*"*alla*" comes from the old Turkic exclamatory word *ala* (*ala-ala*) meaning "calm down" (Devon I, 118); in the Uzbek language the vowel "a" transformed into "ä", the consonant "l" doubled: *ala-ala* > *alla* > *ällä*. Indeed, in Devonu lug'otit-turk the word *ala* is present, explained thus:  $\text{الا}$  *ala* – slow, without haste;  $\text{الا}$  *ala-ala* they say. Slowly, gently. To this word by adding "k", "l" they say  $\text{الا كل}$  *ola kel* as well. From this explanation it can be understood that the word *ala* might have been used to calm a person who is rushing or angry. But saying "*ala-ala*" to a sleeping baby, i.e. "slowly slowly," arouses doubt. In Devon, Kashgariy gives another word in the sense of *alla*: \* $\text{بلو بلو}$  *balu-balu* – a word used by mothers at lullaby in the cradle instead of *alla*. If *alla* belongs to Turkic etymology, possibly from *balu-balu* over time developed the forms *alu-alu* > *alla-alla*.

Also, among the Tatars, sayings still present in their cradle melody like "*elli-belli, beu-beu, bellu-beu*" may express the transitional stage from *balu-balu* to *alla-alla*. *Balu-balu* resembles the Russian *bayu-bay*. From this word in Russian arises the verb (u)*bayukat*, meaning "to sing a lullaby." In Max Vasmer's Etymological Dictionary of the Russian Language, he comments on the words *bayu* and (u)*bayukat*. In particular, M. Vasmer sometimes links these words with the Slavic verb *bayat* meaning "to speak", at other times suggests relation to the Turkic *bay* ("rich, noble"). Actually, the Russian "*bayu bayushki bayu*" is a cradle song more common among Russian Cossacks. Perhaps, though M. Vasmer may not have had information about *balu-balu* in Devonu lug'otit-turk, the presence of that word in Devon and forms like "*elli-belli, beu-beu, bellu-beu*" in Tatar lullabies strengthen the possibility that Russian *bayu-bay* has a Turkic root.

The *alla* term and its use as a refrain is not known exactly from when it became customary among us, but by its different applications among various peoples one can divide it regionally. For example, among the peoples of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the *alla* sung ("*allayo-alla, alla, bolam (bacham), alla*") is almost identical (only in some regions of Tajikistan a form "*lalayik*" is used), while in Turkmen the word *alla* is sometimes followed by the sound "hu" ("*alla hu alla*"), which reminds us even more of the word Allah. Generally, among Turkic peoples, mothers did not always express *allas* in words; often *allas* consisted of musical sounds involving syllables like "*hayya-huv, hiy-uv, hu-viy*". Turkmen *hu* may be such a sound. Especially among the Bashkirs in cradle melodings these sounds are clearly visible: "*elli (h)u, elli(h)u vuuv, veliyi-veleyi vay, eveyii-eveyii vey.*" But among the people of Afghanistan, notably among the Pashtuns, in their *alla* the words "*alla hu alla*" are repeated and pronounced even more closely to the name Allah. Thus, one might conditionally designate the Afghanistan

<sup>5</sup> Safarov, O. (2010). *Uzbek Oral Folk Literature*. Tashkent: Musiqqa. p. 333.

and Turkmenistan regions as the “alla hu” zone. The forms “aldi-ay, aldi” among the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz appear to be forms adjusted to their languages of the Uzbek “allayo-alla”. Azerbaijanis call the alla “layla” and use the refrain “layi-lay” instead of alla, where one feels the influence of Iranian alla — la-layi (“لايى”). So Azerbaijan and Iran may be considered part of one alla region.

The notion that the term alla appeared after Islam and is connected with the invocation of the name Allah is closer to the truth. As is known, in past times child mortality was extremely high; for this reason mothers’ prayers for their child’s health in their tongues might have turned into songs invoking Allah. Also, the similarity of alla to Persian lala, and, in some European languages, notably English calling it lullaby, where the participation and repetition of “l-” sounds are present in all cases, leads to the hypothesis that these go back to an ancient archetype. Folklorist Sh. Turg’unov, while studying local features of the region, wrote: “During observation of the allas of Namangan, it was determined that allas with the refrain ‘alla’, ‘alla-yo, alla’ together with the phrase ‘Hi, obbo’ which repeats at the end of each segment form a large portion of Namangan allas. In the process of recording, we also witnessed that the phrase ‘Hi, obbo, hi, obbo’ is uttered by the singer to prepare themselves for performance.”

Hi, obbo, hi obbo,  
In the songs that refuse in the fields, alla,  
Is it the manner, the path, my child, alla,  
Those separated from their child, alla,  
Is the color of their faces yellowed, alla,  
Hi obbo, hi obbo.

Considering the origin of “Hi, obbo”, there are views that this word might be the phonetic change of “Allah”. The word Allah appears in the form Oblo in the epic Alpomish, which serves as proof of this.

“The blossoms have withered in the garden,  
Oblo has taken your reason and consciousness,  
My dear one, your work has grown strange,  
I know you ride in the Qalmoq’s horse, bound for Boychiborn.”

In local dialects, including Namangan city dialect, when praying, the phrase “Oblohu akbar” is used exactly in place of “Allohu akbar”. The form Oblo for the word Allah has likely over time led to the use of “Hi Obbo”, “Obbo hu” in Namangan allas.

Abu Ali Ibn Sina’s reflections regarding alla are extremely valuable in determining its genre genesis. Even in his time, allas were of great importance not only among Central Asia but among the peoples of the Middle and Near East, widely spread as an independent genre with its own traditional features, referred to among Turkic peoples by the name balu-balu, as confirmed by the information in Devonu lug’otit-turk. Alisher Navoi also describes the condition of Farhod in the cradle as follows:

Arusi charx tun-kun doya kirdor,  
Bo’lib har tavri holidin xabardor.

Beshik davrida chiniyu xitoyi,  
Bo‘lib yuz no‘sh lab doston saroyi.  
Ko‘zining nozi eldin eltib uyqu,  
Anga uyqu keturmakka navogo‘.

Among those who attend to Farhod’s upbringing was a special allachi or alla singer; Navoi describes the alla singer as “navogo”. This affirmation in its place indicates that the performance of alla has reached the level of a specialized art, a craft, showing its gradual refinement. These three great figures — Abu Ali Ibn Sina, Mahmud Kashgari, and Alisher Navoi — whose testimonies contribute significantly to world culture and civilization, show that alla has long been deeply and widely woven into the life of our people, into child upbringing, serving a pedagogical function.

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