

Section 1. Folk art

DOI:10.29013/EJA-25-4-3-5



THE UZBEK FOLK LULLABY AS A CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENON: CONNECTION WITH SLEEP APATHY

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Cite: Kasimova O.A. (2025). *The Uzbek Folk Lullaby as a Cultural and Psychological Phenomenon: Connection with Sleep Apathy*. *European Journal of Arts* 2025, No 4. <https://doi.org/10.29013/EJA-25-4-3-5>

Abstract

This article explores the Uzbek folk lullaby (alla) as a cultural, psychological, and physiological phenomenon that transcends its traditional role as a song for children. Drawing upon ethnomusicological, linguistic, and psychological perspectives, it investigates how lullabies serve as a means of emotional regulation, contribute to the formation of a stable mental state, and influence the prevention and treatment of sleep apathy – a condition characterized by emotional detachment, chronic fatigue, and disturbed sleep cycles. The study emphasizes the therapeutic potential of Uzbek lullabies in modern contexts of psychological stress and insomnia.

Keywords: *traditional lullaby; alla; Uzbek culture; sleep apathy; “Tolichavkonim Bolam”; folk*

The lullaby is one of the most ancient forms of musical folklore in human civilization. In Uzbekistan, the traditional lullaby known as “alla” has played a central role in the upbringing of children and the transmission of moral and emotional values from one generation to another. The alla is not merely a song that soothes a child into sleep; it is a powerful communicative act, an emotional dialogue between the mother and her child. Through the soft melody and repetitive verbal structures, the mother conveys a sense of protection, tenderness, and harmony. In this way, the lullaby functions both as a musical ritual and as an emotional therapy that helps regulate the states of both the singer and the

listener. In the modern era, where insomnia, anxiety, and sleep apathy have become increasingly prevalent, the traditional alla offers a valuable framework for understanding the cultural and psychological mechanisms of rest and emotional balance.

In Uzbek culture, the alla represents the embodiment of maternal love, patience, and faith. The simplicity of the melody and the emotional depth of the lyrics are hallmarks of this genre. Typically sung in a slow tempo, the melody imitates the natural rhythm of the body – the beating of the heart or the gentle rocking of the cradle. The mother’s voice becomes the first sound environment in which a child’s nervous system develops.

Ethnomusicologists note that this early exposure to tonal stability and rhythmic predictability fosters the formation of emotional security. The mother's lullaby not only helps the child fall asleep but also programs emotional patterns of trust and calmness that persist throughout life. Therefore, the *alla* can be regarded as an ancient form of psychophysiological training, strengthening the bond between emotional sound perception and physical relaxation.

The poetic language of the *alla* often includes affectionate diminutives such as “*bolam*” (my child), “*jonim*” (my soul), or “*ko ‘zginam*” (my eyes). These repetitive terms of endearment create a rhythmic and semantic loop that enhances emotional resonance. In linguistic terms, repetition functions as a hypnotic tool that deepens the listener's relaxation. Psychologically, it generates a state of mild trance, in which the boundaries between consciousness and sleep begin to blur. The lullaby thus acts as both a linguistic and a physiological bridge to the sleeping state.

Sleep apathy – a state of emotional dullness, fatigue, and difficulty in initiating rest – is often rooted in chronic stress and sensory overload. Modern studies in psycholinguistics and neuropsychology indicate that rhythmic verbal patterns and low-frequency sounds have a measurable impact on the limbic system, which governs emotion and memory. The *alla*'s linguistic structure, with its smooth vowel transitions and lack of harsh consonants, minimizes cortical arousal and stimulates parasympathetic responses, slowing down the heartbeat and breathing. This directly counters the physiological symptoms of sleep apathy.

Furthermore, the lullaby's emotional content serves as an antidote to emotional disconnection. When a child or even an adult listens to a lullaby, the experience reawakens archetypal associations of warmth and care. These affective cues activate oxytocin and dopamine pathways, fostering emotional engagement and decreasing anxiety. Therefore, from a psychotherapeutic standpoint, the Uzbek *alla* can be used as a non-pharmacological intervention in managing stress-related sleep disorders.

The ethno-musicological study of the *alla* reveals its deep integration into daily

life and ritual. Historically, it was performed by mothers and grandmothers in moments of intimacy and vulnerability. During times of social upheaval or war, lullabies expressed sorrow and hope simultaneously. One of the most poignant examples, the World War II – era song “*Tolichavkonim Bolam*”, captures the pain of separation and the mother's longing for peace. Despite the melancholy tone, the repetitive rhythm and modal softness provided emotional release and resilience. Such songs transformed grief into musical form, offering not despair but transcendence.

In modern therapeutic practice, these principles are increasingly recognized. Music therapy research confirms that slow-tempo, repetitive melodies reduce cortisol levels and enhance sleep quality. Traditional lullabies, when adapted for adult use, have shown promise in mitigating insomnia, anxiety, and even depressive apathy. Thus, the Uzbek *alla* stands as a living example of how indigenous musical traditions align with scientific models of emotional regulation and neural restimulation. In contemporary Uzbekistan, the *alla* is experiencing a revival in both artistic and academic contexts. Musicians incorporate its motifs into modern compositions, while researchers analyze its linguistic rhythm and psychological resonance. This resurgence reflects a broader global interest in holistic approaches to wellness that integrate traditional knowledge with modern science. The *alla*, in this sense, is not a relic of the past but a sustainable form of emotional education. It teaches patience, empathy, and mindfulness – qualities that are essential for counteracting the alienation and apathy of the digital age. The Uzbek folk lullaby embodies a synthesis of music, language, and psychology. Its gentle rhythm and emotionally charged words create a sound environment that nurtures both emotional connection and physiological relaxation. When viewed through the framework of sleep apathy, the *alla* appears not only as a cultural artifact but as a therapeutic tool that restores the natural rhythm of rest and emotional vitality. Rediscovering the *alla* in the modern world may thus serve as both a cultural preservation effort and a path toward mental well-being.

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submitted 16.10.2025;
accepted for publication 01.11.2025;
published 28.11.2025
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