

EPIC TRADITION AND EPIC NOVEL 'ALPOMISH'

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Learning oral epic traditions means learning people's lifestyle, traditions, customs and history, their present and future, their way of thinking and their spirit. Specifically, it means understanding the originality of a nation, its qualities, wishes, way of living and outlook or, in other words, learning the oral traditions of a nation means to study the nation itself.

The process of modernising our present morals depends on how we have studied literary heritage, including the originality and degree of mythology in oral epic traditions. For this, initially we need to learn, investigate and research ancient mythological imaginations of our people and their oral narrative traditions, which are the base for art and literature. Oral epic works present the literary history of any nation.

The epic novel *Alpomish* also illustrates the imagination of our progenitors, being the most valuable work sung by epic singers for centuries. It has over forty versions and variations in Uzbek. Each version and variation requires individual research. This novel occupies an exceptional position not only in Uzbek but also in the world's epic novel heritage. Its historical originality and literary qualities make it a great example of an epic novel.

This novel has been studied enough. On the other hand, its position in the

world's folk art, its mythological background and its connection with the nation's history, cultures and traditions must be redetermined.

Let's see how epics illustrate the rituals related to our traditions and how the epic singer (*bakhshi*) followed these traditions. It should be mentioned that the specific qualities of epics, particularly those of the heroic epic novels connected with rituals, have not been fully studied yet. *Alpomish*, as well as other ancient epic novels, demonstrates the great role customs play in the structure of its plot. But it will be too simple to conclude that heroic epics are based entirely on rituals. The ritual is revealed through transformations of epic forms. To research the links between the epic form and rituals is important for the establishment of the deep foundations of epics. In this connection, it is important to mention two points. The first one is the place and functions of epics in rituals. Nowadays, the invitation of an oral epic singer to wedding parties and other ceremonies is an ancient tradition, which still exists in the southern regions of Uzbekistan. The second point is how these rituals are reflected in the plots of epic novels, that is, what role they play there.

Alpomish can be called a *symbol* of ancient rituals, traditions, superstitions and ceremonies of our people, as the novel describes the everyday life of our nation like no other literary work. Different customs and traditions, such as hunting before the birth of a child, the birth of child proper, selecting a name for a baby, driving in a skirt, holding a cradle wedding party, assembling relatives before a wedding party for advice, appointing a herald, holding a circumcision party and others described in *Alpomish* are very important and require special research.

Studying epics and traditions we should use different methods, including the structural, linguistic, poetic and psychoanalytical analyses as well the method of typological comparison. The last one should be used, firstly, to

study rituals and, secondly, to compare them with epics and their principal motifs. The linguistic, poetic and psychoanalytical methods aim primarily to understand epics and ritual semantics. The structural method is highly important, as in this case we can see how the structures of the archaic epics harmonise with each other.

Shamans (shajara), their preferences, protection by good spirits, travel to the other world, fight with evil spirits, taking a different appearance are all attributes of shaman rituals. The archaic elements in *Alpomish*, such as the special stress on the genealogy and birth of *Hakimbek* and his permanent protection by his mentors, the demonstration of heroism, beginning of a journey, fighting against dark forces, seven-year imprisonment, his symbolic resurrection and returning to the world of the living, his reincarnation in *Kultoy's* appearance and other elements show the structural unity with the shaman rituals. Also the epics' genetic characteristics can be understood through studying the structure of the genre.

Speaking about the rituals in epics we should study two characteristics:

a) they occupy a special place in people's everyday life and have an artistic form in epics (birth of a child, naming it, making cradles, engagement at an early age, sending matchmakers, marriages and others); b) rituals that have gone from everyday life but have transferred to the artistic level (hunting before the birth of a child, setting tasks before the bridegroom by the bride's side and others).

Although the birth of a child occupies a small amount of space in the text of *Alpomish*, it plays an important role there. When *Khakimbek*, the main hero of the novel, was seven years old he could shoot from the bow of his grandfather, *Alpinbiy*, which weighted 14 botmons (200 kg), for which he was called *Alpomish*. 'At that time people gathered and said: "Up to this day the world saw 90 minus one alps (strong men). Now let *Alpomish* be

an alp. Since then he was regarded as one of the 90 alps (strongmen)". In ancient ceremonies, particularly in shaman ones, the hero was given a different name. On one hand, the name marked the shaman as a chosen person, who had reached spiritual maturity; on the other hand, it meant that he had gone through reincarnation and magic force. At present, in some of the southern regions of our country people give a newly born male child a false name in order to protect him from evil spirits. If they do not do this, they think the child can get ill. After some time, the child was given a real name, for which a small ceremony was organised. In epics the ceremonies are not fully described; however, their principal elements are reflected in the epic novels. The most important point is that the ritual plays an important part in the construction of the plot and creates an epic character. If we omit the fragment of giving another name to *Khakimbek* in *Alpomish*, the meaning of the novel will change seriously. So the ceremony influences greatly the plot of the epic and at the same time functions as an artistic and aesthetic element. Barchin's division from the people and the putting of a yurt on a high hill are described in the novel in the following way: 'After making this decision, Barchin's yurt was removed from the hill where ten thousand of other yurts were. Barchin had moved there with her 40 kanizes.' At this point two things draw our attention. The first one is the putting of Barchin's yurt on the high hill. Hills and mountains were regarded as sacred places used to hold ceremonies. The second thing is that the yurt was of a mixed white-and-red colour, which expressed ancient theories about two worlds (the place of unity of man and woman). That is why these both colours have a special symbolic meaning in epics and ceremonies. At wedding parties held in the southern regions of Uzbekistan, bride stays in the house of neighbors or relatives, which is away from her own house. The friends of the bride held the ceremony of 'hiding a girl'

by hiding the future bride. The chosen person from the bridegroom's side should find his bride. Only after the *girl hiding* ceremony, the other side is allowed to take the bride. This very ceremony could be found in the novel.

'The ancient ritual was the following. Barchin was hidden in one place... Then she was found'. If we are not informed about such kind of traditions, we can simply think about Barchin's yurt on the high hill. Originally each action in *Alpomish* was done correctly and each had deep logic. The putting of Barchin's yurt on a high hill means the marriage time for the girl on the one hand, and her protection from the external world, on the other hand.

The *girl hiding* ritual that is, separating the future bride from the group is an action which is done in order to protect her from different accidents and dark powers. So the putting of Barchin's yurt on a high hill is an artistic symbol in the novel. The function and poetic power of rituals connected with hair are so great that it is impossible to explain it in one study. While magic actions in ancient ceremonies have a ritual meaning, in epics they become artistic. The ritual of *stroking a lock*, as well as other rites in *Alpomish*, are a good indication of this.

Hair and a horse's mane are symbols of a soul. Having someone's hair or mane was equal to make the person dependent on its owner. Frezer also says that hair played a great role in ancient ceremonies; primitive people thought that by combing, cutting and burning the hair, they could affect the person's nature and soul. The ceremony of plaiting hair is one of the things which meant the time of marriage for girls; it is also one of the rituals that are constantly transforming. The hair magician came from the harvest cult. The ideas of ancient people were illustrated in these 'hair stroking' rituals.

The stick, mirror and rope are objects which are used in ceremonies. The reason why these three things are connected is that they indicate the border between the two worlds. That's why the rope and sticks thrown on the way

of young married couples meant moving from one world to another one. So some of the superstitions, such as the prohibition for a pregnant woman on going over a stick or rope or swimming in a river, looking into the mirror in the evening or cutting her hair still exist in our days.

The mirror is considered an attribute of water; water is also similar to a mirror in its natural qualities. Water is the border between the two worlds. So water plays a special role in all religions and different ceremonies.

The *old woman died* ritual forms a part of a wedding ceremony. In some regions it was held in brides' houses; in others, the bride goes to the bridegroom's house. It was held in Barchin's house in *Alpomish*. N. P. Lyubecheva mentioned that this tradition was seen in all Central Asian Turkic nations. This tradition is also kept until now. In Surkhandarya, Kashkadarya regions, it is still held in a bride's house as it was written in the novel. At the entrance of the room where chimildik was put one old woman stays and behaves like a dog, obstructing the way, when the friends of the bridegroom want to enter the room. This old woman who behaves like a dog should be from a respectful family and have plenty of children and, most important, she should be a close relative of the bride.

After giving the old woman her *share*, the bridegroom enters the room. After this the 'old woman died' ceremony is held. As we know, marriage is always an important connection between birth and death, considered as the beginning of the life-death-life cycle. According to ancient conceptions about live gods, when an old person left the world, they were reincarnated as a *spring*. Without death there is no birth. If winter does not 'die', spring cannot be 'born'. Actually, birth and death are just two aspects of one thing.

The *old woman died* ceremony reflects the same in *Alpomish*, that is, the coming of one season (cycle) in place of another one, the forming of a

new family after the death of an *old woman*, all this expressing the symbolic cycle of eternal life. The representation of seasons in the form of an old woman can be found in other ceremonies, such as chymomo and Sust xotin.

We know many myths about live gods. The most important feature of myths is that all of them shows the cult of nature and harvest and most of them have a female appearance. Each change of seasons was accompanied by sacrifices and special ceremonies. In ancient Egypt the death and birth of Osiris were shown as spring performances.

In Germany a doll from hay, which symbolised death, was shown to brides. It was thought that, *death* in the form of an old woman could help the bride have a lot of children.

The majority of scientists mention stable conceptions about death's influence on fertility and the number of children in a family. That's why rituals connected with family and seasons must be studied together, as all the aspects of family ceremonies can be understood through studying seasonal rituals.

In conclusion, it should be noted that epics and rituals are closely connected with each other. Studying the historical foundations of rituals we to epic novels, such as *Alpomish*. Only through comparing motives in epics with rituals can we clearly understand the main idea. The talent and intellect of an epic artist can be seen from their works, which can demonstrate how well he followed traditions or how he could add his own part to an ancient novel and make this precious piece of art passed from generation to generation look new and fresh.

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