

Objects of Worship and Veneration in Mari Taboos

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Abstract: The study is devoted to a specific genre of folklore which is called in Mari 'taboos or bans'. The researcher's describe language peculiarities, meanings of taboos; compare them with other folklore texts. Taboos go back to ancient pagan conceptions of the Maris; objects of worship appeared in the era of tribal cults and a certain system of beliefs and view had developed in relation to them. Taboos in Mari folklore texts are characterized by strict lines of composition, their briefness provide their availability and durability. Mari taboos include restrictionson different spheres of life. Examples of taboos are found in fairy tales, songs and legends. The function of bans is to emphasize respect to the objects of worship to prevent doing something which is against norms.

Key words: Taboos, rituals, syncretism, availability, durability

INTRODUCTION

The reis an urgent need to fix and study different Mari folklore texts. Taboos which were strictly kept up at the beginning of the last century are gradually disappearing in Mari culture. Some taboos weaken while others become stronger and more dominant because realities of life, social norms and value systems continue to change and develop rapidly. But, on the other hand, the attentions of the public to the traditional culture, the aspiration to explore, preservethis rich spiritual heritage. Despite the significant transformation and the loss of some elements, taboos continue to function particularly in rural areas, villages. That is why understanding and investigation of a contemporary state of folklore texts, particular features of their content and functions appear to be important.

Taboos or bans which are called by the Maris are one of the genres of folklore. They originated in the ancient pagan conceptions of the Maris when the objects of worship appeared during the tribal cult's era and a certain system of values, views and ideas developed to prohibit them including a variety of beliefs, superstitions, omens and bans. At the same time taboos represent life and work experience of the Maris their wisdom.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive and comparative methods were used in this study. Folklore materials of Finno-Ugric Peoples (Udmurt, Khanty) were also analyzed.

The object of study is texts of prohibitions, songs, tales, true stories, beliefs, signs, proverbs, collected by Abukaeva Lyubov in the Republic of Mari El in the Republic of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan from 1990-2015. Different texts published in various sources were also used.

Taboos functioning in poems, stories, fairy tales represent the direct evidence of syncretism of various genres of folklore as well as they allow us to understand peculiar features, their role in the perception of the world system and world view.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Taboos which are closely related by time and conditions of origin, differ in their content and performance features. Over time, some taboos of the cult character have changed their original nature: the cult aspect was ousted in connection with the strengthening of its utilitarian and practical content. Currently, two groups of Mari taboos can be brought into focus:

- Taboos dating back to the old pagan ideas and they have retained their original nature nowadays
- Taboos including restrictions on religious, practical and everyday life; they do not represent a religious, cult content

Composition of taboos fully reflects their pedagogical expediency. Taboos of the Maris usually consist of two parts and their structure is some kind of a formula. The

first part is a ban by itself with the word, 'no good'; the second part is a concise summary of the consequences of violation of the prohibition, more rarely the reasons for its existence. Taboos are characterized by meaningful explanations, commentaries: it is easy to remember them and they are very impressive for example, 'Don't sleep in a field a lizard or a snake can crawl into your mouth' or another example is 'you cannot praise a small child-she/he will lose beauty you put a jinx' (Abukeva, 2007). Typically, the second part of a taboo appeals to strong psychological arguments including life, death, health, illness, family and welfare.

Genre syncretism reflects not only the unity of the religious and philosophical and aesthetic views of the Maris. The ban to drink water directly from the reservoir is clarified as the merman may grab a man. This prohibition was described in a Mari fairy tale "Silver Teeth Pampalche" in which an old man Yantelde who violates this ban was caught by merman called. To be free he was compelled to promise his daughter Pampalcheto marry the son (Abukeva, 2009). The same prohibition is reflected in an Eastern Mari wedding song which is performed in honour of a brides maid: 'do not drink the water from the spring, bending over him: do not know the temper of merman, do not get married in a strange village and you do not know the temper of a stranger'.

There are bans which are similar with signs and predictions but it does not contradict their main content and functions to prevent undesirable consequences of any prohibited actions. On the other hand, some of the bans, reaching a certain degree of generalization are used as proverbs as in 'as long as the child is not born do not prepare a baby bassinet'. General content of the ban represents a wish to carry out any action in a timely manner but not to rush with it.

Bans originated in ancient times during the existence of tribal communities and tribal cults when ancient people worshiped the mysterious and formidable forces of nature. Their main function was to emphasize respect for the objects of worship. Observance of taboos should ensure the protection of these forces, people's security and family's or individuals' well-being, prosperity.

The most ancient and strictly implemented bans whose which are associated with pagan cults of the old Mari religion. This peculiar system of religious beliefs and regulations govern the relationship of a man with the ancient objects of worship. In the period of early paganism, the Maris, like many peoples of the world, worshiped to the objects and forces of nature.

Defining the objects of worship in the world around, ancient people established bans against them as in (Abukaeva, 2007). 'You cannot say the sunrises your

eyes will come out of the eyehole'. The sun was perceived as a kind of deity it does not subject to human will and therefore, appeal to the sun in an imperative form was unacceptable for the Maris. The ban is formulated in a form of a recommendation; instead of prohibited expressions the Maris say 'the sun rises'. It is believed that saying this sentence will help raise the spirit and mood. Let us note in this context the phrase as a part of regular comparison functioning in the texts of Mari pagan prayer. 'Shining, like the light of God; rising like the morning sun; fulling like the moon; talking, like thunder; glistering like lightning; showering, like a cloud; blossom like flowers; prolonging life like wax from one year to pray, asking for a prosperous life in good health'. It should be noted that sunset is represented by the Eastern Maris in a very imaginative expression 'the sun becomes rich'. Some of the bans that go back to the cult of the sun have a real basis for example, you cannot look at the sun-you can go blind'.

Fire was another object of worship of the ancient Maris. According to their beliefs, the fire has a cleansing effect, protects from evil spirits, may convey to the gods prayer treatment of believers. Therefore, with respect to fire and household items those are associated with fire, the following restrictions can be distinguished: you cannot break the embers in the furnace will be quarrels and discord in the family, cannot spit on a fire pan or in the world to make a lick hot frying pan (Abukeva, 2007). Similar bans were found in the Hill Mari texts 'Do not kick the embers in the fire, legs will ache' 'Do not spit on the fire your lips will ache/hurt' (Gracheva, 2001).

It is noteworthy that the prohibitions dating back to the cult of fire can be found in texts of other Finno-Ugric peoples. Thus, the Eastern Khanty have a ban to carry fire from one house to another. Such actions are evaluated as a theft; a disaster happens with the owner, children can be ill, misfortune during the fishery may happen, etc. The Udmurts have similar bans associated with the cult of fire. It is not allowed to blow into the burning stove-you will cough; you cannot play with fire, you will suffer from incontinence; if you spit on the fire, the anbury will appear on your tongue. Do not carry over the fire from a bath house into the house there will be a fire and the house burns down (Vladykina, 1997).

Water was another object of worship of the ancient Maris. Lakes, rivers, springs are rightly considered to be the source of life. It was strictly forbidden to litter the water bodies. Do not throw trash into the water from a natural spring people say that the mother of water becomes angry. When a person tries to evaluate the quality of water, loudly talking about its quality, tastiness there can be a ban-warning. The intended consequences

in case of violation of these bans are the sores on lips and boils on the body. The Hill Maris have the following taboo: (Gracheva, 2001). 'If you drink water, leaning to the spring, the sore will appear on the lips. To avoid this you must throw three blades of grass growing near the stream into the water and say 'I did not drink it, it was a large bull, a big cow, a merman, cure me'. The Udmurts have a similar ban: before drinking water from a natural spring they must throw a leaf and say 'do not grab me but this leaf' (Vladykina, 1997). According to the Eastern Maris, a flower or a leaf thrown into a source of water is considered as the present of the mother of water. The gifts for the spirits of water are brought by a bride on the first day after the wedding. A bride goes to the spring for the first time and she must throw three silver coins into the water and ask to be recognized by 'water sprite'.

Water is perceived as something alive. When you cook soup and there is a need to add water the Eastern Maris advise to say 'I add your own relatives'. Water, drink, spilled on a table does not promise happiness for unmarried girls.

An important object of worship of the Maris is a forest, a wood. According to the ideas of the Maris forests have their own spirits owners; therefore, people should not frighten or annoy them. It is strictly forbidden to scream in a forest, cut down trees, especially during the period of blossom.

An oak, a birch, a lime, a cherry are trees which are especially revered by the Maris. Birch, lime trees and oak groves are the places of prayer and sacrifice where an order and cleanliness should be kept. There is a strict ban to break the branches of trees, pluck their leaves, mow the grass and pick up mushrooms and berries there. A bird cherry, a mountain ash, a rosehip have special guarding power and ability to cast out evil spirits. The Eastern Maris have a ban to break off the cherry tree in a flowering season. The explanation is rather expressive. In case of violation of these prohibitions cherry may lodge a complaint and ask God frost 'they break my hands and fingers'. God grants the request and next year at the time when cherry blossoms, God sends frost to the Earth.

Animals were also worshiped by the ancient Maris. A cow was especially revered. It was strictly forbidden to talk about the merits of cow, about the quality of milk and to praise a calf: it is impossible to say in Mari culture that a cow has a large udder-put a jinx, the milk will disappear.

A cow was rightly considered not only just a fosterer as in a proverb 'If a cow dips its tail, everything will be delicious'. A cow serves as a symbol of protection. 'You cannot drink water in a bath house. If you are thirsty, you should say I drink milk of a black cow. Only after saying these words you may drink water. Special reverent

attitude to a cow is brought in children from an early age. When a child was sent for a cow, adults strictly ordered the following. 'You cannot shepherd a cow making her run the gall bladder will burst'. Putting a jinx on a cow is a sin. Such jinx is verbally called word for word it means to take front of cows, i.e., take away power.

The bans are created not only in relation to one or another object of worship but also in relation to the realities associated with these objects directly or indirectly as in 'do not mix milk with water, you will be forced to separate milk from water after death'. It is strictly forbidden to clean a barn with a broom to sing in a shed; it will be empty. It is not allowed to go from a barn directly to the street. Changes in everyday life, way of life and the appearance of new household items were the reason for origination of new taboos. The Mari organized special holidays dedicated to cows calving cows. Guests are served with 'dumplings with cottage cheese'. According to the norms, this dish should be eaten by hand. It is strictly forbidden to divide these dumplings into two parts or to cut with a knife 'Do not divide curd dumplings into two halves the cow's udder will hurt'. Moreover, if you pierce them with a fork, a cow will suffer. Milk should not be given to anyone before above mentioned holiday. A compliance of the following the ban allegedly determines the behavior of a cow: 'Once the curds get out of an oven it cannot be moved from one place to another when you milk a cow it will not stand'. It is believed that the observance of these restrictions will ensure stable yields of milk, normal offspring and prosperity. At first glance, the bans are devoid of any basis but such bans and regulations, defining the behavior of people, teach them to follow the order to comply with standards of behavior in everyday life.

The Maris refrain from harassment and eating such birds as swans, cranes, wild geese, pigeons. Some of them according to the beliefs of the Maris were under the protection of gods and were considered to be untouchable. It was reflected in the names of some birds: a wild goose is called 'God's geese'; a snipe was called 'God's sheep'. The Udmurts have a ban to kill cranes. If you kill a female crane, a crane will throw a firebrand or your wife or husband will die (Vladykina, 1997).

There is a strict prohibition to kill frogs. Violation of this ban could lead a rainy and nasty summer (Abukeva, 2007). The Udmurts have another explanation for this taboo: if you touch a toad it will suck the cow's udder (Vladykina, 1997).

The subjects of reverence of the ancient Mari were some insects-bees, butterflies, ants. According to Mari beliefs, butterflies are the souls of dead people. Ants were considered to be good healers and it was strictly

forbidden to ravage anthills ‘You cannot ruin the anthill, your life will spoil’. In Mishkino region of the Republic of Bashkortostan a ritual of sacrificing ants was mentioned: a woman stuck goose bones into an anthill and she asked ants to protect her geese.

A cat and a dog are also respected by the Maris and it is reflected in a number of bans as in ‘you cannot say that kittens are bad because a cat may stop looking after them; ‘you cannot kick the cat and dog, your children will be angry’; ‘you cannot hit a cat and a dog, you will be in trouble’. The strict ban to torture a cat and a dog is explained as follows: a person lives by their share. There is a beautiful legend explaining the significance of this ban.

CONCLUSION

Taboos or bans, being an original genre of Mari folklore, reflect the outlook of people, experience of interaction with nature, the practice of setting ethical, religious and aesthetic norms. They govern the relationship between a man and nature, define the hierarchy of relations between members of the ethnic community and families they have a great educational effect.

The bans originated in the era of ancient paganism. They teach to worship the sun, water, fire, some plants and animals. The Maris worship only those objects and phenomena which their health, well-being and welfare of the whole family depend on.

The similarities in the content of Mari bans and the bans of other Finno-Ugric peoples is due to the unity of the ancient religious conceptions of ethnic communities, the similarity of cultural and historical, economic and geographical conditions.

Various aspects of people’s lives in the past and at present are found in taboos: nature, household duties and family, daily life, relations as well as religious, pedagogical and philosophical views.

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