TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND RITUALS VIEWED THROUGH FOLK SONGS
On the Basis of the Material in Russian

Larissa Rybakova. Moscow, Russia

Traditional beliefs and rituals are reflected in the folk songs (the report is about the songs which are comparatively short, the so called non-epic, lyrical ones). Life reflected in songs is the secondary form of existence of beliefs and rituals. But it is rather stable and modern as songs are one of the most vital forms of folklore.

Beliefs and rituals are quite well reflected in songs. It is true as far as ritual songs are concerned; it is just as true (though it is not so obvious) as far as non-ritual songs are concerned. (Speaking about the non-ritual songs we mean such ones, the contents of which do not coincide with the main aims and aspirations of some rites. Not coinciding with the rites ideologically, non-ritual songs, usually in different places, can traditionally exist within the limits of different rites). I want to give you an example of how a ritual can be reflected in non-ritual songs.

The Russian ritual called *the majority of a maiden* is considered to be an initiation. Through this ritual it was announced that the maiden can already be married and, if that ritual was a part of the wedding ceremony, it was used by the bride to express her agreement to the marriage. This initiation ritual was investigated by D. Zelenin.[1] According to the scientist, during this initiation the girl has to face two tests: a physical and a moral one. The physical test is jumping down from a bench. The moral one is having one's own awareness and will power: the girl is being persuaded to make this jump by parents, relatives, neighbours and the girl answers: 'If I want to jump, I'll jump; if I don't want to jump, I shall not jump'. No ritual songs are used for this ritual. But there are many non-ritual songs which have common features with the rituals of initiation, including the ritual *the majority of a maiden*. For example there is a song which has the lines

> *They were sending a young woman to get some water ...*
> *If I want to go, I'll go;*
> *if I don't want to go, I won't go.*[2]

The jump from a bench into a belt, a skirt (that are worn only by people of a certain age) or a sack made of nets (nets are associated with water) is now replaced by going to get some water – and according to a song, death or love were waiting for a woman by the water. The ritual formula expressing the will

changed because the action in the song changed; but still this formula can be easily recognised. In this song it is the answer of the woman to the proposal of going to fetch water, just like the girl in this ritual initiation answered when her relatives asked her to jump down the bench. The elements of a ritual in a non-ritual song sound even stronger, although the event itself – going to fetch water – is just an everyday event.

The songs (both ritual and non-ritual) depict various rituals that are different in their content, they might or might not use songs, or they might be famous or quite unknown. So, the wedding ceremony is widely known, widely depicted in songs. But this *majority of the maiden* is much less known. I would like to give you just one more example of the rather unknown protective ritual. It was made while the cattle died. A magic circle was ploughed around the village and it protected the village from the Cows Death. In certain places this circle was sowed, usually sand was used for that. Sand was used not only while the ploughing ceremony took place. In Olonetskaya province sand was added to seeds. It was believed to make crops grow bigger and protect from evil forces, because, when the devil comes, the sand will get into its eyes.[3] There are several songs about sowing sand. For example a ritual song was included into the ploughing ritual. It described and motivated this ceremony of sowing sand:

> *Girls plough and women disperse sand;*
> *When sand grows, then the Death comes to us*.[4]

In the non-ritual song the sowing of sand is depicted differently:

> *Come, sister, come at dawn, at night.*
> *We shall bring yellow sand,*
> *we shall put it under our father's house;*
> *the sand will never grow,*
> *and I shall never live in my father's house*.[5]

The following things are in common in this non-ritual song and in the ploughing ritual: the time, either night or dawn; the act of sowing sand; the belief that the sand will not grow; then a special order of words, known to the whole Slavonic folklore (according to P. Bogatyryov this is the *formular of the impossible*: just as one event is impossible, in the same way something else is impossible). And at the same time in the non-ritual songs the spreading of sand is not a protective action as it was in reality, but some kind of fortune-telling, which had not existed before that: they never told fortune by spreading sand. Just this tradition in practice of spreading sand created this song. But this non-ritual song does not belong to any particular belief or ritual. It should be placed next to the song from the ploughing ritual, and also next to the wedding song, where the main character sows pearls instead of sand[6] and so all these songs must have common roots.

How do songs depict rituals and beliefs? The most important thing is that songs are not the mirror, the world depicted in songs is not just a passive reflection of reality. Real events can be depicted in songs exactly (for example in the ritual song of the above-mentioned ploughing ritual and many other ones), or things may undergo certain deformations. Especially it is so with non-ritual songs, as we can see from the given examples (but there are many wedding songs which make the reality brighter, with fantastic plots). I must make it clear that the outside reality of these rituals is deformed, but the inside roots are never deformed (the going of the maiden to fetch water is just her movement to death and to her beloved one, it is all connected with the character of the ritual). Moreover, in certain cases these deep meanings are preserved better in songs than in rituals and beliefs. So the act of sowing sand in the given examples of the rite and custom has a protecting meaning. Motivations of the protecting qualities of the sand are different (the sand does not sprout, one can throw it in the Devil's eyes), in this way the motivations somehow exclude each other, they prove to be not paramount. What remains instead of them? Sometimes they sowed different seeds or frankincense in the rite of ploughing. The investigator of the ritual who proceeds from the protecting sense of the rite considers such a sowing the result of the later perversion.[7] But in the Olonets customs the sand is sown together with the seeds. Is it just a chance? The songs prove that it is not so. A long chain of images appears in the tradition: sand – pearl (jewels in general) – star and so on. Here we can see, what is not obvious in reality: sand – stone, a small part of stone. But at the same time in the songs stone is grain which sprouts:

> *The stone has fallen*
> *(On the poppy's seeds.)*
> *A small bush has grown on this place...*[8]

So it is in the spring song. In a wedding song pearl also sprouts. By the way, judging by the songs, stone is ideal, original grain. Sowing stone, one as if repeats the first sowing which took place in the time of the creation of the world. The protecting qualities of sand – stone in the rite and custom, as it usually happens, are derived from the quality of fertility which once was given to it. But this quality of the sand, belief in it, knowledge of it, originally mythological, probably, are lost in the out-of-song reality.

And finally: songs reflect not only beliefs and rituals. They make a system of them. In what way? Songs differ from each other. And if we choose similar songs according to some definite features, then beliefs and rituals which these songs reflect will also make a definite group. The choice of differences of the songs is a special and serious question. I should say that these are not genre characteristics, but that the differences are taken exclusively from the texts (the

peculiarities of the way of life and of music are not taken into consideration). Among the differences, the following characteristics turn out to be essential: whether the parts of some text differ, whether they are joined by the relationship between cause and effect or whether some text consists of similar or, on the contrary, of completely different but anyway quite self-dependent parts. So in the non-ritual song about a young married woman who went to the well to bring some water there are opposed parts in the text and the events develop in succession: her father-in-law sends her to the well to bring some water, she refuses to do it and her father-in-law frightens her with his son's anger. The structure of the songs about the sowing of sand is different from the structure of the previous song; the text consists of two similar but at the same time different parts: the heroine sows the sand which will not sprout, then she repeats everything from the very beginning, but this time she sows peas and they sprout. Thus in the Russian song tradition we can distinguish a big group of songs, within the limits of which the songs and the corresponding beliefs and rites are combined into two groups according to some differences between them. At first it seems there is no order in the out-of-song material. So in the second group reproductive and protective rituals appear alongside with fortune-telling, calendar rites appear alongside with wedding rites. It turns out that there actually is an order here. Songs divide rituals into two groups in accordance with the model of the world, or, to be exact, of the worlds, reflected in these rituals. In both cases the number of the worlds is more than one. But in the first case there are different worlds which coexist. They need each other just in that particular quality (initiation is possible only in an alien world). The worlds are united or divided by a border-line, which does not represent anything concrete, but when this border-line is crossed, some desctructions happen (in the songs the heels are always broken, the floor or some other part of the house destroyed, etc.). In the second case the relationship between the worlds is different. If the worlds are different, they do not need each other and they alienate (protective rituals). If the worlds are attracted to each other, they should become similar, one world should be compared with the other world, which is the ideal one (for example, in reproductive rituals the plants are given some task – they should reach something which is tossed). The worlds are connected not with the borderline (which is always equal to itself), but with the bridge. The bridge either does not exist (the sand did not grow) or exists (in the ploughing ritual the participating people leave the world of the Death of the Cow by lighting the candles, carrying the icons and praying – these are the bridges that connect the world of the people with the ideal world of the God).

These are the two pictures of the organisation of the world and the connections between them – in a way non-realised beliefs, though actual, and

probably very archaic ones. Out-of-song events are subdivided in accordance with this belief. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the structures of the song texts of both above-treated groups are analogical to the models of the worlds. The songs are organised in accordance with the organisation of the world.

Literature

[1]*Zhivaya starin a*. E. 2. S.-Peterburg, 1911, pp. 233-246.

[2]Shein, P. *Velikor us v svoikh pesnyakh, obychayakh, verovaniyakh, skazkakh, legendakh i t.p.* I., e. 1-2. S-Peterburg, 1898-1900, No. 555.

[3]Korinfsky, A. *Trudovoi god russkogo krestyanina*. I. Moscow, 1904, p. 22.

[4]Zhuravlyov, A. Okhranitelnye obryady, svyazannye s padezhom skota i ikh geograficheskoe rasprostranenie. In: *Slavyanski i balkanski folklor: Genezis. Arkhaika. Traditsii*. Moscow, 1978, pp. 76-77.

[5]Dobrovolsky, V. Smolenski etnograficheski sbornik. IV. S.-Peterburg, 1903, No. 19, p. 221.

[6]*Pesni, sobrannye P. V. Kireyevskim: Novaya serya v 2-kph*. Moscow, 1911, No. 388.

[7]See Note 4, p.77.

[8]*Poeziya krestyanskikh prazdnikov*. Leningrad, 1970, No. 479.

ABOUT THE RELIGION OF THE MANSI

Natalya Sainakhova. Khanty-Mansiisk, Khanty-Mansi District, Russia

In the past, the Khanty and Mansi belonged to several tribes, each of whom had its own dialect. The larger Mansi tribes settled in Upper Lozva, Lower Lozva in Upper and Central Konda and elsewhere. Each tribe had its common customs and beliefs and calendar festivals, for which the community summoned to a common assembling place all those who lived up the water-ways. On the Konda such a place was the village of Nakhratsky, on the Ob it were Kondinsk, Belogoye and other villages.

The Ob-Ugrian tribes belonged to two large communities called *Moshch* and *Por*. In the past, the communities were strictly exogamous units, the members of which we called 'blood relatives' and named 'brothers' and 'sisters'. The community comprised numerous lineages, the name of which shows whether