

THE SYMBOLIC FIGURATIVENESS OF THE EAST FINNO-UGRIAN WEDDING SONGS AND THEIR CONNECTION WITH THE RITE

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The wedding rite and songs constitute the most well-preserved part of the East Finno-Ugrian folklore; the East Finno-Ugrian nations being Udmurts, Komi, Mari, and Mordvinians. Nowadays one cannot say that the rite is well-preserved and in its primordial state. Rites are still existing, though their course gets much simpler and shorter.

The magic rites become more entertaining and transform gradually. As for the song-verbal wedding folklore the matter is somewhat different. The texts of songs and rhymes are more traditional and endure better. A song may lose the immediate connection with the specific detail of the rite but it still exists. Examination of a rite and the accompanying texts helps to reveal their sense and function.

The connections between songs and rites, especially those between the poetic language of songs are complicated and multiform. Several levels of the relation of the poetic language of songs, especially the relation of symbols, to the rite can be picked out from the East Finno-Ugrian nations. Some of the wedding songs are essentially immediate descriptions of the functioning rite. Their sense is clear, the images are comprehensible, they are accompanied by ritual actions. The ritual actions and the songs are performed simultaneously. Such songs are numerous in East Finno-Ugrian poetry. Symbols may be present in these songs, though they have no further development and they are often connected with the taboo names for the bride and the bridegroom (*berry, flower, chicken, hen, duck* – symbolical images of the bride; *kite, brother, lonely crane* – symbolical images of the bridegroom). One can find the explanation of symbols in the wedding songs and rites of the related nations. For example, the image of hen is partially explained by the Mordvinian rite in which they bring the bride pastry shaped as a brood-hen and chicken.

Here is a brood-hen, a dappled-back for you.

She takes care of her chicken – little nestlings.

Daughter, you also hatch, take care of your nestlings.¹

East Finno-Ugrian cults continue to exist in songs, some ritual details having disappeared from the rites.

This way of creating images in wedding poetry explains the meaning of many songs and indicates that the specific rite existed before. For example, the

motif of lifting the ceiling or breaking the floor is very frequent in the Udmurt wedding poetry:

*Stamping with the right foot,
We'll break your cross-beams.*²

A number of directions were being observed when the bride was being taken away from the parents' house. It is habitual in Komi ritual that the bride should be taken away through the shed and not through the front door.³ Estonians pulled down the fence for this purpose.⁴ It is not fixed that Udmurts have had the rite itself, but their songs confirm its existence indirectly. These can appear to be descriptions of rites which existed in fact. The other folklore genres also reveal the existence of such a Udmurt rite. For example, in legends and traditions mythological creatures retire from the house, lifting the ceiling or the corner of the house, and not through the door. So the text of the song reveals the connection with folklore and myths by way of the rite. The presence of mythological consciousness helps the performers to understand the meaning of such songs. A song can serve the symbolical description of the specific ritual details.

For example, the meaning of the Udmurt wedding song about a girl who had been promised to somebody as a wife is fairly obscure.

*You have got a white birch in your yard
The nightingale sings on the top of the tree
Threw a stick and dropped it on the branches
Threw a hat and dropped it on the hands.*⁵

The content of the song is not revealed within the framework of the text and the specific rite, but in the context of many conceptions and regulations. It can be explained by means of an idea of Udmurts about when a girl can marry (if she does not fall down when hit by a hat, she is mature). The poetical prelude of the song is symbolical. Birch is a frequent symbol in the wedding poetry, but different nations give it different meanings. Beyond any doubt is only the idealising meaning of the symbol in the East Finno-Ugrian poetry. The nightingale is the image of a dear and beloved man. The song reveals not only a connection with the rite (textually this connection is oblique) but also associated connections with all the vital conceptions. Probably, such songs are not only the descriptions of the existing or lost rite but also serve a substitutes for other ritual details. There may be several reasons for such a substitution: the disappearance of a rite; the impossibility of its accomplishment, etc. The main reason is that the rite has got shortened and condensed owing to the text and the symbols. In the wedding folklore one can often come across the description of the road by which the travellers go. These descriptions are general and are not determined by any place:

*What road were we coming here by?
By the road where hazel-grouses pipe
What road shall we go away from here by?
By the road where bees fly.⁶*

The image of a swarm of bees is typical for non-ritual poetry as well and indicates friendship, consent and love. These descriptions are more frequently represented by symbolical situations, for example, in Komi and Udmurt wedding songs; the coincidence is almost complete:

*Across the Tomtit river in bast-baskets
We sailed to pick pinks.⁷*

The flower is the main symbolic image of the bride in the East Finno-Ugrian wedding poetry. The motif of crossing the river is even more habitual in the wedding poetry. The song extends the framework of the rite by the symbolic images and other connections of the text rather than by the text itself.

Songs which are immediately connected with the rite and songs describing the rite are not frequent in East Finno-Ugrian wedding poetry. Usually the ritual detail itself and its description in the song have a symbolic meaning. The description loses touch with the rite when a symbol is developed irrespective of the course of the rite on the basis of the associative connections of the image outside the song. For example, a white bird is the symbol of the bride in Mordvinian poetry.

*I give you, mother-in-law, a white birch
Keep this birch till we come
So that it wouldn't get thin
So that its leaves wouldn't fall
So that its branches wouldn't break.⁸*

In the wedding and ritual poetry there is a whole cycle of songs showing the attitude of the participants to the rite itself. Symbols are present there only as taboos, they have no development and bring about no realisation of associative connections.

The semantic connections between the text of a song and a rite are not always evident or important. The texts having no immediate rite redaction can be used as wedding ones. The connection is performed through symbols. Melody appears to be a more universal means of connection a text or a rite. The melody enables to use the texts if these are used for similar situations. For example, the motif of parting which is frequent in the wedding poetry is used in other rites, for instance in recruiting. The connections of the ritual text and its poetical language extend and grow oblique, revealing the connections with the rest of the rites and with all the cycle of vital conceptions of the people.

Literature

¹*Ustno-poeticheskoe tvorchestvo mordovskogo naroda*. VI:2. Saransk, 1968.

²Expeditions on Dialectal Studies, Udmurt University, 1973.

³Plesovsky, F. *Svadba naroda komi*. Syktyvkar, 1968, p. 79.

⁴*Estonky folklor*. Tallinn, 1980, p. 82.

⁵NIIJaLI UO AN SSSR manuscript funds, folder 2, No. 284.

⁶See Note 5.

⁷See Note 5.

⁸See Note 1, p. 61.

THE MUSIC OF MANSI BEAR-FEAST

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The traditional Mansi beliefs have found their reflection in the ritual sphere of folklore – the bear-feast. The origin of the bear-feast is connected with the totemic cult of bear, whom Mansi regard as one of their ancestors. In ancient times the Supreme God Numy-Torum changed his son into a bear and ordered him to live among the people and govern their fate. From that time the Mansi worship this animal.

The hunter, having killed a bear, must persuade the ghosts that he killed his wild brother by accident. For this purpose he invites all inhabitants of his settlement and their relatives from other settlements to a bear-feast – *Uy yikvave* ('to dance bear'). The feast lasts five days, or four days, if the bear is female. The bear's head is placed on the table in the hunter's home, and is decorated with birch-bark circles, coins, rings, etc. The food (bread, berries, nuts and wine) is placed nearby. When the day is closing in, the Mansi begin singing, dancing, performing comic plays. They are dressed in specially sewn gowns and their faces are covered with birch-bark masks. Though traditions of the bear-feast have local peculiarities, there are parts obligatory for all dialectal Mansi groups.

Every night the bear-feast begins with singing *uy-erygh* ('bear song'). This term defines songs about the bear: about his life in the forest, his meeting a hunter, and his coming to the bear-feast. Besides, the cycle of *uy-erygh* includes songs about other animals coming to the feast: *oghsar erygh* ('fox song'),