

THE TRADITION AS A FACTOR AND CONDITION OF DEVELOPMENT

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The problems of culture and cultural development get into the spotlight in a situation where society plunges into a period of doubt, searching for ways out of uncertainty and suspense, social chaos, that is to say, faces a crisis. The search for cultural criteria in getting our bearings and always at turning points of historic development must not only emphasise and reveal the very essence of culture as a basic world-forming element. It also casts doubt on the prior direction of development, either overtly or in a concealed way. With all that culture more often emerges as a kind of comprehensive substance and is sometimes understood as the sphere of man's spiritual life. In our opinion, at present such interpretations of the concept of culture equally have rights both to coexist and to be selectively employed, though it is quite clear that they are not the only ones. We consider this to be a matter of principle.

In our opinion, all global and regional problems (economic, social, political and ecological) are basically connected with axiological ones. They can only be resolved through searching for an answer to the poignantly complex and contradictory question: what is to be considered the purpose of the development of humanity?

Regardless of the nature of social set-ups, the problems of cultural development and of policies in the field of culture have no particular differences, provided that the goal of development is to make advances in science and technology, or when you just embark on the way finally leading to scientific and technological progress.

The current integrating processes inevitably led to more uniformity in the ways of life and specific forms of cultural behaviour. To our mind, the impoundment the individuality of a person, an ethnos, or a nation can only be resisted by resorting to cultural values, national traditions and their revival. What is even more important, culture has no frontiers, does not recognise them, for it operates according to the laws that are not influenced by ideology. Cultural processes have no distinctions depending on the nature of socio-political regime; they unite, bind, but not divide us.

The resolution of the problems of culture presupposes a certain concept of development. Such a concept is even more necessary if our orientation to scientific and technological process, advancement on the way to scientific and technological process will inevitably bring us to (and it is already evident nowadays) repeating the mistakes that other nations have already made.

Sociologists today have a habit of looking back at the roots of the people's life, of its spirit, and at its ethnic traditions. This way of thinking can already be regarded as both a humanising element in the society and a possibility of stabilising social development. It is aimed at searching for a moral and ethic principal element that will be able to consolidate the society and lead it out of the present chaos and over-politised attitudes in all spheres of life. All this has a noble objective of searching for possible ways out of the crisis, first of all in the spiritual and moral sphere. The revival of the seemingly structures of life is not only regarded as a major means of attaining this objective, it is already being put into effect. The quest for ways out of the spiritual crisis through actualising humanitarian values common to mankind is in fact resolving socio-political, economic and ecological problems. The revitalisation of traditions or even attempts at revitalising them are doomed to fail, if one does not take into account the following important, as we see them, moments:

1. The current level of society and cultural pattern.
2. The position of a given society and its culture in the macrocosm of the world community and the world culture.
3. The pattern of links and interrelations within society and culture in both national and international contexts.

At present all developments in particular countries or regions as well as on a global scale are interconnected and interdependent. And the world community is getting more and more sure about the necessity to preserve stability both in an individual region and in the world as a whole. The value of stability is beyond any doubt. It all stems from our eagerness to avoid discomfort that deprives us of the apparent feeling of freedom. Additionally, it causes uncertainty. In practice to gain stability or even to keep the existing balance is not so much illusory as problematical. In our opinion, the priority of cultural values can guarantee the stability of development and the balance in the whole of the world. But now, the priority of culture is out of the question. Nonetheless the task of preserving culture is extremely topical because of the latest developments in the world. Man cannot exist outside and without culture, which is equally true of an ethnos and a society. The question is what culture suits the individual and what are his needs. Does the establishment of one culture necessarily mean the repudiation of another?

It is worthwhile to unite the efforts of both superpowers and smallest countries to rescue our national identities, ethnic and cultural peculiarities. This may well be a way out the deadlock of industrial society. To our mind, we can agree to a certain extent with Professor Bogdan Sukhodolsky of Poland who said at the meeting of the European Cultural Association in Belgrade (30/9/1987) that it is not unification, but diversity of national cultures that boosts

human progress. Why to a certain extent? The diversity of national cultures and their unification are not two separate models of development, but the two sides of one and the same process. We think that further progressive movement will be based on their reasonable combination and compatibility.

Nowadays we all witness the formation of a new socio-cultural situation, the effects of which can be foreseen. We should also mind the fact that the situation will further be aggravated after 1 January, 1993, with the 12 countries of the European Community opening their frontiers, which will spur the process of destroying the socio-cultural identities of the member countries. Additionally, emigration from the Soviet Union will grow, with the figures for 1990 being allegedly 600,000 people. These and other factors will inevitably lead and already leading to growing tensions, dissolving culture and the formation of a dehumanised society.

Arguing that the priority of culture will help us find a way out of the deadlock of industrial society, we would not like to seem to be very categorical, we would not expect absolute understanding either. In our opinion, if society resorts to culture and traditions, that will benefit its spiritual health as it is. The fact of turning to cultural values is significant in itself. In an industrial society preserving cultural values is a kind of ethno-social immunity that helps preserve the specific features of a given society. The loss of such immunity has greatly contributed to the world-wide spread of mass culture and commercialised art.

Arguing that every culture and the traditions of every ethnos are of global value, it is worth noting that progressive development is impossible if you take care of your own culture and traditions and ignore or, moreover, repudiate the culture of another ethnos.

It should also be borne in mind that both their revitalisation and the traditions themselves depend on our capability to restore ourselves, to keep the balance and to purify ourselves.

By resorting to cultural heritage and national traditions, we ensure links between generations and continuity and preserve memory, the historical memory of generations, which may well be of the greatest importance. The continuity does not mean the inheritance of rigid structures. Culture and traditions can be assessed from the point of view of their qualitative parameters, of which movement, that is, the capability of culture and traditions to be in a state of flux, is one of the most significant. This movement is nothing but the movement of the value and the perfection of the ideal.

The urgent necessity to resort to the cultural values and national traditions of the past can be explained by the public's anxiety to preserve the nation's individuality as a perspective and a stimulus to historical development. Both

culture and traditions have limits. They cannot be overstepped as that would trigger off the process of disintegration followed by impoverishment of the spiritual life of an individual and a people.

Cultural values are the birthright of the whole humanity. As a specific mechanism of transmitting experience, skills, cultural, moral and other values, cultural traditions play a very important role in the formation of an individuality. That is why we can say the degree of the safe-keeping of traditions reflects the level of the nation's culture.

The concern for culture is the concern for the present and the future of an individual and a nation. The development of culture is the guarantee of resolving today's pressing problems, preserving nations' individualities, which paves the way for constant improvement.

THE CHARACTER OF KEREMET IN THE MARI MYTHOLOGY

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Ghosts called by the general name *Keremet* are considered by nearly all researchers to be evil creatures, whose the aim is exclusively to cause harm to people.¹ It was not quite so in reality. P. Glezdnev has written in his article: *Special ghosts, called by the general name Keremet, protect the whole family.*² This was said about the Maris of Belebeyev region. The idea of Keremet in the other regions of the Mari Republic was the same. A Mari was very proud of paying homage to Keremet. There is an example about a Mari boasting to have a Keremet:

*Hey you, what a man are you? You're lost. Look at me, I have a Keremet! After these words the other Mari wanted to obtain a Keremet by all means. He built a fence around the grave and began to make sacrifices (the village of Susadi-Abalock, Byrsk).*³

V. Filonenko has registered a legend which says that the worship of Keremet was determined by the god Yumo-Keremet, who was considered to be Keremet's younger brother who always resisted him.⁴ But there existed not a single, but a large number of keremets, each having his own name. It was Yakovlev⁵ who gave them these names. In honour of those Keremets there were special groves and mountains (Keremet Arch, Keremet Hill).⁶ With the Chuvash people