THE CONCEPT OF NATURE AND LIFE IN CONGRUITY WITH NATURE IN THE AXIOSPHERE OF THE TRADITIONAL CULTURE OF THE MARI PEOPLE

Galina E. Shkalina¹, Raisia A. Kudryavtseva², Tatyana N. Belyaeva³* & Vitaly I. Shabykov⁴

¹Prof, Mari State University, RUSSIA, galina_shkalina@mail.ru
²Prof, Mari State University, RUSSIA, kudsebs@rambler.ru
³Asst. Prof., Mari State University, RUSSIA, sokolova_belyaeva@mail.ru
⁴Senior Scientific Researcher, Mari Research Institute of Language, Literature and History named after V. M. Vasilyev, RUSSIA, sebs9-kud@yandex.ru

*Corresponding author

Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of the system of value relations and attitude of the Mari people toward nature, society, man. Such an axiosphere is untranslatable into the language of scientific concepts, and is expressed by symbols in a mythological, religious, artistic form. The concept of nature gives to Mari traditional culture structural isomorphism. Mari came to understanding of the natural order not through rational observation and logical thinking, but through mystery. Such form of knowledge today must be viewed as a tradition of sacred wisdom, which governs human life. It is such knowledge, from which theology, philosophy, and science emerged.

All nations have an innate respect for nature, expressed in the sign-symbolic form of their traditional culture.

In the sacred texts of Mari people, there is the idea of harmony between Man and the World. The harmony of the world is based on the circulation, consecrated and supported by higher beings – deities. In such environment nature itself is perfectly and culturally organized space, ideal abode with an eternal source of life energy. The man in such structure of the Universe does not play a passive role. He is energetically involved in activities to ensure his successful existence.

The age-old tradition of the Mari people has an analogue of Tao. It is the concept of Yu. It connects the man and the world in whole, removes limitations, one-dimensionality of human consciousness, which the logical form of thinking is.

The derivatives of Yu are юж (air), Юмо (God), юзо (magician), юлаш / юмылташ (to pray), Югорно (prophetic way).

The practice of prayers in the Mari sacred groves in the XXI century is the ongoing search of the highest truth, justice on this sinful earth.

The artistic treatise of the Mari ethnoethics is the poetic work of Anatoly Spiridonov «Yugorno. The song about the prophetic way»

The worldview basics of the traditional culture of the Mari people are, first of all, natural conformity, ecocentrism. In the Mari ethnoethics it sounds like that: «There is no nature – there is no man either. As I refer to nature today, so tomorrow I will live, as well as my family, my people, my country».
There is a need of reformatting of such sacral knowledge to the conditions of the modern cultural paradigm, what will allow to reduce the consumer attitude of modern man to the ecosphere. In an era of global crisis such approach is a lifeline for mankind, because the essence of this crisis is worldview.

**Keywords:** axiosphere, tradition, culture of the Mari people, the concept of nature, ethnoethics, structural isomorphism.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The axiosphere of culture is the universal system of value communications and relations of man to the world of nature and society. The peculiarity of the axiosphere is high stability, which does not allow to change it by someone’s will. Historically, the earliest way of ensuring stable unity of generations is the tradition. Therefore, the traditional culture and the world of values are very close concepts.

The language of the world of values can’t be translated into the language of strict scientific concepts; therefore, values are often couched in a mythological, religious, art and figurative or philosophical form, are expressed by symbols. The purpose of values is to immerse the consciousness of people in the world of exalted significance, in the realm of vital meanings. The life of society without values would be impossible; the functioning of the social system could not keep orientation on the achievement of group purposes; individuals would not feel in themselves «the necessary measure of an order and solidarity of purposes» (Kluckhohn, Strodbeck, 1992).

The cultural value system has a structural isomorphism (similarity) determined by various factors. Thus, the structural isomorphism of Mari traditional culture gives the idea of nature and life in congruity with nature. The purpose of this article is to consider this structural isomorphism by the example of Mari worldview (religious) axiology.

2. **DISCUSSION AND RESULTS**

Today, the ancient Mari faith (chimari) is in the conditions of influence of serious external calls. On the one hand, this is a worldwide process of multireligiousness increment, dissolving of local traditions and transforming of the religious systems (the so-called new age ideas about grandiose leaps in the spiritual, cogitative and technological development of humanity). On the other hand, this is an increasing the role of Orthodoxy in social and political life of Russia. The existence of these factors provokes the emergence of a problem situation: how the Mari traditional religion keeps today its originality, authenticity and what the historical forms of its modifications are.

The worldview dominant of Mari people indicates, first of all, to the values of the creative mastering nature – «the enclosing and feeding landscape» (Gumilev, 1993). The ancient rituals, customs, myths and legends, behavioral modes, everyday habits and skills, that still exist today, make sense in preservation of initial ways of establishment of communication with the nature and the surrounding world. For example, one of the precepts of the ancestors sounds like this: «Пушенгым арам күрыштыш-тодыштыш капасыме огыл. Ме, чимарып-вак, пушенгым чонанлан шотпена. Тудым погалаш ок пий, сусяр пушенге айдеме ганя шортеш, кошка. Чылажымат шот дене быште. Шуко огыл, шагал огыл, илышлан сипышым веле нал. Налмет гомды Ош Кугу Юмылан удылын-ысмылтен нал. Нимомат Ош Кугу Юмо эпэре тавалаш капасен огыл, эпэре тавалет – икышветлан ок код...» (Shkalina, 2006, p. 5) («It is not said in vain to tear-destroy trees. We, chimari, believe that a tree has soul. It cannot be touched, the wounded tree also cries, as well as the person, it can dry. Do everything reasonably. Take not a lot, and not a little, but as much as it is necessary for life. If you take something, do it with prayer gratitude to the White Great God. Great God does not order to be the insolent grabber. If you will be such – you will leave to the children nothing...»)

Asocial acts of modernity, the actions of insane personalities contradict the former systems of values and models of nature-like human behavior. The destruction of traditional worldview ideas about good and evil, beauty and ugliness, proper and improper etc., at all times induces to plunge into archaic layers of culture. For example, in Mari mythology there is one interesting feature: good and evil in it do not have a rigid dichotomy. Mari’s myth (toshtoy) is based on the ideas of the conflict-free self-development of the world in the process of its creation from the prime matter. The goodness of the Great Light God (Yumo-Iomo), the Lord of the upper World (Heaven), does not comprise any Evil. Yumo of the Mari people is the aspiration of
Good to Absolute Good. But Evil of his brother Keremet, the Lord of the average World (Earth), is not absolute. In this case Good for some reason did not take place. Something prevented Good from happening, and it turned into Evil. However, under the necessary conditions, a person can cajole Evil, and then unmanifested goodness can manifest itself (See about it: Shkalina, 2003).

Speaking about the belief system «Good – Evil» in Mari’s ethnoethics, it is possible to note: evil can be overcome on condition, if the person would assist to the forces of good, for what it is necessary to achieve moral purity, i.e. the unity of «kind thought», «kind word», «kind act». This thesis is confirmed also by the Mari Vedas – prayer texts. The thesaurus of the Mari prayers reflects the world of a person with his worries and problems, shows the moral and material values of the community, the individual person. The idea of harmony between Man and the World is carried out especially brightly, expressively in the sacred texts of Mari people. The harmony of the world is based on the circulation, consecrated and supported by higher beings – deities. In such environment nature itself is perfectly and culturally organized space, ideal abode with an eternal source of life energy. The man in such structure of the Universe does not play a passive role. He is energetically involved in activities to ensure his successful existence. In his prayers, a person seeks to pacify God (or gods) and asks for help in cultural exploration of space, trying to prevent possible violation of the cosmic order, to prevent the emergence of elements of Chaos. In fact, he participates in the creation of Cosmos, thereby performing the fundamental work of universe scales with the help of higher forces.

Attitude towards nature, the native land in the traditional worldview is the relationship of the value interrelation in both the real and the ideal aspect of moral consciousness. It is remarkable, that before the historic meeting with another civilization, the Mari people, as well as his other tribesmen, lived dispersedly, in farmsteads, fitting in and living in different levels of the ecosystem, without causing damage to any of them. It is no coincidence, that there is still a widespread saying: «Mari’s joy is in nature».

All ancient societies in their myths hinted at the existence of some kind of sacred cosmic energy, that animates all outdoor. This power was understood to be higher, deeper, and more fundamental, than Gods. As it is not personal, it is impossible to pray for her and wait, that it will answer for prayers. This sacred energy unites the world into a whole and exists out of time. For example, in the Celestial Empire it was called the Dao – Tao (the path). Dao embraces the whole universe and has neither qualities nor forms.

The age-old tradition of Mari people has an analogue of Tao. It is the concept of Yu (Ю). It connects the man and the world in whole, removes limitations, one-dimensionality of human consciousness, which the logical form of thinking is. The thing is temporary, the process of its changes is constant, therefore the emphasis in Yu’s philosophy is not on what, that thing exists as a material object, but on what, that it is invisible, inexpressible, it is as things in existence. Man follows the Earth, Earth follows Heaven, Heaven follows Yu. Yu follows naturalness. The derivatives of Yu are юж (air), Юмо (God), юзао / юзылпаш (to pray), Югорно (prophetic way). (See about it: Shkalina, 2017).

In the Mari philosophy life-giving energy of Yu streams, like a source, from certain sacred places, and then flows by four "rivers" to all ends of the earth. The sacral place is one of the oldest widespread symbols of the divine. This is the point, where Heaven and Earth meet, in which divinity manifests itself especially strongly.

The sacral place of Mari people with the highest concentration of Yu energy is күсоро (sacred grove), where the person:

a) Participates in the mysterious process of nature;

b) Causes and stimulates its creative powers;

c) Connects to powerful cosmic energy;

d) Enters into an alliance with the vital principles – the energy of Yu (Ю);

d) Goes the prophetic way – Югорно.

Differing by life in congruity with nature in the course of the history Mari people demonstrated a special commitment to the ancient rites and beliefs. It is still possible to hear such words of parents (Mari) addressed to their children: «Күүүрек өңүүн ойтумышо үйөө нөө эч ок боңч» («What was said by elders does not remain below»). Even today for the vast majority of Mari life gets meaning insofar as they follow the standards of behavior set by ancestors. It is in this that their participation in the sacred consists.

The practice of prayers in the Mari sacred groves in the XXI century is the ongoing search of the highest truth, justice on this sinful earth. Justice in understanding of Mari people protects the dignity of a person, does not allow to humiliate a person and saves his self-esteem. This is not forgiveness, but the basis for
wise administration and social harmony.

It is remarkable, that in the Mari pagan pantheon there was ğlä́k ѕµó – God of Justice. «Ко твыйны  мног хоны́ммэ – ху́м ку́йллэ́н – тудап шинымыш шу́йлээ» («Who threw a stone at you, give him bread») – this is, in the words of the great moralists, the «golden rule of morality» of Mari people. In the behavior of ordinary rural Mari women, it is still possible to notice the following moment in their behavior: to be really kind in practice, not in words; always be courteous, helpful, entering into any relationship with other people. There are some national sayings about it, that should be considered as ethical maxims: «Чы́н кычке дача́йт волгы́до» («Truth is brighter than the sun»); «Энглэн тушманным шо́но – шкаланет топеэ» («Do not wish evil to another – it will return you»); «Сийже шерве ыыл – порылыкшо щераган» («Food is not expensive, and kindness is expensive»); «Ондален торашке от кай» («Due to lie far you will not leave far»), etc.

The artistic treatise of the Mari ethnoethics is the poetic work of Anatoly Spiridonov «Yugorno. The song about the prophetic way» (Spiridonov, 2014). According to it the modern reader through the epic word learns to make his own special world and to feel in it as if he is under native shelter. It happens because the author skillfully puts the Mari legends, tall stories, folk tales, fairy tales and sagas into the storyline about Good and Evil in the fate of the people. The characters of «Yugorno» act not for the sake of personal glory, they subordinate their will, themselves to a good cause. The main character is Saliy, he is «the glorious hunter, the keeper of our forest keeper and its ancient laws». He is poor, «all his wealth are slings and arrows (there are only three of them)», and at the same time he is rich, his true wealth are Honor, Dignity and Glory. They are his magic protective charm and amulet of the people themselves. Saliy and the belle Pampalche are the symbols of the spiritual beauty and greatness of the people themselves.

3. CONCLUSION

Thus, the axiological constant in the traditional worldview of Mari people is an idea of nature, which gives Mari ethnic culture a structural isomorphism. Such understanding of nature as the basis of human sensory experience is even more abstract and sophisticated, than the idea of God. Ancient Mari came to the concept of natural order not through rational observation and logical thinking, but through mystery. This knowledge can represent small value from the objective point of view. It can be false, superstitious, and even ridiculous. However, subjectively and psychologically, this is the highest form of knowledge, that ancient man possessed, and it should be regarded as a tradition of sacred wisdom, thanks to which human life is governed. Therefore, its cultural significance is very high, as it is the archetype of the tradition of highest knowledge. Just from such kind of knowledge in the course of development of archaic culture the theology, philosophy, science appeared.

All nations have a congenital respect for nature, expressed in the sign and symbolic form of its traditional culture. The worldview basics of the traditional culture of the Mari people are, first of all, natural conformity, ecocentrism. In the Mari ethnoethics it sounds like that: «There is no nature – there is no man either. As I refer to nature today, so tomorrow I will live, as well as my family, my people, my country».

There is a need of reformattting of such sacral knowledge to the conditions of the modern cultural paradigm, what will allow to reduce the consumer attitude of modern man to the ecosphere. In an era of global crisis such approach is a lifeline for mankind, because the essence of this crisis is worldview.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The reported study was funded by RFBR according to the research project № 18-012-00086.

REFERENCE LIST


