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Festive Culture of Kryashens

Ksenia Yu. Khusnutdinova¹, Tatyana A. Titova², Elena V. Frolova³,

Abstract

Traditional festive ritual culture occupies an important position in the life of the Kryashens. The article is based on our own field research conducted in 2014. The purpose of the article is to study traditional holidays and their significance for the Kryashens. The article showed popular traditional Kryashen holidays, their innovations and origins, which go deep into history and are closely intertwined with the culture of neighboring peoples. The methodological base of the study assumes the consideration and the analysis of the traditional festive culture of the Kryashens. The work uses general historical methods: historical-comparative, cultural-anthropological, the method of complex analysis and the discriminative method. The work is also based on the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods: discourse - mass survey through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus groups, included monitoring. The article gives a detailed description of each holiday. Kryashen people keep the ancient traditions of their ancestors, combining their Turkic roots and Orthodox culture. During the long parallel development of national holidays, customs and religions, Christianity has become an integral part of the Kryashen spiritual life - this confirms the special significance of Orthodox religious holidays. Also, ethnic-cultural characteristics and the celebration of traditional holidays are of great importance for Kryashens. Particularly honored calendar holidays for the Kryashens are the following ones: Easter, Christmas, Epiphany, Petrov Day (Pitrau), Trinity, Nardugan, Semik, Pokrov. These festive traditions are marked by a certain important value and stability in the cultural environment of the Tatarstan Kryashens. The materials of the article can be useful for ethnologists, social and cultural anthropologists, and everyone interested in this topic.

Keywords: Ethnography, Ethnology, Kryashens, Kryashen population, Orthodoxy, Ethnic-cultural practices, Festive culture, Traditions, Holidays.

¹ Kazan Federal University, Institute of International Relations, History and Oriental Studies, Kazan, Russian Federation.

² Kazan Federal University, Institute of International Relations, History and Oriental Studies, Kazan, Russian Federation. E-mail: tatiana.titova@rambler.ru

³ Kazan Federal University, Institute of International Relations, History and Oriental Studies, Kazan, Russian Federation.

Introduction

The traditional Kryashen culture developed historically on the territory with multi-ethnic and multi-confessional population of the Volga-Ural region of Russia. A unique feature of this people is the synthesis of Orthodox faith and Tatar culture, as well as the existence of a stable ethnic identity. The Kryashens have preserved ancient rituals, traditions, customs, festive culture, folklore, folk games, which are vivid and original. The history of festive culture is closely intertwined with the history of the Kryashen people. There are several versions of Kryashen origin. The most common point of view is that the development of the Kryashens on the territory of the former borders of the Kazan Khanate is connected with the mass adoption of Orthodoxy during the period of Christianization in the second half of the 16th century when the Volga region was annexed to the Russian state. There is also the opinion that the Kryashens, like people, existed before the annexation of the Kazan Khanate to the Russian state, being pagans. It is important to note that the cultural traditions that they had at the time of baptism were evidently formed in previous eras, as evidenced by their song culture (Almeeva, 2007). Until the 20th century, the Kryashens celebrated holidays connected with agrarian and Christian cults, held rituals related to the birth and upbringing of children, as well as wedding and memorial ceremonies. During the Soviet period, traditional calendar holidays were transformed and adapted to the conditions of the Soviet way of life, and some were even eradicated from the Kryashens' life. Since the second half of the 20th century, the original festive culture of the Kryashens was in the state of partial preservation, remaining in the memory of the elderly generation only. During this period, large ethnographic expeditions are conducted with the aim to record the spiritual and the material culture of people.

During the post-Soviet period of history, the ethnic self-consciousness of the Kryashens is growing, and thus, the Kryashen national movement is growing. There is an increasing interest in the issues of the revival and the presentation of ethnic traditions and rituals. The collections of Kryashen folk songs, poems and stories appear. At present, most of the ancient rituals are not observed by the Kryashens. However, during ethnic festivals folklore ethnographic Kryashen collectives revive old, centuries-old cultural traditions, and also new calendar holidays are established with the purpose of their forms transfer to subsequent generations.

Methodological Framework

The methodological base of the study assumes the consideration and the analysis of the traditional festive culture of the Kryashens. The work uses general historical methods: historical-comparative, cultural-anthropological, the method of complex analysis and the discriminative method. The work is also based on the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods: discourse - mass survey through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus groups, included monitoring.

800 Kryashens were interviewed during the study, 349 of them are men and 451 are women. The study covered the following administrative and territorial regions of the Republic of Tatarstan: Kaibitsky, Laishevsky, Rybno-Slobodsky, Zainsky, Mamadyshsky, Chistopolsky, Kukmorsky and Yelabuga region, which is conditioned by the compact residence of the Kryashens in these territories. They conducted 10 interviews and 4 focus groups with representatives of the Kryashen population in the designated areas.

The interviews with the informants gave unique insights into the way of life, origin, social identity, national language, religion, family traditions and rituals and the studied ethnic group.

Literature Review

The study of Kryashen festive culture involves the use of a large complex of various literature. The study of Kryashen life during the pre-revolutionary period was carried out mainly by missionaries - N.I. Ilminsky (1913), E.A. Malov (1866), M.A. Mashanov (1875). The interest of material culture is limited only by the statement of fragmentary data. The majority of prerevolutionary authors consider mainly the issues of Kryashen spiritual culture and religion.

Soviet ethnographers consider the material and spiritual culture of the Kryashens. The works by N.I. Vorobyov are based on expeditionary field research and describe the material culture of the Kryashens and their ethnic genesis. According to N.I. Vorobyov, Kryashens have preserved their ancient way of life almost entirely and to a certain extent can serve as the example of the way of life that the Tatar masses had before the Russian conquest. Vorobyev classifies the Kryashens as the group, "isolated from their own people through baptism" (1929: 12). He also revealed the anthropological differences between the Kryashens and the Tatars of the same localities. The same point of view is shared by T.A. Trofimova (1949: 125). Yu.G. Mukhametshin argues that the Kryashens are the descendants of local Tatars, and gives a detailed analysis of material culture phenomena (1977: 183). Ethnographic expeditions also take place during this period to record the original folklore of the Kryashens.

The modern period is characterized by the growth of ethnic self-awareness, and the growth of the ethnic-cultural movement of the Kryashens at the turn of 1990-2000, also due to the population census of 2002. A special place in the study of the Kryashens and the Kryashen festive culture is occupied by the works from G.M. Makarov (2001), S.V. Sokolovsky (2008) and T.G. Dunaeva (2008). During this period, the scholars are interested in the issues of ethnic tradition and ritual revival and transmission, new hypotheses of their origin arise, the collections of Kryashen folk songs, poems and stories appear. Nevertheless, the Kryashens remain poorly studied people on the territory of Russian Federation, because the issue of their ethnogenesis has not been studied fully so far, the problems of their status determination have not been solved.

Discussion and Results

The important conditions for the development of modern folk culture are the following ones: the strengthening of religious consciousness, the interaction with neighboring peoples and the actualization of ethnic identity. These factors are reflected in the festive culture especially. At present, the Kryashens pay great attention to their ethnic-cultural characteristics, to the celebration of traditional folk and Orthodox festivals.

The festive culture of the Kryashens is quite syncretic. It includes religious, folk and state holidays. The survey showed that public holidays are celebrated by almost all respondents. Religious holidays are also important for Kryashens. According to our observations, 97% of Kryashens consider themselves to be believers. Holidays are celebrated by 81.1% of the respondents, among them the most significant were Easter, Christmas, Epiphany, Petrov Day (Pitrau), Trinity, Nardugan, Semik, Pokrov, etc. The question "What holidays do you consider as national?" was answered in the following way by 72.9% of respondents: the Christian ones.

Orthodox religious holidays and the customs associated with them are very important for the Kryashens. Many respondents noted that they celebrate Christmas (Rashtau) in a faithful way. On this day they visit church, but mostly they celebrate it in the family circle with a huge number of meals allowed after fasting. Some informants recalled, according to the stories of their ancestors, that the importance was attached

to dinner on Christmas Eve, after the appearance of the first star. The first dish that was served at that time on the table was called - kolivo, kutya or sochivo, so some call Christmas Eve - kuteynik.

Baptism is also of great importance for the Kryashens, as for all Orthodox Christians. Many respondents noted that it is important to visit church and pray during this holiday, and the holy water brought on this day has the best healing properties.

Christianity and paganism are intertwined closely in the calendar festive tradition, customs and popular beliefs for the Kryashens. This is conditioned by the fact that during the Christianization period, paganism was not removed from the people's consciousness, and Christianity was not fully understood, therefore, a kind of synthesis from pagan and Christian rites was obtained. Also, the calendar of the Kryashens consists of both agricultural and Orthodox holidays, which are often superimposed on older agricultural holidays (Almeeva, 2007: 41).

In all the areas under study, the main revered feast is Easter. As the respondents note, this holiday is very ancient, and it is celebrated everywhere and with great honor. The entertainment elements of this holiday are centuries-old rituals. Local traditions (including pagan ones) associated with this holiday, are preserved in virtually all settlements.

As the informants note, it was customary to perform cleansing ceremonies in the morning - washing with water for face smoothness, in which silver crosses were placed in advance. In order to decorate a house, it was customary to make special attributes and decorations - a flashlight made of straws with knotted strings in a special order or straw birds. They were suspended to the ceiling in the front corner before the goddess. Any work was forbidden during Easter.

A particular attention was paid for a festive table preparation - the painting of eggs in different colors, cottage cheese paskha, cakes and shangy. One of the indispensable attributes of festive days during the Easter week were the games with eggs. The most common one is the skating of eggs from a mountain: the winning condition is to roll it as far as possible. A swing was put for the youth; they were an important part of the Easter week. Some say that the swing was an entertainment element of the holiday, and some argue that it was an ancient rite of ancestors, as the revival to something new, by the ascension to heaven and then by the return to the ground. Mostly it was celebrated by the respondents from Laishevsky and Zainsky districts of the Republic of Tatarstan. Until now, a number of rites and traditions associated with this holiday remains.

"In Mol'keevo the whole village honors the feast of Easter with great reverence and solemnity - it is worshiped by everyone. There are 2 villages in Mol'keevo (one top and the other lower one) and on Easter they visit each other, relatives visit relatives - Ivanovs to Ivanovs, Sidorovs to Sidorovs, and this is good in terms of communication, it brings together. On the second day that village rises to us. The whole village stands and waits for others. On the third day we go down to them. As far as houses are concerned, they usually visit 5-10 homes, but naturally after work" (interview from 54-year-old man, Mol'keevo village, Kaibitsky district).

"The most important holiday is Easter. I remember how they prepared for it. They collected eggs, rolled them at the moment when the spring did not come fully, a threshing-belt would appear somewhere on a hill, and we played there being children. The snow melted, there was no dry place anymore, the old grass ended, everyone went there to play, the youth, and the old ones too. The eggs were placed in one row, then everyone was retreated, they took a flat ball, like a skullcap, it was made of cowhide, and they pushed it to knock the eggs out like bowling, but they did not talk like that before. If you knock an egg, then you take it yourself, some won a lot, and some were left with nothing, everything that they brought was lost. They played and danced during the festival, because they came with an accordion. And yet, there were 2 trees in

our village, there were willow and oak with swings behind the river and on the mountain. It was the element of celebration, a very ancient tradition. And a girl and a guy had to swing standing, it was the sign of a sexual intercourse, i.e. the continuation of life. After all Easter is a revival, a resurrection, the departure of the old and the beginning of a new one. On the eve we went to bed in clothes, because it was necessary to get up early in the morning and go to visit for refreshments (a detailed interview, 54-year-old woman, Kazan).

At present, Easter occupies a special, important place for the Kryashen people and for the whole Christian tradition. Easter is a religious holiday for them in the first place - "Feast of the Feasts". A particular importance is given to church visits and church services. However, the preparation of a festive table and the decoration of a dwelling in the countryside are of a special nature. Respondents say that in some houses the tradition to hang towels and visit each other was preserved.

The Trinity is celebrated on the fiftieth day after Easter, hence one of its names - Pentecost. Trinity holidays lasted from the Feast of the Ascension until the Troitsky Shrovetide. During this period, nature finally wakes up after a long winter, a new full and full-blooded life begins. The cult of vegetation, the main symbol of which is the birch, which acts as an intermediary between a man and higher powers is in its basis. Some of the respondents considered kalyna and bird cherry as sacred trees. On this day round dances began, symbolizing the name-day of forest, water and land.

The Trinity is celebrated as the "main" holiday for the community of Kryashens at Tashkirmen village of Laishevsky district of the Republic of Tatarstan. A large number of ritual elements, attributed as pagan was recorded there, in which the older generation participates.

"P 2: First they go to a birch tree, decorate it, put on candles, then they go to the church, then they go to the cemetery. Grandmothers have such a custom. We have Kalabash Mountain and there they go to their pagan customs and traditions" (focus group, Tashkirmen village, Laishevsky district)

"I: And what are they doing there on the mountain?

R 4: They run around the mountain three times, after that they go down from above.

I: Is there a sacred place?

R 4: Yes, they descend, so that all sorrows, all adversities are left behind, it is necessary to run there.

R 3: And when they come inside, they throw three eggs into the sky, three eggs into the water and then they dig in three eggs and make a wish.

I: Only you have such a tradition in your village?

R 1: Yes, only we have it (Focus group, Tashkirmen village, Laishevsky district).

In other municipal areas they noted that on this day the floors of the temples are covered with freshly cut grass, and the walls are decorated with birch branches. The Trinity for the Kryashens is the symbol of renewal, the symbol of the beginning.

Semik (mostly, Thursday on the seventh week after Easter). This holiday is associated with memorial rites. Most the commemoration takes place at the cemetery, where it is customary to leave food, sprinkle graves with grain, and read prayers as well as on other memorial days. "Semik" holiday is pagan by birth and it is celebrated in the Mamadysh and Zainsky municipal districts of the Republic of Tatarstan almost never. However, the Kaibitsky municipal district of the Republic of Tatarstan, celebrates it on a grand scale. This holiday is celebrated on Thursday among the villages of this district, when people go to the

cemetery to remember the deceased. Semik is celebrated in the village of Staroye Tyaberdino of the Kaibitsky district of the Republic of Tatarstan on Saturday.

"Semik was not celebrated. But my grandmother and the others went to another village, where this holiday was celebrated. Everyone knows what a feast day they celebrate in each village. They go there and visit. This tradition is a long time one among Kryashens" (interview, expert, 54-year-old woman, Kazan).

"The second most important holiday, Semik, is associated with paganism. A lot of people go to the cemetery and honor their ancestors. On this holiday people come from all over Russia in our village, because everyone honors their traditions. It is celebrated very honorably, in our village it is celebrated only on Thursday, but in Khozesanovo and in Podberezye they go to the cemetery on the Trinity, but in the village of old Tyaberdino Semik is celebrated on Saturday, probably it was determined this way" (interview, 54-year-old man, village Mol'keevo, Kaibitsky district).

"On Thursday we go to the bath-house in the morning before the cemetery, and then we leave a broom and basins for the ancestors. And the Orthodox go to the bathhouse on Friday, and to the cemetery on Saturday" (interview, 57-year-old man, the village of Old Tyaberdino, Kaibitsky district).

The cover "Pokrau" is celebrated on October 14. The history of this holiday came from the Greek lands. During the war there was a wonderful phenomenon of the Mother of God appearance. Having kneeled, the Blessed Virgin began to pray with the tears in her eyes. Then, going up to the Throne, she removed the veil from her head and spread it over the people praying in the temple, protecting them from the enemies, visible and invisible ones. She was shining with heavenly glory, and the cover in her hands was shining "more than the rays of the sun". This helped the Greeks to defeat their enemies. Since then, the feast is very revered by Christians. The signs and the beliefs that are associated with the transitional period of the holiday between autumn and winter are widespread, and they symbolize its borderlands. Many respondents noted that on that day the Kryashens bake pies with certain fillings and give them away to their neighbors.

Nardugan symbolizes the pagan cult of the sun, the awakening of nature. It is celebrated by the Kryashens from December 24 and lasts for twelve days, at the time when a light day becomes longer. Nardugan is holy games. According to the stories, informants, these days there were masquerades during those days, and the youth disguised themselves beyond recognition. On the last day of Christmastide, young people chose a house for fortune telling and bought the house from the owners with some products. Nardugan is forbidden by the Christian religion, it is considered that this holiday is the relic of paganism, it was called Shaytan Tuyy (damned wedding). At present, it is almost not celebrated in the villages of Kryashen.

The festive culture of the Kryashen population reflects cultural interaction with Muslim Tatars. Some respondents noted that they gladly join the Tatar Sabantu - the plow holiday and the end of the sowing campaign.

Shrovetide (May birhme) is a great event in the village life. Shrovetide is the holiday that started since pagan times. The holiday symbolizes the departure of winter and the meeting of spring, originating from Greek and Roman Bacchanalia and Saturnalia. It is celebrated during the week before the Lent. Pancakes are cooked during Shrovetide, which are the symbol of the sun. At this time, relatives come to the Kryashens to celebrate the holiday. All week celebrations take place in the village, mass tobogganing, horse riding, various amusement games and entertaining take place. The first day of the carnival is especially significant for the Molkaevsky Kryashens. On this day, a landlady waits very much for the first guest, and the well-being for the whole year of vice versa depends on that man.

According to field observations, each region and village under study has the rituals and traditions that have local differences. It should be noted that there are patronal holidays in many Kryashen villages. A patronal feast is one of the annual calendar cycle holidays, celebrated as the main local holiday in one or several localities, established in honor of the church, or determined by the villagers, connected with the customs of guest reception and realized as the holiday of this community by local residents and their neighbors. This is the tradition that exists for a long time. Many Kryashen villages celebrated and continue to celebrate richly their patronal holidays, inviting the residents from other villages. One of these holidays is the republican national holiday Pitrau (Petrov's day, Petrovka) for all Kryashens, meaningful for the people. However, it was the example of a new established holiday. Pitrau is held on the night of 11th to 12th of July at the completion of the Petrovsky fast, on the memory day of the holy apostles Peter and Paul. Pitrau is called "night Sabantuy" - in the morning they collect medicinal herbs and flowers, and they choose their bride and groom during the festivities in the evening.

"We have the village of Albaevo, the patronal feast, Petrov's day, was celebrated there instead of Sabantuy. The village is the outskirts of the district. They found a sponsor, everyone liked this holiday very much. The head of the district decided to hold a big celebration in his village near the district center. This holiday has expanded into modern Pitrau. Now, Pitrau is the festival of peoples' friendship. Now many nationalities come to celebrate it" (interview, 52-year-old man, Dumyatyevo village, Mamadysh district).

Pitrau originally appeared as the patronal feast day in the village of Albaevo at the Mamadysh district of the Republic of Tatarstan. They began to celebrate it everywhere since 1999 in the village of Zuri at Mamadyshsky district of the Republic of Tatarstan, in the place of Kryashens compact residence. During a few years the holiday acquired the status of republic-wide, and in recent years, all-Russian one, and began to be perceived as nationwide one. It began to play an even greater role in the midst of the sensational census of 2002, which became an important moment in the development of the Kryashen community during the period of the Kryashen self-consciousness growth. It was held in order to declare its identity with great scope, to demonstrate its distinctive features to other ethnic communities. This event was perceived as the revival of a long-forgotten tradition. However, the original details of this holiday have gone with previous generations. Modern reconstructions have no firm connection with what was recorded earlier. In the past, such large-scale festivals with so many participation of representatives from different villages and guests were not recorded. The status of the republican national holiday and the interest on the part of the authorities is conditioned by the support from elite strata of Kryashens - public figures, entrepreneurs and the representatives of the local administration.

At present time, "Pitrau" has exclusively secular ethnic cultural nature. The exchange of information and communication between the Kryashens of different municipal regions of the republic and other regions of the country takes place during it. Also, the holiday promotes the activation of contacts at the interethnic level and it is especially important, as it serves the purposes of ethnic identity strengthening and preservation.

Thus, these holidays are quite large and significant for the entire Kryashen community. The festive culture of the Kryashens is very interesting and original. There are connections in it, both with religious Orthodox traditions, and with pagan and Muslim roots. Many holidays have local differences and their own special rites and traditions for each village. It should be noted that these holidays are sacredly observed by the elderly as well as by the younger generation.

Conclusion

Kryashen people keep the ancient traditions of their ancestors, combining their Turkic roots and Orthodox culture. During the long parallel development of national holidays, customs and religions, Christianity has become an integral part of the Kryashen spiritual life - this confirms the special significance of Orthodox religious holidays. Also, ethnic-cultural characteristics and the celebration of traditional holidays are of great importance for Kryashens. Particularly honored calendar holidays for the Kryashens are the following ones: Easter, Christmas, Epiphany, Petrov Day (Pitrau), Trinity, Nardugan, Semik, Pokrov. These festive traditions are marked by a certain important value and stability in the cultural environment of the Tatarstan Kryashens.

The modern development of the festive culture of the Kryashens is very interesting. The calendar holidays, rituals and traditions examined in the studied areas are characterized by unique features. Holidays continue to be one of the main forms of leisure for the Kryashen people, and to a large extent act as one of the factors of ethnic self-identification. However, some popular, and sometimes even Orthodox holidays are transformed and are take on new forms, growing from throne village narrowly localized festivals to large-scale celebrations of a secular nature, continuing to show the traditions, culture, identity of an already wide audience through the work of folklore, creative and public organizations. The main task of such groups is the transfer of traditional spiritual and material culture, folk art to youth in the form of songs, dances, musical instrument playing, ancient rituals and a national costume wear.

It should be noted that the festive culture of the Kryashens will change over time, influenced by the development of a new trend, globalization, as well as the virtual and real erasure of borders between cultures, peoples and countries. This article reveals the peculiarities of Kryashen festive culture and it shows historical origins and its transformation at the present level. The results of the research can be useful for ethnologists, social and cultural anthropologists and all those interested in this topic.

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