

AZERBAIJANI TALES AS A SYMBOLIC SYSTEM OF VALUES



As you know, folklore, in particular, fairy tales are the people's memory, the same baggage that has been handed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. It is a kind of archive of knowledge about the world. Rich people's imagination, as well as the result of the experience of coexistence with the environment, which turned into a sort of skills, customs and traditions, is something like rules of relations with the world around. It would be superfluous to mention the high educational role that samples of folklore, in particular,

tales play in our lives. Thanks to them, we foster our courage, bravery, courage and ability to take the pain of others as our own, distinguish good from evil, be vigilant, caring and attentive to those who need it, appreciate friends, help the disadvantaged, etc.

As a rule, tales are a kind of directives that reflect the value system of each individual nation. They are the very foundation on which traditional culture focuses, which is reflected in the specificity and uniqueness of traditions, customs and attitudes.

Scientifically speaking, the tale is a kind of symbolic system. The object is not always what it seems. In this regard, there are a number of analytical works by serious researchers, which explain every phenomenon and every action literally point by point and reveal the meaning and value contained in them. Combining the wealth of archaeological and ethnological material and based on the extensive experience of the work done on the world cultural heritage, etc., experts are trying to explore and give an explanation to those cultural phenomena that still need careful study. Speaking of Azerbaijani folklore, we should touch on just a couple of moments in order to clarify the above in more detail. For example, in one of Azerbaijani folk tales the main character must make a seemingly senseless act (expand a folded tablecloth, turn a container upside down, etc.). Acting to the contrary, as well as lycanthropy (turning people into plants, animals and objects) are primarily a sign pointing to contact with the other world. It is the so-called border zone between the worlds. Of course, we are talking about ancient ideas and beliefs, the echoes of which we find in fairy tales. Why did we suddenly remember about that? Because in tales, like in stories, through characters we sometimes find, in simple terms, strange things. For the researcher, they are clear and understandable. For ordinary readers and especially children, the incomprehensible act of characters of the tale is taken for granted ("told and done, without dis-

cussion"). The further development of the plot explains the incomprehensible to some extent. After all, the purpose for which the action is taking place is clear and well-presented. The most important thing is the happy end, which practically any fairy tale has. In this regard, I would like to mention Kosa (one of the main characters of Novruz celebrations in Azerbaijan). In connection with this popular character, the question often arises: How come that such an externally unsympathetic person, who is not ideal in terms of his moral and spiritual image, as Kosa managed to win national love? And he, without exaggeration, is one of the most popular characters, whom the good-natured audience gladly meets and whose slightest requests they try to implement. Inherently, Kosa is a symbolic image, exactly the same as other characters of Novruz spring festive notions (the Bald Man and the she-goat with her babies). If the she-goat is the personification of spring, Kosa and the Bald Man are symbols of winter, fading old age and all that remains in the past and is replaced with new life.

In terms of the educational function of the tale, the characters (both positive and negative) have features that clearly characterize them as such almost from the very beginning of their appearance on the so-called stage. In the fairy tale, as a rule, each character has a certain place, a kind of niche that he does not leave until the end, the finale of the story. At first glance, this type of folklore is simple and very clear without any fancy features. The positive and negative characters are clearly separated. But the one you should emulate and is intended to be an example to follow is not always composed entirely of merits alone. For this reason, the attitude to some of these characters is ambiguous. For example, quite often there is the idea that such characters of Azerbaijani tales as Jirtan (Tom Thumb) are not worthy of being a role model and that fairy tale characters like Tik-Tik Khanum (a capricious bug who goes in search of true friendship while not forgetting about her own ambitions) does not fit within the concept of the notion about the educational function of the fairy tale. Such a view may sound like an unqualified accusation against the aforesaid fairy tale characters.

As a rule, the features of a positive character in the tale include the stereotypical idea of what he should be like. In particular, such a character is often or almost completely devoid of any negative character traits and negative qualities and always does the right thing (which is good). Even superficially he is attractive for he has an indescribable beauty and magnificent physique, and is often clever, witty and resourceful. In short, imagination paints the perfect portrait of a character that is an example to follow, a



Jirtan, a popular character of Azerbaijani fairy tales

benchmark to aspire to and a standard to strive for. This is how we see handsome princes and brave and invincible defenders of the weak and oppressed. In the character of Russian fairy tales such as Ilya Muromets, Azerbaijani fairy tales - Malik-Mammad and the British epic - King Arthur, we see precisely such characters that appear as a kind of ideal. Of course, boundless imagination has created many different combinations that make up the image of a positive character. And, as a rule, it is precisely these characters that are treated as an object to follow and it is them, as many believe, that the younger generation should orient itself to. This brings out positive qualities in children and the desire to be like the positive characters that appear like a certain standard. But the positive characters in tales are not always perfect. At times a character who, at first glance, does not make such an impression can become positive. Remember Ivan the Fool from Russian fairy tales, who had a lot of disadvantages while being undoubtedly a positive character. Sometimes a fairy-tale character that is not particularly attractive in his appearance shows clear signs of humane attitude towards others - he is sincere in wanting to help, shows a subtle intellect, is good, but is not so strong or brave to fearlessly fight evil. Often a positive character, who has a number of shortcomings, still achieves victory over evil.

Let us return to Jirtan, the well-known Tom Thumb from Azerbaijani folk tales. Lazy and untrained to work, this little trickster goes to the forest to collect firewood with his

brothers and forces them to carry him on their back. Before going to the forest and trying to show care for his parents, he asks his mother for permission: "I am going for firewood with the guys! - Where are you going?"; his mother replies. "You can't even lift a sprig! - I can't, but the guys will help me!"; Jirtdan replies. He is not particularly tall or industrious, and does not stand out for his beauty, but savvy, sly wit and intelligence help him get out of a difficult situation. These qualities help him to save himself and his brothers from the evil Giant and destroy him. Jirtdan's character has a considerable number of analogues in the world of traditional culture - this is proved by similar characters in French, German, Russian, English and Japanese tales. Despite his small stature and small physical strength, the boy is more resourceful, smarter and more intelligent than his peers. Because of his superiority over this evil enemy,

he resorts to an ingenious trick, gains a victory over him and successfully returns home with his brothers. In the French fairy tale, Tom Thumb saves his brothers from the terrible man-eater, taking his seven-league boots, as well as all his property. In the Russian folk tale, Tom Thumb manages to cheat his master. The positive image in this case is characterized by good intentions to help his relatives and friends and save them from the evil enemy, as well as provide them with safe life (in the French fairy tale, for example, he returns to his parents with great wealth). Certainly, his subtle mind, intelligence and wit help him with all this. It is because of these qualities that he surpasses his brothers and it is these features that make him different from his peers. "Small but bold," this is about him! The well-known character of Chukovskiy's tales Bibigon is the same tiny Tom Thumb, fearless and brave, but a little

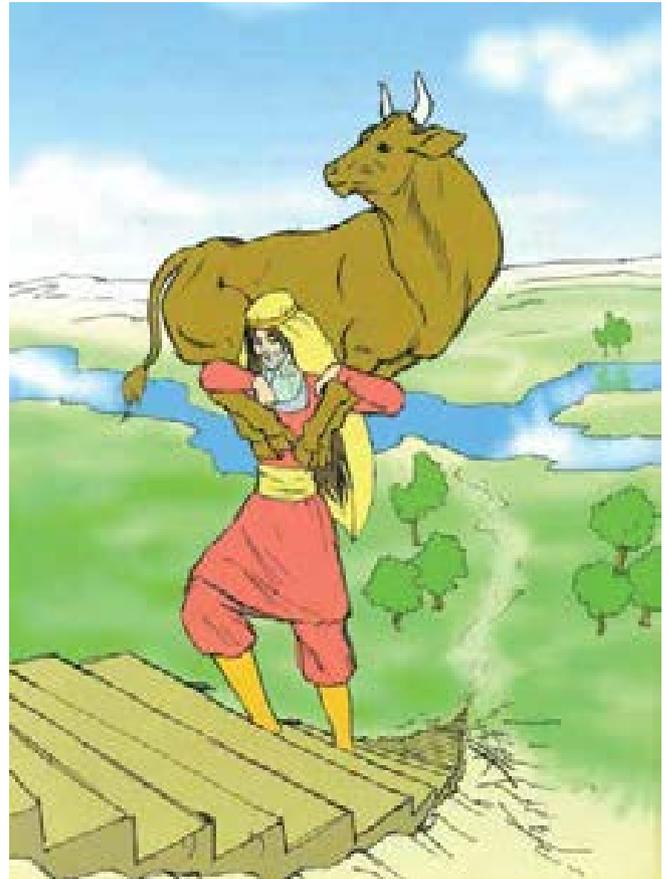
Phoenix. One of the characters in the Azerbaijani tales



bit cocky and a boastful midget. The last two qualities distinguish him from the traditional Tom Thumb, who is absolutely harmless in this sense.

The image of the Bald Man is very remarkable. In Azerbaijani tales it is Kechal (Bald Man). If in the theatrical traditions of the Muslim East, Kechal (Karagoz, Kavuklu) is a character meant to be funny and comic in order to entertain the audience with their amusing appearance, in Azerbaijani tales Kechal is usually a positive character that bears good, helps people and is responsive, intelligent and longing for justice. In the Azerbaijani fairy tale, "The Court of the Bald Men", due to the subtle mind of Kechal, his skill and responsiveness, restores justice in favor of the offended brother of the character of the story. These characteristics of the Bald Man include sensitivity and compassion towards those who need help. Kechal is resourceful and keen-witted. His cleverness helps him in achieving his goal. He deftly does everything to ultimately achieve the desired result. Sometimes the unprepossessing appearance of Kechal initially gives the impression of a worthless weakling and an unremarkable guy, who shows his best side more and more as the story progresses.

Fairy tales teach us good things, they are designed to foster the best qualities in us. For this reason, the characters of fairy tales also function as teachers, even with all their set of shortcomings, they show us what we should not be like. But fairy tales clearly demonstrate that human vices, like laziness, desire to profit at the expense of others, the habit to cheat, selfishness, etc. must be eradicated. In this regard, the Azerbaijani tale about Tik-Tik Khanum, the main character of which is a selfish, capricious insect, who sets out to find a friend, is very revealing. In each of the characters in her way she sees a threat to herself. Asking what one or the other character would do to her if she disobeyed them, she thus determines for herself the possibility or impossibility of friendship with them. In the end, making friends with a patient and good-natured little mouse, she gives vent to her whims. Her selfishness never ceases to show even when she falls into a deep pit and asks for help. The mouse, as a true friend, leaves everything and runs to her aid. Holding out his hand, he asks her to grasp it, to which the insect responds that she has been offended by him. Despite the entreaties of his friend to hold out her hand, she stubbornly turns away from him. After she refuses to do so again, he decides to teach her a lesson and steps back from the pit and pretends to be leaving. Eventually, the insect realizes that she is wrong and relents, and the mouse rescues her, pulling her out of the deep pit. Ideally, the wayward Tik-Tik Khanum is not suited for



Fitne - is a popular character in fairy tales based on the works of genius Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi

the role of the main character. But this fairy tale aims to show how such a character is unpleasant and how bad it is to be like the main character. The tale of Tik-Tik Khanum carries an educational function, and it is from this point of view that it should be seen as functionally significant. The fairy tale shows how capricious children like Tik-Tik Khanum can be punished, how disobedience can end and what selfishness and undue ambitions may lead to.

The good deeds of characters like Jirdan and Kechal characterize these fairy tale characters as positive. You do not have to be handsome like the ancient Greek Apollo, strong and have strong health to gain the love of a girl, defeat the evil enemy and find a way out of a difficult situation for the fairy tale to have a happy end. The fairy tale characters we talked about have a fine mind, skills, wit and sometimes a good sense of humor, do not lose heart in a situation where difficulties seem insurmountable and ultimately triumph over evil, thereby creating respect and love for themselves. ❀