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**COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION OF PROPHETIC DREAMS (THE  
CASE OF THE KALMYKS)**

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***Abstract***

The paper is devoted to the study of prophetic dreams of the Kalmyks. Dreams are characterized by strongly pronounced national and cultural specifics since they reflect the ethnolinguistic worldview and exist under the influence of religious beliefs and mythological stereotypes. Dreams project archaic ideas of the ethnic world order. Many nations believed that a soul can leave the body and travel while a person is sleeping. Dreams are treated as a sign of the future, most often the etiology of such signs and signals cannot be explained, however many people consider such phenomena as a link with the otherworld. Dreams bear the forecasting function and are perceived as the message, they serve the place or space ensuring the link between the living and the dead. Dreams transfer stable forms of figurative thinking and behavior models of culture-bearers most precisely and brightly. Such forms have denotative and informative meaning since they reflect the national worldview, and in terms of culturological aspect they most adequately and widely cover and display the ethnolinguistic picture of the world. The attention is focused on paroemia, texts of the so-called “small genre”, or proverbial sayings having stable verbal format and genre canons expressing their forecasting function. The prophetic dreams are usually interpreted in the oral form and have archaic origin. Besides, in the tradition of Kalmyk and other Mongolian people there is a large number of written texts, which remained in the form of wood-engravers and manuscripts in old written Kalmyk, Mongolian and Tibetan languages.

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**Keywords:** Dreams, prophetic dream, the Kalmyks, Kalmyk culture.



## **1. Introduction**

The paper is devoted to the study of dreams. Aristoteles (1994), Artemidor Daldiansky (Artemidorus, 1975), Prikaspiian Lidiysky (Abdullaev, 2016) and other ancient Greeks were among the first to focus on a special role of dreams in human life. Since dream and dreaming represent a quite complex phenomenon they were considered as part of nervous and mental human activity, for example Moreau (1985). The most famous works refer to the theory of psychoanalysis and belong to Freud (2018) and Jung (1999). They are devoted to the interpretation of dreams and the unconscious. The present times are characterized by the prevalence of the natural-science approach (Shelekhov, Belozyorova, & Martynova, 2015), which denies the supernatural force of a dream and dreaming, and all related ideas fit within the model of views on neurophysiology and psychophysiology.

## **2. Problem Statement**

From interdisciplinary perspective dreams and dreaming present a great interest since they exist at the intersection of linguistics, cultural science, ethnology, psychology, neurophysiology. Dreams transfer stable forms of thinking and behavioral models of ethnic groups quite adequately and accurately. Now the study of dreams analyzing the interpretation of dreams within the national culture, interaction of oral and written traditions and book texts seems quite relevant (Niebrzegowska, 1996).

## **3. Research Questions**

Dreams containing information on the future are classified as prophetic, i.e. “dreams having diverse contents, which figuratively forecast future events, i.e. prophetic... In fact, all memorable (and therefore relevant for retelling) dreams become prophetic in traditional culture. One way or the other but all of them relate to the future by forecasting or programming the facts of further life of a dreamer and his relatives” (Lurye, 2002, p. 32). Dreams are quite informative and exhaustive, therefore it is necessary to understand that “prophetic dreams are the superstitions we dream of” (Pavlova, 1984). Usually a superstition is understood as a paroemia with stable word cliches Permyakov (1975) notes that the main function of superstitions is forecasting. In their form superstitions are similar to proverbs, however they differ from the latter one by the lack of allegoric meaning (Shakhnovich, 1984).

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The study is devoted to ethno-linguistic analysis of prophetic dreams of the Kalmyks and other Mongolian people. The study will mainly focus on paremias or texts of the so-called “small genre”. From the genre point of view, it is possible to note that the texts of “small forms” of dreams are characterized by high degree of superstition (Kaivola-Bregenhøj, 1993).

## **5. Research Methods**

The methodological basis of the study includes system or complex method, which implies a thorough study of the material in relation to a particular routine and ethnographic realities thus assuming

the study of facts and phenomena in all their variety, which provides for the comprehensive study of the problem in general. The collected material was considered via the system approach.

## 6. Findings

Many peoples believed in the idea that a soul can leave the body and travel, visit “another” world during a sleep. The Kalmyks also believed that a soul leaves the body of a person. The reason of dreams was explained by the fact that “during a sleep a soul leaves and walks, while a person is dreaming of everything that it meets while walking” (Dushan, 2016, p. 217). There were cases when people saw how a soul abandoned a sleeping person as a spider through a nose. For this reason, the Kalmyks considered the murder of a spider a great sin and a crime since any spider could be the embodiment of someone’s soul (Dushan, 2016).

Such story about the wanderings of a soul is described by a famous Caucasian scientist and an ethnologist Dalgat (2004) in his work *Primitive Religion of the Chechens and Ingush*. According to the story, a soul of a smith left his body during a sleep and went walking:

*a fly came from a nose of the smith, crawled along the nippers through a dish to an anvil. There was a big crack behind an anvil; the fly went down to this crack and stayed there for quite a long time. Then it crept out, and, having passed an anvil, started passing over a dish along the same nippers, but fell into water. It was struggling for a long time in water, and hardly getting back to nippers it went back to the smith’s nose.* (Dalgat, 2004, p. 105)

When the smith woke up he told his dream in detail. As Dalgat (2004) noted, the Chechens and Ingush believed in reality of dreams, which played an important role in their early religious insights and influenced their idea of the fact that a soul is a material but not an abstract phenomenon. It shall be noted that Dalgat (2004) gives similar views on a soul of the Buryats, which religious beliefs remind of early beliefs of the Chechens. According to Dalgat (2004),

*in one Buryat fairy tale the Buryat saw a bee creeping out from a nose of his friend while he was sleeping, it was flying over a yurt, flew into a hole, then crept out of an opening and, returned to a yurt and was walking along the edge of a wash tub with water, then, it fell into the water, hardly got out and, at last, again returned to a nose of a sleeping person. It was found through talks that the dreams of a sleeping Buryat corresponded to actions and adventures of a bee. This explains why the Buryats never kill bees flying in a yurt.* (p. 92)

The scientist noted that such phenomena, when a soul is identified with a fly, is also typical for other legends of the Chechens.

The words of a Caucasian scientist Dalgat (2004) are confirmed by a story of the Slavs that believe that a soul leaves the body of a person during his sleep for a while, it gets out of a mouth in the form of various animals or insects, travels around places, which a person sees in his dream (Slavic Antiquities. Ethnolinguistic dictionary in 5 volumes, 2012). For example, a husband in the Kharkiv province noticed a

gold fly getting out of a mouth of his wife during a sleep, he turned a body of a sleeping wife. When he came back, the fly was flying and could not get into a mouth until the body was back in the previous position.

The Kalmyks also believed that you cannot turn the body during a sleep and it was forbidden to suddenly wake a person up and to shout loudly supposing that a soul may fail to get back and a person may die (Dushan, 2016). Besides, many nations “think that a soul leaves the body during a sleep and travels as a bird, insect, etc. thus making people believe in “prophetic dreams” and their interpretation, as well as in the fact that it is forbidden to suddenly wake a person up supposing that a soul may fail to get back into a body” (Tokarev, 2005, p. 342). The Ingush magician gam-sag could turn his soul into an animal and leave the body, and if someone turns a body, then a soul may fail to get, and the gam-sag dies (Dalgat, 2004). In the mythology of many peoples a human soul is associated with an insect, an animal, a bird, it can leave a body and travel thus explaining prophetic dreams. The ethnolinguistic studies clearly describe the semantic connection of insects with the underworld and the death context.

A prophetic dream where a woman sees a snake is also interesting. According to beliefs of the Kalmyks: *moyai zegüdülebel, emegtei dabhur bolba* – “if a person sees a snake in his dream, then the wife will be pregnant”; *moyai zegüdülser heuhedtai bolnoo* – “if a person sees a snake in his dream, then he will have children” (Lidzhiev & Vankaeva, 2018). The dreams of other nations predicting pregnancy are bound to other animals. Thus, for example, one of the most frequent symbols of the forthcoming pregnancy of the Slavs is fish. Dreams predicting pregnancy and subsequent childbirth are connected with the souls of unborn children in the form of fish. This may be connected with the arrival of a child from another world (Razumova, 2002) as, for example, the Slavs believed in “mythological ideas that a newborn is sent to this world from “another world” (delivery of children with birds and animals, with water, their falling from the sky, growing in plants is particularly indicative)” (Vinogradova, 1995, p. 182). Frogs and fish are characterized by quietness and dumbness, which is a sign of correlation with the world of the dead, where fish approaches a soul of a person that passed away, or a child that is not yet born. For Mongolian people snakes, frogs, turtles symbolize the chthonic lower world. In the Caucasus the ideas of a soul of a child can be connected with a fly as noted by Dalgat (2004), for example, in Lezghin legends about Sharvili hero – his mother became pregnant when a fly got into her nostril (Dalgat, 2004).

The ideas of death and the dead play an important role in the dreams of the Kalmyks. There is a connection with “another” world during a sleep, a dream is the bridge between the world of alive and the world of the dead, a sleeping person “seems to cross the invisible border between two worlds and comes into direct contact with the inhabitants of the otherworld and first of all with his dead relatives” (Tolstaya, 2002, p. 200). There is a stereotype, for example: *ükügsen kümün ger tüni irežü yayum-a abuysan bolojad žegüdün orobal mayu gežü sežideg* – “if you dream that a dead person came to your house and took something, then it is a bad sign” (Namzhil, 2010, p. 285). The opposite dreams are more positive: *ükügsen kümün dü yayum-a öggügsen bolojad žegüdün orobal sayin gežü sežideg* – “if you dream that you give something to a dead person, then is a good sign” (Namzhil, 2010, p. 286).

Joint actions with the dead person are important for correct interpretation, it is a symbol of the positive outcome of the case: *ükügsen kümün tei hamtu yabužu kereg üyile бүтүгөгсөн болоjad žegüdün*

*orobal sayin gedeg* – “if you dream of doing work with the dead person, then it is good” (Namzhil, 2010, p. 298).

The bad sign is if you are called by name in a dream, for example: *ükügsen kümün ireged ner-e yi dayudažu zegüdülebel maıu gedeg: ene erlig-un elči iregsen-ü temdeg gedeg* – “if you dream that the dead person calls you by name, then it is bad: people say it is the Erlik’s messenger” (Namzhil, 2010, p. 299). In the mythology of the Kalmyk people, Erlik or Erlik Nomin-khan is the master of the kingdom of the dead, a supreme judge in the otherworld. The kingdom of Erlik-khan is underground (Neklyudov, 2005).

It shall be noted that dreaming of dead relatives does not only inform on any event, but also the dead relative may “come to a dream to ask and demand, to blame and claim, to threaten and punish. The dream appears that space that fosters communication (even if it is unilateral) and dramatic relations between the living and the dead” (Tolstaya, 2002, p. 202).

According to the Kalmyks, if the dead parents came to your dream, then you should make a sacrifice, thus: *nasu baraısan abu eže ni zegüdüń dü orobal «ölösčü umdaıasču yabuhu yum bayın-a» gežü toson tu boyorcog kihü metü ber künğšiküü (kengšiküü) ıarııadag* – “if the dead parents came to your dream, you should give them food, make a sacrifice with flour flat cakes with butter, (which) smell sweet” (Namzhil, 2010, p. 348).

It shall be noted that the Slavic people also believed in a soul travelling to “another” world, that is why it was even possible to talk to people, including the dead relatives (Tolstoy, 2003). The Bulgarian stories also have similar plots, for example in texts recorded by a Bulgarian folklorist Georgiev (2000) from the Vlach of the northwest of Bulgaria, when a dead person is visiting his living relatives in a dream.

There is another interesting belief of the Kalmyks where visualization of personal death in a dream is not a bad sign, and on the contrary bears positive semantics: *ükügsen bologad zegüdüń orobal «urtu nasulan-a» gežü belgešiyedeg* – “if you die in a dream, then you will have a long life” (Namzhil, 2010, p. 311).

A negative prophetic dream found in the superstitions of many peoples is a dream about the loss of teeth: *šidün unagsan bologad zegüdüń orobal «maıu iru-a tai kereg egüsekü yın temdeg» gežü sežideg. mön keüken üren tü maıu bolon-a gehü buyu ah-a degü ner ece ıaruhu (ıarulha) ıarun-a gežü sežideg* – “if you dream that you lost a tooth, then is a bad sign” (Namzhil, 2010, p. 312).

As a famous Kalmyk ethnographer Dushan (2016) noted, the worst dream is a dream when you are losing teeth. If you lose permanent teeth, then it means that any of the younger family representatives can die. The loss of the anterior teeth means the death of any of the parents. People invite a Buddhist monk, a gelyung for the corresponding ceremony to prevent negative events.

It is obvious that the loss of teeth as a sign of death of any relative is a universal phenomenon since it is typical for many nations and is considered one of most frequent dreams in the tradition of dream interpretation. According to folk-beliefs, teeth are connected with the idea of vital force and age, with supernatural abilities (Zhivitsa, 2005). In Slavic dreams the loss of teeth also symbolizes the death of a person, and, for example, “a dentition, sense of pain, presence of blood defines the age of a future dead person and the nature of communication between him and a dreamer” (Lazareva, 2016, p. 95).

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, a dream serves the place or space ensuring the link between the living and the dead. Dreams bear the forecasting function, and hence they are perceived as a message, which requires correct interpretation. Dreams transfer stable forms of figurative thinking and behavior models of culture-bearers most precisely and brightly. Such forms have denotative and informative meaning since they reflect the national worldview, and in terms of culturological aspect they most adequately and widely cover and display the ethnolinguistic picture of the world.

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