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INFLUENCE OF THE OB UGRIANS CONTACTS ON THE TRADITIONAL BELIEF SYSTEM

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Abstract

The publication, based on an analysis of interethnic and interfaith contacts of the northern groups of Ob Ugrians (Khanty and Mansi), living on the territory of the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug – Ugra in the Berezovsky, Beloyarsky and Oktyabrsky districts, examines the degree of influence of these contacts on traditional spiritual culture associated with religious views of the peoples in question. Belonging to the Ob Ugrians was determined by self-identification. The analysis showed that the greatest transformation of the traditional worldview is associated with the Soviet period of Russian history, specifically with the policy of transferring the indigenous population to a sedentary lifestyle. Having lost contact with traditional settlements, with the inhabitants of multinational villages, the Ob Ugrians entered into interethnic contacts, including marriages, which affected their worldview. In the post-Soviet period, in the wake of the rise of ethnic self-awareness, there has been a surge of interest in traditional religion and the revival of certain rituals. Currently, about 70% of the Ob Ugrians, with varying degrees of involvement, perform traditional ritual actions; more than 17% consider themselves Orthodox and observe Orthodox rituals.

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1. Introduction

The need to preserve the cultural identity of all peoples and ethnic groups of the Russian Federation is one of the state tasks. At the same time, it is much more difficult for small ethnic groups, which include the Ob Ugrians (Khanty and Mansi), to preserve their cultural heritage. The ethnic mobilization of the indigenous peoples of the North, observed at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, and state support for the efforts of these peoples to preserve their cultural values, gives some hope that these peoples will be able to preserve their ethnocultural heritage (Surgutskova & Alferova, 2018).

2. Problem Statement

The religious beliefs of the Ob Ugrians, like the beliefs of other indigenous peoples, were one of the conditions for their self-identification. Local ethnic groups of the Ob Ugrians were named after their spirit – the guardian of a particular territory (Dokuchayeva et al., 2024; Tang & Yang, 2024). There was a certain hierarchy between the patron spirits. Researchers have recorded generic and group spirits, i.e. they marked the social organization of the Khanty and Mansi (Bardina, 2011). Each spirit had its own sacred place, which was visited only by representatives of a certain clan or certain clans who worshiped it.

3. Research Questions

There were also common Ugric places of worship. Sanctuaries of indigenous peoples as a special space for preserving folk memory associated with the spiritual culture and mythology of the Ob Ugrians in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug – Ugra are taken under special protection.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study of ethnocultural processes occurring under the influence of factors of world cultural globalization, the search for effective mechanisms that contribute to the preservation of cultural diversity is one of the tasks of modern science.

5. Research Methods

The empirical basis of the study was personal conversations, questionnaire data revealing the attitude of indigenous respondents to traditional beliefs and Orthodoxy. 112 people were interviewed using a questionnaire. Another type of the source were burial structures in the multi-ethnic settlement of the village Kazym in the Beloyarsky district of the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug known as Ugra (Lipich & Balahura, 2024; Regnerová et al., 2024; Shumilina & Antsiferova, 2024).

6. Findings

Interethnic relations had and still have a significant impact on the culture of the Khanty and Mansi. Already in the 11th century, chronicles mention the presence of Russians on the territory of Ugra, where they came into contact with indigenous peoples. From the end of the 16th century, the first Russian

fortified settlements appeared on the Ugric lands and constant interethnic contact between the indigenous population and newcomers became inevitable. For a long time, the indigenous population prevailed numerically; Russians and other peoples did not play a significant role. In addition, the Ugric population migrated and left areas of close contact (Ahmad et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2024; Waite, 2024).

The 18th century is considered the century of forced Christianization of the Ostyaks and Voguls (Khanty and Mansi). However, as researchers note, this did not lead to a restructuring of the traditional worldview; at the beginning of the 20th century, missionaries still noted the adherence of the Ob Ugrians to traditional religious beliefs (Isaeva, 2008). An example of this is that until the 1930s, on the river, there were large all-Ugric religious centres on the Ob River, such as Vezhakory and Kaltysyan (Alferova, 2020). This is despite the fact that the territory of the Ob region was a busy waterway along which there were migration routes and movements of both the ancient Ugric population and the later ethnically heterogeneous one. It was also a spiritual centre where people constantly communicated with each other. The Ob territory has long been and still remains a contact zone of initially two peoples: the Khanty and Mansi, and then others; there is a large percentage of mixed marriages and a variety of surnames. According to R.K. Bardina (2011) in this contact zone, the number of Mansi and Khanty is declining, but at the same time, bearers of new surnames appear who consider themselves to be among these peoples. If in the 1930s, 55 surnames associated with the Khanty and Mansi were recorded, then at the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries there were 319 surnames.

This is confirmed by our field materials. At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a quantitative increase in interethnic marriages, in particular marriages between women of Russian origin and men of Ob-Ugric origin. In the first half of the 20th century, there were also isolated cases of relationships between local women and exiled men. Also, in most cases, marriages were unregistered, and at the birth of children, only the mother and child were indicated in the birth registers. There were situations in which children were born out of wedlock, and they were registered in the surname of the first husband. For example, in the family of Egor Nikitich Tynzyanov (born 1910) and Natalya Gerasimovna Yarkina (born 1911), 4 sons were born: Ilya (born 1931), Prokopiya (born 1933), Anatoly and Nikolai. After the death of her husband, Natalya Gerasimovna had another son, Vitaly Vasilyevich (born 1951), who was registered with the surname Tynzyanov. According to the story of Vitaly Vasilyevich's eldest daughter, his father was one of those repressed in the village of Vanzetur, and his nationality was Russian.

In his work E.I. Rombandeeva (1993) writes that according to one of the Mansi legends, Khanty men can marry Mansi girls, since one of the daughters of the eminent Mansi ancestor Tagt kotil oiki was married to one of the eminent Kazym Khanty heroes. For this reason, mutual marriage between these peoples is still recognized today.

One such example is the family of the above-mentioned Vitaly Vasilyevich Tynzyanov (Mansi, born 1951), who in 1979 married Margarita Stepanovna Tueva (Khanty, born 1960), a native of the village of Tutleim, Berezovsky district. Their family had 7 children: Natalya (born in 1980), Vitalina (1981–2008), Peter (1982–2011), Ilya (born in 1986), Anzhelika (born in 1990), Vitaly (born in 1995) and Olga (born in 1999). Among the children, only the eldest daughter Natalya considers herself a Mansi; the rest are identified by their mother as Khanty.

M.S. herself is Novyukhova (Khanty); his mother is Yavrova (Khanty). She received the surname “Tueva” from her older maternal brother, Taras Gavrilovich Tuev, a native of the village of Pugory.

These variations in interethnic relations did not significantly affect the foundations of the traditional worldview, since the traditional way of life was initially preserved.

The work shows that with the gradual destruction of religious centres, there was a weakening of religious consciousness. This is not connected either with interethnic marriages, or with the missionary activities of the Orthodox Church, and not even with the policy of combating religious prejudices, but with the practical activities of the Soviet government, with the processes of collectivization and the consolidation of unpromising villages. It was the forced relocation of people from historical territories of residence that dealt a blow to spiritual culture. Nevertheless, in popular memory, the religious places in question still remained significant spiritual centres, and the Ob Ugrians secretly continued to visit these territories.

In the post-perestroika period, in connection with the possibility of openly expressing one's religious feelings, the first attempts to reconstruct places of worship began with the help of the guardians of these patron spirits and the national intelligentsia, natives of this territory. During the period of so-called ethnic consolidation, under pressure from representatives of the Ob-Ugric peoples, the Duma of the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug – Ugra adopted the Law of the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug – Ugra “On the sanctuaries of indigenous minorities in the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug – Ugra (2005). However, due to a number of objective reasons, in reality this law was not viable.

To date, settlements with a mixed ethnic composition predominate in the territories under consideration in the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug – Ugra (Tkachev et al., 2018). In these settlements, processes of assimilation and the gradual disappearance of traditional beliefs are underway as it was evidenced by field materials and personal data.

During the survey, a total of 52 questionnaires were analysed from respondents who considered themselves to be small-numbered peoples of the North. Of these, 50% are urban residents, 38.5% are residents of large settlements, 11.5% are residents of small settlements, aged 16 to 60 and older. At the same time, 61.5% are women, 38.5% are men. 17.3% consider themselves Orthodox believers, 13.5% are non-believers, but observe Orthodox traditions, 21.2% are indifferent to religion, 3.8% are non-believers and opponents of Orthodoxy, 44.2% are non-believers, but belong to this religion. 61.5% of respondents do not observe religious holidays, at the same time, 36.5% of respondents treat people who observe rituals with respect, 21.2% are tolerant, 42.3% are indifferent; no one expressed a sharply negative attitude. This fact speaks of tolerance towards different religions. According to the survey, anti-religiosity prevails in modern society accounting for 46.2%, or simply a fashion for religiosity for 42.3%, and only 11.5% responded that there is a revival of religious spirituality. When asked about the need to teach Orthodox rituals, 86.5% were against it, while the rest were in favour. 61.5% of respondents have never thought about whether Orthodoxy can instil morality in a person. 13.5% think “no” and 25% answered this question in the affirmative. Also, the majority of them did not think about whether the promotion of Orthodox values is capable of preventing crime amounting to 59.6% and only 17.3% are sure that “yes”. When asked about the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on spiritual and moral education, 69.2% answered “no” and 30.8% answered affirmatively. 48.1% consider the biblical commandments to be

relevant, 38.5% partly agree with this, and 13.5% deny their relevance. 69.2% of respondents do not agree that the church will interfere in the social and political life of society, 26.9% believe that the role of the church should extend only to the spiritual life of society, and only 3.8% are sure that it should participate in discussing and solving problems of both society and the state.

Usually people turn to religion in difficult life situations, so respondents were asked whether the Orthodox religion could help a person in difficult periods of life. 48.1% of respondents somewhat agree with this, 28.8% disagree and 23.1% agree. 65.4% of respondents believe that the Russian Orthodox Church did not have any influence on their own lives, 13.5% answered in the affirmative, 21.2% believe that it influenced “somewhat.”

Funeral rituals are connected with the worldview of peoples and are one of the most persistent elements of ethnic culture. The material embodiment of ideas associated with ideas about the other world are funeral structures, as studies conducted in the village show. In Kazym, Beloyarsk districts of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, there are buildings reflecting both the preservation of tradition and its transformation under the influence of various factors, including interethnic interaction.

In the village Kazym, the territory was originally inhabited by Komi (Zyryans), Khanty, Russians (workers); later other ethnic groups appeared. According to oral information, “at first the Khanty did not bury there,” that is, the Khanty burials appeared later than the Zyryansk and Russian ones.

At present, the changes occurring in the burial structures are easily traceable. Zyryans who came to the territory of the river Kazym in the 1920s were initially baptized, despite the fact that there was a ban on the manifestation of religious feelings; they fully observed the rituals associated with this religion. Throughout the existence of the cemetery, a cross was placed on Komi burial structures, with very rare exceptions. The shape of the cross changed over time; they were made by the believers themselves. Beginning from the 1980s, ritual services appeared in the nearby city of Beloyarsky. For example, stone monuments appeared for the first time, but a cross must be inscribed on it

Traditionally, the Kazym Khanty did not bury very deeply, 40–50 cm, but they always made a grave house (*yijk huḡity hot*), which was considered a refuge for one of the souls. There was a hole in the house that was usually closed. If they came to remember the deceased, the window was opened and the soul of the deceased was invited to a joint meal. For meals, a kettle, a bucket for water, a table and the necessary utensils were always left at the grave site. In tradition, there were no other structures over the grave. At the same time, it was forbidden to correct the grave structures so as not to disturb the soul of the deceased, with which certain transformations took place. The graves were destroyed and fell into disrepair, which caused rejection from representatives of other ethnic groups. Subsequently, even in Soviet times, crosses were fixed on graves, unlike Komi crosses, they were very simple, unified, like coffins, they were made in the state farm workshop. Nowadays, grave pits have become deep, but there is a tradition of a tombstone and the need to share a meal with the deceased still remains.

The first Russians were cultural workers, that is, atheists, and subsequently, for a long time, those who had to work with the indigenous population came to this land. Therefore, on their tombstones, the tradition of placing quadrangular obelisks with a star on top was established; they were most often made of wood, all in the same workshop, and sometimes metal rods were used.

Subsequently, due to the increase in the number of interethnic marriages, various options for mixed burials appear, for example, on the same grave you can see a custom-made monument, a cross and a Khanty house.

7. Conclusion

The study showed that the greatest transformation of the traditional worldview of the Ob Ugrians occurred during the Soviet period, especially as a result of the transfer of the indigenous population to a sedentary lifestyle. This process was directly related to the increase in interethnic contacts, which often led to marriage relationships and, accordingly, a transformation of their worldview. In the post-Soviet period, there was a weakening of ideological control, which led to a surge of interest in traditional beliefs and the performance of certain rituals.

The results of a survey of representatives of the indigenous population show that only a third of respondents in one way or another associate themselves with the Orthodox faith.

The revival of historical, cultural, ethnic centres of indigenous peoples, carried out in the district, had an impact on the rehabilitation of traditional beliefs and rituals.

The funeral rituals of the Ob Ugrians underwent changes as a result of interethnic and religious contacts, primarily with the Russians and Komi-Zyryans. In mixed families, a new form of burial has appeared with elements of Orthodox, Khanty (Mansi) rituals.

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