



THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN THE EPIC “ALPOMISH” AND THEIR ROLE IN THE PLOT

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Abstract

This article analyzes the structural, functional, and aesthetic features of female characters in the Uzbek heroic epic “Alpomish” within the framework of literary and folklore studies. The study examines the image of women, particularly Barchin, Kaldirgach, and Surhayl, not merely as passive background figures, but as active subjects who drive the epic plot, generate key narrative conflicts, and govern the epic timeline. Through textual, comparative-historical, and archetypal approaches, the semantic roles of the motive of the four epic conditions and the diplomatic strategy of the seven-year delay are highlighted. The purpose of the article is to scientifically demonstrate the socio-legal status, independence, and mental power of women in traditional epic consciousness based on the version of Fozil Yuldosh ogli and recent researches, including the works of M. A. Kholboyeva. The results confirm that female characters are a fundamental factor ensuring national identity, poetic structural dynamics, and ethical continuity in the heroic doston genre.

Keywords: Epic, doston, Alpomish, female characters, plot dynamics, elements of folklore, literary studies, scientific research.



Introduction

The existence of the image of a woman in literature goes back to the ancient times of folk art. This is especially evident in religious stories. Both in the pre-Islamic period and after it, special attention is paid to the issue of women. In fact, in the pre-Islamic era, there was an image of women, old fairies, and in the Islamic society, the most respected person is a married woman, that is, a mother. This is also evident in the hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) that “Paradise is under the feet of mothers” [7, 32].

The epic “Alpomish”, which is a rare monument of Uzbek folk oral poetic creation, is a heroic epic that embodies centuries-old national values, social relations and the ideas of national independence. In the process of the formation and development of the heroic epic of any nation, the social environment and the institution of the family play a leading role. This epic book, which is a variant of the epic “Alpomish” and the son of Fazil Yoldosh, opens with a prologue that encourages the realization of national identity. The preface of the publication contains the following conceptual ideas taken from Islam Karimov’s work “High Spirituality - Invincible Power”: “Alpomish, a unique masterpiece of folk art, is a heroic song that shows the identity of our nation and is passed down from generation to generation” [1].

In the “Alpomish” epic, along with national defense and bravery, the issues of family honor, high respect and loyalty to women determine the main ideological direction. Academician V. M. Zhirmunsky noted that in Turkish heroic epics, a woman is not limited only to family relationships, but is an active participant in maintaining tribal unity and creating heroic motives [2, 84].

This scientific article analyzes the artistic-aesthetic nature of female characters in the epic, their compositional and plot-creating role based on the criteria of modern literary studies.

Literature review

The text of the epic “Alpomish”, sung by Fazil Yoldosh and considered the most perfect version of the Uzbek epic tradition, was taken as the object of the article [1]. The role and artistic function of female characters in the plot was highlighted based on the theoretical views of the folklore scholars V. M. Zhirmunsky, H.



Zarifov, T. Mirzaev and B. Sarimsakov about the genesis of epic motifs and heroic epics [2; 3; 4]. The actions of the characters were analyzed within the framework of the functions of ensuring the dynamics of the plot, creating knots and solutions.

Research Methodology

In this study, the following methods of literary studies and folklore studies were used in order to determine the artistic-constructive and plot-creating functions of the female image in the Uzbek folk heroic epic:

Systematic (structural) analysis method: The variation of Fazil Yoldosh, which is considered the most perfect among the epic variants, was taken as a whole system, and its plot lines, knots and solutions were analyzed.

Method of textological (textual) analysis: Characteristic poetic fragments from the epic and dialogues of the characters were proved on the basis of direct artistic text analysis.

Method of mythopoetic and archetypal interpretation: The epic transformation of the totemic mother and evil sorceress archetypes in the ancient mythological thought was revealed in the interpretation of the negative image (Surhayl kampir). As the theoretical and methodological basis of the research, the well-known folklorist scientists V.M. Zhirmunsky, H. Zarifov, T. Mirzaev and B. Sarimsakov's fundamental views on epic motifs and the genesis of the heroic epic were relied upon.

Analysis and results

In the version of Fazil Yoldosh, Barchin is not just a beloved sidekick of the hero or a passive character. He is the main central force driving the events of the epic, an epic hero with an independent will and a high social status. Barchin is considered the image of an alpine woman in the Uzbek epic, and according to the explanatory dictionary of the Uzbek language, the root of the name Barchin means "leopard", "ilvir", "tiger" [8]. Names are assigned to people in a monad way, which they want to accompany them during their life.

The naming of Barchin in the "Alpomish" epic differs in the epics sung by different Bakhshis. In particular, in the version of the son of Fazil Yoldosh, which we analyzed: *"Shunda farzandlarning uchovini ham olib kelib, Shohimardon*



pirining etagiga soldi. Shohimardon piri Boybo 'rining o 'g 'lining otini Hakimbek qo 'ydi, o 'ng kiftiga besh qo 'lini urdi. Besh qo 'lining o 'rni dog ' bo 'lib, besh panjaning o 'rni bilinib qoldi. Qizining otini Qaldirg 'ochoyim qo 'ydi. Boysarining qizining otini oy Barchin qo 'ydi. Ana shunda Shohimardon piri Hakimbekka oy Barchinni atashtirib, beshkirti qilib: "Bu ikkovi er-xotin bo 'lsin, Hakimbek bilan hech bir kishi barobar bo 'lolmasin, omin ollohu akbar", – deb fotiha betiga tortdi" [1,14] like this.

As the folklorist scholar H. Zarifov noted, "From the very beginning of the epic, Barchin rises from passive objectivity to active subjectivity, its fate determines the disintegration or unification of an entire tribe" [5, 45]. The diplomatic and psychological skill of an Uzbek woman in resolving family crises is clearly demonstrated in Barchinoy's speech in response to Boisari's decision to leave her country.

*Xo 'ja kelsa, chiqar murid naziri,
Xotin bo 'lmasmikan erning vaziri?!
Er deganning aqlin olmas bo 'lurmi,
Aldab-suldab yo 'lga solmas bo 'lurmi,
Boy otamman biy boboma ne boidi? [1, 24]*

Barchinoy justifies traditional gender relations in society and the strategic role of women in the family through the metaphor of "minister". In this place, a woman is interpreted as not just a submissive subject, but the closest adviser of the husband (and the family in general), a social force that makes the right strategic decisions in crisis situations.

One of the leading characteristics of Barchin's character is his determination and ability to protect his dignity. In the epic, these qualities are clearly expressed in the answers to the claims of the Kalmyk Alps: "To 'qson alpning zo 'ri Ko 'kaldosh: — Bir ahmoq qilmaganing bizlar qolibmidik? Yo birimizga teg, yo barimizga teg. Bir javob ayt, biz shuytib tengsalib yuramizmi? — dedi.

*Bu so 'zni eshitib, Barchin bir so 'z deb turgan ekan:
Eshitgin, qalmoqlar, aytgan tilimnan,
Meni olar kelmas sening qo 'lingnan,
Badbaxt qalmoq, qolma kelgan yo 'lingnan.
Meni olmoqqa hadding bormi, qalmoqlar,*



O‘z yo‘lingga bora bergin, ahmoqlar [1, 61].

In this episode, it is shown that Barchin is a determined, proud and deeply aware of his own worth. Barchin’s response sounds like a sharp reaction to this pressure.

A short letter sent by Barchin in the epic “Alpomish”. — *“Oltoychilik yo‘lga keldim, to‘qson alpda toy-talashda qoldim, olti oyga muhlat oldim, mendanumidi bo‘lsa, Alpomish kelsin, bo‘lmasa javobimni bersin” [1, 69]*, lines are the most vivid lyrical and psychological tool that reveals his character. Barchin, who is in a foreign country, under the pressure of ninety mountains, does not lose his temper. The request “If he has hope for me, let Alpomish come” is proof of Barchin’s pure love. He will not give in to wealth or violence.

Qorajon turib aytdi: - Qani, Barchin, Alpomish bo‘lsa keldi. Alplarning muhlati bo‘lsa bitib qoldi. Sen nima javob aytasan? Barchin aytdi: — Alpomish kelsa, kelibdi-da. “Alpomish keldi”, deb men Alpomishning etagidan ushlab ketaverayinmi?... Har kim maydonga ot soladi, otini o‘zdirgan odam oladi. Shunda har kimning o‘z ko‘ngli o‘zidan qoladi. Mening to‘rtta shartim bor, shu to‘rt shartimni bajargan kishiga tegaman. Xoh Alpomish qilib olsin, xoh qalmoqlarning biri qilib olsin, shu so‘zimni xon to‘ramga aytib bor [1, 115].

As noted by folklorist J. Eshonkulov, in the epic “Alpomish” the freedom of a woman and her high socio-spiritual position in society, characteristic of the era of matriarchy, have been preserved [9, 45]. Although devoted to Alpomish, the heroine’s mere arrival does not automatically resolve the issue of marriage, placing her personal will above male authority. As academician T. Mirzaev noted in his scientific views, such traditional formulas in epics are based on the principles of epic legitimacy and open competition (meritocracy) [10, 112]. The creation of four conditions is a product of Barchin’s strategic intelligence. While analyzing the poetics of Turkish epics, the great folklorist V. M. Zhirmunsky connects such conditions in the motif of “The Bride’s Victory” with ancient rituals of heroic weddings [2, 218].

The image of Hakimbek’s sister Kaldirgoch in the epic “Alpomish” is a bright example of family care, courage, national will and loyalty characteristic of an Uzbek woman. If Barchin is the cause of the external world (Boysari’s migration, clash with the Kalmyk Alps) and the beginning of heroic journeys in the plot of



the epic, the Swallow is the pillar that preserves the inner world of the hero, that is, the inner integrity and spiritual environment of the people of Kungirost.

Kaldirgoch enters Alpomish's fate and his mental state as a force that directly affects him. After reading the letter from Barchin, Hakimbek pressed the letter under his knee and said, "If Altaychik is on the way, if it is in the hands of the Kalmak, if it is in the hands of a great man, we will get a wife." Deeply aware of the seriousness of this situation, the swallow appeals to his brother as follows:

*"...Mard yigitning yori talash bolami,
Er yigitning yorin qalmoq olami,
Barchin checham talash bo'lib qolami,
Senday beklar bul bexabar turami?!..."* [1, 69-70]

With this, we can find out how brave and honorable a girl Kaldirgoch is. She understands that not only his brother's honor, but also the family's honor is not right for his brother's wife to be stolen in the hands of others. Kaldirgoch values masculine concepts of courage, honor, and glory above all else.

When Alpomish's parents (Boybori and Aysuluv) block his way and try to adopt him without blessing, it is Kaldirgoch who helps to untie the knot of the saga. Despite the opposition of his parents, he deeply feels his brother's spiritual experiences and prepares his son for the journey and watches him on the way:

*"Qayda borsang, Shohimardon yor bo'lsin,
O'nikimom, chilton jilovdor bo'lsin,
Dushmanlaring ko'rsa seni zor bo'lsin,
Sog' borib, salomat kelgin, bek og'a.
Ishingni solganman qodir xudoga,
Sog' borib, salomat kelgan, bek og'a. ..."* [1, 80].

Kaldirgoch truly cares for his brother's safety. As the literary scholar T. Mirzaev wrote: "*Qaldirg'ochning bu harakati doston syujetini turg'unlikdan qutqaradi va qahramonlik safarining boshlanishini tezlashtiruvchi katalizator vazifasini bajaradi*" [3, 104].

Tragic events occur after Hakimbek goes to Kalmak country. Alpomish is thrown into prison, Ultontoz takes power in Kungirost, humiliates his family, including Kaldirgoch, and at this time secretly raises Barchinoy's son Yodgor. As a result,



after seven years of exile, while tending his camels, Kaldirgoch meets his nephew Yodgor and takes him in his arms to hide from his enemies:

*“G‘arib bo‘p ezildi mening yuragim,
Akamning o‘rniga qolgan, chirog‘im,
Bu so‘zdaytib oy Qaldirg‘och turadi,
Yodigorni bag‘riga bosib suyadi,
Oy Qaldirg‘och ancha xursand bo‘ladi,
Qaldirg‘ochoy tuyaga olib jo‘nadi” [1, 227].*

In the epic “Alpomish”, the image of a woman is not presented only in a positive way. The representative of the Kalmyk land, the old woman Surkhayil is the center of negative forces in the epic, a symbol of evil and cunning. His actions serve to tie the biggest knots in the saga and turn the course of events to an unexpected tragic turn.

In the epic, when Alpomish and his forty-two Alpine men approach the Kalmyk people, Surkhayil stalks them from a distance and, knowing that he cannot win in open battle, turns to a mythological and psychological trick: *“Bular munda borayapti, hech bir dushmandan bexabar. Endi gapni Surxayil mastondan eshiting. Bularning yo‘lida turib, har yoqni durbin bilan qarab, ko‘rib, kuniga xabar olib yurar edi” [1, 207].*

Surkhayil is not just an ordinary enemy, but an epic manifestation of the archetype of the “witch old woman” (evil totemic mother) in ancient mythological thought [6, 74]. He is well aware that he cannot match his seven alpine sons, Alpomish, in terms of physical strength. For this reason, he employs intellectual evil—craft and trickery—against physical power.

*“Bu suhbatni oxir qilar,
Kosalarni olib qizlar,
Bul beklar qoldi bexabar,
Ish ko‘rsatib bunday ayyor,
Mast bo‘lib qirq ikki nomdor,
Qalmoqshohga bordi xabar,
Ko‘ringiz kampir jodugar,
Bu kulfatga qoldi beklar.
Qirq bir odam o‘libdi.*



*Alpomishga asar qilmay,
Qoldi bu olovda kuymay” [1, 218].*

This action proves once again how cruel he is and how he does not tolerate any evil in the way of his goal. However, the old woman can physically destroy ordinary people (forty-one Alpins), but she cannot overcome the archetype of sanctity and inviolability of the main character, who is supported by divine powers, absent elders and holy powers (Shakhimardan, Chillatans) and who is the symbol of freedom of the Uzbek people.

As folklorist scientist V.M. Zhirmunsky pointed out, such negative female images in heroic epics are conditioned by the laws of the plot for the hero to once again pass the test as an alp, pass through the stages of death and rebirth (mythological initiation) like a dungeon, and become a more powerful person [2, 118].

The old woman Surkhail continues her mission of evil until the end of the saga, and she will face her punishment only when the knots of the saga are fully untied and justice is served. Thus, his image is the main source of conflict that brought the dynamics of the plot to the highest point in the epic.

Conclusion/ Recommendations

As a result of the systematic and textological analysis of the artistic-aesthetic nature of female images and their functional tasks in the epic “Alpomish” sung in the version of Fazil Yoldosh oglu, some conclusions were reached. The female characters in the epic are not just a background (static character) of the events, but are the main factor that directly drives and controls the plot of the work.

Based on the results of this research, it is suggested to carry out the following works in the future in the field of folklore studies and humanitarian sciences:

Incorporation into curricula: emphasizing not only the heroic motif, but also the socio-legal status of epic female characters as a separate topic in the literature textbooks of secondary schools and higher education institutions;

Media and distribution materials: development of mechanisms to inculcate the national educational significance of the images of Barchin and Kaldirgoch in the minds of modern youth in the feature and multiplication films based on the epic.

In general, in the “Alpomish” epic, the Uzbek woman is not only a miracle limited to the family circle, but she is glorified as a great person who has a high socio-



legal status in the society, who can decide the fate of the nation with her word and free will, and who is a symbol of intelligence and loyalty.

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