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## THE SIMILARITY OF MOTIVES IN TURKISH FOLK EPICS

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### **Abstract**

Turkic folk epics represent a rich cultural and literary heritage shared by many Turkic-speaking peoples. Despite geographical dispersion and historical differences, these epics demonstrate striking similarities in motifs, themes, character types, and narrative structures. This article explores the common motifs found in major Turkic epics such as Alpamysh, Manas, Dede Korkut, Koroghlu, and Edige. The study analyzes heroic birth, initiation, struggle between good and evil, loyalty, exile and return, and supernatural assistance as recurring epic motifs. By examining these shared elements, the article highlights the unity of Turkic worldview, values, and mythological consciousness preserved through oral tradition.

**Keywords:** Turkic epics, folklore, motif similarity, heroic narrative, oral tradition, mythological motifs

### **Introduction**

Folk epics occupy a central place in the cultural memory of Turkic peoples. Created and transmitted orally over centuries, these epics not only narrate heroic deeds but also embody social values, moral ideals, historical experiences, and collective identity. Turkic epic traditions developed among various peoples such as Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Turkmens, Azerbaijanis, Tatars, Bashkirs, and others.

Despite differences in language, regional context, and historical development, Turkic folk epics share remarkable similarities in motifs and narrative patterns. These similarities reflect a common origin, shared mythological thinking, and similar socio-cultural conditions of nomadic and semi-nomadic life.



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The purpose of this article is to analyze the main motifs common to Turkic folk epics and to reveal the reasons for their similarity. The study contributes to comparative folklore research and helps to understand the unity and continuity of Turkic cultural heritage.

In folklore studies, a motif is understood as a recurring narrative element, theme, image, or situation that appears in different works and traditions. Motifs function as building blocks of folklore texts and help scholars identify connections between narratives across cultures. In epic tradition, motifs may include:

- miraculous birth of the hero,
- early display of extraordinary strength,
- heroic journey or quest,
- struggle against enemies or monsters,
- loyalty to family and homeland,
- exile and triumphant return,
- divine or supernatural assistance.

The repetition of such motifs in Turkic epics indicates not simple borrowing, but deep-rooted cultural patterns formed within a shared worldview.

Turkic peoples historically lived a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle, which strongly influenced their folklore. Epics emerged as a means of preserving history, social norms, and moral values in societies without written literature.

The oral performance of epics by bakhshi, ozan, manaschi, or ashiq ensured the continuity of epic tradition. Although each epic adapted to local conditions, the core motifs remained stable, reflecting common Turkic ideals such as bravery, honor, loyalty, and justice. Shared historical experiences — such as migration, warfare, tribal alliances, and resistance against enemies — also contributed to motif similarity across Turkic epics.

One of the most widespread motifs in Turkic folk epics is the miraculous or extraordinary birth of the hero. This motif emphasizes the hero's predestined greatness and divine selection. For example:

- ✓ In Alpamysh, the hero is born after his parents pray for a child for many years.



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✓ In the Manas epic, Manas's birth is accompanied by prophetic dreams and signs.

✓ In Dede Korkut, heroes often descend from noble or blessed lineages. This motif symbolizes hope, continuity of the tribe, and divine favor. It also establishes the hero as a protector of the people from the very beginning of the narrative. Another common motif is the hero's early demonstration of physical strength, intelligence, or courage. Even as a child, the epic hero surpasses others in ability. In many Turkic epics:

✓ The hero defeats older rivals at a young age.

✓ He masters weapons and horse riding early.

✓ He undergoes tests that prove his worthiness as a warrior.

This initiation motif represents the transition from childhood to heroism and reflects traditional Turkic ideals of masculinity, bravery, and readiness to defend the community.

The conflict between good and evil forms the central axis of most Turkic epics. The hero typically fights external enemies such as invaders, tyrants, monsters, or traitors. For instance:

❖ Koroglu depicts resistance against injustice and oppression.

❖ Manas narrates wars against enemies threatening the Kyrgyz people.

❖ Edige focuses on political struggle and moral responsibility.

These conflicts are not merely physical battles; they symbolize moral opposition between justice and injustice, loyalty and betrayal, order and chaos.

Loyalty — to family, tribe, homeland, and companions — is one of the most consistent motifs in Turkic epics. Heroes are often tested through situations that challenge their faithfulness. Common elements include:

✓ devotion to parents and elders,

✓ faithfulness to a beloved spouse,

✓ respect for promises and oaths,

✓ readiness to sacrifice personal happiness for the people.

Honor (namus) and reputation play a crucial role in the hero's actions, reflecting the ethical code of Turkic society.



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The motif of exile followed by triumphant return appears frequently in Turkic epic narratives. The hero may be banished, captured, or separated from his homeland, only to return stronger and wiser.

In Alpamysh, the hero is imprisoned and later escapes to reclaim his family and honor. This motif symbolizes endurance, resilience, and the restoration of justice. Exile serves as a period of trial, while return represents rebirth and victory.

Supernatural elements are deeply embedded in Turkic epics. Heroes often receive help from:

- ✓ divine forces;
- ✓ sacred animals (especially horses);
- ✓ wise elders or saints;
- ✓ prophetic dreams and visions.

The epic horse, in particular, plays a symbolic role as the hero's loyal companion and guide. This motif reflects ancient Turkic beliefs in animism, shamanism, and the spiritual connection between humans and nature.

The similarity of motifs in Turkic folk epics can be explained by several factors:

1. Common Ethnic and Linguistic Roots – Turkic peoples share a historical origin and worldview.
2. Oral Tradition – Oral transmission preserved stable narrative patterns.
3. Nomadic Culture – Similar lifestyles produced similar values and stories.
4. Mythological Thinking – Shared ancient beliefs influenced epic structures.
5. Cultural Interaction – Continuous contact among Turkic tribes reinforced common motifs.

**Table-1. Comparative Table of Common Motifs in Turkic Folk Epics**

Epic Title	People / Region	Main Hero	Miraculous Birth	Heroic Initiation	Struggle with Evil	Exile and Return	Supernatural Aid
Alpamysh	Uzbek, Kazakh	Alpamysh	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Manas	Kyrgyz	Manas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes
Dede Korkut	Azerbaijan i, Turkish	Various heroes	Partial	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Koroglu	Azerbaijan i, Turkmen	Koroglu	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial
Edige	Tatar, Nogai	Edige	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial



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Explanation table-1: This table demonstrates that despite regional and narrative differences, Turkic folk epics share a stable set of core motifs. The recurrence of these motifs confirms the existence of a common epic tradition and shared cultural values among Turkic peoples.

## **Table-2. Description of Key Epic Motifs**

### **MIRACULOUS BIRTH**

- This motif symbolizes divine favor and the predestined role of the hero. In most Turkic epics, the hero is born after long prayers or supernatural signs, emphasizing his future greatness.

### **HEROIC INITIATION**

- The hero undergoes physical and moral trials that mark his transformation from childhood to warriorhood. This reflects traditional Turkic ideals of bravery and maturity.

### **STRUGGLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL**

- Epic conflicts represent not only physical battles but also moral opposition. Heroes fight to protect justice, social order, and tribal unity

### **LOYALTY AND HONOR**

- Loyalty to family, tribe, and homeland is a fundamental value in Turkic epics. Betrayal is condemned, while faithfulness is rewarded.

### **EXILE AND RETURN**

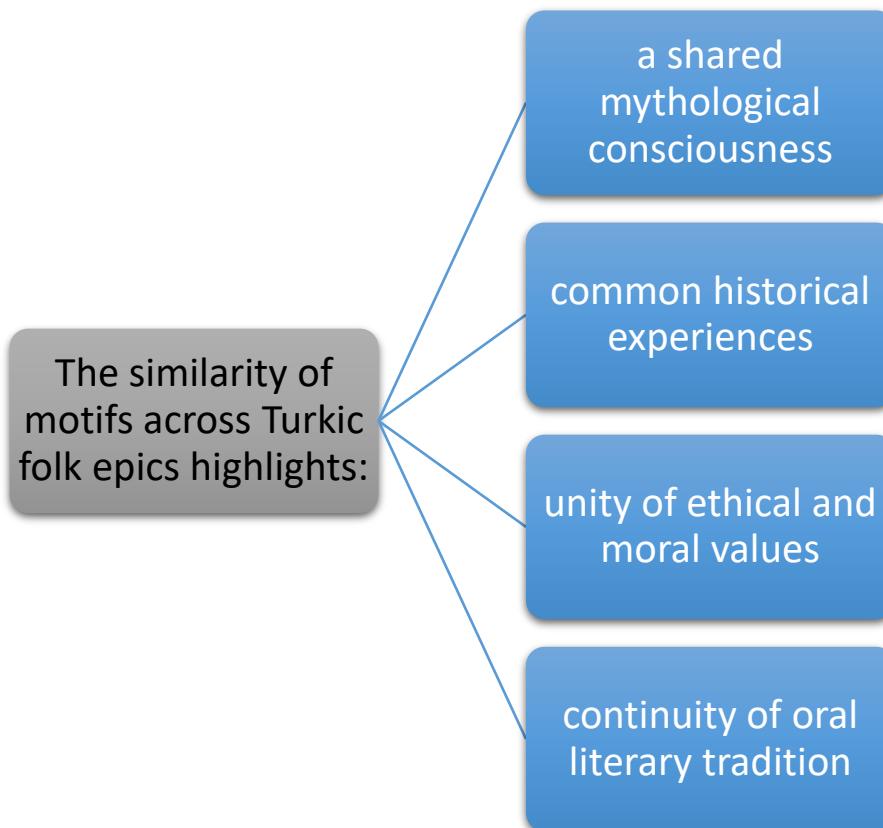
- Temporary separation from the homeland serves as a test of endurance. The hero's return restores justice and social harmony.

### **SUPERNATURAL ASSISTANCE**

- Help from sacred animals, divine forces, or wise elders reflects ancient mythological beliefs and spiritual worldview

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**Table-3. Cultural Significance of Motif Similarity**



These motifs function as cultural codes that preserve collective memory and national identity among Turkic peoples.

## Conclusion

The similarity of motifs in Turkic folk epics is a clear indication of the unity and continuity of Turkic cultural heritage. Miraculous birth, heroic initiation, struggle between good and evil, loyalty, exile and return, and supernatural assistance form a common narrative framework across different Turkic traditions. These shared motifs not only enrich comparative folklore studies but also demonstrate how epics function as a collective memory of the Turkic peoples. Preserving and studying these epics is essential for understanding Turkic identity, values, and historical consciousness in the modern world.



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