UDMURT MAD’ SONG: PARADOX OF A GENRE

IRINA NURIEVA
Senior Researcher, Cand. of Art History
Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences
Udmurt Institute of History, Language and Literature
Department of Philological Research
Lomonosov Street 4, Izhevsk, 426004 Russia
e-mail: nurieva@ni.udm.ru

ABSTRACT
The genre system of Udmurt folk songs has been researched by scholars many times. The accumulation and publication of new folklore and ethnographic material requires reconsideration of the general concept and definition. The folklore of northern Udmurtia gives interesting material for the study of the origins of some genres and of their interconnections. For example, the researching of the Udmurt mad’ song genre, which is associated with popular Udmurt and Russian songs today, within the overall context of the Udmurt genre system, and use of comparison materials from the Komi and Ob Ugrians, has lead to ideas about the magical character of this genre and its syncretism (the song fairytale, the song riddle, the song dialogue).

KEYWORDS: Udmurts • Besermians • plot songs • mad’ • drinking songs • song dialogue

The genre originality of Udmurt folk songs was repeatedly the subject of special attention from folklorists, ethnomusicologists and ethnographers (for example, Boikova 1986; Vladykin 1994; Popova 1998; 2004; Vladykina 1998). The accumulation and publication of new folklore and ethnographic material requires a reconsideration of general concepts and definitions. The folk songs of northern Udmurtia give interesting material for the research of genre genesis and interrelations.

The northern Udmurts and the Besermians divide their song material into two basic genre categories: krez’ (songs with an improvised text consisting of a non-semantic lexicon with alternating semantic inserts) and mad’ (plot songs). This sort of division seems important, alongside the division into ceremonial or extra-ceremonial genres. In addition, such genre differentiation can’t help but effect terminology levels, especially in the sphere of song performance: singers themselves say that, krez’ kyrdzalo, mad’ mad’ylo (mad’ is performed by singing, krez’ is performed by telling). Ignorance of ethnic terminology sometimes leads to amusing incidents, for example, during folklore expeditions singers would refuse to ‘sing’ any plot song when asked, using the term kyrdzany, which is usual in southern and central Udmurtia.

For a long time, the attention of folklore specialists has been directed towards the study of krez’ as the most representative and archaic genre of north Udmurt folk songs. The other song layer, called mad’ by native speakers, includes at present the last plot songs, which are well-known Udmurt songs, and also an extensive layer of adopted Russian folklore (round dance songs, ditties, romances, etc.). It is surprising that many
of these songs are included in the ceremonial structure. For example, the Russian songs Tam v sadu pri doline (There in a Garden in a Valley), Skuchno mne na chuzhou storone (I am Lost in a Strange Land), Proshaite vse moi rodnuy (Farewell my Dears), Poteryala ya kolechko (I Have Lost My Ring), performed in Russian, a popular Udmurt no folk song called Kapi-kap-kapi (Drop by Drop) and many others are performed during funeral and commemorative rites, recruitment ceremonies untitled shaivyl mad’ (a Funeral Song), dzhozh mad’ (a Sad Song), köt kurekton mad’ (a Grief Song), saldat kel’an mad’ (a Send-off Song). Clearly the performance of this late layer of Russian and Udmurt songs in ceremonies is a characteristic feature of modern life.

At the same time, the semantics of the word mad’ (a story, saga, narration) made scholars think about the other genre meanings of this term. At the end of the 19th century the collector of Udmurt folklore and expert on north Udmurt culture Nikolai Pervukhin correlated Udmurt mad’ song with fairy tale:

The Votyak name of the song type is actually mad’on, but now it is ordinarily called by the shorter mad’. At the same time the meaning is fairy tale (more often with the word vozho, i.e. vozhomad’) and even riddle or parable. In any case the words mad’on and mad’ have a similar root, and thus, in the most ancient notions of the Votyak people, song can obviously be similar to fairy tale, not the opposite as it is in the Russian proverb: a fairy tale is a fiction, a song is a true story. (Pervukhin 1888: 42)

Taking into consideration Pervukhin’s opinion, the contemporary researcher of the north Udmurt song tradition Marina Khodyreva has supposed that the word mad’ “could also designate musical and epic things, or song fairy tales known, for example, in Komi folklore” (Khodyreva 1996: 8). According to Komi folklorists, song fairy tales are ancient and effected by the voice genre of Komi folklore, composed in the form of dialogue. The most typical features of song fairy tales are the followings: an absence of real characters participating in the dialogue (a certain bobo, rui, dzhydzh, pan, etc.), the cumulative character of plot development, an absurd ending, an archaic lexicon, a synthesis of fairy tale genre signs, a song and an exorcism (Rochev 1976: 45, 52, 55, 56, 59). Today, song fairy tales have turned into a genre of children’s folklore, although in the past they had a multifunctional character (Rochev 1976: 59). Similar genres, composed in the form of dialogue, can be observed in Udmurt children’s folklore:

– Gurys’ dzhukez kin s’i’em? – Who has eaten the porridge from the oven?
– Makar/Onton s’i’em. – Makar/Onton has eaten it.
– Makar/Onton kytyn? – Where is Makar/Onton?
– Bun pölyn. – Wrapped in bast.
– Bun kytyn? – Where is the bast?
– Tył sutem. – The fire has burnt it.
– Tył kytyn? – Where is the fire?
– Vu kysem. – The water has put it out.
– Vu kytyn? – Where is the water?
– Osh yuem. – The bull has drunk it.
– Osh kytyn? – Where is the bull?
– Derie nödem. – He has sunk into the dirt.
– Der kytyn? – Where is the dirt?
– Kuaka pan’sam. – The crow has smeared it.
– Kuaka kytyn?
– Bad’pu iylyn.
– Bad’pu kytyn?
– Tir tshogem.
– Tir kytyn?
– Shyr mudem.
– Shyr kytyn?
– Inme tubem.
– Maly tubem?
– Shyr kules’ nyrtshushet/shuba vyryny tynes’tyd nyrulde tshushyny.

– Where is the crow?
– On a willow top.
– Where is the willow?
– The axe has cut it down.
– Where is the axe?
– The mouse has buried it.
– Where is the mouse?
– He has risen into the sky.
– What for?
– To sew the handkerchief/the fur-coat from a mouse skin to wipe your nose.¹

The author Lidia Dolganova (1981; 1996; etc.) describes these dialogues as fables (vyzhyiaton) and marks their similarity to counting rhymes (Dolganova 1996: 59). It is also necessary to note their amazing similarity to riddles. As riddles, these fables are constructed with a question-answer structure and are characterised by deep mythological attachment to cosmogony (for example, the characters of the heavenly bull drinking water/rain, and the world river Kama). The archaic lexicon confirms the antiquity of the fables (pan, s’az’eg, gar, etc.). Unfortunately, there is little information about the way they can be performed because the tradition has been lost as a functioning genre. However, according to the memoirs of different informants, fables could be played by adults and children in the form of dialogue.

Examples of song dialogues are also fixed in ceremonial genres, for example, as a drinking song in the ceremony of autumn mummery (pòrtmas’kon):²

– Kytchy vetlid, urome?
– Tugde bichany oi-a vetly.
– Kytyn kölid, urome?
– Kapka kuspady oi-a kól.
– Ma’e vetlid, urome?
– N’ylpu da lyste oi-a valy.
– Main mis’tis’kid, urome?
– Tshukna us’em lysvuen.
– Oi-a mis’tas’ky, urome?
– S’iz’yl us’em bad’yar kuaren
Oi-a chushki, urome...

– Where did you go to, my friend?
– You (after all) know, to pick hops.
– Where did you sleep, my friend?
– You know, in your gateway.
– What did you spread, my friend?
– You know, fir needles.
– What did you wash with, my friend?
– You know, with the morning dew.
– What did you dry yourself with, my friend?
– You know, with the maple leaves that fell in autumn.

– Kytyn kölid, Durie?
– Kapka s’öryn oi-a kól?
– Mar val val’esed, Durie?
– S’yala gon oi-a val?
– Mar val mindered, Durie?
– S’yala mamyk oi-a val?
– Main mis’tas’kid, Durie?
– Tshukna us’em lysvuen oi-a mis’ky?
– Main chushkid, Durie?
– Bad’yar kuaren oi-a chush?...

– Where did you sleep, my Duri?
– Was it beyond the gate, as I did?
– What was your bedding, my Duri?
– What was the hazel grouse feathers?
– What was your pillow?
– Was is hazel grouse catkins?
– What did you wash with, my Duri?
– Was it the morning dew?
– What did you dry yourself with, my Duri?
– Was it the maple leaves?

(Dolganova, Morozov, Minasenko 1995: 70, 118)
Semantic analysis of these drinking songs and songs fables could be the subject of separate research. We are interested here in when, and how, these drinking songs were performed. In answer to the former question, these songs were performed at Christmastide (vozhodyr) as songs, using vocal inflection. The sacral periods of Christmastide, as well as the corresponding period in summer (invozho), are the winter and summer solstices, times of crises in the annual calendar, times of contact with the other world and with the world of the ancestors. The period known as vozho is full of special actions, called to treat the spirits of the ancestors, to stimulate the forces of the earth and the person, to recreate a habitual world order, i.e. to create harmony from chaos. Consequently, telling fairy tales, legends, epic legends about local warriors, as well as asking riddles, are linked to Christmastide in traditional Udmurt culture:

There are such riddles that have a precise time and appointment; they are called vozho mad’ (riddles of the winter vozho or, more correctly, terrible riddles). These riddles are asked from December 25th to January 5th (approximately), i.e. in the transition period of the year, the critical period of winter, and are considered to be riddles with special force. (Gerd 1997: 166)

Today it is not easy to find song fables and dialogue rhymes, in addition to which their folk terminology has not remained. However, the tradition has turned out to be alive: during last folklore and ethnographic expeditions to the Besermians, the tune of the farewell to water, vu kel’an, was identified. This text is also based on a dialogue:

Lud vyle myni no, lud vyle myni no, voz’ vylyn töd’y kys’pu.
Töd’y kys’pu ulyyn peres’ d’edush puke.
I went to the meadow, I went to the meadow, and there is a silver birch in the meadow.

There is an old man sitting under the silver birch.

- I sit here.
- The fir tree bark I eat, the birch catkins I eat.
- Why do you live here? What do you eat, where do you sleep?
- In the bear den I sleep – he says.

The old man … The birch leaves rustle, throwing the dew upwards.

(Popova 2004: 211–212)

By content, this text is similar to a drinking song, although here one of the participants in the dialogue is given a real identity: a bear, whose name in the Udmurt language is taboo and is replaced by byd’zym d’ad’a (the great old man), peres’ atai, moiy atai, moiy d’edush (the old father/grandfather), pas’kyt kymys (wide forehead), pas’kyt pyd (wide paws), etc. This appeal, to a creature from the strange forest world and, probably, a totem and a family patron, can also be found in drinking songs.

The last example is valuable because it gives an idea of the character of vocal performance. The tune is performed in the improvised manner of the krez’ and is based on two linked melodic motifs within the intervals of a fifth and a third. Maria Alekseyevna Ponomareva, a talented singer and performer of Besermian folk songs, has improvised some song variants of the farewell to water,6 each one differing in melody and text. Judging by performance style, these tunes are akin to krez’ (the author of the record, ethnographer Yelena Popova, has also identified them as such; see Popova 2004: 205–225). However, it is curious that Maria Alekseyevna found it difficult to indicate a genre for the tune:

Ponomareva: Tan’ ma’e mad’ylo val.
Popova: Otyn, ben-a?
Ponomareva: Ben.
Popova: A muket dyr’ya taoste kyrdzalo na, ug ni-a?
Ponomareva: Ug gine. T’in’ so yö kel’an dyr’ya taiz mad’ylo val.
Popova: A so krez’-a lyd’yas’ko ta?
Ponomareva: So... olo so krez’, olo mar so. Mad’ylo val. Olo krez’, olo mar so luele val.

Ponomareva: These examples were sung by telling?
Popova: There, yes?
Ponomareva: Yes.
Popova: Was it singing at other times of the year or wasn’t it?
Ponomareva: It wasn’t. But during the farewell to ice these examples were sung by telling.
Popova: Is it kreź’?
Ponomareva: It is… I am not sure what it is… It was sung by telling… Maybe it is kreź’ or something else…

(Recording from the private sound archive of Y. Popova.)
this term to a later layer of Udmurt, and then Russian, plot songs that have practically nothing in common with the fundamental principle.

NOTES

1 The text was written by Alevtina Kamitova in 2007. She was born in Saraikino village, Grahkovo Rayon, Udmurt Republic, in 1976.
2 See Khodyreva 1996: 54; Pozdeyev 1987: 122–123; Churakova 2006: 141, etc.
3 This word is also translated as “the time of changing” (Glukhova 2002: 26). For more on the etymology of the word, see vozho (Pletneva 1999: 248).
4 In 2002, in the Krasnogorye (Krasnogorsk) Rayon of Udmurt Republic, we recorded the term vozhokyl to denote a riddle: vozho + ‘a word’, i.e. ‘a sacred word’ (the field records of Irina Nurieva and Aado Lintrop).
5 The text under the musical notation and that of the transliteration are different in the original source.
6 Udmurt spring holiday vu kel’an (farewell to water) or yö kel’an (farewell to ice) is celebrated after the melting of snow, usually in April.

SOURCES

Field records of Irina Nurieva and Aado Lintrop.
Private sound archive of Yelena Popova.

REFERENCES

Aksyanova et al. 2005 = Аксянова Г. А.; А. В. Бауло, Е. В. Перевалова, Э. Рутканин-Миклин, З. П. Соколова, Г. Е. Солдатова, Н. М. Талигина, Е. И. Тыликова, Н. В. Федорова. Сыныские ханты. Новосибирск: Издательство Института археологии и этнографии СО РАН, 2005.


Pervukhin 1888 = Первухин, Николай Григорьевич. Экзилы преданий и быта инородцев Глазовского уезда. Экзил III. Следы языческой древности в образах произведений устной народной поэзии вотяков. Вятка: Издание Губернского Статистического Комитета, 1888.


