

# RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE YAKUT PEOPLE IN THE WEDDING CEREMONIAL POETRY (ALGYS)

РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЕ ВОЗЗРЕНИЯ ЯКУТОВ В СВАДЕБНЫХ АЛГЫСАХ

DÜĞÜN ALGISLARINDA YAKUTLARIN DİNSEL OLGULARI

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, the wedding ceremonial poetry in a context of family-household folklore of Yakuts is considered. The wedding *algyses* are studied in terms of their semantic blocks and compositional structure. Examples of published field materials are used to identify mythological views and the pantheon of deities of the Yakuts.

**Keywords:** Ceremonial Poetry, A Wedding Ceremony, *Algys*, Spirit-Patron, A Deity, The Reference, An Entertainment, The Request, The Pantheon Of Deities.

## АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье рассматривается свадебная обрядовая поэзия в контексте семейно-бытового фольклора якутов. Проанализированы свадебные *алгысы*, изучены их семантические блоки, композиционная структура. На примере опубликованных и полевых материалов выявлены мифологические воззрения, пантеон божеств якутов.

**Ключевые Слова:** Обрядовая Поэзия, Свадебный Обряд, *Алгыс*, Дух-Покровитель, Божество, Обращение, Угощение, Просьба, Пантеон Божеств.

## ÖZET

Makalede Yakutların aile-hayatlarında önemli yer tutan düğünde sunulan merasim nazımları tetkik edilmiştir. Düğün algıları tetkik edilmiş, onların semantikselsel makaraları ve kompozisyon yapıları tahlil edilmiştir. Yayınlanmış ve Saha çalışmaları malzemelerine dayalı Yakutların mitoloji algıları ile tanrılar panteonu belirlenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Merasim Nazımları, Düğün Merasimleri, Algıs, Koruyucu Ruh, Tanrı, Hitap, İkrâm, Rica, Tanrılar Panteonu.

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Presently the ceremonial poetry is acquiring a great deal of interest among many researchers. The reason of such interest refers to the fact that the ceremonial poetry is a piece of the unique heritage of each nation reflecting its oldest concepts, knowledge of people about the world, their interaction with the nature.

The problem of traditional beliefs, mythology, and particularly, the Siberian ceremonial poetry, was investigated by N.A. Alexeev (1975, 1980, 1984, 2008).

Nowadays we have very few myths about supernatural beings that remained in the course of time. However, some names of deities and spirits, their epithets and characteristics have been kept in hymns and *algys*-sorceries that were spelled during the rituals dedicated to them.

For the Yakuts *algys* was a constant attribute, every Yakut man had to know at least some kind of *algys* narration. Strong was his belief in the magic power of words that were meant to affect and conciliate the deities and spirits.

Almost all the wedding *algyses* of Yakut people begin with the address to the deities of Light, so called *ajyy*, and host-spirits *ichchi*, with begging for the good attitude to the people, or with the description of scarifying and treating, begging for the wealth, prosperity and happiness.

According to the mythological views of the Yakut people, the universe consists of three worlds: the upper, the middle and the lower. In the upper world there live good spirits *ajyylyar*. In the middle world there live people *jhonnor* and *ichchiler*, i.e. host-spirits or patron deities. The lower world is inhabited by evil spirits *abaasylyar*.

The Yakut people belong to the pagan nation who did not worship One God. Instead, they adored deities, so called *ajyy*, who patronized the legendary ancestors of the Yakut people. The only difference from other spirits was that *ajyy* lived in the nine layers of heavens and were characterized with better and kind temper. However, if they were not pleased, *ajyy* could instantly turn into the cruelest and revengeful demons.

The major deity among *ajyy* was considered to be *Urung Ajyy Tojon* (The Light great creator). When hanging *salama* (a hair rope with threaded gifts to the good and evil spirits), they first call to him:

ҮҮТ таас олбохтоох	Having a milk-stone throne,
Сөгөлөннөөх түһэртээх	Lucky fated,
Үрүң Айыы Тойон!	Urung Ajyy Tojon!

From these lines we see that he lives in the heavens. The milk-stoned throne stands for clouds. The Yakut people believed that the *Urung Ajyy* resided in the beautiful land, that is why they say about lucky fate. *Urung Ajyy Tojon* was believed to be the creator of the universe living in the ninth heaven, the other deities were called *ajyy* – his residents and servers (*oruoljuttar*). Among them: *Jhesegey Ajyy* (patron deity of horse-breeding), sir *Jhylgha Khaan* and lady *Chyngys biis* (patron deities of fate), *Khotoy Ajyy* (Eagle *ajyy*, patron deity of the eagles and some part of the Yakut people), sir *Barylyyr Baar Chankhar* and lady *Barylyyr Baar Chankhar* (white deities).

*Urung Ajyy Tojon* was considered to be the creator of souls of the humans, the cattle and others. All Yakut people called themselves *ajyy jhono* (people of *ajyy*). Let's take, for instance, *algys* to the host-spirit of the earth:

Арҕабыттан тэһииннээх,	Reined with withers,
Аһыныылаах санаалаах	Kind-hearted and minded tribe,
Айыы Дьөһөгөй аймаҕа.	Created by Jhesegey Ajyy.

According to the Yakut mythology, eagle was one of the major deities *ajyy*. Greater than Hawk-nosed (*Gorbonosy*) eagle *Khaan ajyy* there was only *Urung Ajyy Tojon*. For instance, we can see that in the spell to the host-spirit of fire, besides him they call to *Khotoy Ajyy* as well:

Эбирдээх таныылаах,	Having freckled nostrils,
Хотоостугас хоноруулаах,	Hawk-nosed,
Хотой Айыыһыт!	Khotoy Ajyysyt!

Among the other deities *ajyy*, called to during the wedding *algyses*, were *Isegey Ajyysyt* – patroness deity of the cattle, *Nelbey Ajyysyt* – patroness deity of the childbirth, *Iejieksit Khotun* – patroness deity of humans, horses and cattle. *Iejieksit* also helps in child delivery, she takes care of a mother and her new born child.

*Iejieksit*, in contrast to *Ajyysyt*, gave nothing to people, being only a provider and a patroness of some human or animal. For example, in blessing the bride’s mother, they said:

Аһыс кырыылаах	Having shiny
Аһынахтаах дьылбэктээх	Eight times anointed knees
Ахтар Айыыһыт хотун!	Reminiscent Lady Ajyysyt!

Another example is *algys* spelled before the leaving of the wedding cortege:

Налыгыр Айыыһыт аҕаскыт аргыстастын,	Let Dignified Ajyysyt be
	your companion!

Иһэһэй Иэйиэхсит эдьиийгит энэрдэстин!	Let Virtuous Iejieksit follow you!
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From the given examples we see that *ajyysyt* of a human was named *Akhtar Ajyysyt* (Reminiscent *Ajyysyt*), or *Nalygyr Ajyysyt* (Dignified *Ajyysyt*), or *Nelbey Ajyysyt* (Settled *Ajyysyt*); *Ajyysyt* of the cattle – *Isegey Iejieksit* (Virtuous *Iejieksit*); *ajyysyt* of the dogs – *Noroluya*. The fact that they live on the eastern part of the earth can be shown by the next example of *algys* spelled during the hanging of *salama*:

Имэннээх ытыстаах,	Having well-doing hands –
Илин диэки Иэйиэхсит эбэм!	Eastern Iejieksit - grandmother!

As the Yakut people didn’t have the ceremony devoted to all the creatures of the Upper world, the works of the ceremonial poetry cannot give it’s full and complete description. Any *algys*-teller could bring some changes into the standard traditional and mythological views on the creatures of the Upper world. The characteristics of the supernatural beings living in the Upper world were given mainly by sacrificers and shamans during the ceremonies devoted to the worship of deities *ajyy* and *abaasy* – demons of the Upper world.

The Yakut people believed that the true “knowledge” about *ajyy* and upper *abaasy* was a privilege of shamans and sacrificers only. They shared it with them in their prays and sorceries that later became the examples of the ceremonial poetry. During the performance

they told about which part of the Upper world was to be visited, who lived in there and so on.

The ancient Turkic views on the protection of humans by the local host-spirits, such as host-spirit of the family territory, supernatural hosts of the mountains, lakes situated near to the inhabited places, host-spirit of fire etc. have been preserved in Yakut *algyses*. According to the Yakut views, the happy life of a man and his family depends mainly on the good attitude of the host-spirits (*ichchi*) of house, hearth, yard, cowshed etc.

*Ichchi* spirits look like a human. The ancient Yakuts ascribed all animals and the nature some human qualities. *Ichchi* – an example of hominization of entire nature by ancient Yakut people. That is why the word *ichchi* was translated by prerevolutionary experts of Yakut history as *host-spirit*. The word implies that Yakut *ichchi* belonged neither to deities, nor natural creatures. The whole spiritual pantheon of Yakut religion was made up with those *ichchi* that were divided into good and evil. *Ichchi* inhabit the Middle world. They didn't have the power of deities, but they were responsible for protection of nature by different means.

The next spirit spelled in the wedding *algys* was the host-spirit of hearth or home-fire. According to the Yakut beliefs, fire had supernatural qualities to lay evil spirits. V.L. Seroshevsky wrote the following about the magic qualities of fire: "Fire can be of various types: 'holy fire' (*ajyy uota*) – the fire that is stroke over the fainted person by shaman. Also there is a fire – creation of *Uluu Tojon* – that is used in everyday life and sacrificed by a white horse. And, finally, there is a terrible fire, killing everything – creation of an old man from underground world (*allaraa oghonn'or ongoruulaakh uot ichchite*); it is sacrificed by a horse, red as blood, with dark back and white face" (Seroshevsky 1896:665).

As shown in the given examples, the Yakut people call the host-spirit of fire in different ways – *Aal Darkhan tojon* (Initial Great Sir), *Aal Ukhkhan* (Aal the Light), *Tuene Mongol*. As the Yakuts believed, this spirit appeared as a small white-bearded old man. Usually he came only in dreams. The host-spirit of the hearth had a plump and kind appearance for those who treated him well, and conversely, he appeared as skinny and angry for those who didn't treat him. He could take care of human soul, protect him from diseases and bad luck. This can explain the old Yakut belief about why "one cannot break coal in the hearth: because the souls, *kut* and *sur*, of babies, coming to birth are in there, and so, one can break them as well".

It must be noted that the cult of the host-spirit of hearth remains widely used at present. The Yakut people sometimes "feed" the fire, many of them spelling *algys*.

The next patron spirit being called to at wedding ceremony was the host-spirits of house and the host-spirit of cowshed. Thus, every yurt or house had its own host-spirit, as the Yakuts believed. These spirits were called: *Djie Tangarata Djierde Bakhsyyla* (*Bakhsy*) (the house deity - *Djierde Bakhsyyla*) and *Ierime Djie ichchite Djiebe Bakhsyja khotun* (the host-spirit of prosperous house – lady *Djiebe Bakhsyja*). In their *algyses* the Yakuts called only to host-spirits of house. The host-spirit of cowshed was called *Bu Boguchai* or *N'aady Djankha khotun*. She was considered to be a daughter of *Uluu tojon* – the terrible heavenly deity. For instance, a bride in her first visit to her fiancé's house calls to her like this:

Иэримэ дьиз иччитэ	The hostess of cozy house,
Дьизэбэ Бахсыя хотун,	lady Djiebe Bakhsyja,

Хотон уорук иччитэ                      Host-spirit of cowshed,  
Хотой Бахсы!                              Khotoy hostess!

The old family cult of patron spirits involved also the worship of host-spirit of family territory – *doydu ichchite*.

The Yakuts believed that happy life of people depended on good will of the host-spirit of the earth, and increase of cattle was gifted by patron deities of the cattle. That is why when a daughter-in-law is taken to her husband's house, having arrived at the end of the valley (where he lives), they make a stop at the very raise of the sun. Everybody gets off their horses and gets ready to the ceremony. Then the daughter-in-law cuts three bunches of hair from her horse and ties them to the lower thick branch of the larch that stands apart from the other trees. After that, she unties some part of the fir from her saddle, pours *kumys* into three-legged *choron*, comes to the larch where she previously tied the bunch of the horse hair, falls to her knees and spells *algys*, standing right in front of the East:

Аан дойдум иччитэ                      The host-spirit of my motherland,  
Аан Алахчын хотун,                      Lady Aan Alakhchyn,  
Бэтгэх көрөн мичээрдээ!              Stand in front of me and give me your shiny smile!

We see from the given *algys* that the host-spirit of the earth was called lady *Aan Alakhchyn*. In other materials she is called *Aan Darkhan khotun* (Initial Great lady), *Aan Aalay khotun* (Initial lady *Aalay*). According to the materials given by A.A. Popov, the Viluy Yakuts called her *Aan Doydu ichchite Nelberdeen* or *N'adjay Baraan khotun* – the hostess of the earth, *Ajyy Nelberdeen* or lady *N'adjay Baraan khotun*. In Yakut folklore she is a good spirit living in the sacred tree *Aal Luuk Mas*. In *Olonkho* she is the major protector of the bogatyr's land who gives him wise advice, blesses him before the journey and replaces him a mother. According to other materials, the same spirit of the territory was considered to be a bird nesting or having a rest on the specially marked tree of the given territory. Such a tree was to be the biggest tree growing on the edge of the most remarkable brow, or *oruk-tree*, or *aryk*, growing near the water. This tree was recognized by all its branches meeting at the top. They didn't just grow, but made a certain hat-like shape, so called *aryk*.

In the sorceries spelled during *delbirge* (a rope made of white horse hair for hanging the sacrificed animal to the patron spirit of the territory) hanging *algys*-teller, describing the host-spirit of the earth, uses epithets such as: having foamy bosom, having oily hands, having knees smoothed with grease. These epithets characterize her as a hardworking spirit. In all *algyses* she was represented as a white-haired old lady, living in old birches. That is why it was prohibited to cut old trees: the host-spirit of the earth could be offended and make harm to her offender. The children of the latter could die or he could lose his cattle. In fact, *Aan Darkhan* could do everything that she wished.

The study of the Yakut *algys* texts shows that the names of deities and spirits, their epithets, characteristics can be found in hymns and *algys* sorceries, spelled during the rituals devoted to them. The length and artistic value of the sorceries depended on the talent of their tellers. They believed that the more colorful is the description of a certain host-spirit, the more generous would be his or her regard. In the descriptions of deities and spirits there are used a lot of archaic words. It shows that traditional and mythological views remained in the course of time. The most archaic were the rituals connected with the

worship of the environment and the oldest spheres of human activity were: hunting, fishing and rituals connected with the cult of fire.

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