

CILGAYAK FESTIVAL AMONG ALTAIC TURKS IN THE CONTEXT OF COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS AND SENSE OF BELONGING



BİZ BİLİNCİ VE AİDİYET OLGUSU BAĞLAMINDA ALTAY TÜRKLERİNİN CILGAYAK BAYRAMI

Fatih ŞAYHAN*

ABSTRACT: The celebrations / ceremonies / festivals and rituals that bring societies together also make it possible for people who make up a society to have a common historical existence via their deep meaning systems. At these meeting points, humans have the facility to widen and merge with the social horizon that is beyond individual identity. In the social sense, societies uniting around collective consciousness and sense of belonging establish themselves as ontological beings through the memory created by language, communication, objects and ancestors. As a matter of fact, meeting points such as festivals, ceremonies, celebrations and the transitional periods (namely birth, marriage and death) carried out by individual identity in the light of rituals play a dominant role in keeping the common identity alive and transferring it to future generations. The community provides a new dimension to the human relationships that have lost their values through a mythical refinement and renewal process at such times of collective acts. The ritual practices, which are demonstrations of human gains in the social sense accompanied by rituals, are indicative of the extent to which societies grasp time as a cycle of life. The Altai Turks transfer to future generations cultural value systems that they have held in their ancestral memory from the past to the present by means of the celebrations / rituals and festivals that provide national awareness and unity solidified at the moment. They gather under a single roof in ceremonial practices and communication channels, turning to the voice of the unifying spirit of their ancestors. In this context, the most important element of the unity of the Altai Turks in terms of adherence to the values and transferring them to future generations is the Cılgayak Festival. Cılgayak is “foot/head of the year”, which means to set foot in the new year. The Altai Turks celebrate the Cılgayak festival in March, with the melting of the snow, in accordance with the emergence of the new moon. In this regard, Cılgayak festival is noteworthy as it signifies Altai Turks’ adherence to the values and transferring them to future generations. Cılgayak Feast, which is described as awakening of nature, is important in terms of integrating oneself with nature and adding spirit to nature’s vitality. This study will focus on the functions of Cılgayak festival in creating and sustaining national consciousness based on public knowledge creation activities which are gained from periodical field works in the Autonomous Republic of Altai.

Keywords: National consciousness, fact of belonging, Altai Turks, Cılgayak feast, ritual.

ÖZ: Toplumları bir araya getiren kutlamalar/törenler ve ritüeller içerisinde barındırdığı derin anlam dizgeleri itibari ile bir toplumu oluşturan kişilerin ortak tarihsel varlık alanına sahip olmasını sağlar. İnsan, söz konusu buluşma noktalarında bireysel kimliğinden öte toplumsal ufka açılır. Toplumsal anlamda biz bilinci ve aidiyet duygusu etrafında birleşen toplumlar,

* Dr. Öğretim Üyesi – Ardahan Üniversitesi İnsani Bilimler ve Edebiyat Fakültesi Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü / Ardahan – fatihsayhan@ardahan.edu.tr (ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8592-3490)



This article was checked by Turnitin.

kendilerine dil, iletişim, nesnelere ve atalar belleğine dönük ontolojik bir varlık alanı kurarlar. Nitekim bireysel kimliğin kendisini ritüeller ışığında grup kimliğinin içerisine taşıdığı bayram, tören, kutlama, geçiş dönemi oluşları gibi buluşma noktaları ortak kimliğin yaşatılmasında ve gelecek kuşaklara aktarılmasında başat rolü üstlenirler. Topluluk, bu tür buluşma zamanlarında mitik göndermeli bir arınma ve yenilenme sürecinden geçerek değer yitimine uğrayan insani ilişkilerin yeni bir boyut kazanmasını sağlar. Toplumsal anlamda insani kazanımların ritüeller eşliğinde gösterimi olan törensel uygulamalar, toplumların zamanı ne denli yaşamsal bir döngüde kavradığının göstergesidir. Altay Türkleri de geçmişten günümüze atalar belleğinde barındırmış oldukları kültürel değer dizgelerini milli bilinci ve birlikteliği sağlayan kutlamalar sayesinde şimdide konumlandırıp geleceğe açıklamaktadır. Altay Türkleri, atalarının birleştirici ruhunun sesine yönelerek törensel uygulamalarda ve iletişim kanallarında tek bir çatı etrafında toplanmaktadırlar. Bu bağlamda Altay Türklerinin değerlerine bağlı kalması ve gelecek nesillere aktarması bakımından en önemli birliktelik unsuru Cılgayak Bayramı'dır. "Cılgayak", yeni yıla ayak basmak anlamında "yılın ayağı/başı" demektir. Altay Türkleri Mart ayında -karların erimesiyle birlikte- yeni ay'ın doğumuna göre Cılgayak bayramını kutlamaktadırlar. Cılgayak Bayramı, bu bağlamda Altay Türklerinin değerlerine bağlı kalması ve gelecek nesillere aktarması bakımından dikkat çekicidir. Doğanın uyanması olarak nitelendirilen Cılgayak Bayramı, insanın kendisini doğa ile bütünleştirmesi ve ruhunu doğanın canlılığına katması bakımından önemlidir. Bu çalışmada; Altay Özerk Cumhuriyeti'nde periyodik olarak tarafımızdan yapılan saha çalışmalarında elde edilen halk bilgisi yaratmalarından hareketle Cılgayak Bayramı'nın milli bilincin yaratılmasında ve yaşatılmasındaki işlevleri üzerinde durulacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Milli bilinç, aidiyet olgusu, Altay Türkleri, Cılgayak bayramı, ritüel.

*"Ak tagın cerine ak çeçek kelsin
Kökin cerine kök çeçek kelsin..."*

Introduction:

Collective consciousness, in which a person feels him/herself a social subject –in context of sense of belonging- and a part of the collective opinion beyond being personal, shows that a person reaches the level of historical-existence with typical rituals and practices.

In fact, the past is the most important memory place where historical mind of the nation is hidden as the core part of cultural value system. In this regard, collective consciousness integrates the individual with his / her own intellectual dimension and unique cultural memory, and the history of the society in which he was born and raised. In this context, cultural value systems, which are the shelter of all human gains with their social dimension, provide the integration of the individual with common values by combining the individual with the historical one.

Culture, based on common human experiences, allows people to acquire a historical stance in the social sense. Therefore, culture which embodies the principle of continuity as a system of values, refers to the bond of coexistence of separate individuals who form a society. Societies, united around collective consciousness and sense of belonging, establish themselves as an ontological entity with the help of language, communication, objects and memory of ancestors. As matter of fact, meeting

points such as religious or cultural festivals, ceremonies, celebrations and transitional periods transferred by individual identity into group identity in the light of rituals, play a leading role in maintaining the common identity and transferring it to future generations. The community provides a new dimension of the long-undermined human relations by a purification mythical reference and renewal process at such times of meeting. These meetings and unions mentioned allow to go beyond the usual flow of daily life and create a happy moments with their unique time frames. Regular repetition of unity and solidarity enables the knowledge and experience of the past to be re-created in the present and expounded to the future. At this point, people who want to avoid the static structure of time open their individual horizons to the social horizon moving around a common ideal. A person, who positions him/herself as a subject of the nation of which s/he is an inseperable part instead of being an irrelevant individual, reaches the essence of existence attained in different spheres of history. At the same time, the person expands the mental boundaries of collective memory by making contact with spiritual existence codes hidden in the deep subconscious through such ritual practices. The ritual practices, which are the presentation of human gains in the social sense accompanied by rituals are indicative of how the societies understand the time in a vital cycle.

The knowledge and experiences of the past become evident when the person becomes an inseperable part of the society. In these moments of the meeting, societies meet with the erecting power of ancestors from previous ages. Therefore, these uniting practices provide us with exemplary reflections from the realities/phenomena of history in such a way as to trigger original reactions of societies against hardships of life. The Altai Turks position their cultural value systems in the memory of their ancestors from the past to the present thanks to the celebrations which help enhance national awareness and unity, as well.

About Cılgayak Festival

One of the most important factors of unity in terms of adherence to the values of the Altai Turks and transferring these values to the future generations is the Cılgayak Festival, indeed. For Altai Turks, Cılgayak Festival means a holy time period in which nature and human beings get integrated rather than simply the coming of spring. For this reason, Cılgayak Festival is regarded as the beginning of abundance of health, physical and spiritual purification, in recognition of the system of values in the form of happy beginnings. "Cılgayak" means 'foot/beginning of the year' which is setting foot in to the new year. Altai Turks celebrate the Cılgayak Festival in March -when snow starts to melt- in accordance with the emergence of the new moon. Cılgayak, which is defined as the awakening of nature, is regarded as very important in the spiritual perceptions of Altai Turks. According to Altai Turks, every Cılgayak Festival the land hosts human

beings (Source-1). Cılgayak is also interpreted as the opening of the voice of nature to the external world. In a sense, Cılgayak Festival described as awakening of nature is important in terms of integrating human being with nature and accompanying his soul to the vitality of nature.

“Cılan uyasından çıktı,

Cer curtkanın açtı,

Ayıldın içinde tulaan eşikte turbas.” (Source-2, Source-3)

The snake came out of its nest,

Opened its quilt,

Goods at home, not on the door sill.



Common meeting points like celebrations, ceremonies and rituals ensure that community-residing persons have a common historical existence with their deep meaning systems. Altai Turks make preparations for Cılgayak months in advance. A few days before the ceremony, streets, barns, and all houses are cleaned. As soon as February ends, Cılgayak Festival is celebrated on the top of a high mountain in March in accordance with the birth of the new moon. All Altai Turks, and especially those in Mountainous Altai, Ongudays of Altai Autonomous Republic, like Ulagans, Maymas, Koş Ağaçs, Köksu Oozıs, Kan-Oozıs, Şabalins, Çoys, Çamals and Turaçaks participate in ceremonies with utmost care and zest. When ceremony time is up, fire is made and milk, oats and butterfat are dusted with blessings (prayers) by the person influential (female or male) who has the spirit of ‘kamlık’ among the participants.

“Cılgayak cıl ekeldi!

Cılu, cılu bol!

*Kar kayılzın,
Kök çıksın,
Kıra sürzin,
Kobidañ sular
Korkurañp kojoñdoşsın!
Cılgayak! Cılgayak! Cıl ekelzin!
Kuştar da kojoñdoşsın.”* (Ukaçına and Yamaeva, 1993: 70)
New year has come Cılgayak!
(Warmer, be warmer!
The snow melts,
Let nature show itself,
Let the fields get plowed,
Let the water cascade from stream bed!
Cılgayak! Cılgayak! New year may come!
And birds may sing.)



*“Cılgayak, Cılgayak,
Cıl ötköñniñ bayramı!
Caşöskürim cırgalı,
Cas kelgenniñ kököni.
Caskı küñniñ cart çoğı
Catkan kardı kayıltar.
Caraş üñdü kuştarıs
Canıp keler Altayga!”* (Ukaçına and Yamaeva, 1993: 71; Source 4)
(Cılgayak, Cılgayak,

It is a festival year-end!
The joy of youth,
Herald the coming of spring,
Herald the coming of first day
Melts the snow.
Sweet-voiced birds
Turn back to Altai!)

One of the most important celebration of Cılgayak times is blessing the power of fire keeper/watcher to respect the cult. So, fire functions as spiritual purification and regeneration. At the same time, the blessing to the power of fire is accomplished to remove evil spirits and evil elements. Altai Turks perform the rituals traditionally as number (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) identified with bad souls in blessed ceremonies around a fire set at the top of a high mountain. There is no specific number of the relevant rituals. More rituals means more evil spirits will be outcast.

The meanings of 'signifiant' hidden behind 'indicative' in terms of semiology of Altai Turks is an expression of their perspective about the universe, nature and objects beyond the visible world. This is the expression of the desire to create a space of existence by imposing a world of symbolic meaning on things that physically exist. In order to create the ambiance of historical existence, Altai Turks meet in the mountains that hail the spirit of ancestors during the Cılgayak Festival and broadening the boundaires of the cosmic universe by opening their individual identities to social universe. Mythical thoughts are revived in ceremonies. Mythical thoughts serve to keep alive such experiences from the past to the present. As a traditional performance, such associations become a spiritual creation in memories-transforming and changing themselves in time, but not disappearing- and take place in the common consciousness. Altai Turks behave with great respect to water and soil spirits, and the other elements of nature which have generated and will generate them. They handle what life offers to humans as opportunities and generate them with great respect in a deep conscious and they bless the elements of nature with magic of the sacred. The magic of the sacred gives change a cognitive perception of environment and life and combines them with the power of the word at the meeting points where the social spirit is revived. Altai Turks struggle for life against a long and strenuous winter, and consider of rebirth of nature as the first day of the year. Thanks to the applause that is combined with the power of the word, the arrival of the new year is blessed in the festival.

"Üç-Kurbustan Kudayım!

Ulu alkış beriger.

Ürlü mal cıl çıgıp,

*Üstü ajıs tügenbezin!
Altay-Kuday alkış berzeer!
Ak malıbıs koroboy,
Amır, cakşı cıl çıksın!
Ak bıyanıbıs oorıbazın,
Ak südibis tügenbezin.
Alkı boyıs oorıbay,
Amır, cakşı cıl çıgak!
Kazan-ayak kaymaktu,
Kelin-keçin omok bolzın!
Ercinelü çımalı curt
Ercine biske berzeger
Eldiñ-conniñ ooruzı
Eski karla cogolzın.
Kubulgazın cuuktatpay,
Kuday, biske, boluşsaar?!
Cer-kindigi enebis!
Kös cetpesteñ körzögör,
Ukpas cerdeñ uksagar.
Baştañ baş bolzın!
Bazıp öskön Altayıs!” (Ukaçına and Yamaeva, 1993: 67-68).
(Three Kurbustan¹ Kudayım
Make great clapping
Don't run out of goods
And food at the end of the year!
Altai-Kuday applauds!
Don't run out of our goods,
Get a beautiful and peaceful year!
Our white flavour don't get worst,
Don't run out of our white milk.
Our goods don't be taken ill,
Get a beautiful and peaceful year!
May pots and pans be creamy,
And visitors are healthy!
Precious and holy dormitory*

¹ Intermediary spirit believed to provide communication between God and Erlik.

Appreciates us.
Illness of nation
Should disappear with old snow.
May the separated ones get closer
Kuday be with us!
Owner of land, our mother!
Managed to see what eyes can not see,
Managed to hear of the unheard place.
May our prayers come true!
Ever-gathering Altai Turks!)

In addition to the Cılgayak Festival; Altai Turks celebrate the New Year's Day, which they call Çağa Festival in January. Altai Turks celebrate the Çağa Festival in their homes because the weather is very cold. Both the El Oyun and the Cılgayak Festival and Çağa Festival are remarkable in that Altai Turks stick to their values and pass them on to future generations.

Tending to the voice of unifying spirit of their ancestors, Altai Turks gather under a single roof in ritual practices and communication channels. By looking at common national identity, they take a vital stance against external threats by establishing cultural existence areas for themselves. Altai Turks, who have been besieged and deprived of a national unity so far, feel the unifying voices of their ancestors at common points of unification and maintain inclusive and holistic stance with conscious language and identity against ever-lasting threats to estrange their self-values.

Conclusion

Altai Turks who perceive and re-animate the universe in a holistic rhythm, reveal their national unity and solidarity at the meeting points where they come together. So, at the time of Cılgayak Festival, Altai Turks gathering in the mountains carry on the spirit of ancestors, pushing the limits of the cosmic universe by opening their individual identities to social horizon. Altai Turks come into contact with the spirit of their ancestors and feel mentally unified thanks to Cılgayak, Çağa and El Oyun Festivals, and through these festivals they achieve collective consciousness. The festivals mentioned and the rituals keeping customs alive unite individuals in terms of collective consciousness. On one hand, they remind Altai Turks of their commitment to common rules and values, and on the other they engrain in self-consciousness based on the memories of the common past. From this viewpoint, Altai Turks who experience the sense of social spirit through such rituals, confront the historical transformations and create culturally and spiritually rich and happy periods in the flow of time.

REFERENCES

Ukaçina, K. E. and Yamaeva E. E (1993). *Altay alkıştar*. Gorno Altai: Publications of Ak Çeçek.

Oral Source

Source 1: Gögo Talkıbayef, Date of birth 1956, Autonomous Republic of Altai, Koşagaç Aymağı, place of birth Beltir Village, kam. Date of meeting: 12.07.2012.

Source 2: Nadya Yuguşeva, Date of birth: 1958, Autonomous Republic of Altai, Koşagaç Aymağı, place of birth Kuray Village, graduated from university, kam. Date of meeting: 28.06.2012.

Source 3: İrina Demçinova, Date of birth 1975, Autonomous Republic of Altai, Koşagaç Aymağı, place of birth Kuray Village, graduated from university, Researcher, Date of meeting: 28.06.2012.

Source 4: Mariya Mihaylovna, Date of birth 1927, Autonomous Republic of Altai, Ulagan Aymağı, place of birth Ulagan, farmer, Date of meeting: 10.07.2012.