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# ON THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE KYRGYZ EPIC "MANAS" AND THE ANCIENT INDIAN EPIC "MAHABHARATA"

©*Zaiyrkulova R.*, *Kyrgyz National University* named after. J. Balasagyna, Bishkek, *Kyrgyzstan*, statelanguage@ism.edu.kg

## К ВОПРОСУ О СРАВНИТЕЛЬНОМ ИЗУЧЕНИИ ЭПОСА КЫРГЫЗСКОГО НАРОДА «МАНАС» И ДРЕВНЕИНДИЙСКОГО ЭПОСА «МАХАБХАРАТА»

©Зайыркулова Р. Ж., Кыргызский национальный университет им. Ж. Баласагына, г. Бишкек, Кыргызстан, statelanguage@ism.edu.kg

«Манас» Аннотаиия. Героический эпос благодаря своему масштабному И фантастически насыщенному содержанию, а также по художественному совершенству, образной выразительности и богатству как словесных, так и визуальных средств занимает заслуженное место в ряду выдающихся памятников мирового эпического наследия. Сравнительный анализ эпоса «Манас» c мировыми эпическими произведениями способствует более глубокому и всестороннему осмыслению его содержания и художественных особенностей. По мнению исследователей, в Средние века предки кыргызов входили в состав Великого каганата тюрков, который поддерживал культурные связи со многими странами, включая Индию. Существуют исследования, подтверждающие этот факт. В данной статье проводится сравнительный анализ великого индийского эпоса «Махабхарата» (Повесть о великом Бхарате) в переводе Нургазы Кемелбаева и Кенеша произведения «Теңири Манас» в варианте Ашыма Жакыпбекова. Жусупова И Исследование направлено на выявление сходств и различий в прозаических версиях этих эпических произведений. Изучение типологических параллелей между индийским эпосом «Махабхарата» и кыргызским эпосом «Манас» позволяет глубже раскрыть оригинальность последнего, поскольку благодаря культурным, историческим и ментальным особенностям каждого народа каждый эпос представляет собой уникальный памятник с неповторимыми чертами.

*Abstract.* The heroic epic Manas, due to its grand scale and fantastically rich content, as well as its artistic perfection, figurative expressiveness, and the wealth of both verbal and visual means, holds a well-deserved place among the outstanding monuments of the world's epic heritage. Comparative analysis of Manas with other world epics contributes to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of its narrative and artistic features. According to researchers, in the Middle Ages, the ancestors of the Kyrgyz people were part of the Great Turkic Khaganate, which maintained cultural ties with many countries, including India. There are studies that confirm this historical connection. This article presents a comparative analysis of the great Indian epic Mahabharata (The Tale of the Great Bharata), translated by Nurgazy Kemelbaev and Kenesh Jusupov, and the work Tengir Manas in the version by Ashym Zhakypbekov. The study is aimed at identifying similarities and differences in the prose versions of these epic narratives. Examining typological parallels between the Indian epic Mahabharata and the Kyrgyz epic Manas allows for a deeper exploration of the originality of the latter, as each epic is a unique cultural monument shaped by the specific cultural, historical, and mental characteristics of its people.

Ключевые слова: эпос, Махабхарата, Манас, этнос.

Keywords: epic, Mahabharata, Manas, ethnos.

The term "epos" originates from Ancient Greek ( $\check{\epsilon}\pi\sigma\varsigma$ ), meaning "word", "narration", or "song". It refers to a heroic narrative that encompasses a complete picture of folk life and reflects the worldview of an entire people in harmonious unity. Epic poems traditionally do not have a known author, as in ancient times there was no custom of attributing authorship to those who collected and composed such works. In epic narratives, the story is often told from the perspective of a real or fictional narrator, observer, participant, or protagonist. Sometimes, an epic serve as the only and most important testimony of its time. Initially transmitted orally through tales and songs, epics gradually developed by incorporating new plots and characters and were eventually recorded in written form. Typically, epics recount the heroic deeds of legendary figures from ancient times and portray the life of an entire people through the experiences of one or several heroes. An epic can include various genres such as legends, myths, poems, fables, bylinas (heroic Russian oral poems), and others [1].

Alongside such epic heritage, it occupies a worthy place. Today, the task before the world epic studies of the Kyrgyz people is to reveal the uniqueness of the heroic epic Manas in the global epic space. In comparative studies of the heroic epic Manas with world epics, there are common motifs, plots, and images that belong to the general artistic-epic tradition of Turkic peoples, as they are part of the heritage of the cultural-historical artistic-epic tradition. They can help uncover the distant histories of the Turkic peoples and illustrate the realistic patterns of their intertribal and ethnic relationships. The similarities between the heroic epic of the Kyrgyz people, Manas, and the epics of other Turkic and Mongolian peoples have been repeatedly noted by many researchers: V. M. Zhirmunsky [1],

A. P. Okladnikov, G. U. Ergis, I. V. Pukhov, B. Kerimjanova, R. Z. Kydyrbaeva, and J. B. A. von Gabin. In his work Ancient Turkic Literature, he wrote that "Central Asia — a land of transit roads, caravanserais, and marketplaces — should be the ideal ground for the flourishing of beloved forms of popular entertainment, including the art of literary performance". In the Middle Ages, the ancestors of the Kyrgyz were part of the Great Khaganate, and he notes that the Turks had cultural ties with many countries, including India [1].

Despite the distinct characteristics of the "Manas" epic and the "Mahabharata", one can expect each of them to share similar plots, motifs, images, and artistic ideas. The article presents a comparative analysis of the work Tengiri "Manas" in the translation of Nurgazy Kemelbaev and Kenesh Jusupov, the great Hindu epic "Mahabharata" (the tale of the Great Bharata), and the "Manas" epic in the version of Ashym Jakypbekov, aimed at identifying the similarities and differences in their adaptations. The study of typological parallels between the Indian epic "Mahabharata" and the epic "Manas" can further reveal the uniqueness of "Manas", as each epic, due to the cultural-historical and mental characteristics of the world's peoples, possesses distinct, memorable, and unique features.

A comparative-typological methodology is used to study the general patterns and specifics of folk collective creativity that determine the emergence and development of the epic genre systems of the world, along with their associated plots, images, and artistic ideas. This is because the epic is truly heroic in its local national-historical content, which is not easily influenced by external international literary influences.

Before conducting a comparative-typological analysis of bylinas, let us first turn to typology. Typology is a comprehensive research method in a general scientific framework that compares objects, identifies their common or similar features, and classifies similar objects into specific categories (groups, classes, or types). The similarities among the heroic epics of different peoples are almost always typological in nature [1].

Comparative aspects play a significant role in folklore studies and have been extensively examined by scholars such as V. M. Zhirmunsky, E. M. Meletinsky, B. N. Reichl, P. A. Grintser, and others in their fundamental historical-typological research. In his study of bylinas, V. Ya. Propp considered their distinctive feature to be their heroic content. He described the high ideals of behavior for a given era, the musical rhythm and performance, a specific metrical structure, and artistic generalization, providing a scientific definition [2].

V. M. Zhirmunsky, in his works Introduction to the Study of the Manas Epic [5], The Tale of Alpamysh and the Heroic Fairy Tale [3], and The Oghuz Heroic Epic and the Book of Korkut, conducted a large-scale comparative study of Turkic epic traditions [4].

V. M. Zhirmunsky was the first in epic studies to emphasize the typological nature of the similarities between the plots of heroic epics from different peoples, stating that they are "based on the artistic generalization of a similar social reality and on the same level of societal consciousness development" [1, 5].

M. Meletinsky studied the genesis and development of narrative traditions in archaic literature using extensive material from Turkic-Mongolic, Karelian-Finnish, and Nart epic folklore, as well as the works of the peoples of Australia and Oceania. He analyzed the main genres of the epic, starting from the earliest forms of folklore expressed in non-literate cultures. The Poetic Edda, a written collection of Icelandic epic poems that emerged in the second half of the 13th century, served as the basis for a historical-typological study of the saga genre, which identified its oral origins. The scholar analyzed the developmental patterns of epic genres from their archaic origins to modern literature and carried out a complementary synthesis of historical typology and the structural approach. E. M. Meletinsky, in his work On the Origin of Literary-Mythological Plot Archetypes [6], developed a model for analyzing the semantics of motifs and plots. He demonstrated the evolution of verbal art from myth and ritual to epic and literature. The works of B. N. Putilov contain important principles of epic studies. Scientists have established that the epic hero originates from archaic myth. The scholar determines that the development of epics, despite the presence of cultural connections, follows certain stages characteristic of many peoples: from archaic epic to heroic epic, and then to religious-didactic or historical epic. B. N. Putilov identified the influence of general epic patterns and the typological commonality in the process of epic creation. He developed an effective research methodology that offers extensive opportunities for analyzing universality and local parallelism, as well as continuity, variability, and the mythological subtext in national epics. One of the methodological issues raised by the scholar is the necessity of a scientific elaboration of the concept of "typology" and its application in folklore, as well as the establishment of its boundaries and levels of application. In our view, typology in folklore represents a system of regularly occurring and historically determined correlations at various levels - from the "elementary" level, as an image or artistic device, to folklore as a complete system [7].

The Origin of Bylinas. According to historians, the heroic epic of Turkic-speaking peoples was created and developed in ancient times, as early as the 2nd–1st millennia BCE, when they lived in the steppes of Central Asia. It had long existed in the oral tradition and was passed down from generation to generation. Regarding the creation period of the Manas epic, the first plots were composed after the 840s, and the earliest version of the Manas epic was likely written during the political era of the Karakhanids, meaning it was completed in the first half of the 11th century. In particular, the earliest version of the Manas epic was created around the year 840, between the 9th and 11th centuries. Its early plots were based on historical events; however, their content was gradually replaced by accounts of conflicts between the Kyrgyz and the Uighurs, as well as the

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Black Chinese, in the Tian Shan region. The Manas epic originated among the Kyrgyz who lived in the Manas Valley and to the west of it. There are historical grounds for associating Beejin with the city of Beshbalyk. The adoption of Islam by the Kyrgyz under the influence of the Karakhanids brought significant changes to the content of the Manas epic. After the 13th century, due to Mongol, and especially Oirat-Kalmyk, invasions of Central Asia, almost all the epic's plots related to the eras of the Yenisei Kyrgyz, the Karakhanids, and the Kara-Khitans were replaced. Based on the aforementioned historical facts, it can be stated that the Manas epic was created more than a thousand years ago [8].

The Manas epic was shaped and refined by storytellers, thanks to which its main content, plot, motifs, linguistic richness, artistic devices, epic formulas, and typical passages have been preserved in their original form, forming the archaic layers of the epic tradition. In Ashym Jakypbekov's version of the Manas epic, Tengiri Manas, a prose epic novel, is primarily based on the versions of Sagymbay, Sayakbay, and Jusuup Mamai. Despite the presence of exaggerations, myths, and fairy tales in the Manas, it is fundamentally a highly realistic work. In the prose version of the epic, the author expresses one key viewpoint: the influence of Islam, which began spreading over the next seven or eight centuries, became very strong, as the epic, passed down through the centuries, continued to absorb the events of the time. In each version, especially in Sagymbay's, Islam clashes with the ancient traditions. If we go back to the roots, we can see that the ancient Kyrgyz worshiped Tengri, the Sky, the Sun, and Fire. Not only the scents and customs arising from this, but also the ancient traditions themselves have been preserved. The influence of Islam, which came later, appears as a new addition alongside this. The mixing of Arabic and Iranian words is a natural process. The influence of the Silk Road, which existed a thousand years before Islam, cannot be forgotten. Since I started thinking about writing the epic in the form of a novel, I have wanted to preserve this divide and emphasize the ancient nature of the epic. The ancient Manas is a monument that is two or three times older than Islam. I myself am also a Muslim. However, since the antiquity of the folk epic is evident, it is right to adhere to justice, explained Ashym Jakypbekov [9].

As for the ancient Indian epic Mahabharata, it was written in Sanskrit, the ancient literary language of India, approximately 2000 years ago. Its creation is attributed to the poet and sage Vyasa. The epic was written by the ancient thinker and philosopher Brahmarishi Ved Vyasa, based on the knowledge of humanity. The poem developed in the oral tradition and preserved many characteristics of the oral poetic style. In the 3rd-2nd centuries, Mahabharata was created in the military sphere, initially by sutras-noble warriors who drove chariots, knew the legends, and, at the same time, by improvising performers who modified the text within the framework of the epic canon. Later, the Mahabharata, following the paths of Hindu pilgrimage, became a pan-Indian epic and was performed with religious and didactic modifications by Brahmin priests. As a result, the Mahabharata contains religious, philosophical examples such as the Bhagavad Gita, and didactic texts, mainly found in the 12th and 13th books of the epic. From that time, the epic, primarily its didactic sections, began to be passed down orally from generation to generation, drawing inspiration from the smriti texts of Brahmanical religious tradition. However, the Mahabharata is not a deeply philosophical or religious treatise. On the contrary, this is a description of all the signs of human characteristics, from primitive to divine, the result of which is God's call to humanity through Krishna. Researchers P. A. Grinzer, Y. V. Vasilkov, and J. Brockington suggest that the Mahabharata epic recounts the events of a war between the real alliances of the Kuru and Panchala tribes that took place during the late Vedic period in northern India. The Mahabharata consists of works of various types and content-artistic, philosophical, religious, and scientific-created by numerous storytellers over many centuries. The Indian epic "The Great War of the Bharatas" is an epic consisting of numerous myths, legends, parables, verses, and other elements related to the main

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story, which is divided into 18 books and includes around one hundred thousand poetic verses. From the perspective of historical typology, the Mahabharata has become a partially religious and didactic epic, yet it continues to preserve elements of the archaic epic as a classical epic. For Hindus, the Mahabharata has become a sacred text and is sometimes regarded as the "encyclopedia of Hinduism. The Mahabharata epic reflects the most important ideas for Indian culture: revelation about knowledge; about karma — the rebirth of living beings based on what they did in their previous lives; about yoga — the connection of the human soul with the universal spirit and liberation from eternal rebirths through this connection; about the mind that does not distinguish between good and evil; and about the eager fulfillment of one's duties according to one's varna, caste, lineage, and family. Performers of the Manas epic are singers (poets) who made the art of reciting Manas their specialized craft. The word 'manaschi' emerged after the October Revolution and acquired a terminological meaning. According to some written sources and oral information collected from elders, before the October Revolution and in the early years of Soviet power, those who recited Manas were commonly referred to as "singers" or "storytellers" in the people. The term "manaschi" is typically used to refer to those who fully recite one part or the entire Manas epic, including Semetey and Seitek. Undoubtedly, the epic was first spoken by people who were witnesses to the historical events depicted in it and later transformed into a legend. There is no reliable information about the first manaschi. The scholar Mukhtar Auezov, recalling that in the Manas epic of Sagymbay Orozbak uulu there is a character named Jaysan the singer, suggested that the first verses of Manas might have been created by this poet. In some folk legends, it is said that when Manas died, Kanykey sang a song, which was later developed by storytellers-poets and turned into a work. According to a widely spread legend among the Kyrgyz, the first person to begin singing Manas was one of the forty elders - Yrchyul. Yrchyul performed the duties of a herald at gatherings and weddings, and when Manas died, he added his heroic deeds and feats to the song. Later, these songs, passed down orally, were collected by the singer Toktogul and transformed into a complete work about Manas [10].

In the Mahabharata epic, the charioteer-suta takes on the role of the narrator-brahmin and recounts the events of the war. Witnessing the events of the Mahabharata and narrating them is the charioteer-suta, as well as the blind king of the Kauravas, Dhritarashtra, who is considered the most trusted advisor of Sanjaya.

Sanjaya always gives the king wise advice and is portrayed as his trusted person, not fearing accusations of deviating from moral laws (dharma). Before this, the epic was narrated by brahmins. However, based on modern historical-typological studies, the first narrators, the sutas, were witnesses to the heroes' events and spread them among the people. In other words, in the Mahabharata epic, the narrators and modern studies contradict each other. In the Mahabharata, the brahmin Vyasa, also known as Vaishampayana, is one of the main narrators of the events. The great battle is narrated by the charioteer-suta named Sanjaya [10].

The arrival of heroes into the magical world. The Mahabharata epic begins with the words: "This epic primarily tells the story of ancient heroes, their wisdom, justice, valor, and victories".

Who can win in a fierce battle?

What is true heroism?

Who holds the truth that has no equal in dispute?

Who can exalt anyone in this world? — with these questions, the narrative begins, signaling the era when feats and pride were celebrated, starting with questions typical of heroic epics.

With a roar and a thunder, the earth cracks open, and the animals in the forest cannot find shelter. Dushyanta draws his bow, knocking down hundreds of lions and tigers, and hunts thousands of deer and antelopes. Enraptured by the thrill of the hunt, the king, disregarding his attendants,

enters the dense thicket. As for the description of Shakuntala's son: he grew very quickly and by the age of six, he had reached the size of an ordinary giant. He could catch a tiger or a lion and tie them to a tree like a pet.

When Dushyanta first met Shakuntala, the girl told him that her mother was a celestial fairy who had come to give her life, and after giving birth to the child, she left him by the water and returned to the realm of the gods. In the section "The Story of Bhishma", it is described how Dushyanta first saw his son: Suddenly he saw a young man standing on the shore, who, facing the waves, shot thousands of arrows, each of which blocked the flow of water. Astonished by what he saw with his own eyes, the king wanted to learn about the boy's incredible magical power. Such fantastical and mythical comparisons are frequently encountered.

In A. Jakypbekov's novel "Tengiri Manas", it is written: Suddenly, chasing after him, Chegebay ran in, panting from the run. The wolf shuddered slightly and returned to human form. Then, looking at him, she said: "Your name is Manas! Remember it. You will have forty companions. The boy who just ran in is named Chegebay. Later, he will become your companion, and his name will be Kutubiy, and he will become righteous. You will also have twenty-nine more companions, and their names will be known to us. Be well, Manas! After saying this, the forty chiltens disappeared from sight". The first meeting with the forty chiltens is described. At the time of Manas' birth, when he was being supported, special attention is drawn to the arrival of Kokjal. Suddenly, through the door, a huge wolf with a black nose and a red, flickering tongue rushed in. Ignoring the wives who had collapsed in fear, it ran straight to the boy and licked him on the forehead.

Behind him, hiding their tails between their thighs, a black tiger stealthily entered the cave. It approached the boy, sniffed his right shoulder, then his left shoulder. After that, both disappeared. Whether it was a vision or reality, no one could tell. The boy's arms were covered in blood. Kanymjan, almost losing consciousness, cut the boy's umbilical cord and wrapped him in a piece of cloth. Then the boy, as if he were a fifteen-year-old young man, pulled his right arm out with strength. "Tatai, enough!" Kanymjan said, leaving the boy, and recorded it — thus, the birth of Manas is described as that of a fifteen-year-old youth.

There are also contradictions in the epics: those who speak about the special role of women in the society of ancient Aryans (for example, Herman Wirth) argue that this is confirmed by the matrilineality reflected in Indo-Iranian sources (including the Mahabharata). As evidence, it is pointed out that, unlike the familiar patrilineal naming system, where names are given from the father, in the Mahabharata, many heroes are referred to as the sons of their mothers, not their fathers.

For example: Arjuna is mentioned here as Partha (son of Pritha) or Kaunteya (son of Kunti), Karna as Radheya (son of Radha), Skanda as Kartikeya (son of Kritti), and others, where the heroes are named after their mothers. Matriarchy or maternal power (from Latin mater — mother, arche — power) denotes the power of women.

Comparing the events of the Mahabharata with the canonical date, it can be said that during the Aryan period, various forms of marriage were recognized, each considered lawful but with its own special status and form. For example, it was lawful to abduct a bride without informing her parents. Such a marriage was recognized along with others and carried obligations. Krishna advises Arjuna to abduct his sister.

Another form of family structure is polyandry. A classic example of this topic is found in the Mahabharata, where Draupadi and her five husbands, the Pandavas, are depicted. It is clear that during the time the epic was created, such a union was not only acceptable but also considered a normal practice. In India, Bhutan, and northern Nepal, polyandry is still practiced among national

and religious minorities. It is widely spread among the Sherpas. In 1914, polyandry was the dominant form of marriage in Bhutan. In modern Bhutan, polyandry is much rarer, but it is still practiced in the Merak and Sakteng dzongkhags in the Trashigang region. Polyandry is also found among the Nivkhs of Sakhalin and the Eskimos of northern Eurasia (https://clck.ru/3McH7k).

Conclusion. Although the Manas epic and the Mahabharata were created in different countries and eras, there are many similarities between them. In both epics, the heroism of the characters is glorified. The heroes of both epics uphold the values of justice, truth, and valor. They stand by their word, sacrifice their lives for freedom, and prioritize the interests of the people and the defense of the land over personal gain, fulfilling the task of uniting the people.

As a result of comparing and analyzing the Kyrgyz and Indian epics, typological similarities have been identified: both the Kyrgyz and Indian epics have lived in the oral tradition for centuries, passing from generation to generation among the people; both epics are united by the motifs of leaders, sages, and heroes who overcome selfishness and are firmly committed to high moral values such as loyalty to their word, honor, friendship, love, adherence to traditions, and respect for mothers and children. In both epics, the main heroes fight against fierce enemies and defeat them. In some places, the development of events in the plot is similar: in both the Manas and Mahabharata epics, there is admiration for the beauty, strength, and bravery of the main characters; both epics are rich in excessive imagery and astonishing miracles — these epics are united by artistic devices; the Manas epic was shaped and developed by manaschis, through whom its main plot, content, motifs, linguistic richness, artistic means, epic formulas, and typical excerpts have been preserved in their original form, and the archaic layers of the epic tradition remain. The ancient Indian heroic epic Mahabharata consists of works of various types and artistic content. In the Mahabharata, more attention is given to the psychological state of the heroes: their love, experiences, and hatred. In the study by Nurgazy Kemelbaev and Kenesh Jusupov, in the translation of the great epic of the Indian people Mahabharata (The Tale of the Great Bharata) and the Manas epic in the version of Ashym Jakypbekov Tengiri Manas, a comparative analysis is conducted with the aim of identifying similarities and differences in their prose versions. In the course of the comparative analysis of the epics, we focused on the description of the miraculous birth of the main characters, their struggle against internal and external enemies, and the epic traditions of protection. The scale of the descriptions of events in the epics, the richness of their language and literary devices, and the humanistic content of the victory of good over evil bring the two epics closer together. As a result, both the Manas and Mahabharata epics require comprehensive study, and this is an area that has not yet received sufficient attention in science.

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