

Traces of Ancient Religious Beliefs in Animal Husbandry Customs and Traditions

Akchaev Farrukh Shavkatovich

Jizzakh state pedagogical university Head of Distance Education in Social sciences and Humanities chair, PhD, docent

Saydamov Shakhzod Arslan ugli

Student of Jizzakh state pedagogical university

Abstract: This article analyzes the customs and rituals of the ancient cattle-breeding population, their religious beliefs, ancient religious imaginations and folk views formed on the basis of Islamic traditions.

Keywords: Religious imagination, customs, traditions, Totemism, Animism, magic, Avesta, Rowan, Cotoneaster, Red Mulberry

Animal husbandry is one of the ancient economic activities of the Uzbek people, and various religious-mythological worldviews and ethno-local features related to this area have been preserved for centuries. Animal husbandry is one of the oldest forms of traditional economic activities and the main source of livelihood. Since ancient times, particularly from the beginning of taming and domestication of animals, rituals and traditions related to animal husbandry have reflected people's interest in the animal world. Animal husbandry has been satisfying people's daily needs such as food and clothing. Over the years, catching, feeding and breeding animals has become a common work of people.

As we mentioned above, animal husbandry is a very ancient type of human activity, cults and beliefs related to animals played an essential role in people's lifestyle since the beginning of human history. The sacred book of Zoroastrian religion, "Avesta", explains the religious attitude towards livestock, especially horses, cattle and domestic animals with small hooves. Herdsmen were considered believers [1: 45]. Animal husbandry also developed as a result of taming animals. In general, the sheep was considered the most sacred animal among the Turkic nations, and they treated sheep respectfully.

In the Zoroastrian religion, the cow (ox) was also treated with special attention. The most ancient and difficult to interpret part of "Avesta", the most ancient and difficult to interpret part of "Avesta" called "Goh" gives the valuable information about the specific forms of belief in cows and in general, the breeding of cattle, raising cattle breeding to the level of belief in an ideological sense.

For example, in the 39th song of the book of Yasna, Geush Urvan and Geush Tashan are referred to, that is, the spirit of a bull appearing in the form of a cattle or an ox [1: 47]. From this we can see that people treated cattle well and respected them since ancient times. Cattle breeding had long been considered one of the leading economic sectors in the Jizzakh oasis. Favorable climate and vast pastures in the oasis created an opportunity for the development of cattle breeding. Cattle grazing depends on the availability of seasonal grass stocks. Since spring, the growth of the world of nutritious plants, depending on the climatic conditions, changed towards deserts, hills, foothills,

mountains and mountain pastures. These conditions ensured that the population migrated to the mountain region from spring to summer to graze livestock. The periodical growth of vegetation in the regions adjacent to Morguzar and other mountains and mountain pastures was considered an important factor in the development of cattle breeding.

It is known that since ancient times, cattle were valued mainly for milk, meat and skin, as well as a working animal. Cattle, like all types of livestock, were fed on pastures and natural hay collected in the summer. Natural conditions had an effect on their body structure, flesh and product quality. Because the reserves of grass in the oasis were not the same throughout the year, the natural conditions somewhat limited the opportunities for the free development of cattle. Because of this, mostly small-bodied, low-yielding, but disease-resistant cattle were kept in the oasis. From ancient times, cattle were kept as wealth and sold at a high price in the market in times of need, and it was possible to make a living with its money. There are two types of cattle rearing in the region, the first is grazing in pastures, and the second is rearing at home. Residents of the areas of the oasis specializing in irrigation farming mainly fed their cattle at home. Therefore, the average number of cattle in them did not exceed 3-4 ones. Cattle owners were well aware of the need to pay special attention to the microclimate of the rooms where they are kept so that their cattle do not get sick [2: 5]. The influence of Islam was used not only in diseases related to animals, but also in the diseases of the pastoral population of the oasis. For example, when insects bit in the oases, the population sought the help of religious scholars. In the religion of Islam, information is given about rest treatment. When the insects bit not only the people but also the animals, the scholars gave great practical help in their recovery.

In general, the sheep was considered the most sacred animal among the Turkic peoples, and they were treated with special respect. Among the animals, sheep were given special respect in this case, first of all, it is related to the fact that the oasis was mainly engaged in sheep breeding, and secondly, the religion of Islam and the love and consumption of sheep in it. Therefore, in the practical art of the inhabitants of the oasis, there are many expressions related to this animal and its image. For the majority of the local population, the sheep (horned ram) was a symbol of wealth, glory, and power [3: 39-42]. In the ancient Zoroastrian religion, the ram was interpreted as a divine deity protecting the owners of the house and their health. In addition, Iran and ancient Turonian people imagined the god of war and victory in the form of a ram [4: 115]. Therefore, since ancient times, people performed many rituals in animal husbandry. When we look at the nature of rituals and traditions related to animal husbandry, we can see that in most of them, views related to sorcery, magic, and totemism are the priority. In general, from the above evidence, we can see that among other Turkic people, among the Uzbeks, the sheep was valued as the most sacred animal and believed in it at the level of a totem.

The residents of the oasis used “incense” in the place where stock held in order to get rid of the evils. Usually, the shepherd chose one of the holy days, such as Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday as a special day to let the sheep out to the pasture. The herdsmen of the Jizzakh oasis, with the arrival of the shepherd year, moved the cattle from the villages to the summer pastures [5: 60]. Before letting the cattle out to the pasture, the "Is" ceremony (one of the religious rituals of Uzbek people) was held for Chuponota, who was considered the shepherd's Pir. At the end of the ceremony, the mullah (religious teacher) of the village recited verses from the Koran and blessed the shepherds. This situation was also observed among the herdsmen of Yulisoy village of Forish district [6]. From these rituals, we can see that ancient religious ideas and Islamic views got mixed.

It is obvious that keeping the health of sheep was the most important task for shepherds. If the sheep fell ill in the pasture and started to die, the shepherds got their sheep to the sacred shrines and graves of saints around the pasture [7: 165]. When livestock were sick, the inhabitants of the oasis

took them to cemeteries and places of pilgrimage, turned them three times, and threw coins and money there as an offering. After those actions, the calamities that befell livestock were also eliminated. In fact, according to popular imagination, the ram was also considered a creature that repels the gaze of evil-minded people. For these reasons, there was a custom to hang a ram's horn at the entrance of the houses. By hanging a ram's horn at the entrance of the house, they tried to destroy various calamities that enter the house with ill-intentioned people. In addition, we can see that when shepherds went to deserted places, they spent the night among sheep and lambs, believing that sheep and lambs have the ability to eliminate different evil figures.

Stick and clothes, which were the main working tools of shepherds, had also their own magical properties. A shepherd's stick was usually made of mature "rowan", "cotoneaster" or "red mulberry" wood. Since the shepherd's stick was considered sacred, the shepherd made a sacrifice and slaughtered an animal in order to own it. Only then did he get a shepherd's stick. In turn, animals were not hit with anything but a stick, and stepping on a stick and jumping over it was also considered a sin. If an animal passed over the stick, they would become sick, and it was recommended that a sick animal should be stroked with the same stick. According to those reasons, shepherds always carried their staff with them and tried to put it on the branch rather than under their feet [8: 158].

In conclusion, it is worth saying that among the inhabitants of the oasis, traditions related to cattle breeding have a long history. Religious and magical images related to totemism, animism and fetishism are reflected in these traditional rituals. They are mainly interrelated to religious beliefs toward animals. Later, as a result of the emergence of the Islamic religion, such traditions were combined with the Islamic religion. There were a number of religious-magical images related to sheep and cattle that were considered important in animal husbandry training, and they are still preserved their actuality among the people today.

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