

**ARTISTIC AND AESTHETIC ANALYSIS OF MOURNING CEREMONIES IN
TO‘LAGAN QOSIMBEKOV’S NOVEL “THE BROKEN SWORD”****NIGORA ALISULTONOVA**

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Abstract. This article examines the mourning ceremonies depicted in To‘lagan Qosimbekov’s novel *The Broken Sword*, which covers the political and historical period of the Kokand Khanate in the 18th–19th centuries. It focuses on sacrificial rituals during the enthronement of the khan, lamentation songs of widowed women, and Kyrgyz cultural traditions based on Tengriism and Islamic syncretism, revealing their artistic and aesthetic reflections. The study also analyzes the author’s skill in creatively reworking folkloric material and adapting it to historical reality.

Keywords: sacrifice, ceremonies, lamentation songs, rituals

To‘lagan Qosimbekov’s novel *The Broken Sword* is celebrated as a gem of Kyrgyz historical literature. The novel spans a historical period of 176 years from the late 18th century to the 19th century, primarily beginning with Sherali Khan’s ascension to the throne in 1842. Alongside historical events, it vividly portrays the customs, beliefs, ceremonies, and folkloric elements of the Kyrgyz people. Among these, mourning ceremonies—including human sacrifices during the enthronement of the khan and lamentation songs of widowed women—occupy a special place. These elements demonstrate a syncretic blend of Tengriism, common among ancient Turkic peoples, and Islam, while also harmonizing with oral creative motifs like those found in the epic *Manas*.

The novel begins with a philosophical epigraph derived from folk wisdom:

“...Without a court, there is no people; without people, there is no court; without a court, there is no homeland; without kinship in between, the people cannot be equal...” [1, p. 19].

The episode of Sherali Khan’s enthronement is depicted as a vivid example of mourning ceremonies. The enthronement of a khan is a ritual in the political and cultural traditions of the Kyrgyz and Turkic peoples, incorporating elements of Tengriism. In the novel, Sherali, from the thirteenth generation of the Altinbeshik lineage, is enthroned with human and animal blood scattered on a white felt. This ritual seeks to dedicate the blood to God and gain His favor.

The text depicts the ritual’s dynamics as follows:

“— Allahu Akbar... Allahu Akbar... For the way of the sultans... Allahu Akbar... For the way of the Chiltans... Allahu Akbar!

Two men led him to one edge of the white felt.

— Don’t be afraid... Don’t be afraid... Nothing will happen... Nothing will happen...

In the blink of an eye, the cold sword, merciless sword, cut through the throat of the red-faced young man.”

This episode emphasizes the psychological state of human sacrifice with the exclamation “death!”

Sacrifice signifies approaching God. The animal slaughtered on the day of sacrifice is called “Qurbonlik.” In verse 162 of the *An‘am* Surah, Allah commands the Prophet that every deed

must be performed sincerely for Him, stating: “Say (O Muhammad), my prayers, my sacrifices, my life and my death are solely for the Lord of the worlds; He has no partner.”

However, in the novel, human sacrifice occurs first, followed by animals.

Sacrifices have specific rules. For example, an animal should not be dragged to the place of slaughter. In the novel, during Sherali Khan’s enthronement, the child brought by an elderly woman’s grandson is sacrificed first:

“The armed men held the child under the armpits:

— Don’t be afraid... Don’t be afraid...

— Don’t be afraid, nothing will happen... Nothing...

The child could not understand ‘what would happen’ or ‘what to fear.’ ‘Will they put me on a horse?’ he thought. He could not hold the reins! He might fall! Scared of his imagination, his eyes filled with tears, sobbing, mouth half open, his limbs trembling.

Under the loud sound of the horns:

— Allahu Akbar! For the way of the One God, Allahu Akbar! For the way of the sultans... For the way of the Chiltans... Allahu Akbar... Allahu Akbar... the cleric’s voice echoed continuously.

Suddenly, a loud wail came from behind...

— Oh, my lonely one... May your sacrifice be accepted... — someone cried loudly, coming closer.”

This was the wailing of a woman. Yusuf’s eyebrows knitted, his face reddened, and his eyes darted nervously.

The child being sacrificed did not know what was happening. From the soft words he heard and the careful handling, he thought he would be placed on a horse.

From a folkloric perspective, this ritual originates from the practice of sacrifice in Tengriism, where blood symbolizes the vital force, and the white felt represents purity and authority.

In scientific analysis, such ceremonies are viewed as remnants of the animistic beliefs of Turkic nomads, where sacrifice reinforces the sanctity of power and ensures social unity.

In the novel, this element combines historical truth—namely the history of the Kokand Khanate—with folkloric motifs, intensifying the psychological state and showing the political significance of death to the reader.

Professor U. Qultaev’s analysis notes that motifs of death (e.g., beheadings and offerings) are linked with epic traditions, where death acts as a driving force in national history.

Additionally, the portrayal of widows and the announcement of the deceased is uniquely described in the novel, for example, the case of Oyzoda. Many young men sacrificed themselves for the freedom of the people, leaving young women widowed. Oyzoda, one of Temir’s wives, was brought into the community shortly after marrying him:

“Oyzoda wiped her tears, lifted the full water buckets, and stood up, seeing a group of horsemen approaching from the village path. They were coming swiftly like a whirlwind driven by the wind. The sound of hooves seemed familiar. Could it be Temir? Despite the shaking water in her bucket, she hurried forward. The horsemen approached. What about the others? Temir was not in sight. As they neared the village, they suddenly turned and began crying loudly:

— Our dear one!..

— We have been separated from our friend!

— Our equal!.. Our beloved!

Oyzoda dropped the buckets. Darkness filled her eyes, and the mountains appeared level, with fir trees resembling women dressed in black, sorrowful. Who? Oyzoda still hoped. Who? She

saw her mother-in-law, her hair covered in white, crying aloud. Her legs trembled, and something was stuck in her throat.

— What happened? What is it?! — Oyzoda lost control; one of the elderly women held her.

— You have lost your husband to misfortune, dear... Oyzoda did not know how to respond. Unconscious, she thought: “Let it be! Don’t speak like that! Mind your words! Is this a joke?” The women wiped their tears, unsure what to say, trying to bring Oyzoda back to consciousness. The sudden calamity had stunned her.

The women carried Oyzoda into the house, placing her near her mother-in-law, who wore a black scarf, sitting backwards with hair spread like snow. The bride could not regain consciousness.

— Oh, unfortunate one!.. Oh, fortunate one! — said one elderly woman, distressed by the bride’s condition, also sprinkling water on her face as she cried. Oyzoda opened her eyes again and continued to burn:

— Ah... What should I do... — she choked, pulling her hands from the women holding her, scratching her face violently, and blood streamed from both sides of her face.”

In traditional Kyrgyz rituals, widowed women often scratch their faces or necks following the death of their husbands. This act is considered an expression of deep grief and has been preserved since the nomadic era. It represents a syncretic blend of ancient beliefs and Islam. This practice is not merely an emotional reaction but a social obligation—it publicly demonstrates the widow’s condition, reinforces respect for the deceased, and symbolizes ritual purification.

According to some scholarly sources, widows may continue this practice for a year. If a woman does not comply, she may face social shame, blame, or even punishment. This custom reflects women’s expression of sorrow, while men participate externally through “lamentation” rituals. Lamentation songs (yigi-yoklov) are the most widespread and developed form of folk mourning songs. Thematically, they are divided into several types: mourning by a widow for her deceased husband, mourning songs composed by a professional poet (akin to a dedicated bard) for a notable person, mourning by a girl who has lost her parents, a mother who has lost her children, a bride who has lost her husband or lover, or sisters separated from each other [2, p. 147].

Regarding the use of songs in the novel and their poetic analysis, the song is a lyrical genre of Kyrgyz oral literature, serving as a mourning ode. It is often improvised and performed mainly by women, extolling the virtues of the deceased. For example, following the beheading of Olimbek Dotqoh:

“Kurmanjon immediately raised a flag as a sign of mourning, gathering relatives and shedding her tears earnestly, removing her bracelets and earrings, dressing in black, leaning on both sides, she turned before the people and softly sang:

‘...From crimson velvet,

An endless deep eye,

Your daughters will never be born like you,

For the Kyrgyz-Kipchak people...

...From black velvet,

An endless deep eye,

Your daughters will never be born like you,

For the Kyrgyz-Kazakh lands...’

Relatives, with a mix of concealed emotions, raised their voices, and the mountains echoed the lamentation.”

Professor U. Qultaev, in her article *Typical Features in Kyrgyz Historical Novels: Epic Tradition and Motifs*, cites this song as preserved in the manuscripts of the National Academy of Sciences:

“Struggling, I came, my lady,
Crimson velvet leaned, my lady,
From Kyrgyz and Kipchak lands, my lady,
Daughters will never be born like you, my lady.”

In these laments, Olimbek Dotqoh’s personal virtues are evaluated through his contributions to the people within a historical context. His influence in the court was significant for the Kyrgyz, while Musulmanqul’s influence was crucial for the Kipchaks.

The author, To‘lagan Qosimbekov, creatively reworks every piece of information derived from folk sources, adding his own contributions, without copying material directly [2].

Jamgyrbek Bokoshev, a researcher at Kyrgyz-Turk Manas University, cites French writer Franz Kafka: “Tradition cannot encompass everything. It is necessary to study it deeply” [3, p. 34].

Similarly, mourning traditions such as human sacrifices during the enthronement of a khan or a widow scratching her face are not found in contemporary practice or in the Qur’an. In the novel, Qosimbekov artistically and aesthetically improvises these customs, effectively conveying them to the reader.

The Broken Sword stands among the pinnacles of Kyrgyz historical literature, exploring the cultural and historical heritage of the people through the artistic-aesthetic depiction of mourning ceremonies. Sacrificial rituals, widows’ lamentation songs, and face-scratching practices portrayed against the political events of the Kokand Khanate reveal the unique expression of Tengriist-Islamic syncretism. By creatively adapting folkloric elements, including motifs from the *Manas* epic and folk laments, to historical reality, the author evokes profound psychological and aesthetic impact. These elements illuminate not only the political and cultural significance of death and mourning but also highlight the enduring distinctiveness of Kyrgyz customs from past to present. Overall, the analysis of mourning ceremonies in the novel demonstrates the author’s deep knowledge of Kyrgyz oral literature and provides an important source for studying the epic traditions of Kyrgyz literature. Such works also broaden the opportunities for preserving and developing the nation’s cultural identity.

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