

**THE REPRESENTATION OF FOLK BELIEFS AND SYMBOLS IN TOLOGON  
KASYMBEKOV'S NOVEL "THE BROKEN SWORD"****Nigora Alisultonova**Andijan State Pedagogical Institute Faculty of Philology  
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The article reveals how sacrifice, regarded as one of the forms of folk beliefs and rituals (ЫРЫМ-ЖЫРЫМ), is not merely a background element in the novel, but is skillfully depicted as the main driving force behind the characters' psychology, consciousness, and behavior. The functions and artistic significance of these rituals are analyzed through specific examples from the work.

**Keywords**

folk beliefs, symbols, rituals, sacrifice.

Tölögön Kasymbekov's novel *The Broken Sword* is one of the historical works in Kyrgyz literature that depicts the struggle of the Kyrgyz people against the Kokand Khanate in the nineteenth century, the socio-political situation of the time, and the spiritual defeat of the nation. The novel is of particular significance for its artistic portrayal of Kyrgyz folk beliefs, sacrificial rituals, and symbols. These elements function not merely as background details or ethnographic information, but rather as the primary means of revealing profound philosophical reflections on the psychological world of the characters, social cohesion, and the resilience or fragmentation of the national spirit.

*The novel was published in 1971 and represents a vivid example of the artistic depiction of historical truth, synthesizing the experience of Kyrgyz literature through the author's many years of archival research and fieldwork.*

The title of the novel—*The Broken Sword*—is based on one of its most powerful symbolic images. For the Kyrgyz people, the sword is not simply a weapon of war, but a sacred symbol that represents:

- willpower and honor;
- continuity of generations and the hierarchy of relationships between elders and youth;
- the defense of the homeland, justice, and freedom.

In the cultures of Turkic peoples, the sword has traditionally been regarded as a symbol of power, leadership, and bravery. For example, among the Ottomans, the sword appeared in official portraits of high-ranking figures as a representation of authority. Among ancient Scythians and Turkic tribes, the sword was also viewed as a symbol of magical power and protection. As the author himself notes: "*Among the Kyrgyz people there is an expression, 'do not break one's gaze,' 'do not break one's horn'... This novel is about the trampling of the Kyrgyz spirit, about a nation being humiliated on its own land...*"

This symbol runs like a red thread throughout the novel and is closely intertwined with historical events. For instance, in the episode depicting the solemn oath-taking ceremony during the election of Sherali as khan, the sword is revered, while its breaking symbolically represents the spiritual defeat of the nation—"the breaking of its horn." Acts such as making sacrifices with a sword, presenting a sword as a gift, or setting out on a journey with it all reinforce deep reflections on the preservation or loss of national dignity and spirit. In Kyrgyz culture, the sword also occupies a central symbolic role in the epic *Manas*, where the hero Manas never lets go of his sword while fighting enemies—an embodiment of national courage and defense.

Among the Kyrgyz people, animal sacrifice (tülöö, kudayı, aksarbashyl) is an ancient tradition that has endured to the present day through its integration with Islam. Its main purpose is to seek protection from misfortune, healing from illness, or to express gratitude to Allah for blessings received.

Typically, a sheep or another animal is sacrificed, its meat cooked and distributed among relatives, neighbors, and members of the community, while Qur'anic verses are recited and prayers are offered. This ritual is a vivid example of the fusion of pre-Islamic beliefs with Islamic practices.

In the novel, sacrifice is portrayed not merely as a religious act, but as an important social ritual that strengthens social solidarity, collective hope, and confidence in the future. This tradition is especially performed before military campaigns, major undertakings, and moments of ascension to power.

Here, the ritual of **immersing the sword in blood** is performed. According to Kyrgyz folk belief, for a sword to be sharp and invincible, it must be “purified” or “tempered” through sacrificial blood, that is, ritually sharpened. As mentioned above, the act of sacrifice reveals the deep layers of the heroes’ spiritual world: the sword is not merely iron, but a “living” symbol of protecting the homeland, of willpower and justice.

One of the most dramatic episodes in the novel is **human sacrifice** (Abish offering a person as a sacrifice). This scene alludes to the Islamic narrative of the Prophet Ibrahim’s sacrifice of his son, while simultaneously depicting the most extreme form of sacrifice within the ancient nomadic worldview:

“In a single moment, the icy sword... cut the throat of the red-faced young man. Alongside him, the white mare was slaughtered. — *Allahu Akbar!* ... In the path of the One God... In the path of the sultans... In the path of the Chiltons...” [2. <https://uz.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibrohim>].

The ceremony of raising Sherali to the khanate is described as follows:

“On the spotless white felt, drops of blood shimmered like red flowers. Yusuf (Nüzüp) held Sherali under one arm, and Muslimhul under the other, and slowly lifted him over Ashir’s severed head lying on the ground, seating him upon the felt” [3, p. 49].

The **white mare** and **white felt** symbolize purity, blessing, prosperity, and the openness of the path ahead. Among the Kyrgyz and other Turkic peoples, the color white is regarded as sacred; therefore, before military campaigns a white mare was often sacrificed, and during the election of a khan, the ruler was seated on white felt. This motif is also widely found in the epic *Manas*: when Jakyp Bay is blessed with a son, he sacrifices a white mare, opening the way for Manas’s prosperity and good fortune. In the epic, the sacrifice of a white horse demonstrates the harmony between **Tengrist** and **Islamic traditions**.

In the novel, folk beliefs perform the following functions:

1. **Revealing the inner world of the characters** – through religious rituals, their spiritual support, fears, and hopes are made visible.
2. **Creating the spiritual atmosphere of the historical period** – depicting the cultural core of nineteenth-century Kyrgyz society. The novel is based on real historical events, including the invasion of Kyrgyz lands by the Kokand Khanate and the national resistance.
3. **Strengthening national identity** – although spiritual defeat is symbolized through the broken sword, the preservation of folk beliefs signifies the possibility of revival and renewal.

In the novel *The Broken Sword*, **Tölögön Kasymbekov** masterfully portrays folk beliefs and symbols not merely as elements depicting the past, but as the spiritual core, psychological foundation, and condition of social unity of the Kyrgyz people. Sword veneration, sacrifice, and the symbolism of the color white transform the work from a historical novel into an **encyclopedia of Kyrgyz spiritual culture**.

Thus, the writer does not merely depict nineteenth-century historical events, but also reveals the deep roots of national identity and its capacity for renewal even in times of hardship. In this respect, *The Broken Sword* stands as a **classic work of Kyrgyz literature** and remains a powerful testament to the preservation of national spiritual heritage.

### References

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