

The Concept of "Fire" and Azerbaijani Folklore

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Abstract. The concept of "fire" in Azerbaijani folklore is a complex and multi-dimensional symbol with significant cultural, spiritual, and historical meanings. Fire is portrayed as a natural phenomenon and a potent symbol associated with life, death, purification, danger, and protection. The article explores how fire is depicted in Azerbaijani folklore, focusing on its metaphorical and literal representations in myths, fairy tales, proverbs, and songs. Fire's symbolic role extends to its use in rituals, particularly during the Novruz holiday, where it represents renewal, purification, and spiritual protection. The research emphasises fire's protective, purifying, and regenerative functions, examining how it shapes the worldview of the Azerbaijani people. The study also highlights fire's connection to individuals' internal struggles, symbolising destructive and life-giving forces. Through a detailed exploration of fire's role in folklore, this article offers insights into its enduring cultural significance and impact on Azerbaijan's social and spiritual life.

Keywords: concept; fire; Azerbaijani language; folklore; metaphorical mean; cultural significance.

INTRODUCTION

Fire plays a significant role in numerous legends, fairy tales, and folklore examples, both as a natural phenomenon and cultural and religious symbol. This symbol holds real and symbolic meanings in folklore, reflecting a culture where fire is considered a symbol of life and death. The article focuses on fire's protective and purifying functions and its cultural and symbolic importance during the Novruz holiday. Fire affects human life as a natural phenomenon and is recognised as a powerful symbol that shapes people's spiritual and social lives.

The "fire" symbol holds deep and varied meanings in Azerbaijani folklore. As a natural phenomenon and a cultural and religious symbol, it plays an important role in numerous legends, fairy tales, epics, and other folklore examples.

It is noted in the "Dictionary of Turkish-Origin Archaic Words" that the in Azerbaijani language lexical unit "od" once existed in the form "ot" [7, p. 415-416]:

*"Ol ümmid ilən ki, fərmanındadır **otla** dəmür*

*Getdi yüzi suyivi oldı **otı** cümlə kömür (Ş.Səfi. XVI. 290)" [7, p. 415].*

In the Explanatory Dictionary of the Azerbaijani Language, the definition of the synonym "atəş" for the word "od" is presented as follows: "1. Fire; 2. In a metaphorical sense: something that radiates light, a point of light; 3. In a metaphorical sense: passion, enthusiasm, heat; 4. Gunfire or cannon fire." [1, p. 158-159]. The word "alov" (fire) is explained in the same dictionary as follows: "Fire coming from something that is burning." [1, p. 106]. These definitions show the nuanced ways the concept of fire has been understood and expressed in Azerbaijani, literally and metaphorically.

The relevance of this topic is explained by the in-depth analysis of the place of the "fire" concept in Azerbaijani folklore and its symbolic functions in Azerbaijani culture. Throughout history, fire has been an important symbol, natural phenomenon, and force that has shaped people's spiritual and social lives. The role of this concept in folklore and traditions like the Novruz holiday is particularly significant in preserving and promoting folklore and cultural heritage in the modern era. The

continued relevance of fire's protective, purifying, and regenerative functions in our culture makes research in this field especially timely. This article highlights the depth of folklore and the symbolic power of fire in our culture.

In Azerbaijani, lexical units with significant meanings, such as "atəş" (fire), "alov" (flame), "ocaq" (hearth), "yanmaq" (to burn), etc., form the closest periphery of the "fire" concept. The sociocultural load of these lexical units is most evident in folklore examples. Here, both the real and symbolic aspects of fire combine with the main elements of folklore to create rich symbolic depictions. This article will explore the role of the "fire" concept in Azerbaijani folklore, its various layers of meaning, and how it manifests in folklore examples.

METHODS

The methods and materials of this article are primarily based on qualitative and content analysis methods. Relevant folklore examples, folk songs, proverbs, and fairy tales were used to explore the various manifestations and symbolic meanings of the "fire" concept in Azerbaijani folklore. The article also draws on etymological sources such as the Explanatory Dictionaries of the Azerbaijani Language and the "Dictionary of Turkish-Origin Archaic Words." Through these materials, fire's real and metaphorical aspects were explored, with analyses focusing on its significance and functions in folklore and culture. Thus, the methodological approach allows for examining the interconnected areas of language, culture, and folklore.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The symbolism of fire has held great significance in Azerbaijan's ancient culture. Fire is sometimes seen as a symbol of life and, at other times, as a symbol of death. "This symbolism is particularly evident in Zoroastrianism and the folklore examples that emerged under its influence" [4, p. 76]. In Zoroastrianism, fire is considered sacred, and its preservation is paramount. Fire is also closely associated with purification, struggle, and rebirth. In Azerbaijani folklore, accepting fire as an element representing both the beginning and the end of life further enhances its power and significance. For example, "Qılgımdan alov törər" – "From a spark, a flame will arise" (Folk proverb); "Atəşim var, külüm yox, Bülbül oldum gülüm yox" – "I have

a fire, but no ash, I have become a nightingale, but I have no rose" (Folk song), etc.

In folklore examples, it is possible to observe that the lexeme "fire" is used in various meanings. For example,

Mən aşiq, gəldi keçdi,

Günlərim gəldi keçdi.

Yarın odlu baxışı

Sinəmi dəldi keçdi. (Bayati).

(I am in love, it came and went, My days came and went. Lover's fiery gaze Pierced my heart and passed).

Here, the phrase "odlu baxış" ("fiery gaze") is used in the sense of "intense // passionate gaze."

Əzizim, buda məni,

Xəncər al, buda məni.

El-obadan ayırır

Saldılar oda məni. (Bayati)

(My dear, here I am, Take the dagger, here I am. They separated me from the people And threw me into the fire.)

In this example, the phrase "saldılar oda məni" (threw me into the fire) is used in the sense of "falling into difficulty // encountering a problem." It is noted that "the emergence of metaphor is related to the conceptual system of native speakers, their standard ideas about the world, and the evaluative system expressed orally in language. This concerns the image of things in people's minds, not real objects. For example, words with fiery semantics figuratively express the feeling of burning in a person's soul and heart. Fire is considered the source of feelings and the centre of emotional experiences." [5, p. 382].

The concept of fire, frequently encountered in the Bayati genre, expresses meaning more vividly. In some instances, lexemes that belong to the closest periphery of this concept can also be concentrated within a Bayati, creating a repetitive effect that helps to express the meaning more powerfully:

Dağ başında ov budur,

Çaxmaq budur, qov budur.

Sevgi od deyil yana,

Oddan da alov budur [6, p. 142].

(This is the hunt on the mountain top, the spark, and the chase. Love is not just fire, It is fiercer than fire itself.)

or

Əzizim, qandı bağrım,

Hey səni andı bağrım.

Gözümün alovundan,

Od saçdı, yandı bağrım [6, p. 167].

(My dear, my heart is blood, My heart constantly swears by you. From the fire in my eyes, Flames spread, and my heart burned).

In folklore examples, fire sometimes manifests as a terrifying force and sometimes as a life-giving element. For instance, in many fairy tales, fire is associated with "heroism" and "goodness." According to some folk beliefs, *"the flames of fire have the power to protect people from evil spirits, which is why protective rituals were performed around the fire"* [3, p. 112].

Novruz is one of the oldest and most important holidays celebrated in Azerbaijan and other Central Asian countries. This holiday is linked to the beginning of the new year, the revival of nature, and the renewal of life. One of the key elements in the celebration of Novruz is fire. Fire carries a significant symbolic meaning during Novruz, representing the purification, renewal, and protection of nature and the human spirit. One of the traditions associated with Novruz is the preservation of fire. As a part of nature, fire symbolises the continuity and renewal of life. During Novruz, the Azerbaijani people honour the flames of fire, believing in its purifying power. For this reason, at the beginning of Novruz, people jump over the fire, attempting to protect themselves from evil spirits and illnesses.

This tradition also represents both physical and spiritual purification. Fire is seen as a means that burns away all negative environmental influences, bringing health and happiness. In this sense, fire is incorporated into holiday rituals as a symbol of purification, renewal, and protection.

The protective function of fire is another important element of Novruz. It is believed that the flames of fire also protect people from household dangers. At the beginning of the holiday, especially in villages, people light fire at the edges of their homes or carry fire flames inside their houses, attempting to protect themselves from

evil spirits. This ritual also aims to protect their family members from any external danger.

The preservation of fire is not only one of the most important rituals of Novruz but also relates to the renewal of nature. The melting of fire in its flames is associated with the purification of everything and the emergence of a new beginning. These rituals carry nature and life's meaning, starting a new cycle.

The purifying function of fire is very significant during Novruz. Many of the holiday rituals involve practices such as jumping over fire and passing through fiery fields. These rituals' purpose is physical purification, inner cleansing, and spiritual renewal. In Azerbaijani folklore, expressions such as "to burn with fire" or "to wash in fire" signify spiritual and physical purification. This symbolism is also widely spread in folk beliefs. Fire is regarded as a means of purification from bad deeds and spiritual impurity. In many examples of folklore, heroes are forced to pass through fire to cleanse themselves from darkness or evil. During this time, people jump over small bonfires saying *"Ağırlığım, uğurluğum odlara"* (I cleanse my heaviness, my unluck with the fire), wishing to rid themselves of all negativity, illnesses, and difficulties.

In Azerbaijani fairy tales, the "Zumrud bird" (Zümrüd quşu) is a protective symbol of fire. In these tales, the Zumrud bird is mainly symbolic and metaphorical. For example, in the tale "The Story of Malikmammad," after the Zumrud bird leads Malikmammad into the bright world, it gives him a special feather. This feather is a tool that carries the power of "fire" and helps the person overcome difficulties.

The role of the Zumrud bird in the fairy tale and its connection to "fire" primarily manifests symbolically and metaphorically. The actions of the Zümrüd bird reflect the purifying, protective, and life-giving power of fire. The symbolic effect of fire, combined with the bird's intervention in Malikmammad's life and its help, demonstrates both the process of purification and the renewal of life. In this sense, the Zumrud bird combines the forces represented by "fire" in its existence, enabling Malikmammad to overcome difficulties and transition into the bright world.

Fire is also a symbol of danger, rage, and destructive power. In many Azerbaijani fairy tales, the dangers that fire creates for the heroes are analysed. This is particularly evident in fiery

monsters or dangerous creatures. In some tales, the heroes must overcome the negative or evil forces they encounter through fire. In this context, fire also embodies internal anger and wrath. These emotions represent an individual's internal struggle and development, linked to fire's burning and purifying power.

The following points can be noted in the portrayal of fire in language and folklore: *"First, nominative terms directly related to flames are relatively few compared to the lexical layer associated with the burning process. Second, unlike the burning process, fire is an indefinite phenomenon. Both in language and folklore, there is a comparison between natural, celestial, and chthonic fires."* [8, p. 149].

Fire symbolically also represents struggle, the confrontation of opposing forces. For example, in expressions like "fire and water," contradictions represented by these two elements are contrasted, with each symbolising different life principles. When compared to water, fire appears as a powerful and destructive force. This creates purifying, strong, lasting effects on nature and human life.

In Azerbaijani folklore, many examples of fire play a protective role. In villages, especially during winter, fire was used to protect life. The fire was believed to protect the family from evil spirits, keeping the life within the house and its inhabitants safe. Some folklore pieces include motifs such as protecting fire, making sacrifices on fire, or preserving the flames. This shows that fire carries both sacred and protective significance in folklore examples.

"In the "Kitabi-Dede Gorgud" epic, fire is used as a symbol of unity, success, and warning. If a bonfire was lit on a high place, it symbolised a warning and mobilisation; if two bonfires were lit, it signified a call for disaster and battle; and if three bonfires were lit, it symbolised victory and celebration." [2, p. 71].

Thus, in Azerbaijani folklore, the concept of "fire" is analysed as a multifaceted and profound symbol, both as a natural phenomenon and as a part of culture and belief. Fire carries various symbolic meanings, such as life and death, danger and protection, and anger and purification. The different rituals, ceremonies, and cultural practices carried out through "fire" in folklore examples reflect the worldview and relationship of the Azerbaijani people with nature. This symbolism is an essential

part of folklore and a significant aspect of Azerbaijani culture, its deep history, and social structure.

This research explores the concept of "fire" in Azerbaijani folklore, emphasising its symbolic and cultural significance. Fire is depicted as a natural phenomenon and a profound symbol in various myths, legends, and other folklore examples. The article delves into fire's diverse meanings, including its association with life and death, protection and danger, anger and purification. Through its analysis, the article illustrates how fire serves as a powerful symbol that shapes the worldview of the Azerbaijani people, representing both the physical and spiritual realms.

In Azerbaijani folklore, fire is often associated with purification and protection. The article highlights the use of fire in rituals and practices, especially during the Novruz festival, where fire represents renewal and the purification of nature and the human spirit. Fire's role as a protective force, especially in folk beliefs, is also examined, where it is believed to ward off evil spirits and protect households. The concept of "fire" also functions as a means of cleansing negative emotions and physical impurities, symbolising spiritual renewal.

Additionally, the article discusses fire's symbolic role in literature and its deeper connections to Azerbaijani society's cultural and historical context. The use of fire in folklore reflects the natural world and serves as a metaphor for internal struggles, personal growth, and societal values. The article suggests that the symbolic meanings of fire, such as its destructive or life-giving power, continue to resonate in contemporary Azerbaijani culture, reminding the nation's rich heritage and the dynamic relationship between tradition and modernity.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the concept of "fire" in Azerbaijani folklore is a profound and multifaceted symbol deeply rooted in the natural world and Azerbaijani society's cultural, spiritual, and historical fabric. Throughout various folklore examples, fire is portrayed as a powerful force that embodies dualities such as life and death, protection and danger, and purification and destruction. Its symbolic significance extends beyond its physical presence, serving as a metaphor for personal growth, internal struggles, and societal values.

The research highlights the central role of fire in Azerbaijani traditions, particularly within the context of the Novruz holiday, where it is revered as a symbol of renewal, purification, and protection. Fire's ability to physically and spiritually cleanse is deeply embedded in folk rituals and practices, reflecting the community's belief in its transformative power. The connection between fire and spiritual renewal is evident in numerous folklore narratives, where fire becomes a vehicle for heroes to overcome darkness and evil.

By exploring fire's role in Azerbaijani folklore, this research has not only shed light on the historical

and cultural significance of this elemental force but has also demonstrated how the symbolic meanings of fire continue to shape the collective consciousness of the Azerbaijani people. Fire remains an enduring symbol of strength, purification, and continuity, integral to understanding Azerbaijan's ancient traditions and modern cultural expressions. This research contributes to a deeper appreciation of fire's profound impact on the Azerbaijani people's folklore, language, and cultural identity, reinforcing the importance of preserving and reflecting upon these rich traditions.

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