

NATUR WORSHIP IN SIBERIAN SHAMANISM

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During the last few decades animism has escaped the attention of scholars of comparative religion. Animism, however, still represents a very important concept both in the world view and the shamanism of Northern Siberian peoples. In this paper different types of the concept of the soul will be enumerated, and animistic notions of Siberian shamanism will be presented against that background. Special attention will be paid to the different types of shamanic spirit helpers, and to the forms of their representation.

What kind of symbols play what kind of roles in that representation? The answers to that question will lead us to a semiotic understanding of Northern Siberian shamanism. Siberian shamanism, moreover, is involved in the cult of the dead, of ancestors and mountains, and in rituals of animal sacrifice. As a conclusion, one could say that the deepest meaning or message of Siberian animism was to balance man and nature.

Introduction

As it is well known, it was the 19th century English anthropologist, Sir Edward Tylor, who first coined the term "animism" for the earliest period of magico-religious thinking, in his 1871 work "Primitive Culture" Tylor made the distinction between the concepts *soul* and *spirit*, declaring that only human beings had *soul*, while *spirit* was an abstract notion that could be related to a wide spectrum of natural phenomena (Tylor 1871: vol. 2: 194-195). The English scholar was of the opinion that animism must have developed from the dream experience, where people generally feel as if they existed independently of their bodies, flying. In short, the soul take "journeys" outside the body. During such dream journeys they could see dead relatives, friends, or their spirits.

This idea was then adopted by many, especially Russian-Soviet school of history of religion (V. G. Bogoraz, D. Klementz, A. F. Anisimov, F. A. Kudravtsev, S. A. Tokarev, T. M. Mikhailov - see Krader 1978: 194). Since one important element of shamanic lore was *soul-flight*, these Russian researchers, thinking in an evolutionary scheme, believed animism to be a religious-ideological formation predating shamanism (Anisimov 1967: 109-115). S. A. Tokarev, who wrote a comprehensive Marxist-oriented work about the early forms of religion, made the conclusion that Siberian shamanism developed out of animism, refining it in the process - since it follows from a hunting lifestyle to maintain a close relationship with the spirits of hunted animals: this was the task of shaman (Tokarev 1964: 304). Naturally this idea has its antecedents, J. Stadling from Sweden (1912) has already stated that animistic ways of thinking are tightly interwoven with the world-view of shamanism.

Ivar Paulson, who, after his monograph on the soul concepts ("Seelenvorstellungen") in Northern Eurasia, studied the phenomenology of shamanism, and wrote that "shamanism is an animistic ideology, one of the characteristics of which is the use of an ecstatic-visionary technique" (Paulson: 1964: 131). Another distinctive feature of Eurasian shamanism is the dualistic soul concept. According to the Estonian scholar the "free soul," during ecstasy, is able to leave the body, and shamans send this soul to the world of spirits and gods, in other words, this is the type of soul which practices the so-called shamanic soul-flight.

Another prominent scholar of the studies of comparative religion, from Scandinavia, the Swedish Åke Hultkrantz, treated the subject of the images of the soul in several of his studies. I am going to quote a comprehensive article he wrote about soul-dualism in connection with shamanism: "the cases of soul-dualism were clearer in shamanism, due to the intense observations of shamanistic performances... In the majority of cases the free-soul of the shaman sought the free-soul of his client... It was not always a matter of a regular dualism between free-soul and body-souls, where the free-soul of the shaman left in search of a runaway soul and a body-soul remained to keep his life. The record of the diffusion of shamanic and soul-dualism make it evident that soul-dualism had its origins in a hunting culture." (Hultkrantz 1984: 31-34).

During the first year on fifties' Mircea Eliade was completing his work, which, up to his day, counts as a fundamental, classic book (on the life-work of Eliade, a scholar of Rumanian origin, Siikala has given a good survey and appreciation in 1989). He was an adherent of the phenomenological approach, therefore he was mostly interested in a phenomena which gave the whole complex of shamanism its distinctive characteristics: initiatory visions, the shamanic journey to the otherworld, shamanic cosmology and, above all, ecstasy. The title of his book reveals his main idea: *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Eliade 1951, enlarged edition in English 1964). Eliade did not discuss the historical antecedents of shamanism, thus he declines to mention animism, and his characteristic, that certain recent comprehensive works - thought made for the wider public - witch introduce shamanism as a world phenomenon in the framework of "Eliadism", also fail to discuss the formation of shamanism (Perrin 1995, Vitebsky 1995).

As a curiosity in the history of research I would like to mention the first issue of the periodical *Asian Folklore* from 1979, in which several studies were published on the subject of the images of the soul concepts in connection with shamanism (see Kim 1979). That issue published the lectures of an international conference, so one could read about the soul beliefs of certain Indian, Singhalese, Thai, Japanese and Chinese peoples. Unfortunately these articles appeared to be rather like synopses of the lectures delivered at the conference, most of them lacking the *apparatus philologicus*, although many such articles delivering original folklore material would be needed in the comparative studies of the future years.

This is one of the reasons why we are planning to prepare a comprehensive work stretching to several volumes entitled *Encyclopaedia of Uralic Mythologies* (Editors-in-chief: V. V. Napolskikh & A. L. Siikala & M. Hoppál; to be published in the *Ethnologica Uralica* book series) in which we describe and compare the soul concepts of all Finno-Ugrian (Uralic) peoples.

Shamans, as it is well known, play several social roles in their respective societies (e.g. curing of the sick, fortune-telling, or conducting sacrifices etc.), but all of them share the common element that the shamans somehow contact the spirits. L. E. Sullivan put it well, when he said: "Shamans are experts in the movements of the human soul, because they not only control the ecstasy of their own souls but specialise in the knowledge and care for others'souls, as well." (Sullivan 1994).

In this study I am not attempting to describe the way shamans keep the human soul in balance, only to illustrate their relationships to the spirit world, with examples from the mythology of shamanism. Naturally, the relationship to spirits helpers, at least Siberian data seem to bear out that conclusion. One interesting aspect of this is that the final aim of communicating with spirits is the calming of the human soul to insure a spiritual as well as physical-biological balance.

Animistic Mythology in Shamanism

Among peoples with the hunting and fishing lifestyle, the daily interactions with their natural environment formed a unique world-view, the starting point here is that not only human beings, but all the animate and inanimate things of the world also have souls. The belief-system of Siberian peoples thus categorises the knowledge of the world in a sort of "nature-animism" (Paulson 1964). In this form of thinking the environment is of primary importance, in other words: the ecologically-minded mythological world-view provides shamanism with a unique background, or more exactly, it helps us understand the concept of shamanic spirit helpers deriving from this attitude. I am therefore going to quote a few less-known examples from Siberian folklore. One such idea is that of *spirit owners*.

N. A. Alekseev, a prominent specialist of the folk beliefs of Siberian Turkic peoples published his comprehensive monograph in 1980, describing the early forms of religion of these nations, and one chapter of this work, "The Deification of Nature and Elemental Forces" deals with animism. In this chapter he writes about the spirit owners of fire, water, mountains and forests, stating that "...in the consciousness of those who believed in them, the majority of spirit owners totally merged with the things they owned". Names (*aazi*, or in Yakut, *icci*) and the respective natural phenomena were completely identical.

"According to the beliefs of Southern Altaic peoples, every mountain, every lake or river has its own spirit owner, which owns the place, and is in command of the animals and birds living there. It could protect people who lived there or crossed the area. Spirit owners were believed to be able to understand human speech, and the myths associated with them say that, like people, they also had children, and one could obtain their goodwill with prayers, supplications and sacrifices" (Alekseev 1980: 63).

A. Gogolev mentions them in his work on Yakut mythology thus: "According to Yakut beliefs, the *icci* is a unique category of being, present in certain specific objects and natural phenomena as a mysterious inner force. Among the *icci* there is a higher category equal to the gods. These beings do not belong to the categories of either *ayi* or *abasi*. If certain rules are observed, they can be helpful to human beings in various life situations, people can regard them as protectors... For all the *icci* bloodless sacrifices were made. Among the *icci* a special place was accorded to the spirit of Mother Earth, *Aan Doydu iccite*." (Gogolev 1994: 42).

The spirit of Mother Earth was regarded as Important and worthy of a special respect by peoples throughout Siberia (as well as by North American Indians).

Prayer and invocation are special forms of speech acts which do not exist and lose their meaning outside the ritual context. They are validated not only by the text, which, aside from certain phrases, is mostly improvised, but also by being spoken, by the act itself.

"The Shors believe in the existence of mountain spirits (*tag-azi*) and water spirits (*shug-azi*). Every clan had its own clan mountain and its mountain spirit, who protected the members of the clan. Every three years sacrificial ceremonies were held on that mountain. To express their respect, every Shor threw a libation the spirit owner of the mountain or river, when he or she was near the mountain or river... The spirit owner of the waters was imagined as a long-armed naked woman by the Kumandines... The Tuvans used to believe in the spirit owners of the waters. They made an *ovaa* of stones and dry branches for her, too, on the riverbanks, and near the fords. This looked like a hut, and they placed the sacrificial objects in it: stones, rags, horsehair etc. Before crossing the river they usually performed a sacrifice." (Alekseev 1980: 72-73).

Among the Tuvans the cult of springs (*arzhan*), especially that of medicinal springs was intertwined with the cult of the trees growing around the springs. This was especially true of the trees whose growth or shape differed from the usual - for instance, they had a double trunk, or their fronds consisted of branches grown irregularly. Trees of this kind were called "shaman trees." I took a picture of one such tree in Yakutia in 1990 (Hoppál 1995: 227) - if such a tree stood near a spring, under the tree shamans made their ceremonies.

Passers-by usually stopped - and even today, they stop their cars - at these special trees, and place some money, tie a little piece of their clothes or handkerchiefs on its branches, put a comb or some other personal belongings. They attribute special powers to these trees, and they maintain that the trees bring good fortune in travelling, and that they protect people from accidents. This belief is a sign of unconditional trust in the power of nature, of a conviction which supposes the powers of nature to be so strong as to control human destiny as well.

When the Yakut hunter is getting ready to hunt, he turns to the forest spirit: above all he tries to win its favour, therefore he pours some oil on the fire. Then he gets down on his knees, puts his hand over his heart, bows towards the fire and says an *alghis* (a prayer asking for blessings). Having started out he is not allowed to look back.

"Before the start they sometimes hung a sacrifice (*salama*): they stretched a rope between two trees at arm's height, the length of which was "seven little fathoms," on this they hung a hare's pelt, and horsehair taken from the mane of a white horse, and they tied woodpecker feathers on it. This sacrifice was intended for *Bayanay*. They asked for a rich quarry in their prayers performed for the spirit of dark forest. In the old times a white shaman did the ceremony: the shaman of the *ayii* dieted. He poured butter mixed with *q'umis* or sorat on the sacrifice from a *hamiyah* (large wooden ladle). On the occasion of the *alghis* the priest, shouting '*Uruy!*', also sprinkled some *q'umis* on the hunter." (Gogolev 1994: 23).

The Turkic peoples, however, were not the only ones who knew about and respected the spirit owner of forests, so did the hunter tribes living further north.

The Finnish researcher Toivo Lehtisalo visited the Yurak Samoyeds already in 1912, gathering valuable folklore data. Among the forest Yuraks, who belong to the Uralic group of peoples, the existence of an animistic world-view was still obvious in those times. The forest spirit, the *parnee*, for example, is such a category: an invisible, malicious being, who can even kill people. It was believed to be a female being, who lives underground in a decayed tree-trunk, and, according to some accounts, has a human exterior, and possesses wings (Lehtisalo 1924: 41).

Uno Harva prepared a comprehensive study of Finno-Ugrian mythology in the first decades of this century, dedicating several chapters of his work to animistic ideas. In some chapters he described forest and water spirits, the spirits of the weather (sky and wind), mother of fire, and the spirit places of plants and of the Earth (Harva 1927: chapters XI-XV.). Among the Selkups, who live among the river Ob, one can still find animistic beliefs, thus S. M. Malinovskaya (1990) recounts that in order to ensure the success of fishing, one should give a gift or a sacrifice to the spirit owner of the water (*utkim-loz*).

Among the Nenets, who live in Northern Siberia, animistic beliefs are still alive today. This was the subject of M. Ya. Barmich's lecture at a 1990 Helsinki conference, the main theme of which was *Circumpolar and Northern Religions*.

"The Nenets people have always been conscious of the existence of spirits (in Nenets *tadebtso*) living side by side with them. The Nenets are confident that good spirits protect them from evil spirits, and provide them with a fortunate life. Custom and taboo are the two aspects of their spiritual life - positive and negative.

Thus the custom of feeding the fire reveals the traits of a good attitude towards the fire spirit. This custom has survived up to the present time. When sitting down to dinner, a senior person, if not all the persons are present at the dinner, is sure to throw a piece of foodstuff, pour some soup, tea or alcohol to the fire.

The taboos connected with the cult of fire are aimed not to hurt or pollute fire which gives pure warmth and to life property, so that the people are forbidden to pour water on fire hastily, throw any unclean sweepings to the fire, or to spit into the fire. It used to be forbidden to stir up fire with sharp metal objects, otherwise the hostess of fire might be wounded. Women and girls are forbidden to step over the fire, since they are considered unclean and may pollute the fire." (Barmich 1990: 1-2).

The Samoyeds also believed that fire was a living being, notably an old woman. The licking flames of the fire are her movements, and She is the guardian of the tent, who immediately gets angry if someone throws trash or trodden wood shavings, or spits into the fire, or hits it. When children lost their teeth, they told them to throw the teeth into the fire, so that 'Old Grandmother Fire' could give them new ones instead. They were awed by fire, and respected its power so much that their swore by it, saying "May I be devoured by Old Grandmother Fire if I am guilty!" (Lehtisalo 1924: 103).

Among the Turkic peoples of Siberia the Tuvans held the compulsory family holiday "fire-feast," which meant that under the direction of the most powerful shaman they sacrificed a lamb or a calf to the fire. They were feeding the fire with oil and butter, so that then following year the spirit would provide the family members with the health and happiness (Kenin-Lopsan 1993: 31). The Yakuts categorised the spirit owner of fire (*Uat iccite*) among the most revered spirits, elevated to the rank of a deity.

"For the Yakuts of the old beliefs this god was a grey-haired, loquacious, old man in perpetual motion. What he chatters and twaddle's is intelligible only to the few: shamans understand him, also the tiny babies whose ears are still not used to the comprehension of human speech. The fire, burning in the family heart, however, understands brilliantly what is being said and done around him. Hence the warning that it would be dangerous to insult the fire. It was thought of as a living being, wherefore it was not advisable to poke at fire with iron. Housewives always attempted to keep the fire satisfied, and they gave him a piece of everything they cooked or baked. Similarly he got some from the results of a lucky hunting expedition." (Gogolev 1994: 19).

The Tungus of the Far East also personified fire and gave its spirit food and drinks (Tugokulov 1978: 425).

The majority of Uyghurs live today in China. Zhong Jinwen, a researcher of Yellow Uyghur (Yoghur) shamanism, studied the cult of the Sun, the Moon and the heavenly bodies in Uyghur folk tales. As a starting point he stated that Yoghur shamanism is permeated with the idea that everything in nature possesses a soul. One interesting example he brought was the sun. Quoted as follows:

"Sun and fire are originally the one and the same god in the same god in the thinking of primeval man, they become divided into two deities in a later stage of social development only. The sun-god fosters and supports all beings, the fire-god, however, exists for the benefit of man only." (Zhong 1995:).

The Spirit Helpers of the Shaman

As we have seen, the animistic mythology of Siberian shamans, which is full of spirit beings, provides an ideological context to serve as a basis for the formation of the idea of spirit helpers. This whole paper aims to prove that point.

Two things follow from animism as a world view: one is the ideology of totemism, the other is the idea of helping spirits. I am not discussing totemism in the present paper, because I have already given analysis of the interface of shamanism and totemism in an earlier one (Hoppal 1975).

M. Eliade has already pointed out the central role of spirit helpers, which can even become the shaman's alter ego. Notably, that is how the shaman's need for identification with the spirit helpers can be understood. In this case the shaman ventures to the soul-flight in the shape of the animal. All comprehensive studies mention these animal-like helpers (see Perrin 1995: 38-39; Vitebsky 1995: 66).

"...spirit guides are perceived as crucial to the shaman's resolve and power - literal embodiments of his psychic and magical strength.

There are two basic types of spirit guide. Firstly there are spirits which are substantially under the shaman's control and which serve as his familiars. But there are also other spirits - though of more as guardians or helpers - who are available when he needs to call on their aid. These may be minor deities, or the spirits of deceased shamans: entities who maintain a certain independence in their particular realm, and who are not automatically subject to the control of the shaman. Siberian shamans generally have animal helpers like bears, wolves and hares, or birds like geese, eagles and owls. Yakuts, for example, view bulls, eagles and bears as their strongest allies, preferring them to wolves or dogs - the spirits of lesser shamans." (Drury 1994: 27-28).

The idea of spirit helpers of an animal shape can be supposed to derive from its ancient character, from the age when for human beings animals represented both idols and inscrutable force, which they could only scarcely control, and then only with the help of magic. The era goes back to the Palaeolithic, when animals were generally looked upon as superior and sacred, which is why they were portrayed with preference in ancient petroglyphs, rock art and cave paintings. Human figures - representing the first shaman or magical - appeared only later (see Hoppal 1995: 37; Vitebsky 1955: 28-29). It is therefore perfectly natural that shamans wanted to identify themselves with powerful, strong and intelligent animals.

Shamans, however, possessed not only animal helpers, since it follows from animism that all phenomena of nature can serve as spirit helpers. Even today, one of the most crucial problems of anthropology is how far a researcher is able to penetrate the culture being under examination, how much he/she is able to comprehend the world view and the language of a given culture. Language skills of native level are of utmost importance in the examination of mythology and, within that, soul beliefs.

Luckily, in Siberia today we can find many *native* ethnographers and folklorists working, who publish authentic data and descriptions. Such is M. Kenin-Lopsan, an expert of Tuvan shamanism, who is Tuvan origin.

Kenin-Lopsan differentiated among five categories of shamans, starting from the Tuvan belief that only persons inheriting shamanhood can become true shamans. Kenin-Lopsan categorised Tuvan shamans in the following five groups, according to the origins of their powers:

1. Shamans who directly descend from previous shamans, or shaman ancestors. It is noteworthy that these shamans called upon their ancestors or mentioned their abodes in their abodes in their invocation before their rituals.
2. Shamans who originate themselves from earth and water spirits (in Tuvan: *cher sug öazinden hamnaan hamnar*). The members of this group have obtained their shamanic powers from the host spirits of water and earth. The existence of these is without doubt connected to the animistic beliefs of the local Turkic peoples, since one of the characters of animistic mythology was *Yer-Shub*, the God of Water and Earth.
3. The members of the third group descend from the sky, their name was *tengri boo* (sky shaman). They had a relationship with rainbow: it related powers to them, or it gave a sign for them to perform their shamanic rituals. Shamans in this category chanted in their songs about various natural phenomena - storms, thunder and lightning; what is more, a man struck by lightning was to become a really powerful shaman. We can suppose that through their animistic spirit helpers this group of Tuvian shamans was responsible for the weather.
4. Shamans originating from the evil spirit called *albis* (albistan hamnaan hamnar). This evil spirit, which can manifest either as a man or a woman, steals the soul of the shaman-to-be, who falls ill with a really serious sickness (for example, epilepsy or temporary insanity). If he/she gets cured, such a shaman will be called a "sexless shaman" (*uk chok hamnar*). This category contained some very powerful shamans.
5. The last group also acquired abilities from evil spirits, from a devil-like spirit called *aza*. This kind of shaman always invites his/her spirit helpers to the session to fight sickness (spirits of sickness). It would seem that fighting diseases was the chief function of this group of shamans. (Kenin-Lopsan 1993: 1-5).

The activities of the "free-spirit" of the shaman are made in accordance with the various animal shapers of the spirit helpers. This means that during the trance, the soul flight, as fish they would swim to the underground waters, to the domain of the dead, as birds they would soar to the sky gods of the Upper World, while in the form of reindeer stags or bulls they would fight other shamans'spirit helpers or evil spirits on the ground.

The helpers of Tungus - Nanai and Udekhe - shamans, as I have confirmed drink my own field work - are members of the family, and influential shamans strive to collect all the spirits that belonged to other family members, relatives and earlier shamans to serve and strengthen themselves. Among the shamans of the Oroch people there were some who had as many as fifty such spirit helpers (Qui Pu 1989).

Buryat shamans formed a very intimate relationship with their spirits helpers, as we learn from R. Hamayon's interpretation - they could even enter into sexual relationships. The whole shamanic session, with its increasing speed of drumming, consist of symbolic motions altogether comparable to sex (Hamayton 1995: 454-491).

Helping spirits and the symbolic meanings attached to them lead us to a hitherto quite neglected field, towards something we could call the semiotics of shamanism.

Here we should begin with the well-known fact that in a culture everything can be understood as a sign, according to the theories of ethnosemiotics (Hoppal 1996:). We live in the world of signs and symbols, and this has always been the case with religious phenomena, and Siberian shamanism is no exception to this. We may declare that all the paraphernalia and ceremonies of shamanic rituals have been symbolic. Let us quote first Wilhelm Radloff, the linguist and traveller of the last century, who visited the lands of the Altaic Turks, and published his travel notes under the title *Aus Siberien*, in which a particularly rich description of shamanic ritual appears, beginning with the human-shaped spirit owner of the drum:

"Inside the drum, on the longitudinal axle of the frame there is a grip shaped like a stick, usually representing a man standing with outstretched hands, who is called the master owner of the drum (*tüingür asi*). A round head is carved onto the inner end of the handle, with button-shaped eyes on the head, with an iron stick symbolising the hands. On this and the handle red or blue ribbons were attached, which symbolised the ancestors of the shaman, recalling their memory." (Radloff 1884: 31).

The enlivening of the drum was followed by the first element of the ritual - Radloff's authentic description tells the story of a horse sacrifice - the invocation of the spirit helpers. Almost all the deities and spirit beings of the shamanistic pantheon are invited, "because without their help the shaman would be unable to make the journey, which is done during the ritual in the Upper World of the sky" (Radloff 1884: 31).

The shaman's costume was in its totality as well as in its details a carrier of symbols throughout Siberia (Hoppal 1995: 108-121). Uno Holmberg-Harva (1922) perfectly summed up the main types, when he stated that types of 'bird', 'reindeer' and 'bear'-costumes could be differentiated. In his opinion all kinds of shamanic costumes in all their constituent parts represented whatever real or imagined animal was regarded as the helper of the shaman, which, through its powers and abilities gave supernatural powers to the shaman who wore the costume. All these ideas gain their explanation from the animistic roots of shamanism (Alekseev 1984: 275).

In the case of Tuvan shamanism, a really powerful shaman never worked without his/her drum and costume, only weaker shamans relied solely on metal mirrors (*küzüngü*), or Jew's harp (*khomuz*) (Kenin-Lopsan 1993). While in these case of Tuvans the presence or absence of an object could signify the symbolic power of the shaman, among the Yakuts it defines two opposing categories of shamans.

Less well known is A. M. Zolotarev's monograph (1964) on the dualistic social structure and the similarly dualistic mythological structures of Siberian peoples. He quotes data from Yakut shamanism, where the main accessory of black shamans was the gown, while the symbol of white shamans was the drum. White shamans did their rituals in the daytime, while black ones chose dark nights without the moon for theirs. White shamans served the sky spirits, the black shamans chose dark-coloured animals.

It is obvious, that this series of mutually opposing symbols, which also explain each other, from a coherent world-view. This world-view means a way of thinking, or to use an appropriate expression coined by Juha Pentikainen, "a grammar of mind" (Pentikäinen 1995: 266).

In language we put words into an order with the help of grammar, we build a world from words to create meanings. In other words, we are conscious of the meaning of things from their mutual relationship. Understanding comes from revealing the inherent interdependence of things.

Beliefs in spirits in animism and in shamanic symbolism mutually suppose each other. I am going to add a few more examples to the ones we have seen before in order to shed some light on the real message of this ancient way of thinking, because it has a meaning for us as well. Namely, if everything in nature has a spirit (or soul), then we ought to behave in a way so that we avoid hurting, insulting, or polluting them.

A characteristic attitude of protecting and not harming Nature is revealed in the belief system and taboos of the Todja living in Tuva, described by N. A. Alekseev in his monograph on the religions of the Siberian Turkic nations:

"According to the belief of the Todja Tuvans even big rivers and lakes have their spirit owners, which appear to people in the form of women only. They performed sacrifices to these before fishing: they tied a *calama* on the tree near the river or lake, or sprinkled some tea or milk on the bank. According to their beliefs, every *arzhan* (medicinal spring) has its own spirit owner. The people who went there prayed to the spirit of the medicinal waters, making supplications that they would be cured at least for a year or two. Around the *arzhan* hunting was forbidden, because all the animals and birds there were regarded as the property of the spirit owner. It was also an obligatory rule to avoid polluting the water." (Alekseev 1980: 78-79).

The message is clear: it is our moral duty to maintain the balance of the natural order. Let us take another example: the nature philosophy of a tungus tribe from the Far East was thus characterised by a Russian scholar:

"A clear expression of the animistic attitude to nature was the hunting rite whose vestiges still make themselves felt in practically all areas populated by Evenki and Evens. The hunting cult of the Tungus was based on the following premise: to kill animals, birds, fish, and to destroy trees in order to obtain food, clothing, fire, etc. is not contrary to nature and does not hurt it. What is contrary to nature and hunting is useless, senseless waste of natural resources..." (Tugolukov 1987: 420).

Since everything has a soul (spirit), it should not be endured - that is, it would be senseless to do so, because it would result in retribution. Exactly this rule was observed in former times by another Tungus people, the Nanai, who live along the river Amur.

"In traditional Nanai society the unit of man and nature was regulated by the law of reflection or 'boomerang' (in Nanai *amdori*)... Centuries old observations led the Nanais to the conclusion that it is impossible to torture someone without being punished afterwards... This self-regulating system of interdependence between man and nature was kept through centuries, and maintained. At present this interdependence takes different shapes and people have almost stopped being conscious of it... Old people tell that some destruction in the spirit world upset the balance of Nature." (Bulgakova 1992: 25-27).

I think the message of these sentences - which is ethnographic data at the same time - is quite clear: it is a program for a new, ecologically conscious animism (*eco-animism*) - for the protection of the environment. Unfortunately I have seen with my own eyes, while doing field work among the Nanai, how much injury the landscape sustained, how polluted the dignified river was, thought still rich in fish, and how defenceless people could be, when they are left to fend for themselves, deprived of their traditions.

It is apparent, then, that an *ethnohermeneutical* (Hoppal 1992) understanding of shamanism can lead to the revelation that the belief systems of Siberian peoples, their mythological world-view and their practice of shamanism, like a giant reservoir or refrigerator, have not only conserved the ideas of animism (Gemuyev et alii 1989: 136-137), but also a message valid up to this day, a message has been serving the protection of the environment from the most ancient times until today.

The message is: balance has to be maintained in all respects - and this is typically a shaman's task. This is why we agree with Nevill Drury's statement: "Shamanism is really an applied animism." (Drury 1898: 5).

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