



# **GESER**

**THE BURYAT HEROIC EPIC**



**Translated by  
Ye. Khundaeva**

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**Geser. The Buryat heroic epic**

«Издательские решения»

**Khundaeva Y.**

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The book contains the text of the English translation of the unique epical monument of the Buryat people “Abai Geser the Mighty” written down from one of the gifted Buryat story-tellers Manshud Imegenov by a well-known expert of the Buryat folklore Ts. Jamtsarano in 1906. Its published variant (Abai Geser khubun, Moscow, 1995) was consulted. The translation, commentary and articles are completed by Ye. Khundaeva.

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# **Geser**

## **The Buryat heroic epic**

*Translator* Ye. Khundaeva

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The book contains the text of the translation to the English language of the unique epical monument of the Buryat people “Abai Geser the Mighty” written down from one of the gifted Buryat epic-tellers Manshud Imegenov by an outstanding expert of the Buryat folklore Ts. Jamtsarano. Consideration is given to the general characteristics and contents, the epical heroes, the cults and rituals, the traditions and customs, the natural phenomena and some other issues. It is argued that the rudiments or the first lines that gave the beginning to the text of the present “Geser” epic appeared in the earlier times when there were no religions, there were only some cults and beliefs wholly based on the observations of the natural phenomena. The author of the epic “Geser” is the common folk known as the Buryats. The hints concerning the religions were incorporated in the text much later. The manuscripts and block-prints in the Old-Mongolian script are briefly discussed.

The book is intended for the experts in folklore, literature, cultural and religious studies, ethnography and all those interested in the spiritual culture of the Buryat people.

## Preface

In 1906 one of variants of the Buryat epic “Geser” was recorded by Ts. Zh. Zhamtsarano from a well-known Buryat rhapsode Manshud Imegenov (Emegenov) in the Kukunut ulus (now the Ekhirit-Bulagat district, Irkutsk province). The epic shows how Geser was sent to the Earth by the Tengris – the celestial deities. He performs his heroic deeds for the people’s happiness and peace. The epic depicts the mythological level of consciousness. One of the best folklore traditions of the Buryat people, the heroic epic of the mighty hero-bator and liberator of the whole world from all evil is a wonderful creation of the gifted epic-tellers – uligershins who came from the common people and partook of the rich spiritual and world view heritage of their people and expressed it with help of the magic of word.

Many people have the fascinating tales narrating of the ideals of kindness and fairness. These are the following: the Uzbek “Alpamysh”, the Kyrgyz “Manas”, the Turkmen Gyor-ogly; the Kalmyck “Jangar”, the Anglo-Saxon “Beowulf”, the French knights’ novel ‘Tristan and Isolda’, the Karel and Finnish ‘Kalevala’, the Evenki Nimngakans, the Sakha-yakut ‘Nyurgun-bootur’, ‘Meldiu the Mighty, etc. All of them sing glory to life and beauty, kindness and fairness, common sense and wisdom of men, their struggle for the highest ideals, happiness, love and prosperity. The Buryat Geseriade is a unique creation of the Buryat people, it’s very big and surpasses in size the epics of many other peoples. It is sometimes called the Iliade of Central Asia. The Geseriade is spread on the vast territory from the tropical Ganges, a river in North India and Bangladesh flowing from the Himalayas into the cape of Bengal, to the cold Amur in North-East Asia; from the sunlit Yellow river in East China to the cool Lena in East Siberia.

## Part 1. The buryat heroic epic “Geser”

One of the best folklore traditions of the Buryat people, the heroic epic of the mighty hero-bator and liberator of the whole world from all the evil Geser is a wonderful creation of the gifted epic-tellers or uligershins who came from the common people and partook of the rich spiritual heritage of their own people.

Many people have the fascinating tales narrating of the ideals of strength, kindness and fairness, devotion to one’s motherland and its defense. One can mention some of them: the Kalmyck “Djanganr”, the Evenki nimngakans, the Sakha-yakut “Nyurgun-bootur”, the Kazakh “Кобланды батыр”, the Uzbek “Alpamysh”, the Kyrgyz “Manas”, the Turkmen “Gyor-ogly”, the Anglo-Saxon “Beowulf”, the Greek “Iliada”, the Karel and Finnish “Kalevala” and many others.

All of them sing glory to life and beauty, kindness and fairness, common sense and wisdom, the struggle of the people for the highest ideals, happiness and prosperity.

The Geseriade is a unique creation of the Buryat people, it’s very big and surpasses in size the epics of many other peoples. The Geseriade is spread on the vast territory from the tropical Ganges in North India and Bangladesh flowing from the Himalayas into the cape of Bengal, to the cold Amur in North-East Asia; from the sunlit Yellow river in East China to the cool Lena in East Siberia. The heroic epic of the Buryat people narrates of the noble deeds of Geser liberating the people from the evil, of his battles with the monsters preventing the people from living in peace and harmony. Not infrequently those monsters- mangadkhais personified the powerful, threatening forces of Nature that were beyond understanding of the common folk. They were quite unaware of their origin and the cause for their being merciless. Therefore those powerful forces were taken as, say, Gal-Nurman Khan who was the symbol of one of the prime elements – the Fire, the oppressive heat and drought or Loir Lobsogoldoi who was the personification of another prime element, the Water, the flood and overflow that badly damaged and injured the people, animals and plants. One could add here the monster Orgoli who was taken as Master of the thick forests and could deprive the hunters of their game or sometimes took up their lives. Then there was Shereem Minata khan with an iron whip and a pig iron thigh who possibly symbolized the starting point of the blacksmith shop, the first steps in mastering the art of forging. The sparks and flames coming from the glowing incandescent metal were perceived by the ancient forefathers of the Buryats as a threatening iron whip which might burn or dazzle. One might as well recall the epical devil Arkhan who wanted to swallow the Sun and the Moon and plunge the Earth into the darkness. This might be the symbolical representation of the Sun and the Moon eclipse in the perception of the ancient Buryats. Geser also fights with the alien tribes who threatened the peaceful life of his kinsmen. In the epic those are the Sharaldai Khans. The heroic and fair Geser-bator fights with those evil forces.

On the other hand, the Buryat epic sings glory to the same natural prime elements. Not only do those forces of nature harm the people but they do them a lot of good. Man could not get on without the fire, water, gifts of the thick forests including the wood, plants, game, etc. Man realized it far too well. He felt that the fire, water, woods, stone, metal and the like possessed the positive qualities too. They helped him survive. There was more favourable in them than negative. So he worshipped them, took them to be sacral. Hence there were many cults, that (*здесь: культ*) of the Sky, for example, though it sent down to the Earth the thunderstorm and lightning, heavy rain and floods, etc. There was the cult of the Sun and the Moon which is closely connected with the light, heat and fire. One cannot but mention the cult of the Water, lakes and rivers, as well as the cult of the Master of the taiga (the thick forest) that provided the people with the food and wood. There were many other cults. Since there were the sacral cults there certainly were the cult rituals, the sacral ceremonies which were to persuade the divinities in charge of the natural forces help the people survive and protect

them from the evil spirits. Each hardship in life was thought to be directly connected with the unkind spirits whom it was needed to keep away with the help of the deities.

This double nature of the earthly and cosmic elements interfering with the life of the Man was the reason for the appearance of the numerous pantheons of the gods, sky-dwellers or divinities. They had special names and were in charge of the specific meteorological and other phenomena. Naran Gerel tengri (the deity of the Sunlight) was in charge of the sunny days, Oyor Sagan tengri (the white bottom sky) was in charge of the cloudless weather. The following divinities come the first among the rest of the Heavens according to their role and status: Yekhe Ekhe tengri (Great Mother the goddess, the eldest goddesses Manzan Gurme and Mayas Khara. One could also mention Esege Malan tengri (the bald-headed or cloudless Sky) whose supreme sacredness prevented him from being active and in reality he was too quiet and idle. Then there come Khormusta tengri, Atai Ulan tengri, Zayan Sagan tengri (The White Creator, who represent the older generation of the divinities.

The sense and cult perception of the world made the Buryat people depict the epical personages either as men with some extraordinary features (the anthropomorphous creatures) or the animals with the exaggerated grotesqueness (the zoomorphous creatures or just the mixed types bearing the features both of the human being and the animal (the mixmorphous creatures). One can understand why it was so. The powerful forces excited fear, so that the people gave those inexplicable phenomena like the lightning or the space and time some fantastic mysterious coloring.

As a consequence the Buryat tales give the exaggerated grotesque fantastic descriptions of the personages irrespective of their being either positive or negative. Some are horrible, ugly and fearful whereas the others are the ideals of beauty, strength and generosity. The former are quite fear-exciting with the many eyes, many heads, sharp claws and teeth covered with the snakes, blowing out the flame and sparks. The latter are well-built, strong and slender, handsome and attractive, kind and open-handed.

The Geseriade, a well-known epical work of the Buryat people, was in the focus of the scholars in Europe and Russia in the course of almost two hundred years. Most prominent are the two narrative traditions of the Buryat epic of Geser, they are the Ekhirit-Bulagat and the Unga variants. The former is considered to be an archaic one whereas the latter dates back to a later period. There are still the other variants of the same heroic epos, e.g. the Khorinsk variant which has been studied least of all up to now. The interest in the epic which is the cultural heritage of the Buryats has increased. Many talented investigators made contribution to the study of this monumental creation of the Buryat nation. The various narrative traditions and the historical and ethnographical background were studied by Ts. Damdinsuren, A.I.Ulanov, N.O.Sharakshinova, M.P.Khomonov, S.Yu.Nekludov, S.Sh.Chagdurov, E. A. Ulanov, B.S.Dugarov, D.A.Burchina and many other investigators.

## **The Buryat heroic epic of Geser: the general characteristics**

The heroic epic of the Buryat people “Geser” narrates of the noble deeds of Geser liberating the people from the evil, of his battles with the monsters that would not let people live in peace and harmony. Not infrequently those monsters-mangadkhais personified the powerful, threatening forces of Nature. They were quite unaware of their origin and the cause for their being quite merciless.

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On the other hand, the Buryat epic sings glory to the same natural prime elements. Not only do those forces of nature harm the people but they do them a lot of good. Man could not do without the fire, water, gifts of the thick forests including wood, plants, game, etc. Man realized it too well. He felt that the fire, water, wood, stone and the like, possessed the positive qualities too. They helped him survive. So he worshipped them, took them to be sacral. Hence there are many cults, for example, that of the Sky, though it sent down to the Earth the thunderstorm and lightning, heavy rain and flood. There was also the cult of the Sun and the Moon which is closely connected with the cult of the light, heat and fire. One cannot but mention the cult of the water, lakes and rivers, as well as the cult of the Master of the taiga that provided the people with food and wood. There were many other cults.

Since there were the sacral cults there certainly were the cult rites, the sacral ceremonies which were to defend the man from the evil spirits. Each hardship in life was thought to be directly connected with the unkind spirits whom it was needed to keep away with the help of the deities. This double nature of the earthly and cosmic elements interfering with the life of the man was the reason for the emergence of the pantheons of the gods and divinities. They had the special names and were in charge of the specific meteorological and the other phenomena. One could mention Naran Gerel tengri (the deity of the Sunlight), who was in charge of the sunny days or Oyor Sagan tengri (the white bottom sky) who was in charge of the cloudless weather.

The following divinities come the first among the rest of the Heavens according to their role and status: Yekhe Ekhe tengri (Great Mother the goddess), the eldest goddesses Manzan Gurme and Mayas Khara, Esege Malan tengri [the bald-headed or cloudless Sky] whose supreme sacredness prevents him from being active and in reality he is too quiet and idle that careless Khormusta tengri. Then there comes Atai Ulan who represents the older generation of the divinities, Zayan Sagan tengri (The White Creator, etc.).

The sensory and cult perception of the world made the Buryat people depict the epical personages either as men with some extraordinary features, i.e. the anthropomorphic creatures or animals with the exaggerated grotesqueness, i.e. the zoomorphic creatures or just the mixed types bearing the features both of the human being and animal, i.e. the mixmorphic creatures. The powerful

forces of Nature excited the fear and shock. The inexplicable phenomena like the lightning or the thunder obtained some fantastic mysterious coloring.

As a consequence the Buryat tales give the exaggerated grotesque fantastic descriptions of the personages irrespective of their being either positive or negative. Some are ugly, horrible and fearful whereas the others are the ideals of beauty, strength and generosity. The former are quite fear-exciting with the many eyes, many heads, sharp claws and teeth covered with the snakes, blowing out flame and sparks. The latter are well-built, strong and slender, handsome and attractive.

The study of the epic of Geser started with the publication of the texts including the texts of the shortened variants of the chapters, translations and scientific recordings of the epic. In the period to follow one can mention a more purpose-oriented, scholarly and systematic collection of the folklore pieces. With this in view quite a few folklore expeditions followed. S.Sh. Chagdurov made a contribution to its study by a number of his books. In the 80s of the last century the female personages, the epical genres, the various oral traditions were studied (S.S. Bardarkhanova, E.M. Kuzmina, D.D.Gomboin, S. Yu. Nekludov). The study of the Mongolian version of the “Geser” saga, particularly of over sixty manuscripts and xylographs of the written version of “Geser” in the Old Mongolian script was carried out (E. O. Khundaeva). In 1995 published in the academic edition “The epic of the Euroasian peoples” was “Abai Geser the Mighty” which was written down from the epic-teller Manshud Imegenov (Emegeev) by a well-known scholar Ts. Zh. Zhamsarano in 1906. In 1995 the book “The Geseriade of the western Buryats” was completed by D.A. Burchina, who gave a brief account of the various versions of the Buryat epic of Geser. In 1999 the two books by E.O. Khundaeva were published, one of them being “The Buryat epic of Geser: the symbols and traditions”, the other “The Buryat epic of Geser: the ties and the poetical style”. Both of them are devoted to the problems of the symbolic nature of the epopee, the cult rituals, the everyday customs and habits, the language and style. In 2015 the book entitled “The Geseriade: the Buryat epic and the Mongolian written story” was published by E. Khundaeva and Ch. Erdyneeva.

In the Buryat and Mongolian epic of Geser there is a persisting idea of closeness, coherence, unification of man and nature which has been of great importance in all times, for the alternative to it might be neglecting all the laws and regularities of nature. At present there are the attempts at the ecological revival of the old traditions, rituals, holding festivals that evidences of the emotional loving attitude towards nature. A persistent necessity of waking up in the people of all the positive which had been accumulated by the ancestors, a respectful attitude towards one’s own culture and resulting from it self-education and the spiritual growth. This all presupposes a true recognition of the other cultures which cease to be alien in that case. This involves a two-fold task, to excite interest in the world civilization through cognizing one’s own.

## On the study of the “Geser” heroic epic

The manuscript “Abai Geser khubun” (Abai Geser the Mighty) is kept in Ulan-Ude in the archives of the Buryat folklore pieces in the collections of the Center for the Manuscripts and Block Prints at the Buryat Scientific Center which is a part of the Siberian Department (the city of Novosibirsk) of the Russian Academy of sciences (Moscow). It is well known all over the world among the orientologists, and its prestige among the scholars is ever growing. It is one of the richest repositories of the oriental heritage which attracts lots of the experts from the various countries. It has the ties with the scientific organizations and workers throughout the world. There are a lot of the foreign guests visiting or working in its richest archives. It is of the innovational nature and well equipped. The workers of the Centre also keep close ties with the scholars from many countries. They go on expeditions and business trips across the world and complete the joint projects. Very many international scientific forums take place in its assembly halls. It has got the international recognition and is making a good contribution to the further development of the oriental science.

In 1776 P.S. Pallas gave the first information in Russia concerning the epic “Geser”. B. Bergmann rendered the contents of the two chapters from the Kalmyck version of the tale of Geser (1804). J. I. Schmidt re-edited in the Old-Mongolian script the so-called (так-называемый) Peking version of 1716 consisting of the seven chapters [1836], and in three years he published its translation in German [1939]. S. A. Kozin published the translation of “Geser” to Russian [1935—36]. A.M. Pozdnev in 1896 published the rendering (пересказ) of a Kalmyck version with the translation in Russian [1896]. G. N. Potanin gave the rendering of a Buryat version [1981, 1883]. He then published in prose the Tibetan and Buryat versions of “Geser” [1893]. M. N. Khangalov wrote down from the epic-tellers the variants of the Buryat version and published their renderings (пересказ, переложение) in Russian in the so called “Balagan collection” [1903, 1959].

One should take note of the fact that in 1909 an English traveler J. Curtin published the three variants of “Geser” making use of his notes [1909]. One can find among them the abridged tale of Geser written down from the epic-teller M. Imegenov. This curtailed variant has some passages which differ it from the full recording made from the same epic-teller by Ts. Zhamtsarano in 1906. One should bear in mind that the texts in J. Kurtin’s book present the result of the double translation. At first the text was translated from Buryat to Russian by V. Mikhailov on the request of J. Kurtin. Then it was translated from Russian to English, therefore they present in fact a prosaic rendering of some motives of the epic but certainly they cannot be taken as the precise recording of the epic performed by the epic-teller.

On the contrary, the records made by Ts. Zhamtsarano are of great academic interest. In the first and second issues of the second volume of “The patterns of the folklore of the Mongolian tribes” one can find the tales “Abai Geser khubun”, “Oshor Bogdo” and “Khurin Altai” written down from a story-teller M. Imegenov [1930, 1931]. Ts. Zhamtsarano accompanied his records with the comments, the characteristics of the epics, the peculiarities of their performing art. The epic-teller M. Imegenov was born in 1849 into a poor peasant’s family in the village of Kukunut. He had a special gift for story-telling. Ts. Zhamtsarano wrote: “When the rhapsode performs the uliger, he puts the pure water near him to have it time from time, leans back, half closes his eyes and gets absorbed in the atmosphere of his epical poem and begins to sing in a drawn-out, melodious manner being carried away while as if drawing one picture after the other with a surprising calmness and impassivity despite his being inspired and taken away. The listeners echo him whenever necessary” [Obraztsy, 1930]. (Translated by Ye. Khundaeva).

The folklore experts S. P. Baldaev, A. K. Bogdanov, G. D. Sanjeev, K. A. Khadakhane, K. B. Baginov, A. I. Shadaev, I. N. Madason, D. D. Khiltukhin, N. G. Baldano, R. F. Tugutov, D. A. Alexeev, N. O. Sharakhshinova and the others wrote down the tales of Geser in all the districts

of Buryatia. They wrote down the epics from the celebrated (знаменитый) story-tellers of the 20—30-s of the 20 century.

At present in the Center for the Oriental Manuscripts and Block-prints at the Institute for the Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan studies of the Siberian Department, the Russian Academy of sciences, the collection of the epics (uliger) contains over one hundred authentic works among which presented most richly is the epic of Geser. There are about ten variants of “Geser”. The records were made in different years in such districts of the Irkutsk province (oblast’) as Ekhirit-Bulagat, Bokhan, Osinsk and Nukut. The epic-tellers were M. Imegenov, A. Vasiliyev, P. Petrov, P. Dmitriyev, P. Tushemilov, N. Ivanov, P. Stepanov, A. Baldakshinov, B. Zhetukhaev, A. Toroyev and the others.

The academic studies and the texts of the heroic epics are published beginning with the 1950-s. One can mention a fundamental study completed by a Mongol scholar Ts. Damdinsuren [1957]. He made a comparative study of the Mongol, Buryat and Tibetan versions of the epic. The French scholar R. – A. Stein completed a study of the various aspects of the Tibetan Geseriade [1959]. The Hungarian scholar L. Lorincz studied the Mongol and Buryat epics, particularly “Geser” [1978—79]. The issues of the epical heritage of the Mongols and Buryats were studied by the scholars in such countries as Japan (K. Tanaka), France (R.-A. Stein, R. Hamayon), Germany (W. Heissig, C. Sagaster).

The Ekhirit-Bulagat variant of the Buryat version of the “Geser” epic written down by Ts. Zhamtsarano in 1906 from the epic-teller Manshud Imegenov was published in Buryat in the academic transcription in St.Petersburg in 1930. In 1961 its second publication with the translation to Russian was completed by M. P. Khomonov. Then in 1969 it was again published with a new translation to the Russian language by N. O. Sharakshinova.

Since that time about fifty years passed. During those years a great progress was made in the study of the heroic epic of the Buryats. The academic level of the preparation of the texts for publishing improved as well as the translating techniques to Russian. The book “Abai Geser khubun” (1995) was prepared taking into account the new requirements. The Buryat authentic text, its translation to Russian, the commentaries and the academic articles are in essence a new academic interpretation of the epical monument in its unique and artistic originality taking account of the new requirements concerning the edition of the epics.

But it hasn't been translated to English although it might be the prerequisite (предпосылка) of its becoming known to a wider public. Therefore a decision was taken to translate the epic to the English language. The English translation of the Ekhirit-Bulagat variant of the Buryat version of “Geser” written down by Ts. Zhamtsarano in 1906 from Manshud Imegenov was recently completed by Ye. Khundaeva. The present English translation of the epic of Geser is made on the basis of the manuscript (Inv. No 1) of the collection of the Buryat folklore (The Center for the Oriental Manuscripts and Block Prints, The Institute for the Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan studies, SB RAS, Ulan-Ude) which is entitled “Abai Geser khubun” and its published variant (Abai Geser khubun, Moscow, 1995).

## A brief summary of the contents of Geser

Those were the remotest times when there were neither celestial gods nor sun, stars. Instead of the sky there was some misty haze and below there was only water. The Great Mother the Goddess was all alone. And she decided to create a world and fill it with some creatures. For the beginning she made an earth from a piece of clay brought from water by the duck created by her earlier and put it on back of the turtle. Then there appeared the mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes; moreover, there appeared the beasts, birds and fish. The goddess makes the sun and the moon. From the rays of the sun and the light of the moon she gives birth to the two daughters Manzan Gurme and Mayas Khara who afterwards become the foremothers of the kind western and the evil eastern sky-dwellers or deities-tengris. The goddesses's daughters had then many children and grandchildren who were fond of having merry open-air parties and festivals with the games – naadan. On the first day of the naadan there were the wrestlers' competitions, on the second – those of the archers, on the third day – the horse races, on the fourth day the people devotedly listened to the singers, storytellers and epic-tellers – uligershins, on the fifth day there were the contests of the sages. In a word, there was a joyous festival which might be called the “*yokhor*” in the Buryat language.

In the western part of the sky there live the fifty five tengris, their head being Khan Khormusta. He has the three sons, the middle of them being future Geser. In the eastern part of the sky there live the forty four tengris, the head over them being Atai-Ulan, who has the three sons too. Living in the middle place of the sky is Segen-Sebdeg tengri. He has a daughter Seseg-Nogon, she is a beauty and sews skillfully. The eldest sons of the heads of both the skies eagerly wish to take her as wife. The western and eastern deities want to get possession of the middle sky, there bursts out a quarrel between them. In the battle that followed the western tengris win. Having cut Atai-Ulan into the pieces they throw them down to the earth that causes the people the numerous troubles and misfortune. From the parts of Atai-Ulan's body there appear the various monsters: from the chest – Gal-Durme khan, from the thigh – Lodsogoldoi mangadkhai (monster), from the neck vertebrae – Sherem-Minata devil, from the stomach – Mitagar Khara Mila, from the liver – Ganga Bured khan, from the right hand – Abarga Sesen mangadkhai, from the left hand – Asurai Shara mangadkhai, from the right leg – Khitad Gumen khan, from the left leg – forty-eyed Dume, from the kidneys – the Edir sagan tree and the spotted deer Taril Eren, from the lungs – Black Guma Mitan who had a thousand of the white eyes. Apart from them, there were the other monsters that caused the innumerable troubles, such as Arkhan Khara devil, fifteen-headed Asurai mangadkhai, ninety-five-headed Yenkhoboi mangadkhai.

In order to save the people from all the misfortunes Khan Khormusta's middle son Erkke Beligte (future Geser) gets down to the earth. To complete his mission he is to be re-born on the Earth because being of the celestial origin he is too pure and sacral for the earthly life. He gets born into a poor childless family of an old man Sengel and an old woman Sengelen. The old woman gets pregnant in a magic way and gives birth to the three children. The two daughters get up onto the sky, remaining is the son who is far from being nice-looking and stains all around at that. He gets the name of Nyukhata Sura (Snot Sura). He does a lot of trouble to his elderly parents.

Being quite a small child the future Geser does away with the envoys of the monsters. Having completed a lot of the noble deeds, he gets the three wives. Nyukhata-Sura becomes a bagatur (mighty warrior) Abai Geser Bogdo khan. The tengris give him a magic horse, bator's (mighty warrior) clothes and the miraculous weapon and armour. When he comes back he learns that his native place was attacked by the three Sharyn (Sharaigol) khans. He sets out for a fight to save his wife from those khans. On his way he comes across a she-mangadkhai Moyil-Khara who desecrates him with a piece of dirty felt and turns him into a donkey. Geser's celestial sisters set him free and make him a human being again. Geser-bator punishes the monsters and saves the earth from the evil. Each chapter of the epic is devoted to his struggle against the enemies of the people.

In some other variants of the Geseriade conflicting in the primordial times are the two camps of the tengris – the celestial deities. Those are the western fifty five tengries headed by Khan Khirmas-tengri and the eastern forty four tengris headed by Atai Ulan-tengri. Among the western tengris there is the second son of Khan Khirmas by name of Bukhe Beligte, the earthly name of Geser after his second birth. Atai Ulan-tengri gets Naran Gokhon to fall seriously ill. In case she dies the western tengris will have to submit to the eastern deities. Manzan Gurme-grandmother reads the sacred book and learns how one could cure the girl. She sends Bukhe Beligte for a skylark with the golden letters on the back and the silver letters on the chest. They apply the bird on the chest and the back of the sick girl and she recovers.

Such a description of the start of the heavenly events is connected with the mythological ideas of the Sun deity whose personification was Naran Dulan tengri as skylark. The reason for the quarrel between the heads of the western and the eastern tengris was the desire to possess the rich and prosperous middle Segen Sebdeg tengri's land. Atai Ulan sends his batars to Segen Sebdeg with the request of submitting to him. Khan Khirmas makes the same suggestion. Segen Sebdeg values his own freedom and the independent position and refuses them. He drives the envoys away. Then Atai Ulan sends his sons to Segen Sebdeg with the same message. Bukhe Beligte (future Geser) from the western skies also arrives there. Sagan Sebdeg again refuses them. The sons of the tengris (heavens) begin to fight. Bukhe Beligte wins the victory over his adversaries. He throws down Atai Ulan's sons onto the Earth where they turn into the evil Sharablin khans.

After the defeat of his sons and warriors Atai Ulan again sends the tengris of the mist, dusk and gloom, hoar-frost. But Bukhe Beligte meets them with the nine tengris of wind and flame. Khan Khurmas and Atai Ulan join the battle. Khan Khurmas, having learned that the soul of his adversary is in the metatarsus of the big finger of his right foot, strikes it and thus beats the enemy. The defeated Atai Ulan-tengri is thrown upon the Earth where the various monsters come out of the different parts of his body.

In the land of the three Tugeshin khans there comes the time of the misfortunes, mortality. The people die, the rivers and grass dry out and fade away. The shamaness Sharagshakhan makes the offerings of the sick people's tears to the western deities, namely, to the head of the 55 tengris Khan Khirmas-tengri, to Shutegte-burkhan and Manzan Gurme- grandmother. Thus she informs the tengris of the misfortunes on the Earth. Khan Khirmas asks in turn his sons to get down to the Earth but only Bukhe Beligte agrees to go down on condition that his father should give him all he asks for.

Bukhe Beligte turns Naran Gokhon-maid into a lark. He calls up the dreams to Sargal Noyon-khan about the lark with the magic letters on the chest and the back. If they caught that lark the Tugeshin khans would prosper. The khans shoot with an arrow and get down the lark that turns into Naran Gohon beauty. They marry her to Sengelen – khan and drive them away having first crippled her.

Then Naran Gohon gives birth to the children: the son Jasa Mergen and the three daughters. They are born from the top of her head, her armpit and the navel. They rise to the Sky. The last child is born in the usual way as all the earthly children. That was the future Geser who now got born on the Earth. That's how he descended down from the Heavens onto the Earth to save the people from all kinds of misfortune.

Being still a child Geser punishes the evil creatures: a black mouse as big as a three-year-old bull, a yellow wasp (oca) as big as a horse's head, a mosquito or a gnat as big as a horse, sends down into the sea the seven black and nine yellow devils. Sargal Noyon-khan brings back Sengelen-khan and Naran Gokhon, adopts Geser having given him the name of Nyuhata Nyurgai [Snot Nose Nyurgai].

Nyuhata Nyurgai goes to his future wife Tumen Yargalan together with his uncle Khara Soton. His future father-in-law Turushkhai Bogdo-khan puts his daughter's fiancés on trial at the match. Nyuhata Nyurgai wins the victory over his rivals.

Then Nyuhata Nyurgai goes again together with his uncle Khara Soton to Urmai Gohon maid, Ulanai Bogdo khan's daughter, to ask her as wife. He catches the three wasps – werewolves, who tried to suck the blood from his chest. Ulanai Bogdo-khan pleads Nyuhata Nyurgai to set them free. He promises to give him half of his herds, gold and silver as well as his daughter Urmai Gohon as his wife. The hero together with his wife Urmai Gohon comes home where they have a rich feast.

The Tengris-protectors send down from the Heavens for Nyuhata Nyurgai the thirty three batars (mighty warriors), batar's weapons and a magic winged horse. Thus Nyuhata Nyurgai becomes Abai Geser-khan. Having obtained the mighty armor Geser goes hunting in the Altai and Khukhei but in the course of the three days he does not manage to "let out even a black mouse's blood". He comes across a hunter on a sorrel horse. Geser cannot catch up with the hunter. The unknown hunter disappears in the sea, Geser following him goes down into the sea. The hunter appears to be Alma Mergen, the daughter of the Lord of the underwater kingdom. Geser manages to curb the obstinate girl. He marries her and stays at his father-in-law's place for three years. When his wife gives birth into a daughter they go home. Geser after having returned home builds the palaces for his three wives.

Geser learns from the yellow book of fortune that on the southern slope of the Sumer mountain lives the Lord of the thick forests. Then there is a white monster Orgoli who can draw into his mouth everything from the distance of forty versts [forty four km; 26, 4 miles]. He has an intention of swallowing Geser together with his batars. Abai Geser, Sargal noyon, Khara Soton and the warriors fight and kill the monster.

Geser defeats Abarga-mogoi (a huge snake) with the twenty seven heads and thirty three tails having pierced his main head with a spear. He carries away an underground treasure with the silver that the snake guarded.

Khara Soton who made many unsuccessful attempts at enticing Geser's wife Tumen Yargalan goes to the nether world to the nine devils who advise him to deliver a blow on Geser's health. Geser falls ill having inhaled the yellow mist that spread from the black sheep's blood. According to the prediction of the yellow book of fortune for Geser to recover it was needed to send Tumen Yargalan to the mangadkhai Abarga Sesen-noyon. Geser thinks that it is better to die than send his wife to the monster. Tumen takes a decision to go to the land of the mangadkhai to save Geser. Her people are ready to follow her but she scatters her coral string of beads and tells to collect them. On her way she overcomes many obstacles. The mangadkhai comes out to welcome her.

Geser and Khara Soton go to the mangadkhai's place to save Tumen Jargalan. Because of the heat that Geser has caused Abarga Secen is bathing in the sea. On the shore the two boys whom Geser had turned into are playing with a bow and arrows. Abarga Sesen puts on his head a pellet and asks the boys to hit it. One of the boys utters an incantation in a low voice and shoots. The arrow hits the mangadkhai's right eye. Abarga Sesen calls Tumen Jargalan. She recognizes Abai Geser's black Khangai arrow, ties the mangadkhai with a rope and hammers in the arrow still deeper. Abai Geser and Tumen Jargalan burn the mangadkhai together with his horse. In order to keep Geser to herself, so that he did not leave her, Tumen Jargalan gives him the food that makes him quite silly and helpless. Now he grazes the mangadkhai's red calves.

Erkhe Taija, the son of the eldest of the three Sharablin khans who possess the Sharaid valey made a magpie and sent it to look for a beautiful girl for him to marry. Having returned from the land of the larks the magpie says: "There is no one more beautiful than Urmai Gokhon". They then send a black raven and a magic bird Gangga Zada and they claim the same.

The three Sharablin khans send their warriors to Geser's land. His warriors courageously fight with the enemies. Khara Soton betrays Geser and his warriors fall dead desecrated with the bloody water. Alma Mergen having turned into a man like Geser in appearance accepts the battle.

The three Sharablin khans attack Urmai Gokhon and seize her with the help of slyness. Manzan Gurme-grandmother learns from the maternal book about the trouble in Geser's camp. She sends onto the Earth Geser's three sisters who find him and take away and give him back his true mighty look.

Abai Geser returns home. Alma Mergen meets him. Geser raises his bators and warriors from the dead. The bators want to kill their offender Khara Soton but Geser does not give his consent. Khara Soton pretends to be dead. Geser goes to the lands of the Sharablin khans to bring back Urmai Gokhon.

Geser in a magic way turns into a child. He is adopted by Sagan Gerelte khan. The boy who is given the name of Foundling grows up very quickly. He takes part in the contests of the bators and wins. The Sharablin khans are happy, they think that he can grow a strong man and fight against Abai Geser.

The Sharablin khans send their troops headed by Foundling against Geser's warriors and bators. Foundling (Geser) joins his warriors and defeats the Sharablin khans. Then in his own look heading his warriors he comes to the land of the Sharablin khans. The latter ask for mercy. Abai Geser and Urmai Gokhon return home. Their people meet them with great joy. They have a big feast.

In the land of Gangga Burged-khan there are great misfortunes: the rivers and lakes got dried up; the fatal illnesses, dreadful diseases and epidemics began to spread all over the place. Ganga Burged-khan learns from an old man that all the misfortune comes from the crafty designs of Gal Dulme-khan, the monster that came from Atai Ulan-tengri's head that had been thrown down upon the earth from the skies. The old man says that they should ask Geser to help them. Geser says that it is still early to start the fight with him. Nine years should pass before they might attack him. He is still too strong, possesses the magic abilities, and has got the six hundred bators and the six thousand warriors. But Geser's bators are ready to fight with Gal Dulme-khan and try to persuade their head to start the battle.

Geser agrees and the battle begins. He asks the fifty five tengris and Manzan Gurme-grandmother to help them. On the order of the deities Geser's brother Zasa Mergen descends from the skies. He shoots Gal Dulme-khan's central eye in which hidden is his soul and his vital energy. The defeated enemy and his horse are burned down. His beauty-wife is cut in two, from her belly a seven-month-old baby falls out. No weapon could cut him and only the seven celestial smiths could deal with the boy. He falls into the lower world.

The black mangadkhai Lobsogoldoi had three sisters. The eldest sister Yenkhoi tells Lobsogoldoi to turn into a traveling lama, build a temple and desecrate Geser with a dirty cup. Lobsogoldoi captures Urmai Gokhon. Asurai mangadkhai ploughs on the donkey. Alma Mergen flies to the country of Khonin Khoto as a lark. There she sends the hail on the ground. The donkey eats the hail and that gives him strength. Alma Mergen having turned into Lobsogoi's sister Yenkhoi comes and asks to give her the donkey. Together with the donkey she rises up to the sky to Gurme-grandmother. They clean and wash Geser and he resumes his former look.

Geser together with his bators sets out on a journey. His place of destination is the country of Khonin Khoto. He wants to bring back his wife Urmai Gokhon. He fights with Lobsogoldoi, throws him into a deep hole and leaves the guards with the iron bodies armed with the arrows. Having returned home he arranges a good feast which lasts nine days.

Geser fights with Shirem Minata devil. Neither Geser's Khanggai arrow nor his black spear, nor his yellow damask steel dagger can cut the devil. Shirem Minata beats Geser with a cast iron whip. The bator gets weakened. On his winged horse he goes to the skies and asks his father Khan Khirmas and his brother Zasa Mergen to give him advice how he could conquer the devil. Manzan Gurme-grandmother gives Geser a wool-carding twig. Geser with that twig knocks to pieces the devil's cast iron whip and beats him to death.

Geser goes to Alma Mergen's father to ask him help to tame the late four sons of the Mother-Earth. Uhan Lobson-khan gives him his magic walking stick. Geser sets out in search of those four late sons, at last he finds them. They turn into a healing spring, silver, gold and ginseng, that help Geser live a long and happy life.

The Chinese sovereign Gumen-khan after his favorite wife's death orders his people to mourn her for three years in the posture her death caught them. He himself fell asleep for three years embracing his dead wife. The khan's subjects decided to address Abai Geser for help, they sent one of the seven black smiths to him. Geser promises to help them but he needs the seven black smith's heads, the seventy carts of wool and a big copper.

When the khan's people brought those objects Geser made of the skulls of those heads the seven cups and rose on back of his winged horse to Manzan Gurme-grandmother. They both have the arkhi from those cups. When his grandma got drunk Geser opened the trunk with her keys and took out the fifteen magic treasures and got down to the Earth. The grandma having awakened found out that her treasures disappeared. She was in rage and threw those seven cups after Geser. The cups turned into the seven stars known as the Great Bear.

Then she got sorry about what she had done in rage and sprinkled with her milk in the same direction. The splashes turned into the Heaven's stitches, or the Milky Way and Geser's protective armor. The bator came to Gumen-khan who was still asleep. Abai Geser buried the khan's wife and instead of her he put a black bitch. When Gumen-khan awoke he threw Geser into the dungeon. Geser cleaned the dungeon and filled it up with the treasures.

When going home he took with him the Chinese khan's daughter. But on the way home he told her that they would not be happy together and sent her home. Geser goes to the land of Tebid to shoot through the top of a lonely growing tree that threatened to grow through the eight celestial vaults. He shoots off its top with his Khangai arrow, utters an incantation for the tree to remain as it has been before and not to grow upwards and in breadth.

Having completed all his deeds on the Earth Geser goes back to the sky to his grandma Manzan Gurme. He says: "I have done away with all those evil and cruel enemies, I have cut short those that grew too high, I narrowed those that grew too wide, I have done away with those with the beaks and fangs. Now we'll live on having the three lucks each day".

The epic shows that Nature is closely connected with the life of man. Nature gives the man strength and vital energy. The co-evolution of man and nature or the principle of the ecological imperative, ecological ethics and ecological responsibility that are believed to be the main contribution of the epic to the common knowledge of the humankind cannot be overestimated.

## **The Image of Nature in the Buryat heroic epic**

A good deal of attention is given to the image of the Mother-Earth in the Buryat myths. In the old days they worshipped the Earth that gives everything to the man including life and everything returns back to her. She is the Hostess of the water, she represents the souls of fish, bird, snake, all the beasts and animals. She is taken to be the Great Mother of the Beasts. The image of the Great Goddess in the Buryat epic “Geser” has its parallels in the world folklore. The most ancient image of the Mother – Earth was discovered in Ur, an ancient Sumerian city on the Euphrates. This is a mother holding the son in her hands, both depicted with the snake’s head. The snakes represent the eight kinds of the spirits of the Earth worshipped by the peoples including the Buryats who thought the snake-like sabdaks to be the hosts of the territory or locality. In Sumer she is a dual divinity, in the morning she is the goddess of the battles and heroes, whereas at night she is the goddess of fertility. In a later time in Egypt she was understood as the virgin giving birth to all the worlds. In the Buryat uliger or epic she conceives from the rays of the Sun and the Moon and gives birth to the daughters who continue the lineage of the human beings.

Yenkhoi sisters from the Geseriade like the Mother-Earth from Sumer also had the long breasts, they threw them back which symbolized death and forward which symbolized life. The bulls in the epic are understood as the totemic forefathers of the Buryats. The grain is often mentioned in the Buryat uligers. They are of the sacral meaning, Geser when praying throws them around as an offering to the hosts of Nature.

Understanding of the essence of the physiological phenomena like pregnancy, birth, growing of corn from grains, the appearance of birds out of eggs, the reproduction of fish, insects, worms in the water led to the sacralization of the biological vitality. The water, grain, egg were attributed the magic vital potentiality. Their ritual part in the religious cults was enormous. Those natural elements have a deep symbolical meaning connected with the idea of the vital energies. The larva reminding of the worm is of interest in understanding the phenomenon of the sacralization of Nature.

One of the main attributes of the shaman is the crown on his head which is connected with the idea of the World Tree. On the crown there are the hangings. The semantics of those objects was not quite clear. The hypothesis put forward by S. V. Alkin enables to solve the problem to some degree. He takes them to be the images of the larvae of the insects. The crown is the image of the World Tree with the souls of the unborn people that are depicted as the larvae. The outward similarity of the human and the animal embryos with the C-like larvae might give rise to the formation of a peculiar cult.

The epic gives much attention to the chaos, fire, water, air, wind, rain, frost, etc. which all have the special epical names. One of the powerful personages of the “Geser” epic, Gal Durme Khan is the symbol of the Fire. Thus one can say that the prime elements of nature are attached a great significance to in the Buryat tales. The Buryats took note of the fact that their household and everyday life were dependent on the natural phenomena, such as the periodical change of seasons, the climatatic variations, rain and snow, humidity of soil, etc. Alongside with this they mastered the reality in the spiritual sense, they had the ideas of the spiritual relationship of Man and Nature. As a result there emerged quite a few cult rituals.

There is a custom of hanging from a tree a Khii-morin (air horse), a personal votive flag for well – being and prosperity. This is connected with the honor and respect for horse. The horse is regarded as mediator between the Sky and the Earth. The horse plays one of the most important parts in the Geseriade and in the life of the Buryats, especially in the early ages.

There are the special rituals when building something. Earlier it was prohibited to dig ground not to damage its upper soil which was taken to be most fertile. It was needed to appease the spirits of the Earth, to calm them down, to ask them for the permission to erect something. The spirits

of the Earth get very angry when people without any reasonable excuse dig the ground, break stones and rocks, fell trees, contaminate rivers and springs, throw the dirty things into the fire. One has to appease the gods and the spirits making offerings and addressing them with the invocations.

Before the battle the heroes of the epic complete the special rites. Geser is often shown going onto the top of a high mountain and praying. Before he starts his prayer he unbuttons his coat and takes off his belt.

Nature played a great role in the life of the Buryats as it is shown in the epical works. It is inseparable from the nomads everyday life. It gives strength to the nomad, the latter receives from Nature his/her life energy. The idea of the cohesion of Man and Nature which is depicted in the Geseriade has been of great importance in all the times because the alternative idea would be non-acceptance of all the laws of Nature. Thus there were the numerous cults connected with Nature.

Hunting in the taiga had some territorial limitations, the hunters were well aware of the stock of the hunting areas, they had a good idea of how much game they could catch or kill in order to keep in balance the number of the wild animals, i.e. the food stock of the nomads. The latter abstained from hunting the she-animals, especially with the cubs and the young animals with no couple. Thus there was the cult of hunting and the Lord of the thick forest. Before going hunting the Buryats completed the special rites, among them chanting of the “Geser” verses.

The atmospheric phenomena are presented in the epic in the personages of the tengris. Among the 44 eastern tengris there are the tengris of the summer, autumn, winter mists, the black dirt, the black smoke. Among the 55 western tengris there are the following: the Tengri of the Upper Wind, the Tengri of the Fire, the Tengri of the Sun Warmth, the Tengri of the Rain, the Tengris of the Lightning and the Thunderstorm, the Tengri of the Snow, the Tengri of the White Bottom) or in the other words the cloudless sky, etc. The struggle takes place symbolically between the warmth and the cold; between the clear, sunny weather and the black nastiness; between the rain contributing to the growth of the vegetation which is favourable for the nomad-cattlebreeder and the drought.

The Geseriade evidences of the fact that the Buryats were noted for their ecological approach to Nature which presupposed the adaptation to the natural conditions. The form and the type of the dwellings, the utilitarian constructions, the tools, the clothes, the customs and the habits are chiefly dependent on the climate, the geographical position, the flora, the fauna, the temperature and the other objective factors that gave rise to the numerous religious cults and rituals.

The proto-Buryats, i.e. the hunters and the collectors of the plants representing the forest tribe communities entered the new stage of the social and economic life brought about by the establishment of the paternal right much later than the ancestors of the other nomad tribes. The socio-economical ties were those of a tribal community and the Buryats did not undergo the process of the unification for a considerable period of time. Even in the end of the XIX century the Buryats somewhat preserved the patriarchal and tribal relations since the new tendencies did not display themselves so vividly in their economy for there were neither factories, nor railroads, nor electricity, etc. Due to fact the epic preserved itself almost in a pure form.

One should mention that the epic of Geser in its versified version which is believed to be the Buryat creation was preserved by the “western” Buryats, among whom most widely spread were the shaman rituals. One can say that the oral “Geser” and shamanism are to some extent interrelated. The versification and the shaman elements evidence of “Geser’s” being ancient since it is generally recognized that the most ancient epical works of the Mongolian people as well as the shaman invocations were in verse, not in prose. The epic “Geser” as well as the shamanism underwent the two gross pressures: one, that of the Buddhist authorities and the other, that of the Soviet period when it was persecuted as “anti-people”.

One can't understand the essence of the current shamanic rituals without touching upon the old beliefs which the contemporaries hadn't watched but which the epic and the other folklore pieces help reconstruct, though they underwent some changes.

Some functions of the Mongolian shamanism or *boo* are close to the *bon* belief, an ancient Tibetan belief. The epic of Geser was quite popular among the Tibetan *bon-po* communities. Some nomads take “Geser” to be an oral people’s monument of the *bon* epoch. They liked to recite or rather sing it to the musical instruments.

The mythological consciousness or religiousness revealed in the epical sources of the Mongolian tribes is of the diverse forms. At the early stages of its formation the religiousness reflected the primitive cults of the early communities. The epical material contains the evidences of such phenomena as the deities, spirits, souls of the ancestors, the added properties of the real objects or the fetishes as well as the “supernatural” relations amongst the objects of the material world (the magic, the totem). The ordinary religious consciousness or religious psychology as the epic evidences was being shaped out without any predetermined frame or rather chaotically at first sight. It was certainly the sensual reflection of the everyday life. In this period, the “infant” period of the evolution of man, of particular importance in his life were the feelings and frames of mind associated with the animistic, totemistic magic ideas which in their turn were related to the formation of shamanism, *bon*, the various cults, those of the Sun, Fire and the other natural objects.

The animistic ideas as one of the relics of the primitive religious syncretism penetrate the whole of the Mongolian and Buryat folklore and epic. Widely spread were the genealogical myths in which the cult of the mountain spirits is depicted. It is just the mountain spirit who appears to be in fact the father of Geser on the Earth. According to the epic the man possesses not one soul but a few of them. One soul is in the body, another may leave the body, the third soul may be somewhere else out of the body.

Very often the souls are of some zoomorphic form. There may be the two golden fish coming out of the mangus’ nostrils during his sleep. One might recollect the hero’s chasing of the three stags that had the soul of the mangus. In the Oirat epic the soul may be found in a copper-headed iron-winged raven that flies out of a cut-open breast of the mangus’ mother. The raven turns into a fish, a marmot. The hero chases it as an eagle, fish or marmot. In the demon’s body, both male and female, in one of the big toes or in one of his ninety five stomachs found not infrequently was an invulnerable baby combining in itself the features of the enemy’s unborn offsprings and of some powerful “inner strength” of the enemy.

Most often the birds and snakes or fish that present the universal cosmic symbols of the upper and the lower worlds come as the embodiments of the soul. A soul saving itself from pursuit flies into the sky as bird or plunges into the sea as fish. It might be associated with the dichotomy of the upper and the lower, e.g. the placement of the mangadkhai’s “golden seed of soul” firstly in the plume of Khankhan Kherdig bird (Garudi) whose nest is on top of an aspen growing on top of a high mountain, then in the stomach of a gigantic black frog, living in a yellow lake or the placement of another soul of the same mangadkhai embodied in the thirteen quails in a golden and silver box placed in a silver trunk in the yellow milk sea under the protection of a one-eyed woman whereas the soul of the hero is hidden in the western Heaven with the seven celestial smiths.

Such episodes are quite typical for the Buryat epic. One can recall some Mongolian epical motives of the destruction of the enemy’s soul located in the three bees, in the plume of the Kherdig bird, in the toad, in the mangus’ mother’s box, the transformation of the soul into the quails, the roe deer and the hero pursuing them in the form of a hawk, a wolf, etc. Mentioned as the soul keepers are the knotted larch, perch, bull, wolf, fox, frog, birds like the quail, falcon, crow, eagle. Then there might be the snake, the fish, the goat, the ram, spider, the stallion, the lion, the mule, the Kherdig bird’s plume, the thread, the needle, the gold.

One should mention the existence of the cult of the mountains, prayers on the mountain, begging for children and the birth of the child from a mountain spirit. If the necessity arose to move the stones from one place to another it was advisable to complete certain rituals to appease the spirit of the mountain. The relics of such consciousness may be observed in our days too. As we have already

mentioned there are the totemic features fairly well preserved in the epic. In a Khori genealogical legend of Khoridoi-mergen the hero gets married to a celestial fairy that had formerly been a bird. Very well known is the motive of the swan, the ancestor of one of the Buryat tribes. In the Mongolian epic of Geser the two bulls are shown as fighting, one of them being white, the other black. The white one is taken to be the protector of Geser, the black of the mangus. The totemic ancestors of the Bulagats and Ekhirits are the grey Bukha noyon bull, the black and white bull. This motive has its parallel in a Tibetan legend, describing the fight between the white and black snakes that come out of the mangus' nostrils or in the Tibetan version of the Geser epic where the two snakes fight having come out of the mangus' ears.

The nomad tribes of Central Asia left the monuments resembling the "deer stones" or the stone slabs with the engraved inscriptions, magical formulas. In Transbaikalia and Mongolia they found the sacral writings on rocks, the so-called rock paintings or petroglyphs on which depicted most frequently was an eagle in flight. They date back to the second half of the second millennium B. C. They all are of the conventional nature and are given as symbol or sign. There is much in common between the drawings mentioned and the zurags on the Balagan ongons (mascot, amulet). The ongons are the symbols of the ancestors' spirits and the eagles are also thought to be the spirits of the ancestors. The Baikal region is abundant in the legends of the genealogical totems depicted in the form of a flying eagle. According to those legends the host of the Oikhon (Olkhon) island on the Baikal, married a tengri's daughter. She gave birth into a son, Burged by name which means "eagle". He adopted the eagles as sons. The latter gave the beginning to the kin of the Ol'khon shamans who were known as the shubuuni noyod (lords of birds). They say that earlier during the sacrifice ritual to Khan Khoto Babai they made the three replicas of the eagles from the birch bark. There are the beliefs that the eagle was a shaman. One can come across his image everywhere. We might just mention in this respect Khan-Garudi. Garudi came originally from India perhaps via Tibet, its image might have intermingled with that of the eagle, the cult of which is so widely spread in Buryatia.

The heroic epic of the Mongolian tribes is rich in the other diversified mythological elements. One could mention the demons that appeared out of the remnants of the evil deities thrown down to the Earth. Geser has the reputation of the destroyer of the demons and monsters, the personifications of the dark chthonic forces. The epic tells of the Tengris coming down to the Earth, of the middle place between the Sky and the Earth, of the dragons, of the various monsters such as mangadkhais, manyheaded snakes, birds, huge dogs, frogs, ants. The fantastic images reflect the mythological essence of the epic and hence its archaic shamanic nature. The cosmic elements are widely presented in the epic of the Mongolian tribes. They are the Sky, the Sun, the Moon, the stars, the Earth, the water, etc. To this may be added the cosmogonic prologue of the Geser epic. In the Kalmyck "Djanganr" the main character gets married to a celestial girl. Geser is often given help by his three celestial sisters. Presented also is a solar motive. The conception of a child is associated with a golden pole of light coming through the upper hole of the yurt.

The performing of the "Geser" epic was of ritual, magic, shamanic nature. The epic-tellers sank into trance when performing the epic. The epic was used by the shamans for exorcising the evil spirits. This is reflected in the shaman practice, in the invocations. Geser is taken to be the son of the Tengri (Heaven). Sometimes the Earth and Water are regarded as Geser's parents, this fact is associated with the shaman ideas of the human personification of the souls of the mountains and localities. Reciting of the uliger appeases the spirit of the Master of the taiga (thick forest) and helps in hunting. A folklore performer himself was in fact a shaman or is now a peculiar type of shaman.

## **The natural phenomena and the epical heroes**

According to the epic the people are deeply affected by the natural phenomena. To be more exact, this all reminds of some of the features and deeds of the main character of the Buryat epos "Geser". He gives an impression of being quite often an emotional and caring personality in his attitude to his family, relatives, kinsmen, motherland and nature. All his deeds are closely connected with the natural forces and phenomena. The heroic epic of the Buryat people narrates of the noble deeds of Geser liberating the people from the evil, of his battles with the monsters that would not let people live in peace and harmony. Not infrequently those monsters-mangadkhais personified the powerful, threatening forces of Nature that were beyond understanding of the common folk. They were quite unaware of the origin and the cause for their being sometimes quite merciless. Therefore those powerful forces were taken as, say, Gal-Nurman Khan who was the symbol of one of the prime elements, i.e. the Fire, the oppressive heat and drought. One might recall Loir Lobsogoldoi who was the personification of another prime element, i.e. the water, flood and overflow that badly damaged and injured the people, animals and plants. One could add here monster Orgoli who was taken as Master of the taiga (thick forests) and could deprive hunters of their game or sometimes took up their lives. Then there was Shereem Minata khan with an iron whip and a pig iron thigh who possibly symbolized the starting point of the blacksmith shop, the first steps in mastering the art of forging. The sparks and flames coming from the glowing metal were perceived by the ancient forefathers of the Buryats as a threatening iron whip which might burn or dazzle. One might as well recall the epical devil Arkhan who wanted to swallow the Sun and the Moon and plunge the Earth into the darkness. This might be the symbolical representation of the Sun and the Moon eclipse in the perception of the ancient Buryats.

On the other hand, the Buryat epic sings glory to the same natural prime elements. Not only do those forces of nature harm the people but they also do them a lot of good. Man could not do without the fire, water, gifts of the thick forests including wood, plants, game, etc. Man realized it too well. He felt that the fire, water, forest, stone, metal possessed the positive qualities too. They helped him survive. There was more favourable for him in those objects than negative. So he worshipped them, took them to be sacral. Hence there are the many cults, that of the Sky, for example, though it sent down to the Earth the thunderstorm and lightning, heavy rain and floods. There was the cult of the Sun and the Moon that is closely connected with the light, heat, warmth and fire. One cannot but mention the cult of the Water, lakes and rivers, as well as the cult of the Master of the taiga that provided the Man with the food and wood. There were many other cults. Since there were the sacral cults there certainly were the cult rituals, the sacral ceremonies which were to plead the divinities to help the man prosper and protect him from the evil spirits. Each hardship in life was thought to be directly connected with the unkind spirits whom it was needed to keep away with help of the deities. This double nature of the earthly and the cosmic elements interfering with the life of man was the reason for the emergence of the pantheons of the gods and deities. They had the special names and were in charge of the specific meteorological and the other phenomena. Naran Gerel tengri was in charge of the sunny days. Oyor Sagan tengri was in charge of the cloudless weather. The following divinities come the first among the rest of the Heavens according to their role and status: Yekhe Ekhe tengri (Great Mother the goddess), the eldest gods Manzan Gurme and Mayas Khara, Esege Malan tengri (the bald-headed or cloudless Sky) and idle, careless Khormusta tengri, Altai Ulan who represents the older generation of the deities, Zayan Sagan tengri (The White Creator). The sense and cult perception of the world made the Buryat people depict the epical personages either as men with some extraordinary features (the anthropomorphous creatures) or animals with the exaggerated grotesqueness (the zoomorphous creatures) or just the mixed types bearing the features both of human being and animal (the mixmorphous creatures). One can understand why it was so.

The powerful forces excited the fear and shock so that the people gave those inexplicable phenomena like the lightning some fantastic mysterious coloring.

As a consequence the Buryat tales give the exaggerated grotesque fantastic descriptions of the personages irrespective of their being either positive or negative. Some are horrible, ugly and fearful whereas the others are the ideals of beauty, strength and generosity. The former are quite fear-exciting with the many eyes, many heads, sharp claws and teeth covered with snakes, blowing out flame and sparks. The latter are well-built, strong and slender, handsome and attractive.

The ideas of the heavenly origin of the totemic forefathers of the Buryats as well as the ideas of the spirit-hosts of the localities, the shamans, the epical heroes are related to the archaic cult of the Eternal Blue Sky which is taken to be the highest divinity and the creator of all that is found in the Universe. The highest divinity, the sky or the Heaven (“tengri” in Buryat) is personified in the epic as Khormusta Tengeri or Esege Malan Tengeri. The most archaic cult of the Mother-Earth, the foremother, has the genetic ties with the cult of the World Tree and the World Mountain. It has greatly affected the emergence of the other, not less popular cults, like those of the Fire, the Mountain Caves, the Water, the Genealogical tree. There are the shaman elements and the Buddhist inclusions. Then one can mention the cosmogonic prologue of the epic, the creation of the main hero by the Heavenly Gods who was then sent down to the Earth with the mission of fighting the evil, Geser’s three celestial sisters, the theme of the cosmic marriage or the motive of being born from a cracked-apart stone. The archetype of the celestial forefather is often connected with the solar motive, e.g. a golden pole or rays of the Sun coming through the upper opening of the yurt are associated with the conception of the son. This all proves that the Buryat people were respectful towards nature, natural objects and natural phenomena.

Geser is both a shaman and a healer. He can control the natural atmospheric phenomena. Geser is one of the sons of Khormusta tengri, residing in the Heavens, the highest sphere of the Universe. When there came the time of trouble and misfortune on the Earth he was chosen to descend to the Middle sphere (the Earth) to struggle against the evil and complete his mission of salvation of the people. He was born on the Earth an ugly child, this is accounted for by the necessity for him to survive, it was kind of protection against the evil forces, the spirits and the like. When he was a child one of his names was Bukhe-Beligte (strong and gifted). Since childhood he was noted for his unusual gifts. He committed good deeds, displaying the magic abilities which helped him in doing good things. When he grows up he turns into a mighty warrior. The three cosmic spheres are in his power. His origin is in the sky, among the divinities, i.e. in the Upper World. He lives on the Earth, in the Middle world. He travels to the Lower world, i.e. the Water kingdom and establishes the ties with its Lord having married his daughter.

Much of what has been mentioned above is in favor of the idea that people in the past were guided by the intuitive, emotional, humane feelings. In the past the folklore, the rites and the creative arts made a significant contribution to the psycho-emotional state of the members of the communities. One can also draw the conclusion that all the phenomena somewhat “magic” in their essence are closely connected with, affected and inspired by Nature and the way the people treat it.

## The golden proportion in the Buryat Geseriade

The golden section or the golden proportion is the division of something into two parts so that the relation of the bigger or longer part towards the smaller or shorter part equals the relation of the whole towards the bigger part. The author of the principle of the golden section is Leonardo de Vinci (1451—1519). Roughly speaking, the relation 2 to 3, 4 to 6, 6 to 10 is best. For instance, the sculpture looks well if the pedestal is 3 parts and the figure is 2 parts. The monument “Hospitable Buryatiya” in Ulan-Ude is structured in accordance with the golden proportion, that is, the lower part (the pedestal) is approximately 3 parts and the statue itself is 2 parts. The proportion is 2 to 3, which makes the statue look quite impressive and majestic. The figures and objects on the bas-relief of the building of the Buryat Drama theatre in Ulan-Ude are also structured in relation of about 2 to 3 (from left to right). It looks nice because it is comfortable for the perception by eye-sight. It helps to comfortably visualize something because it observes the law of the golden proportion. Everything in nature obeys that law: the structure of the pine tree cones, algae, mollusk or the ear and the eye, the pulse of the heart, the brain biorhythm, etc. It is also observed in structuring the poems, the pieces of music and painting.

One can briefly dwell on the law of the golden section which is based on the natural phenomena and is also marked in the Buryat epic. Man gradually came to the notion of the golden section as an expression of a certain harmony after having been observing for thousands of years the presence of some adequacy and order in the objects, processes and the interactions observed in the material world.

The golden section or the golden proportion divides something into the two parts so that the relation of the bigger or longer part towards the smaller or shorter one equals the relation of the whole towards the bigger part. This principle well coordinates the parts of the whole unit, it's kind of the dynamic symmetry. This is found in the human organism, in the gene system, in the build-up of the ear, in the interlocation of the rod of retina of the eye apple, in the pulsation of the heart muscle, in the symmetrical biorhythms and the neuro-physiological structure of the brain, the proportion of the body and organs.

The key to its understanding might be found in the specificity of the mental activity of the human brain as an invariant of the betta-wave emerging during mental activity. Let's recollect in this respect the ancient pyramids where one can observe the same phenomenon. This principle became an academic canon in architecture when it was understood that it was good to erect the building, the compositional properties of which should be invariant to the biorhythmic properties of man.

This principle is presented in painting too as it has been mentioned above. Its simplified variant is division of the canvas in proportion of 6 to 4 or 3 to 2 where the main figure should be located not strictly in the center. One can divide the picture into 5 parts then the golden section will be found in 3 to 2 relation. The main object is located in the point of the intersection. The visual and notional or semantic center may be located either in the right, left or the lower, upper part of the picture. This is prompted by the lay-out or the structure of the eye, the specificity of the activity of the brain and the regularities of the visual perception. Where there is the motion, growth and development, there is the principle discussed. In botany, biology this might be observed in the location of the scales in the cones of pine-trees.

It can be found in poetry as it has been mentioned above. Take, for instance, Pushkin's novel “Eugene Onegin”. Its structure is based on the closeness to Fibonacci's numbers: 8, 13, 55. Eugene's letter to Tatyana breaks the last chapter into 2 parts: 32 and 19 verses. Let's divide 32 by 19, we'll get 1, 68 which is the criterion of the harmonic build-up in which the growth of the emotional strain is longer than the culmination and the fall.

In the compositional build-up of many musical works there is the highest point of culmination which is seldom situated in the central part of the work. In many eight-bar melodies of many composers like Skryabin, for one, the culmination is in the point of the golden section.

It helps to comfortably visualize something because it observes the laws of nature and psychology, physiology of the human perception. Everything in nature obeys that law: the eye-sight, the pulse of the heart, the brain biorhythm, etc. It is also observed in structuring of poems, music and painting, as we have already noted.

Roughly speaking, the relation 2 to 3, 4 to 6, 6 to 10 is best. For instance, the sculpture looks best if the pedestal is 3 parts and the figure is 2 parts. Fibonacci made up a series of the natural numbers which proved to be of great use. This is as follows: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, etc. The law of the formation of the terms of this series is quite simple: the first two members are 1, then each subsequent member is formed by adding up of the two preceding terms. For example:  $2 = 1 + 1$ ;  $3 = 1 + 2$ ;  $5 = 2 + 3$ ;  $8 = 3 + 5$ , etc. The Fibonacci series is known not only to mathematicians but to naturalists and other specialists too.

It was not until the 90-s of the XX century that the principle of the golden section was first mentioned in the academic works of the Buryat Geser experts. The Buryat tales are noted for the specific structural build-up, the image-bearing units, but the Buryat scholars did not associate that symmetry with the principle of the golden section. It was discovered by a Buryat scholar S. Sh. Chagdurov. He devoted one of his books to the phenomenon of the Altan Kheblig which is a Buryat analogue of the golden section.

A comprehensive study of the role of this phenomenon in the Buryat uliger (epic) was carried out by D. B. Badmatsyrenova [2001]. The thesis is called “The principle of the golden section in the Buryat epic “Geser”. The “Altan kheblig” means the golden model. The “Geser” epic observes the laws of the poetical structuring, one of which is the principle discussed.

The “Altan kheblig” was first mentioned in the Buryat epic by Pyokhon Petrov, one of the best Buryat epic-tellers of the XX century. The principle appears when the uliger episodes are in dynamics, when there is the gradual growth, then the highest point, the culmination and, last of all, the fall or the end. This dynamic symmetry was studied in the various epics – uligers written down from well-known Buryat epic-tellers.

The academic collection of the musical folklore started in the 60-s of the XXth century by D. S. Dugarov. The uliger tunes are very old, they present kind of a melodious recitative. The uligers did not have a certain fixed melody. Each rhapsode possessed one or more tunes and used it when performing all the uligers (stories, epics) that he knew. The peculiarity of the Buryat folk music is pentatonism. The melody or tune is depended on the structure of the verse. The verse and the tune closely interacted. S. Sh. Chagdurov and D. B. Badmatsyrenova noted that the golden section point is usually in the third quarter of a musical phrase.

The golden section is marked in the compositional lay-out of the uliger (epic) and gives prominence to the culminating points which are found not in the center of the epical text but in its third quarter. The most important function of the golden section in the text is semantical, notional, dynamical, structuring and euphonic. It is the symmetry of the laws of motion and growth in nature.

Due to the principle of the Altan kheblig presented in the main constructive units of the epic of Geser the listeners could not but feel them. The rhapsodes and the listeners could not but get adjusted to the betta-wave which dominated and caused the feeling of joy and success. In the rhythmical build-up of the verse in “Geser” an asymmetric division into the syllables is observed, when in the first hemistich there are 5 syllables, in the second 3 syllables. The interrelationship of 5 to 3 is 1.66 which almost ideally corresponds to the proportion of the golden section.

In the scene of the struggle between Abai Geser and Orgoli tiger the beginning and the intensification of the action (384 lines) is one and a half times as longer as the culmination and the concluding lines (строка) (223 lines). The interrelation of the numbers 384 to 223 makes

approximately 1.7 which is close to the mathematical expression of the golden section equaling 1.618. On the whole there are 607 lines in this scene which is one and a half times as longer as the number of the lines in the intensified action (384 lines). The relation of the two numbers, i.e. 607 and 384 is close to 1.6.

One can state that the principle of the golden section is traced in architecture, painting, poetry, music, as well as mathematics and the other areas of the natural and human activity. The principle of the Altan keblig, an original analogue of the golden section, is well presented in the text of the Geser epic which was called “the greatest epic of the humanity” by a well-known Russian poet and translator Vladimir Soloukhin. The shamans and narrators or story-tellers have good memory, artistry and expressiveness of speech. Owing to the gifted story-tellers and shamans, the skill for the masterly performance of the ancient pieces of poetry and prose remains well preserved up to now.

## The religious cults and rituals

The ideas of the heavenly origin of the totemic forefathers of the Buryats as well as the ideas of the spirit-hosts of the localities, the shamans, the epical heroes are related to the archaic cult of the Eternal Blue Sky which is taken to be the highest divinity and the creator of all that is found in the Universe. The highest divinity, the Sky or the Heaven (tengri in Buryat) is personified in the epic as Khormusta Tengeri or Esege Malan Tengeri. The most archaic cult of the Mother-Earth, the foremother, has the genetic ties with the cult of the World Tree and the World Mountain. It has greatly affected the emergence of the other, not less popular cults, like those of the fire, the mountain caves, the water (rivers, lakes), the genealogical tree. When reading the epic one comes across the other cults, like those of the ancestors, the magic. There are the shamanic elements and the Buddhist inclusions. Then one can mention the cosmogonic prologue of the epic, the creation of the main hero by the Heavenly Gods who was then sent down to the Earth with the mission of fighting the evil, Geser's three celestial sisters, the theme of the cosmic marriage or the motive of being born from a cracked-apart stone. The archetype of the celestial forefather is often connected with the solar motive, e.g. a golden pole or the rays of the Sun coming through the upper opening of the yurt are associated with the conception of the son.

The proto-Buryats, i.e. the hunters and gatherers or pickers of the plants including the sorrel, garlic, berries, kind of bulbil lily representing the forest tribe communities entered the new stage of the social and economic life brought about by the establishment of the paternal right much later than the ancestors of the other nomad tribes. The socio-economical ties were those of a tribal community and the Buryats did not undergo the process of unification for a considerable period of time. Even in the end of the XIX century the Buryats somewhat preserved the patriarchal and tribal relations since the new tendencies did not display themselves so vividly in their economy: there were neither factories, nor railroads, nor electricity, etc. Due to this the epic preserved itself in a pure form with some impacts of the feudal and Buddhist ideologies. One should mention that the epic of Geser in its versified version which is believed to be the Buryat creation was preserved by the "western" Buryats. Among them most widely spread were the shaman rites. One can say that the oral "Geser" and the shamanism are to some extent interrelated. The versification and the shaman elements evidence of "Geser's" being old-aged since it is generally recognized that the most ancient epical works of the Mongolian people as well as the shaman invocations were in verse not in prose.

Widely spread were the genealogical myths in which the cult of the mountain spirits was depicted. It is just the mountain spirit who appears to be in fact the father of Geser on the Earth. According to the epic the man possesses not one soul but a few of them. One soul is in the body, another one may leave the body in its sleep, the other souls are somewhere else out of body. Very often the souls are of the zoomorphic form like the two golden fish coming out of a mangus' nostrils during his sleep. One might recollect the hero chasing the three stags that were said to keep inside the soul of a mangus. In the Oirat epic the soul may be found in a copper-headed iron-winged crow which flies out of a cut-open breast of the mangus' mother. Then the crow turns into a fish, marmot; the hero chases it as eagle, fish or marmot. In a demon's body in one of his big toes or in one of his ninety five stomachs found not infrequently was an

One should mention the existence of the cult of the mountains, prayers on the mountain, begging for children and the birth of the child from a mountain spirit. When building something in the mountains if the necessity arose to move stones from one place to another it was advisable to complete certain rituals to appease the spirit of the mountain. The relics of such consciousness may be observed in our days too. As we have already mentioned there are the totemistic features fairly well preserved in the epic. In a Khori genealogical legend of Khoridoi-mergen the hero gets married to a celestial fairy that had been a bird previously. Very well known is the motive of a swan,

the ancestor of one of the tribes. In the Mongolian epic of Geser two bulls are shown as fighting, one of them being white, the other black. The white one is taken to be the protector of Geser, the black of the mangus. The totemic ancestors of the Bulagats and the Ekhirits are the grey Bukha noyon bull and the black and white bulls. This motive has its parallel in a Tibetan legend which describes the fight between the white and black snakes coming out of the mangus' nostrils or in the Tibetan version of the Geser epic where the two snakes fight having come out of the mangus' ears.

The nomad tribes of Central Asia left the monuments resembling the “deer stones” or the stone slabs with the engraved inscriptions, the magical formulas. In Transbaikalia and Mongolia they found the sacral writings on the rocks, the so-called rock paintings or petroglyph on which depicted most frequently was an eagle in flight. They date back to the second half of the second millennium B.C. They all are of the conventional nature and are given as symbol or sign. It is another evidence of the fact that there existed a written language though primitive. There is much in common between the drawings mentioned and the zurags (drawing) of the Balagan ongons. The ongons are the symbols of the ancestors' spirits and the eagles are also thought to be the spirits of the ancestors. The Baikal region is abundant in the legends of the genealogical totems depicted in the form of a flying eagle. According to those legends the host of the Oikhon island was married to a tengri's daughter. She gave birth into a son, Burged by name which means “eagle”. He adopted the eagles as sons. The latter gave the beginning to the kin of the Ol'khon shamans who were known as the shubuuni noyod – the lords of the birds. They say that earlier during the sacrifice ritual to Khan Khoto babai they made the three replicas of eagles out of birch bark. When I attended the tayilagan on the Baikal I saw that on the shore of lake Baikal the shamans put the three birch trees and under each of them they put the meat and the bones of the sheep sacrificed, covered them with hides and burned. When an eagle flew down onto one of the trees they said that the spirit of the ancestor of the kin represented by that tree came down. Those belonging to that kin were overwhelmed with joy. There are also the legends that the eagle was once a shaman, that is why the eagle is much esteemed. One can come across his image everywhere. We might just mention in this respect Khan-Garudi. Garudi came originally from India perhaps through Tibet, its image might have intermingled with that of the eagle, the cult of which is so widely spread in Buryatia.

The heroic epic of the Mongolian people is rich in the other diversified mythological elements. One could mention the demons who appeared out of the remnants of the evil deities thrown down to the Earth. Geser had the reputation of the destroyer of demons and monsters, the personifications of the dark chthonic forces. The epic tells of the Tengris coming down to the Earth, of the middle place between the Sky and the Earth, of the dragons, of the various “personified” monsters such as the mangadkhais, many-headed snakes, birds, huge dogs, frogs, ants. The fantastic images reflect the mythological essence of the epic and hence its archaic shaman nature. The cosmic elements are widely presented in the epic of the Mongolian people. They are the Sky, the Sun, the Moon, the stars, the Earth, the water, etc. To this may be added the cosmogonic prologue in the Geser epic. Geser is often given help by his three celestial sisters. Presented also is the solar motive. The conception of a child is associated with a golden “pole” of the light coming through the upper hole of the yurt.

The performing of the “Geser” epic was of a ritual, magic, shamanic nature. The epic-tellers sank into the trance when reciting the epic. The epic was used by shamans for exorcising the evil spirits. Geser is taken to be the son of the Tengri. Sometimes the Earth and the Water are regarded as Geser's parents which is associated with the shamanic ideas of the human personification of the souls of the mountains and localities. Reciting of the epic-uliger appeases the spirit of the Master of the taiga and helps in hunting. The epic-teller himself was in fact a shaman or a peculiar type of shaman.

Prior to the battle, on the mountain or obo the heroes of the epic performed the shaman smudging asking to protect them and give the victory over the enemy. The petrogenetic motive, i.e. the birth of the hero out of stone is evidently associated with the shaman cult of the personified mountain deities. The common people took the shamans to be very powerful and helpful to them. This

is reflected in the Buryat epic. A woman shaman throws the tears and snot of the poor people onto the heavenly palace and the latter gets cracked and leans over on one side. Thus the heavens learned of the sufferings of the people on the Earth. Besides the khats, ejins, zayans in Cis-Baikalia there were the spirits of the lower categories, i.e. the bokholdois, shudkhers and shulmuses, ada or anakhais, ukheri ezi, etc. They caused the misfortune, illnesses, even death. The people were afraid of the evil spirits, they kept their children away from them. They called a shaman, completed smudging, put a knife under the pillow to save their children or an axe under the threshold, they had at home the sanctified mirrors, bells, polecat's fur. The objects sanctified were called hakhyuhan (savior) in the Buryat language.

## **The everyday traditions and customs**

The epic shows that the traditional occupation of the Buryats was hunting, then cattlebreeding. The battles with the epical personages that were quite often the embodiments of the powerful natural forces, for example, Gal-Nurman who personified the prime element of the Fire, played a big part in the life of the Buryats. Before the description of the battle the epic-tellers gave a detailed account of the clothes, weapon and armour of the heroes. A good place in the life of the people was given to the tournaments, for example when matchmaking. After a successful matchmaking they had a big feast, which lasted nine days, on the tenth day the guests went home.

When people met they had a long friendly talk so that “the foam came out on the water, the grass grew on the stone”. The epic gives a detailed description of the dwellings of the Buryats, i.e. the straw-huts, yurts, wooden and stone houses that evidences of the evolution of the epic itself. This all is the background against which the epical scenes are laid. From them one can draw some knowledge concerning the habits, customs and traditions of the Mongolian people, including the Buryats.

In the early morning they get up, they are not in the habit of staying in bed for a long time because a lot of work to be done is usually ahead. Their bedding is very soft, sometimes of the fur of the sable, they compare it with the lungs of animals. All that is soft, nice, luxurious is associated on the physical level with the lungs of animals. Then they have their tea, when eating they discuss their home affairs and news.

Each variant of the epos reflects the evolution of the epic that proceeded along with the development of the community it narrates about. The higher is the social development, the more rich and artistic is the epic, its composition, language and style. Given in the text are the many habits and customs which survived or are somewhat forgotten. The guests were invited to get seated in the western or right-hand side of the yurt which was believed to be the most honorary place in the dwelling, its door being most often in the southern part. This is accounted for by the following circumstances. There was a dynamic balance between the dual natural oppositions, i.e. between the right and the left, the anterior (front) and the posterior (rear, back) side of the space, the male and the female half of the community, the good and the evil, strength and weakness, white and black, etc. The front or the anterior right-hand space orientations were regarded as male, light, active, positive whereas the back or posterior, left-hand space orientations were considered to be female, dark, passive, negative. The yurt was divided into the right-hand (male) and left-hand (female) halves, men took seats in the right-hand side, women on the left-hand side. A glass with a drink was given with the right hand and all the meaningful gestures were made with that hand. In the epic they invite their guests: “Please, get seated higher” which means to take seats in the right-hand (western) side of the dwelling, i.e. in the honorary place.

The people in the epic address each other ceremoniously, with the highest esteem. They are friendly and hospitable. They treat their guests to whatever is good in their home. The Buryats are very careful about their home.

In the old days as well as not infrequently nowadays there was a tradition of the respectful attitude towards the man as the embodiment of all that is positive. He was the personification of the head of the kinsfolk, therefore it was strictly forbidden to step over a man or his belt, sash. This is depicted in the epic when one of the girls reproaches her girl-friends because they stepped over a sleeping old man. She says: “You stepped over an old man, thus you broke the women’s custom” and herself goes round him avoiding stepping over the man. When the devils – albins were going to harm Geser they stepped nine times over the food they had prepared for him. There was also a strict regulation not to bring home any meat at night for it was fraught with the negative consequences. This might be related to the prohibition to kill the wild animals at night for one could miss and hit, say, a she-deer or a she-goat or just simply mistake them for a male-animal in darkness.

A good talk was of importance. They talked with respect and dignity, carefully selecting the right words. They went to see each other, to have a hearty talk душевный разговор. The Buryats always kept a good meal for the guest. That was commonly dry curd, milk skin, cottage cheese, pancakes, sweets and hot dishes like boiled meat, clear soup and the like.

The personages of the epic are very tender to their horse, they treat it as a true friend and devoted companion. They get mounted on the horse with the exacting movements as if completing a kind of ritual.

In case one makes some mistake or is guilty there is no excuse. He is heavily punished just as he deserves.

The Buryats are very tender towards their children. If a family did not have any children the Buryats were greatly sorry for such people and sympathetic with them. They did want them to have at least one child to continue the lineage. Thus if a family with no children asked for one they were never refused. The families with several children gave one of their sons or daughters to a childless family, they did it with no regret for they were quite sure that their child would grow up in very good conditions. The two families kept good relations and were respectful towards each other. Sometimes a child was given to the relatives if his/her parents were not well-to-do and had no opportunity to provide him with all needed. Thus there were very few orphans or beggars.

The Buryats treated their routine work with great diligence. The epic says that the worth of man is in his doings, the worth of woman is in her sewing. Good attitude to one's work and duties was inseparable from the Buryats since childhood. Life itself prompted them to be hardworking people, or else they would not survive. The Buryats wanted their children to be modest enough and restrained. They taught them not to shout out, not to cry out his/her mind when not asked to, not to talk too quickly as if saying a tongue-twister, not to laugh too loudly showing the teeth. They taught the young people to be restrained.

The Buryats were always ready to give a rebuff to the enemy, to fight him if the necessity arose. But despite their being quite ready to rebuff if necessary. The Mongolian tribes as well as the other people in the world strived to peace and quiet life without any battles, without shedding blood. They took up their swords only when there was a need to safeguard the motherland and strengthen the status of the kin.

They were ecologically-minded, loved their native place and took care of it. This is evidenced by the following episode. The epic narrates of Loir Khara Lobsogoldoi, Geser's enemy. He was taken as the embodiment of such prime element as water. Having defeated Lobsogoldoi Geser tells not to kill him for otherwise the vegetation would not grow without water. One can understand that he did that because he was devoted to his motherland, he was anxious that the Nature should flourish.

The epic gives much material for discussing the traditions of the Buryat people. Besides the traditions mentioned above there is much material on suit before the marriage. There were the tournaments, trials, seeing off and meeting a bride. There also were the various methods for killing a sheep for donation. There were some prescriptions for organizing the feasts, games, dancing in circle, for holding the tayilgans (a religious ceremony, festival) and the rituals like purifying, telling the fortune, smudging, offerings, invocation, etc.

All the habits, customs and traditions of the Buryat people are generous, benevolent. They disapprove of the unworthy deeds. The Buryat people are careful and scrupulous about the children, loving towards their native land and nature.

Naturally there is no marked development of the images in the epic. Most often the characters are either positive or negative. Our attention is focused now on the main character. The whole narration is concentrated around the main personage, i.e. Geser.

Having analyzed the situation Geser usually takes up the most complicated problems to solve, he is sufficiently confident of himself. Geser respects the elder people, obeys the decisions of the council of the Tengris, he is tolerant of some of their mistakes and weakness. In spite of his divine

origin Geser is humane, he does not like the idea of being singled out, rather he would live the way the other people do, though he never forgets about his true designation.

Geser is a magician possessing the supersensitive abilities but he never boasts of it. The people like and respect Geser. He is industrious, possesses good skills for practical life, he is above all a good warrior. Geser is kind and open-handed, he is just and follows his principles. He can also control the atmospheric phenomena.

Geser is one of the sons of Khormusta tengri, residing in the Heaven, the highest sphere of the Universe. When there came the time of trouble and misfortune upon the Earth Geser was designed to descend to the Middle sphere (the Earth) to struggle against the evil and complete his mission of salvation of the people. He was born on the Earth an ugly (некрасивый) child, this is accounted for by the necessity for him to survive, it was kind of protection against the evil forces, the spirits and the like. When he was a child one of his names was Bukhe-Beligte (strong and gifted). Since childhood he was noted for his unusual gifts. He committed good deeds, displaying the magic abilities which helped him in doing good things. When he grows up he turns into a strong, well-built, handsome bator.

The three cosmic spheres are in his power. His origin is in the Sky, among the divinities. He lives on the Earth. He goes down to the Water kingdom, he establishes the ties with its Lord having married his daughter. Geser performs his deeds for the sake of the people, for their well-being and happiness.

## A brief summary of the translating methods

The first translation to the English language of one of the Buryat variants of the heroic epic of “Geser” entitled “Abai Geser the Mighty” has been completed by Ye. Khundaeva. The lack of the full coincidence between the two languages and cultures made it hard to give an exact and accurate translation of all the passages of the epic.

In the Buryat language the nouns are too often substituted for by the pronouns. One can note a reverse order of the words in Buryat in contrast to English. Most peculiar are the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations, phonoaesthetical words as well as the hyponymic relations, the frequent use of the various kinds of the particles, etc. However there are some similar features that are lacking in the other languages. Here one could mention the grammar expression of completeness (Perfect) or incompleteness (Non-Perfect or Progressive) of the action which are typical of the two languages: Buryat and English.

The Buryat language is noted for by the following features: the omission of the main parts of the sentence: the subject, the predicate and the object that are quite explicit and it is easy to restore them. One can note a reverse order of the words in Buryat in contrast to English. Most peculiar are the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations, the phonoaesthetical words as well as the hyponymic relations, the frequent use of the various kinds of the particles, etc. Let us dwell on some of the methods used when translating the Buryat heroic epic “Geser” to the English language.

### 1. Lexical transformations

#### 1.1. Transliteration

Transliteration is most often used, for example, when reproducing the proper names.

Малзан Гурмэн – Malzan Gurmen

Дашин Шөөхөр – Dashin Shokhor

Зарлиг Саган – Zarligh Sagan

Санхан Гоохон – Sankhan Gookhon

#### 1.2. Loan translation

Бээжин (мүр 3563) – печь (строка 3566) – stove (line 3564)

Үйлэнсүй (мүр 3705) – улица (строка 3705) – street (line 3705)

Мэшээг (мүр 3503) – мешков (строка 3504) – sack (line 3506)

### 2. The semantic transformations

#### 2.1. Concretization and generalization

Орой дээрэм харыто (мүр 447) – Сверху меня опекайте (строка 447) – From heavens take care of me (line 448). *Орой дээрэм* (from above) might be translated as “from the heavens” using the semantical concretization that shows that the actions are undertaken as if by the will of the heavenly divinities.

Басагам (мүр 4226) – сынок (строка 4226) – sonny (line 4226). In the old times the boys were sometimes called “girls” lest they might be taken away by the evil spirits who wanted to harm the people. The spirits wanted to deprive the people of the sons for the boys were taken to be the successors of the kin or clan and bread-winners.

There are the lexical correspondences, such as the interlingual hyponymy and hyperonymy. These are the terms to designate the generic or specific relations. The word possessing a generic meaning can be taken as a hyperonym whereas the word possessing a specific meaning might be taken as a hyponym. For example, the word *hapaana* (lily) is a hyponym in relation to the word *seseg* (flower) which is a hyperonym in relation to such words as *badma seseg* (lotus), *urgy seseg*

(snowdrop). *Jemes* (berry) is a hyperonym of the word *алирхан* (bilberry), *moihon* (bird cherry). When translating one can replace a hyponym with a hyperonym if need be and vice versa.

In the English language most spread are the generic features represented by the words of the broad undifferentiated meaning. Compare the English and Russian sentences: Old birds are not to be caught with chaff. – Старого воробья на мякине не проведешь. Here we see that a broader notion *bird* is substituted for by a more concrete notion *воробей* (sparrow). In many languages such words as *внук, внучка, внуки* in Russian; *grandson, granddaughter, grandchildren* in English denote the offsprings both on the mother's and father's side whereas in Buryat the designations of such relatives on the part of the mother differ from those of the father. Thus they are as follows: *zee* – grandson, granddaughter (on the mother's side); *asha* – grandson, granddaughter (on the father's side).

## 2.2. Modulation

The method of modulation presents kind of the semantical development or integrated transformation. Мэдээн сайндаа мэдэбэ, ухаан сайндаа ойлгобо (мүр 119—120) – Ясным разумом понял, острым умом распознал (строки 119—120). – Perceived it in his quick mind and felt it very well (line 121—122).

The hero got the situation owing to his insight, he possesses the extrasensory abilities.

## 2.3. The lexical and semantic correspondencies

Абай Гэсэр хүбүүн (мүр 3116) – Абай Гэсэр Могучий (строка 3116) – Abai Geser the Mighty (line 3116). As it has been noted above the word *хүбүүн* possesses many meanings, among them “*bogatyр*” (mighty).

*Abai* is translated as “father, dear, honourable”. This is the most respectable form of addressing. The word *хүбүүн* has many meanings: son, boy, lad, guy, young man, brave spirit, daring fellow, very strong, leader, etc. Thus the word *хүбүүн* could be translated as *mighty*.

Халуу нугудаа (мүр 3341) – на родные луга (строка 3341) – Into my native meadows (line 3341) *Халуу* has the meaning “hot”, but in this very case it could be understood as “native, one's own”.

## 3. The lexical and grammar transformations

### 3.1. Breaking a sentence into a few parts

Далан долон тагалгай Үбдэгөө найгаар ла Түлхэжэ инеэжэ, Үнүгыөө найгаар ла Үдх-элэжэ хаажа ла, Нэгэ дүнгөөр хаажа, Саа биедэн сараагүйеэр Ороо гэхэ юмэ лэ (мүр 5606—5614) – [Гэсэр] ударом сильного колена [Двери] открывает, Ударом сильной пятки [Те двери] захлопывает – Открывает лишь одним ударом, захлопывает лишь одним ударом, так вошел он в самую дальнюю из семидесяти семи комнат (строки 5606 – 5614) – [Geser] with the push of his strong knee opened [the doors], with the kick of his strong heel he closed [those doors]. He opened with only one push, he closed with only one kick. This way he entered the farthest of the seventy seven rooms (lines 5606 – 5614).

The original sentence is quite long, so it is broken into the three sentences. Breaking a sentence into a few ones is not just obligatory in all the cases but it is quite indispensable if the necessity arises.

### 3.2. Uniting the sentences

Уряаһаан саазгай ерээд лэ Унталгай мяхай абаадажа байбай ла. – Энэ саган түрэ лэ <...>. Зугаалажа байтагай! Гэжэ Үрөөр хэлэжэ ябалдана бэлэй лэ (5748 – 5761) – Прилетала с юга сорока На ночь мясо к себе уносила. “Пусть эта светлая свадьба <...> так же гуляет, пирует. Пьют архи и курят табак!” – [Вот такой] юрол сказав, она улетела (5748 – 5761) – A magpie flew in from the south and took home the meat saying: “May this fair marriage party <...> feast and enjoy themselves, let them drink arkhi and smoke tobacco”, thus having wished she flew away (5748 – 5761). This is an example of uniting a few sentences.

To achieve the equivalence one might make use of some transformations like substitutions, such as the lexical and grammar substitutions, transliteration, addition of the lacking parts of speech, most often of the subject, predicate, object, as well as the change of the order of words, concretization and

compensation. Sometimes of great use might be such transformations as the antonymical substitution, the syntactical likening and the other translating techniques.

## **The Geseriade as part of the world culture**

The epic as a part of culture is the expression of the national way of thinking. It may help tell the nationality of an individual. Besides, the communicative function of folklore enables the exchange of the achievements among the certain human communities and individuals. This function also provides for the possibility of the communication in the sphere of folklore in the form of the dialogues. The communicative function makes it possible to create the international cultural fund. The interaction of the Tibetan, Mongolian, Buryat and the other cultures made it possible to create different variants of the heroic epic of Geser. One of the functions of culture is associated with the social and individual factor, that is with the differentiation of the social, national and other communities of the peoples, on the one hand and their integration on the other. The cultures are not isolated from each other and they are of no great significance if taken alone, just all by themselves. Each culture carries in itself the energy of the neighbouring and other cultures. In this context the idea that it is very difficult to understand and cognise the other, “alien” cultures is not relevant at present. The idea of each culture being of a peculiar nature, of the contribution of each nation to the culture of the whole mankind is obviously quite clear but it does not contradict the idea of a certain coherence of all the cultures. The words “harmony” and “understanding” should become the key notions of the contemporary world view. The people belonging to different cultures should treat each other with the greatest understanding possible. It is very important to recognize the priority of the spiritual entities in the whole life of the contemporary man, the ecological imperative and nature-corelating tendencies. The globalization brought the world civilizations and cultures closer to each other, the world has become more cohesive and coherent. In the context of the theory of the cultural pluralism the culture is taken to be the linking element among nations. Therefore understanding and respect towards the cultural values and traditions of the peoples is not going to be the fact of being educated but rather the precondition of the mutual understanding and the harmonious development. One cannot say with the great confidence that there is a more civilized culture or a less civilized, a backward culture. At present we witness the two types of the development: the traditional and the innovational. In the period when the might of the state was determined by the technical and economical as well as the military and political factors, the superiority proved to be with the advanced technogenic civilization. However the end of the XX century revealed, on the one hand, the negative consequences of the technological expansion of the civilization that brought the mankind to the global crises and, on the other hand, it revealed the spiritual advantages of the traditional type of development in some cases. Now the contacts among the different communities are becoming wider, the direct communication is becoming more diversified. Now we witness the growth of the planetary unification though we still recognize the necessity of knowing one’s own “roots”. We witness the interest of many people in their own origin. The man who is not aware of his forefathers and the cultural traditions feels as if he were a black sheep, he feels a loser in some circumstances. Chingis Aitmatov, a well-known Kirgiz writer, gives the following historical fact that in the ancient times the people recognized the importance of the kinship ties. The ancient Kirgiz people had a custom, which is as follows. When they captured a man from some other tribe they did their best to make him forget his past. They tied his head very tight so that the hair began to grow inside. As a result the man forgot everything, in his brain there were the processes that turned him into an obedient slave. They are known as the *mankurts*, the people who do not know their origin, roots, ancestors, traditions and rituals. But the fact is that each man would like to share the other people the knowledge of his own culture, to speak about it, to exchange the cultural experience. Each culture has the right to exist. Many people are of the opinion that in the XXI century there might be a certain opposition of the civilizations and cultures. They think that the motivation for the conflicts will be the culture rather than the ideology

or economy. The differences among the civilizations are quite evident, i.e. the different histories, languages, traditions, beliefs and religions. But that should not be the cause for the armed opposition.

Quite a number of the non-technogenic civilizations turn to their genuine “roots” which is likely to give the world a traditional colouring. The epical culture of the Buryat people shows all the stages of the man’s development. The Buryat epic gives a wide panorama of the origin of the Universe showing the significance of the basic elements of the macrocosm, i.e. the chaos, the world ocean, the prime elements, the threesome universe that come the first when treating the problems of the anthropogenesis.

The Buryat epic has made a good contribution to the interpretation of the problems of the origin of the Universe and the Man. It made it clear that the Man is a microcosm, that the whole might of the Universe is concentrated in the Man. This might be taken as an indispensable human and cultural significance of the Buryat epic. The Buryat epic enters the modern picture of the world, now in the epoch of globalization, with a clear-cut, the epically expressive paradigm concerning the origin of the Universe, the Earth, the Man, the paradigm of the relations of the people with the forces of Nature that provide for the proper physical and spiritual existence, the joint efforts of the corporative forces in the Universe’s functioning (synergetics), the connection of the whole with a part and of a part with the whole, the selection of the way for the further development which is closely connected with the bifurcation processes, the stochastic phenomena, the dissipative structures and attractors. This all shows the contribution of the Buryat epic in the cultural heritage and its significant symbolic nature. The Buryat epic shows the historical stage of the development of the mankind in the ancient and medieval period, the period of the so called cosmogenic civilization which was based on the use of the tools and manual technology and was largely dependent on the natural forces in the time, when the cosmic forces determined the sense of life and dictated its laws.

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