

## RATIONAL REASONING BEHIND THE PROCESS OF “MOVING” AND “NOMADIC MIGRATION” IN THE “MANAS” EPIC POEM

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**Abstract:** nomadic cultures are one of the cultures most under threat in the modern world with all pervasive centralised state control. Nomadic people have a distinct and complex cultures developed over many centuries. Their cultural heritage may not be as grandiose and visible as of urban city dwellers, but unique and inimitable nonetheless. Kyrgyz epic tale “Manas” has been transmitted orally over the centuries and tells captivating stories of life in nomadic societies. The author seeks to examine different aspects of nomadic existence through the prism of the epic poem “Manas”, which is rich with descriptions of everyday life of nomadic Kyrgyz tribes.

**Keywords:** culture, nomadic, semi-nomadic, nomads, folklore, epos, epic tale, settled way of life, military campaign, rationality.

## РАЦИОНАЛЬНОСТИ В ПРОЦЕССЕ «ПЕРЕКОЧЕВКИ», «КОЧЕВКИ» В ЭПОСЕ «МАНАС»

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**Аннотация:** кочевые культуры являются одними культур, находящихся под угрозой в современном мире со всем повсеместным централизованным государственным контролем. Кочевники имели различные и сложные культуры, развивались на протяжении многих веков. Их культурное наследие не может быть столь же внушительно и видно, как у городских жителей, но уникально и неповторимо, тем не менее. Кыргызский эпос-сказка «Манас» передается в устной форме на протяжении веков и рассказывает увлекательные истории о жизни в кочевых обществах. Автор стремится исследовать различные аспекты кочевого существования через призму эпоса «Манас», который богат описаниями повседневной жизни кочевых кыргызских племен.

**Ключевые слова:** культура, кочевой, полукочевой, кочевники, фольклор, эпос, эпическая сказка, оседлый образ жизни, военные походы, рациональность.

The main body of research on world cultures demonstrates that settled way of life and agricultural cultivation of lands were considered as the main indicators of development of cultures. Such opinion was evidenced by the presence of monumental architectural sites, handwritings, samples of irrigation systems, urban built-up areas. Along with this, the idea that settled people possessed superior culture and civilization was supported by the presence of the centralized state apparatus, clearly defined state borders, well organized armed forces, regulated and well-managed housing estates, and consumption of a wide variety of food products.

The alternative lifestyle is associated with the nomadic way of life, whereby people subsisted by rearing livestock and hunting and gathering practices. It must be noted here that rearing domestic livestock was also popular among settled farmers. Nomadic lifestyle is generally characterized by outdoor living in open spaces, making good use of such open spaces in everyday life, carrying out physically demanding activities and works on a daily basis, and living in close proximity with the nature and wild animals.

Indeed, the world of nomads is a dynamic and well balanced way of life quite similar to other cultures. It is based on sustainable existence in harmony with the nature and with rational usage of its resources. Knowledge is transmitted through carefully preserved cultural attitudes and customs. Life in challenging environment tends to provide real life education to the members of society, in some cases even harsh lessons to its younger members. The transitory way of life of the nomads reflects the transitory and fleeting nature of human life itself.

Nomadic existence developed its own logic and rationality based on respect to the nature and environment. Careless wasting of natural resources would lead to diminishing of such resources which are essential for nomads' survival. The destruction and reduction of precious natural resources would lead to forced migration to new areas which always presented various challenges to the nomads in that they would have to search and find new available areas, would have to move across great distances under harsh conditions and would have to adapt

to new conditions. These challenges were equally testing for humans and animals and would perhaps even lead to further new and unknown challenges.

Furthermore the harsh conditions of life in the wild helped develop strong personal characteristics for the members of nomadic societies. They learned to resist and endure different climatic conditions and natural disasters, to adapt and to overcome difficulties of living in the wild. By identifying themselves with natural top predators such as “tiger”, “snow leopard” or “eagle” in their folktales, songs and poems, they strove to acquire characteristics that would help them reduce their dependency on their environment. Spritualization and personification of natural phenomena are usually at the centre of core religious beliefs of many nomadic peoples.

At times the nomads tended to perceive the settled people as naturally infirm, with weak will and tender health. They looked with amusement and mild disdain at the comforts of the settled way of life, imagining such comforts as corrupting the character. In general nomads believed the settled people did not deserve the wealth that they amassed with great avarice and greed, and therefore some nomads also believed that it was fairer for the wealth to be taken over by the stronger people for more equitable redistribution.

Many aspects of cultural life of the nomads were related to migration, and to being in constant transit. In her book “Medieval Nomads” S.A. Pletneva explained the development of nomadic culture by characterizing its first model as follows: 1) migration; 2) hunting; 3) the erosion of the tribal system and its replacement by military democracy; creation of class societies 4) creation of state; 5) creation of common standardized language and emergence of common ethnic identity; 6) worship of shamanism and souls of ancestors; 6) lack of architectural monuments.

The nomadic people spend most of their lives in very close contact with nature. Therefore they tend to develop a complex system of beliefs focusing on the responsibility of people to the nature, and of the nature to people.

The second model of development of nomadic societies as outlined by Pletneva includes: 1) migration and semi-nomadism; 2) conflicts; 3) diffusion of tribal system, military democracy and origins of early class society; 4) unification into a state; 5) formation of an ethnic entity with a common language; 6) origins of ethnographic culture; 7) development of the cult of a pastoral leader and this concept in cosmogony; 8) archeological monuments, cemeteries, and seasonal winter pastures located on river banks.

The third stage includes: 1) seminomadism; 2) struggle for political power and dominance; 3) feudal system; 4) state; 5) transformation of a unilingual stable ethnic entity into a nation; 6) development of culture and writing; 7) trade; 8) development of cities and towns; 9) acceptance of world religions; 10) archeological monuments similar to ones developed by sedentary cultures.

It is obvious that in any stage of nomadism “shift” and “migration” remains as the main attribute and central to the life of nomadic societies. Despite the lack of architectural monuments, there are many other archeological findings that testify to the richness and depth of nomadic cultures. Such archeological objects may include petroglyphs and pictograms (such as discovered at Orkhon-Enisei site in Siberia), oral literary genre compositions, items of everyday use that reflect the daily life of nomads, embroidered patterns, jewelry, weapons and tools, etc ...[2.41].

«Nomadic life, indeed, is closely related to migration and “migration” can vary depending on circumstances. Depending on environmental conditions, migration may be classified as steppe migration, desert migration, and mountain migration. All these types of migration have their own special aspects», - says I. Abduvaliev, who studied the lexicon of nomadic life [1, 15].

Moving and migrating to new places has been an integral part of human existence from the dawn of history. In fact the very spirit of adventure and seeking out of new places has contributed greatly to how humans spread on the planet. However most human societies tend to settle down in places they find comfortable and they start building roots in those places. For nomads migration is simply a way of life and that makes nomadic migration different to other types of moving and migration.

Epic tale “Manas” is an example of unique cultural heritage transmitted orally from generation to generation. It can be described as Kyrgyz nation’s encyclopedia, It tells captivating and compelling stories about the nomadic life of Kyrgyz tribes, their suffering from external invaders and retreat to remote pastures, their struggle to restore their lost pastures, as well as their internal problems and the struggle for unity in the face of a common foe. In this literary masterpiece there is a wealth of information about the essential attribute of the nomadic way of life – migration and movement.

It is evident from the observations of Pletneva that the nomadic people did not live in constant and uninterrupted state of migration. The state of permanent migration was only experienced during a military campaign. Ancient Kyrgyz tribes, similar to other nomadic people, have obeyed the natural conditions and have adjusted their activities in accordance with their environment. First of all, there was a rational decision making system behind migration that took into account the surrounding landscape and seasonal circumstances. Moving to new pastures usually was a joyful event, especially in spring time when the nature renews itself and there is abundance of beautiful alpine flowers and singing birds. People tended to move to new places with a positive anticipation of grazing their livestock in fresh pastures. Everybody looked forward to a change of scenery.

Secondly, no migration happened without careful assessment of the necessity to migrate, objectives of migration, and potential risks and hazards. These factors were discussed at the tribal council and consultation. There is plenty of evidence to demonstrate this in the folklore and spoken heritage. There is also linguistic evidence preserved in the Kyrgyz language and its lexis. Indeed a language itself can be a powerful historical tool, reflecting the culture and worldview of the people who have spoken that language over the centuries. Ibraim Abduvaliev illustrates in his works the different types of migration in the various collocations in the Kyrgyz language: people's migration, tribal migration, hamlet migration, moving house, the great migration (exodus), short-term migration, daily migration, little migration, etc. [1. 17].

However it would be erroneous to assume that every type of relocation can be described as migration to new places or that every type of relocation was voluntary. In the "Manas" epos the moving of the Kyrgyz people to Altai was not recognized as migration, but rather it was described as "forcible relocation of the Kyrgyz people from Ala-Too". To put it simply it was a mass exodus in the face of imminent danger. This can also be viewed as eviction and perhaps even as an early form deportation. The epos narrates how when Oroz died, Alooqe Khan subjugated the Kyrgyz people and Oroz's ten young orphaned sons went "one wandering to Alai, another rambled off to Kangai, the third one left for Eren, the next one sank to Tereng" [3. 62-66]. This description evokes vivid negative images of family members being forced to separate under unfortunate and sad circumstances.

The phrase "moving to Bukhara" acquired special idiomatic meaning after Chiyirdi and Kanikei in their quest to save infant Semetei (son of hero Manas) took him to Bukhara. [6.58] Further to the use of this phrase in the "Manas" epic tale, "moving to Bukhara" came to symbolise a sudden flight and seeking of refuge from danger. Similarly, the 1916 historical exodus of the Kyrgyz people to the southern side of Tian Shan mountain range when they were fleeing the brutal suppression of the rebellion by the Imperial Russian administration was not described as an ordinary migration to new pastures, but rather as one of the darkest days for the Kyrgyz people. It is known in the history of the Kyrgyz people under a chilling name "Urkun", meaning the sudden and hasty flight from imminent and great menace.

In the "Manas" epic poem the main character the national hero Manas makes it his personal objective to facilitate the return of Kyrgyz tribes to Ala-Too. Prior to bringing his people back though, he travels to Ala-Too alone. There he meets his uncle Khan Koshoi and asks for his advice. Khan Koshoi tells Manas about the social environment and advises on the best course of action [4,126-137]. Manas makes an agreement with Khan Koshoi on behalf of the Kyrgyz people and returns to Altai to gather Kyrgyz people and organise their migration back to motherland. Finally with the guidance of his uncles Bakai and Khan Koshoi, and having thwarted the attacks by Tekes Khan and Keselik Khan along the way, Manas brings his people back to Ala-Too [4, 168-187].

Upon his return Manas is met by Kokotoi and his troops who helped him defeat Tekes Khan and Keselik Khan. Through this service to the Kyrgyz people Kokotoi becomes popular among the Kyrgyz people and remains a respectable member of the community. When eventually Kokotoi dies of old age his son Bokmurun gathers people for his father's funeral as is the custom and announces: "I will make the dust fly [under the hooves of the horses mounted by those who came to the funeral], I will make sure the whole world hears of the great funeral of Kokotoi" [5, 12]. His request to Khan Koshoi to advise on how best to organise the funeral once again depicts the Kyrgyz tradition to seek and follow the advice of the clan elders with reverence and humility.

At the consultation it was noted that "in Alai there is hardly any firewood, Sari Arka is a barren flatland without so much as a mound or a hill and would not even accommodate a horse harness in a gully, Suusamyr is narrow, etc..." and it was agreed that the valley of Karkyra river with its many mountain stream tributaries would be the best place for a grand funeral. And so the mournful migration to Karkyra valley is depicted thus in "Manas" epic poem:

"Kokotoi's son Bokmurun, brought the Kyrgyz from Tashkent to the funeral. He made the people fold their tents, gather their tent poles, loaded them on camels. Decisively forded the river. [People] plaited the ginger coloured camel's tail, showing off the smart caravan to the whole world. Kokotoi's vast property was gathered and loaded on many male camels, all arranged in neat rows. [Everybody] prepared lots of presents. [The caravan was accompanied by] pretty girls wearing red coats, their coat hems sweeping the ground, and married young women wearing smart robes, their robe hems sweeping the ground. His blue standard with golden flagpole top flying high in sky, Bokmurun started with his people, heading to Karkyra. Kokotoi's widow Kulayim, wearing mournful black clothes, announcing Kokotoi's sad burial event to the world, supervised camels loaded with her late husband's property. Sixty ladies [accompanied her] loudly lamenting the death of Khan Kokotoi." [5, 14-15]

The process of migration also encompasses settling at the new place. Therefore the process of choosing a suitable place for pitching a camp and ensuring it is safe and comfortable is an important part of migration. Upon their return from Altai the Kyrgyz people and their leader Manas were satisfied that the Talas river valley with its spacious open dales, forests and wild animals in the forests, myriads of mountain springs and tall mountain cliffs was suitable for settlement [4, 166]. The place for pitching nomad tents was chosen because it was believed it would facilitate peaceful life for the people.

Much later when Manas' widow Kanikei and her son Semetei returned from Bukhara to Talas [6, 125-144], Kanikei expresses unease at the thought of settling once again at the place where Manas died after treacherous betrayal and backstabbing by his enemies. Her son Semetei who has come of age by this time responds by praising the virtues of the land where Manas has achieved great success as the leader of his people and asks his great uncle Bakai for advice on where to return with his retinue: "My darling mother, here is my esteemed great uncle Bakai. Let him say his word and choose a place for us. I have missed my father's people and so I came back. This place is the generous land where my father Manas lived and loved. My umbilical cord's blood fell here. My father Manas became hero Manas here..." [4, 147] This whole episode reflects the careful and diplomatic way of conducting negotiations and manoeuvring the social protocol to ensure the elders had a say in major decision as such. Bakai supports Semetei's opinion on settling in the Talas valley and convinces Kanikei. Similar to this when Seitok returns to Talas the poem describes the cultural attitudes towards moving and customs and traditions surrounding migration.

Migration is not a mere relocation to new lands. It can also be a powerful tool of intercultural contact and exchange. One of the stages of nomadic lifestyle is settling down and tilling earth for agricultural purposes. This process has developed more rapidly in the remote areas where nomads had little access to goods produced by sedentary rural and urban peoples. When nomads lived closer to big cities and established rural settlements, they travelled to these places on market days and had opportunities to exchange their produce (wool, furs, handcrafted items, etc.) for the produce of the settled farmers or urban manufacturers (grains, cotton, etc.). In this way the nomadic and settled way of life have been intertwined for centuries. Therefore in remote areas further away from organised settlements nomads had to learn the ways and skills of settled people and this facilitated the transition from pastoral nomadic lifestyle to semi-nomadic lifestyle and even to settled subsistence farming.

The process of becoming settled was speeded up with the development of state mechanisms and incorporation of settled communities into state administration. After becoming settled the nomadic people seldom if ever returned to nomadic way of life. So there is no reverse process whereby settled people would turn into nomadic communities. However when the great majority of people in the community were still pastoral nomads, the ruling tribes who have acquired sufficient political and economic power to lead a more comfortable settled life, used to retain their nomadic lifestyle at least symbolically because in the collective consciousness nomadic lifestyle still preserved its prestige and was the symbol of courage, resilience and valour.

Even when conquering and subjugating highly developed settled civilizations, the nomadic ruling elite would strive to preserve features of their nomadic heritage to distinguish them from the rest of the population. So highly esteemed remained the nomadic way of life among the descendants of the nomads.

Having observed the patterns of becoming settled after leading nomadic life, the researchers draw following conclusions:

- 1) nomadic life cannot be completely separate from land husbandry;
  - 2) huge land areas are necessary to maintain nomadic economy; when nomadic people are restricted in their ability to expand their areas nomadic lifestyle inevitably declines;
  - 3) state building cannot happen without effectively combining agriculture with domestic animal husbandry.
- For this reason the state building did not start until the third stage of pastoral nomadism [8, 90].

In the "Manas" epic tale, when the Kyrgyz people have escaped to Altai they had to subsist by cultivating land and making agricultural produce. This is an example of how nomadic people have always been using agriculture and animal husbandry intermittently. Depending on environmental conditions the nomads learn new skills and adjust accordingly. When the Kyrgyz people returned to Talas they continued using agriculture there and have developed their land tilling skills even further. This has helped them improve their economic situation and having achieved sufficient economic clout they started seeking political power as well.

Military campaigns have played an important role in the economy of the nomadic people. At the primitive level of historical development people have always solved their deficits by invading other tribes' camps and confiscating their belongings. One of the defining features of the nomadic conquerors was that they were open for cultural exchange and cooperation with their subjects. Nomadic conquest is characterised by the conquerors learning skills from the conquered subjects and assimilating more readily. Sometimes the nomadic people even accepted the language and religion of the people they have conquered. Having observed the benefits of agricultural work many nomads rapidly became farmers too [8, 91]. At this stage of development the nomadic people viewed military campaigns as a dangerous yet essential tool of progress in order to ensure the development of their economy and culture. Therefore the members of community who could contribute positively to the success of military campaigns were held in high regard. Able-bodied, courageous and decisive men, who could demonstrate outstanding valour and intelligence were generally considered heroes.

Most nomadic people lived within the tribal and familial groupings. This tribal societal structure helped ensure that an individual had a wide support network and the backing of his/ her tribe. From the moment of its birth a child belonged not only to its parents but to the entire clan or tribe. Therefore the familial and tribal ties are highly esteemed in nomadic cultures and people preferred to stay close to their blood relatives and clan members.

We can draw a conclusion here that nomadic people lived in close contact with nature and therefore have learned to respect it immensely. They usually tended to attribute supernatural powers to natural phenomena. The harsh and dangerous conditions that are part of nomads' everyday life have contributed to the development of the deeply spiritual character of nomadic people, whereby they came to revere their natural environment.

However in addition to their spiritual attributes the nomads have also developed practical skills based on their everyday life. Theories of natural selection and survival of the fittest are very pertinent to the lives of the early nomads. Nomadic people have come to value such qualities as bravery, physical prowess, valor and courage – personal qualities necessary for survival in harsh conditions. Nomads and their descendants (semi-nomads whose numbers are dwindling even in traditionally nomadic strongholds such as Kyrgyzstan) hold dear their centuries-old traditions. Even when they become settled for several generations they preserve cultural symbols of their nomadic past in the folklore, arts and crafts and belief systems.

The nomads were the original global citizens who had very vague notions of state borders and centralized state institutions. Their cultures are being continually eroded by the increasing speed of industrialization and development in all corners of the world.

The Kyrgyz epic poem “Manas” provides a rich cultural backdrop to the way of life of Kyrgyz nomadic tribes. The descriptions of nomadic lifestyle are graphic and vivid and illustrate various aspects of nomadic societies with brilliant depths and lucidity.

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