

Lyrics of traditional weddings in Gjirokastra

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Gjirokastra, as a typical Albanian city, has established its traditional profile through folkloric values which have an indisputable role along with its architectural structure. The work of Tasim Gjokutaj, a well known Albanian writer and scholar, "Lyrics of traditional weddings in Gjirokastra" has been instrumental to the outline of this profile. It is particularly this source which has helped the author in coming up with conclusions on broad and extended basis. As the author mentions: "Through this study we create a generally precise perception about life and mentality of traditional Gjirokastra people, about social-psychological values he represents, tastes and his artistic inclinations". This conceptualized way and the final conclusions reached have given a scientific basis to this study. It has influenced a full study of lyrical genres in order to give an overall evaluation about it. The notions which permeate the whole work are: traditional wedding - Gjirokastra - lyrics.

Gjirokastra, as a typical Albanian city, has established its traditional profile through folkloric values which have an indisputable role along with its architectural structure. The work of Tasim Gjokutaj, a well known Albanian writer and scholar, "Lyrics of traditional weddings in Gjirokastra" has been instrumental to the outline of this profile. This work is the first monograph which focuses on lyrics of Gjirokastra traditional weddings. This monograph, which comes after a series of general and partial studies, treats special aspects of Albanian wedding lyrics and various problems related to wedding rites. It gives a valuable contribution to painting the folkloric portrait of the Albanian wedding.

It is necessary to mention that it is not a purely folkloric study, but also an ethnologic one. The syncretic character of folkloric creations has stimulated the author of this study to undertake a complex analysis of Gjirokastra wedding lyrics, viewed as being closely connected with the rites, geography and

ethnography of the folkloric zone under study. While making this analysis, the author has used not only studies related to folklore, but also ethnographic and historical ones. The author has traced the ethnographic source found in the verses of Gjirokastra wedding songs, which is not solely to the wedding rite, but to life in general e.g. architectonic background, ornaments, toponyms, lexical nuances that present the colors of the traditional Gjirokastra life.

It is particularly this source which has helped the author in coming up with conclusions on broad and extended basis. As the author mentions:” Through this study we create a generally precise perception about life and mentality of traditional Gjirokastra people, about social-psychological values he represents, tastes and his artistic inclinations”. On the other side, the study witnesses an elaborate and thorough exploration of the folkloric material, which has been realized not only by finding recourse to the respective publications, but he himself, has recorded the lyrics of the songs in special cases or weddings.

The long time expansion assured a full completion of wedding lyrics repertoire as well as enabling the observation of its evolution. The thing which catches our attention is the way of his conceptualizing the work in three parts:

- a- The ethnographic and sociolinguistic aspect.
- b- Social psychological aspect
- c- Artistic aspect

This conceptualized way and the final conclusions reached have given a scientific basis to this study. It has influenced a full study of lyrical genres in order to give an overall evaluation about it. The notions which permeate the whole work are: traditional wedding - Gjirokastra - lyrics. Moreover, this structural way has added to these study particular ethnographic, social, psychological and artistic values. Concerning the ethnographic aspect, Gjokutaj has intended to approach on two different points of view, firstly on a broad angle and later from a narrow angle.

Through a broad viewpoint, the author has tried to analyse the relationship between Gjirokastra traditional wedding lyrics and the rites of its ceremonial. The oral transmission by the elderly people as well as a considerable number of lyrics collected by him or others, reveal that different rites of Gjirokastra traditional wedding have had special songs related to them and they served as illustrations. Among them we can

mention lyrics of such rites as: the night of the henna, the day of the baklava, the rite of shaving, the bride leaving her house and her arrival in the groom's house, the rite of wee hours in the groom's day. Besides, these lyrics related to peculiar rites, the ceremonial of Gjirokastra traditional wedding has been conducted to the accompaniment of a range of rich lyrics which sang to general events like love, conjugal relations, beauty and bride virtues, changes caused in the family by the new couple cohabitation etc. In a figurative way, lyrics of these weddings have a solid part, immovable, similar to the atom's core. They also have a movable part similar to elements circling the core. The lyrics illustrating special rites would play the role of the core, while lyrics of universal motifs would have the role of the movable elements. "From the observations made in a number of weddings in Gjirokastra, as he mentions in his notes- observations started by 60-s, being intensified during '70-80-s, it results in that: lyrics illustrating special rites tend to fall into disuse. There have considerably survived only lyrics where descriptive tendency has been replaced by the focus of universal reflection motifs like: the youth separation, the drama of departing from the hearth and home". Lyrics that generally tend to survive in the present ceremonial, composing the movable part of the repertoire, have dropped out of the folklore being characterized by an archaic trace and related to rather conservative mentalities, archaic lexicon etc. Naturally, the artistic value of each lyric has played the main role in the selection of this group.

Through a broad observation it has been studied the ethnographic material which is found in Gjirokastra traditional wedding, not on the outer aspect as rite illustrations, but on the inner aspect concerning the data about the surroundings, architectonic values, ornaments, sociolinguistic elements like barbarisms and dialecticisms which if analyzed in details shape the color of time and place, particularly the color of the traditional Gjirokastra. Though slightly painted, in Gjirokastra traditional lyrics, there are created images of city life as well as lyrics which present the country life. It is nearly the same conclusion we reach after investigating the verses concerning ornaments, everyday life etc. Combining the ethnographic city elements with the country elements is not coincidental, but it is related to a range of historical, economic and demographic factors. These are also cultural factors which have given to the spiritual living of the traditional Gjirokastra the civic profile of a country background. Among these factors, it is mentioned the position of Gjirokastra by the main roads, the type of administrative and trading city with an inconsiderable artisan

products, its being a centre of administrative divisions throughout the centuries, the periodic migration of country people to the city, dominance of polyphonic songs for a long time, as the single way of singing. The narrow view includes some sociolinguistic investigations which appear to have visible connection to certain ethnographic realities. The linguistic elements investigated in the sociolinguistic plane have been searched in phonetics, morphology and particularly in the lexicon.

We mostly give precedence to distinguishing some elements which divert from the north dialect, as a part of provincialism or regionalism about Gjirokastra city and its peripheral areas. Barbarisms, Greek words and especially Turkish ones are studied in two groups. First, those which are characteristic mainly of this city and rarely or never found in the dialects of other cities or regions. Secondly, this is a considerable group- barbarisms found in the traditional Albanian dialect, especially in cities. Sources of barbarisms are numerous. Attention is paid especially to some of them, which for the mentality of the time created a poetic vocabulary layer. This phenomenon has been injected in folklore by the poems of bejtexhinj, known to be transmitted orally as recited verses or generally as songs accompanied by the folk orchestra.

Anyhow, compared to the folklore of the cities like: Berat, Elbasan and Shkodra, the influence of poems on the traditional wedding lyrics has been little and as a result the number of Turkish, Arabian and Persian words maintaining the function of a poetical layer is also small. By '30 's this traditional lyrics lacked the tendency towards the lexical purity of today.

While carrying out this ethnographic analysis we have regarded the nature of the genre: lyrics that focus on the feelings sometimes lose or fade the reflective function, often mimetic, in some cases they transform the situations, details, atmosphere etc in the name of beautifying or other functions characteristics of the oral creation.

In the second part of the study efforts are made to investigate the Gjirokastra traditional wedding lyrics on the socio-psychological plane. This orientation has been determined mainly by two factors: the accentuated collective character of the wedding and the great changes it caused not only in the couple's life, but also in that of the patriarchal family. Seeing the Gjirokastra traditional wedding lyrics on this plane of its significance, we notice some phenomena which at first sight seem paradoxical. For example, one of the main

functions of the marriage, which is also stressed in the main formula of congratulating of the ceremonial: “may the couple live a happy life”, is almost not mentioned at all in these lyrics. It is about the birth and well upbringing of children. Different transmitters and also ethnographic testimonies by Durham, Çabej lead us to think that here we are dealing with a taboo subject: it has been a custom that the future birth, post partum period and the newborn baby are not to be slandered, not to be praised. Also when the baby was born used to be even “sworn at” by the female visitors so as not to cast the evil eye on it.

Another paradox we notice while investigating the Gjirokastra traditional wedding lyrics is the perfunctory at mention made on the economic aspect of marriage bond. In everyday life these aspects played an important role, because they were related to the future way of living of the couple, but also because marriage served, among other things, to establish relationship of support and cooperation between the two families. In the rare cases that the economic facts are mentioned, their real importance is not treated of but they are rather seen as a function of underlying such an attitude as: “dear girl don’t be sad, because you will be happy where you are going; we, both sides are from renowned families”. Economic relationships, more like gifts, occupy a more important place in the love lyrics which sings to relationships out of wedlock. The almost unimportant place that the economic motives occupy, may have been caused by a number of factors among which less debatable seem to be the natural tendency of the lyrics from the inner world, from the feeling leaving aside the material world. The socio-psychological plane is characterized by another paradox, among the parents of the couple, father and father in-law are respected more, whereas the mother and mother in-law are frequently made fun of. The above mentioned paradox becomes more perceptible, when we juxtapose it with a fourth: more attention is paid to the bride, whereas the groom compared with her emerges as a secondary character. So, in one case male takes precedence, in another female. Reasons of these paradoxes may be different. Among those we have discussed, such as the dignitary role of man in the family, singing of a good part of lyrics by women in a womanly environment, the tendency to poeticize beauty and youth, strength and vitality as ethical, esthetic ideals for the couple etc.

The paradoxes listed above sound as such because they clash with facts, norms, and customs of everyday life. The voices heard in these lyrics are various, we hear the bride speaking, the groom, their friends, mother, father, wedding guests, mother in-law, sister in-law, sister etc. etc., but in most of the cases we face an imaginary conversation, that is why we say that the community's voice is the one that prevails.

The variety of these real and imaginary voices is the source to a rich psychological material a fact, which creates situations similar to that of a dialogue that becomes noticeable when sung in groups that alternate one another. The community in most of the cases professes to speak in the name of the bride, of the groom, of the mother, of the father etc. etc. Keeping in mind this fact, makes it more comprehensible the reason why it is given such an immense place to the motif of alienation in this lyric. This motif includes the transformation from girl to mother, father – brother - relative, mother in law – father in law – sister in law – kinship, son – mother, peers etc. The motif of alienation and other above mentioned motifs, bring to this lyric a wealthy social and psychological matter (content) they filling it with a sense of reality and survival as they are a phenomenon of an almost universal illumination. This is the reason why in this part of the study there are so few details characteristic only to the traditional Gjirokastra. Most of them present imageries of the traditional Albania or of the traditional Balkan society in general.

In the third part of the artistic layer in wedding lyrics research, the author is focused on two feasible features: in its spectacular and emotive character. By the spectacular character, we mean a magnificent ceremonial that attracts one's attention with its beauty and it presupposes the relationships similar to that of actor – spectator, though sometimes these relationships lie within the same individual. The spectacular character of this ceremonial derives from its solemn nature, from the lack of real artistic life as well as from the contribution of a considerable number of bearers who are part of the same ceremonial.

Wedding solemnity in Gjirokastra was also fostered by the fact that the role of the church, mosque and the state was almost inconsiderable in marriage celebrations, contrary to what happened in nearby rural areas. So marriage in Gjirokastra was also celebrated by the Cadi, the Imam or the church. Lack of real artistic institutions, lack of

electronic media etc, contributed to the further increase of the spectacular character of weddings.

The highly stressed emotive character of the traditional wedding of Gjirokastra is related to the fact that its ceremonial would mark a dramatic event of a wide illumination. In fact, the celebration in solemnity of the couple's wedding would deeply bring into light the joy of the family, of the kinship and of the community as well as it would bring into light the drama of the girl's separation from her maternal house, the slight sadness of the change from boyhood into manhood for the groom etc. In a spectacular and solemn atmosphere, the above mentioned and other lived experiences have shown the tendency to initiate the phenomenon of projection which is nothing more than the psychological tendency of individuals to incarnate themselves, their own past or future inside heroes of a book, of a movie, of a spectacle, ritual or ceremonial act, etc. In this way, females starting with young girls up to old women had the right to be perceived within the image of the bright, the mother and the mother in law, etc.

It can be easily perceived that both the spectacular and emotive character of Gjirokastra's traditional weddings have through centuries marked an important source of artistic values.

However, in this last part efforts are made to approach the traditional wedding lyrics of Gjirokastra region no longer from outside; from its relation to rituals, from the extent of its reflection to an ethnographic reality or to a range of traditional socio-psychological phenomena, but to approach it from the inside, from the poetic immanent values it transmits.

In order to reach this inner approach, which nonetheless remains within the limitations of a test, we are based on the theory of the multi-layer character of the poetic work; a theory which as a rule distinguishes three main layers: the layer of the sonorous units, the layer of comprehensive units and the layer that illuminates the world of work.

Research in the sonorous layer of this lyric presents it as a problematic one; it is hard to speak in terms of rhythm accuracy, for example in cases when the folkloric synchronization is not held; which means the word is separated from the melody. This fact results as completely natural, if we bear in mind that as a rule, both the number of syllables and the number of rhythmic stresses do not match in a

sung or oral lyric mentioned for study reasons. From the typological point of view, stylistic figures of the traditional wedding lyrics of Gjirokastra are mainly proved to be figures based on similarity despite the fact that this similarity is linguistically materialized or implied.

We see the third layer; the layer of the world of works in the traditional Gjirokastra wedding lyrics, as a research object of only humoristic and satiric nature of songs; so it has been intended only for the discovery of the comic world, leaving apart all the rest. Humoristic songs have helped us create a more concrete imagination of the unique features and colors characteristic of Gjirokastra's weddings.

It is a pleasure for me to stress that the traditional colorfulness of this lyric, of a "labe" basis in essence, has provided me with a special pleasure, the pleasure of meeting and satisfying my nostalgia with our grandfathers, grand-grand fathers and their obsolete world, but highly loved and respected.

The research of Tasim Gjokutaj represents in this way, not only a simple descriptive work but also a general one. The effort to emphasize his fondness to preservation and renovation of these values is one of his greatest merits as an expression of dialectical historical development determined by inner and outer factors.