

**EEIA-2018**  
**2018 International Conference "Education Environment for  
the Information Age"**

**THE RITE AS A COMPONENT OF EDUCATIONAL SPACE OF  
THE EASTERN SLAVS**

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*Abstract*

This paper considers the formative episode of educational space, associated with the meaning of the rite as the most significant source, by which it is possible to judge about the heathen period of education of the Eastern Slavs.

One of the ceremonies of the Eastern Slavs was the rite of tonsure. The symbolic significance of this action was in moving the child from maternal care to fatherly custody. Then it was father who was responsible for the further raising of a child. He taught his son hunting techniques, told him about the rules and requirements of lifestyle, historical facts and some religious mysteries. This ceremony had utilitarian pedagogical direction, tightly related with the social order of the Eastern Slavs.

The other striking and significant family worship, which allows to judge about parenting in the Eastern Slavs was the initiation ceremony. The person was not only to go through the great number of painful physical tests related to magical beliefs but also had to follow the requirements of moral imperative. This ceremony of initiation was special there and differed from the ceremony of other peoples. The purpose of the ceremony for the Eastern Slavs was to change the behavior of children and make them obey moral standards and regulations established by tribe.

Significant efficiency of this paper is in findings which have been made after theoretical and methodological study. Due to this research the rite can be regarded as a carrier of Eastern Slavs ideas of upbringing during pagan period.

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**Keywords:** Educational space, the rite, the Eastern Slavs.



## 1. Introduction

Nowadays the interpretation of educational space in pedagogical science is ambiguous. In the broadest sense, it is treated as a united integrative formation which creates an extended educational length combining educational events with didactic and upbringing ideas. Actually, this range indicates special components one of which is known as a traditional folk rite household of the Eastern Slavs. Folklore has significant importance for understanding pedagogical ideas of the Eastern Slavs. We wrote about it in detail in «The Experience of historical and theoretical reflection of the phenomenon of folk pedagogy» (Makarov, 2017). Slavic folklore has preserved traces of several ceremonies, which have pedagogical base. The ceremonies created on the peculiar features of social life of the Eastern Slavs reflect their pedagogical thinking and consequently didactic and upbringing actions. That is why it makes possible to judge about the rite as the most significant source of pedagogical ideas of the Eastern Slavs. This clarification is made in understanding the rites as the most significant source, by which it is possible to judge about the heathen period of the Eastern Slavs.

The most colourful rites, which throw light on education of Eastern Slavs, were family rites. The specific features of family worship of the Eastern Slavs are described in details in cultural and ethnological writings (Antropocentrizm ..., 2017; Lippert, 1881; Niderle, 1898, 1909, 2013, 2015; Leskinen, 2016; Milyukov, 2008). This paper focuses on the pedagogical continuum of family rituals. In fact, this research is interdisciplinary (Lukackij, 2017). It takes into account the data of cultural studies describing compliance with cultural norms and regulations, methods and orders established in symbolic actions of rites (Tylor, 1871; Lippert, 1881; Niderle, 1898, 1909, 2013, 2015; Milyukov, 2008; Tolstoj & Tolstaya, 2013; Leskinen, 2016) information, explaining different ways of human behavior, social relations (Morgan, 1878); data characterizing ethnology, cultural and historical life of the Eastern Slavs (Frazer, 1923; Mihajlov, 2017; Milyukov, 2008). However, this article focuses on the pedagogical views of education of Eastern Slavs, contained in the family rituals. The family rituals gave children consistent knowledge about moral norms and regulations of the certain genera and tribe, they said about household duties and responsibilities of each member of the family, upcoming spouse relations, prepared them for the future family life. These rituals had utilitarian pedagogical functions: they «naturally» reported a child about the environment and set an example of adults' behavior in different situations. Children as direct participants of these rituals were involved in a series of actions which created a kind of lengthy and sometimes rigorous school for them.

## 2. Problem Statement

The Eastern Slavs rituals which were built on the basis of social organization of life of the Eastern Slavs reflected their pedagogical and teaching ideas and consequently educational actions. The rituals contained some traces of perceptions of parenting and teaching children in the pagan period. The educational potential of the ceremonies has become the subject of study for pedagogical science. The results of this study are extensive descriptions and explanations of how the Eastern Slavs educated and raised their children during pagan period. However, pedagogical science has not yet taken the necessary steps to analyze

this question in the theoretical methodological key. That stated the problem of this investigation. This paper presents one of the aspects of the problem.

### **3. Research Questions**

Paper solves two important issues: the rite could be regarded as a carrier of the spiritual culture by which it is possible to judge about upbringing of the Eastern Slavs during the heathen period, and also to find out what is the uniqueness of pedagogical thinking and caused by it didactic and educational actions of the Eastern Slavs during this period.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

To make a review of the rite in the theoretical-methodological key and indicate the peculiarity of pedagogical thinking of the Eastern Slavs in the pagan period.

### **5. Research Methods**

To solve the issues were used the following research methods:

-historical-comparative, which allows to estimate and find out the level of knowledge on this problem, to indicate the key ideas of the research examining the sources;

-historical-retrospective, to establish correlation between diversity of historical facts, their generally accepted interpretation and pedagogical understanding of materials containing the ideas of upbringing of the Eastern Slavs in the pagan period.

In addition, a block of methods was used to make it possible to obtain, describe and characterize the ideas of upbringing of the Eastern Slavs from the pedagogical point of view.

### **6. Findings**

One of such ceremonies in the Eastern Slavs was the rite of tonsure, which was held in three or more years after the birth of a boy. The boy from his birth and up to the age of three was under the supervision of his mother. After this period of mother care he was taken from mother and given for the responsibility of his father. These actions were accomplished by this ritual: father or reputable guest on a family holiday cut some strands of boy's hair. This ceremony had a significant symbolic meaning it meant that from this time the boy started living a new life, the child from maternal care passed into the care of the father and it was father who would patronize his son from this very moment. The circle of his concerns was determined by teaching his son men's occupations, mainly hunting techniques. Besides, father told his son about the rules and demands of everyday life and all the things that seemed to be necessary in the life (historical information, secrets of religious nature, etc.).

The rite of tonsure introduced the boy into generic association and gave him new rights. This ceremony had utilitarian pedagogical direction and was tightly connected with a social organization of the Eastern Slavs. Analyzing the rite from this angle it is clear that the rite is not more than an institution which is characteristic of this social order and here it is possible to search the roots of pedagogical intentions.

The other most striking and significant family worship by which it is possible to judge about parenting in the Eastern Slavs is initiation ceremony. This ceremony like no others increasingly proves its

correlation with the institution of the past, because its social function was to grant a child the right to be a full member of the family community. The initiation ceremony occurred on reaching children of different ages, but as for the Eastern Slavs they tended to perform this rite at achieving the child sexual maturity.

At the very beginning of this ceremony father or elder brother took the committed person deep in the forest. The mother was not allowed to present during this ceremony for many reasons. Firstly, it was father who was responsible for the child at that period of time. Secondly, the ritual was performed under the great secret and it was forbidden for women to enter that place. Taking the child to the forest had special meaning it was like sending him to death. The place where the ritual took place was painted and decorated in a special way. Child and his family overcame this event as a tragedy. The committed person was left alone on a half way to the hut hidden deep in the forest which was built beforehand and he had to find himself the path to this place.

Another variant of sending the child to the forest was acting out a kind of kidnapping of a child by a creature from the forest. The perpetrators of these creatures camouflaged themselves as animals or birds and behaved like them. The children were frightened by these creatures and the fear served and still serves as an educational means of calming naughty children without using the power. The creatures from the forest took the child to the specially built construction in the forest where he was left alone.

This construction was in a form of a huge animal mouth. Entering this mouth was thought as if the monster had eaten the child. Symbolic death was caused by actions described how the monster was swallowing the whole child. This action was accompanied by a symbolic blinding of a boy (his eyes were patched). It was thought that the bright white light was the light of death, thus blinding the committed person was connected with his call to death. During this rite, it was assumed that he died and then again he was born, but it was already a new person. Another form of symbolic death was the chopping of a person. He was symbolically fried, burned, and then again a new person was born. Since the Eastern Slavs believed that the fire had cathartic and anti-aging power the neophyte was exposed to fire. It was thought that in this way his soul could be cleaned and a new man would appear.

The central action of the initiation ceremony was circumcision symbolizing the rejection of marriage, but this action was only the smallest and less harmful part of the scenario which was going on in the forest house or shack. The basic steps of the rite were accompanied by painful physical tests (knocking the front teeth, cutting finger, causing deep wounds and other atrocities). These tests lasted for weeks and accompanied by horror, darkness, hunger, thirst, disgust. Contrary to the view that the purpose of these tests was to nurture obedience, training absolute submission and harden the will of the future warriors, these atrocities were just the means which served to cause the temporary madness of neophyte, made him forget all: his name, his parents, his previous life. These actions had to cause the state understood for submitted person as a death.

This system of tests reflects ancient notions of our ancestors their vision of magic transition into another world. However, as the social life developed and cultural ascent of the Eastern Slavs formed standards of ethical and other relationship it gradually turned into a cult and became known as virtues. Therefore it was already in the pagan period, when in addition to a series of painful physical tests associated with magical beliefs; there was hidden requirement to verify the virtues of a neophyte. This requirement formed a special stereotype– to follow the moral imperative which was developed according to social and

cultural life of the Eastern Slavs and it was necessary for a committed person to fulfill these obligations. These made the rite of eastern Slavs different from the rite of initiation of other peoples. The originality of this rite lays in that it was accompanied by educational ideas, aimed to change the behaviour of a committed person, bringing him to ethical norms and regulations established by native or tribe to which the neophyte belonged. There was a kind of pedagogical impact associated with targeted raising of a committed person and a desire of a person who carried out the ceremony, to make some changes in the behavior of the neophyte. The necessity of making this changing was directly connected with ethic regulations of a tribe.

At the end of the ceremony the neophyte was washed, he was given special marks and other signs that indicated his successful passing, a new person had been born, he got spiritual awakening and a new name. The enclosing action of the ritual in different tribes of the Eastern Slavs had at least three forms of termination: a committed person returned to his home or went to the place where he was going to marry or create his own family; he could also stay at the forest house for some months or years; went to the “men’s house” and started living there. Regardless of further existence the committed persons organized a kind of brotherhood or “men’s union”, so the initiation ceremony was at the same time the rite of admission to this fraternity.

Being the main culprit of the rite, the committed person was involved in a series of symbolic actions syncretically related with didactic activities. A committed person was taught singing and dancing which was the part of the calendar ceremonies; it directed to call rain, raising crops, increasing game, scaring away diseases. Singing and dancing, usually accompanied by playing the psaltery, the tunes and other musical instruments; their sound was considered to be the voice of spirit. The boy was continuously long and thoroughly told historic data, household rules and requirements, the contents of the mythical representations were revealed for him, he was trained hunting techniques and all things that were necessary for balanced social life of a tribe.

Like in school, the committed person was given the knowledge by a teacher who was the ancestor and he performed the rite disguised himself as an animal. Likely this ancestor was a man, although initiation was carried out through woman genus. According to some ethnographic materials, initiation was carried out not only through the birth of a woman, but also through the very woman, so committed person was temporarily transformed into a woman – he was dressed in women’s clothes. It is thoroughly discussed in Propp’s works (Propp, 2000, 2001). This ancestor acted out not only symbolic but didactic actions which were to bring the neophyte to set of norms and standards of social order of the tribe. In this regard, the ongoing ancestor’s didactic actions were inseparable from the goals of socialization and lead to improving social life of a tribe. And in this case it is said about pedagogical impact-impact due to which the committed person was socialized in accordance with the demands of the practical life.

## **7. Conclusion**

Focusing on pedagogical issues of Slavic folklore gives pedagogical science the opportunity to analyze teaching ideas of upbringing of the Eastern Slavs in the pagan period. There are traces of these views in the family rituals built on the basis of social order of the Eastern Slavs. These rites reflected their pedagogical ideas and consequent educational actions. The originality of these actions in that the rituals were accompanied by educational ideas, aimed to change the committed person, improve his character

bring him to the moral norms and regulations established by the tribe to which he belonged. This clarification introduced in understanding of the formative episode of educational space, associated with the meaning of the rite as the most significant source, gives chance to judge about upbringing of the Eastern Slavs in the heathen period.

## Acknowledgements

Article is made in the framework of the State Assignment of the Institute for Strategy of Education Development of the Russian Academy of education No. 27.8520.2017/BCh

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