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**A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL NORM IN  
OSSETIANS: AN ETHNOPEDAGOGICAL ASPECT**

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**Abstract**

The article is a historical and anthropological analysis of the basic concepts of the Ossetian national education system. The traditions of national pedagogy are considered as a significant part of the ethnocultural heritage of this people and as an integral system of the most important and internally interconnected social macrostructures: basic values, spiritual and aesthetic traditions, moral attitudes and ethical and behavioral programs. The author adhered to two research directions: the analysis of the traditions of socialization themselves, specific institutions and norms, their factual content; and the analysis of the peculiarities of the subjective refraction of traditions from the standpoint of an ethnophore, that is, a person – the bearer of ethnic culture – themselves. The principles, norms and communicative subsystems of the pedagogical culture of Ossetians are considered sequentially, in a historical retrospective. The archaic, embodied in the mythological space of the ancient epic about the Narts (its Ossetian version), is revealed in line with the traditions of scientific folklore-ethnographic/historical parallels. In the public space of the modern Ossetian ethnic group, traditions, including traditional education, are not so zealously preserved. Nevertheless, the basic values of the ethnoculture of this people still have a fairly promising socializing resource. The article reveals the modernization potential of some traditions of public education, the forms of their modernization. A targeted study of the various components of ethnopädagogy, analysis of its specific content convinces of the irrationality of the complete rejection of this part of the ethnocultural heritage.

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*Keywords:* Ethnopädagogy, traditions, cultural continuity, retrospective analysis, socio-humanitarian approach



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## **1. Introduction**

This article analyzes the social norms included in the traditions of folk pedagogy of the Ossetians and those aspects of ethnic identity that are included in the semantic series of "values – norms – symbols" from the standpoint of a socio-humanitarian approach. They are embodied in stereotypes of behavior and motivating moral norms. In this study, ethnopedagogy (ethnic traditions of socialization) is studied as a historical and anthropological phenomenon based on the analysis of ethnographic and folklore material. The main focus is on the humanistic traditions of national pedagogical system.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The task of ethnology/anthropology in this context is to reveal the specific spiritual and moral accumulations of various ethnocultures, to provide an opportunity to rely on this unique heritage, to include it in the development strategies of both own ethnic group and the multicultural society as a whole.

## **3. Research Questions**

The socio-cultural aspect of the declared topic involves two research directions. The first is the analysis of the ethnic originality of the traditions of familiarizing the younger generations with the values of their (in this case, Ossetian) ethnoculture. The second is the analysis of the issues of the continuity of traditions from the standpoint of the ethnophor, that is, a subject – the bearer of the ethnic culture. We believe that such exploratory approaches will make it possible to more accurately identify traditional norms that have modernization, or even innovation potential.

The researchers of national pedagogy in one way or another associate their research with the ethnic factor (Chedgemov, 2019). Its influence on modern society is of interest to various specialists (Sikevich, 2011). Ethnologists consider ethnopedagogical problems in the context of issues of ethnic ethics (Bgazhnokov, 2000, 2011; Khadikova, 2016), moral principles (Bgazhnokov, 2011), age relationships (Bgazhnokov, 2002), various aspects of traditional etiquette (Bgazhnokov, 2011), national games (Gavrilova, 2016) and even the very phenomenon of ethnicity (Arutyunov, 2017; Barbashin, 2016). Traditions of upbringing are a projection of the moral and spiritual accumulations of any ethnoculture; they actualize the humanistic perspective and empathic approach to its study (Bgazhnokov, 2003; Khadikova, 2014).

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

To consider the traditions of Ossetian national pedagogy, its specific concepts, principles and communicative norms in a historical retrospective.

## **5. Research Methods**

Historical retrospection, historical and ethnological analysis: casual comparative, aggregative.

## 6. Findings

The study of the traditions of education implies the study of not only the semantic content of traditions, but also their motivational dominants. Since the functionality of traditions comes from antiquity, we turn to their archaic layer, captured in the Ossetian version of epic stories (Tsorieva, 2019).

1. Archaic layer of traditional education. As an ethnographic source, the epic is quite acceptable, since it recreates the ideology and values of its creators. Success in the field of educating a worthy personality among the Narts was equated with a feat. In the legends there are no direct indications of pedagogical methods, they are restored by indirect remarks. One of them is the measures of upbringing the "winner": the deliberate initiation of constant competitions between boys and young men. But unmotivated manifestations of physical strength are punished. The pedagogical (personal) ideal of the Narts is a man of "honor", the upbringing of whom is the main goal of the mythological "teachers". His qualities are succinctly stated in one of the central legends of the Ossetian version of the epic (Narty, 1986). This is courage, asceticism, respect for elders, for women, the ability to negotiate.

In the Narts society, various youth male groups stood out, they must serve the society, fulfilling the code of "minority" ("kæstæriuæg"). The following attitude is characteristic of the Narts: "Better general destruction than bad offspring" (Narty, 1986).

The epic contains motives of female mentorship associated with the "Mother of the Narts", the witch Shatana. She, being the undisputed authority for soldiers, takes care of them with her outstanding skills and sacred knowledge and often motivates them to feats. In general, Nart women are independent, absolutely free in the choice of companions, and are also trained in military skills and can defend themselves.

An important aspect of upbringing among the Narts is the development of creative abilities, often their victories are the result of a sharp mind and logic. Great importance is attached to aesthetics, the formation of creativity and good taste. The famous beauty Agunda preferred Atsamaz to other suitors for his musical talent. Narts (both male and female characters) tend to take care of themselves, they have developed ideas about personal taste.

The main forms and institutions of upbringing among the Narts are social institutions for the formation of public opinion: men's meetings, the previously mentioned competitions. The winners were honored by the whole people; therefore, competitions are an important school of Nart education. The threat of condemnation in public opinion is in the epic the most effective measure to achieve the "correct" behavior of young people, an incentive for their self-improvement. Methods of influencing the younger ones – psychological or physical punishment – are rarely mentioned. In the stories about Batradze, the effectiveness of self-education of an individual is mentioned. Public education is built in a hierarchy of age subordination according to the principle: imitating the elders, you bring up the younger ones. The personal example of "educators" requires the strictest self-control. And one more fact: epic pedagogy is characterized by the predominance of group forms of socialization over individual ones. Of the measures of individual influence, the most common are either encouragement to feats and good glorious deeds, or the threat of a curse. The concepts of military honor of the Narts include strict moral principles and ideas about a noble and generous attitude towards people. The warlike Narts did not follow exclusively the rule of force; they honored an order based on their notions of good manners and decency.

2. Education in the "traditional period". The study of the ethnopedagogy of the Ossetians in the so-called traditional period (18–19 centuries) is based on the analysis of a fairly extensive ethnographic material that makes it possible to identify pedagogical patterns of social behavior that were preserved in the processes of cultural continuity. We are also interested in the value-motivational attitudes accompanying them. The analysis of the material shows that in the "traditional period" the samples of the "ideal" personality have undergone certain changes. For example, in the male image, while maintaining the qualities of will and courage, the values of hard work were added. The values of the "minority" code ("kæstæriuæg") were still taught to children as an approved social norm. At the same time, the "educator" himself had to express himself extremely respectfully, not to allow rough abuse against the younger ones. Within the framework of the patriarchal society, the ancient "Nart" code was preserved, according to which educational functions were assigned to each adult. In 1781, Shteder (1967) noticed, perhaps, the basic principle of "Ossetian" upbringing. He argued that persuasion among them is quite effective, but "an example does everything" (Shteder, 1967). In traditional Ossetian society, like in the world of Narts, there were different youth groups. Kokiev (1885) argued that already the younger ones were required "complete disregard for all bodily needs. No physical pain and suffering should cause him a single groan or complaint" (p. 80). Further, it was required to understand the norms of social morality, the ability to correlate actions with the norms of social benefit. The broadest context of traditional education remained the spirit of competition, cultivated from an early age. In 1872, Pfaf (1872) noted "something like the Olympic Games" among the Ossetians, where "there were competitions in horseback riding, fist fighting, shooting, dancing, singing, etc." (p. 102).

Ethnopedagogy was based on an ethical and behavioral "charter" that distributed male and female social-role functions as basic categories of social "norm". The meaning of "male" upbringing reflects early historical strata, and it is more a regional than an ethnic characteristic. The observation of Kovalevsky (1886) that the highlanders praised courage and stoicism confirms the youth direction of "Dzhigit" upbringing. Also, the most important principle of traditional education was familiarization with the rules of conflict-free communication.

In the traditional life of Ossetians, female mentoring was preserved: the eldest woman of a large family – afsin – was a very authoritative subject of the upbringing system. The girls were introduced to the "female" value norms. First of all, to "bashfulness", which, in comparison with the Nart foremothers, was more meaningful and substantive. But the seclusion of girls was not welcomed, their main advantage was the ability to be in society. The researcher of mountain adats Leontovich (1883) found that among the Ossetians "great importance was attached to instilling in children the ability to behave with dignity and at the same time respectfully, politely speak and observe behavioral attitudes appropriate to age" (p. 359). We can regard this thesis as the goal of the pedagogical efforts of the Ossetians of the traditional period.

3. Traditions of national pedagogy in the reality of the present day. Let us consider the subjective perception of some traditions of upbringing among the Ossetians, focusing on the results of a survey of student youth in North Ossetia made in 2019, as well as on our own long teaching experience and practice of ethnographic reconstructions.

The young generation of Ossetians is interested in preserving and even re-actualizing some aspects of the socio-cultural, including ethnopedagogical, heritage. A common understanding of the humanistic

essence of various “codes” of national ethics has survived: “uag” (decency of speech), “afsarm” (modesty), “nymd” (bashfulness), etc. The young generation considers their complete rejection unreasonable, and find sensible the targeted popularizing – and even branding – of these phenomena. Further, the Ossetians now tend to be guided by public opinion, but the spirit of competition is no longer seen as the main principle of achieving success. They do not reject the traditional ethical and behavioral code “kæstæriuæg” (“minority”), but they do not consider it possible to follow it everywhere. The effect of a personal example is called the most optimal pedagogical influence. The risk of public ridicule, as well as of a woman's reproach, is still considered the most undesirable consequence of “doing wrong”. In the youth environment, the personal image of a “man” and the corresponding code “lægdzinad” (“manhood”) have been preserved. From the sum of the characteristics obtained, we can conclude that as an ideal, it remained almost unchanged.

## 7. Conclusion

In the public space of the modern Ossetian ethnos, traditions, including traditional upbringing, are not so jealously preserved. Nevertheless, basic values, traditional meanings of “norm” have a promising socializing resource. A targeted study of pedagogical ideals and, confirming their social and spiritual phenomena, convinces of the irrationality of a complete rejection of the ethnocultural heritage in the processes of historical creativity of peoples.

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