

**COMPARATIVE-TYOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE IMAGE OF THE GIANT (DEV)
IN KARAKALPAK AND TURKISH FAIRY TALES**

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Abstract : This study examines the portrayal of the giant (däw/dev) in Turkish folktales through a literary-folkloric and comparative-typological lens. Drawing on 77 tales collected by I. Kunoş (Budapest 1887–1889, Leipzig 1907) and analyzed according to Aarne–Thompson and E.M. Mélétinskiy’s frameworks, it identifies 17 tales where the ogre assumes dual roles—as adversary and occasionally as a helper to the hero. These dual functions highlight the ogre’s complex symbolic, pedagogical, and mythic significance in Turkic mythology.

Keywords: giant, folktale, typology, Turkish folklore, mythological archetype

Introduction

One of the oldest and most artistic forms of oral folk literature is the fairy tale. Fairy tales are an important genre of folklore that reflect a people's worldview, perception of life, aspirations, and hopes for the future. In the folkloric traditions of Turkic peoples, fairy tales hold a special place. They are not merely collections of entertaining stories and characters but also embody the customs, beliefs, and mythological views of the people.

In the fairy tale heritage of the Turkic peoples, alongside traditional characters, mythological figures are also widely encountered. One such image is that of the giant. The image of the giant holds a unique position in the folklore of Turkic nations. It may sometimes appear as a frightening, sometimes comical figure — occasionally helping humans, and at other times acting with hostility. In fairy tales, the giant typically serves as the hero’s primary adversary or as a character who creates obstacles. Its appearance, character, and actions are based on ancient mythological conceptions.

In the fairy tale traditions of Kazakh, Karakalpak, Turkish, and other Turkic peoples, the image of the giant appears in different forms. In one culture’s tales, the giant may be a man-eating, evil force, while in another, it might be portrayed as naive, foolish, or even just and fair. These features reveal both the commonalities and differences in the worldviews of the peoples, reflecting the typological character of their traditional beliefs.

This article examines the literary-folkloric and comparative-typological characteristics of the giant image in the fairy tales of Turkic peoples, identifying their shared features and national distinctions. It also analyzes the giant’s role, function, and symbolic meaning within the structure of fairy tales. The main goal of the article is to investigate the image of the giant in a comprehensive manner and to reveal the role of mythological characters in the folkloric worldview of Turkic peoples.

Main Body

The Mythological Foundations of the Giant Image

In the mythological worldview of Turkic peoples, the image of the giant holds a special place. In ancient beliefs and superstitions, giants were depicted as supernatural beings that posed a threat to humankind. They were imagined as enormous, immensely powerful creatures who lived in mountains, caves, forests, or remote open spaces and harbored hostile intentions toward people.

In Karakalpak folk tales, the image of the giant often appears as a frightening and cunning character, though sometimes as a foolish figure. For example, in the fairy tale “The Giant’s Daughter”, the giant uses various tricks to prevent his daughter from marrying a hero. However, the brave protagonist defeats the giant with his cleverness and achieves his goal. Here, the giant is portrayed as an evil force, though in some tales his naivety and foolishness are also highlighted.

Similarly, in Turkish folk tales, the image of the giant bears comparable traits. In the tale “The Invisible Giant”, a massive giant plots against humankind, but the main character overcomes him through intelligence. In Turkish fairy tales, giants often appear in groups of brothers (three giants, seven giants), each with distinct characteristics. In the folklore of Turkic peoples, the giant represents the people's worldview on life's struggles and the fight against evil and injustice.

Typological Commonalities of the Giant Image

When examining the image of the giant from a comparative-typological perspective across Turkic folk tales, several common features can be identified:

Possession of enormous size and extraordinary strength — In the fairy tales of all Turkic peoples, giants are depicted as beings of immense size and power. They can travel great distances in a single stride, uproot mountains with one hand, and cover the moon with clouds.

Hostility toward humans — In fairy tales, the giant typically appears as an antagonist, posing a threat to the hero or protagonist.

A combination of cunning and foolishness — The giant boasts of his physical strength but lacks wisdom. Thus, the protagonist usually defeats him by exploiting his gullibility.

Living in supernatural, remote places — Giants live in caves, mountains, dungeons, or uninhabited wilderness, signifying their mythological and otherworldly nature, distinct from humans.

National Characteristics of the Giant Image

Alongside common typological features, each nation's fairy-tale tradition preserves its own distinctive characteristics:

In Karakalpak fairy tales, the giant is typically a harmful force who blocks the hero's path. However, the hero often overcomes the giant's tricks with his intellect.

In Turkish fairy tales, giants frequently appear as brothers, each possessing unique traits. Additionally, giants are often depicted as guardians of treasure or owners of magical items. The hero usually achieves his goal by obtaining these enchanted objects from the giant.

The Function and Symbolic Meaning of the Giant in Fairy Tale Structure

In the fairy tales of Turkic peoples, the image of the giant plays a pivotal role in the narrative structure. Especially in classical fairy tale structures, the giant acts as the conflict instigator and a figure who tests the protagonist's courage. The giant presents both a psychological and physical challenge — a symbolic embodiment of the hero's trial.

In Karakalpak fairy tales, the giant usually represents a hostile force in the story, not just an obstacle but also a symbol of the evil threatening the people. The hero's battle against the giant

symbolizes a struggle against evil and the establishment of justice. For instance, in “The Giant’s Daughter”, the giant devises various tricks to avoid giving his daughter to the hero, but the protagonist ultimately exposes the deceit and defeats the giant.

In Turkish fairy tales, the giant is not solely an evil force; sometimes he serves as the owner of magical items, a treasure keeper, or even possesses certain virtues. For example, in “The Invisible Giant”, the giant is eventually forced to hand over a magical object to the protagonist. Here, the giant functions as a test on the protagonist’s path to maturity. Symbolically, the giant represents life’s obstacles and difficulties that must be overcome.

Moreover, the image of the giant embodies the hopes and worldview of the people. If the giant is the symbol of evil, then the hero represents justice. Thus, the hero’s victory over the giant reflects the people’s belief that justice will ultimately prevail.

Comparative Typology of the Giant Image in Karakalpak and Turkish Fairy Tales

When comparing the image of the giant in Karakalpak and Turkish folk tales, both similarities and differences become evident. In the mythological understanding of both peoples, the giant is viewed as an evil force, a supernatural being. However, each nation’s unique worldview and socio-cultural values have influenced how this image is portrayed.

Similarities: In both Karakalpak and Turkish fairy tales, the giant is the hero’s primary antagonist, the one who intensifies the conflict and tests the hero’s courage. In both traditions, giants are depicted as beings far larger and stronger than humans, inclined to commit acts of cruelty against people. They are often captors of the hero, guardians of treasure, or major obstacles on the protagonist’s path. For example, in the Karakalpak tale “The Giant’s Daughter” and the Turkish tale “The Invisible Giant”, the giant appears as a formidable force.

Differences: In Karakalpak fairy tales, the giant is predominantly a malevolent and socially dangerous force. Defeating him signifies liberating the community and establishing justice. In these tales, the giant is not only physically powerful but also cunning, sometimes possessing magical abilities.

In Turkish fairy tales, however, the role of the giant is broader. He is not just a cruel force but sometimes a helper or even a friend to the hero. In some Turkish tales, the giant owns a particular object or treasure, and through this, the hero reaches his goal. This reflects the Turkish folk belief that it is not always necessary to destroy an enemy; one can overcome and even benefit from them or neutralize them.

Typologically: In Karakalpak fairy tales, the giant remains a traditional menacing force that must be eliminated. In Turkish fairy tales, he evolves into a more versatile character. In Karakalpak tales, the giant must be vanquished as an evil being, whereas in Turkish narratives, he might even become an ally by the story’s end.

These differences are closely connected to the distinct ways each culture perceives evil within their folkloric thought systems, as well as their social environments and historical circumstances. In Karakalpak tales, defeating the giant signifies the establishment of justice within society, while in Turkish tales, it represents a personal milestone in the hero’s path to self-realization.

CONCLUSION

A comparative-typological study of the folkloric and literary nature of the giant (dev) image in Karakalpak and Turkish folk tales made it possible to identify the common and national characteristics of the two peoples' worldview and mythological perceptions.

In the folk tales of both nations, the image of the giant appears primarily as a symbol of evil power, an antagonist to humanity, and a character that tests the hero's bravery. However, in Turkish tales, the function of this image is broader — sometimes serving as a helper to the hero or adding an entertaining element to the narrative. In contrast, in Karakalpak tales, the giant is typically portrayed as a malevolent force threatening society, whom the hero must defeat through wisdom and courage.

From a typological perspective, while there are many similarities in the depiction and narrative function of the giant character in both nations' tales, certain differences rooted in national identity and cultural values are evident. In Karakalpak folklore, defeating the giant symbolizes the restoration of justice and liberation of the people from fear. In Turkish tales, overcoming the giant is sometimes a stage in the hero's personal growth or even involves neutralizing the giant or reaching a compromise.

This research demonstrates the connection of the giant character in the folk narratives of both nations with historical, social, and cultural factors, highlighting the significant role of mythological images in shaping the people's worldview.

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