

TARIQAHS IN TURKEY AND THEIR EFFECTS ON POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

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As an aspect of religious life, sufism which has existed for centuries in Islamic societies, still continues its existence today in the same way. Sufi schools have offered a way out for people who are trapped in the material life. Because some movements against the newly established Republic were performed through tariqahs, as a reflex the new regime developed a prohibitive attitude towards Sufi movements. On the other hand, although it has been prohibited by related law, Sufi movements have continued to maintain their presence in society. However, the issue that sufism and tariqahs have been restricted has brought the difficulty of applied work in this field.

Today, in Turkey, many tariqahs such as Qadiriyya, Naqshbandiyyah and Khalwatiyya still exist. These tariqahs occasionally seem to be highly effective on both religious life and country management. In recent history, although tariqahs and religious life have been attempted to be suppressed by the February 28 post-modern coup, the case is opposite today. It could be said that some tariqahs have a role in the election victory of the AK Party which has been in power since 3 November 2002. Especially, it might be argued that a large majority of tariqahs in Turkey have supported the AK Party on 30 March 2014 local elections.

In this paper, we aim to shed light on tariqahs, which still continue to exist despite of all restrictions in Turkey, without any prejudice and any reductionist attitude in the frame of the methodology of social science.

I would like to start with the notion of tariqah briefly. Tariqah refers to institutionalized Sufism in Islamic literature. In other words, tariqah is a transition of Sufism from the theoretical field to the practical field. Tariqah, which means road in Arabic, could be considered as a form that emerges from the same center of mystical thought but embraces different principles and methods. With the institutionalization of tariqahs, two foundations developed under the leadership of Madrasa and Tekke (Dervish Lodge) in Islamic society. From time to time, these two foundations came across the critique that Sufi interpretations are contrary to The Qur'an and Sunnah. Needless to say, the fact that Sufis had become popular and had gained success while shaking the role of ulama has an immense role in this confrontation.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, knowing the importance of mysticism for Turkish people, wrote letters to influential sheikhs and received their support when he started the Turkish War of Independence. As a result of this, after being elected to the presidency of The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, founded in 1920, he chose Mevlevi Dervish Lodge Sheikh Abdulhalim Efendi and Kırşehir Haji Bektash Dervish Lodge Sheikh Cemalettin Efendi as his deputies. However, some separatist ethnic groups who want to declare independence started a series of riots with the abolition of Caliphate in 1924. The most significant of them was Sheikh Sait Rebellion in February 1925. The use of religious themes in rebellions against newly founded Republic brought up the issue of closure of dervish lodges, as a result they were closed with the law no 677 on 30 November 1925.

Although they were closed by the law, tariqahs still continue to their existence in the Republic of Turkey. Furthermore, it is possible to say that some tariqahs operating in Turkey have implications on the world. Important active tariqahs in Turkey; Naqshbandi, Qadiriyya, Jerrahi, Mevlevi Order, Khalwati order and Rifa'i.

It can be said that politicians and tariqahs use each other. Both sides aim to give less but take more. Members of tariqahs and Islamic communities are seen as potential voters in elections by politicians, and this situation damages Islam most. Political parties who know that they will not get votes from these tariqahs eliminate their freedom of religion when they come to power.

It needs to be emphasized that Turkish elector votes not only for religious reasons but also for economic and other social needs. Therefore, it cannot be said that all votes of a tariqah goes to one party or non-members of a tariqah do not vote for the political party choice of tariqah members. For example, the winner of the presidential election, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan received votes from all sections of society. Yet, some religious communities and tariqahs voted to opponents of Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

It should be kept in mind that tariqahs have undergone serious changes from the time in which they arise to this day. Some tariqahs have emerged, which deviate substantially from their main purpose. From the Ottoman Empire to Turkish Republic, some tariqahs who want to have a voice in political authority had emerged and they experienced conflicts with the authority.

Tariqahs, whether some people like or not, stand before us as a social reality.

Republic of Turkey was built on the legacy of the Ottoman Empire which had a feudal society structure. The country's population, which came out of a devastating war, lived in rural areas greatly. Because this society living in rural area did not become urbanized quickly, a number of problems revealed. There were two main elements in feudal rural society structure: squirearchy and religion. Although squirearchy system remained in the village with the migration from rural to urban, the phenomenon of religion continued its importance in the city. The gap left by the squirearchy system in the village was filled by tariqah sheikhs in the city. Thus, tariqahs which are seen mostly as religious life style of the villagers were introduced into the city life.

In order to understand the process that tariqahs went through with foundation of republic in Turkey, political needs of the country needs to be considered. First of all, religion has always been used against laic intellectuals who were shaped by modernization movements since the last period of the Ottoman Empire. So, Sultans provoked tariqahs against this secular community which did not accept the authority of the ruler. Therefore, those tariqahs continued their stance against the Republic which removed the Caliphate. The newly established Republic had to break this resistance.

Besides this, Ottoman Empire was built on Panislamizm, but the Republic of Turkey aimed to built a nation-state. Thus, the creation of a new nation required ignoring the religious factors which feed the Panislamizm. Due to this reason a prohibitive attitude had employed by newly established Republic.

It has been in the early stages of the Islamization process that the Turks met with tariqah. Turkish Sufism, born and developed in Central Asia, extends from Central Asia to Anatolia. Yesevilik, the starting point of Khorasan Dervishs Movement, is a tariqah that largely shaped of Islamization of Anatolia and have affected the whole Turkish world.

State- tariqah relationship , beginning with Osman Gazi, Sheikh Edebali's groom, came up to Vahidettin, the last Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. Initial positive contributions of the tariqah spoiled as the time went by together with the state. When it came to the Republic time, tariqahs had really lost their primary functions. While a reform movement needed to be done, unfortunately, it was a destruction action.

Effective for the Islamization of the Turks, Sufi influences strongly goes ahead today. But it does not mean that cults proceeded in a straight line during the historic process. As in other places, in the Turkish communities there were conflicts between the cults, such as Malya war in 1237. During the last bloody conflicts of Babai riots, which rocked the state of Anatolian Seljuk, urban cult leaders and Sufis were in the ranks and moral support of Sultan Aladdin Keykubad. In contrast, many Khorasan Dervishs were the head of the Turkmen, who revolted in the rural area. Malya was bloodshed. Turkmen killed Turkmen and the basis of separation between Sunni-Alevi of Anatolia was laid there.

There has been three kinds of relationship between cult leaders and statesmen throughout history: hostility, friendship or relationship based on self-interest.

In history we can find a number of examples of this kind of hostility. Hallaj –al Mansur, who was stoned to death and Nasimi, who was tortured and murdered by excoriating, are the most fa tariqah mous Sufis. As he said “Ene-l’hak = I am God”, Hallaj - al Mansur was killed for the name of the Sharia and as the victim of the classic conflict between "madrasa-lodge" . Yet, here "sharia" was abused, Hallaj - al Mansur was in fact, intended to be silenced for criticizing the power. When failed to silence, he was killed on a make-believe sharia court decision.

From the past up to the present day, relationship based on self-interest between tariqah and politics has never finished. In this type of relationship, parties utilize each other in order to provide financial rewards or influence. One of the most colorful examples of friendship based on mutual respect is Abraham Gülşeni, the founder of Gülşeniyye Branch, which is one of Halveti Tariqah. He saw five heads of state, Sultans, from Sultan Selim I to Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent and he was able to establish a healthy friendship with all of them.

It is crucial to consider the difference between Islam and other religions so as to understand the relationship between cult and politics. This difference is the synthesis of "Learning and living both afterlife and the world at the same time ". Therefore, two centuries later from the beginning of Islam, a government-related "clergy group" began to emerge, and they brought some official and always available comments to be discussed.

Islam, after its emergence, took a state tradition with it, especially in expansion period. Prophet and Caliphs were both religious leaders and state governors; this situation necessitated the religion-state relation and carried this relation to religion-state equality.

For this reason, the fundamental essence of Islam which handle the human as an individual and give much importance to his rights and human dignity stayed in the background. At this stage, sects came into play and saved people, who became suffered and weak because of state power, from political oppression.

Thereby, sects, with spiritual power of community, also have presented their earthly reaction against political government. While some sects are used the spiritual power of community in order to increase of their worldly power, some of them used this power in order to join political movements, even to organise local disobedience or contact with external effects against national unity and solidarity.

When the spiritual and earthly power of sects surpassed the power of religious scholars and leaders; sultans, viziers and other statesmen who represent the political government, seek the ways of collaboration in order to prevent the using of this power against him. Thus, sects and their members became the partner of political government.

Democratic values and institutions transferred from the West together with Republic, provide community to join political formations and have the right to speak on governance. Legal institutions and new organisations which represent and manage the community were formed. These organisations undertook the duty of representation of the political and social thoughts of community.

When the principle of secularism started to be dominant on the political and social life, the relation of religion and state started to loosen gradually. This situation constricted the scope of sects, so they draw back to their real area of activity which is Sufism. As a result of this, social effectiveness of sects on political and earthly life ended.

This situation did not last long. In the time period, when infelicity raised in some sections of society because of new socio-political institutions and values which was brought by the initiatives of modernisation, need for old traditions re-emerged in these sections.

Because, interchange and development in society is closely related to mentality of individuals of society. If a society is not mentally ready to change, the success of other changes is not easy. Dependence of community to religious and traditional values, and the idea of that new institutions did not bring anything to them, caused community to cling past values. When this idea of community put into context of democracy, work became easier and it caused sects to re-emerge.

Over the time, attendance of some bureaucrats and politicians to these sects caused to increase the effectiveness of sects on politics and have a repressive power on politicians. These oppressions are still alive or at least politics-sect relation is in progress despite all preclusion.

If we consider again the Republican era, new founded Turkey was had to be, by a frequently repeated expression, modernised. This obligation has made itself evident during last two centuries. But, the success was not somehow coming in this field. New founded Republic has chosen the controlling of sects which leads society pietism in order to practise the modernisation which community consider it as irreligiousness.

Another reason of developing a prohibitive manner against sects was to take liberty of religion and conscience under guarantee, namely was to adopt the secularism. According to those who have this thought, present society was not able to tolerantly consider other beliefs, which are different from their beliefs.

But, we see that principle of secularism is not in progress properly. Secularism must be a state “attitude” rather than state “ideology”. State shows this attitude in a neutral area and does not identify itself by any ideology within the narrow and solid manner. State prepare the conditions of coexistence of people who gathers around and live in different thoughts and beliefs, it also prevents these rules in action.

If liberal and democratic culture flourish and take new roots to wider community spheres, sect-politics relation resides on a strongest ground.

Conclusion

As long as sects is seen within the concepts of right of association of democracy in Turkey, the relation of both left and right parties to them will remain because of vote concern. This fact will not change until all institutions, rules, principles and values of democracy settled completely.