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UNDERSTAND AND CRITICALLY DISCUSS SUFISM: 'ABD AL-RA'UF FITRAT, YASAWI AND YASAWISM

Tasavvufu Anlama ve Eleştiri Tartışma: Abdurra'uf Fitrat, Yesevi ve Yesevizm

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Abstract

Activity and creativity of Ahmad Yasawi has attracted many researchers since the beginning of the 19th century. The first scientific discussions about Yasawi and his activities appeared in European editions. Among the Turkic peoples, the first scholar of Sufism, in particular the teachings of Ahmad Yasawi and his Sufi Order, was Mehmed Fuad Köprülü. His book *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar* still serves as one of the main sources on the history of the literature of the Turkic peoples. A worthy continuer of the scientific traditions of Köprülü in Turkestan was 'Abd al-Ra'uf Fitrat. In the early 20-ies of the 20th century, Fitrat began to create a history of Uzbek literature since ancient times. In this direction, he pays special attention to the history of Sufism, the origins of its emergence. In particular, Fitrat illuminating this problem, in detail analyzes the personality of Ahmad Yasawi, his activity, and creativity. In addition, he is considering the formation of the Yasawi poetic circle. Fitrat, arguing about Yasawi and Yasawi Order, critically analyzes and tries scientifically substantiating the ideological heritage of Yasawi, especially his *Divan-i Hikmet*. Comparing different manuscripts and editions of this work, Fitrat analyzes in detail each verse and scientifically substantiates the meaning of individual words that play a certain role in understanding and interpreting the ideas of Yasawi and the Yasawi Order.

Keywords: Abd al-Rauf Fitrat, Yasawi, Turkistan, Yasawism, Yasawi poetic circle.

Öz

Ahmet Yesevi'nin etkinliği ve yaratıcılığı, 19. yüzyılın başından beri birçok araştırmacının ilgisini çekti. Yesevi ile ilgili ilk bilimsel tartışmalar ve faaliyetler Avrupa yayımlarında yer aldı. Türk halkları arasında, Sufizm, özellikle de Ahmet Yesevi öğretileri ve Yesevilik ilk alimi Mehmed Fuad Köprülü idi. *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar* adlı kitabı, Türk halklarının edebiyatı tarihi hakkında hala temel kaynaklardan biri olarak hizmet etmektedir. Türkistan'da Köprülü'nin bilimsel geleneklerinin değerli bir kıtası, Abdurra'uf Fitrat idi. 20. yüzyılın başlarında, Fitrat eski zamanlardan beri Özbek edebiyatı tarihi oluşturmaya başladı. Bu doğrultuda Sufizm tarihine, ortaya çıkışının kökenine özel bir dikkat gösterir. Özellikle, bu problemi aydınlatan Fitrat, Ahmet Yesevi'nin kişiliğini, onun aktivitesini ve yaratıcılığını ayrıntılı olarak analiz eder. Ayrıca Yesevi şiirsel çevresi oluşumunu düşünüyor. Yesevi ve Yesevi tarikatini savunan Fitrat, Yesevi'nin, özellikle *Divan-i Hikmet*'in ideolojik mirasını bilimsel olarak analiz ediyor. Bu çalışmanın farklı elyazmaları ve baskılarını karşılaştıran Fitrat, her beyti ayrıntılı olarak analiz eder ve Yesevi ve Yesevizm fikirlerini anlama ve yorumlamada belirli bir rol oynayan bireysel kelimelerin anlamını bilimsel olarak kanıtlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Abdurra'uf Fitrat, Yesevi, Türkistan, Yesevizm, Yesevi şiirsel çevresi.

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The beginning of the twentieth century is marked by great changes in the socio-political life of the Central Asian states. In particular, Uzbek literary criticism, which has experienced rapid development in a short time, has moved into intensive development. Uzbek literary criticism, revising the thousand-year history of the people's spiritual heritage, tried to form a new scientific attitude to it. However, this process, which took place under difficult conditions of the nation's comprehension of its identity, the formation of national identity and the emergence and strengthening of the idea of national independence, came under the influence and pressure of various political regimes. These phenomena are especially evident in the "propagation of ideas", "reconciliation" with the political ideology of the ruling authorities. From this point of view, scientific and popular scientific works, published in the early Soviet period, must be considered and analyzed based on historical realities.

In Turkestan, the scientific interest in the life and activities of Ahmad Yasawi arose in the first quarter of the twentieth century. One of the first who wrote an article on this topic was Tatar literary critic 'Abd al-Rahman Sa'di (1889–1956) (Zagidullina ve Gilyazova, 2008: 384-401). His article titled *Who was Yasawi?* was published in 1922 in the journal *Inqilāb* (Sa'di, 1922: No 5-41-42). The second scientific article (Fitrat, 1927) was published in 1927 by 'Abd al-Ra'uf Fitrat (1886–1938) (Qosimov, 1994; Karimov, 1993: 29-34), one of the founders of modern Uzbek literary criticism.

Fitrat at the very beginning of his article, analyzing previous works on the life and creativity of Yasawi, characterizes the work of 'Abd al-Rahman Sa'di as an article entirely consisting of philosophical ideas. In addition, Fitrat commends the work of Sa'di not purely scientific, because it contains mostly praise addressed Yasawi (Fitrat, 1927: No 6-29).

'Abd al-Ra'uf Fitrat, was fascinated by the study of Sufism and Sufi Orders and their teaching while he was still in Istanbul in 1910–1914. At that time, he was ideologically close to Sehbenderzade Filibeli Ahmet Hilmi (1865–1914), who was a follower of the *Wahdat al-wujūd* – the unity of being. In his works, he appeared as an anti-materialist and sharply criticized materialists. (Uçman ve Özerverli, 2010; Uludağ, 1996; Aydın, 2001; Tepekaya, 2005) Hilmi was one of the ardent preachers of pan-Islamism after the establishment of the Constitutional Government in the Ottoman Empire. Hilmi spent several years in Tripoli, where he agitated local Muslims to the ideas

of pan-Islamism and the anti-French campaign. In addition, being in exile, he was carried away by Sufism, in particular by the *Wahdat al-wujūd* teaching. After the Constitutional Revolution of 1908, Hilmi began teaching philosophy at the University of Istanbul. In the newspaper *Hikmet*, which he published in 1910-1911, Hilmi took an even more open line, calling 300 million Muslims for unity and engaging in propaganda for Sufism at one time, in particular, he published in the newspaper whole books about the Sufi doctrine, a biography of famous Sufis (Uçman, 2010: cilt 38-424; Landau, 1994: 77-78).

Fitrat, unlike other researchers of Sufism, views its emergence as the result of development of various opposition political forces to Arab despotism against conquered peoples. In his opinion, these opposition political forces, in its turn, caused the split of official Islam and the emergence of various religious trends. The biggest opposition movement against official authority, as Fitrat defines, was Sufism, whose representatives began to interpret the main Islamic dogmas in a different way (Fitrat, 1927: No 6-29-30).

Fitrat, talking about the nature of Sufism and its spread borders, argues that Sufism originated in the second century of the Hijra in Turkestan. Turkestan, in his opinion, is the ancestral home of Sufism and brought up the first famous representatives of the Sufism as Shaiq Balkhi and Ibrahim Adham (Fitrat, 1927: No 6-30). Fitrat, continuing his discourse on the nature of Turkestan Sufism, writes “*in Central Asia, Sufism existed long before Ahmad Yasawi. Nevertheless, the Sufi ideology in Turkestan split into two large currents, following precisely the teachings of Ahmad Yasawi and 'Abd al-Khāliq Ghijduwani*” (Fitrat, 1928: cilt 1-74-75). At the same time, Fitrat refers to the *Manāqib* books while speaking about the ideological differences between these two currents.

Fitrat's research on Yasawi and Yasawism includes detailed information on the biography of Yasawi, where he attempted to extract biographical data from *Diwan-i Hikmet* and determine the date of Yasawi's birth. Fitrat, based on the following couplets of the *Diwan-i Hikmet*, determines the date of birth of Yasawi in the second half of the fourth century of Hijra:

*After four hundred years, he will be born,
And will serve the people for several years.* (Fitrat, 1927: No 6-31)

In addition, Fitrat analyzed in detail the *Diwan-i Hikmet* and the influence of this book in the spread of Yasawism. In this part of the study, Fitrat

discusses the ideology of the Yasawian doctrine and tries to extract the basic rules of this teaching, commenting on the quatrains from the *Diwan-i Hikmet*.

We can say that Fitrat studying Yasawi and Yasawism mainly wanted to determine the role of Yasawi and the influence of his ideology, in particular his *Diwan-i Hikmet*, on the socio-political situation in Turkestan. In addition, Fitrat considers the *Diwan-i Hikmet* as one of the important elements in the formation and development of Turkic written literature. From this point of view, Fitrat considers the *Diwan-i Hikmet* one of the three main sources of Turkic written literature along with *Qutadghu Bilig* and *Hibat al-Haqāiq* (Fitrat, 1927: No 6-32). Fitrat clearly defines the role of Yasawi in the birth of written Turkic literature. In particular, as he claims, Yasawi deliberately refused the form and style of Persian poetry. Yasawi, after returning from Bukhara to his hometown Yassi, gathered around him pupils from the nomadic population of Turkestan. According to Fitrat, this factor served as a rejection of the form of Persian poetry and the birth of a written style and form of national Turkic poetry, based on folk oral literature (Fitrat, 1927: No 6-31).

Fitrat, basing and confirming the opinions expressed by the well-known Turkish scientist, one of the first Sufi researchers Mehmed Fuad Köprülü (1890–1966) in the book *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar* (1919), believes that all known versions of the *Diwan-i Hikmet* of Ahmad Yasawi have been rewritten or published in recent centuries. Therefore, Fitrat, repeating the thoughts of Mehmed Fuad Köprülü, not having in hands the version of the *Diwan-i Hikmet*, rewritten closer to the era of Ahmad Yasawi, science cannot study this book as the primary source of the history of the Turkic language (Fitrat, 1927: No 6-32-33).

Fitrat, arguing about the influence of Ahmad Yasawi's creativity on the last generations of Sufi representatives, claims that after Ahmad Yasawi, writing poetry in his style became "fashionable" among the Turkic Sheikhs (Fitrat, 1927: No 6-33). The influence of the *Diwan-i Hikmet* has spread not only in Turkestan, but also among the Volga Tatars. Fitrat, determining the scale of the spread of Yasawism and the influence of the creativity of Yasawi, bases on the ideas of Mehmed Fuad Köprülü and recommends that everyone must familiarize themselves with his above mentioned book *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar*.

The ideology of Yasawism, largely set forth in the *Diwan-i Hikmet*, according to Fitrat, was directed against the despotism of high-ranking Muslim officials and the clergy that supported them. Fitrat, to determine and give an objective description of the essence of the ideology of Yasawism, tries to outline the socio-political objectivity of the time and bases on the historical works of Herman Vamberi and Vasilij Bartold. At the same time, Fitrat tries briefly recount the history of Turkestan since its full conquest by the Karakhanids to the advent of the “infidel” Turkic Qara Kitaians. Political intrigues, the non-centralized political administration of the Karakhanids and the repressive policy of the Qara Kitaians, according to Fitrat, became the most influential factor in the spread of the Yasavian ideology in Turkestan (Fitrat, 1927: No 7-8-39).

However, Fitrat wonders. Was the ideology of Yasawism effective in establishing justice and equality in society? According to Fitrat, the study of the legacy of a man who had an impact on a vast territory and existed for 7 centuries, in a unilateral direction, will not give an objective scientific conclusion. Fitrat, after some reasoning, finds Yasawi’s doctrine unfit for restoring justice and equality in society. He explains his thoughts, so that Yasawi agitated humility to objective reality and live only “the passion of the Almighty”. According to Fitrat, this “passion” passed to Sufism from “New Platonism” and in the creativity of Yasawi the theme of “passion” takes an important place (Fitrat, 1927: No 7-8-41). In addition, according to Fitrat, Yasawism adopted some of its doctrines from Buddhism (Fitrat, No 7-8-1927: 42).

Fitrat, at the end of his scientific observations on Yasawism, concludes that Ahmad Yasawi does not interpret the formation of his teachings, unlike other representatives of Sufism. In his opinion, Yasawi perceives Islamic values in the form they are. Therefore, according to Fitrat, Yasawi is not a Sufi on a high level; he is an ascetic who renounces worldly affairs (Fitrat, 1927: No 7-8-43).

In conclusion, one can say that ‘Abd al-Ra’uf Fitrat regards Turkestan as the ancestral home of the emergence and development of Sufism and its influential currents. He perceives Ahmad Yasawi not as a traditional Sufi, but as an ascetic, renouncing worldly affairs and living only as “the passion of the Almighty”. His *Diwan-i Hikmet* for Fitrat was and remained one of the primary sources of written Turkic literature and the founder of Turkic poetry. The

ideology of Yasawism, based on the “passion of the Almighty”, Fitrat considers from the point of view of socialist realism and his conclusions differ from the traditionally accepted conclusions that are expressed in terms of Islamic dogmas. Fitrat, investigating the emergence and development of Sufism, in particular one of its influential current – Yasawism and the life of its founder Ahmad Yasawi, mainly argues in the style of “propagation of ideas” and “reconciliation”, which was mentioned at the very beginning of this article. Therefore, an objective analysis of his reasoning must proceed from the point of view of an objective perception of the historically formed political regime and system that dictated its rules. Fitrat, as an investigator of the history of

Sufism tries to expel his thoughts and conclusions from the point of view of the modern scientist. At the same time, he tries to justify his observations with the statements of other influential scientists and refers to their generally accepted scientific works. From this point of view, we can perceive his thoughts as objectively stated and scientifically grounded. However, while, as was said above, we must take into account the political regime in which he was forced to exist.

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