

INSTITUTE OF ALEVI-BEKTASHI CULTURE

A. Evaluations

In the course of time, humanity has investigated the causes of existence. The questions starting with “what” and “why” have built the history of civilisations, and all religious and philosophical doctrines have been the attempts to give meaning to the objective reality. Thinking has thrived in this way in Greece, Egypt, Babylon, China, India and other geographies. It is a fundamental truth that human being is the leading agent in the cycle of existence, world, and life. As a being with an ability to think, he is the dynamic force of the material world and social life. He is, at the same time, a social value with the social systems and institutions he has constructed in life. His social aspect also expresses his spiritual and psychological domain. His reflex to question and define the external world has constructed the phases of the philosophical sphere. While the schools in the history of thought have defined their ontologies holistically, Alevi-Bektashi thought-faith systems have developed as constructs placing human being into the centre.

Alevism-Bektashism, which sees the problematic with life not in the physical world but in the development of human metaphor, has been a school where the ideal human being is not only defined but also cultivated. Speaking of the internal terminology of the doctrine, perfect human being (*insan-ı kamil*) has been viewed as the exemplar of human value. Contrary to the categorical attitude of the traditional view in the form of creator-created-matter, Alevism-Bektashism explained on the basis of oneness-multiplicity parallelism (*Vahdet-i Vücut*). Making human being, as a subject-matter, the centre of its ontological-epistemological structure, Alevism-Bektashism has accepted as its basic manifesto the propositions with divine-human content. From the 13th century on, Hadji Bektash Veli thought has contributed to the settlement of social, political, and cultural conflicts and to the human phenomena, by saying “*no gender discrimination is made, in the language of love*”. Not discriminating against gender, race, nationality, and faith; it has seen the objective reality in the self-fulfilment of mankind. This philosophical-spiritual profile has united in itself such virtues as tolerance, equality and sharing.

Alevi-Bektashi thought-faith systems have been established in Anatolia since the 13th century. Hadji Bektash Veli and the charismatic dervishes with such titles for spiritual leadership as *dede*, *baba*, and *sultan* have been the prototypes of the Alevi-Bektashi systems. As a saint affiliated with the doctrine of Hodja Ahmet Yesevi, who lived from the second half of the 11th century to the second half of the 12th century, Hadji Bektash Veli took this mystically characterised thought to Anatolia. 13th century is a significant milestone for the Anatolian history and culture. Hadji Bektash Veli and the group of dervishes organised around him promoted a human-centred discourse, despite all the political, military, social, economic and cultural impasses. Contrary to the dominance of the paradox between thought and faith in the Medieval Age, the doctrine managed to offer the humanity a model that discarded alienation.

Alevism-Bektashism has preferred to express in a symbolic universe the analyses related to internal and external phenomena. It is possible to see these means of expression in *Velayetname*, written in the name of Hadji Bektash Veli. Description of Hadji Bektash Veli and his thought in the form of a white pigeon is one of the basic examples of the symbolism in the text. The doctrine aims at characterising the substantive truth with the symbol of pigeon. It is also possible to see the philosophical-historical missions of Hadji Bektash Veli and

Khorasan saints in what they did in Anatolia and the Balkans. Educated at Hadji Bektash Veli lodge in the 13th century, the dervishes were sent to Anatolia and the Balkans to represent the thought-faith system. In this context, Guvench Abdal was appointed to Kürtün-Harshit Valley in Gumushhane; Karadonlu Can Baba to Sivas-Erzincan; Koluachik Hadjim Sultan to Ushak; Seyyid Cemal Sultan and Resul Baba to Kutahya-Afyonkarahisar-Eskishehir junction (to Eastern Aegean), Sari Ismail to Denizli; and Sari Saltik to the Balkans (to Eastern Europe). By means of villages, associations and lodges they established, these dervishes became the primary agents in the process of settlement in their regions, each being a social-spiritual leader, and the saints had effects on the social-religious identities of the communities in their influence areas. What is socio-anthropologically significant is that the philosophical-historical structures formed around the lives of the saints in question have remained for many centuries now. It is an important example that the historical-religious personality that emerged in the name of Sari Saltik has so far survived in the Balkans since 13th century, through the holy places in Romania-Babadag, being the primary centre, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania. Guvench Abdal, another member of the doctrine, was sent by Hadji Bektash Veli with the same mission to Kürtün-Harshit Valley in Gumushhane. Guvench Abdal, who founded the village of Tashlica (Shihli) in Harshit, set up a social-historical-philosophical organization that started in Kürtün and its environs and later expanded to the entire Black Sea region. The Chepnis who settled in the region, its centre being the village of Tashlica, dominated an area as far as Sinop in a short time. The Chepnis, whose thought-faith world is associated with Hadji Bektash Veli through Guvench Abdal, have preserved their philosophical-religious identities up to now. Today the Alevi faith-dede order known for Guvench Abdal is still active in hundreds of settlements in cities like Gumushhane, Trabzon, Giresun, Ordu, Samsun, Zonguldak, Duzce, Kocaeli, Tokat, Erzurum, Kars, Sivas, Chorum, and Yozgat.

It is possible to give several other examples about the happenings in the lives of the two saints which we reported to analyse the historical-religious development of Alevism-Bektashism. The propositions that the doctrine formulated for human being and society can be analysed from this historical material. With this methodological attitude, it becomes feasible to describe the philosophical universe of Alevism and Bektashism. Not being based on any political, economic, and military power, Alevism-Bektashism refrained from the hegemony of power-dominance in this respect and promoted a humanistic vision for the human phenomenon. This is an achievement that Alevism and Bektashism present to the collective memory of civilisation. The lines “*Entwined in flesh and bone, in Yunus form have I showed up*” by Yunus Emre, one of the major representatives in the 13th century of Hadji Bektash Veli thought; the address of Pir Sultan Abdal, who spoke to humanity in Sivas-Banaz in the 16th century:

“Four things there are that brother needs

One science, one word, one song, one saz” (*the Turkish string instrument)*

and the stanza of Shah Hatayi, the charismatic representative of the Alevi theology in the 16th century:

“Thrown I was from one candle to another

Soil I became and so scattered to the Earth

For a while God I was, with Him I did stay

Fire fell on my heart, I have come burned”

all transfer at an aesthetic zenith the Alevi-Bektashi understanding into the philosophical platform. Not only has word in Alevism-Bektashism remained in the literary, artistic domain, but also has transformed into a social-philosophical expression. In this context, poetry and music have developed as two main expressive means of the doctrine. The ingenuity to express with wisdom what is to be told in the name of thought cultivated hundreds of *ashiks* (minstrels) such as Yunus Emre, Pir Sultan Abdal, Shah Hatayi, Kaygusuz Abdal, Virani Abdal, Yemini, and Kul Himmet. What has been transmitted to the society by the discourse of these minstrels has been the doctrine’s analyses of human being, life, faith, and society. In the course of time, music has contributed to the development of the minstrel tradition as much as word has. *Baglama* (the Turkish string instrument), so-called *Telli Kur’an* (Kur’an in the form of the string instrument) in the internal terminology of the doctrine, has transformed into *nefes*, *deyish* and *deme* (all three being mystical songs) by complementing the right word. For this reason, Alevism-Bektashism history has gained a greatly significant characteristic in terms of such branches of science as literature and music.

Since Alevism-Bektashism has been based on human being, divine love, equality and sharing, all being different from the traditional beliefs and institutions, it has faced reactions from the rulers, dominant culture and faiths in the past. The Alevi community, which constituted an important population of the Anatolian rural life, stayed away from the centre and its values, and represented the religious-philosophical identity of the periphery. Alevism fulfilled its mission as the set of values of the peripheral population by not isolating itself from life and social realities. The faith institutions which have been referred to as faith-dede orders in the literature have been the fundamental truth of Alevism. Alevi faith-dede orders have developed two main statuses of Alevism in its internal system, *dedelik* (Alevi leadership) and *taliplik* (discipleship). Basic ritual practices like the ritual organization called *Cem*, *ikrar* (promise to commit), *musahiplik* (fraternity), *görgü* (rite of integration), *dar* (a rite in Cem) and *düşkünlik* (excommunication) have survived in Alevi-Bektashi faith-dede orders. Membership to the order has been the religious-philosophical identity of the Alevi individual. The religious, cultural and social domain has been disciplined with the system organized among the Alevi faith-dede orders and defined as “*hand to hand, and hand to God*”.

Bektashism was organised by Balim Sultan as a thought-faith system of specified rituals, institutions and statuses. Bektashism, which found its principles and values in Hadji Bektash Veli’s historic-charismatic personality, tried to reach the entire humanity through its religious venues called *tekke* (*dergah*). Bektashism has established in the course of time a systematic organisation in urban settlements and was actively practiced especially in the Balkans. It still retains its historical, institutional and religious status in the Balkan geography today. Bektashism was also organised in the North Africa in 14th-15th centuries by means of Kaygusuz Abdal’s activities. The Bektashi tekke known in the name of Kaygusuz Abdal in Egypt had been an important religious-cultural centre of the doctrine in the region until the 20th century. At the turn of the 21st century, Bektashism was moved to the continents like Europe and America by its adherents. Bektashism carried out its activities through religious venues called tekkes in various locations, all of which were centrally controlled by Hadji Bektash Veli Dergah, so called *Pirevi* (Saint’s House). The posts of *dedebaba*, *halifebaba*, *baba*, *dervish* and *muhip* have been the main statuses of the Bektashi tradition.

Alevi-Bektashi thought-faith systems which we have attempted to summarise in certain aspects are the address of the saint doctrine to the civilisation. Different from the official historical studies and specifications of mechanical analyses, Alevism-Bektashism is

an attempt to define the ideal human being and the ideal society. 20th century is an era when the societies in the world came face to face with a monopolar, capitalistic transformation. In today's world, where human being and its values have been lost and an individualistic, pragmatic rationale has been adopted, humanity is experiencing a social, cultural, economic and political decomposition of a large scale. Despite this, Hadji Bektash Veli's wisdom that gives precedence to humanity; Yunus Emre's lucidity in faith and thought; Pir Sultan Abdal's joy of life; and Edip Harabi's closeness to truth are the values that should survive for the essence of humanity to be preserved and for the civilisation to thrive.

Recognising the importance of the philosophical-historical mission of Alevism-Bektashism, the Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture was founded in Germany in 1997 to assist this process. The institute programmed scientific, academic activities to scientifically study the phenomenon of Alevism-Bektashism; to analyse the historical process; to specify oral and written sources; and to encourage studies made in other fields concerning Alevism-Bektashism. The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture, viewing Alevism and Bektashism as a religious fact, gives priority to the activities carried out to help the survival of the historical, philosophical structure of the Alevi-Bektashi faith. It is among the primary goals of the institution that the ritual practices, religious observances and philosophical discourse of the doctrine be introduced and presented to the adherents of the Alevi-Bektashi faith and to the entire humanity. Within this context, Germany-based centre of the Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture not only carries out scientific activities but serves as a religious-cultural venue as well. The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture maintains that Alevi-Bektashi thought-faith systems should preserve its historical structure while being scientifically critiqued and that it should be internalised after this. Only in this way can the Alevi-Bektashi community be said to correctly understand and put into life the advice given by Imam Ali in "*I would be the slave for forty years of the one who teaches me a word*" and the one given by Hadji Bektash Veli in "*The destination is darkness unless one takes the path of science*". One further contribution of the scientific attitude and method will be to the eradication of Alevism-Bektashism-related speculations, polemics, and fallacies that have reached today increasing in number.

B. Goals and Activities

The primary goal of the Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture is to scientifically put forward the historical, philosophical and religious profile of the Alevi-Bektashi faith. Alevism-Bektashism, which has represented in its history the human being and his values, has not been able to express and concretely present its philosophical-intellectual discourse due to the political, cultural causes that the dominant mentality has brought about. This sociological-historical reality has caused Alevism-Bektashism to have difficulty operating its structures and institutions. In the process that has lasted for centuries, Alevi-Bektashi faith-thought centres have always been put under control; sources and documents of the doctrine have been destroyed; communities of Alevi-Bektashi faith have been subject to forced migration and settlement.

At the turn of the 21st century, the need for scientific studies concerning Alevism-Bektashism became obvious. The primary scientific work is to archive the Alevi-Bektashi oral and written sources after their precise inventory is made. Archiving the Alevi-Bektashi sources is one of the primary goals and activities of the Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture. The archive is of strategic importance for Alevism-Bektashism, which has not been able to classify its oral and written sources because of the sociological reasons in the historical process. The first dimension of the archiving activity consists of preserving written documents

like lineages, edicts, caliphal certificates, and foundation vouchers by copying, repairing, and maintaining them. Particularly, historical documents available in the families of the dede orders are important from the perspective of identifying the historical developments of the Alevi faith-dede orders and their institutional-religious connections with each other. The written sources belonging to the Alevi faith-dede orders are also primary materials to critique the historical dimension of Alevism. The second dimension in archive construction is to record of the collections of *nefes*, *duvaz imam*, *deme*, *deyish*, *velayetname (vilâyetname)*, *conk* and *divan*, all of which are primary elements (of prose and verse) to understand the philosophical universe of Alevi-Bektashi doctrines. It is a scientific fact that Alevism and Bektashism have a rich literary and musical tradition. Studies concerning the Alevi-Bektashi music, which has developed on the basis of the minstrel tradition and reached a significant aesthetic-philosophical level, should also be included in the archiving activities. By doing so, the elements that have been orally transmitted so far and that are the basic dynamics for the Alevi-Bektashi philosophical history will have been specified.

The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture believes that the records obtained through the archiving activities should be analysed from the perspectives of various sciences like philosophy, history, sociology, anthropology, ethnology, literature and music so that the Alevi-Bektashi sources will be critiqued in terms of different disciplines. For this reason, the Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture aims to build institutional, scientific connections with the universities and to develop these relations increasingly at the academic level. The institute also aims to have continuous dialog with the scientists dealing with Alevism-Bektashism and, accordingly, to develop the scientific contacts between the science world and the institute. The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture values, from the scientific point of view, the master's and doctoral theses written on Alevism-Bektashism at the universities. Therefore, the institute gives priority to the publication of available theses. The publication of academic theses is important for the development of the Alevism-Bektashism literature and for the completion of typological and terminological studies. Supporting the academic studies and educating competent experts of Alevism-Bektashism are also the primary activities to be encouraged. One of the most important problems in the Alevism-Bektashism studies is that there are very few scientists specialising in Alevism-Bektashism.

The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture has included in its work program the publication of a journal to disseminate scientific studies on Alevism-Bektashism. To be issued in every six months as the publication of the Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture, the journal is planned to meet the international scientific-academic criteria. The articles in the journal will be full text in Turkish and German, and their English abstracts will also be provided. Through the scientific and advisory boards to be set up, support will be provided from the scientists specializing in Alevism-Bektashism and from the representatives of the Alevi-Bektashi faith. The articles will be published on the basis of the reviews by the referees, which will make the journal a refereed publication. The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture attaches importance to the publication of the journal from the point of the socialization of the academic-scientific knowledge.

The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture has also included field work in its program within the framework of scientific studies. To carry out scientific research in Anatolia and the Balkans, which are the historical development regions of the Alevi-Bektashi thought-faith systems, is a primary endeavour to specify the oral, written sources of Alevism-Bektashism. A great deal of significant data related to the doctrine has been collected through field work in the past. It will be possible to find out new documents and data by means of new field work to be done in the future. Within the context of field work, it will be possible to compile the

elements created in relation to the minstrel tradition, and the data about the preserved ritual practices of the Alevi faith-dede orders and, particularly, about their influence areas. In line with the field work, oral and written materials primarily related to Alevi faith-dede orders, Bektashi lodges, and the doctrine's historic-charismatic representatives will be specified. This work will enable the science world to define more precisely the historical, philosophical and spiritual structure of the Alevi-Bektashi thought-faith systems. A similar activity to field work will be the cataloguing of the Alevi-Bektashi texts registered at world universities and international libraries. The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture will include in its archive the records that it has catalogued in different centres within a certain work program.

The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture has scientific, academic connections with the scientists from Turkey, Europe, and various locations of the world, who study Alevism-Bektashism. In the context of these contacts, the Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture periodically organises events like symposiums, conferences, and panels. The institute holds scientific, academic activities on specific topics in its Germany-based centre, with the support provided by specialists.

There are also religious, cultural activities among the events of the Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture. It is among the foundational goals of the Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture to help perform the basic rituals and observances of Alevism and Bektashism. Accordingly, to carry out religious, cultural activities on such dates significant for Alevism-Bektashism as *muharrem* (a month for commemorative, mourning fasting), *nevruz*, *hidirellez* (time to welcome spring; rebirth of nature) is among the primary functions of the institute. The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture strongly agrees to the proposition that Alevism-Bektashism thought-faith systems should preserve its natural, historical and philosophical aspects by checking them against the realities of the time. For this reason, within the scope of religious, cultural events the institute regularly participates in and supports the events held in Turkey and various other countries, of which the activities to commemorate Hadji Bektash Veli come first.

The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture is an institution that carries out religious, cultural and scientific activities as summarised under certain headings above. In the years to come, the institute will resume its activities geared towards carrying Alevism-Bektashism thought-faith systems to the future and publicising it to the humanity. What is important for the Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture is that Alevism-Bektashism, which, opposing any form of discrimination against race, religion, language, gender, nationality and ideology, regards everyone equal and ascribes holiness to love, should keep contributing to the civilisation.