

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE BEKTASHI DERVISHES

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ABSTRACT

This research paper focuses on the analysis of the “dervish” figure as a chronological effluence of his life. Analyzing the conditions that an individual should fulfill when he wants to become part of Bektashi faith, the steps to be taken, the rights and obligations, until the moment when separated from life. Dervishes have played an important role not only in their institutions such as *tekkes*, *tyrbe*, *headquarters* (Alb. *Kryegjyshata*), but have helped people with the opportunities they have had. The love they have given to humanity, has caused the tekke to be added with many other dervishes, to attract many Albanian and foreign believers. All this analysis is based on documented data as well as record data from conversation with dervishes during the time this research paper is realized in protection of the dissertation topic.

Keywords: Cleric, dervish, myxher, Bektashi practices, Bektashi rituals, dervish dresses.

INTRODUCTION

“*Dervishia*” is the smallest religious unit, where the Bektashi dervishes serve. Every “*dervishie*” is directed by a dervish, decreed by the Bektashi World Headquarters. In his religious and administrative functions he has direct subordination by the parent of the tekke and dede of the respective dedeliks (Alb. *gjyshat*) (Article 9, Statute of the Bektashi World Headquarters 2009).

Simplicity in speech, discipline, rule in Bektashi manners and devotion to the path of right are the most valuable qualities of a muhib or a Bektashi cleric.

It's a duty of every follower and cleric that Bektashi philosophy to study and embrace, and each in his duty be competent in the tasks that are required.

In the book “Bektashi Testament”, (Alb. *Testamenti Bektashian*) is presented the figure of a true follower and a cleric who should be an example for the people, as people turn their eyes always to them. Bektashis should be example in appearance, to be always and to fight as much as selfishness (Kalçani, Baba Selim., 2000: 106-107). Bektashis must be implacable warriors to defend their faith thus the bright way of Haxhi Bektash Veli with no change and distortion. They muhibs, that are not yet formed can sins of talking nonsense, inexistent things, inherited from generations or uneducated muhib, it is advisable for them better to silence, and when they become acquainted with the truth then they are free to express their opinion (Ibidem).

In the book “Search the Truth” (Alb. *Kërko të vërtetën*), a journey in Dede Ahmeti's speech are appeared some elements that characterize the dervish. In Bektashi morality a dervish must be secretive and silent. His faith is the truth. Dervish needs to gather all the knowledge of Bektashi sofas, must spend the life sideways as in a forbidden land. Dervish needs to be careful, do not let the words go without thinking. Dervish must be a seeker in Bektashism,

protection for those who seek protection, knowledge for those who understands (Ahmetaj, K., 55).

*In humility to be like ground,
in knowledge to be like the Sun, in generosity to be like a river,
in secret to be like night, in supreme will to be like death (Ibidem).*

A man should be born twice. He should be born from his mother and he must be born by his Murshid. He who born only from his mother is the body. It's just a copy of something tangible. Human is born into the really world, only through the influence of murshid (Birge, J.K., 2008:115-116). Murshid takes the place of God for the beginner, surrendering to the murshid he finds the truth he seeks. One of the main features of Bektashism is mysticism that exists between murshid and his follower. What murshid learns to his follower only they know.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ranks

In Albania there are 8 different levels through which a Bektashi member passes in a consecutive way, getting the names: “ashik”, “muhib”, “candidate dervish”, “dervish”, “myxher” (*unmarried dervish*), “father” (*Alb. baba*), “grandfather” (*Alb. gjysh*) (*Turkish dede*), “great dede” (*Alb. kryegjysh*) (*Turkish dede baba*).

In Bektashism, members who which to dedicate more and to become part of the Bektashi faith must pass some stages basis on the hierarchical pyramid of Bektashism.

Based on the pyramid stands ashik. Ashik means someone who loves the Bektashi religion. It refers to him who is attracted and feels some loyalty to Bektashi principles and activities, but has not yet received a nasip or has not entered into the order. This is the moment when ashik are in the process of drawing from the order. They visit tekke, talk to father and their regular members, listen to Bektashi music, and sing at the feasts of this faith (Birge, J.K., 2008: 186-187).

Muhibs. In the initial sense it is not different from the ashik and it means someone who loves or friend spiritually connected. The technical use of this word refers to someone who has passed through the rite of acceptance, has received nasip and is worthy to sit at the religious ceremonies of the order. The ceremony under which someone becomes a muhib is called *Ikrarayini* ceremony of declaration of faith or *Aynicem*, gathering ceremony (Birge, J.K., 2008: 188).

Dervishes. This position requires a greater devotion to religious life. After attending the necessary ceremonies, the dervish can wear the taj (*Alb. taxh*) or hat of the order and tekke becomes his home where he serves until the end of his life. A Muhib, before becoming dervish, has served 10-15 years in tekke. In fact there is no any determined time when muhib may be ready to become dervish. This is determined by the ability to approach his teacher (Birge, J.K., 2008: 189).

Babas (fathers). Babas are all those dervishes elected from Bektashi people by the circle of a tekke and are decreed by dede (grandfather) and dedebaba (great dede). Babas lead the tekkes and enjoy the right to perform the delivery ceremonies for Muhibs and Dervishes (Kallajxhi,

Xh., 1964: 35). A worthy dervish can raise in standing and becomes baba, taking over the direction of the tekke and becoming a friend, religious cleric and counselor inside the Bektashi order (Birge, J.K., 2008, 190). Also in Article 46 of the Statute of the Bektashi community in 1924, "In every tekke, baba is the one who leads, the dervishes are his employees".

Dede (grandfather), are the fathers who see the last Bektashi delivery ceremony and head the dedeliks, which are the centers of the entire district's Tekke (Kallajxhi, Xh., 1964: 36).

Dedebaba (great baba), is the highest spiritual authority of Bektashism, who heads the Headquarters and represents the morality of Bektashi element. (Ibidem)

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative methodology. Data were collected through the instrument of in-depth qualitative interview with dervishes during the working time. In addition, the research uses the technique of text analysis and the content analysis of the documents, the statutes of the Bektashi community and the various books that complement this work.

FINDINGS OF EMPIRICAL DATA

This part explores empirical data based on qualitative interviews with dervishes and literature review. The questions are: What are its main rites? How is the life of dervishes? What are the 10 days of Matem? What are its main practices? Which is the end of the dervish life?

1-Dervishes, rites

There are two dervish categories, those married and unmarried dervishes. Below, is described each of them with their features.

2-Dervishes

After the satisfying fulfillment of the probation period, muhib became dervish during a special ceremony, in which placed "Taxh" ("*crown*", *headgear of the order*) and attire. In the book "Bektashism and Albanian tekke in America" attaches particular importance to the religious attire. There we learn that the three main elements are: taxh, hirka ("attire" long white dress until the bottom of the foot) and lintel (a kind of belt very wide):

The Bektashi clergy attire is a symbol, an inherited gift from ancient times, after the Prophet Adam. This habiliment is honored and sanctified by all the prophets. Also Prophet Muhammad himself it was communicated this holy habiliment from angel Gabriel in Mirage's night. And the Prophet Muhammad entrusted this to Ali the Great in a special ceremony. After Great Ali, he was held by Imam Hasan, Imam Husain and all the Imams, hand in hand, until to the one who arrived at the Pir Haji Bektash Holy. According to Bektashi norms, the religious attire is eternal and invariable. This attire is an indication of dogma, not a sign of youth and belonging to a discipline. The religious attire summarizes mainly Taxh (taj), Hirka and Lintel (Kallajxhi, Xh., 1964: 36).

As for Taxh, the Albanian Bektashi dervishes wear the taxh with 12 pairs. These are called *terke*, a name of Arab origin that namely, “leaves”, because the taxh symbolizes abandonment from the vices and all the wickedness of the people's world.

Hirka is the body cover from neck to ankle. It symbolizes the removal of dirty clothing of this world and wearing the white garment of moral purity. For this reason, the traditionally used hirka is always white because it has the meaning of generosity and purity. Hirka also symbolizes the first mantle of Adam's prophet, and in this case, has the meaning of covering mistakes and human vices. (Kallajxhi, Xh., 1964: 37).

Lintel, very wide wool belt, which tied in midst and derive from Great Ali, who tied it for first time to seventeen of his loyal at the time of the covenant ceremony. In the Bektashi sense the belt symbolizes the connection between the guide and the holder. The Belt constitutes a solemn pledge on the part of the holder who will be faithful and inseparable from the covenant. (Kallajxhi, Xh., 1964: 38).

To be accepted as a dervish, it's not enough just to finish the probation period mentioned above. The 1924 Statute contains some conditions which must be fulfilled. To become dervish, you must be between the ages of 15 and 25; to have begun the studies; to be a graduate in special dervish's lessons and to have the authority of his dervishes' parents (Chapter III/B, article 36, Statute of the Bektashi World Headquarters). We notice two points: on one part the dervishes becomes such at a young age, on the other part, there was the necessity of a level of knowledge (taken out of the tekke) for candidate dervishes.

In subsequent statutes, none indicates exactly the conditions for giving the rank of dervish; it is not known whether they were changed in the meantime, but we can assume that they remain roughly the same.

Regarding the duties of dervishes, it is the Statute of 1924 that gives us more data. First of all, the dervishes are considered in every tekke as “employee” of baba (Chapter IV, article 46, Statute of the Bektashi World Headquarters). Their obligations in this period have to do with the care for the flourishing of the tekke, of its prefecture and of insurance, thanks to tekke revenues, of a pleasant life, as well as with the purity of the places (Chapter III, article 30, item 2-3, Statute of the Bektashi World Headquarters 1924). What is characteristic is the fact that everyone works in the tekke: the baba, the dervishes and other peoples who belong to other religious belief. Tekke it is like a bee hive where all the bees, young and old, give their help doing what they can (Xhelaj, S., 2015: 74).

Generally, to ensure the welfare of the tekke, when one of the dervishes departs for travel or dies, with his services will be charged another. The notion of service is very important to the Bektashis and is renewed without cease, dervishes serve their babas, their tekkes, serve the community and serve Bektashism. The life of dervishes in tekkes begins with prayer, religious ceremonies, works on tekkes or in the field and keeping of the tyrbe.

3-“Myxher: Dervishes or “unmarried dervishes”

This dervish category does not exactly constitute a “rank” in the Albanian Bektashi hierarchy, at least this is reflected in the community statutes. Dervishes called myxher, which to win this title, must provide evidence of a strong discipline and of a profound maturity, and in realization of another ceremony, that of the virgin. The virginity consists in the puncture of

the right ear. Myxher dervishes have a higher rank than that of other dervishes (Kallajxhi, Xh., 1964: 35)

So these disciplined dervishes give proof of their maturity, they also pass the ceremony of celibacy and after being accepted, they have a higher rank than others because it includes one new “pass ritual” in a more closed circle and a greater devotion to Bektashism. An important fact in passing to the level of myxher is that the ceremony, during which the dervishes expressed their wishes, does not develop in tekke, as it happens when they express their desires when they become simple dervishes.

4- Knowledge of the life of the Bektashi cleric

Discipline and rule keeps alive Bektashism. Without discipline and rules Bektashism would have no progress as it is today. Every follower and cleric is obliged to apply general regulation and internal regulation implied by the principles.

5-Conversation

The Turkish word “muhabet” comes from the Arabic word which means “love”, “affection”, “connection” and “friendship”. In Albanian, the *muhabet* (eng. conversation) has got a different meaning of “discussion”, surely as a result of what this term implied for the Albanian dervishes who used it, because the conversation in the Albanian Bektashis was a gathering “friendly” during which it was discussed, talked, sang, but especially during which the baba or a dervish explained to believers the doctrine of the order (Rossi, E., 1942: 72-73).

This table talk was therefore of special importance. In every tekke it was assigned the room of conversation (hall of conversation). Such meetings could be made every week, every two weeks or every month, according to population opportunities (especially in the function of field work). So frequency was not constant. The number of participants varied according to tekkes. Men and women were present without distinction and without separation. During the meeting it was customary to drink brandy (Alb. raki). Most of the time, baba recited or sang, then explained to them by teaching to believers Bektashi dogmas.

As for drinks, alcohol in general was not forbidden, including drinking in tekke, as alcohol consumption was part of the conversation sessions.

Most of the Bektashi believers remain muhibs which frequented the tekke for conversation, for ceremonies and celebrations that marked the life of the community.

The life of the Bektashis in tekke and Bektashi wealth has been transmitted in the queue of the people. Nefeses are singing in every case: during the ceremonies, during the concerts for ashik (Melikoff, I., 2010: 18). Nefeses for Bektashi traditions are present in every significant case of life. Throughout the various religious ceremonies they try to recall the events of the afterlife through songs and dances. But it is pleasing that in the Bektashi conversations every muhib brings with it ashiks and talibs to learn and clarify the way of Bektashism, for embedded to them the love for this Islamic sect and consequently to prepare the talib to see erkan (Kalçani, Baba Selim., 2000: 98).

Tekke or the assembly where they gather and talks, there are these separate divisions, but similar to that of Pirevi, with no changes such as: Meydan or the place of mystical pray,

chimney coffee paved with hassock where it usually takes place in Bektashis conversation, hashef or kitchens where food is prepared, the guesthouse of the clerics and muhibs sleeping, bakery, slaughterhouse where sacrificial animal meat is cut, stables for keeping livestock and any other (Kalçani, Baba Selim., 2000: 99).

6- A Dervish willingly accepts fasting of ten days of Matem

Mourning or Matem for Bektashis is held for 10 days in sign of worship for the 72 martyrs of Karbala. For all the followers and clerics these 10 days are days of great pain. Before Matem occupancy, muhibs should be washed, cleaned in the face, cut the nails and wear clean clothes, preferably with a dark color.

Every muhib except he will fast for all of days of Matem in sign of worship for martyrs of Karbala, but also mourn he will show it in view, clothing and everywhere. During Matem the follower must be deprived from the world's pleasures, his delight will be prayer and forgiveness for today's eternal life. On this day of sorrow for muhib, his house will be Meydan, where will be read the books of "The Flower of Saints" (Alb. "Lulishtja e Shenjtorëve") and "Two Beautiful Roses" (alb. Dy trëndafilat e bukur).

During these 10 days visit for marriage or other goodness are forbidden, except for cases of visits to unhealthy and comforting visits to death. Breaking of fasting with desire for the Bektashis is a great sin. These days, should take care to ensure that nothing with the soul be violated, shedding of blood is absolutely forbidden. The food during mourning days mostly need be with productions of land. In order to maintain the health, liquid foods are preferred such as soup, soup with peas or rice with herbal oil, can used diluted beans, food with herb, different salads, etc. (Kalçani, Baba Selim., 2000: 80-81).

The meat slaughtered within Matem's days and unbroken eggs before are strictly prohibited. Beverages of any kind, whether or not sweet, are prohibited. To feel thirst for the first 3 days is not allowed any liquid for drinking, except the diluted foods. Coffee without sugar is allowed since the first days of Matem, because only the coffee is drinking in death, and such Matem is.

After three days it is allowed to use yogurt and buttermilk, as well as plum liquids in natural state for use with bread. Milk is not allowed in use as well as cheese. The greeting of the follower in these days is the saying, "Ja Ali!" and the answer: Ja Hyjsejn! It is advisable that Matem to be done together with the followers nearby the tekke, based on the rules, but can be started and alone according to the requests. Likewise, it is also recommended that the opening of mourning to be near the tekke, under the guidance of myrshid, in Yles' time (lunch), but in impossibility the opening can also be done at home (Kalçani, Baba Selim., 2000: 81).

The rules of mourning are not just for muhibs, but and for clerics of any grade. Clerics as devoted to these days, their dress simplifies, the tone in conversation is low and their face presents compassion and sorrow. Baba removes the lintel and carries Dervish's taxh on the head, removes the rings and other symbols of the cleric.

Clerics are forbidden to wear black dresses, because the mourning of clerics appears in the simplicity of the dress. With all of these, they tell the world that we are really mourning for the sake of Imam Husain, they show that we are stripped of all clerical grades (Kalçani, Baba Selim., 2000: 82). The next day of the opening of Matem becomes Ashura. It is a sin during

the days of Ashura to make other sweets alongside her, such as halvah or something else. Every believer, and especially every Bektashis muhibs, before Ashura's preparation, must sing the Dua and then begin the preparation and eating it, Ashura is the blessed dessert that is devoted to Imam Husain (Kalçani, Baba Selim., 2000:83).

7- Practices

Outside the ritual we have just described, Albanian Bektashis observed in their lives some practices that were removed from the strict Muslim observation. Unlike the practice of the five daily prayers of the Sunni Muslims, they did only two prayers a day:

“Once at dawn of the day and once at night, in these prayers, prayed to God to make progress, peace and brotherhood in the world and in the people.”

These prayers were made without turning to Mecca, and ablution was practiced only once in a lifetime when entered in the tariqat. Women who had the grade of muhib attended the meetings with men, which provoked many criticisms and accusations of bad habits over the Bektashi during the times.

In the statute of 1924 signify that a woman could become muhib only if she was married. Bektashis also had some special nutritional practices from those of Sunni Muslims: they eat pork meat, but did not touch snakes, turtles, dogs, and especially rabbits. As for beverages, alcohol in general was not forbidden, including drinking in tekke because it was part of the conversation sessions.

The practice of numerous pilgrimages are realized by Bektashis in holy places not only in Mecca, but also in Karbala and in Albanian cities, such as Mount Tomorri, etc.

8- Dervishes moral reports

Dervishes are believers, are capable of interpreting reality and occurrences from human life. They appreciate their human and whatever work and profession of their. Among them are individuals who deal with trade, with agriculture and different crafts. Among them are writers, intellectuals belonging to educational and cultural fields. For dervishes as a special religious social category it is characteristic that they mostly care for the moral image and faithfully respect the tekkes norms.

Dervishes are known as charitable people. Everyone who knocks at the shelter of dervishes in tekke to find food or refuge is sure to encounter a good hospitality and no one asks for name and surname, nor to what religious belief belongs.

One of the greatest Sufi Iranian poets, Farid ud-Din Attar, in his work Pand-nama or “Book of Counsels.”, in chapter XIII, for the life and work of dervishes writes:

*If you have mind and knowledge,
Be Dervish and with them associate.*

All dedes, babas and dervishes, as well as in the middle of the night to come in Tirana, will address to the Bektashi World Headquarters, because the tekkes are everywhere home of the clerics and believers. It is haram and unlike for clerics to sit in the club and sleep in hotels, being surrounded there by many servile, making wasteful spending because it is sweat of

people. Him cleric who violates these rules will be judged at the Supreme Council (Kalçani, Baba Selim., 2000: 22).

Dervishes are dedicated and are devoted with a chaste soul and clean to their faith. Many are dervishes who have left great works in Bektashism and humanity. Dervish Ali Mehmet, a man educated in religious schools that he had since the Ottoman Empire, who has served in the tekkes of Frasher and Pristina. He had gained the trust and hearts of people, he knew to keep his figure of a believer and exalt his moral figure. This magical force of this dervish attracted people. Dervish knew to keep the people connected around Bektashism even when the religion was persecuted (Artistic, social, religious magazine "Wisdom" "Alb. Urtësia", No. 43, 2005:20). The dervish figure was very important, they honor the village chambers. In joys, family celebration they added the joy, in misfortune they diminished the soreness (Ibidem). These calming elements for humanity show the great and white soul, the wisdom, maturity, and the justice that characterize dervishes.

9-Obsequial of a dervish

Based on the Bektashi customary right and in the centuries old tradition, with their passing from life, the Bektashi clerics of every rank, rest on the objects of cult where they have had the longest time of their religious service. In cases when unduly are buried in public cemeteries or other places (especially after the ban on religious freedom in 1967 in Albania), the clerics and councils of bektashi dedeliks, in cooperation with the Holy site of the Bektashi World Headquarters and the relevant state organs, organize the work for bone reburial. No one of his family or relatives can enjoy the right to hold bones of babas and dervishes (Article 13 of the Bektashi World Headquarters Statute 2009). When dervish dies, the stone or wood carved on the head is made in the form of taxh to show the Bektashi identity. The green color of the taxh, the baba's green hirka and the green cover of tyrbes, reflects the green color of the dress of the saints in paradise (Kalçani, Baba Selim., 2000: 106). The place of the dervishes' grave is determined by their contribution throughout life. There where they have contributed more and have invested more good, they are buried there. Babas are buried in the premises of the Bektashi World Headquarters.

In the book "Tekke of Shëmbërdhenj", is made a description of the burial place of the Bektashi clerics. The spaces of burial sites have the shape of an irregular quadrangular, located in the north-south direction (the frontal part 45m and the eastern part without the arc part on the northeastern side, is 40m). The width, on the south side is 12m and it extends up to 20m in the middle, while on the north side the straight part is 9m of the rest, of depended by the terrain is made in the form of an arch. So the perimeter of the walls of this burial site reaches over 120m in length. The height of the walls at the frontal part reaches 1.5m, in the north part 1.9m, over 3m on the eastern and over 2m and less on the south part (Basha, P., 2009: 42).

CONCLUSIONS

Bektashism is the faith that focuses on perfecting the character and spirituality of human beings. It tries to free human from all bodily obstacles, to embellish people with divine qualities. Bektashism guides human to the right path through many proofs. That person, who decides to pursue this path, in order to follow up to the end perfection like human, must abandon all the benefits of this material world in order to have faith. The good dervish

preaches the leaders of Bektashism, is one that becomes useful to society, helps others, and equips with virtues.

Bektashism has played and plays an important role in Albania, with social and national influence. Bektashism in Albania has marked and continues to mark important successes in all directions. With the wisdom and spirit of tolerance, it has contributed to the creation of a warm climate of cooperation with other religions, targeting a unique front, in the struggle against the evils that stain the society. One of the motives which has followed the Bektashis is the fact that have adapted with time but always by removing people from evil and to purify their spiritual world with those values that ennoble human.

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