

# The Path of the Khoja Ahmet Yasawi in Kazakh and Turkish Minstrel Customs

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## Abstract

Since our people have suffered under Russian colony nearly for about a century, we were remotored from our history, literature, cultural heritage, and from religious beliefs, so we had to get education and knowledge within the framework of the Soviet Union and Communist ideology.

Regaining the independence of Kazakhstan, new researches were conducted in Kazakh

history, beliefs, and culture based on real facts and documents reproduced by scientists on the literature review. "Cultural Heritage" project started in this area in Kazakhstan. The main objective of this project is to investigate our national culture, and historical facts; introducing our people and future generation real facts of our cultural and civilized heritage. Nowadays a lot of researches and studies have been made and are still ongoing due to this project.

One of the most important areas in this study was to introduce the Master of Turkish world Ahmet Yasawi to the Kazakh nation. Indeed a very strange case, because Khoja Ahmet Yasawi's mausoleum is on Kazakhstan lands. It was buried in the city of Turkestan. However, it was impossible to introduce Khoja Ahmet Yasawi's heritage due to the political regime of that century, and those who tried were also silenced by the government.

As the wind of independence blew our people felt relief more and more, and starting period of "Rebirth, revival", put much effort towards continuing a new kinship ties again that have been broken between brotherly Turkish states.

**Keywords:** Kazakhstan, Turkic World, Ahmet Yasawi, Turkish Oral Literature, tradition of minstrelsy

## Introduction

In our study, we are going to look at relationship between Turkish and Kazakh jiraus (minstrelsy) from religious-mystical (minstrelsy) tradition who followed the path of the Khoja Ahmet Yasawi. Turkish minstrels as Yunus Emre, Hacı Bektaş-ı

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Veli, Hacı Bayram Veli and poets of Kazakh literature as Abay Kunanbay, Shakarim Kudayberdi, Shalkiyiz Tilenshiul, Shal Kulekeuly, famous Jusip, Maylikozha and Turmagambet, whose works are of a great importance, introduced Islam and our Prophet (PBUH) in their works to enlighten the people.

Our minstrels wrote about our Prophet (PBUH) within the framework of public understanding. Poets committed their works to Islam, the holy book of Quran and the most important to an exemplary life of the Prophet (PBUH), his wonders, and his moral to the patriotic feelings peculiar to nomadic spirit of the Turkic people. Poetic forms, the epic sagas, and story and fable forms are widely used in our literature.

Khoja Ahmet Yasawi, who was first to contribute in foundation of Central Asian Turkish Sufi Literature and founder of the first religious order (path), was Master of Turkistan. Although Khoja Ahmet Yasawi knew Islamic sciences, Arabic and Persian well, in his world famous "Divan-ı Hikmet" work, he speaks to people through his poems in a pure Turkish language that people understand. The work, which was written in a simple language and syllabic standard of Turkish Folk Literature, has left deep love marks in the heart of people. Yasawi is the greatest Sufi of the Turkic World who left profound traces of his own in all the branches of spiritual culture as literature, history, customs and in the system of national thinking not only in the Central Asian lands, but also to Turkic people from Anatolia to Balkans.

### Materials and Methods

Subjects as divine love, Allah's unity and power, love for our Prophet (PBUH), devotion to sunnah, doomsday and hereafter, and human love are covered in Ahmet Yasawi's works. Master of Turkestan, the greatest Sufi poet who inspires Kazakh poets and Turkish minstrels. The works of Abay Kunanbay, Shakarim Kudayberdi, Shal Akın, Meshur Jusup, Maylikozha and Turmagambet are of a great importance.

### Discussion and Results

In the history of the Turkic people of the 12th century, a special place takes intellectual knowledge of thinker, poet and philosopher Kul Khoja Ahmet Khazreti Sultan Yasawi – the founder of the Turkic branch of Sufism (Malgaraeva Z.B., Kasabekov S.A., Umirzakova L.A., 2015; Baitenova N.J., 2012).

Khoja Ahmet Yasawi is the recognized head of the Turkic branch of Sufism, a thinker, a poet. His work "Divan-i-hikmet" ("The Book of Wisdom" - is often abbreviated as "Hikmet") is preserved. Biographical data are sketchy. It is known exactly the date of his death – 1166 year.

There are different versions of the legends concerning the spiritual formation of Ahmet as an individual and his genealogy. It should be noted that the world of ideas and symbols in such a direction of Islam as Sufism is very peculiar. According to one of them, the prophet Muhammad before the demise gathered the people and asked: "Who will take upon me the symbol of my mission (amanat-rosary) and continue my business?" A long-liver Arystan Bab was called. 500 years later somewhere in the steppe Arystan Babu meets an 11-year-old boy and without any forewarnings demands: "Aksakal, please, give me my amanat". This boy was Ahmet Yasawi. Khoja Ahmet Yasawi in the beginning of the XII century sends his first students to different ends of the Turkic world.

The process of spreading Yasawi's teachings went hand in hand with the Islamization of the steppe regions of Central Asia. During the lifetime of Khoja Ahmet Yasawi, his disciples included 12,000 elected and 99,000 people from 26 ordinary people. He had 40 khanaqah-chillahan ("abode", a special institution for 40 days of training for Sufi rituals) in the city of Iasi, in which many followers who had come from all parts of the Turkic world studied. Sufism was a new mystical and ascetic current in Islam. In Central Asia, Sufism became widespread in the 9th-10th centuries, which was reflected in the creation of schools of certain Sufi interpretations, formed in the orders, headed by

mentors, who were called sheikhs in the Arab-speaking countries, in Iranian-speaking sheikhs and feasts, and in Turkic-speaking sheiks, Ishans, baba, ata. The most widespread orders in Central Asia are Naqshbandiya, Yassaviyya, and Kubraviyya. At the same time, the religious trends of the Mubayidites, Isma'iliites, and Karamats existed simultaneously with the teachings of the Shafi'ite, Hanafi'i Mazhab and others. Khoja Ahmed Yasawi devoted his whole life, all his efforts to the creation of spiritual unity against the backdrop of numerous religious movements. He was not only a religious figure, but also a remarkable poet, philosopher, subtly observing all aspects of his surroundings.

He was worried by everything: both worldly life, and the fate of rulers, and the destiny of the people themselves. Being the wisest man, he understood life in all its manifestations: both external - as a thinker, and internal - as a spiritual person who has a connection with the highest spirit of nature. The works of Khoja Ahmet Yasawi – poems, sofas, risal – were widely popular among the locals. He spoke not only as a spiritual mentor, but also as a wise statesman. In his spiritual sermons, verses and treatises, he responded to the actuality when he felt that he could tell his people his frank word. Khoja Ahmed Yasawi urged the people to be tolerant of people of a different faith: If there is an Unfaithful before you, do not offend him. From the heart of the cruel, from the soul of the offender turns away the Lord. Oh, Allah, true! This slave is destined for hell! According to the legend, Yasawi was forced to leave the worldly bustle to serve the Almighty. He settled in the underground cell of the city of Yasi, near the mosque, where he spent the rest of his life (Kamaladdini S.B., 2006; *Khoja Ahmet Yasawi*, 2009; 2015).

According to legend, Ahmed Yasawi had a dream of Timur, who lived two centuries after him, and reported the glad tidings of the forthcoming conquest of Bukhara. Taking this as a sign from above, the emir went on a campaign. After winning the victory, he decided to visit the grave of the righteous in Yasi, feeding a special feeling of respect and gratitude to this auliya. After visiting a

modest burial, Timur ordered his approximate people to erect a majestic mausoleum and directly submitted proposals to the project. So the construction of a whole complex of buildings began under the guidance of the most famous architect of Turkestan of that time – Khodzhi Hussein Shirazi. At the head of the architect of the century, the construction of the mausoleum was over in two years, and again, by the order of the Emir of Timur, near the mausoleum, a mosque, a dervish monastery, a kitchen and a number of auxiliary buildings, all of which form an ensemble.

Ahmet Yasawi was a brilliant connoisseur of Arabic and Persian literature, but preferred the Turkic dialect, understandable for his compatriots who had recently become acquainted with Islam. The main reason was that the native language for his surroundings would have made a significant contribution to the upbringing of Muslim converts. Collection of Yasawi's poems "Hikmet" for centuries passed from mouth to mouth. In the 15th century the book acquired a written form called "Divan-i-Hikmet". The edition passed from hand to hand as especially revered. These verses, written in the style of intimate conversation in simple Turkic language, in a short time spread from the Great Wall of China to the shores of the Mediterranean and Marble Seas.

"Divan-i-Hikmet" is a religious and moral book containing lessons of Islam and Muslim morality. Most of its poems were transferred to Yasawi during a conversation with the dervishes in the hallway of her underground cell (Sadreddin M., 2012; Baitenova N.J., 2012; Asghar S., 2015).

The philosophy of Sufism emerged in the second century of Hegira, and after those dates religious orders (paths) began to spread gradually. Among the Turks, the mysticism movement, which first started with Ahmet Yasawi in Central Asia, came to the peak with Yunus Emre, who came to Anatolia with Mongol invasion. (Artun E., 2001, p. 22). Our poets and minstrels, who were inspired by Ahmet Yasawi's world of poetry, have continued the "the divine wisdom" tradition. The best and powerful representatives of this tradition were Suleyman Ata (Bakirgani) in Central Asia, Yunus

Emre, Hacı Bektash Veli, and Hacı Bayram Veli in Anatolia, who laid the foundation of mysticism movement in Turkish Literature as "Sufi Folk Literature" or "Tekke Literature" in Anatolia. Despite living in different times, poets who followed Yasawi's path, by producing new written works never broke tradition of "the divine wisdom", and were faithful to this tradition for centuries. "Ahmet Yasawi's works are the main source of mysticism in Turkish World's literature" (Sharipov A.M., 2001, p. 307; Zhandarbek Z.Z., 2006).

The book titled "Divan-ı Hikmet" (Book of Reason or Book of Wisdom) made the name of Ahmet Yasawi famous to the Islamic world. The poet wrote his book in Chagatai language so the Turks in Central Asia and Kipchak steppes could understand it. In this way he helped native Turkic people in understanding the Qur'an and various hadiths and interpretations written in Arabic language... Divan-ı Hikmet is one of the literary heritages of Turkic nations that reached present days from XII century (Kelimbetov N., 2010, p. 259; Mehti S., 2007).

Introduction of the Islamic religion and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to Kazakh people was mainly carried out through oral literature. Owing to many jiraus (minstrelsy) and poets, who were sent to exile and thrown into prison for such activities those times, never gave up on telling truth, and due to them religious beliefs of our people were preserved. From XV-XIX centuries to nowadays, Kazakh jiraus (minstrels) and poets started their works with the name of Allah, and showed great love and respect of Islamic values to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions.

The works of Abay Kunanbay, Shakarim Kudayberdi, Shal Akin, Meshur Jusup, Maylikozha and Turmagambet are of a great importance, following the path of Khoja Ahmet Yasawi our poets introduced Divine love and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) into Kazakh literature to enlighten our people. Kazakh poets who studied in madrasah were deeply involved in Arabic and Persian literature, and as subject of their works were interested in the religion of Islam and its

principles, the love of Allah, life and personality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Although Ahmed Yasawi's wisdom, emotion and enthusiasm as well as didactic elements of writing were limited, his sufic and ascetic thoughts were very influential on the people, and were read in all Turkish villages for centuries (Mengi M., 2002, p. 35). In the work of Divan-ı Hikmet, religious aspects such as life and miracles of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Islamic values, complaints of the world, closeness of the Doomsday were included. Khoja Ahmet Yasawi in his "Divine wisdom" has a special and important place devoted to the prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He expresses his feelings about the Prophet (PBUH) as follows: "Muhammad the Lord of the Eighteen Thousand Universes; Muhammad, who is the guide to thirty-three thousand ashabs (companions); Muhammad, satisfied with nudity and hunger; Muhammad whose spirit is intercessor to his Umma ... "(40. Hikmet) (Bice H., 2015, pp. 73-74). Khoja Ahmet was so attached to the sunnah of our Prophet (PBUH) that after Prophet's (PBUH) death at 63 years old, Khoja Ahmet Yasawi spent his own life after the age of 63 under the ground like in a tomb.

Kazakh poets, who followed the path of Yasawi, wrote about the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the framework of "Wisdom" tradition. In the works of poets, exemplary life of our Prophet (PBUH), miracles and the good morals were written in the form of quatrains including national feelings of nomadic Kazakh people. Poetic forms, the epic sagas, story and fable forms are widely used in our literature. Among them "Tolgau" type was used more frequently. "Tolgau is a poem read in a place accompanied with dombra, which is dedicated to a particular event or person" (Koch K., Bayniyazov A., Bashkapan B., 2003, p. 508), explained as a literary genre that many people love listening to.

The most famous poet and thinker of Kazakh nation Abay, tried to enlighten people by explaining Islam and telling about Allah (SWT) and the love of Prophet (PBUH). Abay's:

Allah is perfect, the Prophet is right

If you are a believer, learn, try to be alike

The Qur'an is the truth, the word of Allah,  
Be knowledgeable enough to understand the  
tafsir (commentary).

We are on the path of the Messenger of Allah.. " (On Gasır Jırlaydı, 2006: 273), lines invite people to knowledge.

In his poem "Poem is the Sultan of word, worship of word", Abay mentions the appeal of word on heart, expressing the importance as below:

At first is the verse (ayah), hadith is the beginning of word,

Double couplet is between words.

If the subject is not clear and interesting,

Why let the Prophet and Allah tell it (On Gasır Jırlaydı, 2006: 252) ... saying so, Abay initially stated that the basis of human lives were lying in the Qur'an, which is Allah's (SWT) word, and in Prophet (PBUH) words, which are the Hadith-i Sharif.

One of the famous poets Jusıp (Yusuf) Köpeyoğlu (1868-1931) who truly thought about Kazakh people, continued tradition initiated by the great Sufi poets in Central Asia, such as Ahmet Yasawi and Hakim Suleyman Ata, left a rich literary heritage in our national literature. In poet's works as "The Light of Prophet", "Parting of the Prophet", "Death of the Prophet", "About the Prophet Muhammad", "Mirac (Ascension)", "Battle of the Prophet with Unbelievers", "The Story of Unbelievers of the Prophet", he was trying to introduce and make people love the Prophet (PBUH). In the poem "The Light Prophet", basis of the creation of the world begins from the light of the Prophet (PBUH) as he said in the verses below:

Eighteen thousand years before the beginning of universe,

Noble light of the Prophet was created.

"The light before the creations!"- said,

Came the hadith as a proof of this, (Kopeyuli M.J., 2004, p. 292), saying so he gives information about the lineage of Allah's Prophet (PBUH) starting from the Adam. Each verse, explains shining light of Prophet (PBUH) like this: "Prophet's light was shining in the Adam's forehead", "The light of Muhammed Mustafa reached prophet Idris's arch", "Abdullah was very

beautiful, with bright face, there was Prophet's light on his forehead" (Kopeyuli M.J., 2004, p. 294).

In the poem "Death of the Prophet", poet expressed the love of our Prophet to his community (ummah). Azrael (the angel of death) said to our Prophet:

"I brought the news from the Almighty (the most Righteous) to you,

Paradise has been ready for you,

And the gates of the hell closed " (Kopeyuli M.J., 2004, p. 319), the Prophet (PBUH) asked following questions to the words above:

"If paradise is for good creatures,

What will happen to my community (ummah)?

Committing sins" (Kopeyuli M.J., 2004, p. 320).

He wrote conversation between Prophet (PBUH) and Azrael in a dialogue style. Prophet's (PBUH) following words were very emotional and touched people:

Prophet (PBUH) said to Azrael again,

-My community (ummah) is very weak,

Whatever it is, let me see it

I will take the pain of my ummah.... (Kopeyuli M.J., 2004, p. 325), as poet has written with great enthusiasm, tried to express unrequited love of our Prophet (PBUH), who worried about his community as "My Ummah" until his last breath.

The poet Maylikozha, who lived in the eastern part of Kazakhstan in the 19th century, was an educated poet who knew Arabic and Islamic history well. During the time he lived, his religious writings were forbidden and destroyed. Among our writers, Doctor Asylhan Ospanoglu's research results found two works containing Islamic Religious content writings in poet Mailykozha's works. In those times, handwritten manuscript of poet in Arabic letters was secretly hidden in the depth of chest by the relatives in the Ordabasi village near Shymkent region. "Zarkum" (94 pages) and "Hazreti Hamza" (96 pages) works written in the epic form, were the beautiful gifts to our people. The artifacts, written in Cyrillic alphabet, were published in the regional newspaper in 1996. Asilhan Ospanoğlu published all poems of the poet in a book form in 2005. In the introduction

part of the work, Asilhan Ospanoglu wrote: "Among the works attracting people's attention and interest with deep thoughts and beautiful embroideries as "Zarkum" and "Hazreti Hamza", were plenty of other extensive works. However, these works were being departed from society, because of their religious, and especially patriotic worshipping views of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) introducing Islamic way of living and fighting against unbelievers (Kafir)" (Maylikoja, 2005, p. 378).

In the work, "Zarkum" battle between the Prophet (PBUH) and the ruler of Iraq was described:

From the beginning, our Prophet (PBUH)  
Was growing up as an orphan  
Created for the Prophet

Eighteen thousand universes... (Maylikoja, 2005, p. 381).

Starting from the birth of the Prophet (PBUH), all his family, companions, Hz. Hamza, Hz. Ebu Bekir, Hz. Ömer, Hz. Osman and other important people in religion; as well as enemies of religion like Abu Jahl, Abu Sufyan were explained, grey-haired and bearded elderly who were listening shed lakes of tears.

At the end of XIX and beginning of XX centuries, political and social events in Kazakh steppes left the nation without peace, and considerably shook their spiritual life. When the sky above the country was in dark clouds, fighting against this situation, educated people continued their efforts in enlightening the nation. Poets of this period were worried about politics of irreligion such as "atheism", which began to spread among people, not to take our nation away from the right path. Our poets were aware of a single way to save our nation from the colonial state and religious oppressions, which was an introduction of Islam and the truth. We have many poets whose poems were forbidden and who were exiled because of the following words "Allah is one and the Prophet (PBUH) is right".

Poets living in Syr Dariya part of Kazakhstan (Southeast) were called as 'Secret of Suleys'. Secret of Suleys were famous for their works

written under the influence of Classic and Oral Literature traditions. Among those poets was Turmagambet Iztileuov, who aimed to introduce Allah (SWT) and Prophet (PBUH) to people throughout his life. Though he spent some time in prison and in exile, because of his works and views, he never gave up on his intentions. The poet Turmagambet in his works, told about the love of Allah (swt), pureness of faith and about the life of our Prophet (PBUH). The poem "About Muhammad" was the most beautiful *tolgau* (work) that calls to the heart. In this work, Prophet's growing up without parents since childhood; sufferings and agonies that his enemies showed him in the period of prophecy were written. "The kafirs (unbelievers) follow the Prophet (pbuh) and come to a cave. They wanted to kill the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). They surround the cave..."

In the mouth of this cave,  
I made a spider web,  
Mixed and patched.  
Moreover one pigeon,  
Made a nest here,  
With two, three days eggs.  
If Muhammad entered here,  
Would not they be broken,

He could not believe this ... (İztileuov T., 2007, p. 265) he told about heart-chilling events that passed during Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) journey from Mecca to Medina, accompanying with *dombra*.

In order to reach "Vahdet-i vücud" (unity of the body), which is the basis of mysticism, all the chapters of Yasavi's wisdom, mention important terms as faith and pure ego. For example: "Misleading me out of the right way, my ego deserved contempt; Beating in convulsions made me cry in public; Did not allow recollection of prayers and made friendship with Satan; I said, "I am ready, and I am the head of the nafs (ego)." (1.Hikmet) (Bice H., 2015, p. 6) or "Creature Khoja Ahmad came out of the nafs (ego) mountain; Heart was flooded and poured the boiled water; Praise be to Allah, found his way and got close; He was fried with the inner blood "(61. Hikmet) (Bice H., 2015, p. 102), in above verses, Khoja Ahmet

emphasized the way to reach Allah (swt) starting by morality and educating the ego (nafs).

We can also see literary influence of Khoja Ahmet Yasawi from the works of poet Shal (Tileuke Kulekeuli) (1748-1819): "Ego is a grey wolf; Faith is a lamb; If you do not prohibit; It will take your faith" (Magauyin M., Baydildayev M., 1989, p. 113) or "Faith is a sheep, intellect is a shepherd, an ego is wolf; the brave will not give a sheep to a wolf; If the shepherd holds his stick strong; No disaster, devil or genie will approach" (Magauyin M., Baydildayev M., 1989, p. 136).

In his works, Şal Akin writes Sufic thoughts not only as continuation of traditional Yasevi's school, but also taking into account national values of nomadic Kazakh people, proves human values and relations in the framework of mysticism in Kazakh society. "During the period of Tsarist Russia's governing, when the bribery and decrease of personal values spread in Kazak steppes, Shal Akin invited administrators to be virtuous, loyal and faithful. Therefore, Shal Akin advocated ideas from Ahmet Yasawi's work on wisdom" (Kelimbetov N., 2010, p. 265).

'Yasawism' is the first Turkish religious order that appeared in Turkestan in the 12th century, Ahmet Yasawi and his caliphs taught principles of Islamic knowledge, morality and mysticism to masses of people. Dervishes and poets who were faithful to the idea of Yasawism came to Anatolia from the 11th century (Artun E., 2001, p. 27). Yunus Emre, Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, Hacı Bayram Veli were the greatest poets of this style, and have accomplished great works enlightening people by writing works in pure Turkish without departing from syllabic form of national verse.

In the works of Anatolian minstrels, "Divine love", "Love to the Prophet (PBUH) " and "Doomsday" were the most discussed topics as well as "Heart" concept. The concept of "heart" constitutes center of mystic life. Entering hearts means reaching God. "Worship without gleaming the eye of heart; I knew it is not acceptable in Dervish's lodge (17.Hikmet) (Bice H., 2015, p. 39). If Khoja Ahmed Yasawi calls one of his wisdoms "O heart", in others he say "Heart's eye",

"Heart's land", "Heart's bird", "Heart's property", "Heart's dawn", "Heart's treasure", "Heart's secret", so he separated concept of 'heart' as center of love, wisdom, faith and Almighty God. The most beautiful representative of this tradition Yunus Emre, continues concept of "Heart" in the same air: "Once you broke a heart, it is not your prayer, Including seventy-two nationalities do not squeeze your face and hands" (Tatçı M., 2008, p. 181), saying so he approached human heart very sensitively by stating that prayers will not be accepted if one brakes somebodies heart. The loving heart is not bored with love. To make up a heart is like going to pilgrimage; Understanding heart means understanding the secret of creation, reaching Allah (swt).

## Conclusion

In the works of Hacı Bektashi Veli and Hacı Bayram Veli, among the Anatolian mystical folk poets, tradition of "wisdom" can be seen in the following verses: Hacı Bektaş Veli's " Dreams (worldly) do not enter the heart of Kaaba; Control your ego do not fall into bad temper"; "The darkness of heart is lighted by the love of hope" or "Hacı Bayram Veli's" What is happening to this heart; This heart is full of worries; This heart is burning; and found the cure in this burning heart"(Boratav P.N., Firatli N.V., 1943, p. 54).

In the years when Soviet Russian rule dominated, in Turkish republics, as other Turkish-Islamic elders, Ahmet Yasawi was also tried to be made forgotten and tried to be disgraced by getting rid of some Sufic-mystic advice in his works. Ahmet Yasawi's "Divan-ı Hikmet" publications were prohibited as well. But all these efforts did not reach the point of destroying Ahmet Yasawi's spiritual reputation.

Ahmet Yasawi, who is known as Master of Turkestan in the world, is mystic scholar of Turkish world, who sealed religious understanding of the Turks. Although Ahmet Yasawi knew Arabic and Persian, at a time when Arabic was accepted as a language of science, he preferred his mother tongue to tell people about Islam.

Therefore, Ahmet Yasawi's poems play big role in spiritual life of Turkish people, and it is certain that many more poets and minstrels will be aslo inspired by his works.

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