

## **Muslim Renaissance and Turkic Culture**

The Eastern renaissance that flourished for 500 years between the 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and covered a number of countries is the age of development of Islamic culture. In our times, especially throughout the Muslim world, it is hard to have the reputation of an educated person unless you have mastered the spiritual legacy of those who represent it, such as al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Firdousi, Zhusip Balasagun, Kozha Akhmet Yasawi and Omar Khayam. Understanding the relationship of this Eastern renaissance and the religion of Islam is a worthy endeavor.

The Arabs began their conquests of Central Asia starting in the year 712. As a result, an opportunity came to form a common culture that would unite the entire Afro-Eurasian territory. From this angle, Islamic religion had promoted the blending and integration of all cultures in these countries and the forming of a new pattern of culture. In many countries that were conquered by the Arabs (especially in Iran, India, Egypt and Syria), the former Hellenistic spirit remained.

The influence of Islam spread across the territory of Kazakhstan, which had close relations with Central Asia in ancient times. The political units of a number of Turkic tribes which existed on the territory of Kazakhstan did not receive the Islamic religion right away. Kagan Satuk was the first one to receive Islam in the state of the Karakhanids, and his son Musa declared Islam as the official religion of the Karakhanid State in 955. In 10<sup>th</sup> century a fair number of Oguz and Kipchaks converted to Islam as well. Actually, the embracing of Islam gave an opportunity to the tribes that lived on the territory of Kazakhstan to be introduced to the leading cultures of those days.

Cultural development in the land of Kazakhstan at that time was also influenced by the confrontation of two trends of Islamic spiritual life. The first trend is related to the *peripatetic* way of the East that was based on Greek philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle. This trend of teaching was founded by the 'second teacher' of world culture and science after Aristotle, Abu Nasir Mukhammed ibn Mukhammed ibn Tarkhan al-Farabi at-Turki, who was born in the ancient city of Otrar. The spiritual legacy of Al-Farabi has been studied quite thoroughly, both by Kazakh scholars and scholars of other countries. As for Al-Farabi, there was no sphere of the science and arts that he did not explore. According to the estimation of B.Gafurov, he wrote over 200 tracts. Even though Al-Farabi wrote his tracts in the Arabic language, which was considered an instrument of spiritual and scientific thought at that time, he would always go to his origins, to the Turkic culture of his homeland, which had developed richly over long centuries. The greatness of Al-Farabi is in the fact that he was able to intertwine the features of Iranian, Indian and antique cultures with the cultural melody of his own land.

Al-Farabi's comments on culture are mainly connected with the following four branches of Islamic culture: 1. *Khakikat* (proof of the truth of one Allah); 2. *Shariat* (Islamic religious laws); 3. *Tarikh* (biographies of saints who served Allah); 4. *Ma'arif* (educational and moral ideas).

The Arabs who conquered Iran, a country with long ages of history, realized in a profound way the importance of mastering Persian literature. Writings that are a part of *adat*, which is a significant part of this culture, captivate a reader with their simplicity and wittiness. Al-Farabi looks at the teaching about a perfect man from a humanistic position, which is typical for him. He claims that the supreme trait of such a man is his intellect. His definition of a human as "hayuani akli" ("a rational being") found in his writings sounds a lot like people of the European Age of Enlightenment that followed. There is also profound significance in the fact that in the writings of Al-Farabi, along with the idea of man as a rational being, the idea of man as "hayuani madani" ("a cultured being") likewise occurs.

This is a personal level that first should be reached by the leader of the country. Because of his keenness of observation the leader then becomes a thinker, a philosopher, a wise man, an intellectual; a person with a gift of imagination; he becomes a prophet and a visionary and plays the role of the one who understands occurrences of life and is an expert in those; and all of the above are the virtues of his essence which is in a process of cognizing the divine. Al-Farabi profoundly analyzed the issues of raising up a cultured person in his tracts, including the tracts "About the views of inhabitants of a virtuous city", "Directions to the road that leads to happiness", "About the

meaning of mind”, “Pearls of Wisdom”, “About reaching happiness” and others. He often refers to the idea of a “city”. In Al-Farabi’s works “city” is not just a dwelling place or a refuge. It is the symbol of a state, a cultural community of people. As has already been said, the idea of “culture” (“madeniet”) in the Kazakh language has the same root as the Arabic “madaniyat”, derived from “madina”, which means a city. In the great teacher’s opinion, the citizens of the City of Morality are noted by their good manners, fair treatment of one another, education and their love for arts.

On the whole, Al-Farabi was a titan of the culture of the East, and he took his honorary place in the history of world civilization. His spiritual legacy became an inexhaustible source for his great followers, such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Al-Biruni, Zhusup Balasagun and many others in both east and west.

When talking about the Renaissance of the East, one cannot miss another origin of it, that is, the Sufism which took its start in the Persian world of Islam around the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Sufi motives predominate in creative works of outstanding thinkers who lived in the land of Kazakhstan, including Zhusup Balasagun, Suleiman Bakyrangani, and especially Kozha Akhmet Yasawi. Therefore, it would be narrow-minded to assert that the idea of Renaissance was supported only by formal Islamic followers of Plato and Aristotle.

The Sufi trend of Islam from the very beginning was born as a movement opposed to the official religion. The term “suf” is derived from the arabic term for “woolen cloak.” Sufis were ascetics and were not very pretentious in the clothing they chose. Their thoughts were occupied by spiritual matters. One of the reasons why Sufism spread so rapidly and widely was because, starting in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, fanatics began to gain power in the Arab caliphates which earlier were tolerant of freethinking. They persecuted representatives of various sects under the pretext that they were contrary to the Koran. Particularly, the legacies of ancient Iranian, Turkic and Indian cultures were declared to be alien to Allah. As a result of those persecutions a number of Sufis (who called themselves dervishes) from Iran and Arabia began to migrate to Turkistan (i.e. Central Asia). 3-400 thousand dervishes came to Central Asia. Sufis declared that the Most High God needs to be comprehended with one’s heart and not the mind. An outstanding representative of this trend, who later became a Muslim saint, was Kozha Akhmet Yasawi. His most significant accomplishment was that he was able to skillfully blend the richest of Turkic culture with Muslim civilization.

\*\*\*The main work written by Kozha Akhmet Yasawi was “Diuani Khikmet” (“Book of Wisdom”). The deed of life of Kozha Akhmet Yasawi is in the fact that when he reached the age of 63, he gave all his possessions away to the needy ones and having confined himself in the underground pit, said, “I have reached the age of a prophet; it would be sinful for me to continue my life and see the sunlight”. Emir Timur admired his righteousness, and so he commanded to build a magnificent mausoleum of Kozha Akhmet Yasawi. This is what Ibrai Altynsarin says about Yasawi, “There were four great people among the Mushtafid wisemen; they are: imam Agzam, imam Malik imam Shafiq; imam Akhmed Khanbal Yasawi. These four having studied thoroughly the meaning of Sharia, had explained it to people” (Musilmandik sharttari. – Almaty, 1991 – page 22).

While peripatetics of the East were writing tracts, giving priority to erudition, the Sufi trend was advocating its ideas through a poetic way of culture. It is known that poets including Omar Khayam; Saadi; Khafiz; Nizami; Rumi, whose names are known all over the world, had written beautiful poems while proclaiming humanistic ideas of Sufism. During totalitarian system there were attempts made to label Yasawi, a common representative of all Turkic groups, who takes a proper place among them, as a mystic poet. In reality it would be a mistake to say that Sufism was an actional mystical trend. The founders of philosophical school of Sufism are al-Gazali and ibn-Arabi. According to their teachings, to be cultured and educated meant to take as a model a thoroughly developed, sanguineous person. Another humanistic concept of Sufism is unity of man and cosmos. A Cosmos where perfectly developed people live, is considered to be the best possible part of the Universe. This wonderful cosmos achieves its own scope through a human. The reason being is because a human is a mould of cosmos. Thus, the concept of ancient Greeks of harmony between a microworld and a macroworld, has been reflected in Arabic-Persian-Turkic Renaissance as well.

The main power that moves Sufis-Shaiks who long to erase a difference between God and man, is love. In “Divani khikmet” Kozha Akhmet describes Man and Love as the rock of life. As al-

Farabi, he finds the city he was searching for - “The City of Kindness” in “Gulistan” where love and friendship reign; where the ruler is wise; laws are just and citizens are happy. He sees proclaiming of humanity and virtuous qualities of people and getting rid of the negative, as a way to achieve Gulistan.

One of manifestations of the Renaissance on the territory of Kazakhstan is “Kutadgu bilik” by Zhusup Balasagun. This poem, written many centuries ago between 1069-1070, vividly describes the main features of the Turkic culture and summarizes the ideals of a happy existence. This work of Zhusup Balasagun Khas-Khajib can really be considered as an encyclopedia of medieval Turkic culture.

Zhusup Balasagun lived in a period of maturity of Renaissance and based on spiritual sources of peripatetics of the East. Besides, he was also studying through the poetry of Sufis. Therefore, it would of been wrong to place him categorically among one certain cultural trend. He was one of the great men, who were the initiators of new traditions. Historical and cultural trend receives power from a number of sources.

“Kutadgu bilik” is a philosophic and instructive writing which consists of 6520 beits. The name of this poem comes from the main principle of Zhusup Balasagun, which is that the foundation of life is “kut”, a moral and light existence. The roots of creative work of Zhusup Balasagun are to be found not only in the ideas of Renaissance, but, first of all, in a cultural legacy of turkic peoples. “kutadgu bilik” is not copying an Arabic and Persian literature, as some claim. In this poem there are many descriptions of traditions, customs and beliefs of tribes that lived on the territory of Semirechie in the X-XI centuries.

The names of characters of “Kutadgu bilik” are also related to the former ideas of tengrian religion. The main character Kuntudi is a symbol of a just ruler. This figure comes from the runic writings “Kultegin” (“A Story of Turkic Caganat”) and is the main image of an ideal person in turkic culture that al-Farabi and Kozha Akhmet Yasawi had dreamed about. The personality of another character is revealed in the figure of Aytoldy (the full moon), a vesir who was a just ruler, an embodiment of a bright mind and morals, who provided people with happiness and prosperity, that is “kut”. The Sun and the Moon were deified by peoples of Central Asia at all times. The som of vesir, a wise Ugdulmish, was a symbol of education and morality that were inherent to this culture. In the image of Ugdulmish rationality, order and serenity are conveyed in a philosophical manner.

The fourth character is dervish Odgurmich. There are several profound reasonings given here. A dialogue of Ugdulmish (the understanding) and Ogdurmish (the fire of the heart) represents a quest to cognize the world, which in its time, had stirred the entire epoch of the cultural flower in Arabic-Persian-Turkic world.

The harmony of mind, feelings, morality and understanding, truth and love, did not concern the European scholars only, it also concerned the thinkers of the East. Now many times dervish Ogdurmish had been invited to come to Zheruyik, the khan’s palace, he doesn’t want to lose his freedom, which is a sacred peace. When Kuntusy invites him to come for the third time, only then dervish comes to the khan’s palace, only with the purpose of conversation. There is a great cultural meaning in this, and Zhusup Balasagun, who was able to recognize it, made a profound assumption about the future of human civilization. Ogdurmish, who was able to give the right answer’s to the questions of khan, was not tempted by worldly delights; and so he puts an old bag on his shoulder and goes on to wander in the mountains. This isn’t a mysticism, nor is it an ascetism; it is rather a victory of spiritual greatness. A daily routine is like the labour of Sif who is rolling the stone up the mountain in vain. Centuries ago our ancestors knew that the way to be happy is not in gathering riches or in deceiving others.

Zhusup Balasagun was one of the greatest thinkers who made a great impact on the spiritual development of the Kazakhs and other related Turkic peoples. His legacy is a priceless treasure.

Another evidence that the territory of Turkic tribes was not just a far away outskirts of the Eastern Renaissance is the writing “Divani Lughat at-Turk” (Collection of the Turkic Words) by Makhmud Kashgari (XI century). This dictionary needs to be viewed not just as a lexical textbook, but also as an input of Medieval Turkic culture into advanced civilization. It became necessary for the culture that conquered the Islamic world to show itself to the entire world. That is what

Makhmud Kashgari had done through his writing. The main topic explored by Makhmud Kashgari is the culture of Turkic tribes. With the goal of exploration he travelled around all the territories populated by Turkic tribes. “For many years I have been traveling around the cities, winter and summer camps of the Turkis, Turkmen, Oguz, Shigilis, Yagma, and Kyrgyz, collecting sayings and learning and clarifying the meanings of different words. I was doing that not because I didn’t know the language. Just the opposite, my goal was to identify the slight differences between those languages. I myself come from people who know the language of these tribes the best of all; the greatest masters, visioners and strong warriors of the battle-fields. I was doing this with such diligence that the dialects of Turki, Turkmen, Oguz, Shigili, Yagma, and Kyrgyz tribes became completely imprinted in my memory. I had put everything in order on one common basis” (The Argument of Summer and Winter. – Almaty, 1985. - p. 9)

This Collection not only contains the information about culture life of the Karakhanid State; it also includes a wonderful description of ancient myths and legends of Turkic culture; particularities of traditions and customs; dietification of Heavenly Tengri and the Sun by the Turkis; and natural phenomenons. Makhmud Kashgari was one of the first scholars who studied folk epics in written culture of the Turks.