

A short survey on the common Doctrines Between the Bektashi order and Shi'a Islam

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Abstract:

The study of the Bektashi Order and its relation to Shi'ism is the primary concern of this article. This paper will be examining some of the Bektashi texts to find out the vicinity or distance between Shi'ism and the Bektashi Order.

There have been some scholarly attempts to call the Bektashi order in various and opposite names. This paper, through studying the principles of Bektashiyyah order, aims to assess the relationship between the Bektashi order and Shi'ism.

Keywords:

The Bektashi Order, Shi'a Islam, Albania, Haji Bektash Veli, Hurufiyyah, Denmark

Introduction

Sufism is the inner and spiritual aspect of Islam, which has a history as long as does Islam itself. History of Sufi orders is often mixed with myths. The Bektashiyyah order is not an exception. While studying the history of Bektashiyyah, one may find opposing narrations that lead to various directions. Despite this, the importance, effects, and influence of the Bektashi order from sixteen centuries on in the Balkans is indisputable. This article, although briefly, tries to shed light on the Bektashi-Shi'i inter relations.

The Bektashi order

The Bektashi Order of Dervishes is the most significant Muslim Sufi Order in Albania and Albanian inhabitants, including the Republic of Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro. The presence of Bektashism is not limited to these regions. The word Bektashi has its origin in the title given to Seyed Mohammad Razavi, known as Hājī Bektāsh Velī (1209-1271), a Persian Sufi who was born in Neyshabur, Iran in the thirteenth century.¹ Hājī Bektāsh was connected to the Yasawī Order.²

Ideas concerning why the title ḥājī Bektāsh given to him vary. One might suggest that *Bek* in Turkish means master and *Tash* is stone. Hagiographies tell us that among the Evlia or Saints, ḥājī Bektāsh was the one who ordered a rock to move while he mounted on it. Followers of the Order believe that ḥājī Bektāsh was the grandson of Imam Musā al-Kāẓim (128/745-183/799), the seventh Shī'a Imam.

The oldest source where ḥājī Bektāsh recorded is "*Manāghib Al-ʿArefīn*" by "Aflākī" (1318-1353); a follower of the Mevleviyyah Order who has addressed Rumi's biography and since both figures were

¹ Pashazadeh, Ashik, Tavarikhi Aali Osman, Istanbul, Aamerah Publication, 1332 Hijri, p.200

² In Maghalat-e Ghaibiyyah and Kalamat `yniyyah which contains the sayings of Haji Bektash Veli, written by a disciple of him, the author cited some sayings of Yassawi to Haji Bektash Veli. A copy of this manuscript recorded in Tehran, the library of Tehran University, 3451.

contemporaries, he mentions ḥājī Bektāsh. "Aflākī describes him as “a man of gnostic and illumined nature who failed to follow the *šarī‘a* (*dar mutābe‘at nabūd*)”³ The reason why Aflākī mentions him as failing to follow the Sharia if it was as such, could be due to the presence of Malāmatī characters of Khorasan saints.⁴

Most of the authors like Uzūn Ferdowsī in “*Vilāyet-Nāme-yi ḥājī Bektāsh Veli*,” and those who lived later than thirteen century mentioned that ḥājī Bektāsh was from Neyshabur of Iran. Some call ḥājī Bektāsh of Khurāsān. Among the latest source on *Bektashism* is Baba Rexhebi's (1901-1995), “*Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizma*” that points to the same origin for Haji Bektash.⁵ He records his birth date as 1248.

Vilāyet-Nāme indicates that his father was Sayyed Moḥammad b. Mūsā, a great-grandson of Imam Musa Al-Kadm. Some scholars maintain that the pedigree cited for Haji Bektash is unreliable and impossible and it is given to him to fulfill a desire to connect the founder of the Order to Prophet Muhammad, like what the Safavids did. Ignoring the Hashemite chronology of Haji Bektash is not provable.

It is said that Haji Bektash migrated to Anatolia from Khurāsān. One of the reasons why he migrated could be the Mongols’ invasion of Iran. Also, the other purposes like promoting Sufism is not ignorable. One may suggest that he was a holder of a mission from his Shaikh to spread the teaching among the others as well.

This migration is the beginning of many future events. Approximately after two centuries based on the teaching of ḥājī Bektāsh, Balim Sultan (d. ca 1520 CE) or Piri Sānī, institutionalized the Bektashiyyah Order as what we encounter today. The teachings of Haji Bektash inspired the armies of Janissaries of Ottomans. Furthermore, Babas of the Order become spiritual guides for the army. The role of the *Janissaries* in the propagation of Bektashi teaching in the Balkans is not ignorable. Many *Tekkes* (lodges) were built trough out Balkan, especially in Albanian lands. But eventually, because of its destructive role in the Ottoman empire, this army dissolved by Sultan Mahmud II (r.

³ Algar, Hamid “BEKTĀŠ, ḤĀJĪ,” Encyclopaedia Iranica, Online Edition, December 15, 1989, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bektas-haji-d>.

⁴ "The Malāmatīs deliberately tried to draw the contempt of the world upon themselves by committing unseemly, even unlawful actions, but they preserved perfect purity of thought and loved God without a second thought", cited from Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. ISBN 0-8078-1271-4. 55. 2006, Tirana, p 124.

⁵ For example, Algar, Hamid, *ibid*.

1808–1839) in 1826. Thereupon Albania became the hospitable place of Bektashism, where after the 18th-century, its adherents grew up among the Albanians. Later, the world headquarters of Bektashiyyah was built in Tirana, the capital of Albania.

The Principles of the Bektashi Order

The principles of Bektashism as a Muslim Sufi order are not apart from Islam in general. Sufi orders, to maintain the self-purification and knowledge of God, emphasize the esoteric dimensions of Islam.⁶ By this emphasizes, they don't propose to neglect the sharia laws. Scholars, however, underestimated the mystic nature of Bektashism and described it as tolerating Islam while not paying no attention to the regulations, including rituals and worship. For instance, it is said that "The Bektashis tend to focus on the esoteric aspects of Islam, not paying close attention to many of the outward practices, such as prayer times ".⁷ Or to show it as a modern religion, some scholars offered that Bektashism is a sect with tolerance toward women and civil society values:

“Bektashis, because of their heterodox Sufi practices as well as their dedication to contemporary principles, including the equality of women and men, secular government, and modern, universal education, are naturally in the front line defending a freedom-loving Islam against radicalism and terrorism.”

It seems that many such declarations have resulted from a misinterpretation of Islam itself. As a religion, Islam ordered both men and women to seek knowledge and contribute to creating a healthier society. When it comes to prayers, both men and women addressed in the Islamic revelation.

At least theoretically, the primary texts and sayings of spiritual leaders of Bektashiyyah are against such declarations, and most of them reject being regardless of the law. One of the opposite expressions to these claims is Baba Ruhi Selim's (1869-1944) note in which he asserts that: “Bektashis not only perform their daily prayers (namaz) in mosques or their Meydans and believe in the Shari'at, but they

⁶ For more details on the mystical tradition in Islam see: Asghari, SeyedAmirHossein , “Mystical Interpretation of the Qur'ān”, Burhan Journal of Quranic Studies, Vol 01, No.01, (<http://academicpress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/asghariv1i1-p28-45.pdf>)

⁷ Julianne Hazen, **Contemporary Bosnian Sufism**, 2008, available at:

http://georgetown.academia.edu/JulianneHazen/Papers/1106040/Contemporary_Bosnian_Sufism. MA The sis

perform two more recommended prayers at morning and noon.”⁸

Naim Frasheri (1846 –1900) Albanian National poet, a Bektashi Muhib, summarized principles of Bektashi's beliefs and love for the prophet's family as follows:

The Bektashis believe in the True and Mighty God, in Muhammed – Ali, Hadijah, Fatimah, Hasan, and Husein. They believe in the twelve imams that are: Imam Ali, Imam Hasan, Imam Husein, Imam Zeynel Abedin, Imam Muhammed Baqir, Imam Jafar al Sadiq, Imam Musa al-Kazim, Imam Ali al-Riza, Imam Muhammed Teqi, Imam Ali al-Naqi, Imam Hasan al-Askari, Imam Muhammed al-Mehdi.⁹

We also encounter narrations that Bektashism combined several Sunni, Shi'a, and Sufi concepts. Those scholars don't pay attention to the fact that there are many common grounds among different schools in Islam. Others claimed that it had taken the Christian concept of the Trinity when it refers to Allah, Mohammad, and Ali. To have a clear idea about the principles of Bektashi beliefs, based on the Baba Rejeb's description in "*Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizma*" we summarize Bektashi principles as follow:

- Belief and respect for the holy Quran
- Following the Hadith and tradition of Prophet Mohammad
- They are rejecting the idea that Bektashism has deviated from the path of the Quran and Prophetic tradition.
- respect to the household of the prophet especially to Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Hossein and regarding Ali as master of Evlia (saints) because of certain Quranic orders and prophetic narrations
- Bektashism understands Islam as a religion of logic and reason. Therefor performance of prayer must be accompanied by an understanding of the meaning of it.
- Expression of the Importance of Muslims daily prayer (*Salat*) and stressing on the importance of self-understanding of the meaning of that duty otherwise it is mere imitation.¹⁰

Bektashism, as Baba Rejeb depicts it, follows the whole Islamic revelation with its specific Sufi particularities. Not only stressing the outward (*Zahir*) but also always tries to gain the inward meaning and depth of the prayers. This is what the Quran itself stresses upon; an Islamic intellectual tradition is looking for. One only and only gain *Haq* (Truth) that he/she understand it within him/herself. Otherwise, it is only imitation. Accordingly, to purify one's soul in the Bektashi *Tariqah* (Order), there are four barriers which are: *Shari'ah*, (the outer law), *Tariqah*(the inner path), Marifah (gnostic awareness) and Haqiqah (the Truth). No one can neglect Shari'ah to reach to the truth. Also, the white *taj* (cap) of bektashi dervishes has four folds and twelve gores. Four folds symbolizing the gates and twelve gores imply the number of Shi'i Imams. On the other hand, each one is an indication

⁸ Baba Selim Ruhi, Testamenti Bektashian, p. 48, partially translated from Albanian by Jazexhi, Olsi. Accessible at: <http://www.reocities.com/djalosh/bektashi.pdf>

⁹ Naim Frasheri, Fletorja e Bektashinjet, Bukuresht 1896, p. 9

¹⁰ Baba Rexhebi, Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizma, Tirana2006, Urtesia Publication, summarized and translated into English by the author of this article from p 127-129.

to eliminate an evil character from one's soul. One of the sources to discuss the affinity of the Bektashi Order and Shiism is the Erkānname. They are written by babas to teach religious practices to their followers. For instance, it is worth to refer to an Erkannamah that is written in 1818 and preserved in the Albanian National Archive. The mentioned treatise contains forms of worship and prayers and songs to be read in the religious ceremonies. More interestingly, this treatise includes teachings of ablution, *call for prayer*, *Iqām* and Salats that is following the shi'a jurisprudence.¹¹¹² It is with considering all these facts that some scholars like Norris call Bektashiyah to be "essentially Shi'ite".¹²

Two other main ceremonies of Bektashiyyah can help us to see its ties with Shi'ite doctrines. The one is celebrating the Sultan *Nevruz* as the birthday of Imam Ali, which holds on March 22 every year. The second one is the mourn of Imam Hussain and martyrs of Karbala, which is called Matem. This ceremony every year is held from the first to the tenth of Moharram of *Hijri* calendar. During these ten days, they fast or don't drink water. Every day they will read a part of Fozuli's *Hadiqat al-Su'ada* to remember the martyrs of Karbala.

Bektashiyyah and Hurufism:

The Hurufi movement appeared from works of Iranian mystic Fadl Allah Astarabadi (1340–1394).

"Hurūfism was based on a kabbalistic philosophy associated with the numerological significance attributed to the letters of the alphabet and their combinations (hence the name, *hurūf*, Arabic "letters")."¹³¹⁴ It is said that Bektashism accepted some of Hurufi doctrines. Schimmel points out that "one of the strangest offspring of Shia thought, the Hurufis, influenced the Bektashis. ... The greatest Hurufi poet, Nesimi (who was flayed alive in Aleppo in 1417), has left a deep imprint upon Turkish poetry, with his glowing and passionate mystical hymns. The Hurufi influence is visible in the pictures that sometimes adorned Bektashi convents: the faces of Ali, Hasan, and Husayn, or of others, are drawn by combining the letters of their names."¹⁴

¹¹ unknown author, Erkannamah of the Bektashi order, written in 1818, for example Azan, , Iqama, prayers time and collecting between prayers of noon and afternoon also following second Shahadah in Azan with asserting that Ali is friend of Allah is among those points that leave no doubt of affinity between jurisprudence of Bektashiyyah and Shiism at least in the Erkannames. A part of the treatise is describing Iqama in the Turkish language as follows: *Keyfiyet-i ikamet; Allahu ekber Allahu ekber eşbedu enla ilabe illallah iki defa, eşbedu enne Muhammeden resulallah iki defa, ve eşbedu enne Aliyyen Veliyullah iki defa, hayye ales-salah iki defa, hayye alel-felah iki defa, hayye ala hayri'l-amel iki defa, kad kamedis salah iki defa, Allahu ekber Allahu ekber la ilabe illallah.*

¹² Norris, H.T, Islam in Balkans religion and society between Europe and the Arab world, 1993, Univ of South Carolina Press, p.89.

¹³ the Encyclopedia Britannica, online version, available at:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/409761/Seyid-Imadeddin-Nesimi?anchor=ref95715>

¹⁴ Schimmel, Annemarie. mystical dimensions of Islam, 1975, the university of north Carolina press,

Hurufi doctrines through Nesimi's poetry spread among Bektashi elites like Niyazi Misri, Fuzuli, and Habibi. If one considers the "*Tefsiri I Fatihas*" of Haji Bektash Veli, some hurufi method of interpretation is applied to interpret al-Fatiha. That interpretation concludes that surah al-Fatiha contains 124 letters, which indicates 124000 prophets.

Among contemporary scholars on Sufism, Leonard Lewinson also stresses on hurufi influence on the Bektashi portraits in Albania. He also mentions that Dergand, a French visitor who visited Albania and a Bektashi Tekke in Kruja city, in 1844, learns that " 'Fazil Yezdan' of Khurasan was the 'master' of Hajji Bektash. He was the author of the *Jāwīdān* and was a follower of Hallāj. His informants added that the *Jawidan* was the book of rules of their Order. Fadlullah had died before its completion. It was Hajji Bektash or 'Ali al-A'la who had completed it'".¹⁵

Conclusion:

Many Bektashi Babas and dervishes and personalities played an important role in Albanian renaissance (*relindija*). The critical point is that emergence of the communist regime in Albania and its ban on any religious activity in the twentieth century had many negative impacts on the religious committees. Under the prohibition of any religious activity and closing the *Tekkes*, the Bektashi Order has lost its traditional educational system and resources. It was only after the fall of communism that the remained *Babas* tried to reopen *Tekkes* and undertake their activities.

The common doctrinal beliefs among the Bektashi and Shia make it improper to separate the Bektashi Order from Shi'ism. In other words, Bektashism is a combination of Shi'ism and Sufism.

What Bektashism needs in the current situation is reinforcing its educational system to preserve its traditional teachings. Otherwise, there will be no way to maintain its tradition.

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¹⁵ Lewisohn, Leonard. The Heritage of Sufism, a legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism, V.III. 1999. One World Publication, p114. For more information see text of the original book in French available at: http://www.archive.org/stream/souvenirsdelaha01degrgoog/souvenirsdelaha01degrgoog_djvu.txt

¹⁷ Al-sheibi, Kamil Mustafa, Al-Sellat bayn-al-tassawuf va al-Tashayyo' a. Tehran, (2008) AmirKabir Publication.

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