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The Guidance Pedagogy of Hodja Akhmet Yassawi: An Analysis of the Diwan-i Hikmet in the Context of Sociocultural Transformation and Non-Formal Education

[1]Gulbanu Koshenova

PhD, Head of the Scientific-Analytical and International Relations Department, Yassawi Research Center at the "Azret Sultan" National Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve;
Faculty Member at the Faculty of Art, Design and Media, Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University. Turkistan / Kazakhstan.
E-mail: gulbanu.koshenova@ayu.edu.kz ; Orcid: 0000-0002-8537-6490

[2]Erkanat Beibit
Researcher
Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University, Turkistan, 161200, Kazakhstan.
E-mail:erbeybit@gmail.com; orcid: 0009-0005-4957-435X

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the Diwan-i Hikmet, authored by Hodja Akhmet Yassawi—one of the foundational figures of the 12th-century Turkic-Islamic world—beyond being a purely theological or philological text, but rather as an interdisciplinary tool of "non-formal educational curriculum" and "guidance pedagogy" that facilitated the sociocultural integration of nomadic Turkic tribes. Adopting document analysis and content analysis techniques as qualitative research methods, the study presents analyses based on recognized editions of the Diwan-i Hikmet, centering on theories of sociology of religion, folklore, and andragogy (adult education). The findings of the research demonstrate that Yassawi's presentation of the abstract and complex credal issues (akaid) of Islam through pure Turkic, syllabic meter, and rhythmic folk literature forms was a deliberate educational and memory strategy. It was observed that the author provided a smooth cultural transition by filling the cultural forms of the ancient Turkic belief system (Tengrism/Shamanism) with mystical (sufi) essence, rather than excluding them. Furthermore, the concept of "Defter-i Sâni" (The Second Book) within the work is explained from a hermeneutic perspective by associating it with the structural segmentation model found in Rumi's Masnavi tradition. In light of modern textological data, chronological anachronisms, multi-layered pseudonymity (mahlas stratification), and intertextual fluidities with the Suleyman Bakyrgani corpus concretize that the Diwan-i Hikmet is not a monographic work, but rather a collective repository of memory (a shared authorship) that expanded across centuries. This collective structure holds great significance in determining the dynamic and institutional function of Yassawi's teachings within social transformation.
Keywords: Hodja Akhmet Yassawi, Diwan-i Hikmet, Guidance Pedagogy, Non-Formal Education, Sociocultural Transformation, Defter-i Sâni.

Introduction

In the 12th century, Turkic-Islamic history witnessed a profound sociocultural and religious transformation across Transoxiana (Maveraünnehir) and the Turkistan geography. At the epicenter of this transformation stands Hodja Akhmet Yassawi and his foundational corpus, the Diwan-i Hikmet, which presented the universal messages of Islam to the intellect of nomadic and semi-nomadic Turkic tribes. By formulating complex theological and mystical concepts in a simple and didactic language adapted to the cognitive codes of the steppe people, Yassawi emerged not merely as a religious leader, but also as a mass folk educator.

The bedrock of academic scholarship on Akhmet Yassawi and the Diwan-i Hikmet rests upon the seminal masterpiece of M. Fuad Köprülü (1976). Subsequently, researchers such as Eraslan (1983), Bice (2008), and Tosun (2015) have produced invaluable studies centered on textual publication and Sufi terminology. However, a review of the literature reveals that interdisciplinary

studies analyzing these hikmets (verses of wisdom) within the context of modern educational sciences—such as "concept teaching", "values education" and "andragogy (adult pedagogy)"—remain remarkably limited.

The objective of this paper is to examine the poetic verses in the Diwan-i Hikmet beyond their status as literary texts, analyzing them as "pedagogical tools" that facilitated the alignment of nomadic Turkic tribes with Islamic values. The research aims to uncover the methods utilized by Yassawi while educating the public—such as indoctrination, repetition, exemplification, and simplification—and to determine the direct impact of these methods on the steppe society's transition toward a settled morality.

Methods and Materials

This study adopts document analysis and content analysis techniques, which are qualitative research designs. The recognized editions of the Diwan-i Hikmet in the scholarly world (Bice, 2008; Eraslan, 1983), which constitute the primary data source of the study, were scanned, and the hikmets themed around "education, morality, social rules, and guidance (irshad)" were categorized. The gathered data were analyzed via an interdisciplinary approach centering on theories of the sociology of religion and adult pedagogy, without being detached from their historical context.

Results and their discussion

3.1. Chronological Uncertainties and the Problem of Authenticity

The literary and mystical legacy of Hodja Akhmet Yassawi is subject to extensive scholarly debates within the literature, revolving around chronological inconsistencies, issues of attribution, and semantic disputes (Qydyr, 2021). The hagiographical theses posited by Köprülü (1976) suggesting that Yassawi lived for 120 years cannot be corroborated with empirical evidence from the perspective of modern historical methodology. Furthermore, the fact that an original authorial manuscript has not survived to the present day deepens the methodological challenges in philological research.

The lack of stylistic homogeneity across the Diwan-i Hikmet manuscripts concretely proves that external and collective interventions were made to the work throughout the historical process (Qydyr, 2021). For instance, referring to Yassawi in the third person as "My Sheikh Ahmed" in certain hikmets is incompatible with Sufi ethics and points to the interventions of later dervishes. Comparative textological analyses have revealed that certain eschatological verses attributed to Yassawi are identical to lines in the Book of Bakyrgan (Bakırgan Kitabı) by his most prominent disciple, Suleyman Bakyrgani (Bakırgani, 1991). The appearance of pseudonyms belonging to different Sufi poets, such as Yusuf Bidevâni, in some of the poems further confirms the shared/collective authorship structure of the corpus.

3.2. Hermeneutic Analysis of the Concept of "Defter-i Sâni"

Different hypotheses exist in the literature regarding the semantic framework of the expression "Defter-i Sâni" (The Second Notebook/Volume) appearing in the text. Arguments suggesting that the first notebook refers to the Holy Qur'an or the Preserved Tablet (Lawh al-Mahfuz) are rejected within the context of Islamic tenets (akaid), Sufi epistemology, and intra-textual consistencies (Qydyr, 2021). In the tradition of classical Sufi literature, the word "defter" is a technical term used to denote the structural volumes or sections of a work. Indeed, this tradition is firmly established in Rumi's Masnavi, which consists of six defters (Köprülü, 1976).

Consequently, the hypothesis gaining significant weight posits that, in accordance with literary conventions of the period, Yassawi referred to his initial theoretical/scholarly section penned in Arabic or Persian as the "First Notebook," while designating the mystical, poetic section written in pure Turkic as the "Second Notebook" (Defter-i Sâni) (Kydyr, 2021).

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Table No.1

Table 1. Evaluation of Hypotheses Regarding the Semantic Framework of "Defter-i Sâni"

Proposed Hypothesis	Central Argument of the Hypothesis	Evaluation Based on Scientific / Philological Grounds
The Qur'an and Levh-i Mahfuz (Preserved Tablet) Hypothesis	The claim that the first notebook refers to sacred texts (*nass*) or the tablet of destiny.	**Rejected.** According to Sufi epistemology, human discourse cannot be compared with divine revelation. Furthermore, Yassawi's poems address human frailty and humility rather than deterministic prophecies (Qydyr, 2021).
The Eschatological Two-Worlds Hypothesis	The claim that the expression symbolizes the earthly world and the afterlife.	**Rejected.** This argument violates the grammatical rules of classical Arabic; had this meaning been intended, the dual form (*tesniye*) would have been deployed as "*Deftereyn*" (Qydyr, 2021).
The Rumi Literary Tradition (Structural Section Approach)	The thesis that the concept of "*defter*" denotes the bulky volumes or structural sections of a single work.	**Accepted.** This aligns perfectly with the *Masnavi* tradition. It is consistent with the historical reality that Yassawi referred to his initial scholarly/theoretical section as the "First Notebook" and his mystical poetic section penned in pure Turkic as the "Second Notebook" (Köprülü, 1976).

3.3. Implementation Methods of Sufi Pedagogy

The most fundamental pedagogical method utilized by Ahmed Yassawi to transform nomadic communities is a systematic model of spiritual education grounded in the process of sayr u suluk (the spiritual journey). This model relies on the practices of riyadah (ascetic discipline) and mujahadah (spiritual struggle), which encompass individual self-control mechanisms such as eating little, sleeping little, and speaking little. The transformative power within Yassawi's teachings does not merely consist of theoretical preaching; rather, it is anchored in the method of "teaching by personal example (role-modeling)" (Gürer, 2017). The poet's withdrawal into an underground ascetic cell (chilahane / halvethane) upon reaching the age of 63—as a manifestation of devotion to the Sunnah of the Prophet—stands as the most concrete example of uzlet (seclusion) education offered to society:

"At sixty-three, I heard it was the Sunnah and came to know / Mourning for Mustafa, I entered [the cell] behold." (Bice, 2008).

In order to render abstract religious concepts permanent, Yassawi employed concrete metaphors such as the "shop of love" (aşk dükkânı) and the "sherbet of secrets" (sır şerbeti); furthermore, he maintained a pedagogical gradualism by likening the transmission of knowledge to the uninitiated to "lighting a candle in a windy place" (Gürer, 2017).

3.4. Social Criticism, Linguistic Choice, and Guidance Strategy

Beyond being an individualistic mystical guide, the Diwan-i Hikmet functions as a fierce socio-theological mirror held up to the social and administrative corruptions of the period. While the text emphasizes that establishing friendships with the nâdân (the ignorant) withers the soul, it harshly

criticizes the tyranny of rulers and the superficiality of "false scholars" (Bice, 2008). At this juncture, Yassawi does not adopt a fatalistic approach; instead, he posits that social reformation can only be achieved through individual self-criticism.

The greatest success in the guidance (irshad) strategy of the Pir of Turkistan lies in his linguistic choice. Despite his profound mastery of Arabic and Persian, he addressed the Turkic tribes—who were newly encountering Islam—in their own native tongue (Köprülü, 1976). Molded with syllabic meter and Turkic folk literary forms (quatrains), these hikmets lower complex mystical concepts to a level comprehensible to the common folk, thereby constructing an unshakeable unity of faith and culture across the Central Asian steppes.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the guidance (irshad) activities conducted by Hodja Akhmet Yassawi through his work Diwan-i Hikmet represent the most comprehensive non-formal educational curriculum of the 12th-century Turkistan geography, transcending its status as a purely theological text.

The presentation of the abstract credal issues (akaid) of Islam through pure Turkic and syllabic meter constitutes a deliberate mnemonic strategy. Instead of entirely excluding the cultural forms of the ancient Turkic belief system (Tengrism/Shamanism), Yassawi imbued them with an Islamic-Sufi essence, thereby cultivating an environment of smooth cultural transition (integration) and synthesis. The role-model pedagogy he displayed by withdrawing underground at the age of 63, combined with the concrete metaphors he utilized, rendered learning permanent. The hikmets successfully shifted the conflict-prone and materially driven structure of the nomadic tribes onto an urban moral foundation centered on social peace.

Recommendations

In light of the theoretical and empirical findings emerging from this interdisciplinary investigation of the Diwan-i Hikmet corpus, the following microscopic and macroscopic recommendations are put forward to guide future scholarly research:

5.1. Recommendations for Intertextuality and Digital Philology

Mapping Shared Authorship via Digital Textology: Building upon the finding that the text is not a monographic work by a single author but rather a collective repository of memory that expanded over centuries, the intertextual fluidities between this text, the Book of Bakyrgan (Bakırgan Kitabı) by Suleyman Bakyrgani, and the verses of poets such as Yusuf Bidevâni should be investigated using modern Digital Humanities methodologies. Utilizing computational linguistics tools and stylometry algorithms, researchers should mathematically model and disentangle the archaic Yassawi textual layer from the stylistic heterogeneities and external interventions introduced by later dervishes. Deepening Hermeneutic and Conceptual Matrices: The scholarly consensus established in this study—namely, that the concept of "Defter-i Sâni" (The Second Notebook) reflects a structural, horizontal segmentation akin to Rumi's Masnavi tradition rather than a vertical epistemology like the Qur'an or the Preserved Tablet—warrants further expansion. Rigorous philological surveys should be launched across uncatalogued manuscript collections in Central Asia and Transoxiana to search for traces of Yassawi's presumed lost first notebook, which contained his initial theoretical and scholarly treatises written in Arabic or Persian.

5.2. Recommendations for Educational Sciences, Andragogy and Values Education

Curricularizing the Non-Formal Adult Education Model: Yassawi's deliberate mnemonic and educational strategy of rendering complex, abstract theological tenets (akaid) into pure Turkic utilizing syllabic meter and rhythmic folk literature should be reformulated within contemporary non-formal education frameworks. This specific pedagogical methodology—relying on indoctrination, repetition, exemplification, and concrete metaphors tailored to the cognitive codes of nomadic populations—should be adapted as a pedagogical model for modern curriculum design in fields such

as "Abstract Concept Teaching for Adults" and "Modular Values Education". Modeling Role-Model Pedagogy: The author's implementation of "teaching by personal example," manifested through his withdrawal into an underground ascetic cell at the age of 63, alongside individual self-control mechanisms (riyadah and mujahadah), should be systematically integrated into the literature on character and leadership education.

5.3. Recommendations for Cultural Integration and the Sociology of Religion Sociological Analysis of Cultural Transition and Synthesis Mechanisms:

Yassawi's strategy of achieving a smooth cultural transition and adaptation by filling the existing cultural forms of the ancient Turkic belief system (Tengrism/Shamanism) with a mystical Sufi essence—rather than excluding or obliterating them—presents a rich avenue for macro-sociological research. The role of this strategy in transitioning conflict-prone nomadic tribes onto an urban moral foundation anchored in social peace should be thoroughly analyzed through the lens of modern "Cultural Memory" and "Social Integration" theories. This can serve as a vital historical reference point for current anti-radicalization and social cohesion initiatives in heterogeneous societies. Comparative Eurasian Sufi Anthropology:

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