

RESEARCH AND TEACHING ON SIKHISM IN TURKISH UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Research on Sikhism and its teaching in Turkish universities fall within the structure of Divinity Faculties and in the studies of History of Religions. Unfortunately, studies and researches on Sikhism in Turkey are lagging behind the world standards. The first book in Turkey on Sikhism, Dinler Tarihi (History of Religions) by Hilmi Omer Budda, was published in 1935. Besides a brief references about Sikhism in other Turkish books, Prof Dr Huzeyfe Sayim did Master Thesis on Sih Dini'nin Kurucusu Guru Nanak'in Hayati ve Ogretisi (Life and Teaching of Guru Nanak the Founder of Sikhism) is an outstanding work. The position of Sikhism in History of Religions in Turkey has been briefly reviewed and it appears that a lot of interest is developing in the research and study about Sikhism in universities of Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

Sikhism, one of the principal religions originating from India, is one of the living religions in the world today. Sikhism is considered as a syncretism - a mixture of Islam and Hinduism. However, in contrast to complicated polytheistic belief of Hinduism, it emphasizes the monotheistic belief such as in Islam. Sikhs attract attention with their interesting clothing, principal style of living and ethical consistency. Sikhism has spread in the West by migration and there have been members especially in United Kingdom, Canada and USA. No Sikh is living in Turkey; therefore, there is no direct contact of the Muslims of Turkey with the Sikhs and their religion. For this reason, study and research on Sikhism in Turkey are lagging behind the world standards. Now our aims are to put research and teaching on Sikhism in Turkish Universities at equal footing with that of other world religions. Although research and teaching of Sikhism in Turkey are within the structure of Divinity Faculties and in the studies of History of Religions but very little has been done so far. Let us first examine the historical background of studies in History of Religions in Turkey.

BRIEF REVIEW

1. General Historical Background of Research in History of Religions in Turkey

As it's known, History of Religions appeared in Western World in 19th century as a modern scientific discipline. Max Muller (d. 1900) is accepted as an advance courier of Modern History of Religions with his book named *Comparative Mythology* published in 1856. The works of Muller called *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (1873) and *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion* (1878) were also related to the History of Religions [3]. Before this date, in Islamic world some work about other religions and beliefs together with Islam were written by Muslim scholars such as *al-Ash'arî* (d. 935), *al-Baghdâdî* (d. 1038), *al-Bîrûnî* (d. 1049), *Îbn al-Hazm* (d. 1064), *al-Shahristânî* (d. 1183). However, these are not books of History of Religions from point of independent sense and today's meaning. In these books, subjects such as History, Philosophy of Religion, Theology, Mysticism, History of Religious Sects and History of Religions were in close proximity [11].

Editorial Note: *The well researched article of Dr Isik clearly indicates paucity of historical evidence on 'Sikhism' in literature available at various Turkish Universities. He has also pointed out the reasons for that. However, it is clear from his article that more and more researchers are interested in study of Sikhism in Turkish universities. Dr Isik has also mistakenly accepted that Sikhism is a syncretism as is generally misunderstood by many writers. We feel that it is not his fault since most scholars have failed to represent Sikhism in its real perspective. However, diligent study of its doctrine from its authentic source of information in its Holy Scripture, the Aad Guru Granth Sahuib, commonly called "Adi Granth" will reveal that Sikhism is a unique and of its own kind.*

Teaching of History of Religions and the works written in these areas in Turkey have been going up to the time of Ottoman Empire. In Ottoman Era, first a lecture called *General History and Mythology of Primitive Societies* was given within the lecture program of Istanbul University Literature Faculty in 1874. *History of Islam* and *History of Religions* were taught together among lectures of Islamic Sciences in 1911. In addition to this, lecture on *History of Religions* was taught at *Madrassa al-Mutahassisin* and *Madrassa al-Suleymaniya*. After Ottoman Era, *Turkish Religious History* and *History of Religions* were taught at Divinity Faculty of Istanbul University in Turkish Republic. In 1933, this faculty was closed and lectures called *Turkish Religions and Sects* and *History of Religions* was taught at Institute of Islamic Research instead establishing Faculty of Divinity. After closing of this institute in 1936, religious education and teaching were not given in Turkey until 1949. The lecture of *History of Religions* was again started to be given by Annemarie Schimmel at Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University, which was founded in 1949 [22, p.109-124; 19, p.5-6; 23, p.20-21]. Prof Hikmet Tanyu, who was the assistant of Annemarie Schimmel, was the first professor of History of Religions in Turkey. Today the university teachers of History of Religions in Turkey are the students of Dr Tanyu and the students of their students. The lectures called *History of Religions* were also taught at High Islamic Institutes which was founded next to Divinity Faculty of Ankara University. All these institutes were transformed into Faculties of Divinity after 1980.

Various books for History of Religions were written in order to be read by students and academicians at Divinity Faculties in Turkey. The first book written in this field was *Esatir (Mythology)* written by Semsettin Sami (d. 1904). The first edition of this book, which was started to be written out in the years when Max Muller wrote his books, was published in 1878 while the second edition was published in 1894. In this book, Greek, Rome, Indian, Japanese, Chinese and other mythological opinions were told [18]. Unfortunately, although it had talked about Indian and Buddhist mythologies in this book there wasn't any evaluation whether there was Sikh mythology or not. (*Editorial note: In fact, there is no mythological work in Sikhism [4], although some Sikh scholars do interpret some verse on mythological terms.*)

After *Esatir*, first book related directly with History of Religions was *Tarih-i Edyan (History of Religions)* of Ahmet Mithat Efendi which was published in 1911. This book included Chinese, Japanese and Indian religions. The same named book of Mahmut Emin Seydisihri was published in 1912-1915. It has a character of introduction to History of Religions. It mentions theories

about the origins of religions and primitive religions. The same named book of M. Semseddin Gunaltay, which was published in 1919, mentions primitive religions as well as Chinese and Japanese religions [22, p.6]. Unfortunately, there is not any information about Sikhism in these books either.

In Turkey, the first book that mentions Sikhism was *Dinler Tarihi (History of Religions)* by Hilmi Omer Budda which was published in 1935. This book mentions only Indian and Far East religions and Sikhism was included only on two pages [2]. The book named as *Yeryuzundeki Dinler Tarihi (History of Religions on the Earth)*, written after the previously mentioned one by Omer Riza Dogrul, mentions Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism but does not include Sikhism [9]. In the book named as *Dinler Tarihi'ne Giris (Introduction to History of Religions)* of Annemarie Schimmel, the first edition of which was made in 1955 and prepared as a lecture book for Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University, in spite of Hinduism and Buddhism it does not include other Indian-originated religions such as Jainism and Sikhism [20]. It can be observed that almost all of the books published after this date in Turkey include Sikhism. We will talk about these books in the following section.

2. Research and Teaching of Sikhism in History of Religions in Turkey

In this section, we will first examine general history of religious books including Sikhism and how they describe it. Then, we will discuss independent studies related with Sikhism.

As we mentioned before, the first book that includes Sikhism was *Dinler Tarihi (History of Religions)* by Hilmi Omer Budda, which was published in 1935. This book is a classic in its field and cannot be overcome today by any other book from the point of its contents. Although Brahmanism, Hinduism, Tibet Buddhism, Jainism, Chinese and Japanese religions are described at length in this book, Sikhism was included only on two pages. Perhaps, it is necessary to establish relations with its being first. In the text, it mentions about its foundation on the teachings of Guru Nanak', Kabir, monotheistic belief in Sikhism, Adi Granth and Sikh government, which was founded in 1845 and demolished by English [2].

The books of History of Religions written after this, which were including Sikh Religion, were written after Budda's book. The topics in 1993-press of the book named *Dinler Tarihi (History of Religions)* by Gunay Tumer-Abdurrahman Kucuk are as follows: Life of Nanak, Birth of Sikhism, Situation after Nanak, religious ceremony, beliefs and worship of Sikhs [23, p.100-107].

In the book named *Gunumuz Dunya Dinleri (Today's World Religions)* published in 1995 by Osman Cilaci, Sikhism was described under following topics: After Introduction of Birth and Developing of Sikhism; Faith, Worship and Ceremony in Sikhism; Sacred Books; Sects (Namdari-Akali); and Sikhs' political situations [8]. Sikhism, on the other hand, was described in the forth edition of *Baslangictan Gunumuz Dinler Tarihi (History of Religions-From Beginning to the Present Day)* in 2002 by Ekrem Sarikcioglu as: Introduction, Birth of Sikhism, Developing of Sikhism, Faith and worship in Sikhism [19, p.193-196] The book named *Dinler Tarihi'ne Giriş (Introduction to History of Religions)* published in 2002 by Mehmet Aydin mentioned about Sikh Religion only on two pages [1].

The final History of Religions source under consideration was the book named *Yasayan Dunya Dinleri (Living World Religions)* published by The Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey the editor of which was Prof Dr Sinasi Gunduz. The 605-page book examined Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikh Religion, Confucianism, Taoism, new religious trends appeared in West (Jehova's Witnesses, Mormonism, Moonism, Scientology, Satanism, Humanism, Postmodernism), syncretic trends in Islamic World (Babism, Bahá'í Faith, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community), Sabaitans, Manicheism, Mazdeism, Old Turkish Religion, Arabian Religion before Islam in detail. Each section was written by academicians in Faculty of Divinity in Turkey. Sikhism in the book was written by Prof Dr Sinasi Gunduz, who is a university teacher at Istanbul University. After the section with the topic *Sih Dini (Sikh Religion)*, there are subjects such as Introduction, Guru Nanak and Historical developing of Sikh Religion, ten gurus, Sikhs today, basic doctrines, Adi Grandth, understanding of worship, social structure in the Sikh tradition [10]. **(Editorial Note: The Editors, Prof Devinder Singh Chahal, and Dr Aytar Singh Dhaliwal, met Prof Dr Gunduz at the Istanbul University during their research study on travels of Guru Nanak in Turkey in May 2007. Dr Gunduz showed the above book in which he has written about Sikhism.)**

Here, the most important studies for us are limited number of independent books that just take Sikh Religion under consideration other than those that mention Sikhism. The academician who had independent studies related with Sikh Religion in Turkey until now is Assistant Prof Dr Huzeyfe Sayim, who is expert in Sikhism, is retired lecturer of Erciyes University Faculty of Divinity. The topic of Huzeyfe Sayim's Master Thesis was *Sih Dini'nin Kurucusu Guru Nanak'in Hayati ve Ogretileri (Life and Teaching of Guru Nanak the Founder of Sikhism)* [21]. The thesis includes two parts:

In Introduction History of India, Social and Religious Situation of India in the century when Nanak was living, religious flaws that affected Nanak were briefly described (p. 1-19). In the first part, the Life of Guru Nanak was described. Here, the birth of Guru Nanak, his youth, starting to work, his journeys, his last days, his death and his personality were mentioned (p. 20-73). The second part dwells on Teaching of Guru Nanak. Here, the religious belief, worship and moral principles in Sikhism were described (p. 74-90).

Dr Huzeyfe Sayim published three different articles related with Sikhism other than his master thesis. One of them is *Sihizm'in Din Anlayisi (Religion Comprehension of Sikhism)* [13]. In this article, the birth and development of Sikhism, cosmogony and nature belief in Sikhism, the concepts of Maya, Samsara (reincarnation) and liberation, Adi Granth, understanding of God in Sikhism, worship and Gurdwara, the look of Sikhs to other religions were mentioned.

The second article that was written by Dr Sayim had a topic of *Sihizm'in Kurucusu Guru Nanak ve Islamiyet (Guru Nanak, the Founder of Sikhism; and Islam)* [16]. The birth and education of Guru Nanak, his working at a Muslim manager's disposal in Sultanpur, his Muslim friend called Mardana, what he meant by "There is neither an Indian, nor a Muslim", his journeys, how it is required to understand some ethical commands and Nanak's teaching were described in this article.

The last article of Dr Sayim was named as *Sih Dini (Sikh Religion)* [15]. There is information about Sikhism with its general features in the article.

Retired Prof Dr Abdurrahman Kucuk is another academician who wrote independent article about Sikhism. Prof Kucuk mentioned following subjects in his article named as *Sihizm (Sikhism)* [14]: The reasons and syncretic activities that prepared Sikhism after Introduction, the history of Guru Nanak's thought, doctrine, and understanding of God of Guru Nanak, the birth of Sikhism, the situation after Nanak, Khalsa, understanding of God, Holy Books, Cult, other belief, worship and traditions of Sikhs, Religious Sects, and Conclusion.

Except these studies, there is one translation by me about Sikhism from English to Turkish which is ready to be published. I've translated this from *Philosophy of Religion-An Approach to World Religions* (p.169-173) book of A Ranjan Mohapatra, who is an Indian writer [12]. Before this, I translated *Hinduism* and *Buddhism* sections to Turkish from the same writer's same book [17]. This translation forms the third circle of my translations from same book. I think of translating of

other religions from this book.

NOTE

I hope Prof Dr Devinder Chahal and his collaborator Dr Avtar Singh Dhaliwal's journey to Turkey in 2007 to search Guru Nanak's travels in Middle East and to seek that if Nanak visited to Konya or not will contribute to refresh the studies on Sikhism in Turkey [4, 5, 7]. Prof Chahal came to Konya during this journey and honored my High Licence Lesson (M. A. Course) and delivered a talk on *Concept of God in Sikhism and Travels of Guru Nanak in Middle East* to my students. And I have accepted of his suggestion to translation his new book *Nanakian Philosophy: Basics for Humanity* [6] into Turkish language, even if it will be late. I hope this translation will contribute to developing of researches on Sikhism in Turkey. On the other hand, it will be a great contribution to understand Guru Nanak's real philosophy.

CONCLUSIONS

- It is evident that research on Sikhism and Sikh Religious Teaching has just started in Turkey.
- Sikhism is only taught as a separate religion within the lectures of History of Religions at Faculties of Divinity of Turkish Universities.
- Sikhism is included separately in History of Religions' lecture books and in general History of Religions' books. However, these are in nature of summaries and they are very short.
- There have been only one master's thesis prepared, a few articles written and one article translated about Sikhism in Turkey until now.
- Sikhism expert in Turkey is retired Assistant Prof Dr Huzeyfe Sayim. In this study, a short presentation of his studies and other studies about Sikhism was given.

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