

The Multifaceted Identity of Sufi Poet Maḥmad Elif and His Poetry as a Mirror of Societ

Sufi Şair Mehmed Elif'in Çok Yönlü Kimliği ve Toplum Aynası Şiirleri

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Öz

Anadolu coğrafyasında 13. yüzyıldan 20. yüzyılın ilk çeyreğine kadar manzum bir kimlik inşa etmiş olan tasavvuf edebiyatı, başlangıcından günümüze insan merkezli bir yaklaşımla “insan-toplum” ve “insan-aşkın varlık” arasında bir bağ kurma gayretine hizmet etmiştir. Bu anlayışın son temsilcilerinden biri de Kur’ân, hadis, tefsir, fıkıh, kelâm, tasavvuf, edebiyat, hat gibi sahalarda eserler vererek kendinde bulunan çok yönlü kimlik sahasını beslemiş olan Sütluce Haşîrîzâde Tekkesi şeyhi Mehmed Elif Efendi (ö. 1927)’dir. Onun bu çok yönlü kimliği ve onu besleyen toplumsal yapı ile muhtevanın, şiirlerindeki izdüşümünü ortaya koymak çalışmanın temel amacıdır. Müellifin toplumsal konuları öne alan içerik yaklaşımı, sadece *Dîvân*’ındaki şiirleri çerçevesinde tetkik edilecektir. Bunun yanında şeyhliği dışında kalan şair, hattat, Mesnevihan, müverrih, kâtip, medrese müdürü ve Meclis-i Meşâyih Başkanlığı gibi dışadönük sosyal rollerini de besleyen toplumun, hangi gündemlerle onun şiirine yansıdığı dikkatlere sunulacaktır. İngilizcede direkt karşılığı olmayan Arapça ve Farsça özel isim ve terminolojiler, orijinal dillerinden çeviri yazı alfabesi kullanılarak aktarılmışlardır. Çalışmamızla, tekke şiirinin temsilcilerinden biri olan Mehmed Elif’in çok yönlü tarafı ve şiirlerinin topluma dönük yanının ortaya konulması, dil ve edebiyat disiplinlerinin yanında sosyolojik temelli sahalara da önemli bir malzeme desteği sağlanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tasavvuf Edebiyatı, Tekke ve Tasavvuf Şiiri, Mutasavvıf, Dışadönük Şair, Elif Efendi.

Abstract

Sufi literature, which developed a verse identity in Anatolian geography from the 13th century to the first quarter of the 20th century, served the effort to establish a connection between “human-society” and “human-transcendent being” with a human-centered approach. One of the last representatives of this tradition is Sheikh Maḥmad Elif (d. 1927), the sheikh of Sutluce Ḥaşîrîzâdah Tekkah, who nurtured his multifaceted identity field by producing works in fields such as the Qur’ân, hadith, tafsir, fiqh, kalam, sufism, literature and ḥaṭ (calligraphy). The main purpose of the study is to reveal this multifaceted identity of his and the social structure and content that nourish him in his poems. The author’s emphasis on social themes will be analysed only within the framework of his poems in Dîwân. In addition, it will be brought to attention which agendas of the society, which nurtures its extroverted social roles such as poet, ḥaṭṭat (calligrapher), Maḡnawîḥān (person who teaches Maḡnawî), muverriḥ (person who calculates dates with ebced calculation), scribe, madrasa director and Presidency of the Majlis-i Meshâyiḥ, which are outside of its sheikḥdom, are reflected in his poetry. Arabic and Persian proper names and terminologies that have no direct equivalents in English were transferred from their original languages using transcription alphabets. With our study, the multifaceted side of Maḥmad Elif, one of the representatives of the tekkah poetry, and the revealing of the social aspect of his poems will provide important material support to sociologically based fields as well as language and literature disciplines.

Keywords: Sufi Literature, Tekkah and Sufi Poetry, Sufi, extroverted poet, Sheikh Elif.

Introduction

Most products in the field of language and literature aim to fulfill artistic purposes, while some serve a human and society-centered realm. The fundamental existence of this effort can be framed semantically as the perception of identity, which can be defined as a set of features that distinguish a person from others and shape that individual. Indeed, identity is one of the most crucial structural elements that ensure the continuity of an individual's self-perception. These elements replace the social categories in one's cognitive structure through behaviors, which are the individual's extroverted actions. In this context, identity can also be explained as the state of thinking about oneself and society about the actions one performs or will perform, along with a social meaning.¹ For instance, this situation can be observed in an individual's response to the question "I am a chef, therefore I cook." An individual who has formed their identity in this way is motivated by the urge to perform an action that concerns the outside world. In this aspect, the identity possessed by the individual is at the very center of their action-oriented performance.

The changing dynamics of society, human resources and needs push individuals to determine a role field suitable for this dynamic structure with the skills they possess. By adopting an attitude in light of the knowledge and experiences they have or acquire within their role, they translate this process into behavior in response to societal needs. For some, this situation represents consumption, while for others, it is an act of production on behalf of society.² This outward-facing role field transforms into a multi-faceted identity due to factors such as different human types, the expectations of the times, and the individual's skill centers. The social impact they make in a limited area that achieves a much broader target audience, influence, and depth. These people who can be defined as intellectuals or enlightened people sometimes cannot serve the social benefit mentioned above.³

1 Edibe Sözen, "Sosyal Kimlik Kavramı'nın Sosyolojik ve Sosyal Psikolojik Bir İncelemesi", *İstanbul Sosyolojik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 23 (September 2011), 93-94.

2 Erol Güngör, *Sosyal Meseleler ve Aydınlar* (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2011), 242.

3 Kenan Tazefidan, "Şerif Mardin'in Eserleri Üzerinden Entelektüeller ve İdeolojiler: Sosyolojik Bakış Açısının Gücüne Dair Kişisel Bir İzah" *Akademik Yaklaşımlar Dergisi* 14 (December 2023), 725.

One of the disciplines that undoubtedly serves this multi-faceted identity structure in every era is literature. By encompassing the aesthetic dimensions of life, literature enables individuals to express their multidisciplinary nature through their works. The material revealed sometimes captures the attention of society rather than the individual.⁴ This approach, which considers social structure, is evident in many branches of literature, including poetry. The social content that enters the poetic structure, directly or indirectly, gains a different impact and scope through the poet's multifaceted identity.

Sufi literature, which makes human and society the subject of its poetry, has continued its course in Anatolian geography for centuries with the motivation to guide individuals and complete their spiritual fulfillment. The journey that began with Aḥmad Yasawī (d. 562/1166) in the 12th century mixed with the Anatolian essence in the 13th century, gained new environment, momentum and appearance and continued its existence within an institutional framework until the first quarter of the 20th century with sufis of different temperaments and understandings. Sufi literature, which includes not only sufism but also religious doctrines and social events recorded in the daily life of society, addresses a broad human resource with different forms and shapes by following the essence and meaning rather than form and appearance.

The language and culture in the material used, with content that possesses value systems, have made sufi literature and its specific poetry one of the carriers of national value. One example of this effort is a sufi named Sheikh Maḥmad Elif, who came from Egypt to Istanbul and is the 5th generation representative of a family known as Ḥaṣīrīzādah.⁵ Sheikh Elif, besides being the leader of a religious community, served both his poetry and the society he witnessed through the many skills and formations he possessed. His poems have a feature that reflects the social structure of the period he lived in different aspects. Emphasising the real side of life with his poems has increased our attention on the poet. The special information about the period the poet lived in, his personal life and his environment between the verses has enabled us to put this person at the centre of our study.

4 Şükrü Ünal, *Dil ve Kültür* (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2002), 122.

5 Hussein Waṣṣāf, *Safīna-yi Awliyā* (Istanbul: Seha Neşriyat, 1990), 1/355.

1. The Multifaceted Identity of the Poet

Tracing the origins of Sheikh Elif's broad formation structure and the factors nurturing his multifaceted identity back to his childhood years is appropriate. With the support and sensitivity of his first teacher and sheikh, his father Sheikh Aḥmad Muḥtar (d. 1319/1901), he was introduced to various disciplines by notable scholars of his time at an early age. Among these scholars are Naqshbandī sheikh and *Maṣnawī* reciter Sheikh Ḥusām ad-dīn (d. 1280/1864), who taught him the Basmala and Elifbā lessons; Mr. Fāiq, Mr. Ḥāfiẓ İbrahim, Mr. Ḥādīmī Aḥmad Ḥulūṣī, Mr. Aḥmad Nuzhat, Mr. Ḥāfiẓ Şākır, and President of the Council of Education Mr. Ḥaydar, from whom he benefited in areas such as the Qur'ān, fiqh, tafsir, hadith, kalam, sufism, Arabic, and Persian.⁶

His sufi life, the most intense experiential state in his life universe, also played a part in forming his multidisciplinary identity. He would later become the last sheik of the Sa'diyya Tekkah in Sutluce, where he was born, and would carry out this duty until the year 1925, when the tekkahs were closed. Besides Sa'diyya, he received Sāzālī training from his father and Mawlawiyya training from Sheikh 'Osmān Şalāḥ ad-dīn (d. 1304/1887), the sheik of Yenikapı Mawlawī Tekkah. Additionally, Sheikh 'Ömer es-Şağlabī of the Şaybānī order, who visited Istanbul from Damascus, also presented Sheikh Elif with his order's authorization, succession, sikkes, and khirqa.⁷ From these statements, we can understand that Sheikh Elif was spiritually commissioned with Sāzaliyya, Mawlawiyya and Şaybāniyya besides the Sa'diyya tariqat. The convergence of these spiritual paths, which have different temperaments and human resources, in his spiritual identity must have made his human formation more inclusive. Indeed, during his time as sheik the Sutluce Tekkah experienced its most glorious period, with intellectual accumulation, moral excellence and artistic appreciation. It attracted considerable interest from

6 İbnü'l-Emin Mahmud Kemal İnal, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri* (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, 1999), 1/440; Sadık Albayrak, *Son Devir Osmanlı Uleması* (İstanbul: Medrese Yayınevi, 1996), 3/152.

7 Hür Mahmut Yücer, *Şeyh Sa'deddin Cebâvî ve Sa'dilik* (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2010), 210; Hüseyin Kurt, *Elif Efendi, Hayatı, Sanatı, Eserleri ve Tasavvufî Görüşleri* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2003), 86-87; İnal, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*, 1/440.

the broad public masses, the education community of the time, artistic humans, and administrative officials.⁸

Besides his sufi identity, Sheikh Elif's early youth involvement in calligraphy with the famous calligraphers of his time, Mr. Zakî Dede (d. 1298/1881) and Mr. Râqım (d. 1310/1893) and his self-improvement in this area, reveal his talent in calligraphy. Thus, some of his works have reached us as author calligraphy. He is the author of many calligraphic works, as well as poetic-dated panels and inscriptions found in various sections of the Tekkah in Sutlce, where he served as sheikh.⁹

His interest in architecture and design is also noteworthy. His interest in architecture and design is also noteworthy. Some of the plans and designs of the Tekkah in Sütölce are, in fact, attributed to him. During the periods when the Haşîrîzâdah Tekkah in Sutluce underwent reconstruction, repair and renovation, the drawings and architectural layouts of the buildings associated with the tekkah were personally carried out by Sheikh Elif. This clearly reflects his sustained engagement and technical aptitude in the field of architecture.¹⁰

From his early days, Maḥmad Elif has been in contact with the Mawlawî order, a school of wisdom in which literature and music have always been important. This structure, which specializes in art and especially music, also supported the presence of a distinguished community inclined towards this direction.¹¹ Sheikh Elif can be counted among those who benefited from this. The fact that some of the poems he wrote in Turkish were composed reveals his identity as a lyricist in tekkah music.¹²

His scholarly qualification as a scholar manifested in two ways: one as a discourse scholar. A broad group of distinguished individuals attended and benefited from his *Maşnawî* lessons, which could be considered outside the context of his tariqat discourse. The fact that he granted

8 Yücer, *Sa'dilik*, 210-211.

9 İnal, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*, 1/440; Baha Tanman, "Haşîrîzâde Tekkesi", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 1997), 16/384; İbnü'l-Emin Mahmud Kemal İnal, *Son Hattatlar* (İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1970), 816.

10 Nihat Azamat, "Elif Efendi, Haşîrîzâde" *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 1995), 11/38.

11 Şermin Barihüda Tanrıkorur, "Mevleviyye" *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2004), 29/473.

12 Sadettin Nüzhet Ergun, *Türk Müsîkisi Antolojisi* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1942), 708.

authorization to skilled individuals also proves his competence in this subject.¹³ In one of his poems in his *Dīwān*, he mentions that he taught *Maṣnawī*, consisting of six books, many times over forty years.¹⁴ The well-known sufi and sufi historian Ḥussein Vaṣṣāf mentions that, besides *Maṣnawī*, he taught books related to hadīth and sufism such as *Buḥārī-i Şerīf*, *Şamāil-i Şarīf*, *el-Futūḥāt-ı Makkiye*, *Fuṣūş al-Ḥikem*, and *et-Tuhfe al-Mursele* and shares the information that his teaching sessions were very high-level.¹⁵ Many sources that mention Sheikh Elif state that he consulted and sought solutions to problems with many people through these meetings and preferred a reasonable and gentle style in his interactions.¹⁶

His scholarly qualification also manifested in the works he authored. He wrote fourteen works in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, mainly on religion and sufism, including topics such as the Qur'ān, hadīth, tafsir, fiqh, kalām, sufism, and literature.¹⁷ His works have a formation that prioritizes teaching rather than art and aesthetics. The scholarly aspect of his works has been discussed in many references, and he was later promoted to *Mūsile-i Sulaymāniyah*,¹⁸ one of the indicators of scholars' degrees. This title allowed him to join those who prepare students for higher education.

The state service duties Sheikh Elif performed at certain periods of his life are also part of his multifaceted identity background. Among the various positions he held are clerkship at a military court, judiciary official, lecturer, and finally, the presidency of the *Majlis-i Meshāyih*, which served to supervise the tekkahs administratively and socially.¹⁹ Several instances of his experiences in these roles are reflected as content in some archive records and his poems. Examples related to the subject will be addressed in the second part of the article, so the information provided here is considered sufficient for now.

Growing up in an environment suitable for and curious about art, it was inevitable for Sheikh Elif to engage in poetry. The interest of his

13 Yücer, *Sa'dilik*, 211.

14 Murat Ayar, *Hasırzâde Mehmed Elif Efendi ve Dîvânı* (Ankara: İlahiyat Yayınları, 2024), 148.

15 Vaṣṣāf, *Safina-yi Awliyā*, 1/364-365.

16 Yücer, *Sa'dilik*, 210.

17 Ayar, *Elif Dîvânı*, 11.

18 It is the first madrasah in the Ottoman education model that prepared students for higher education.

19 Albayrak, *Osmanlı Uleması* (İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Yayınları, 1996), 256.

Tekkah environment, the teachers he studied with, and the previous sufis in this field must have kept his curiosity alive. Therefore, it would not be wrong to highlight his poet identity as one of his strongest outward-facing aspects. Besides his *Dīwān*, where he compiled his poems, there are also poems written with the pen name Elif on the inscriptions and panels in the Tekkah.²⁰ Like other sufi poets, he stated that his poems did not serve the purpose of making art and that therefore rhetorical manifestations should not be sought in them:

Dīvān-ı eṣ'ār-ı belāḡat ṣanmasun ihvānımız
 Sulṭān-ı 'aşk-ı vaḥdetiñ menşûrıdır dīvānımız²¹
 (Dīwān, I. Section, Ghazal 1/1)

2. The Poet's Society Mirror Poems

Some of the poems in Sheikh Maḥmad Elif's *Dīwān*, in which he collected his poems, contain examples that projection and reflection of the society showing the reality of the time. Therefore, his concern for message and meaning is far ahead of the ideal of making art. Being a sufi, he has many poems with religious and sufi themes and didactic formations, but a small number of poems reflect the real politics of the society by holding a mirror to the era in which he lived. In both subject centers, to make his message more effective and authentic, he included a wide variety of human types, who were living in different eras, as direct or indirect subjects in his poetry. These people existed in society with their positive or negative achievement values and gained meaning within this social structure.

In his poems, 'Abd al-Qādir Gaylānī (d. 561/1166) [founder of the Qadiriyya], 'Abd al-Vāḥid Celebi (d. 1325/1907) [Mawlawī Sheikh], 'Abd al-Ḥamid II [Ottoman sultan], Ḥaẓrat Adam [First human and prophet], Sheikh Aḥmad Muḥtār [Elif's father], Ḥaẓrat 'Alī (d. 40/661) [Fourth Islamic Caliph and son-in-law of the Prophet], Aṣḥāb-ı Kahf [The Companions of the Cave], Āsiya [Pharaoh's wife who believed], Belkīs [Queen of Shebā], Baydāwī (d. 685/1286) [Commentator, theologian and jurist],

²⁰ Tanman, "Hasırîzâde Tekkesi", 16/385-386.

²¹ "Our brothers should not regard this book in which we have collected our poems as a rhetorical skill for they are the decree of love that expresses unity."

Ḥaẓrat Bilāl (d. 20/641) [Şaḥābī], Gabriel [one of the four great angels], Diogenes [Greek philosopher], Ḥaẓrat Abu Bakr (d. 13/634) [First Islamic Caliph], Abu Sufyān (d. 31/651-52) [Şaḥābī], Plato [Ancient Greek philosopher], Ayyüb [Prophet famous for his patience], Fāṭima [Daughter of Sheikh Elif], Fāṭima al-Zahra (d. 11/632) [Daughter of the Prophet], Faṭma Sultan [Daughter of Sultan Murād V], Ferhāt [Male protagonist of the story Ḥusrev u Şīrīn], Pharaoh [a cruel ruler who lived during the time of Moses], Ḥaẓrat Ḥassan (d. 49/669) [grandson of the Prophet], Ḥassan Ali al-Shadhili (d. 656/1258) [founder of the Shadhiliyya sect], Mr. Ḥassan Tawfīq [a writer to whom Sheikh Elif wrote a commentary and an afterword to two of his works], Hemdem Celebi (d. 1275/1859) [Mawlawī Sheikh], Sheikh Ḥussam ad-dīn (d. 1317/1900) [Maṣnawīḥān], Ḥaẓrat Ḥussein (d. 61/680) [grandson of the Prophet], Mr. Ḥussein Ḥusnu [son of Tiryākī Ḥassan Pasha, who is buried in Unye], Avicenna (d. 428/1037) [Islamic philosopher and physician], Ḥaẓrat Abraham [Prophet], Abraham Barāde [Shadhiliyya sheikh], Ḥaẓrat Isa [Prophet Jesus], Ishāk Jamāl ad-dīn Karamanī (d. 933/1527) [Ḥalwatī Sheikh], Laylā [female protagonist of the story of Laylā and Majnūn], Majnūn [male protagonist of the story of Laylā and Majnūn], Ḥaẓrat Maryam [Mother of Jesus], Mawlānā Jalāl ad-dīn-i Rūmī (d. 672/1273) [Sufi and Islamic thinker], Ḥaẓrat Muḥammad (d. 11/632) [The last prophet], Muhy ad-dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) [Sufi and Islamic thinker], Ḥaẓrat Moses [Prophet], Mr. Nejip [Kadi of Rhodes, poet and literary figure, whose poetry collection Sheikh Elif wrote a introduction letter], Nimrod [Cruel ruler], Ḥaẓrat Noah [Prophet], ‘Oṣmān Salāḥ ad-dīn (d. 1304/1887) [Mawlawī Sheikh], Sa’d ad-dīn al-Jibāwī (d. 575/1180) [founder of the Sa’diyya sect], Salmān al-Farīsī (d. 36/656) [the first Iranian Companion to convert to Islam], Sultan Murād V (d. 1321/1904) [Ottoman Sultan], Ḥaẓrat Solomon [Prophet], Sulaymān Sitki (d. 1258/1843) [Sa’diyya Sheikh], Shaddad [the famous Yemeni ruler who built the vineyards of Irem], Shams-i Tebrīzī (d. 645/1247) [Mawlānā’s conversation sheikh], Uwais al-Qarānī (d. 37/657) [a Yemeni ascetic who lived in the time of the Prophet but never saw him], Ḥaẓrat Joseph [Prophet].²²

22 Ayar, *Elif Divām*, 62-64.

Sheikh Elif, who grew up in a religious and sufi environment from an early age and whose life was shaped accordingly, is also a witness to the people, society and time in which he lives. He adopts an attitude towards life that is not introverted but rather extroverted, but with restraint. The emotion-centered gains of a poet living in society can be easily seen in the shares he gives through individuals. For example, the love of a member of an ummah in the poems he wrote for his prophet; the love for the Ahl al-Bayt in the poems he wrote for²³ Ḥaẓrat Ali,²⁴ Ḥaẓrat Fāṭima²⁵ and their sons Ḥaẓrat Ḥassan and Ḥussein;²⁶ the sorrow of a child and a father in the elegies he wrote for the deaths of his father Sheikh Aḥmad Muḥtar²⁷ and his daughter Fāṭima;²⁸ fidelity to promises in the poems he wrote for or mentioned the scholars and teachers²⁹ he benefited from and other people he knew as familiar;³⁰ courtesy³¹ in the congratulatory and thank-you letters he wrote on various occasions; and the sensitivity³² in the poems he wrote for the revival of places that served the society are all examples of his outgoing side that has been put into writing.

We can read through his poems that he was not indifferent to the problems of the sociology and culture in which he lived. The fact that he was a sufi never held him back from being a witness to society; contrary to popular belief, he preferred to be a proactive and observant in

23 Ayar, *Elif Dîvânı*, 104, 108, 111, 118.

24 Ayar, *Elif Dîvânı*, 114.

25 Ayar, *Elif Dîvânı*, 133.

26 Ayar, *Elif Dîvânı*, 185.

27 Ayar, *Elif Dîvânı*, 248, 256.

28 Ayar, *Elif Dîvânı*, 253.

29 Names from whom Sheikh Elif benefited materially and spiritually ('Abd al-Qādir Gaylānī, 'Abd al-Vāhid Celebī, Sheikh Jalāl ad-dīn, Hemdem Celebi, Sheikh Ḥussam ad-dīn, Abraham Barāde, Ishāk Jamāl ad-dīn Karamanī, Mawlānā Jalāl ad-dīn-i Rūmī, Muhy ad-dīn Ibn 'Arabī, Sa'd ad-dīn al-Jibāwī, Sheikh Sulayman Sitki, Osmān Salāh ad-dīn et al), see respectively, Ayar, *Elif Dîvânı*, 142, 255, 260, 255, 268, 140, 250, 140, 144, 137, 256, 254, 260.

30 For the people with whom Sheikh Elif met in different ways, Mr. Ḥassan Tawfiq, Mr. Najip, Mr. Rāshid's daughter Suad Lady, Mr. Ḥassan Ḥalat, Mr. Ḥussein Ḥusnu, see respectively, Ayar, *Elif Dîvânı*, 267, 266, 258, 260, 262.

31 For his congratulations to Ali Rafiq Pasha and his thanks to Faṭma Sultan, see respectively, Ayar, *Elif Dîvânı*, 265, 265.

32 For the people with whom Sheikh Elif met in different ways, Mr. Ḥassan Tawfiq, Mr. Najip, Mr. Rāshid's daughter Mrs. Suad, Mr. Ḥassan Ḥalat, Mr. Ḥussein Ḥusnu, see respectively, Ayar, *Elif Dîvânı*, 267, 266, 258, 260, 262.

the social structure he lived in, rather than retreating to a corner and living a life of seclusion:

Dervîş ne diye cümleye bîgâne durursuñ
 Sen kûşe-i ‘uzletde ne tenhâ oturursun
 Âşâr-ı melâl olmada rûyuñda nümâyân
 Ğam-h’ârsıñ ey sūhte söyle ne görürsüñ³³
 (Dîwân I. Section, Qasîda 29/1-2)

Whatever issue he criticizes in his poems, he does not stop at criticism but guides people on the subject. This situation, which is a conscious choice of formation, is the same for many sufi poets like himself.³⁴ One of the main topics he criticizes is the period and the people who live with it. According to him, the time lived in and the people of the era who experienced it are disloyal. For this reason, one should establish a cautious relationship with both:

Çü idrîsi eyle devr-i muhtefî eflâk-i ma’nîde
 Ne beklersiñ cihânda nâs ile bu tanışıklıktan³⁵
 (Dîwân, II. Section, Ghazal 64/3-4)

Sheikh Elif’s state of caution does not leave one in the hopeless situation of complaining and worrying about the current situation, on the contrary, what he says will allow one to be calm and firm:

Keşti-i dehr içre keştibân metîn olmak gerek
 Tünd ü bād u şiddet-i yemden şikâyet nâ-revâ³⁶
 (Dîwân, II. Section, Ghazal 5/7)

We see that the poet, whose suggestions and reminders are characterized by caution and restraint, sometimes had difficulties with the attitude he recommended. So much so that, although he served for more than three years as the head of the Majlis-i Meshâyiḡ, which was established under the office of the Sheikhulislâm to supervise the administrative and social aspects of the tekkahs, some incidents he encountered while

33 “Dervish, why do you sit in the corner of solitude, indifferent to everything? There is sadness in your works, tell me, O troubled one, what do you see?”

34 Necmettin Şeker, “İslam Kültüründe Tenkit ve Tenkit Adabı”, *Akademik Siyer Dergisi* 4 (June 2021), 99-100.

35 “You should not expect much from the people you meet in the life of the world while the era that is hidden in the realms of truth is here.”

36 “The captain in the ship of the world must be firm, it is not for him to complain about the rough and windy sea.”

in office, which were also included in official records and correspondence, overwhelmed him.³⁷ He must have been fed up with the existence of some false sheiks who claimed to be postulants in his time, as some of his poems express this situation:

Usandım şeyhliğin sahte vakâr ile şu bārından
Göklere kalmadı germi ma'nî şoguklıktan³⁸
(Dîwân, II. Section Ghazal 64/2)

In fact, sometimes his attitude towards the subject has become so harsh that we encounter rare examples of his vocabulary expressing curses against the related community. Especially in the red-lined ghazal “olsun”, expressions of cursing such “hānesi yıkılsun, kanı heder olsun, hānümānı cümleten zîr u zeber olsun, cehennem çukuru olsun, yüzünün karası kalbinden beter olsun, cemiyetleri dağılsın” can be shown as examples:

Yıkılsun yire geçsün hānesi kanı heder olsun
İlāhî hānümānı cümleten zîr ü zeber olsun
Nedir bu pîşe kılmışlar ezâ vü cevri ü tuğyânı
Bu çāh-ı mekr ü tezvîrānlara çāh-ı sakar olsun
Tarîk-i evliyâyı dām-ı tezvîr-i fesād itdi
Yüziniñ karası yâ Rabbî kalbinden beter olsun
Dağılsun şarşar-ı kahr ile cem'iyetleri haşmıñ
O dehşetle heme güyende-i eyne'l-mefer olsun³⁹
(Dîwân, II. Section, Ghazal 60/1-4)

The poet drew attention to the damage these people caused to sufism and tariqat, but he used his name as the perpetrator in the poem for tact, humility, and to prevent any mischief that might arise. According to him,

37 A letter we came across in the Sutluce Tekkah section of the Sulaymaniyah Library is about a letter Sheikh Elif received from various tekkahs while she was on duty. The letter included the information that the tekkah was subjected to unjust attack and rape by a former deputy, and for this reason, this person's contact with the tekkah was cut off. For detailed information see, Istanbul: T.C. Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Sulaymaniyah Library Archive, Sutluce Tekkah Section, Number 504-3.

38 “I am tired of the false dignity of some sheikhs and the spiritual burden of this work as if the warmth of this work cannot reach the heavens because of this coldness.”

39 “May his nest be broken and his blood be wasted, may his home be turned upside down. They are in the habit of causing trouble and misery to people and being insolent. May these pits of lies and rumours turn into a pit of hell. Because of them, the path of parents has turned into a trap of lies and gossip. O Allāh, may the blackness of your face be worse than your heart. May these enemies be scattered by the wind of destruction. With this horror, let them say, ‘Where is the place to escape, where can we escape?’”

such people not only misappropriated the reputation of sufism and the tekkah but also caused the misfortune of those who grew up in them:

Ṭarīkat nāmını isrāf idüb bāzīce olmuşsuñ
Niçün eṭfāl-i bī-‘akl-i zamāna sen Elif oldun⁴⁰
(Dīwān, II. Section, Ghazal 45/12)

Elif states that even the disciples of the tekkah were affected by the gains and losses of the era. The imbalance, which began at the top, gradually spread downward, negatively influencing the seekers and dervishes trained there. So much so that the dervishes of the time, instead of seeking closeness to the Divine, became preoccupied with establishing ties with the rulers of the period. This led them away from love for the Divine and sincerity in their devotion.

Yakışmazdı saña dervīş iken şāhān ile ülfet
Niçün ḥadden çıkub şāh-ı cihāna sen Elif oldun⁴¹
(Dīwān, II. Section, Ghazal 45/9)
Yalanmış gördün ihvān -ı zamānıñ vedd ü iḥlāsı
Ġaraźmış yā ‘acz yāḥūd nümāyiş yā çocuklıkdan⁴²
(Dīwān, II. Section, Ghazal 64/6)

We have already mentioned in other sources that Elif prefers a balanced, reasonable and soft style in his communication with his interlocutors. Presenting the time he lived in with a negative framework, the poet suggests that in such an environment, people should pay utmost attention to their communication with each other. Because people are of different creation and abilities in terms of intellect, estimation and understanding, it is very important to speak to them according to their level, to treat them well and to complement them in terms of communication:

Ez ser-i taṭyīb ü talṭīf nevī
Ey Elif-i rāz-dān-ı Meşnevī
Hem çünin āmed ‘ukūl-i cümle nās
Muḥtelif der fehmi ü hem der iḥtişām
Behr-i in fermūd ān Faḥru’l-Fuḥūl

40 “You have squandered the made the beautiful fame of the tariqa a toy for yourself, O Elif, you have become a guide for the foolish people of the time.”

41 “It is not a good thing for a person to establish intimacy with the rulers while he is a dervish, O Elif, why do you leave your own level and establish relations with the rulers?”

42 “The love and sincerity of today’s dervish is a lie, either because of malice, weakness, vanity or childish behaviour.”

Kellimü'n-nāse 'alā ḵadri'l-'ukūl⁴³

(Dīwān, I. Section, Maṣnawī 28/21, 39, 40)

Some people use meaningless and unproven words to justify their differences with others. This situation is not morally and methodologically appropriate. In such cases, one should act with prudence and not immediately strengthen the other side and speak about it in advance:

Lafz-ı bī-ma'nist heyn da'vā-yı bī-ḥüccet mekün

Çünkü da'vī mīkünī āver güvā meydān ferāḥ⁴⁴

(Dīwān, II. Section, Ghazal 13/5)

Ḥazm ü dūr-endīṣi vü ān geh kelām

Ḥaşlet-i her nāṣıḥ āmed ve's-selām⁴⁵

(Dīwān, I. Section, Maṣnawī 28/19)

Sheikh Elif, who served as the Maṣnawīhān for many years and taught *Maṣnawī* lessons to different segments of society, also makes some observations about this book and its misunderstanding in society. In his time, he must have seen that some of the stories in the book had acquired a meaning that was far from the truth, so he included an explanation of such a preconception in his poem. Since the poet thinks that some of the parables in the *Maṣnawī* may be misinterpreted by people with malicious intentions and defects, he says that it would be more by decency not to teach them, considering the unrest and fitna conditions of the time:

Yek dü kıṣṣa rā ki esrāreṣ 'aẓīm

Nākıṣān rā līk takrīreṣ vaḥīm

Çünkü netvāned be-fehm-i rāz-ı ān

Der ḍelāl üfted ez ān ender zamān

Pes be-kerdem terk-i takrīr z'in sebeb

Der zamān-ı fitne in dīdem edeb⁴⁶

(Dīwān, I. Section, Maṣnawī 28/15-17)

43 "O Elif, who knows the secret of *Maṣnawī*, you should treat and compliment well. The minds of all human beings are different from each other in terms of feeling, imagination and understanding. For this reason, the Prophet said, 'Speak to people according to the level of their intellect.'"

44 "These are meaningless words, do not make claims without evidence. If you have a claim, bring your evidence, the square is wide."

45 "Acting with prudence and then speaking has become the characteristic of every adviser."

46 "I deemed it dangerous to make the short-thinkers read one or two parables whose secrets are sublime. Because they cannot understand their secrets and in time they fall into heresy. For this reason, I stopped reading them and I thought it was proper at the time of the fitnah."

On the other hand, he argues that the meaning and artistic value of this work are based on metaphorical meaning and expression and that the value of some poems as obscene does not reflect the truth and should not be feared, with the thesis that the beauties of God's wisdom sometimes show from falsehood:

Kıṣṣa ger müstehcen âmed çist bâk
 Makṣad -ı Sulṭân -i mā pâkest pâk
 Şûret -i in kıṣṣahâ makṣûd nîst
 Der ḥakīkat hezlhâ ma'hûd nîst
 Hikmet ī vü sırrī ez esrâr-ı Hû
 Geh zi-bâṭıl mînümāyed ḥüsn -i rû⁴⁷
 (Dîwân, I. Section, Maṣnawî. 28/24-26)

Although Elif was not a health professional by profession, the fact that he witnessed many patients, illnesses and related losses resulting in death around him may have caused him to convey some of his experiences regarding health and well-being. For example, the death of his daughter Fâtima, who died as a result of a sudden illness, and the death of Suat, the daughter of one of his followers, are enough to convey his grief over this situation.⁴⁸ His assessments of health in his poems do not present a special and separate situation. He makes his suggestions on this point as parenthetical evaluations. For example, in one of his poems, he reminds us that the sick person will be weak and incapacitated, so it would be more appropriate to give him a dose of medicine that he can tolerate. He reminds us that if this is not done, different diseases will emerge from the patient and this will put the stomach, body and treatment of the person in a difficult situation:

Haste çünki bî-mecâlest ü za'îf
 Bâyedet dâden 'ilâc-ı bes laṭîf
 Ger berây-ı nef' dârû-yı kavî

47 "If the parable is told obscenely, it is not to be feared for the intention of our Sultan (Mawlânâ) is pure. The visible side of these parables is not the purpose. In reality, humours are not intended. The wisdom and mystery in the mysteries of Hû (Allâh) sometimes shows its beauty from falsehood."

48 Elif wrote a historical poem for the disappearances of her daughter Fâtima and the daughter of one of her followers, Mr. Râshid. Thanks to these poems, which also feature an elegy due to the emotion they convey, it is possible to access fragmentary information about the deceased people. For related articles, see, Ayar, *Elif Divânı*, 253, 258.

Mīdihī zāyed dü-şad derd -i nevī
 Mī‘de-eş bī-tāb ü ten hem bes nezār
 Hāzm bāyed der tedāwī şad hezār⁴⁹
 (Dīwān, I. Section, Maşnawī 28/59-61)

According to popular health knowledge, many soups made with special spices and natural remedies for the sick person were drunk only in certain periods and for healing.⁵⁰ In one of his poems, the poet writes that the sick person expects a healthy soup in addition to the medicine, which can be interpreted as the manifestation of one of the remedy memories of the society:

Ṭıfl cūyed şīr ez behr-i ğızā
 Merd-i haste hem ‘ilāc ü şūrbā⁵¹
 (Dīwān, I. Section, Maşnawī 28/37)

Maḥmad Elif’s interest in the tradition of writing history poems, which our dīwān poets are particularly inclined to, reveals his identity as a historian who tries to inhale society in every aspect. In this endeavor, he uses poetry, a product of aesthetic order and the system of calculation, the abjad system, to bear witness to some of the events of a period of nearly forty years of his own life. It is understood that his poems, which are given in chronological order, cover events that took place during the reigns of the Ottoman sultans ‘Abd al-Ḥamid II and Maḥmad Rashād. Starting from his neighborhood, the poet wrote history poems under such headings as the restoration and transformation⁵² of architectural

49 “Since the patient is weak and weak, it is best to give him enough medicine. If you give strong medicine to the patient thinking that it will help him, two hundred new troubles will arise from him. The treatment of those with a weak stomach and a very weak body should be strong in proportion.”

50 Yasemin Ertaş - Makbule Gezmen Karadağ, “Sağlıklı Beslenmede Türk Mutfak Kültürünün Yeri”, *Gümüşhane Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimler Dergisi* 2/1 (January 2013), 120.

51 “The baby asks for milk for nourishment, the patient asks for medicine and soup for a cure.”

52 Elif Efendi; He wrote the first historical poem on this title in 1297 hijri for the repair of a Shadhiliyya Tekkah in Alibeykoy, Eyup, on the opposite side of the Sutluce district where he lived. For the poem see, Ayar, *Elif Divanı*, 252.

works, death⁵³, condolences and appointments⁵⁴. In some of his poems, special information that cannot be found in any other source has been encountered. In this respect, these poems of his are a projection -albeit limited- of the period with its time, place and people. The poems, which deal with Istanbul-centred events, can be considered as the product of an effort in terms of language taste and aesthetics as well as calculation / abjad system.

Elif also included in his poems his criticism of some social and political events that took place just after the 1900s. In particular, the writing of one of his ghazals must have coincided with these years, as almost the entire poem is based on these criticisms and warnings. The poet, who experienced the last period of the Ottoman State, is aware that this period was a period of disintegration for all institutions and organizations. Territorial losses due to defeats in different continents and geographies accelerated this process even more.⁵⁵ In this process, as an individual living in society, he advises to be cautious against the Union and Progress movement⁵⁶, which was founded in the Ottoman geography in 1899 and became famous during the Balkan Wars, the formation of the Entente alliance organized by foreign states⁵⁷ for the World War in 1907 and the movements with religious discourse that coincided with the same years. According to him, the politics of this period was based on uncertainty and desperation:

Ne ittiḥād u terakkī ne mülk ü cāha güven
Ne itilāfa temāyül ne irticā'a özen⁵⁸

53 The poems written specifically on this subject, his daughter Fâtıma, see, Ayar, *Elif Divânı*, 253; his father, Aḥmad Muḥtar, see, Ayar, *Elif Divânı*, 256; Yenikapı Mawlawî Tekkah sheikh 'Osmân Şalāḥ ad-dīn and his son Muḥammad Jalāl ad-dīn Efendi, see, Ayar, *Elif Divânı*, 254, 260; cousin Ḥassan Ḥalat, see, Ayar, *Elif Divânı*, 260 and they were written on the deaths of his uncle Mr. Ḥussein Ḥusnu. See, Ayar, *Elif Divânı*, 262.

54 This historical poem was written on the occasion of the appointment of 'Abd al-Vāḥid Celebi, who gave the poet permission to wear the destar and sikke specific to Mawlawî sheikhs, as post-nişin to the central tekkah of Konya. See, Ayar, *Elif Divânı*, 255.

55 Kemal Beydilli, "Osmanlılar", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2007), 33/496.

56 M. Şükrü Hanioglu, "İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti" *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2001), 23/476.

57 Ercüment Kuran, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 1992), 6/196.

58 "Do not trust in the political formations of the time neither in wealth nor in office and do not incline to some foreign formations and strange formations that take religion behind their backs."

(Dîwân, II. Section, Ghazal 63/1)

Bütün siyâset-i ehl-i şüver netâ'ic-i vehm

Mu'âmelât-ı cihân ser-â-ser yalan ü düzen⁵⁹

(Dîwân, II. Section, Ghazal 63/3)

Although he says that people may experience difficulties if they do not conform to the established order of this period, he also warns that being close to the things that are recommended to be avoided during this period will lead many people to regret it later:

Muḥîte gerçi uymayan biraz meşakkât çeker

Selâmet-i dili zâyî' ider muḥîte uyan

Nifâk-ı 'ârifâne gerekdir zamânımızda

Nedâmet ider bir gün bunlara temâyül iden⁶⁰

(Dîwân, II. Section, Ghazal 63/4-5)

Apart from this, there are two other topics that he could not write explicitly but tried to express indirectly and metaphorically in his couplets. In one of his poems, he implicitly criticized the decisions to close madrasas on March 3, 1924 and tekkahs on September 2, 1925:

İcâzet virdiler tedrîse ammâ vâkt-ı 'aşr oldu

Boşandı medrese mekteb kapandı şimdi bu ilde⁶¹

(Dîwân, II. Section, Ghazal 71/6)

Geçmiş evvel karbân-ı ehl-i dil biz görmedik

Bir eser kalmışdı maḥv itdi anı da rûzigâr⁶²

(Dîwân, III. Section, Mufred 19)

CONCLUSION

Sheikh Maḥmad Elif, one of the sufi poets of the last century of the Ottoman State, is a versatile figure with many social roles in addition to

59 "The politics of temporary people who feed on fear is based on lies and order from beginning to end in this world."

60 "The one who does not conform to the environment is always in some distress and the one who conforms to the environment is in the light of heart. It is necessary to act with caution at this time for those who are inclined to all this will regret it."

61 "It was said that education was allowed, but the tightening time started and madrasahs and schools were closed in these places."

62 "The caravan of the people of the heart (tekkahs) has passed from here and there is no trace of it now, because the age has abolished it."

his Sufi identity that shaped his life. Thanks to these social roles, he lived in the society for 77 years and continued to be its witness. We see that there are more than one factor affecting this social approach of the poet in his poems. The first of these is that Elif carries professions belonging to different formation skills in her social identity as mentioned above. In addition to being a tekkah sheikh, his various titles such as calligrapher, *Maṣnawī* writer, author, scribe, madrasah director and president of the Majlis-i Meshāyih must have influenced the community-centred perspective he used in his poetry. Another sphere of influence is the number of his works in different disciplines such as Qur'ān, hadīth, tafsir, fiqh, kalam, sufism, literature and ḥaṭ (calligraphy). Even some architectural designs in the Tekkah are his endeavours. From this sentence, we can say that the poet has a wide scale formation power that appeals to all segments of the society.

The reflection of the period and environment he lived in on his poetry has been through different events and occasions. Sometimes a death, sometimes a professional promotion or the renovation of an architectural monument inspired his poetry in terms of content and style. In order to narrate these events in a certain reality, he used a type of poetry called history manzūme in addition to standard poetry types. In particular, such poems present projections from the poet's own life and the life of his close circle.

In Sheikh Elif's poetry, we see a general dissatisfaction with the time lived and the people living in this time. For example, we think that he drew attention to the deterioration of the Sufi structure many times in his poems and that the existence of false sheikhs and insincere dervishes was effective in this. Another issue he is uncomfortable with is some political and pseudo-religious discourses brought to the fore by the times. It invites people to be more careful and cautious against them. Because he thinks that after a while people who follow these ideas will regret it. One of the issues he emphasises is the communication of people with each other. The age we live in puts people into an environment of sedition based on different reasons. For this reason, it is extremely important for people to establish a healthy communication with each other. Because time and human beings are unfaithful no matter what social class they belong to. It would be appropriate to consider these inferences as

● solution-oriented warnings and information for human beings, rather than complaints made by him through poetry.

In this study, it is presented to the attention that a sufi poet assumes the role of the memory of the society with his social roles and exhibits examples of this in his content approach.

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