

THE INTROSPECTIVE CRITICISM IN MAKTUBAT OF IMAM RABBANI AHMAD FAROQ AL-SARHANDI

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Abstract: Criticism is important for the refinement and the maturation of any person or institution. Introspective criticism is more beneficial than outside criticism in the field of science.

Islamic Mysticism has an extensive background of introspective criticism within Islamic science. These provide introspective critiques that are separated into two sections within Islamic mysticism.

The first is the general introspective criticism which looks like a complaint. This kind of critique emerged from the third century (AH). The second type of introspective criticism is “deviation” and it is accepted as a tool for behavior and also for practices of criticism.

Letters to the disciples of the Murshids contained questions from remote places which were answered. These letters are considered guides to introspective criticism.

Imam Rabbani (1034/ 1624) is one of the murshids who educated his disciples with his letters. In this article, I will be studying on Imam Rabbani’s introspective criticism on Sufis’ ideas and practices like paradoxical expressions, in favor of the preponderance of sainthood, the acknowledgement of halal and haram, giving importance to the miracle and khal and vajd (state), the excess on malamah (reprimand), and unauthorized guides.

Keywords: Imam Rabbani, Maktubat, Introspective Criticism.

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İmam-ı Rabbânî'nin Mektûbât'ında İçedönük Eleştiriler

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Özet: Eleştiri, bir kurum ya da bireyin olgunlaşması, kendini yenilemesi özellikle de ıslah etmesi açısından önemlidir. İlim dalında içe dönük eleştiriler, dışarıdan gelen eleştirilere göre daha inşa edicidir.

Tasavvuf, içe dönük eleştiriler konusunda önemli bir birikime sahiptir. Sufilerin davranış ve düşüncelere ilgili içedönük eleştirileri iki kısma ayrılabilir. İlki, belli bir konuya yönelik olmayan yakınma türü eleştirilerdir. İkinci eleştiri türü ise sufilerin "sapma" olarak kabul edilen bir takım davranış ve uygulamalarına yönelik eleştirilerdir.

Mürşitlerin, uzaktaki müritlerinin sorularını cevapladığı mektuplar, söz konusu eleştirilerin derli toplu bir araya getirildiği eserler arasında sayılabilir.

Tasavvufta mektuplarla müritlerini eğiten sufilerden biri de İmam Rabbani'dir (1034/1624). Bu makalede biz de İmam Rabbani'nin Mektubat'ında dikkat çektiği, şatahat, velâyet-nübüvvet, ibahilik, keramete aşırı önem vermek, hal ve vecdi asıl maksat kabul etmek, melâmette aşırılık, çalışmanın terk edilmesi, irşada ehliyet konularında müritlerine tavsiye mahiyetinde, sufilere yönelik eleştirilerine değineceğiz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İmam Rabbani, Mektubat, İçedönük Eleştiriler.

INTRODUCTION

Criticism, especially introspective criticism, is important for the refinement and the maturation of any person or institution. Introspective criticism is more beneficial than outside criticism in the field of science. Therefore, the term “layman” is used, who interprets something from outside- without prejudice to his merit-.

Islamic Mysticism has an extensive background of introspective criticism within Islamic science. These provide introspective critiques that are separated into two sections within Islamic mysticism.

The first is the general introspective criticism which looks like a complaint. This kind of critique emerged from the third century (AH) –after Islamic Mysticism institutionalized-The second type of introspective criticism is “deviation” and it is accepted as a tool for behavior and also for practices of criticism.

Letters to the disciples of the Murshids contained questions from remote places which were answered. These letters are considered guides to introspective criticism. They are important sources not only for Sufism but also for social and political events as well as Islamic science because they helped build motivation.

Imam Rabbani (1034/1624) is one of the murshids who educated his disciples with his letters. Imam Rabbani is an important character in the history of Islamic Mysticism, because he criticized some practices of the Sufis and also the thought of “wahdat al-wujud” (unity of being) epistemological and has put forward his “wahdat al-shuhud” (unity of witness). He is called “Mujaddid Alf Sani” (the reformer of the second millennium) because of his active role in religious, social and political areas

In this article, I will be speaking about Imam Rabbani’s introspective criticism on Sufis’ ideas and practices like paradoxical expressions, in favor of the preponderance of sainthood, the acknowledgement of halal and haram, giving importance to the miracle and khal and vajd (state), the excess on malamah (reprimand), and unauthorized guides.

Let’s start with his criticism on paradoxical expressions:

I. SHATAHAT OR PARADOXICAL EXPRESSIONS

Shatah is an Arabic word and it’s from the stem of “sh-t-h”. The meaning of this word is to move or to shove. The word “shatah” is used for someone who talks too carelessly. In mystical literature, the word shatah is used for

spiritual ecstasy. These expressions are not interpreted outwardly. I appear as an opposite of the Qur'an and also of Sunnah, and these expressions cannot be accepted and at the same time they cannot be rejected (AL-TAHANNEVI, Muhammed A'la b. Ali *Kasshaf ıstılahat Al-funun*, Daru Sadr, Beirut, vol.: II., p. 735; YAZICI, Tahsin, (1979), "Şath", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, MEB, İstanbul, vol.: XI., p. 351; ABU HAZZAM, Anvar Fuad, (1993), *Mu'cem Al-mustalahat Al-sufiyye*, Beirut, pp. 103-104; ULUDAĞ, Süleyman, (1995), *Tasavvuf Terimleri Sözlüğü*, Marifet, İstanbul pp. 485-486; CEBECIOĞLU, Ethem, (1997), *Tasavvuf Terimleri ve Deyimleri Sozlugu*, Rehber, Ankara, p. 660).

The Sufis' paradoxical expressions are the result of the sakr (spiritual ecstasy) during their spiritual journey. The spiritual ecstasy occurs with increasing love. The Sufi, who is intoxicated due to an increase in God's love, is not conscious of what he says.

Imam Rabbani divides the shatahat. In the first ones are able to be interpreted one level, (IMAM RABBANI, Ahmad Faroq Al-Sarhandi, *Al-Maktubat*, trans.: Muhammed Murad Al-Munzavi *Al-Maktabat Al-Muhammediyye*, İstanbul, letter no 35: vo. I, p. 240; letter number 95: vol. I, p. 239) such as Hallac's speech for "Anal-Haq" (I'm truth) which is the most famous of these expressions). When he says this, he isn't saying "I'm God" since Hallaj doesn't mean want to be a God himself. He had proclaimed, however in his sublime spiritual ecstasy, simply a total annihilation of himself (Imam Rabbani, letter no 266: I, 628).

Imam Rabbani said that he also had tested the same state of sakr (spiritual ecstasy) in his sayr al-suluk (spiritual education) (Imam Rabbani, letter no 290: I, 788). He added that every Sufi has to improve to reach this level in his spiritual education and graduated from it. The name of upper level is sahv (awake). Sahv is more important than sakr for the Sufi, because, the religion appeals to the mind. The choice of Imam Rabbani also in favor of sahv and this choice is the main character of his Tariq (Naqshbandiyya) (Imam Rabbani, letter no 95: letter no 272; letter no 251; letter no 286: I; letter no: 50: II).

Imam Rabbani likeness the Sufi, who uses paradoxical expressions, to a child who is learning a new language. The Sufi improves his/her spiritual education when he/she ripens from childhood into an adult and from spiritual ecstasy to the feeling of being awake (Imam-ı Rabbani, letter no 23; letter no 41; letter no 84; letter no 272: I). When the Sufi wakes up his/her inconsistent attitudes will end. And if Bayazid Al-Bestam ripened his spiritual education, he had realized his mistakes (Imam-ı Rabbani, letter no 120: III).

Imam Rabbani also opposes Sufi's staying in his/her spiritual ecstasy and not improving their spiritual education themselves. He likens this situation to the Sufi's incarceration of them in that stage and he interprets this situation as the Sufi's weakness. What should do is to pass this level. That's why it is an obligation for every Murshid to warn Sufis like Bayazed. Junayd, who clarified the sometimes paradoxical expressions of Bayazed Al-Bestam, says about Al Bestam that "he stayed in his stage in spite of his possibility". Actually, Junayd couldn't find any evidence of expressions that would move Al-Bestam passed this stage (Imam-ı Rabbani, letter no 50: II; letter no 131: I; letter no 120: III; Cebecioglu, 1997: 660-661).

As a result, according to Imam Rabbani, the paradoxical expressions are caused by the Sufi's weakness. So, an ideal Sufi has to improve himself in their spiritual education instead of caring about their paradoxical expressions.

II. THE DISCUSSION ON THE RELATIONSHIP SAINTHOOD AND PROPHET HOOD

The relationship between sainthood and prophet hood and the discussions on preponderance are that each of them is contentious issues.

The Sufis, in favor of the preponderance of sainthood, claim that sainthood deals with the Truth and in contradistinction that prophet hood deals with creatures. Due to the orientation of sainthood to the Truth, they claim that sainthood is more superior to prophet hood (Imam Rabbani, letter no 35: I, 241).

Imam Rabbani criticizes Sufis, who claimed that sainthood was superior to prophet hood. According to him, prophet hood deals not only with creatures but also with the Truth. The prophets look inward when they deal with the Truth and look outward when they deal with the creatures. They are the most virtuous people of all humans. In addition, sainthood is a part of prophet hood. However prophet hood is superior to sainthood every time (Imam Rabbani, letter no 108, I: 273; letter no 35, I, 241).

Some of the Sufis claim that the prophets' sainthood is more superior to the prophets' prophet hood. Imam Rabbani opposes this thought and says; "prophet hood is more superior to sainthood in any case" (Imam Rabbani, letter no 35, I, 241; letter no 108, I, 273).

The reason why some Sufis think superiority lies within sainthood is due to spiritual ascension. Spiritual ascension brings about sakr (spiritual ecstasy).

At the stage of sakr, Sufis believe that they are the closest people to God, even prophets, whereas the closest humans to God are the prophets. The speech of Bayazed al-Bastami “my flag is higher than Mohammad’s flag”, is due to his sakr (Imam Rabbani, letter no 220, I: 469-470).

To conclude, if someone says, “sainthood is more superior to prophet hood” he is a man of sakr. If Sufi stays at the stage of sakr and does not improve his spiritual education, he won’t acquire the true/real way of Sufism (Imam Rabbani, letter no 251, I: 553).

III. EBABIYYAH: TO SEE EVERYTHING AS LEGITIMATE

Ebahiyah means the acknowledgement of halal and haram as the same. It is possible to experience this thought in every stage of Sufism

The people of Ebahiyah, who acknowledge this thought, claim that they are free from the general rules which everyone obeys. They claim; “due to their close relationship with God, they eliminate their egotism, [because] they don’t need any religious rules. If they do haram which is considered unlawful and don’t pray, they won’t get God’s punishment” (AL-KUSHAYRI, Abdulkerim, (1991), *Kuşeyri Risalesi*, haz. Süleyman Uludag, Dergâh Yay., Istanbul 95-96; KARA, Mustafa, *Tanımı ve Tesirleriyle Tasavvuf*, Seha Neşriyat, Istanbul 78).

According to Imam Rabbani, these expressions can’t be accepted. He doesn’t use the term “Sufi”, he uses the term “zındık” (apostate) or “mulhid” (heretic) for them. According to Imam Rabbani, the closest people to God are prophets, and all of them pray for God and avoid any kind of sin. Therefore, no one can claim that religious rules are not for themselves. The people of Ebahiyah are doing it only for their egos and unlawful desires (Imam Rabbani, letter no 172, I: 369).

IV. GIVING IMPORTANCE TO KARAMAT (MIRACLE)

The word karamat in Arabic means miracle and is an oracle for people who don’t have a relationship with the role of prophet hood (Uludag, 1995: 307-308).

According to Imam Rabbani, doing a miracle for a person doesn’t mean he is a Saint, because the miracle is not a stipulation of Sainthood. In addition, doing lots of miracles doesn’t make him virtuous. The only way to be virtuous in Sufism is to become close to God (Imam Rabbani, letter no 107, I: 268; letter no 216, I: 457).

Furthermore, the sheer number of miracle is opposed to the proficiency of irshad (on capability of Sufi education). It means that if someone has done a lot of miracles he still has no proficiency of irshad, because a miracle is ascension but irshad is a necessity to descent to level of people (Imam Rabbani, letter no 216, I: 457).

According to Imam Rabbani, giving a lot of importance to karamat is not a way to look forward. The main goal of Sufism is to give more time and meaningful prayers for God. In this instance, the miracle looks like both a play and a toy.

V. GIVING IMPORTANCE TO KHAL AND VAJD (STATE)

The word “khal” in Arabic means a feeling that comes into the heart with God’s grace, and the word “vajd” in Arabic means awe and calmness when the soul learns the secret of the Truth.

Imam Rabbani opposes the Sufis who give importance to “khal” and “vajd”. According to him, the state of “khal” and “vajd” is not the main idea. Giving importance to these states of feeling hinders the Sufi from his own way. The main idea for a Sufi is to pass over these levels and reach a feeling of deference with God. He also claims in another letter that the main idea is “ekhlas” (the sincerity) (Imam Rabbani, letter no 36, I: 118; letter no 40-41, I, 126-128; letter no, 131; I 302).

VI. THE EXCESS ON MALAMAT (REPRIMAND)

The word of Malamat comes from Hamdun Kassar who was born in Nishabur. The name of his Tariq was Malamatiyyah. According to this Tariq, this feeling of deference is the main idea. To reach this point of deference, Malamatis do the opposite of their internal world, and don’t interest themselves by reprimanding people (Cebecioglu, 1997: 498).

According to Imam Rabbani, Malamat (reprimand) may be useful to avoid ostentatious feelings, but he doesn’t confirm how excessive malamata can be. The main aim in Sufism is to avoid excess and other deficiencies and live straight (Imam Rabbani, letter no, 100, I: 256).

VII. UNAUTHORIZED GUIDES

Learning from an unauthorized guide is an important attribute. He doesn’t know how to see the way of Truth clearly, because he hasn’t learned the exact method for seeing the path of Sufism. In addition, he doesn’t know how to train his disciples yet (Imam Rabbani, letter no 23, I: 77).

In Sufism, all the disciples have to be trained according to their abilities. If a person claims that he is an authorized guide but he actually isn't, he'll deviate his disciples from the path they are on. Because he can't train the disciples according to their capabilities (Imam Rabbani, letter no, 221, I: 482).

The rules of how to be a Sheikh (authorized guide) and also a murid (disciple) is possible only through learning and training. It can't be said however, for everyone who wears a cardigan and a coif.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Introspective criticism is important for the refinement and the maturation of any institution or system. Sufism, for example, has protected itself from relative degeneration because of its introspective criticism.

Introspective criticism is more beneficial than outside criticism –because it is without prejudice to the merits of layman- especially in the field of Sufism. This is because Sufism uses the method of introspection. An example would be an idiom in Arabic that goes like this “men lem yezuk lem ya'rif” (the person who has never tasted something will never know about it).

Another problem with the critiques of layman, they may deny the existence of Sufism. The main idea in the critique of Sufis is not to deny meliorating.

The importance of this thinking of Imam Rabbani is this: As a member of the Sufis, Imam Rabbani had criticized some of the Sufis thinking and actions but he never denied the existence of Sufism.

In this context Imam Rabbani had criticized some of Sufis paradoxical expressions, such as thinking of the relationship between sainthood and prophethood, giving more importance to the miracle and the state of thought and excessive focus on malamah and unauthorized guides. Yet his introspective criticism hadn't denied the Sufism, but instead had upgraded. This is because of his important role in the History of Sufism, that he deserves the soubriquet of “Mujaddid alf sani” (the reformer of the second millennium).

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