

# The Traces of Haji Bektash Veli’s Words of “Protect Your Hands, Language and Waist” in Kyrgyz Culture

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## Abstract

Although Bektashism, which was an extension of Yesevism in Turkish-Islamic culture, was influential in Anatolia and the Balkans, the religious life, thoughts and ideas of Haji Bektash Veli also influenced other Islamic countries, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. In Kyrgyzstan, which is the subject of our paper, the name of Haji Bektash Veli is not heard much. Nevertheless, his ideas and thoughts are kept among the people and are applied to consciously or unconsciously to bilateral relations. His thoughts on human virtue, which he expressed, inspired by the hadith of the Prophet, such as " *Whosoever gives me a guarantee to safeguard what is between his jaws and what is between his legs, I shall guarantee him Jannah* " and " *A Muslim is someone from whose hand and tongue the other Muslims are safe,*" have a special importance in Kyrgyz culture. In addition to accepting Islam, the Kyrgyz, who are firmly attached to their traditions and customs, have very different meanings of holding hands, tongue and waist (genitals) from forbidden deeds. These are sometimes expressed in the form of a proverb, as well as in the form of practice.

**Keywords:** Haji Bektash Veli; Hand; Kyrgyz; Language; Proverb; Tongue; Waist.

## 1. Introduction

Bektashism was named after Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, who was active in the process of Islamization of 13th century Anatolia and who was the practitioner of Hodja Ahmed Yesevi's teachings in Anatolia, and later on in Azerbaijan and Anatolia in the 14th-15th centuries. Sufi/Sufi sect based on the Twelve Imams, which was institutionalized by Balım Sultan at the beginning of the 16th century, with the incorporation of the concepts of İbahlilik, trinity, reincarnation and hulul under the influence of the Hurufism movement that became widespread (Rado, 1965. 212 -213)).

Although Bektashism, which is an extension of Yesevism in Turkish-Islamic culture, was influential in Anatolia and the Balkans (Çetinkaya, 1999. 347), the religious life, thoughts and ideas of Haji Bektash Veli also influenced other Islamic countries, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. In Kyrgyzstan, which is the subject of our paper, although the name of Haji Bektash Veli is not heard much; his ideas and thoughts

live among the people and are applied consciously or unconsciously in bilateral relations. His thoughts on human virtue, which he expressed, inspired by the hadith of the Prophet, such as "I promise paradise to a Muslim who protects his tongue and waist" and "People cannot be believers unless they are sure of their tongue and hand", have a special importance in Kyrgyz culture.

In addition to accepting Islam, the Kyrgyz, who are firmly attached to their traditions and customs, have very different meanings of protecting a hand, tongue and waist. These are sometimes expressed in the form of a proverb, as well as in the form of practice. For example, the word hand means people in Kyrgyz and is understood as own or own your people. In the same way, the concept of owning your waist is understood as owning your honor, but also expresses unity. For example, in some villages of the Kyrgyz, a tie is tied to the waist of the newly married young people. This means that two young people are now bound to each other for life, and that they must be firmly attached to their honor. In the same way, there are many ancestral words that will train people in language. Some of them are as follows; "The boneless tongue breaks the bone", "The word that comes out of the tongue is an arrow shot", "Honey also flows from the tongue, in the poison". In this paper, we will deal with examples of what having a hand, a tongue and a waist, which Haji Bektash Veli also emphasizes, means in Kyrgyz culture and in what meanings it is used.

### **The meaning of "protecting a hand" in Kyrgyz**

The Kyrgyz, one of the old Turkish nations, have orally transferred their traditions and customs from generation to generation throughout history (Gokalp, & Colaliyeva, 2022, 61-68). The Kyrgyz kept their spiritual and cultural values alive in this way until the sedentary life and the formation of the writing culture. In these periods, many idioms and proverbs emerged that educated the people, taught to love the Motherland, called people to unity and solidarity, advised to have national values, and most importantly, contained human morality (Kadirov, 2014, 34). Due to our subject, we will only discuss what the hand means in Kyrgyz language and Kyrgyz culture and in which meanings it is used.

As we mentioned above, the word hand also means people in Kyrgyz. It is important for Kyrgyz people to have both their own hands and their people, as it is in all nations. There are many proverbs on this subject. The fact that a person should not steal and earn *halal* income was one of the issues that the ancestors constantly advised their children. Not only harming others but also nature (Arikova, & Artikova, 2016, 151-152) with their hands had been one of the subjects they focused on the most. For example, "*Eldi siylasan cerdi siyla*", that is, if you are going to honor your people, respect nature. This means that you do not harm nature with your hands, cut trees, pollute the water, harm animals, etc. Because the damage caused as a result of this will turn around and touch the people and humanity. To prevent this, the ancestors always warned their children with such idioms and proverbs. In this way, there are many more proverbs that support Haji Bektash Veli's word "protect your hand". We can list some of them as follows;

*Kolun menen kılğandı başın menen tartasın* / You will answer with your head for what you have done with your hands.

*Akkan suuga küil tökpö* / Do not throw ashes into running water

*Jalgız darak kiyilbayt* / Do not cut down a lone tree.

*Kız kishige kol kötörbö* / Don't raise your hand to women, girls.

*Koldon namys ketkençe baş ketkeni artyk* / Better to lose your head than honor.

*Koldun kiri ketet, könüldün kiki ketpeyt* / The dirt on your hand goes away, the dirt on the heart does not.

*Kolu baylangandın tili baylanbayt* / The tongue of the one whose hand is tied is not tied.

*Kolu menen iştebegen oozu menen ot orot* / The one who does not work with his hands talks a lot about nothing.

*Kolundan kelbes cumuştu oyun menen büdürbö* / Do not finish the job you can't do with your dreams.

With these and many similar idioms and proverbs, the Kyrgyz educated, taught and warned their next generations (Zhunieva, 2017, 6). If we try to explain each of these idioms and proverbs separately, it may be necessary to write volumes of books. We can only state that, even in the world-famous epic of Manas, issues such as protecting the hand/people, unification of disparate tribes in one nation, defending the homeland against the enemy constitute the main subject of the epic (Alymkulov, 2016, 123.).

When we look at Kyrgyz literature in general, there are many different works and books on these subjects. When we consider the thoughts and ideas of Haji Bektash Veli as a whole with thoughts and ideas in the Kyrgyz culture, it is easy to see that they point to the same meaning.

### **The meaning of “protecting your language/tongue” in Kyrgyz**

Language, which is accepted as a communication element in world culture, caused love, affection and peace among people throughout history, as well as was a reason of the emergence of hostilities and various wars. In this sense, it has always been considered important to protect the language/tongue. Many things have been said about language in all civilizations of the world, since words such as lies, sedition, mischief, backbiting and gossip have emerged from language as well as true and truthful words. In this context, the Kyrgyz culture was no exception.

In Kyrgyz literature, there are so many proverbs and idioms related to the language or tongue that have survived from history to the present day, that it may not be possible to express them all here. However, we will try to briefly evaluate only some of them. Thus, we will try to determine how "protection a language/tongue", as stated by Haji Bektash Veli, is understood in Kyrgyz culture. Regarding language/tongue in Kyrgyz;

*Baş kesmek bar, til kesmek cok* / You can cut off someone's head, but you can't cut off his tongue.

*Butunan canılğan turat, tilinen canılğan turbayt* / The one who slips from his feet gets up, but the one who slips from his tongue does not.

*Caman tilden cakşı baş ayrılıptır* / Good head is gone because of a bad tongue.

*Azgirgan da til batırgan da til* / Tongue is both the cause of incitement and the cause of reconciliation.

*Tilinen çan çıgat* / Dust comes out of his tongue.

*Til körgö da kirgizet, kökkö da çıgarat* / The tongue puts someone in the grave and takes someone to the sky.

*Tilden bal da tamat uuda tamat* / Both honey and poison flow from the tongue.

*Uzun til uudan caman* / A long tongue is worse than poison.

*Cakşı söz can ergitet* / A good word is a balm for the soul.

*Söz atılğan ok kaytıp kelbeyt* / A word is an arrow that is shot, it does not return.

*Kılıç birdi keset söz mindi keset* / Sword cuts one, one word cuts thousand.

When we look at these proverbs and idioms in general, it is possible to see that good or bad things that can happen to a person pass through the language/tongue. Characteristics such as being sweet all the time, saying nice words to others, not offending them and not talking behind people's backs, have always come

to the fore in Kyrgyz culture, as in other cultures, in order for things to go well or for bilateral relations to be solid.

The Kyrgyz's acceptance of Islam (Alimova, 2016, 97), their conversion to Islam and their communication with other Islamic countries further reinforced their thoughts on language/tongue. The idea that one should be careful in saying a word, whether it is the hadiths about language from our Prophet or the words of Islamic scholars about protection a language/tongue, has become widespread among the people.

The hadith of the Prophet, such as "...the one who drags people face down to Hell is nothing but what their tongues say..." (Hâkim, IV, 319/7774) and the following words of Islamic scholars, such as;

“The most harmful thing is to talk too much.

He who holds his tongue is saved.

Whoever wants peace, let him be silent and hold his tongue!

The most acceptable deed is to hold one's tongue.

No, except for the word, he who holds his tongue defeats the devil.

Stay close to a silent believer! He is not unwise.

Whoever believes in Allah and the Hereafter should either speak good or keep silent!

The easiest worship is silence and good morals.

The believer thinks first, then speaks. A hypocrite speaks without thinking.

Those who talk a lot are very mistaken, and those who are wrong a lot have many lies. The one who lies a lot is worthy of Hell.

It is their language that drives people to Hell.

A person who does not hold his tongue cannot attain full faith.

Those who want comfort, shut up!

Every word is to the detriment of the person, except for the *amr-i maruf and nahy an munkar*.

Most of the mistakes and faults of man are from his language.

A believer cannot be a believer whose heart does not conform to his tongue, whose tongue does not conform to his heart, and whose deed does not conform to his words.

Worship as if you see God, consider yourself dead, and the best thing to do is to hold your tongue.

His silence is contemplation, his gaze is a lesson, and he who asks for forgiveness is saved.”

([www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/insanlari-cehenneme-262121.html](http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/insanlari-cehenneme-262121.html))

Protect your hands, tongue, and waist, [Bektaşh Veli]

Perhaps for this reason, at the beginning of the most used idioms or ancestral words in the Kyrgyz, the phrase "*oynop süylösön*" is also "*oylop süylö*"; in means “Say something by thinking, even if it's a joke, or talk by thinking, even if it's a joke.”

When an important guest comes to their home, the Kyrgyz slaughter and offer sheep. It is a custom to give the sheep's head to the guest. The guest cuts off the tongue of the sheep and gives it to those sitting at the table. This gesture conceals a good wish to the sitting people to have a good language, that is, to be a skillful storyteller, to speak little but to the point and not to slander

### **The meaning of “protecting a waist” in Kyrgyz**

The subject of protecting a waist is used in two senses in Kyrgyz culture. The first is, of course, to avoid adultery, to protect the generation, and to stay away from all kinds of unlawful acts in this way. The second is to protect the nation, homeland and identity.

The Kyrgyz have given a great importance to genealogy, dye and tribe since history (Sultanov, 2010, 11.). They paid great attention to this issue in bilateral relations, especially in marriages. Sometimes, the marriages inside the same tribe were widespread, and there were also exchanges of brides from another tribes. This was usually done with the advice of the elders, whom we call “*ak sakal*” white beard, or “respected elders” (Alan, 2023. 304-306). In this regard, some aimed to protect their own tribes, while others aimed to strengthen the lineage. As such, if illegitimate acts were committed by a girl or a boy in any tribe, it was met with a great shame. This also pointed out that not only the people who did that, but also the tribe they belonged to, were dishonored, and that other tribes had negative views towards that tribe. Therefore, great importance was attached to these issues in order to protect the generation. In order not to commit adultery and to protect the generation, sometimes more than one marriage was accepted in the Kyrgyz society. There are many examples of this throughout history. It is known that famous and rich people have more than one wife.

The Kyrgyz use the term *bel kuda* (Polat, 2008b, 143-145.). This means that when some people become close friends or see each other close in friendship transactions, they promise to marry their children in the future before their children were born (Karatayev, 2005, 66). When they have children and when the time comes, they get them married. This is called *bel kuda* in Kyrgyz. After that, the friendships of the two families are strengthened by being relatives to each other (Myrzakmedov, 2011, 9) The continuation of this goes as far as protecting the generation and honor. For this reason, when young people get married, a belt is tied to the waist of men as a tradition.

Another meaning of protecting a waist is related to heroism (Polat, 2001a, 644). In this sense, protecting a waist means always acting heroically against the enemy in order to follow the path of ancestors, to protect the homeland, to protect the lands, to be brave and to protect the people. In this regard, a great importance was given to the belongings of the ancestors. Belt, waist tie or what we call courtship is one of them. The waist tie of the valiant soldier was important in this sense. Because the symbolic meaning of this it understood as having a strong back, being strong, having an upright waist, having a spine and a personality. It included the meanings of keeping the waist straight when the enemy came, not bowing down in front of the enemy, being brave against him.

Again, in the national wrestling sports games of the Kyrgyz, they say that a person or athlete who does not lose the wrestling and whose back does not touch the ground has a solid back. When the sultan came to the throne, they tied a belt around his waist, in the sense of being a backbone to his people, his homeland, or to be strong against his people.

In the same way, in the Kyrgyz people, when something bad happens to a person, the old people comfort the person who has been hurt, keep his back or keep his waist straight, so that the person does not lose himself in that evil. This tradition still continues. We can give examples of the following proverbs about having a waist;

*Bel bekcheyse koz chekcheyet/* If the waist is fixed, the eyes will be tired (in other words gets old).

*Beldi bek bayla/* Fasten your belt very strong. (Kyrgyz meaning to be strong).

*Beline bek bol/* Take care of your waist.

There are more proverbs similar to this in Kyrgyz culture.

## 2. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that in Kyrgyz culture, protecting a hand, tongue and waist is understood as what Haji Bektash Veli said. This understanding has been passed down and kept alive from generation to generation throughout history. This issue also has a very important place in educating future generations and protecting national identities. Although the Kyrgyz have been under the influence of the Soviet regime for a long time, their national values and Islamic identities have not been lost, owing to such understandings. Today, it is the duty of every one to protect such national values inherited from the ancestors and handed down from generation to generation, in the revival of Islam and the comfortable re-living of the Muslim identities of the people. In this context, in the development and growth of the common Turkish-Islamic culture, highlighting all kinds of material and spiritual similar points and transferring them to the new generation will gain importance in terms of unity and solidarity.

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