

Akhism, guild system in the ottoman empire

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GUILD SYSTEM IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE: FROM AKHISM TO GEDIK SYSTEM

Akhism which is an organization founded by the Turkish people in Anatolia, is an important guild system for the Ottoman State when we take its regulatory role (of the social order) into consideration. In this paper, I will give detailed information about Akhism until its removal, including its origin, its importance, its guild organization, its norms and its roles in the society.

Akhism; being an Arabic word which meant “brotherhood”, was the name given to the unions of artisans (esnaf) and craftsmen (zanaatçÄ±) between the 13th and 20th centuries. Akhi organizations were the associations which have been training their own craft members, which have been organizing and controlling the economic constitutions of the society (ÇaÄŸatay, 1989: 1) and as in all pre-capitalist societies, in Ottoman State, production was organized within the guild organization which had four levels as “errand boy” (çÄ±rak), “apprentice” (yamak), “qualified workman” (usta), and “master” (Belge, 2005: 312).

Western orientalist say that the origins of the Akhism go back to the Islamic Futuwah tradition. The Arabic word Futuwah means youthful qualities. These youthful qualities are courage, generosity, hospitality and being skilled in all kinds of physical exercises (ÇaÄŸatay, 1989: 2-3).

Although some Western social scientists think that Futuwah and Akhism have the same meaning and the same role, Åžanal& Güçlü (2007) think that they are different. They say that although Futuwah is more authoritarian and more religion based, Akhism is an organization which regulates the working

conditions and every kind of needs of the artisans; and which is existing within the society, not being separated from it. Akhi organization which is based on the rules put by Islam scholars tries to provide ethical and well-behaved lifestyle to the artisans; and to ameliorate their craft level to a certain degree to protect standardization. Akhism is seen as the consequence of the service lacks of the state such as supplying security to the individuals, to their properties and to their honor; altering communication and education system, and providing equality of rights where there is not a strong juridical system.

It is said that in Anatolia, Turkish people shaped and developed Futuwah organization and formed Akhism which is more different than Futuwah and which is proper to Turkish people. Although Futuwah tradition was more authoritarian about religion; and was commanding to the artisans to obey to the Islamic authority; Akhis had a big deal at the issues of economy and politics besides the morality. While Futuwah tradition gave more importance to the individual virtues and military characteristics; Akhism was an organization which helped Ottoman State to put military and administrative institutions in order and which constituted artisan and craftsmen corporations (CaÄŸatay, 1989: 1). The contribution of the guild system in the Ottoman State's foundation period may not be despised (Belge, 2005: 312).

In Anatolia, the foundation of the Akhi organizations was the result of political and socio-economical necessities. At the 13th century, Turks who arrived in Anatolia from Turkestan for escaping from Mongolian invasion formed craft and commercial organizations among themselves to protect

their solidarity and to survive amongst the native Byzantine craftsmen. They thought that they could exist only if they sell high quality and standard goods, in a sense by improving their own craft and commercial organizations. The organizations adopted the futuwwatnamas' religious and moral rules as their laws and this led to the foundation of Akhism with the leadership of Akhi Evran and Abul-Hakaik Mahmud. Later, Akhi organizations were divided into 32 main branches of trade or art and fixed 740 Principles in their futuwwatnamas to form the moral and religious life. Every Akhi had to know 124 necessary Principles (Cagatay, 1989: 48-51).

According to Koprülü (1984), the artisans who were members of these organizations had to obey to the strict moral rules. There were strong moral and solidarity ties among the members. Besides to protect their common interests, they were organized to provide moral control to each other in their all kind of worldly activities (economic, social). This statement shows us that Akhi organizations were important controlling mechanisms.

Every branch of craft which was joined to an Akhi organization was recognizing a superior Protector and was accepting a chain of Protectors for the trade (for the tradesmen). The organization of Akhi was set up independently in each town and villages. But, they maintained their relationship with other towns and other villages. In each branch of Akhi organization which is a guild organization, Akhi Baba was the chairman of craftsmen of the guilds situated in the region (ÇaĀyatay, 1989: 201).

Fuat (1977) said that in 14th century, as Akhi organizations played a part in structuring military and administrative institutions of Ottoman state and in

organizing social life within the society, to be a member of these organizations was accepted to be honored. There were also sultans who were Akhis such as Orhan Ghazi, Sultan I. Murat. Ottoman state was supporting Akhis and was providing them some privileges.

In his book of " Ahilik nedir?", Çağatay (1990) mentioned that Akhism was a multi-dimensional social organization. Its social roles may be grouped as below;

- To establish a hierarchical order based on four stages such as " errand boy" (çakırak), " apprentice" (yamak), " qualified workman" (usta), and " master" in workplaces. Members have to be stayed a definite time in each stage to be educated. The ties between the members have to be sincere as the relationship of fathers and sons and the craft has to be based on strong moral and occupational basis
- Producers' and consumers' self-interests and relationships have to be organized in a way which will not cause any problem between them
- To establish an organization which provides meeting and guest houses in all cities and all villages.

Fuat (1977) mentioned that Akhi Baba who was the chairman of the craftsmen (of the guild) of a region and who was democratically elected by the members was responsible of making the zawia built. His commands and his warnings had to be obeyed. They had the administration power where the Sultan was absent. Zawias were places where religious and moral books were read, where Akhis were enjoying with dance or music. This shows that Akhis were not only religious peoples.

According to ÇaĀyatay (1990), Akhi organization which was religion (Islam) based was a solid occupational and moral system. Their solidarity and their helping each other within the Akhi organization caused their superiority over the non-Muslims artisans and craftsmen. This situation continued until the second half of the 15th century. Belge (2005) said that when the society began to put its own rules; guilds had been transformed to social strata and they had lost their autonomy and authority; and they became limited to the production function. ÇaĀyatay (1989) mentioned that Fatih Sultan Mehmed eliminated their political and moral power in the cities because of their expanded authority in the empire. The original Akhi spirit has been lost among the Ottoman craft-guilds by the end of 16th century, and they became occupational organizations which impose discipline to artisans and craftsmen. They lost their autonomy and became bound to the local representatives of central government (qadis) and then, qadis had the authority to choose Akhi leaders (Akhi Babas). According to Sencer (1999), although they hold some economic privileges and a degree of control over their members and production, they lost their autonomy and their administrative power. ÇaĀyatay (1989) said that some craft branches rejected heavy regulations of the state and state tolerated some of them because of their importance to the economy. Thus, some craft-guilds such as leather and shoe trade could continue their occupation and they preserved their rules and their Akhi Baba tradition. So, we may say that when the state guaranteed its power, took the authority back from the Akhi organization and this caused the end of the privileges of Akhism.

Guild was a typical medieval organization system; it was a conservative organization with its own logic. As their production was demand based, they had not a market problem. They had not an aim to expand their market. Although it was acceptable to have some qualified workmen (usta) who were seen as better and who were preferred for some needs; guild organization and logic behind it was preventing competition between craftsmen, especially in economic issues. This equality was functioning as law thanks to the fear of being opposed to the ethical rules which were accepted to be represented by their pir (who had started their craft work and who is thought to be a prophet) to whom they had a strong commitment (Belge, 2005: 313).

Esnaf (artisan) was the plural of the word class. At these times, in every war and expedition, there was a group of artisan and prostitutes who were moving with the army for logistics and some services. Evliya Celebi who had the best writings about the Ottoman guilds said that in 17th century; there were also thief and pickpocket guilds. He explained that this situation was not astonishing by saying in pre-capitalist times; Ottoman State was ordering people to be a member of an organization, to be in solidarity with the other members in this organization; and to be under the surveillance of this organization for having the right of free circulation in the city (Belge, 2005: 313). This shows us that Akhi guilds had a responsibility to shape social life in cities by taking control of their members.

After the 17th century, as Ottoman Empire was expanding to the new lands and as the non-Muslim population was increasing, the number of non-sectarian occupational organizations augmented. In this situation, Ottoman

state wanted to erase the distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. By a reform in 1727, guilds became reorganized within a new system called *gedik* which was not so different than the Akhi occupational organization in terms of the working process. But, what was different was that in *gedik*, there was not religious differentiation. *Gedik* meant monopoly and privilege. State had taken the authority of electing the person who would be the chairman of the guild. Therefore, guilds had lost their initiatives outside the state. Thus, guild was choosing the candidates and the state was electing them (Belge, 2005: 313). According to ÇaĀŸatay (1990), state began to fix the number of masters within all trades (*meslek*). Somebody outside the *gedik* could not perform the same craft of this *gedik* independently or could not sell the goods produced in these *gediks* according to the rules of the state. The state took the authority of giving mastery licences from the guild. State established *gedik* system for increasing central authority over the guilds. As the Muslim character of the guilds disappeared when the guilds became open to the non-Muslim artisans, the meeting place of the guild members of the Akhi organizations which was *zawia* was no more a meeting place for guild members. In these times, when non-Muslim could establish their own guilds, the new meeting place became *lonca*.

Gedik type work organization which began in 17th century continued until 1860. As there was a monopoly rule at *gediks*, without a necessity, the number of workshops was not changed by the state. This meant that the number of workshops was stable at a number decided by the state. In *gedik* system, nobody could open a shop without getting his mastery licence from the state and also, they could not perform their skills. Monopoly rule's aim

was to prevent changes in numbers of craftsmen at the city, to obstruct the tenants to increase the rents, to impede the performance of craft outside the gediks and to protect the system of being educated in the gedik, starting as errand boy (ÇaÄŸatay, 1989: 111-118). So, state took the control completely.

In the 19th century, after the declaration of Tanzimat Command in 3 November 1839, Ottoman State made trade treaties with foreign countries. Liberal economy of the foreign countries based on laissez-faire obliged Ottoman State to eliminate traditional monopoly over the craft and the trade seeing that monopoly rule was damaging the development of craft and trade and also, was causing state's increased economic dependency to the Europe. Thus, the gedik system and all monopolies were abolished in 17 June 1861 with the command of Abdülmecit. The traditional craft-guilds continued until the Second Constitutional Monarchy period next to the newly established modern occupational associations. As the capitalist economy gained access in Ottoman State, traditional craft-guilds lost their all power and Ittihat&Terakki rule let this organization to create modern chambers as esnaf odalarÄ± in 1910 (ÇaÄŸatay, 1989: 216-217).

The Akhi organization is considered to be the basis of today's some institutions such as Esnaf Chamber (Esnaf OdasÄ±), Trade Chamber (Ticaret OdasÄ±), labor unions, BaÄŸ-Kur, Turkish Standarts Institute (Türk StandartlarÄ± Enstitüsü) and municipality (oztürk, n. d).

Looking Akhi's mode of dressing, according to ÇaÄŸatay (1989), they were not wearing silk clothes; they were not using gold ornaments. Because, in Islam, silk and gold were forbidden for men to use. Their turban (sarÄ±k)

was 5-6 metre. Their clothes were at the colors of blue, white, black and green. In zawias, guild members were learning Koran, Sufism, the languages Turkish, Persian, Arabic; they were dealing with history, literature; and also, they were learning how to cook, how to play game, how to play an instrument. Every Akhi organization had its own flag. In every craft-guild, there was mütevellii who was taking care of every kind of problems about their craft. He was controlling private and occupational life of the members; he was organizing ceremonies of “ errand boy”, “ apprentice”, “ qualified workman”, and “ master”.

Çağatay (1989) said that every craft guild had 2 kinds of members such as internal (dahili) and external (harici). Externals were retired and disabled members. Internals were divided in to 4 groups:

- Errand boy: He has to be younger than 10 years old. His presence to work had to be provided by his father or his protector (veli)
- Apprentice: After working for 2 years without wage, errand boys were promoted to the apprentice position with a prepared ceremony. In these ceremonies, master was mentioning his solidarity and talents. The chairman of the ceremony was giving advices to the child about not lying, not leaving his ritual worship (namaz) and continuing his solidarity to the shop, being respectful to his parents; to his qualified workman and to his master. Chairman was deciding a weekly wage to be given by his master.
- Qualified workman: He has to be apprentice for 3 years. Ceremony was done in craft-guild. This day, he was wearing for the first time the

clothes belonging to his craft branch. His master and other 3 masters were witnessing about his good morality. Chairman was giving necessary advices.

- Master: He had to be qualified workman for 3 years. There shouldn't be any complaints about him. He had to be peevish about educating errand boy. He had to have good relations with apprentices; he had to have a strong commitment to his craft. During his ceremony of being master, chairman was mentioning which prophet was the pirof their craft, and he was giving advices about doing the trade honestly, being respectful to other craftsmen and customers and being merciful to the public.

At these times, education was not the responsibility of the state. Therefore, at these times, religious rules were the basis of the society. In Akhism, religion was the main point. Akhi organization was trying to make adopted a well-behaved (ahlâklî) life to the craftsmen. Akhis were saying that if in this world, they would have a well-behaved lifestyle, in the other world (in ahiret), they would be rewarded by the God, by pointing Koran. In Akhi organizations, it was learned to gain money honestly without making any tricky act. It was learned that the money which they have been gaining had to be permissible (helâl). Craftsmen had to give priority to his craft more than everything. Craftsmen believed that their pir who had first started their craft was a prophet. That's why, on every shop's wall, there was this couplet (ÇaĀŷatay, 1989: 157):

**“ Her seher besmeyle açÄ±lÄ±r dükkanÄ±mÄ±z
Hazreti dir pirimiz, üstadÄ±mÄ±z”**

Important Akhi rules

What they have to do

Eli açÄ±k olmalÄ±: He has to be generous

KapÄ±sÄ± açÄ±k olmalÄ±: His door has to be open

SofrasÄ± açÄ±k olmalÄ±: His dining table has to be open

What they should not to do

Gözü kapalı olmalÄ±: He has not to be plotter

Dili baÄ±yılı olmalÄ±: He has not to say any bad words

Beli baÄ±yılı olmalÄ±: He has not to dishonor anybody

According to Cumbur (1975) cited in Türk Esnaf TeÄ±kilatÄ±nÄ±n kuruluÅu ve Denizli, Akhism had four principles such as:

- Kuvvetli ve galipken affetmek
- Hiddetliyen yumuÅak davranmak
- DüÅmanlıÄ± dostlukla, kötülüÅü iyilikle karÅılamak
- Kendi ihtiyacı varken elindekini baÅkasına vermek

In this project, my subject was Akhism as a guild system in the Ottoman Empire. I tried to answer my research question which is “ the effects of the guild organization’s norms to the craftsmen’s process of production”. Firstly, I defined the world Akhism and its origins. Than, I mentioned its role and its importance in the society, I talked about its foundation, its development, and

its weakening reasons. I stated its control mechanisms and the reasons of the decline of their control in the society. I expressed the reasons behind the change of the system (gedik). I indicated its work organization (errand boy, apprentice, qualified workman and master), the norms within the organization and the effects of the norms to the guilds' production process; and lastly, I also denoted why Akhi organization was removed. I think that I could answer to my research question. In this project, my argument was that the norms of the guild organization were mainly shaped by religion. I saw that my argument was true. Because, in Akhi organizations, religion was the main point and the norms were based on futuwatnamas' religious and moral rules (Islamic Futuwah tradition's laws); and also, a well-behaved lifestyle was ordered to craftsmen to be rewarded in ahiret by the God.

To sum up, in this project, with the aim of analyzing the effects of the guild organization's norms to the craftsmen's process of production and with the aim of verifying my argument, I made a literature review on Akhism. I gave detailed information about Akhism starting from its foundation until its removal, including its importance, its organization, its norms and its roles in the society.