

## FOLKLORE AS FORGING A MEANS FOR KURDISH NATIONAL IDENTITY

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### Abstract

“Thankfully: we also have a rich language and a far-reaching literature, an ancient history, a crowded population, and a big country like heaven. Any nation all over the world doesn’t have a land as wide as ours. From past to present day, we haven’t let our language and customs to melt away. We have continued our existence under the other nations’ heel and compulsion. It means that we intrinsically owe everything. One would wish that we pull our socks up and glance around.” The article dwells on the relation between folklore studies and Kurdish National identity. In this article, according to the modern nationalistic theories, we have researched the writings of some Kurdish highbrows that are related to Kurdish, and all of them date back to the first quarter of 20th century. How have the recollection and the course of events for Kurdish highbrows grounded? How have they put these fundamentals into use in order to expand awareness of national values and to revive Kurdish identity? This article looks for an answer to these questions.

**Keywords:** *Kurd, identity, folklore, literature, highbrows.*

Among the people of Eastern Europe and Middle East, the conception of romanticism movement flourishing in the 19th century that is in search of the “national spirit and identity” mainly focuses on the researches about the folkloric fundamentals that have a quite wide literature in this field. After Tanzimat Reform Era (1839-1876), a flounder in this manner among the Ottoman highbrows increased. In our opinion, both the works on folklore by the Ottoman highbrows and Union and Progress Party’s puissance (1908) for the execution on Turkism policy have an increasing influence upon the Kurdish highbrows. In 1917, some articles entitled “Origin of Kurds” and “Tribal Community in Kurds” were published in the journal of *İctimaiyyat*. In 1918, a book titled *Kurds: Historical and Social Detailed Investigations* was published. Within all these publications, it is asserted that

there isn’t a nation of the name of Kurds, they haven’t got a culture, language, literature and history; supposing that there is a nation named Kurds, they are the melding ones with the other contiguous nations (BOZKURT, 2013).

The stance of Kurdish highbrows against this assertion and knowledge in this book became clear though. According to us, a group of Kurdish highbrows shared tasks among themselves, and each of them responded to the assertions and knowledge in compliance with their might and wisdom. The Kurdish being Bitlis resident reconitered on the myths, history and origin of Kurds; Mehmed Mihri made his researches on the folk literature and songs, Law Reşid and Hilmi, the resident of Siverek probed about the proverbs in folk literature; Selimbeg made some researches on festivals, myths and special occasions of Kurds, and Kemal Fewzi held examinations on Kurdish mythologies and stories. Naturally; this study is not only a stance against some assertions, but we also see that there is an increase in number of the articles on Kurdish culture, history, literature and folklore by Kurdish highbrows after the publications against Kurds in this way. The meaning of this century comes to light in the pages of these publications clearly including the issues about language, culture and folklore, from the newspaper of Kurdistan (1898-1902) to the publications like journals and *Jîn* newspaper (1918-1920) that were published before the foundation of Turkish Republic (1923).

The characteristic of this period is that the Kurdish highbrows not using the articulations of “folklore” have studied and made researches on the fundamentals of folklore (CELİL,1985).

## KURDISH Highbrows AND FOLKLORE

The role of highbrows through the history of humanity is quite crucial for the progress and revival of the society. That is how it occurred either in western world or eastern world. The highbrows have incurred the profound effects in the sense of social and national upheaval both with the recollections and courses of events of them, and the studies and efforts of them. As Anthony Smith stated, "the highbrows like poets, musicians, theatrical authors, linguists, anthropologists and folklorists create an articulation and language about nation and nationalism, and they convey the images, myths and symbols to people with their thoughts and studies" (SUAVI, 1993).

Smith say sthat nationalism as ideology and symbolism will maintain its way with the cultural heritage values, and he calls out to the highbrows that this "sub-culture" for "superior culture", oral traditions for written traditions, they are converted in a literary form and it makes each group justified (BAJALAN, 2010).

In this regard, William A. Wilson says that romantic nationalism is based upon folklore in terms of building a nation; however, liberal nationalism is based on the contemporary political reality. Therefore the literary traditions that can be accessible in reference to modern conditions simplify the highbrows' works. This is unveiled in all writings of Kurdish highbrows (SOKOLOV, 2009).

However, there are some crucial discrepancies between the eastern and western highbrows. In Europe, the national movements like "renascent culture" occurred after a long period. Especially in Asia and Africa, the both simultaneously occurred besides them. That is to say, in eastern world, the revival of the culture and national movements simultaneously realized. To Şerif Mardin, "The highbrows of the nations that are modernism-wardly are romantic, and they are in a struggle for self-knowledge." This struggle is about the crisis of identit. Thus the highbrows in the country acquainted with more progress than modern thoughts. They romanticised all their sentimental values, had better knowledge about western values, and put in effort to revive their ancient history. Therefore the feelings and attitudes towards the west world is reciprocal.

As Partha Chatterjee determined, there are grave contradictions in this exertion. It is both contradictive and virulent against the model imitating them. It means that eastern nationalism is unsteady and uneven. So the thought of obscurantism is never heart-warming. However, it is the destiny of obscurantist nations (ABBAS, 2013).

According to Smith; much as the reactions of the literate highbrows against westernisation and modernisation are different from each other, the primary objective of them is to make a call to their society having an ethnic background, and to make them to remember their roots in order to raise them in this manner. Because of that, that was a necessity related to mind and customs map and historical traditions that occurred in open-history and poetic. They aimed to convert the obscurant ethnic community into a politicised nation with sense of belonging (MARDIN, 2000).

To Hamit Bozarlan; much as it is historiography, it is a part of an extend foundation based knowledge and cultural meanings and intellectualness. But if there is a relation of it with the invention and popularisation of reciprocal myth, legend, folklore and tradition; then one of its meaning is possible. Especially, the patriotic historiography is interestingly romantic. A patriotic historiographer is sometimes only a historian, however he is generally a linguist, folklorist, mythologist, expert on folk songs, and deals with the researches about spirit of communities. In the written content and the studies by Kurdish highbrows like Abdullah Cewdet, Mewlanzade Rifat, Xelil Xeyali, Hemzeyê Muksî, Kurdiyê Bitlîsî, Kemal Fewzî, Memdûh Selîmbegî, Ebdurehim Rehmîyê Hekarî, Law Reşîd, Hilmiyê Siwerekî, Mehmed Mîhrî and et all; this exertion is obvious (DORSON, 2011).

According to Suavi Aydın, the main features of Arabic, Turkish and Persian nations in accordance with the ones in the west are as following:

"1.A severe criticism on recollection and courses of events in Classical İslam; 2.Regarding the bilateralism before İslam. Beyond Muslimism the previous ethnic past, and the recognition of the land residing on as a homeland. For example; in Tahtawi-Egypt, being proud of bilateralism in

the old Egypt. Atatürk bases on the Turks before İslam and regards the Hititians as the former ones before Turks. Maronites in Lebanon assert that they have a relation with Phoenician history and have ties of affection with Phoenicians. The shah od İran identify himself with the tribe of "Achaemenid". He bases on "Babylonians"; 3. Preserving of a bare language that is not under the effect of a foreign language and the purification of loanwords. For example, "Turkish Languse Society" in Turkey-TLS (1932), "Ferhengistan" in İran (1935) (SMITH, 2014).

When considering the situation of Kurdish highbrows of their period that some researchers named them as "Jon Kurd", more or less they also have the same characteristics. As Abbas Vali stated, in the last period of Ottoman Empire, the characteristics of Kurdish highbrows were as following: "they were secular, a few but co-workers, modernist, interested in the political and ideological movements of their era. From the beginning, they supported panislamism but after the break-up of the panislamist system, they went after the designation of a new statute. They wrote in Turkish and Kurdish. They had works including dialects belonging to cultural nationalism. According to them, Kurdish ethnicity was the basis of national Kurdish identity. Culture and language were the main factors for Kurdism, and the boundaries were determined with those" (PROPP, 1998).

If considering the ratio stated by Suavi Aydın, the criticism exists among the Kurdish highbrows; however, the highbrows like Abdullah Cewdet and Mewlanzade Rifat aren't among them, the criticisms are never so radical but maybe in a way of tirade to "their Muslim siblings" after all they put support behind the west world because most of them were secular. The importance of history before İslam preserves its place among the Kurdish highbrows. This is a study of evidence for the history before İslam. The writings of Kurdiyê Bitlîsî, Mehmed Mîhrî, Kemal Fewzî and Memdûh Selîmbeg include the information about Kurdish national history before İslam. İhsan Nûrî Paşa also mentions only the history before İslam in his book titled *The History of Kurds' Roots* (MALMÎSANIJ, 2010).

Smith explains this with "the myth of golden age" that aroused the interest of most highbrows.

To him, the objective of literate highbrows who are patriots wasn't academic but it might be social and political. They wanted to maintain the folk's characteristics and put forward. So it was a necessity to recreate some sentimental examples, and to revive the bilateral light in a glorious way. Therefore they went back to the past with the help of some myths. The root, thought, freedom, migration, a golden period with their protagonists and saints and maybe the selected folk myths awaken from their long sleep again or return from exile (GORGAS, 2006).

Kurdiyê Bitlîsî, Memdûh Selîmbeg, Mehmed Mîhrî and Kemal Fewzî are the good examples with the writings and exertions of them for the evaluations of Smith. However, The political solicitations for Kurdish nation are quite accessible when considering the conditions of the period. It means that, as Chatterjee expresses, "it deflected its way into a rational future under an archaic romantic flow." But as Wilson states, the fact that "the mythological past and the noble and profound nation that they wanted to recreate indeed was their profitable dream" (WILSON, 1973). So the highbrows and the linguists do not only revive the customs, traditions and languages, but also explore the history, rebuild the proprieties, and add the new political meanings to these acts. For example, the myth of "Kawa the Forger", celebration of "New Year of Kurds", and conveying the history of Kurds in the Aryan period was recurrently used by the aforesaid highbrows. The 14th volume of the *Jîn* journal was bedighted with multifarious writings on "New Year of Kurds" and "Newroz". In these writings a furore and exaltation shows up. Smith clarifies that the celebrations for the memorial of heroical past are exactly within this framework (MÎHRÎ, 1918). Therefore as "The Myth of Kawa the Forger", "National Celebration for New Year of Kurds and Newroz", "Purification of Kurds' Roots" is also a substantial thing for a dependent nation that isn't in the limelight and has few things to be proud of with, and has a relief about palmy days and cannot imagine even this. Prys Morgan made an observation, "Goths" engaged themselves with Kelts. According to Morgan, that exposal was the fantasy of the century (BENJAMIN, 2012).

Smith says that we encounter heroic legends and historical memorials in all nationalistic movements that is especially like this in Western European national movements and Middle East national movements. Patriots always revive the heroic cycle of the past and the nobility of grand civilization, and they recreate heroes and legends.

Not only the small populated nations but also the large populated ones sometimes did need it. As Walter Benjamin says, "The French Revolution regarded itself as the recurrence of the Ancient-Roman. As fashion refers to the old style clothes, the French Revolution referred to the Ancient-Rome. Fashion goes hunting in the forest of the past all the time and catch the hunt with an instant fling" (HAŞIM, 2004).

To Smith; after exploring the fountain of essence, it is forsaken anymore and becomes a unrefined timber, and for the works to be created and revived:

"There are lots of examples for highbrows who are lecturers to revive national movement and to see how they use the history and golden period. However, if an extended source is provided and conveying of the essence begins, then it means that the period of "the cultural wars" break out. That war has two ways. The first one is a cultural resistance against an imperialist cosmopolitanism and a colonialist mindset like the Slovakian against the Czech Republic and the Ukrainian against the Russian. The second one is that the secular highbrows quit to be defenders of old customs and traditions, and they do cultural studies against these wars till they mobilise their ethnicity and make it a political nation."

That is to say, after the highbrows prove the source of "Purification" of Kurds like "Kawa the Forger" the whole essence of this source owns the fundamentals of Kurdish nation and they are conveyed without being grateful (KEMAL, 1919).

The preservation of a bare language is a defended thought among the Kurdish highbrows and based on this, a private institution in the name of Kurdish Association of General Education and Publication was founded in 1919. So the presence of a particular language and culture was directive for revival of a national identity and empowerment of a political

movement. To Chatterjee, the idea asserting that culture and especially, language makes a nation unique is the invention of 19th century European writers in 19th century that the thoughts of philosopher like Herder, Schlegel, Fichte and Schleiermacher showed up and then were adopted by the patriotic eastern highbrows. The Kurdish patriots who are the eastern highbrows in the meantime also made explanations about the works on the preservation and purification of Kurdish language (BAYRAK, 1991).

According to Haşim Ahmedzade; as Kurdish nationalism, modern Kurdish literature is also a field of study against Persian, Arabic and Turkish identities that are freshly nascent. The new Kurdish literature in the hands of Kurdish nationalism became a quite crucial means to form an independent identity from the puissance's. Certainly, the relations and researches on Kurdish folklore by Kurdish highbrows aren't independent from this. As we see in the previous years, the works and researches of this period revealed a wide field of study on *Hawar* (1932-1946). As HJordi Tejel Gorgas explains the numerous myths and symbols that were composed by the Kurdish patriots at the beginning of 20th century, and that would be a cultural and political heritage for the Kurdish movements coming after them. It was such a cultural and political heritage that each Kurdish movement could forsake its interests. The myths and symbols revived and created in this period were used in various kinds (HBRAHİM, 1984).

## CONCLUSION

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Consequently, we see that the works and researches on Kurdish fundamentals of folklore by Kurdish highbrows are within the framework of forming a Kurdish national identity. As patriotic romantics, they were conscious of the power of folklore and they tried to utilize the fundamentals of folklore in order to provoke the people and to revive the Kurdish national identity, and to prove that Kurdish nation also has a rich culture and a language in this way. They laid claim to Kurdish folklore and made an endeavour not the folkloric fundamentals to disappear. They propose the scientific methods

for gathering, registering, translating and publishing Kurdish folkloric Fundamentals. According to them, these fundamentals are supposed to be analysed by intellectuals and linguists. Moreover they dwell on the importance of comparing works. We can say that the writings of this period as modern precursor texts are crucial sources in the history of research on Kurdish folklore and especially, Kurdish folk literature.

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