

ALBANIAN TRADITIONS IN *BESA* PLAY OF ŞEMSETTİN SAMİ

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Şemsettin Sami, the writer of *Taaşşuk-ı Talat ve Fitnat* which is regarded as the first Turkish novel, was the second son of Halit Bey the owner of a manor in Fraşer near the Berat in south Albania. Besides his famous novel, Şemsettin Sami wrote two plays, seven books in Turkish, several student books which are called “Cep Kitapları”(Pocket Books) about various topics. The authors of the Tanzimat suggested the idea of focusing on history, culture and their lives writing in the novel and the theater of Ottoman society. Ahmed Midhat, in the preface of translated, version of *Konak* ; Abdülhak Hamid, in epilog of his play, *Duhter-i Hindu*; Namık Kemal, in *Evrak-ı Perişan* handled lives and historical actions of Turkish and İslamic great men. Şemsettin Sami, in his play, *Besa Yahut Ahde Vefa*¹, handled “besa” which is an important tradition of Albanian people. He also evaluated some collective traditions in Turkish and Albanian cultures, such as marriage and revenge in this play. In this work, critics and evaluations will be detected in this play of Şemsettin Sami.

Sami Şemsettin uses the words of his period to create a natural atmosphere in his play. These pastoral motifs also be seen in environment discriptions.

These places and decors that he created, are pieces of the mother nature. This choice on one hand, can be related to his love for the homeland; on the other hand to romanticism that affects the authors of the period.

The first tradition we have identified in the work, is "Besa". This tradition has the same name with the play "Besa", in Albanian culture, is a word, a vow, which is used with intense feelings and must be fulfilled whatever happens.

The first besa in the game is Zübeyr's promise on Receb and Meruşe's marriage. Second is Vahide's besa that is given to her, to take revenge of the husband. The

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¹ *Besa Yahud Ahde Vefa*, Şemsettin Sami, İstanbul 1292/1875, 176 p. , Played Ottoman Empire Theatre in 18 Safer 1291/20 March 1874, Printed in 1785 in İstanbul. (This edition has been used in this work.)

third one is Fettah Ağa's besa. Selfo's father Fettah Ağa, while returning home after fighting many years at borders, wants to have a rest to sleep. In the meantime, Selman, an old enemy of Fettah Ağa finds him sleeping. Vahide, who was there, saves him when Selman was about to kill him. So, Fettah Ağa gives besa to Vahide, to kill the murderer of her husband. "You will be my daughter in this world and the Hereafter. (Taking the Kur'an out from his neck in the silver sheath and puts his right hand on it) "I promise and swear on this holy book, I give you besa, I will find and kill the murderer of your husband" he says.(p.141)

Fettah shoots his son Selfo to keep this besa. Upon this, Vahide begins to see Fettah Ağa as a monster. Fettah Ağa did this in order to fulfill the besa that he gave. For him, to be a monster, is better than to not fulfilling his besa. "I killed my son to keep up my besa" he said to defend himself.(p.167)

The second tradition that we deal with, is the tradition of revenge. This feeling, which is as old as the history of humankind, has been a tradition. These days, the tradition of revenge, which is not acceptable anymore, is available as similar in Turkish and Albanian communities. Besa, has turned into a vow of revenge in this play. Because it is based on the desire of Vahide to take revenge of her husband. She says "should a woman who doesn't take revenge of her dead husband and is not able to save her daughter from enemies, live in this world? No, no, this is not suitable for an Albanian woman"(p.122)

Vahide, asks help from Saibe to move the dead body of her husband who was shot by Selfo. Saibe is frightened. Her hands tremble, her arm doesn't move. Then, Vahide reminds her that, she is an Albanian woman, she mustn't be afraid of, and be brave. This warning is remarkable, for it represents the importance of courage in Albanian's tradition.(p.120)

The third degree tradition in the play is honor. Each society has its own concept of honor. The idea of honor in this play is the same with Turkish and Albanian communities. This similarity shows the intimacy between two communities at that time.

In the play, the importance of chastity is emphasized. As a father, honor is very important for Zübeyr. He advises his daughter "My daughter! This life is very short in this world! . We are here today, tomorrow won't. This world will stay, but in the other world, honor will be important for us, only honor!"(p.37)

In the Ottoman society, people consider a daughter as a guest in her father's house. The real home is her husband's and his family's house for her. We encounter this tradition as the fourth in the play. Zübeyr gives life to this tradition while saying his daughter Meruşe "A girl's home is not her father's house, but her husband's."(p.27)

Fifth tradition that we identify in Ottoman society, is the tradition of entrusting children to someone else, in case of death. Zübeyr's brother Daylan entrusted his

son Receb to Zübeyr, while dying. He mentions his wife Vahide: "Poor Daylan! I wish he had been living now and saw his son as a young man like an angel. He entrusted his son to me, while he was dying!"(p.25) Receb grows up in Zübeyr's house together with his daughter like brother and sister. They consider themselves as siblings.

The sixth tradition, in the play, is to consider girls and boys as siblings who live in the same household. Receb and Meruşe grow up knowing each other siblings in the same house. But the attachment between them turns into a real love after learning that they are not siblings in fact.

This situation is against traditions. Şemsettin Sami, uses this tradition as an element to increase the tension in the play. For this reason, Meruşe doesn't tell her love to Receb at first. And, can not talk about this situation with his mother and his father either she says herself when they ask "Who do you want to marry? How can I dare and say, with Receb, your son, my brother. I have been calling him brother since I was little, and he call me sister. Now its very hard to change the words sister and brother to husband and wife."(p.30)

Zübeyr wants to marry them, knowing that they are not siblings. Zübeyr and Vahide talk about marriage of Receb with Meruşe. Zübeyr wants to marry them as soon as possible. Vahide claims that relative marriages in a family, bring bad luck. In the dialogue between them, she says "Those types of marriages are bad luck. May she rest in peace, there is a testament to us from our great mother! There shouldn't be marriages between relatives in our generation."(p.74)

Zübeyr does not believe in this argument, and refuses this tradition saying that: "How absurd things you say, I do not believe it. How could it be bad luck?"(p.75)

Eventually, they decide to marry two young couple with the approval of Vahide. Zübeyr engages them.

The seventh tradition that we identify is type of engagement Ceremony. This is one of the old customs of the Balkan tradition, young people were engaged to show each other the best and the most beautiful feelings and wishes come in the form of token to give ordained flowers.

"Zübeyr says, "My son and Meruşe! Do not be shy. I give permission to you to marry. Here you promise to each other. God bless your marriage. Now, my children! Find a flower and give it to each other as engagement. "(p.52)

On the other hand, Selfo likes Meruşe and he wants to marry her. In order to attract her, he dances horon in front of her. This horon dance is the Albanian tradition as the eighth that we've found in the play. Selfo. thinks he will win her heart, with his manners, his agility and attraction during the horon dance. When Meruşe tells this

to her father, he becomes angry for this situation. Zübeyr shouting "Viles, rascals!" and expresses his anger for his spoiled and irresponsible man.(p.37)

On the other hand, Selfo's social group don't like his idea of marriage with the daughter of a shepherd, they consider this as a down stratum. Because Albanian society was ruled with caste system at that time. Each stratum took strict precautions like this to protect their existence and nobility.

Demir Bey, calls Selfo: "Is that so? Are you crying out? Good! You are an Albanian! You are a Lap! You are from Kolveliş, and you are crying for a shepherd's daughter."(p.97-98)

Zübeyr is a shepherd from Progonat and a warrior Demir Bey from Burç. They reveal two social layer and the contrast between them at that time in Albanian society. This contrast has been a tradition and created a social system. Two sides do not like each other, but criticize, and there is no marriage between them.

As a result, we can conclude that, there were many tribes in the early nineteenth century under Ottoman rule. One of these is the great interaction between Albanian society and Turkish Ottoman society. Because of the hundred years interaction caused by sharing the same geography and religious unity, many traditions of these countries are the same. This historical background and perspective created an intimacy between them. The two nations closer to each other. To conclude, I believe and want to say that, this is a strong relationship, which is a promise of hope for the future.