

HOW MEHMET AKIF'S CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN PERCEIVED THE NATIONAL POET

ÇOCUKLARININ VE TORUNLARININ VATAN ŞAIRİ MEHMET AKİF'E BAKIŞI

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ABSTRACT

The most trustworthy source to learn about the unofficial details of the life and personality of Mehmet Akif, the National Poet would be his family members. Akif's grandchildren Ferda and Selma Argon, who were named by Akif himself, have made interviews with the author Fatih Baytar, relaying their memories on Akif. The collection of these would of course be a way for us to understand the poet better and comprehend the spiritual dimension of the environment which gave birth to his work.

Our study, first of all is going to focus on how Mehmet Akif Ersoy was seen through the eyes of his children and especially, his grandchildren. We are going to try to analyze what kind of a father, husband and grandfather he was. We are going to focus on what his family has conveyed regarding the matter of translating the Qur'an to Turkish, which added a new dimension to his relationship with Mustafa Kemal Pasha. In addition, the themes of family in his work and his understanding of raising children are going to be a focal point.

Keywords: Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Ferda Argon, Selma Argon, National Anthem, Translation Of The Qur'an Into Turkish.

ÖZET

Vatan şairimiz Mehmet Akif Ersoy'un zorluklarla geçen hayatının resmi olmayan detayları ve kişiliği en güvenilir kaynak olarak aile bireylerinden öğrenilebilir. Mehmet Akif Ersoy'un isimlerini bizzat verdiği torunları Ferda ve Selma Argon'un yazar Fatih Baytar ile yaptıkları röportajlar ve anlattıkları anılardan oluşan bir seçki hiç kuşkusuz onu daha iyi anlamamızın ve eserlerini verdiği ortamın manevi boyutunu kavramamızın bir yolu olacaktır.

Çalışmamızda her şeyden önce Mehmet Akif Ersoy'un çocuklarının ve bilhassa torunlarının gözüyle aile içinde nasıl tanındığına odaklanacaktır. Onun nasıl bir dede, baba ve eş olduğu irdelenmeye çalışılacaktır. Özellikle Mustafa Kemal ile ilişkisine yeni bir boyut kazandıran Kuranı Kerim'in Türkçe'ye tercüme edilmesi meselesi hakkında ailesinin aktardıkları üzerinde durulacaktır. Buna ek olarak gerekli görüldükçe eserlerindeki aile temaları ile çocuk yetiştirme anlayışına odaklanılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Ferda Argon, Selma Argon, İstiklal Marşı, Kuran'ı Kerim'in Türkçe'ye Tercümesi.

1) INTRODUCTION

Mehmet Akif Ersoy is one of the most valuable personalities of the Turkish Nation. The national poet has made a breakthrough both in society and in the disciplines of literature and history via his works in which he presented reflections of his personality.

Mehmet Akif, who was born in Sariguzel District of Fatih, Istanbul during the December of 1873, is the first child of Mehmet Tahir Effendi and Emine Şerife Hanim. The first of the little-known facts about Mehmet Akif appear with his birth. His father who had an immense command in Arabic, used "abjad" and named him Ragıyf, in order to highlight his birthdate. The name, which is not a common name in Turkish, in time, transforms into "Âkif" and stays so. Mehmet Akif, who received a lot of attention from his parents, goes through a happy childhood. The memories of this happy childhood can be seen in "Fatih Mosque", the first poem of his "Safahat".

*"I was eight years old. My father came and said, "Tonight,
Let's head to the mosque boys, alright?
Come if you will, but in prayer be good,
If you want to be naughty, stay in home for good!"
Said unto us, and took my brother and I
When he prays, he turns me a blind eye.
The prayer ends, And there rises that kind dearest,
The boys follow him with lights,
He comes home and sleeps
Into sweet delights." (Koyuncu, 2012)*

When we see the poet calls his father his "kind delight", we can see what kind of effect his childhood had on him and his opinions about other children and their upbringing.

In our study, we are going to try to create a new perception of Mehmet Akif through the words of his grandchildren. We are also going to consult to the views of his family regarding the ever-popular subjects of National Anthem and the Turkish Qur'an.

1.1 MEHMET AKİF ERSOY'S CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN

Mehmet Akif Ersoy married his beloved İsmet Hanim in September 1898. During their married life which lasted for 40 years, their children named Cemile, Feride, Suad, Emin Tahir and Ibrahim Naim were born.

Ibrahim Naim dies as an infant when he was one and a half year old.

The eldest daughter Cemile Hanim, marries to Omer Riza Dogrul. She gives birth to a daughter named Seyhan. Their son named Bülent however, dies when he was only an infant. Cemile Hanim gives birth to two more daughters named Nazan and Rezzan. While Nazan Hanim, the granddaughter never ever marries, Rezzan Hanim gives birth to three children named Serpil, Ayçin and Aydemir.

Feride Hanim marries Muhyiddin Akçor. She gives birth to two children named Seyhan and Nihal. Seyhan Hanim, the granddaughter, gives birth to a daughter named Seda, while Nihal Hanim becomes the mother of Fatma and Ahmet.

Suad Hanım marries Captain Ahmet Ali Bey, a veterinarian. She gives birth to daughters named Fatma Ferda and Selma (With the surname Argon) and has a son named Cevat. Though, Cevat is the stepson of Suad Hanım.

Emin Bey, on the other hand, is the most famous child of Mehmet Akif. (Anar, 2011)

The memories which we are going to base our study on are the memories of Fatma Ferda, Selda and Emin Bey.

1.1.1 Family and Children According to Mehmet Akif Ersoy

Today, the importance of family and the upbringing of children is emphasized for the creation of a healthy future in the world. Since family and children are quite up-to-date topics, they have found a place for themselves in almost every work of a poet such as Mehmet Akif. According to his views, children are associated with innocence. They are the protagonists of the prospect of a happy future. So much that the welfare of countries are burdened on the shoulders of the children and therefore this important actor must be carried to a more positive point through education. In his poem "Freedom", the poet asks people to welcome the battalion of children who are going to take the Ottoman country further with the help of the constitutional rule while taking on a glorious path.

"These innocent children, O' Nation:

Thou shalt salute its mighty wind. (Amin Alayı:442)" (Şengül, 2018)

The education of the children mentioned by the poet begins in the family and Mehmet Akif emphasizes that happiness can be found yet again in children within this institution, describing it as; "We have left one thing untarnished, a simple thing: Family" (Firat, 2015).

Mehmet Akif combines the concept of family rooted in Islam and the one lies within the ancient Turkish tradition (Ercilasun, 1987).

The family, which manifests itself as an institution that must be kept alive in his poems, is not only a place where children are shown compassion and protected, but also a home where they undergo an important education. He was educated earnestly by his father from an early age. The pillar of the actions taken by the family, which he designed for both his private life and society in order to create the ideal type of person, is always those obtained via education:

"The ideal person of Akif is one who understands the importance of patience on the road to victory, is the person who wants to leave an important name behind, who does not procrastinate and use time effectively, who has a heart beating with a love to his nation, who has an understanding regarding the importance of family, who does not mime but create, who has a healthy body and a mind but also sensitive and poetic." (Gülendam, 2016)

1.1.2 Mehmet Akif Ersoy Through The Eyes Of His Children

The Memoirs of Mehmet Akif's daughter Feride Hanım and his son-in-law Muhiddin Akçor and his son Emin Bey can be accessed from the periodicals of the recent period. In order not to go beyond the purpose of our study, the memories of people will be transmitted from their own words in this section, however.

Feride Hanım remembers a memory of her father as follows:

"When we were young, my father used to take us for a trip from time to time. We were fairly young, back then. When I was tired, he carried me on his shoulders. We'd walk around... My father would have tea with his friends and chat. He used to give me lokum. My father always liked outdoors. We used to live in houses with large gardens. He would have us read the poems of our great poets. He would sometimes explain them to us. He would have us memorise some

of them... He was very sad during the wartime. He did not speak very much. He was an excitable person. Sometimes, he used to sit until the morning with his friends. They were talking and he had tremendous faith that we would win the war." (Anar, 2009)

His son-in-law Muhiddin Bey cites:

"I've never heard him talk nonsense, even for a day. He did everything he could to keep his children physically strong and knowledgeable." (Günaydın, 2017)

Finally, Emin Bey says the following words about his father's distinctive features and his final years:

"I think his character had more value than his literary and scholarly persona. He was tremendously strong-willed. This sometimes bordered on stubbornness. I recall that he quit the snuff that he used for thirty five years just because of a single word. During his final years, he felt quite unwell. The reason for that was our stagnation compared to the advancing of the West. He had one flaw. He was too trusting. Because of this, he witnessed countless ingratitude and these made him heart-wrenched. I can say that, that his over-reliance on his favorite son, me; caused my failure in life... He was devout, sure but he was never a radical. He believed that religion was a branch of science that would be processed, advanced, evolved, such as medicine, agriculture or economics. He hated bigots, always said that religion lost its way in their hands." (Anar, 2009).

1.1.3 Mehmet Akif Ersoy Through The Eyes Of His Grandchildren

The writings in which Mehmet Akif Ersoy's grandsons Selma and Ferda describe their grandfather was made into a book by Fatih Bayhan. Selma and Ferda, who were named by Akif himself, are daughters of Suad Hanim. When Ferda was born Akif was in Egypt. When his daughter Suad asked a recommendation for a name during the birth of Ferda, Akif wrote these names to a paper. Therefore, Suad Hanim names the first daughter, "Ferda", meaning future and the next one, she names Selma.

The poet also wrote a poem for the little Ferda:

"Miss Ferda! Miss Ferda!

I have loved you without seeing you;

You mayhaps, have seen me,

But I am too old, you might not have liked me.

Miss Ferda, Miss Ferda!

Firstborn of my daughter,

Is there someone really sweeter,

Than you? But what is that ugly name?

No, no, calling your name ugly would be a shame;

Your name is more beautiful than the world,

More beautiful than the Moon, and the daylight;

What is the Moon and the daylight, compared to it? Your name is more beautiful than you;

Even than me,

For the future is destined to be, more beautiful than the past." (Karaer, 2010)

Ferda Argon, the muse of these lines in which the love of a grandfather is felt thoroughly, passed away in 21 December, 2012. Selma Argon continues to relay that myth who is her grandfather Mehmet Akif Ersoy, throughout Turkey. In this part of our study, a selection of the abovementioned book and interviews are going to be presented.

According to Selma Hanım, Mehmet Akif was a great patriot:

"My grandfather is a beacon of morality who followed the path of his homeland, his nation, his flag, his adhan, Allah and the Prophet. He is a sincere person. Apart from being my blood relative, he is the grandfather of our nation."

(<https://www.trthaber.com/foto-galeri/mehmet-akif-ersoyun-torunu-dedem-buyuk-bir-vatanseverdi/31565.html>)

Ms. Selma talks about his grandfather in context of the words that mentions his childhood:

"My grandfather was born in Fatih, Istanbul and his childhood was spent in Fatih Mosque. He started to read at the age of 4. His mother wanted him to have a religious education. His father was very much like his personal tutor. My grandfather spoke Persian, Arabic and French as if these were his mother tongue. He was a person who had a difficult school life, but he was also a voracious learner. He always tried to establish contact with his teachers. In order to learn from them, he followed them whether they were in the street or a bazaar. During his childhood, he strived to learn even a single word. He had dedicated his life to learn and to teach."

(<https://alacamposta.com/haber/torunu-mehmet-akif-i-anlatti>)

Ms. Selma also describes a little-known feature of her grandfather in the following words:

"He was also a sportsman. He told us that sports developed the mind and the body perfectly. There was a sport called rock throwing, very much like the tossing of today. He always came first at that. He is such a good swimmer that he was able to swim through the Bosphorus. He loved to walk. He used to walk from his home in Fatih to his school in Halkalı. And when he walked, he thought and created ideas. He also was a wrestler. He was always a tradesman at heart; he used to teach reading and writing to people who taught him wrestling."

(<https://www.haberler.com/mehmet-akif-ersoy-un-torunu-dedesini-anlatti-10393952-haberi/>)

Mehmet Akif Ersoy lived during the most turbulent period of the Ottoman Empire. This period contributed significantly to the formation of his personality and art:

"The characteristic of my grandfather's poems is that he wrote every poem within his experience of life. So in a way, he left us a documentary. 'I wrote what I saw. I have nothing to do with dreams' he used to say. The places he was not able to see, well, he listened about them from his friends. Another feature of his was that he made people talk in his poems."

Until 1908, his life was always extroverted. As he travelled through Anatolia step by step, he saw the people who he lived in the same country, and their needs, what they were afraid of, what they liked... and in the future, in the days of national struggle, these experiences have proved very useful. He knew people very well. Everyone hung on his words. He was famed for the advice he gave to people."

(<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/kultur-sanat/mehmet-akif-ersoyun-torunu-argon-dedem-her-siirini-yasayarak-yazdi/1332206>)

2. THE PERIOD OF NATIONAL STRUGGLE AND AFTERWARDS

2.1 How Was The National Anthem Written?

Ms. Selma often expresses her grandfather's participation in the National Struggle and the story of our National Anthem in interviews:

"My grandfather Mehmet Akif Ersoy came to Kastamonu hurriedly when he was called to Anatolia for the national struggle, and here he published the magazine 'Sebilürreşad'". Even before our National Anthem was accepted, it was published in Açıksöz Newspaper.

In Kastamonu, he preached at the Nasrullah Mosque. These magazines and sermons were reproduced and distributed on all fronts to improve the morale of the soldiers. Because my grandfather told there that there was a knife in our throat, which went by the name of Treaty of Sèvres."

(<https://dogrusozgazetesi.com/kastamonu-benim-icin-ikinci-bir-vatan-gibidir-9356.html>)

"A need arises for an anthem to relay on the passion and excitement of the nation, and it was decided that a competition should be held. Then the price for the competition is set to 500 gold coins, and 724 poems participate. These were distributed on the front and were read, but did not stir any excitement. Mustafa Kemal himself asked 'Why there is not a poem by the master Mehmet Akif Ersoy' because he knew about his patriotism, his fervour and excitement, and those around him told Mustafa Kemal that "The Master did not participate because this was a contest, he said that I am not going to write a poem which would be dedicated to my nation for money, especially a poem which is going to be the National Anthem." Those who visit my grandfather to write the poem say to him, 'We promised to have this poem written on your behalf', Then, my grandfather asked them for three times whether did they promise for a promise is something that he would not keep only if he was going to die, because of this, he gives a positive response. And he puts all the sentences in his mind on the paper."

(<https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/malatya/torunu-mehmet-akif-ersoyun-sakli-kalmis-oykulerini-anlatti-12645986>)

"Then they try to give my grandfather the 500 gold coins which was the prize of the competition, but my grandfather does not accept it and says unto them, 'I told you in advance that I won't take this.' Our grandfather, then, donates these 500 gold coins to an institution that helps veterans and the relatives of veterans in order to find them work and wants this donation to be published in a magazine because he did not want to deal with statements such as "he said I won't receive the award before, but yet again he did".

There were only 2 liras in his pocket that day and he took it from his close friend Şerif Bolarlı, in order to go to the parliament.

(<http://file.yesilyurt.bel.tr/faaliyetler/MART-2018/files/basic-html/page15.html>)

2.2 The Question of the Translation of the Qur'an

Another issue on the agenda about Mehmet Akif is the question of translating the Qur'an into Turkish. According to a decision taken during the budget negotiations held in 1925 in the Parliament, Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır was offered for the Tafsir of the Koran and Mehmet Akif Ersoy for its translation. He worked extensively between 1926 and 1929 and continued to work on it until his death. But during the years when the Adhan was forcefully recited in Turkish, he was worried that the prayer was also going to be done with the Turkish translation of the Qur'an, therefore he terminated the agreement and returned a sum of money which he had received for it. It is understood that when Mehmet Akif fell ill in Egypt, and he bequeathed that the

translation was to be burned in case he died before he could return to Turkey. (<https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/mehmed-akif-ersoy>)

Although it is a matter of debate whether this will has been fulfilled, Ms. Selma who represents the family, views on this issue are as follows:

"After the Republic was declared, he thought that I would go back to my own work. In the meantime, he was given a very important task, however. That task was to translate Qur'an, the Word of God, which he attached great importance to, into Turkish. He undertakes this task and begins the translation. And according to what was said he did it, he did not like it, he yet again did it but did not like it and finally finished it after labouring work. It was relayed that he used to say: "The Qur'an will be read with my translation and my Tafsir. What if I did it wrong at some point, how can I look at my Prophet's face?" I believe he didn't deliver the translation he made because of it...he sent the money he received for the translation back because he didn't finish it... My grandfather's work was burned afterwards. He had no friends to go against his will. He had friends like himself around him. They may have kept it for a long time. And from what I've heard, they hid it for a while. But this will is fulfilled by a delegation established later. We, as his family, are not aware of this situation..." (Bayhan, 2016)

Atatürk put great importance on this translation. He himself has traced this particular translation for many years. He even sent intermediaries to Mehmet Akif, who was lying in a sick bed, and asked him for the translation. However, Mehmet Akif stated that he gave the translation to someone in Egypt, that he gave the translation to someone else, and that he did not like the translation anyway, and that he would do a new translation work if he recovered. The intermediaries never learned about the fate of the translation. (Cündioğlu, 2017)

Finally, Ms. Selma has one last request about her grandfather:

"My grandfather used to preach to prisoners in mosques during his time in Germany. And those sermons were duplicated and sent to Muslims fighting on the fronts. A large number of Muslims who listened to the sermon saw that they were on the wrong front and left the war. Copies of the versions of these sermons were kept in Germany. Last year we applied to the Consulate General in Cologne. We requested that the Archive be found and given us a copy. My grandfather was a good orator. I wanted to hear my grandfather's voice when he preached. I've never given up hope about this."

CONCLUSION

Mehmet Akif Ersoy is one of the rare people who made a great place for himself in history not only with his contributions to Turkish literature and society, but also with his high humanistic sensitivities. For all his life, he never betrayed the things that he saw as rightful and gave this advice to the children of all humanity which include his children and grandchildren as well. Because he really had managed to become the grandfather of Asim's generation, which he created in his ideals.

The image of Mehmet Akif that we try to recreate through the eyes of her children and grandchildren shows us that he had attached a special importance to children, in his literary and personal life, who were the most neglected and vulnerable element of the society. He made his children and grandchildren who he tried to stand by in every possible sense, the importance of family. Especially his letters, which have appeared in recent years, are proof of this. In these letters, we know Mehmet Akif as a man, father, husband and grandfather.

The poet of the homeland, who spent his entire life fighting, also took active part in the national struggle; he tried to fulfill every task assigned to him, including writing our National Anthem

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