

## AN ORGANIZASION BASED ON TRADE, ART AND MORAL VALUES: AKHI INSTITUTION

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### Summary

*The Akhi Institution is a socio-economic organization created by the Turkish nations who lived in Anatolia between the 13th and the 19th centuries. It contributed to the training in various arts and professions and to the development of moral values and organized the working life based on the good person merits.*

**Key words:** *Akhism, trade, moral values*

### 1.Introduction

The necessity of the limited resources to meet unlimited demands, has been one of the main reasons that give rise to economic knowledge. Used in the same sense with the economy in Turkish language, " İktisat" which means mid-way. However, when human went after his request not after the needs, he got out of mid-way line. Therefore, requests, needs and resources must be in balance. Akhi instution is an organizasion that regulates trade and ethical values in a balanced way. Akhism is a socio-economic order in which virtue, honesty, fraternity, charity, in brief all good merits are combined.

### 2.What is Akhism and who is Akhi?

The word "Ahi" is from Arabic and means "brother or my brother". However, some researchers say that the word "Ahi" is originated from the word "aki" which means generous, open-handed and brave in Turkish language. It is supposed that the word "aki" was turned into the word "ahi" which means "my brother" in Arabic language in a period during which the Turkish institutions and terms proliferated in Anatolia.<sup>1</sup>

A person who is called an "Ahi" should either he is involved in science or in a professional activity. Therefore, the Ahi institution acted as a school of moral values besides taking responsibility in the development of vocational trainings demanded.<sup>2</sup>

When we examine the history of the tradesmen and craftsmen community, we see that "Akhism" and "Turkish-Islamic Guild" occupy an important place because these two institutions and orders had been the determinative elements of the Ottoman society for many years.<sup>3</sup> For example several early Ottoman Sultans were Akhi.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.When it was founded?

Four issues were influential in the formation of this organization. These aspects of life are expressions of structural transformation for the Turkish people in XIII century.

1. The advent of Turks in Anatolia
2. Transition from nomadic life to settled life
3. Religious factors
4. Cultural values of Turks and Ahi Evren who is the founder of this organization.

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<sup>1</sup>Kazım Ceylan, Ahilik, Ankara 2013, p. 12; <http://www.tesk.org.tr/tr/eng/akhism.php>

<sup>2</sup> <http://ahilik.net/ahi-institution/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.tesk.org.tr/tr/eng/akhism.php>

<sup>4</sup> Neşet Çağatay, Bir Türk Kurumu Olarak Ahilik, Ankara 1997, s. 7; Halil İnalçık, Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Sosyal ve Ekonomik Tarihi, İstanbul 2000, s. 491.

The Akhi Institution played an important role in attracting the Turkish immigrants into Anatolia and in creating new lands for them. Anatolia became the second homeland of the Turks within the second half of the 11th century. In order to be able to live and take root against the local merchants and craftsmen, the Turkish craftsmen and merchants who migrated from Asia had to establish an organization among them. Furthermore, the Turks considered that they could produce solid, durable and standard goods by means of such organization. This necessity resulted in the establishment of the solidarity and inspection organization for tradesmen and craftsmen, in other words through Akhism, that is the religious-moral principles of which already exist in the rules and regulations of Turkish-Islamic guild.<sup>5</sup>

The Akhism organization left a mark in the Ottoman-Turkish community due to its teaching of arts at the workbench and manners in the lodges to its members from the Anatolian Seljuk State until the 18th century. The increasing of non-Muslim subjects that lived in the Ottoman Empire created the necessity of collaboration among people of various religions. As a result, “Lonca System” and later “Gedik System” were established. That was in the nature of monopolies and without discrimination of religious difference. It was carrying a continuation character of the Akhism organization.<sup>6</sup>

#### **4. Ahi Evren**

The founder of the Ahi Organization was Ahi Evran, a great Turkish mystic, scholar, economist and master of arts, who lived between 1172 and 1262. Born in the city of Hoy in Azerbaijan, he took courses from Fahreddin Razi, himself, a great Islamic scholar. Ahi Evran was educated in the Sufi philosophy by the students of Ahmet Yesevi. He was also influenced by philosophical books of Turkish scholars, such as İbni Sina and Farabi. He married Lady Fatma, daughter of a Turkish father named Evhadü'r-Din Kirmani. The Lady was later called “Kadın Ana” (Mother Fatma) and she was the founder of “Bacıyan-ı Rum”, the first women’s organization in Anatolia.<sup>7</sup>

Ahi Evran was a very successful person in organizing the tradesmen-craftsmen of leather workmanship. Ahi Evran established Akhism organization by making use of Turkish-Islamic guild which had undertaken great and essential duties in providing religious and moral information and the rules and regulations of Turkish-Islamic guild for many centuries. Being the harmonic combination of morality and art, Ahi Evren acquired for it so much prestige that Akhism had directed tradesmen and craftsmen, organized their social and working life, played an essential role in the establishment of the guild of janissary for centuries and the statesmen deemed joining the organization as a great honor.<sup>8</sup>

#### **5. Akhism Philosophy**

1. To work in the worldly life as though one never going to die and to work for the Hereafter as one would die tomorrow. Next is the principle
  2. Three main concepts that rise above the Akhism sobriety, solidarity and to be contented with less
  3. To consider human beings as the basic value not property.
  4. Production and Halal/lawful earnings
- Individuals and community interests have tried to establish the balance. For that reason there was no struggle between classes. And it also prevented the Colonialism.<sup>9</sup>
5. It aimed to prevent excessive and unjust gain
  6. It aimed to be a good man, a good Muslim and a good trader.
  7. To do the trade like a worship and not to do the worship like a trade.

#### **6. The main principles of Akhism**

It is written in Futuvva books hundreds of the basic principles of Akhism.<sup>10</sup> Some of these are as follows:

1. To serve the public, to worship God
2. Do with less, to thank very much and deploy
3. To continue Prayer
4. To be generous
5. Not to be the material's slave<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.tesk.org.tr/tr/eng/akhism.php>

<sup>6</sup> Agim Mamuti, An Essay on Economic Values of Akhism, Epiphany: Vol. 6, No. 1, 2013, p. 243

<sup>7</sup> <http://ahilik.net/ahi-institution/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.tesk.org.tr/tr/eng/akhism.php>

<sup>9</sup> Ahmet Tabakoğlu, Ahiliğin Türk Esnaf Ahlakına Tesirleri, Ankara 2007, p. 412.

<sup>10</sup> Süleyman Uludağ, Ahilik, DİA, XIII, s. 259-261.

<sup>11</sup> Veli Erken, Ahilik Teşkilatının Vizyonu, Kültür Bakanlığı Uluslar arası Ahilik Sempozyumu, Ankara trs. s. 127-129

Basic principles are focused on four main points.

1. Social responsibility
2. The quality of products and services.
3. Honesty and integrity
4. Strengthening the culture of living together.

Akhism was effectively functioning from the end of the Seljuk era to the late Ottoman period. Akhism, with some modifications, played an important role in the establishment of an effective economic and social structure, by bringing together socio-economic factors such as ethics, production and trade. Then, Akhism succeeded in creating an effective and reliable network of relationships between citizen and state, rich and poor, producer and consumer and labor and capital. Akhism also established the working and corporate principles based on morality and social justice.<sup>12</sup>

## 7.Social Aspects of Akhism

Akhism organization aims at the societal benefits, is a civil organization that is often founded by tradesmen and craftsmen. Akhism as an organization directly affects the economical life of the society. The functions of the Akhism organization in comparison with the equivalent organizations today are quite similar. It is possible to arrange them in order as follows: commerce of industry and chambers aims at solving the industrial and business problems; unions of labor and employees regulate labor and employee relations; competition authority prevents the monopoly; bodies of goods and service standards protect consumers by controls of the quality of goods and services. Therefore, Akhi organization has carried out similar missions and had similar structure as many modern organizations. Actually, Akhi principles and business system made significant contribution towards socio-economic flourishing of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>13</sup>

The Akhi Organization defended and spread the principles of indiscrimination towards people of different religions, languages and races. Virtues of honesty, benevolence, charity as well as the principles like brotherhood of people, hospitality, and faithfulness and also principles relating to professional ethics were spread, too. The Ahi organization transformed the principle of solidarity into almost a new capital source.<sup>14</sup>

Akhism as the system aims to primarily educate and to produce a high moral person rather than extremely rich person. Such a person should achieve the success in the economical, political and military areas.<sup>15</sup> It aimed to educate the society in advanced moral principles. For this purpose there were some simple important rules.

You must be open-handed: To be generous

You must open your house door for the guest. Because when guests arrive, luck comes.

You must share your meal.

On the other hand

You must close your mouth for not to say bad things

You must close your eye for not to see every thing

You must guard your chastity.

## 8.Conclusion

Akhism's world view is not to materialize values and value systems. They were working to build such a society. Today we need such organizations like before.

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<sup>12</sup>Agim Mamuti, An Essay on Economic Values of Akhism, Epiphany: Vol. 6, No. 1, 2013, p. 238.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://ahilik.net/ahi-institution/>

<sup>15</sup> Agim Mamuti, An Essay on Economic Values of Akhism, Epiphany: Vol. 6, No. 1, 2013, p. 244.

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