



THE IDEALS AND THE REALITY OF THE EAST IN THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

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ABSTRACT

In the opinion of some researchers, the late 19th and early 20th centuries is the second period of revival in some Eastern countries. That period is even called the second Renaissance. Consequently, 20th century can be considered as the period after the Renaissance or its continuance: an abundance of ideas and new currents, enlightenment of the spirits and tendency to originality and etc. However, there is an important fact should be taken into account: the increasing influence of the Western thought, its large-scale activity and at last, its nihilistic spirit. It means that the process of revival in the Eastern countries was the reflection of the Western thought, only with some specific features. In the article will be considered the main features of the second Eastern Renaissance that led to two opposite effects: the formation of the new criterion of perfection and the destruction of the previous values. Based on the views of Indian, Russian and Azerbaijan thinkers will be considered three leading ideas not only in the philosophical thought but also in politics and everyday life: Europeanization, preservation of the national and religious values.

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INTRODUCTION

In opinion of some researchers 19th century is the second revival, even Renaissance in many countries of the East. Consequently, 20th century is the post-Renaissance or its continuing: the abundance of ideas, new philosophical and cultural currents, enlightenment of the spirit and craving to the novelty. However, it should be borne in mind some important facts: the increasing influence of the West, its wide activity in the East and, at last, its crushing force. The considering of this contrasting situation can answer the painful question why the post-Renaissance period in the East can be characterized as a mismatch of the ideals and reality.

I. RENAISSANCE AND DISTORTED ENERGY

The cultural movement in the East in the late 19th and early 20th centuries called Renaissance appeared mainly in the revival of the national spirit and thought, the process of enlightenment, the development of science, philosophy and literature. At the same time it confirms the fact that the East is behind the West nearly three centuries from the West. However, it does not mean that the East was always behind the West. If we remind that the East with its philosophy, culture, science and art was one of the main resources of the Western (European) Renaissance, the second revival of the creative energy in such a short period will appear in a different light. Certainly, in comparison with the Middle Ages, the second Renaissance was based on scant potential. Moreover, for many centuries the East remained to be a place for the Western 'experience', purposeful policy. In consequence of this activity the main feature of the period can be the increase and expansion of the western-oriented socio-political views and enlightenment process. Azerbaijani thinker Ahmed Aghaoghlu appreciated this situation as a tragedy: "Although we practically possess the mentality that Europe had four or five hundred years ago and live its former life, today we willy-nilly have to imitate many of their vital organization. It creates very tragically situation, the scale of which can be noticed only by them who considers the reasons of our today's tragedy.¹ It means that the path of development of the East was chosen under the strong influence and pressure from the West and today the East has to imitate the West for catching up with it. Consequently,

¹ Əhməd Ağaoğlu. *Üç mədəniyyət* (Bakı: Mütərcim, 2006), 49.

although the West played great role in the maturation of the second Renaissance, the true aim of this movement was to revive the own potential and specific thought of the East.

It is not surprising that only a few researches write about this Renaissance and somebody calls it tragedy for his nation. Point is that this process was forcibly interrupted and the incomplete development instead of becoming a revival of thinking, turned to tragedy and despair for nation and society. Rabindranath Tagore writes with a heavy heart: "Through the official channels of British educational organization in the head of our children is shoved no English literature, but its waste. And it killed their love to own culture".² In Russia and Azerbaijan the interrupted force was the Soviet Imperia based on the Marxism-Leninism ideology. Thus, in the early 20th century the process of revival and self-affirmation of the Eastern nations was interrupted by the external force. In other words, it changed and distorted its way of development under the influence of the Western thought. Salahaddin Khalilov called this process as a tragedy of individual intellectuals and the entire nation: "As the revival of the national thought and the political repression, ideological restrictions were in the same period, the contradictions in political, social and individual consciousness turned into the reasons of the individual tragedies".³ Hence, interruption of the natural course of cultural movement not only delayed the development of the East, but also caused the failure of the national spirit.

The aforementioned thoughts can be generalized in the following theses that characterize the ideals of the East.

- a) The ideal of perfection in the East is the West.
- b) Although the East was behind the West, instead of passing stages in stages, gradually, it accepts the Western values and criteria as a ready template and adapts its own to the Western requirements. It is possible that the reason for such haste is the growth of the difference between the East and West till the contradiction and confrontation; the desire of the East to escape from the state of the loser and helpless. However, the ready template distorts the specific Eastern values that is more dangerous for the East.

The Eastern enlightenment had two aims: to know the West better and to know itself – its specific features better. Unfortunately, the second aim was regulated and focused by the

² Рабиндранат Тагор, Открытое письмо в редакцию "Калькутта мьюнисипал газетт" // Открытие Индии. Философские и эстетические воззрения в Индии XX в.; Москва, Худож. Лит., 1987, с. 336.

³ Səlahəddin Xəlilov. *Fəlsəfə: tarix və müasirlik* (fəlsəfi komparativistika) (Bakı: Azərbaycan Universiteti Nəşriyyatı, 2006), 373.

criterion of the first aim, in other words, the East recognized itself through the Western prism. However, this is an undeniable fact that the enlightenment served to protect the essence and originality of the national spirit.

II. NATIONAL THOUGHT AND ALIEN IDEAL

There is one more truth in those words: there are two different processes in the East in the XX century. On the one hand, as we noticed, the influence of the West increased. For example, comparing existing three cultures Ahmed Aghaoghlu writes: “Comparing these cultures we see that one of them – the Western culture is winner and the other two, i.e. Islamic and the Buddha Brahma cultures are loser”.⁴ Indeed, it was a great and unavoidable process: the East divides to two poles: who has Western thought and who has Eastern thought.

On the other hand, there was a strong desire to develop the national thought and to create own national republic. The thinkers consider not the commonly human being but especially the Russian, Indian, Turkish and etc. man. If we take into account the identity of the leaders and the ideologists of the national movements, we can say that some Eastern national republics were the fruit of the Western thought. Although the stimulus of their aim was to save the nation from the Western exploitation, however they used the Western pattern of republics. Azerbaijan and Turkey, Pakistan and India can be very good example for this practice.

In addition, one more fact should be taken into account. The thinkers who received Western education knew the great problem of the humanity: how the human being worshiped his new idol – Science, how the human being pushed the morality to the background, how the human being was degraded. These feelings were alien for the East where the religion and faith were an important part of the human’s life and identity. Rabindranath Tagore explain the eastern man to Albert Einstein:

We realize the supreme man, who has no individual limitations, through our limitations. Science is concerned with that which is not confined to individuals; it is the impersonal human world of truths. Religion realizes these truths and links them up with our deeper needs. Our individual consciousness of truth gains universal significance.

4 Əhməd Ağaoğlu, *Üç mədəniyyət*, 28.

Religion applies values to truth, and we know truth as good through own harmony with it.⁵

Indeed, the Eastern thinkers consider the human being living in the inhuman world and risk of humanity. For example, “Muhammed Iqbal he went to England and Germany, where he pursued his philosophical studies; he returned to India three years later to practice law. As Wilfrid C. Smith has put it, three things impressed him most about Europe: the vitality and dynamism of European life, the immense possibilities open to man, and the dehumanizing influence that capitalist society had on the European soul”.⁶ Iqbal was also a philosopher and saw the problem of humanity. Naturally, his first reaction was to save his nation. It was required a lot of courage for Eastern thinkers to save the national values when the process of westernization ruled in all spheres of life. They desired to save their nation from the risk of dehumanization. By the end of his life Tagore said in his last speech: “The spirit of violence which perhaps lay dormant in the psychology of the West, has at last roused itself and desecrates the spirit of Man. The wheels of Fate will someday compel the English to give up their Indian empire. But what kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery? ‘When the stream of their centuries’ administration runs dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth they will leave behind them! I had at one time believed that the springs of civilization would issue out of the heart of Europe. But today when I am about to quit the world that faith has gone bankrupt altogether.”⁷ The Eastern wise men – thinkers tried first of all to save the creative energy, faith and ancient culture that helped to identify the essence of this nation. Leo Tolstoy who concerned for the younger generation and future of Russia in his pamphlet ‘Trust Yourself. An Appeal to Young People’ wrote: “When the main desire of your spirit is to be the best, trust yourself. I don’t say that perfect yourself, as there is something individual, egocentric. I say that be God wants you to be; discover your similarity with Him that invested in you at birth”.⁸ Tolstoy’s appeal is the expression of all his creativity, the most valuable thought he wanted to say not only Russian nation, but all humanity. As noticed Ahmed Aghaoghlu, Tolstoy didn’t accept the Western’s dictation and culture, because

5 Rabindranath Tagore. *Harmony and Beauty in Man and His World* (Mumbai: Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 1997), 24.

6 Majid Fakhry. *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 373.

7 Rabindranath Tagore. *Civilization’s crisis*; accessed at <http://specials.rediff.com/news/2007/aug/06slide5.htm> on 21.04.2015.

8 Л.Н.Толстой, *Верьте себе* (Trust yourself. An Appeal to Young People); accessed at <http://www.bookmate.com/r#d=DPj2wNvk> on 21.04.2015.

he believed that it is dangerous and reason separating the human being from himself. He called the younger generation to find their historical energy. Mahatma Gandhi appreciated Tolstoy's desire to fight against the violence, to light the divine light in inner world of human being, to correct their souls, to be a believer guide for his nation and considered him as a true personification of Perfection.⁹ Indeed, all of these thinkers noticed an idea: the original inner light can to save the identity of the nation.

III. A NEW IDEAL – SYNTHESIS

Certainly, the thinkers who wanted to take his nation to step toward chose the third way: to synthesize the unavoidable effect of Western thought and its some progressive attitude with the national features and national thought. On the one hand, this way meant to keep faith in contrast to the West, to reform according to the requirement of new period, on the other hand, to keep up with the West at the same time and to use the Western practice to create its own republic based on the national ideology and democracy, to improve education system and etc. The thinkers of Pakistan, Turkey, India or other eastern country knew that it is very hard mission to awaken nation, develop it and get positive results. First of all, the nation should cognize itself and appreciate its material and moral potential, know its real leader and follow him. For example, Muhammed Iqbal admits that although he “could not awaken” his nation, but there is another nation who can be example for others: “The truth is that among the Muslim nations of today, Turkey alone has shaken off its dogmatic slumber, and attained to self-consciousness. She alone has claimed her right of intellectual freedom; she alone has passed from the ideal to the real– a transition which entails keen intellectual and moral struggle”.¹⁰ He criticizes the fact of imitation that is so fashionable in the East and emphasizes the difference of the Turkish who could discover his power in Islamic world: “It is, I think, the English thinker Hobbes who makes this acute observation that to have a succession of identical thoughts and feelings is to have no thoughts and feelings at all. Such is the lot of most Muslim countries today. They are mechanically repeating old values, whereas the Turk is on the way to creating new values. He has passed through great experiences which have revealed

9 *All Men Are Brothers: Life and Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi as Told in His Own Words*, compiled and edited by Krishna Kripalani (Paris: UNESCO, 1969), 175.

10 Muhammed Iqbal. “The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam” in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, accessed at <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/> on 11.04.2015.

his deeper self to him. In him life has begun to move, change, and amplify, giving birth to new desires, bringing new difficulties and suggesting new interpretations”.¹¹ Similar ideas can also be found in Ameen Rihani, who wrote about Turkish women who could assimilate Western culture and won freedom.¹² Indeed, the Turkish thinkers and ideologists could recognize their own inner power. For example, Ziya Gökalp convinced that “the *Übermensch* (superman) of German philosopher Nietzsche is Turkish. Turks are new men of every century. That is why the new life will be born from the Turkism that is mother of all young”.¹³ Oktay Sinanoğlu, who known as the youngest professor in the West, wrote that the mission to create a bridge between the moral wealth of the East and material abundance of the West is on the Turks. Because of the favorable geographical position they has a wealth of culture and spirituality.¹⁴

If we look at history, we can see that indeed, the first result of the ideological processes taking place in the East in the beginning of the XX century were received by the Turks. In other words, the first republic combining the Western and Eastern principles was created by the Azerbaijan Turks – Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. We are talking about the ideology “Europeanization – Islamization – Turkization.

It should be add that this ideology was the principle of a lot of Eastern republics: India, Pakistan, Azerbaijan and etc. The famous ideologist of Turkish world Ali bey Huseinzade characterized the movements and efforts in the East in this period as “let’s be with Turkish blood, Islamic faith and French clothes”. This formula that can be accepted as the personification of perfection, united three main principles: national identity, religious faith and the Western culture, practice and science.

CONCLUSION

Thus, in the late XIX and early XX centuries there are two examples of the development and perfection. One of them is the model of the East that is established under the influence of the Western thought and grown with it. If we take account that the entire West and process of

11 Ibid.

12 Ameen Rihani. “Women in the Near East” in Ameen F.Rihani, *The White Way and the Desert* (Washington D.C.: Platform International, 2002), 99-107.

13 Ziya Gökalp. *Türkçülük nedir?* in Hilmi Ziya Ülken, *Seçme Eserleri: Ziya Gökalp* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 2007), 49.

14 Oktay Sinanoğlu. *Bye-Bye Türkçe Bir New York Rüyası* (İstanbul: Otopsi, 2000), 121-122.

globalization stand behind this model, we can imagine its power and scale. Another one is the Eastern model that although considers the socio-political requirement of the time, especially the influence and scale of the Western thought, wants to bring to the fore the specificity of the East and uses the Western advantages only as a component. For them the West is only transition into national and religious roots.