

Family as a Site of Ethical and Spiritual Formation in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Sufi Narratives

Dr. Esin Kurnaz

Üsküdar University, Institute of Sufi Studies, Turkey

Abstract

Religious–ethical Sufi mathnaw?s composed in the sixteenth-century Ottoman intellectual milieu function not merely as literary and devotional texts, but also as narrative frameworks for ethical and spiritual formation. Within these narratives, the family is represented not simply as a sphere of emotional belonging or social continuity, but as a primary site in which moral crises become transformative experiences. Situations such as poverty, child loss, interpersonal conflict, attachment to material possessions, social prejudice, and moral failure are presented as spiritual tests through which virtues including patience (?abr), trust in God (tawakkul), contentment (ri??), humility, and ethical discernment are cultivated. This paper examines selected narratives drawn from sixteenth-century Ottoman religious–ethical Sufi mathnaw?s, including *Pend-n?me* and *?Ibrat-n?me* by Güvâhî, *Mahzenü'l-Esr?r* by A?med-i R??v?n, *He?t Behi?t* by Vizeli Rama??n Behi?t?, *Genc?ne-i R?z* by Ta?l?cal? Ya?y?, *Riy?zü'l-Cin?n* by Cin?n?, and *Mir??tü'l-Ahl??* and *?Ibrat-nüm?* by ?emsedd?n-i Siv?s?. The study argues that these texts should not be approached merely as didactic moral tales, but as examples of narrative ethics in which familial crises operate as mechanisms of ethical self-formation and spiritual maturation. Methodologically, the paper combines close textual analysis with the conceptual framework of narrative ethics and ethical subject formation. It further argues that Ottoman Sufi storytelling constructs crisis not as the collapse of moral order, but as the necessary condition for inner transformation and self-discipline (tazkiyat al-nafs). In this respect, the study demonstrates that sixteenth-century Ottoman Sufi narratives articulate a sophisticated model of relational ethics that continues to offer important insights for contemporary discussions on moral education, family studies, and the ethical function of storytelling.

Keywords: Narratives; Moral Pedagogy; Ottoman Mathnaw?s; Relational Ethics; Sufi Storytelling