

THE DEEP PRINTS OF TRIPOLI WAR ON MUHAMMAD IQBAL

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ABSTRACT:

The people of the subcontinent accepted to be on the side of the Ottoman Empire, as they were pleased and grateful for their ongoing administration since the first Turkish states. The strong bond between the Ottoman Empire and the Muslims of the subcontinent increased even more after the caliphate passed to the Ottoman Empire. During difficult times that countries go through, authors are usually the ones who put societies in action. Muhammed Iqbal, who had a sincere love for Turks, shared the grief of Turks during the Tripoli War. As a reflection of this, Iqbal made a great contribution to forming public opinion by instilling love for Turks into Indian Muslims through the poems in which he gave examples about the heroic epics of Turks. In this study, we aim to reveal the significance of Iqbal's support, which reached to a big crowd of people between Subcontinent Muslims, by studying his poems, written with the same emotions and enthusiasm as Turks, that depict the tough times Turks were going through during the Tripoli War.

Key words: Muhammad Iqbal, Tripoli War, Tripolian Abdullah b. Fatma, Mehmet Akif Ersoy.

Introduction

Indian subcontinent started to be invaded by the West from the 16th century, who came to the region for trade purposes. Under the rule of the British, who took over the region completely in the 19th century, the Muslims of the subcontinent moved from the ruler to the position of being

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ruled, and they came to the point of losing their identity with the privileges given to the Hindus at the administrative levels.

In the same period, the Ottoman Empire started to lose territory with the Crimean War, and entered a difficult process that would continue with the 93 War and the Tripoli Wars. In this process, Muslims of the subcontinent, who were affiliated with the Caliphate and the Ottoman Empire, entered into various political formations to save the Ottoman Empire, especially the Caliphate, from the dangerous process it was in, and made propaganda in this direction through poems.

In order to explain how Muhammed Iqbal felt in his poems about the war, I would like to talk about the Tripoli War first.

Tripoli War

England, which entered Cyprus by taking advantage of the Treaty of San Stefano signed as a result of the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, sided with France in the dominance of Tunisia along with Germany. Although Germany and England declared that Tunisia was now a zone of influence of France, it was known that there was no change in the thought of Italy, which had dreams of owning Tunisia. For this reason, it was necessary to put a bite in front of Italy that would whet its appetite. This bite was Tripoli. For the first time, Italy's attention was tried to be drawn to Tripoli during the Berlin Congress.¹

Tripoli, which is one of the important trade centers of the North African region, joined the Ottoman Empire in 1511 and remained under Ottoman rule until 1911. Apart from the colonization that started in the 16th century, Italy saw that most of the colonies were shared between England and France when it consolidated its political unity in the 19th century. With the invasion of Tunisia by France in 1881 and Egypt by England in 1882, Italy became interested in Tripoli, which became the last piece of land belonging to the Ottoman Empire in North Africa. With the Racconigi Treaty (1909) that Italy made with Russia, Russia's support was also received in this regard.²

Starting from 1910, the Italian government and the press began to openly express their thoughts on Tripoli. The Italian press began to make

¹ Mümtaz Onur Gürer, "İtalyan Krallığı'nın Doğu Akdeniz Politikası (1861-1913)", **Unpublished Master's Thesis**, İzmir 2007, pp. 34.

² Arzu Çiftsüren, "93 Harbinden Sonra Hindistan-Pakistan Alt Kıtasında Urduca ve Farsça Şiirde Türkiye ve Türkler", **Unpublished Doctoral Thesis**, İstanbul 2013, pp. 91.

intense propaganda against the Ottoman Empire in line with its ambitions. They tried to warm the Italian people to the idea of war by expressing due hostile behavior of the rulers of the Ottoman Empire against the Italians, Tripoli was economically backward, interests of the Italians were not protected and they could not stand a possible attack on this region. Thus, the idea that it was a necessity to occupy Tripoli as soon as possible began to emerge in the Italian public opinion.¹

While the Ottoman Empire tried many ways to give up the idea of invading Italy, it did not stay idle during this time and started to take measures against the invasion of Italy. First, the defense of the region was be strengthened by taking precautions against attacks from the sea. Sultan Abdulhamid had arms depots and barracks built in Tripoli and the coastal cities around it, and he had formed armed units similar to the Hamidiye regiments from the tribes in the region against the Armenian attacks in Eastern Anatolia. Despite limited opportunities, he tried to strengthen the region from within by making economic and educational investments. With the Derne ship, food materials, sacks of food, weapons and various ammunition were sent to Tripoli. Receiving this news, Italy tried to prevent the ship from reaching Tripoli, but was unsuccessful and panicked in the face of this measure. Italy, which was worried about the increase in the defense measures of the Ottoman Empire, decided to start the war that it had been preparing for a long time.²

Italy, looking for a reason for war, stated in the note given to the Ottoman Empire that the Ottoman Empire did nothing for the advancement of Tripoli and Benghazi, because of this region was of vital importance for them it was close to the Italian coasts and it was imperative to bring civilization to this region. In addition, Italy stated that the Italian consuls and officials in Tripoli and Benghazi were provoked by Ottoman soldiers and officials against Italy and this would have very grave consequences. They declared war on the Ottoman Empire on September 29, 1911, by declaring that her own citizens had begun to leave Tripoli by getting on the ferries, and that the Italian government had to take precautions against the dangers that might arise.³

Along with important countries of the Islamic world such as Indonesia, India and Afghanistan, all Muslims in the world described

¹ Hale Şıvgın, **Trablusgarp Savaşı ve 1911-1912 Türk-İtalyan İlişkileri**, Türk Tarih Kurumu Publications, Ankara 1989, pp. 38.

²Mümtaz Onur Gürer,**aforementionedthesis**, pp. 99.

³ Mümtaz Onur Gürer,**aforementionedthesis**, pp. 101-102.

Italy's attempt to occupy Tripoli as an attack against the Islamic Caliphate. The Muslims of India showed their reaction as soon as they heard that the war had been declared, two days after the war started, in a meeting held in Calcutta on October 1, 1911 and attended by thousands of people, Italy, which attacked Tripoli, was condemned and the Ottoman Empire was asked to protect the glory and honor of Islam. The Indian Muslims in London, who were extremely upset because of the war, also recorded their feelings to the world by making a press statement. The Muslims of India established the Aid Committee for the Ottoman Red Crescent Society in Calcutta in order to provide the necessary medical assistance to the Muslims who were damaged in the war, and they sent a medical delegation with medical supplies under the chairmanship of Dr. Ahmed Ensari, in May 1912. Indian Muslims also provided cash aid to the Ottoman Empire during the war.¹ In this period, there were people who gave moral support as well as monetary aid.

For example, Mahmood Hassan Deobandi (1851-1920), who was known as Sheikh'ul-Hind, was one of the first students of the Deoband Madrasah founded in 1866 and started to work as a teacher in this madrasah in 1875. He was appointed as the rector of the Deoband Madrasah in 1905 during the Tripoli and Balkan Wars. He called on all Muslims, especially his students and friends, to help the Ottoman Empire. Although Mahmood Hassan had moved to Delhi to manage the affairs, he instructed his students to set up a military camp in Yagistan on the border with Afghanistan. Ubaidullah Sindhi who was his student sent to Afghanistan to carry out diplomatic activities and to become the minister responsible for India of the Indian government which is established in exile.² The main purpose they wanted to achieve with these activities was to prevent any possible attack against India and to be on the same side against the British by establishing friendships with other states.³

In this war, in which the first bombardment was made by plane, the Italians could not penetrate further than the range reached by the navy's artillery and were stuck on the beach. However, the Ottoman was looking for ways to resolve the war peacefully against the possibility of being attacked by the Balkan states. Nevertheless, the young Unionist officers were allowed to go to Libya and organize as insurgents. Among these

¹Zoubeir Khalfallah, "Trablusgarp Meselesi ve Osmanlı Kamuoyunun Tutumu (1878-1912)", **Unpublished Doctoral Thesis**, Istanbul 2009, pp. 175, 176.

²Abdülhamit Birişik, "Mahmûd Hasan Diyûbendi", **DİA**, C. XXVII, 2003, pp. 366-367.

³Kadı Muhammed Adil Abbâsî, **Tahreek-e Khilafat**, Progressive Books, Urdu Bazar, Lahore 1986, pp. 66-67.

volunteer officers were Tripoli Commander Staff Colonel Neş'et Pasha, Staff Major Ali Fethi (Okyar), Captain Nuri (Conker), Benghazi Commander Enver Pasha, Senior Captain Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), Süleyman Askeri and Eşref Kuşçubaşı. Although the Italians were imprisoned along the coast with the Tripoli War, the existence of the state was endangered due to the events that took place outside and inside. For this reason, the Ottoman Government started secret peace negotiations with Italy in July 1912. Peace talks were accelerated when the Balkan states began declaring war one after another at the beginning of October. The Treaty of Ushi (Ouchy/Lausanne) was signed on 15-18 October 1912. According to this treaty, despite the acceptance of Italian domination, it was accepted that a viceroy would be in Libya for the Muslim section, but this person would not have any administrative authority. The Ottoman Government would cut off their aid to the insurgents and withdraw their soldiers.¹

With this treaty, Italy would withdraw its soldiers from the Dodecanes, the Ottoman Empire too would withdraw its soldiers from Tripoli and Tripoli would have an autonomous structure. The Italian Government would respect the religion, customs and traditions of the people in Tripoli, which passed under Italian rule. After the Balkan war, on the rumor of the impression to Greeks occupied the island, until the treaty would be signed between Ottoman Empire and Greece, Dodecanes would be decided give under the Italians. In addition, Tripoli and Benghazi would be evacuated as soon as possible, and the officers and army officers working here would be recalled.²

Indian Muslims, who were a colony of the British administration, one of the most important western powers, provided various aids in the Tripoli War, on the basis of religious brotherhood, by making great sacrifices for the Ottoman Empire.³

Tripoli War in Iqbal's Poems

The love and devotion brought by centuries of mutual culture between Turks and Indian Muslims inevitably reflected on language and

¹Orhan Koloğlu, "Libya", *DİA*, vol. XXVII, 2003, pp. 181-182.

²Şengül Mete, "Trablusgarp Savaşı ve İtalya'nın Akdeniz'deki Faaliyetleri", *The Journal of Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Araştırmaları*, vol. III, issue 8, İzmir 1998, pp. 287.

³Hasan Taner Kerimoğlu, "Trablusgarp ve Balkan Savaşları'nda Hint Müslümanlarının Osmanlı Devleti'ne Yaptıkları Yardımlar", *The Journal of Türk Dünyası İncelemeleri*, Winter 2012, pp. 164.

literature, leading to the formation of a large literature on Turks and the Caliphate in Urdu literature.

On the one hand, while Urdu Literature went through the stages of modernization in the field of verse and prose and continued its development, the interest of the Muslims of India under the British Rule towards the world outside India, especially the Islamic World and the Caliphate center, Istanbul and the Ottoman Empire increased. In order to meet this emerging need, naturally, writers and poets started to focus on the issues related to the Ottoman State and the Turkish nation, which was accepted as the servant of the Caliphate. The urge for information about the disasters that befell religious brothers, especially during the Crimean, Tripoli and Balkan wars, has led to a rapid increase in the number of works on Turkey and Turks.

In this process, during which the Tripoli War took place, poets and writers also did their part and created public opinion with the articles they wrote in favor of the Ottoman Empire. During this period, the greatest support came from Muhammad Iqbal, who was devoted to the Turks. Iqbal was one of the most talented poets of the younger generation who emerged in the early 20th century, using old images in new ways. Iqbal never accepted the Western world's domination and exploitation of the Indian Subcontinent and the Muslim geography through colonialism.¹

He says in his poems, don't burn for the one you love, there are always others. There are messages in his poetry about being trapped in a cage like a bird, flying high like a young hawk. Breaking the chains of social tradition, obsolete religious teachings and political bondage are also among Iqbal's messages.² In his poem which is called "Huzûr-u Risâlet-mâb meyn" (In the presence of the Prophet), Iqbal says that when the Hz. Prophet (PBUH), whom he met in his dream, asked Iqbal what he has brought as a gift, he expresses that he has brought the bottle as a gift that is containing the blood of Turkish martyrs which is not even in heaven and presented to the Hz. Prophet (PBUH). With his imagery and metaphors, Iqbal expresses how much he values the Turkish nation in the poem below.³

¹ Muhsin Ramazan İşsever - Mehmet Kemal Çakmakçı, "İqbal'ın Şiirlerinde Hindistan Bağlamında Batılı Güç İngiltere Eleştirisi", *The Journal of Müttefekkir*, vol. 8/15, Aksaray 2021, pp. 265.

² Gail Minault, "Urdu Political Poetry during the Khilafat Movement", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 8/4, issue 463.

³ Arzu Çiftsüren, *aforementioned thesis*, pp. 121-123.

“Before the Prophet’s Throne

*Sick of this world and all this world’s tumult
I who had lived fettered to dawn and sunset,
Yet never fathomed the planet’s hoary laws,
Taking provisions for my way set out
From earth, and angels led me where the Prophet
Holds audience, and before the mercy-seat.
‘Nightingale of the gardens of Hijaz! each bud
Is melting,’ said those Lips, ‘in your song’s passion-flood;
Your heart forever steeped in the wine of ecstasy,
Your reeling feet nobler than any suppliant knee.
But since, taught by these Seraphim to mount so high,
You have soared up from nether realms towards the sky
And like a scent comes here from the orchards of the earth—
What do you bring for us, what is your offering worth?’
‘Master! there is no quiet in that land of time and space,
Where the existence that we crave hides and still hides its face;
Though all creation’s flowerbeds teem with tulip and red rose,
The flower whose perfume is true love—that flower no garden knows
But I have brought this chalice here to make my sacrifice;
The thing it holds you will not find in all your Paradise.
See here, oh Lord, the honour of your people brimming up!
The martyred blood of Tripoli, oh Lord, is in this cup.’¹*

When the Italians attacked Tripoli, that is today's Libya, Turkish officers and soldiers in the region started the war against the Italians by organizing the Libyan local people. Meanwhile, many Arab women in the region were at the front to help the warring men and heal their wounds. Abdullah, the father of a girl named Fatma who is eleven years old, was

¹Sir `Abd Al-Qadir, *The Call of the Marching Bell (Collected Poetical Works of Iqbal)*,
Translated by V.G. Kiernan, pp. 193.

among these mujahideen. Her mother, along with Fatma, were giving water to the wounded and bandaging their wounds.

One day, around 20 Turkish soldiers under the command of Nuri Bey were fighting along with the Libyans who resisted the Italian attack. Fatma was at the front with these Turkish soldiers too. For a while, the Italians surrounded the Turkish soldiers, but the soldiers did not give up and continued to advance by breaking the circle. Fatma was left behind with four wounded soldiers. While Fatma was trying to make the injured Turkish soldier drink the water in her hand, an Italian soldier came and grabbed Fatma's neck. Fatma, who got angry, showed great courage and took the sword of the Turkish soldier who was lying on the ground, hit the Italian soldier's hand and cut off his hand. Then she continued to give water to the wounded soldier. The angry Italian soldier shot from behind Fatma and killed her.

Muhammad Iqbal also wrote a poem called "Abdullah's daughter Fatma" in memory of Fatma, who was martyred while distributing water to the war veterans who fought against the Italians in Tripoli. In this poem, Iqbal wanted to explain that people can achieve great things with sacrifice and courage, even at a young age. He stated that there are many gems like Fatma under the ashes of the Islamic World, which are being tried to be destroyed. Stating that the martyrs did not die and a stronger nation was born thanks to their sacrifices, Iqbal said that although he was saddened by Fatima's martyrdom, he was also happy that the Islamic world would be exalted thanks to people like her.¹

"Abdullah's Daughter Fatma (The Arab girl who was martyred while giving water to the war veterans in the Tripoli War.)"

Fatima, you are the pride Of the Community God bless it!

Your dust is holy, every particle of it.

You, houri of the desert, were fated to win such merit!

To give the soldiers of Islam water to drink was to be your good fortune.

A jihad in the way of God, waged without sword or shield!

What courage the love of martyrdom gives!

O that in our autumn-stricken garden.

That spark hid in culture of Islam ashes!

¹Muhammad Iqbal, **Bir Şahin** **Sen**, Translated by Halil Toker, Demavend Publications, Istanbul 2014, pp. 49-50.

*In our desert many deer still hide!
And in the spent clouds many flashes of lightning still lie dormant!
Fatima, though our grieving eyes weep tears like dew over you,
Our dirge is also a celebration song.
How thrilling is the dance of your dust,
Every atom of which is charged with life.
There is stirring in your quiet grave:
Within it a new nation is being reared.
Though I know nothing of the range of its ambition,
I see them spring to life from this tomb.
New stars are appearing in the sky above,
Stars whose rolling waves of light have not been seen by the eyes of man;
Stars just risen out of the dark dungeon of time,
Stars whose light is not hostage to day and night;
Stars whose radiance is both old and new,
And partakes of the splendor of the star of your destiny too.”¹*

Iqbal's long poem "Complaint", which he wrote in this period too, expresses the Muslims' complaints to Allah in the face of the helplessness they were in at that time. Iqbal read the poem he wrote at the beginning of 1911 at one of the meetings of the Association for the Protection of Islam. According to Iqbal, the last stronghold of Islam, the Ottoman Empire, was under threat by the Western powers. In addition, the Syrian and Yemeni Arabs revolted against the Ottoman Empire under the influence of the nationalist movement, and other Muslim countries were crushed under the exploitation of the Western imperialist powers. In the face of this situation, which Muslims didn't deserve at all, Iqbal reproached Allah and expressed his complaint.

The heroism of this woman was also reflected in the European press, the newspaper *Le Reveil* (16.3.1912) writes, "The heroism of a young woman, called the Jan Dark of Tripoli, is enthusiastically spoken about, whipping up the courage of Turkish and Arab warriors against the enemy." It is essentially wrong to mention only one woman. Doctor Nihad

¹<https://iqbalrahber.com/the-call-of-marching-bell-fatima-bint-abdullah.php>,
(26.08.2022).

Sezai also mentioned a 12-year-old girl whose name is Brave Fatma in his memoirs with these words:

“The daughter of Abdullah from Tripoli, Fatma, would walk around the lines of fire without fear, carrying water and ammunition to the soldiers even in the hottest times of the battles.”¹

Conclusion

As we mentioned before, Indian Muslims provided all the moral and financial support to the Ottoman Empire, who was the caliphate in the period that started with the Crimean War of 1853 and lasted until the end of the First World War. In this context, we discussed the Tripoli War in our article.

Italy attacked Tripoli, which is one of the important trade centers, using war excuses such as the Ottoman Empire didn't do anything for the advancement of Tripoli and Benghazi, this region was of vital importance to them in terms of it was close to the Italian coasts, and it was imperative to bring civilization to this region.

In this process, the Ottoman Empire, which was already experiencing difficult times with its political problems and minority revolts, was left alone in the international arena and had to sign a peace treaty with Italy as the Balkan States got ready for war against the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the Ottoman state lost Tripoli, which was the last piece of land it had in North Africa.

This whole process in the Ottoman Empire, just like the Crimean War and the 93 War, was followed closely in the subcontinent with curiosity and concern, and the attacks described as "Italian banditry" were condemned with the demonstrations held in various cities of India.

As in the past, the people of the subcontinent did not leave the Ottoman Empire, which was weakened by a great defeat as a result of the Tripoli War, and provided the material and moral support they could. One of the biggest supporters in this period was great poet Allama Muhammad Iqbal. He showed his concerns and love with Ottomans through his poems.

Iqbal's poems are distinctly political. However, when this mood changed and laments began to be swept over the corruption of Islam, Iqbal called on Muslims to trust themselves and express themselves.

¹ Orhan Koloğlu, *Trablusgarp Savası (1911-12) ve Türk Subayları*, Ankara 1979, pp. 61.

This period is one of the best examples of cooperation and solidarity among Muslim countries.

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