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A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Anecdotes of Bayazid Bastami in Attar's Tazkirat al-Awliya Based on Teun van Dijk's Theory

Elahe joudar
Masters graduate in Persian Language and Literature, University of Kashan, Kashan, Iran (Corresponding Author); elahejovdar@gmail.com.
Reza Rouhani
Associate Professor of the Department of Persian Language and Literature,University of Kashan, Kashan, Iran. Email: r.ruhani@kashanu.ac.ir

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Introduction

Critical discourse analysis studies aspects of language that are significant in people's lives and destinies. It is a social scientific theory shaped by power and ideology. Ideology is the set of fundamental political and social beliefs shared within a group. In this sense, ideologies not only reveal a group's understanding of the world but also serve as the basis for that group's social practices (van Dijk, ۲۰۰۳: ۳۱۰). Teun van Dijk is one of the most prominent theorists of critical discourse analysis, placing strong emphasis on content, and in his theory he introduces the concept of the ideological square. Through his ideological square — which consists of emphasizing the negative traits of others and the positive traits of one's own group, while de-emphasizing the positive traits of others and the negative traits of one's own group — he attempts, using various strategies such as rhetoric, evidentiality, argumentation, detailed description, and so on (cf. van Dijk, ۲۰۱٥: ٦٦–۱۱۰), to interpret, decode, and uncover the hidden layers of a text. Van Dijk's goal in uncovering these hidden layers is to combat inequality and domination and to serve the oppressed (cf. Ghajari, ۲۰۱۳: ۹۸).

Bayazid Bastami was a renowned mystic of the Khorasan school, the founder of the concept of fana (annihilation) and the originator of sukr (spiritual intoxication). Sukr refers to a state of ecstasy and self-loss that, in this framework, is held superior to sobriety, while fana refers to annihilation in the divine essence, in which the seeker empties himself of self and his own attributes in order to reach the Truth, seeing only the Truth. Despite following the path of sukr, Bayazid always remained committed to tradition and religious law, and the foundation of his thought was the oneness and unity of God; he never permitted the slightest disrespect toward religious principles. Yet his words sometimes provoked the anger and hostility of certain jurists and literalists, to the point that it is said he was expelled from Bastam seven times (cf. Attar, ۲۰۱۹, vol. ۱: ۱٦٥). Based on the existing anecdotes, it can be understood that the reason for Bayazid's expulsion from Bastam, and the cause of the jurists' hostility toward him, was not any breaking of tradition or abandonment of religious law, but rather the ecstatic utterances (shathiyat) he spoke under the influence of sukr.

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Findings

The findings of this study are based on two main sections:

۱. The Legalistic (Shari'a-oriented) Approach: In Bayazid's school, despite his path of sukr, adherence to the rulings of religious law and the preservation of the limits of divine commandments held a special place. Based on the anecdotes recorded in Tazkirat al-Awliya, Bayazid's commitment to religious law is consistently emphasized, and he considered even the most minor observances of the Prophet's tradition to be essential. As noted, Bayazid was never accused of heresy or opposed for disregarding religious law; rather, it was only his ecstatic utterances and his account of the mystical ascension (mi'raj), spoken while in a state of sukr, that provoked conflict and accusations of unbelief against him.

۲. The Critical Approach:

a) The Elite of the Era: He criticized prominent prayer leaders and renowned mystics — such as Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri, Yahya Mu'adh al-Razi, Shaqiq al-Balkhi, and Ibrahim al-Hariwa — who outwardly aligned themselves with religious principles but secretly used religion as a tool for worldly and carnal ends.

b) Demagogues and the Unworthy: In this section, Bayazid criticizes two groups. The first consists of hypocritical ascetics, reciters, and disciples who acknowledged the truth of religion but, overcome by ego and in pursuit of worldly status, denied its principles or teachings. The second consists of the unworthy and shallow-minded, who lacked the merit to attain divine truths yet sought to obtain them regardless — a group openly criticized in numerous sayings and anecdotes.

Conclusion

By dividing Bayazid's anecdotes into two general categories — the legalistic and the critical approaches — this study has examined and clarified his religious and social outlook. From this perspective, two ideologies govern Bayazid's anecdotes: ۱) A commitment to upholding religious law and tradition, expressing the mystic's religious outlook; ۲) Criticism, exposure, and marginalization of false claimants and predators of religion and mysticism, reflecting Bayazid's role within society.

Overall, based on van Dijk's ideological square and the opposition between in-group and out-group discourse, it can be said that Bayazid, through various strategies — positive and negative attributes, positive and negative representation, evidentiality, opposition, argumentation, repetition, simile, denial, distancing, and so on — marginalized various groups in society that, in one way or another, contributed to leading people astray and fostering suspicion.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Teun van Dijk, Ideological Square, Anecdotes of Tazkirat al-Awliya, Bayazid Bastami.