

**THE ROLE OF THE YASAWIYA DOCTRINE IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE
TURKIC PEOPLES**

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Abstract. The Yasawiya doctrine, founded by Ahmad Yasawi in the 12th century, represents a significant spiritual and cultural phenomenon in the history of Turkic peoples. This study explores the role of the Yasawiya tradition in shaping the religious consciousness, ethical values, and cultural identity of Turkic societies. By analyzing contemporary scholarly literature and historical interpretations, the research highlights the adaptive nature of the Yasawiya order, which facilitated the integration of Islamic principles with pre-Islamic Turkic traditions. The use of the Turkic language in hikmet poetry contributed to the accessibility and widespread acceptance of its teachings among nomadic and semi-nomadic populations. The findings indicate that the Yasawiya doctrine played an essential role in the Islamization of Central Asia, while also influencing social norms, communal cohesion, and literary development. In the modern context, the Yasawiya legacy continues to serve as an important source of spiritual and cultural identity among Turkic peoples, reflecting its enduring relevance.

Keywords: Yasawiya doctrine, Turkic spirituality, Sufism, Ahmad Yasawi, Central Asia, Islamization, hikmet poetry, cultural identity, ethical values, Sufi traditions.

Introduction. The spiritual history of the Turkic peoples represents a rich and multifaceted tapestry shaped by a confluence of indigenous beliefs, Islamic traditions, and Sufi intellectual movements. Among the various Sufi orders that influenced the religious and cultural life of Turkic societies, the Yasawiya (Yasavi) doctrine occupies a particularly significant place. Originating in Central Asia and associated with the teachings of Ahmad Yasawi (12th century), the Yasawiya order played a crucial role in the dissemination of Islam among nomadic and semi-nomadic Turkic communities. Its emphasis on simplicity, ethical conduct, oral transmission, and spiritual introspection made it especially accessible to populations transitioning from pre-Islamic belief systems to Islamic spirituality. In recent decades, renewed scholarly interest in Sufism and its regional manifestations has brought attention to the Yasawiya doctrine as a foundational component of Turkic Islamic identity. Contemporary studies highlight that the Yasawiya order was not merely a religious movement but also a socio-cultural phenomenon that contributed to shaping moral values, social norms, and collective consciousness among Turkic peoples. Its teachings integrated elements of mysticism with practical guidance for everyday life, thereby bridging the gap between abstract theological concepts and lived experience.

One of the defining characteristics of the Yasawiya doctrine is its adaptation to the cultural and linguistic context of Turkic societies. Ahmad Yasawi composed his spiritual teachings in Turkic languages, particularly in the form of poetry known as hikmet (wisdom sayings), which facilitated widespread understanding among the general population. This vernacular approach distinguished the Yasawiya order from other Sufi traditions that primarily utilized Arabic or Persian for scholarly discourse. As a result, the Yasawiya doctrine became deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Central Asia, Anatolia, and other regions inhabited by Turkic groups. The spiritual framework of the Yasawiya order emphasizes key Sufi principles such as asceticism (zuhd), remembrance of God (dhikr), humility, and the purification of the soul (tazkiyat al-nafs). However, what sets the Yasawiya doctrine apart is its strong ethical orientation and its integration with communal life. Followers were encouraged not only to pursue individual

spiritual growth but also to maintain social responsibility, honesty in trade, respect for elders, and compassion toward others. These values contributed to the formation of cohesive communities grounded in shared moral and spiritual ideals.

From a historical perspective, the Yasawiya order played an instrumental role in the Islamization of the Turkic world. During the medieval period, Central Asia was a crossroads of various religious traditions, including Tengrism, Buddhism, and Christianity. The Yasawiya doctrine, with its inclusive and adaptive approach, facilitated a gradual and culturally sensitive transition toward Islam. Rather than imposing rigid doctrinal structures, Yasawi's teachings resonated with existing spiritual sensibilities, allowing for a syncretic integration of beliefs. This process not only accelerated the spread of Islam but also ensured its sustainability within Turkic societies. Modern academic discourse increasingly recognizes the Yasawiya doctrine as a key element in understanding the continuity of spiritual traditions among Turkic peoples. Researchers emphasize that its influence extends beyond purely religious dimensions, encompassing literature, art, music, and social organization. The oral transmission of hikmet contributed to the preservation of cultural memory, while the ethical teachings of the order influenced governance, interpersonal relations, and community leadership. In this sense, the Yasawiya doctrine can be viewed as both a spiritual and cultural institution. Furthermore, the relevance of the Yasawiya tradition persists in contemporary discussions of identity, heritage, and religious revival among Turkic nations. In an era marked by globalization and cultural transformation, there is a growing interest in rediscovering indigenous spiritual frameworks that reflect historical continuity and cultural authenticity. The Yasawiya doctrine, with its emphasis on inner spirituality and ethical living, offers a model that resonates with modern efforts to balance tradition and modernity.

The Yasawiya doctrine represents a foundational pillar in the spiritual development of Turkic peoples. Its historical role in the spread of Islam, its cultural adaptability, and its enduring ethical principles highlight its significance as both a religious and socio-cultural phenomenon. By examining the role of the Yasawiya doctrine, one gains deeper insight into the formation of Turkic spiritual identity and the broader dynamics of Sufi influence in Central Asia. This article aims to explore these dimensions by analyzing the doctrinal features, historical impact, and contemporary relevance of the Yasawiya tradition within the spirituality of Turkic societies.

Literature review. The study of the Yasawiya doctrine within the broader context of Turkic spirituality has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent decades, particularly as part of a wider revival of interest in Sufism and its historical role in shaping Islamic civilization. The Yasawiya order, founded by Ahmad Yasawi, has been examined not only as a religious movement but also as a cultural and social phenomenon that contributed significantly to the Islamization of Turkic societies. Contemporary literature approaches the Yasawiya tradition from multiple perspectives, including historical analysis, textual studies, socio-cultural interpretations, and comparative Sufi studies. Early foundational research on Central Asian Sufism emphasized the role of Sufi orders in spreading Islam among nomadic populations. Scholars such as Annemarie Schimmel highlighted the importance of Sufi poetry and oral traditions in transmitting spiritual knowledge to non-literate communities. Schimmel's work underscores the accessibility of Yasawi's hikmet tradition, which was composed in Turkic languages and designed for broad public engagement rather than elite scholarly circles. This linguistic and stylistic accessibility is frequently identified in modern literature as a key factor in the widespread acceptance of Yasawiya teachings among Turkic peoples. More recent studies have expanded on the historical significance of the Yasawiya order by situating it within the broader framework of Islamic transmission across Central Asia. Researchers such as Devin DeWeese argue that the Islamization of Turkic populations was not a linear or uniform process

but rather a gradual and context-dependent transformation influenced by Sufi networks. DeWeese emphasizes that Yasawiya disciples played a mediating role between Islamic orthodoxy and pre-Islamic Turkic beliefs, facilitating a syncretic integration that allowed Islam to adapt to local cultural environments. This perspective challenges earlier narratives that portrayed Islamization as primarily driven by political expansion or military conquest.

In addition to historical perspectives, contemporary literature also focuses on the doctrinal and ethical dimensions of the Yasawiya tradition. The Yasawiya order is often characterized by its emphasis on asceticism, humility, and moral discipline, which align with broader Sufi principles but are expressed in culturally specific forms. Modern scholars note that Yasawi's teachings emphasize inner purification (tazkiya) and remembrance of God (dhikr) as central practices, while also promoting social ethics such as honesty, compassion, and respect for communal values. These ethical teachings are increasingly analyzed in relation to their impact on social cohesion and identity formation among Turkic communities. Another important area of research concerns the literary and linguistic contributions of the Yasawiya tradition. The hikmet genre, associated with Ahmad Yasawi, has been the subject of philological and literary analysis in recent studies. Scholars have examined how these poetic works functioned as both spiritual guidance and cultural artifacts, preserving elements of Turkic oral tradition while integrating Islamic theological concepts. The use of vernacular Turkic language in religious discourse is widely regarded as a significant innovation that contributed to the localization of Islam in Central Asia. This aspect of Yasawiya literature is often discussed in relation to the broader phenomenon of vernacularization in Islamic intellectual history.

Comparative Sufi studies have also placed the Yasawiya order within a wider network of Sufi traditions across the Islamic world. Researchers compare Yasawiya practices with those of other major Sufi orders such as the Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya, noting both similarities and distinctive features. While all these orders share core Sufi concepts such as spiritual discipline and devotion to God, the Yasawiya tradition is often distinguished by its strong connection to nomadic culture, its oral transmission methods, and its emphasis on simplicity and accessibility. Contemporary scholarship suggests that these characteristics enabled the Yasawiya order to thrive in environments where formal religious institutions were less developed. In recent years, interdisciplinary approaches have further enriched the study of Yasawiya spirituality by incorporating insights from anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. Anthropological research, in particular, has examined the role of Sufi shrines, pilgrimage practices, and communal rituals associated with Yasawiya figures. These studies highlight the continued relevance of Yasawiya heritage in shaping religious practices and collective memory in modern Turkic societies. Shrines associated with Ahmad Yasawi, for example, remain important centers of spiritual activity and cultural identity, attracting pilgrims and serving as symbols of historical continuity. Another trend in recent literature is the exploration of Yasawiya influence in relation to state formation and political culture. Some scholars argue that the ethical and organizational principles of Sufi orders contributed indirectly to governance structures and social organization in medieval Turkic states. The emphasis on moral leadership, justice, and community-oriented values found in Yasawiya teachings is seen as having influenced patterns of authority and legitimacy in certain historical contexts. While this perspective remains debated, it reflects the growing interest in understanding Sufism not only as a spiritual tradition but also as a factor in broader socio-political development.

Modern digital humanities approaches and manuscript studies have facilitated new discoveries related to Yasawiya texts and their transmission. The digitization of manuscripts and increased accessibility of archival materials have allowed researchers to reassess previously understudied sources. This has led to a more nuanced understanding of the textual variations,

regional adaptations, and transmission networks associated with Yasawiya teachings. Such developments demonstrate that the study of Yasawiya spirituality remains an evolving field with ongoing opportunities for new research. The existing body of literature on the Yasawiya doctrine reflects a multidisciplinary and increasingly sophisticated field of study. Early works emphasized its role in the spread of Islam and its poetic tradition, while more recent scholarship has expanded to include historical, linguistic, anthropological, and comparative analyses. The contributions of scholars such as Schimmel and DeWeese have been particularly influential in shaping contemporary understandings of the Yasawiya order's historical and cultural significance. At the same time, ongoing research continues to uncover new dimensions of Yasawiya spirituality, highlighting its enduring relevance in both historical inquiry and modern cultural identity among Turkic peoples.

Research discussion. The findings of this study indicate that the Yasawiya doctrine occupies a central and multifaceted role in the spiritual development of Turkic peoples, functioning simultaneously as a religious, cultural, and social framework. The analysis of historical sources and contemporary scholarly literature suggests that the Yasawiya order, founded by Ahmad Yasawi, was instrumental in shaping the ethical foundations and spiritual worldview of Turkic communities, particularly during the formative period of Islamization in Central Asia. Its doctrinal emphasis on simplicity, moral integrity, and inner purification contributed to its widespread acceptance among diverse social groups. One of the key aspects revealed in the discussion is the adaptive nature of the Yasawiya doctrine. Unlike more formalized theological schools, the Yasawiya order demonstrated a high degree of flexibility in integrating pre-Islamic cultural elements with Islamic teachings. This adaptability allowed the doctrine to resonate with nomadic and semi-nomadic populations whose spiritual traditions were rooted in oral transmission and experiential knowledge. As a result, Yasawiya teachings were not perceived as foreign impositions but rather as a continuation and refinement of existing spiritual practices. This syncretic quality played a decisive role in the gradual and sustainable spread of Islam among Turkic peoples.

The role of language and literary expression also emerges as a significant factor in the effectiveness of the Yasawiya doctrine. The use of Turkic language in the form of hikmet enabled the transmission of complex spiritual concepts in an accessible and culturally relevant manner. This approach strengthened the connection between religious teachings and everyday life, ensuring that spiritual knowledge was not confined to elite scholarly circles but was available to the broader population. In this context, the Yasawiya tradition contributed not only to religious education but also to the development of Turkic literary culture and linguistic identity. Furthermore, the ethical dimension of Yasawiya teachings has had a lasting impact on social behavior and communal values. The emphasis on virtues such as humility, honesty, patience, and compassion fostered a sense of social responsibility and mutual respect within communities. These principles supported the formation of cohesive social structures that were capable of maintaining stability in environments often characterized by mobility and diverse cultural influences. The integration of spiritual and ethical guidance into daily life highlights the practical orientation of the Yasawiya doctrine, distinguishing it from purely theoretical religious frameworks. Another important observation is the continuing relevance of Yasawiya spirituality in contemporary contexts. Modern interest in Sufi traditions, particularly within Turkic societies, reflects a broader search for cultural identity and spiritual continuity in an era of globalization. The teachings of Ahmad Yasawi and the legacy of the Yasawiya order are increasingly revisited as sources of moral guidance and cultural heritage. Sacred sites associated with Yasawiya figures remain active centers of pilgrimage and spiritual practice, indicating the persistence of these traditions in collective memory and lived experience.

At the same time, the discussion highlights that the interpretation of Yasawiya doctrine is not uniform across all scholarly perspectives. Some researchers emphasize its role as a purely spiritual movement, while others analyze its broader socio-political implications. This diversity of interpretations suggests that the Yasawiya tradition should be understood as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon rather than a static set of doctrines. Its historical development reflects interactions between religion, culture, and society, making it a rich subject for interdisciplinary study. The discussion confirms that the Yasawiya doctrine has played a crucial role in shaping the spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions of Turkic peoples. Its adaptability, ethical orientation, linguistic accessibility, and enduring cultural significance collectively contributed to its historical success and contemporary relevance. The findings underscore the importance of viewing the Yasawiya tradition not only as a religious order but also as a comprehensive system of values that continues to influence identity and spirituality in Turkic societies today.

Conclusion. The Yasawiya doctrine represents one of the most influential spiritual traditions in the historical and cultural development of Turkic peoples. Its founder, Ahmad Yasawi, established a Sufi path that emphasized simplicity, ethical conduct, and inner purification, making Islamic spirituality accessible to nomadic and semi-nomadic communities. The doctrine's use of the Turkic language through hikmet poetry played a crucial role in transmitting religious knowledge in a culturally relevant and understandable form. The analysis demonstrates that the Yasawiya order contributed significantly to the Islamization process in Central Asia by integrating Islamic principles with existing cultural traditions. Its adaptability allowed for a gradual and harmonious transition from pre-Islamic belief systems to Islamic spirituality. Moreover, its ethical teachings fostered social cohesion, moral responsibility, and communal identity, which remain relevant in contemporary Turkic societies. In modern scholarship, the Yasawiya doctrine is increasingly recognized not only as a religious movement but also as a socio-cultural phenomenon that influenced literature, social norms, and collective memory. Its enduring legacy highlights the importance of Sufi traditions in shaping both historical processes and present-day cultural identities. Thus, the Yasawiya doctrine continues to serve as a vital link between past spiritual heritage and contemporary expressions of Turkic Islamic identity.

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