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SYMBOLS OF THE HANDKERCHIEF IN TURKISH CULTURE

Abstract:

Accepted as cultural value, the handkerchief which was introduced into Anatolia from Central Asia has still persisted its importance as both functional and symbolic meanings. Even it has been known and used since B.C., introduction of the handkerchief in Turkish life based on Central Asia with the evidence of images in stones belonging to 6.th century.

The handkerchief has introduced in Turkish culture as material item and several symbolic meanings and these symbols which has been still continued in our times can be understood due to the different usage of the handkerchief. It has been also used as communication tool for the people's feelings, emotions and thought. They all have been expressed through the handkerchief.

The handkerchief which was seen in Central Asia with the evidence of images in stones, balbals and miniature has been persisted its existence as a part of Turkish culture. The portrait of Turkish Rulers with smelling a rose in one hand and holding a handkerchief in the other were drawn traditionally. Especially, the handkerchief became essential part of those portrate of Ottoman Empires. In this study, the cultural and symbolic functions of handkerchief will be studied and the importance of the handkerchief in Turkish culture will be explained.

Keywords:

Handkerchief, Symbol, Culture, Symbols of the reign

JEL Classification: Z00, Z00

1.Introduction

The handkerchief basically entering the daily lives of people for cleaning and wiping, has been defined as a small cloth with squared shape used for wiping nose and sweat, drying hand hand and face according to Turkish Language Association.

In additions to this regular role, the handkerchief has involved in several aspects of human life- both symbolically and functionally. It was initially used for the starting and finishing symbol of Roma's games in 6 th century B.C. (Tütüncüoğlu, 2011:12). In those centuries, the handkerchief was used instead of flama which called "mapa" like a napkin or piece of cloth. Following years, the handkerchief called as the "sudarium" being carried in the hands and used together with " toga" to be weared by Rome nobles. It can be concluded from "dipdikonlar" and several sources that wearing of the "sudarium" has been still continued traditionally (Sürür,1997:386). Functionally used for wiping insturement, the handkerchief comes from the Arabic word "Mindil". The drawings of handkerchief and waistband belonged to ancient Uyghurs prove the mark of the handkerchief in Turkish culture. (Ögel,1978: 87).

Figure 1. The example of the handkerchief and waistband belonged to the ancient Uyghurs



The figures of Balbals in handkerchief owned to Gokturks drawn during the Uyghurs are one of the examples show that the symbolic usage of handkerchief for Turks originated from the Middle Asia

Figure 2. The figures of Balbals in handkerchief owned to Gokturks

The dancing figures with handkerchief was found in 6th century and was one of the examples of Middle East Picture arts. These findings demonstrated that the handkerchiefs were used as supporting items in the entertainment scenes (Çaycı,2008:256). Kaşkarlı Mahmud called the handkerchief as “ulatu” in *Divan-Lugati't-Turk* and it was defined as a piece of silk clothes used for wiping noise and carried in chests.

In the old sources, a “çevre” (a surrounding piece of cloth) and “yağlık” (a large napkin), Macramé (Makrama), yemeni(a kind of cotton handkerchief), destimal and destmal words that are all used for the handkerchief.

The handkerchief was named as “savluk” in the *Book of Dede Korkut*, the most famous among the epic stories of the Oghuz Turks (Tütüncüoğlu, 2011:12). In those ages, the handkerchief was a tool that was used for cleaning. It had gained characteristic identification in 11 th century and was also used as symbol and ornament items in 12 and 13 th centuries. (Berker, 1997:8).

The usage of handkerchief which has gained popularity in Turkish society in 14. cc was mostly seen in Persian, Mongol and Ottoman miniature. However, the common usage of the handkerchief in Turkish culture has gained popularity after the Turks settled in Anatolia (Sürür,1997:386).

In the manuscripts of the 15th century, it was called different names. There are a few examples of the handkerchief in the art of Seljuk period.

Figure-3 The example of the handkerchief in the art of Seljuk period

But we can see a bit more examples in Timur period (Çaycı, 2008:258). Several Ottoman miniatures were found and show that Sultans sit and hold a handkerchief . (Figure 4 and 5). The most ancient Ottoman handkerchiefs belonging to 16 th century can be seen in the Topkapı museum today (Baykasoğlu, 2003:421). The handkerchief has become a symbol with several following meanings since Turks have started to use it.

Figure 4. Examples of the handkerchief in Timur period

2.Symbol and Functions Of Handkerchief

2.1.For Children

There are several symbolic and functional meanings of the handkerchief for children. It has very important value in the stories telling children in Turkey . The famous story here, Keloğlan carries his materials with a large handkerchief on his shoulder by tying its four edges together. In the another children story, the magic handkerchief that the mermaid gives her lovers is imagined to open all doors. (Alptekin, 2002:266). It is accepted to be the most beautiful toys in the street games for the children. The handkerchief is also as very vital and indispensable item in the traditional child games such as “*I sell oil, I sell honey, my chief is dead so, I sell them*” and “*Catching The Handkerchief*“. It is one of the initial items for the child during the first year of their education as much as notebooks, pencils and erasers.

In the feasts, the nice smelling handkerchiefs are also one of the valuable gifts for the children.

Figure 5. Example of Children Games playing in the Parks



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2.2.The handkerchief in Turkish folks

The handkerchief is an essential figure for in Turkish folk dances. The handkerchief can be found as a common items for different local dances belonging to every parts of Anatolia. One of the traditional folk games “Halay”, meaning many people, unity, union and cooperation. The first dancer in the “Halay” has a handkerchief in hands and swinging it according to the rhythm of the music (Karaköse,2003:9). The meaning of the handkerchief in the hand of each dancers is happiness and cheers.

Figure 6. The handkerchief in Turkish folk dances



2.3. Complementary functions of handkerchief for clothings

Beside its symbolic meanings between man and woman, the handkerchief serves as a clothes ornament and as a complement. The colours, dimensions and usage purposes are different for man and woman. In the European man clothings, it is accepted as elegant, and impressive to use the white linen or silk folded handkerchief into the left side of jacket during particular periods (Koçu,1969:172). The handkerchief with silk and gold embroidered or side lace completes the woman's clothes by attaching pins with decorated valuable stones.

The handkerchiefs are prepared in with different sizes and ornamented with different processes in respect to their colours, models and purpose of usage.

The handkerchiefs are sometimes carried in pockets, sometimes covered over belt or shoulder and sometimes held in hand. Some people wear the handkerchief around their **neck** thinking that it is a sign of elegance and an elite position in the society (Tanrıbuyurdu,2010:199).

Figure 8. Complementary functions of handkerchief for clothings



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2.4. The handkerchief as means of communication.

The handkerchief was also used like a letter as a means of communication. Messages were sent to between lovers with handkerchief and it served as a communication language (Çetindağ,2008:337). Depending on its colour, it reflects emotions of love, joy, longing, sorrow, regret and hope in Turkey.

The meanings of the handkerchief according to colours are explained below:

White handkerchief: I love you

handkerchief with pink sides: I can't live without you

Yellow Handkerchief: I am sick for a few days. That is why I am not available.

Handkerchief with green sides: I am totally devoted to you

Green handkerchief: I am waiting for a letter from you.

Blue handkerchief: I can't be happy without you.

The handkerchief can be used among the youngsters as “gifts, souvenirs” and also as a way of communication. The boy wishing to meet sends the handkerchief with the side burned which means a proposal to dateing and if the girl accepts this gift, it means yes.

2.5.The handkerchief as a symbol of the relationship ending

It is clear that the handkerchiefs, which exist in all parts of daily life are not only used as an ornament. It also has been used to share emotions and wipe tears of the crying people (Tanrıbuyurdu,2010:199). It is a witness to affiliation, hope, love and also to pain, sepearation. It is the best friends of the sepearation days for people to wipe their tears after breaking up their relations.

Even representing sepearation, it also has little affiliation in the sense that using handkerchief is directly related to emotions. The flowers or any other motives embroidered at the handkerchief are the symbols of love (Çetindağ,2008:341).

Figure 10. The handkerchief as a symbol of separation



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The handkerchief in the dreams is attributed to the sepearation in relationships according to the Turkish culture. Because the tears dropping from the eyes due to the pain and sepearation are symbolized by wipping with it. For these reasons, it is accepted as a secret friend inside tears during sepearation in relation and missing. On the other hand, as receiving a handkerchief is accepted as a curse, people tries to protect themselves by paying a symbolic amount of money to the people who bring the handkerchief. It is still believed to be as superstitiusion that the receiving handkerchief in this way leads to the sepearation (Sürür,1997:392).

2.6.The handkerchief in the poems

Turkish people dealing with the art in every periods has also used the art for public interests. They have used their motions with literacy and often included the symbol of handkerchief in the poems. In the classic Turkish poems, the handkerchief has also been gained importance for exploring special meanings.

The famous poetries used it as “destmal” like a code for the language which reveals different meaning for its colours and motives (Tanrıbuyurdu,2010:196). For

this reason, in Turkish literature especially in the poems, the handkerchief has always been a symbolic element conveying a different interpretations.

Example:

*When the day comes to weigh anchor from time,
A ship sailing into the unknown leaves this harbor.
It sails silently as if there is no passenger;
Neither a handkerchief nor a hand is waved in that departure.*
(The Silent Ship by Yahya Kemal Beyatlı)

Throughout history, it has been used in order to express love in folklore literacy. In poems, folk song and *Mani* (a traditional Turkish quatrain form), Folk performers express their loves message to lover or shares his pain with silk and figures embroidered in the corner of the handkerchiefs. In this sense, it is kind of a confidant sharing people demands, wishes and emotions (Çetindağ,2008:337).

2.7.The handkerchief in Turks

The symbolic and functional meanings of the handkerchief has always been used in most of the folk songs . Thoughts to be expressed in the songs has been transmitted through the handkerchief. The handkerchief's motives has been interpreted and called differently in every regions. It expresses separation in some regions, sandness in other regions and hopeness in others.

It s the indirect tool of expressing emotions for the society that are enable to express their feelings directly (Karaköse,2003:9). The most enjoyable emotions have been transformed through the the handkerchief in the folk songs.

Examples:

*On the way to Uskudar, I found a handkerchief
And I filled the handkerchief with lokum.*

Two cherries on a branch, one red, one white
If you love me write your letters frequently
Come on wave your handkerchief
Night's come, come on, send my lover to me

2.8.The handkerchief as a Cleaning tool

Today, the handkerchief in the home and in the museums have a different shapes and functions. The cleaning function of the handkerchief has recently been reduced and replaced with new items but its classical symbolic meaning has still continued.

According to the oldest samples and evidences, the handkerchief known as the "ulatu" in 10th century was made of linen, cotton and silk clothes with different shapes for cleaning (Sürür,1997:388). Sweating skin due to the working, feelings of shame can be kept clean with a handkerchief.

2.9. The handkerchief as symbol of the reign

From Central Asia to Anatolia, the handkerchief has been used and existed with both functional and symbolic meanings in the Turkish culture. The handkerchief with different functions and varieties influenced Turkish life and began to create its own culture through Ottoman palace. Therefore, this culture accessed all parts of Anatolia such as cities, towns and villages from Ottoman palace (Baykasoğlu,2003:421). The image of handkerchief was initially found on cave paintings in Turk arts and was later seen in the Balbals' hands.

The figures of the sultan with handkerchief on the ceramics remained from the Anatolian Seljuq art was seen and then became indispensable part of the Ottoman sultans' figures in Ottoman portre art.

The figure of Turk kings kneeling and holding a handkerchief in one hand and a goblet in the other became a typical king symbol (Atasoy,1971:114).

Figure 10. The figure of Turk kings with handkerchief



Later on, the handkerchief on the right hand in the portraits of Ottoman empires represent the power of the sultans (Sürür,1997:390). The Portrait of Mehmed II, painted by Gentile Bellini is one of the famous examples representing this tradition. Portrait of Sultan Süleyman (Suleiman the Magnificent) painted by painter Osman, in 1579 is another sample which the sultan sit with their knees bent, holding a handkerchief or a flower in their hands. In following periods, this figure can be seen in all the Ottoman empires as a culture.

Figure 11. The Portrait of Mehmed II, painted by Gentile Bellini

3. Summary and Conclusion

Being one of the special characters, language separates human beings from other species. The regular way to define emotions and thoughts of human beings is the direct speech but there is some exceptional cases that even words are not enough to explain the feelings exactly. Verbal expression may be forgotten or lost its impact has lost in a long term. For this reason, human wish to last their expression for a long time and become more concrete. So the emotions may be expressed through some symbols. Symbolic expression is different from regular language and has the hidden meanings. Symbolic way of expression may be preferred to verbal communication to describe love, longing and separation (Çetindağ, 2008: 333).

In this sense, the handkerchief is utilized as a symbol with multiple meanings. The handkerchief also has an impact on the Turkish culture as several symbolic meanings and these meanings which started to affect daily lives by using it as a symbol of power both from the Anatolian Seljuq and the Ottoman Sultans. It has also remained an integral part of the Turkish culture by using in folk dancing, song and games.

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