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Exploring the Publication Trends of *Ṣūfī* Studies in European Languages: A Research-Based Analysis

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Exploring the Publication Trends of Ṣūfī Studies in European Languages: A Research-Based Analysis

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Abstract:

This paper examines the publication trends of *Ṣūfī* studies in European languages, analysing the development and dissemination of research work on Sufism in Europe from historical and contemporary perspectives. Sufism has been the interest of the Western academia as reflected in the publication of Western writes. Their approach to perceiving the phenomenon of Sufism remained different in terms of their cultural, religious, and empirical context. The study investigates the thematic focus, methodologies, and cultural contexts influencing the publication of *Ṣūfī* studies in European languages, highlighting key authors, and publishers involved in this field. By conducting a comprehensive literature review and bibliometric analysis, the paper identifies shifts in scholarly interest and the evolution of discourse around Sufism in European academic circles. The findings reveal the unavailability of authentic classical *Ṣūfī* texts based on the principles of the divine law and prophetic conduct as a gap that led to a specific comprehension of Sufism in Western literature from cultural exchange, academic scholarship, and the broader socio-political landscape in shaping the study of Sufism in Europe. This research contributes to a better understanding of how *Ṣūfī* studies have been approached, perceived, and evolved in the European scholarly community, providing insights into the future directions of this dynamic field.

Keywords: *Ṣūfīsm, Europe, Literature, Classical, Socio-Political.*

Introduction

Western world encounters with the Muslim world have been going through various vicissitudes in their relations. However, the intellectual crusade had a deep impact based on fostering tools to subjectivity, and biasedness. Islamic legacy of knowledge and research undergone through a specific research lens producing hate-based literature. An objective analysis of this statement needs attention for researchers to ponder critically.

A brief survey of the history of *Ṣūfī* sources reveals the contribution from travelogues by Western diplomats, merchants, and tourists and later by orientalist. Sufism and its introduction started in the West with the writings of these people whose scholarship and authenticity require a thorough investigation who have approached the subject of *Ṣūfī* literature beyond Persia.

The following pages focus on the link of Sufism with the West i.e., the publication of *Ṣūfī* texts which became the source of grasping in-depth knowledge of the mystical traditions of Islam, and acquaintance with its concepts and teachings. With the help of these sources, one can find which view of Sufism was formed and developed in the West and how another shift in views took place after many unpublished manuscripts became accessible.¹

1. Sir William Jones

He is well well-known name as an expert of the Persian language and a translator of mystical texts in Europe. He introduced his works in Europe. He is an expert in

comparative religion and a linguist who studied Persian and Indian philosophies and traced commonalities between them. The peculiarity of his study is that he associates the East with the West to find similar roots.

2. F. R. Tholuck

He was a German scholar and the name of his book in German language is *Ṣufismus, sive Theosophia Persarum Pantheistica*. He studied Sufism in the Persian context and mixed it with philosophy, pantheism, and Neoplatonism and associated it with pantheistic philosophies having the elements of both oneness and polytheism. Sir Jones and F. R. Tholuck were highly influential and respected and enjoyed socioeconomic privileges in the society that became one of the reasons for to spread of their ideas in the West.

3. Sir Gore Ouseley

He was an orientalist born in 1770 and died in 1844. He had a chance to live in India as an assistant to a British ambassador. He was talented and intelligent and learned Persian and Arabic. He devoted his time to learning about the culture and customs of Persian and Indian people.

His courteous and winning manners, combined with a ripe of knowledge Of Eastern languages and customs, stood him in good stead; and gradually he came under the favorable notice of Lord Wellesley, the Governor-General.²

Having a deep inclination in music since his childhood, he specialized in music and edited certain cathedral services and anthems of earlier masters of England works and composed other works that became standards for later scholars published by the Clarendon Press. Considering his services for the promotion of the Persian language in Europe, he was awarded high rewards from Persian rulers.

In 1812 and 1814 Sir Gore Ouseley was honored with the insignia of the Royal Persian Order of the Lion and the Sun.³

He is said to be the publisher of the Persian poetry of Sheikh *Sa'adī Shīrāzī*, 'The Rose Garden. So, it was the first introduction of Persian *Ṣūfī* poetry through which Sufism became known to the West. "He himself published an interesting work on the "Persian Poets."⁴

He spoke high words for Persian poets because of their moral and intellectual themes and eloquent styles. He was unable to put them better than each other. His comparison of these Persian figures in terms of their contribution to these genera is self-explanatory when he is asked to give his opinion about *Hāfiẓ*, *Sa'adī*, and other great figures of Persian literature. He keeps mentioning several qualities as he was an expert linguist to point out certain merits and demerits of poetic genera.

Even now I am divided between a consciousness of my insufficiency of judgement, and a dread that you would consider my silence as an affectation of my modesty.... I am for from having that knowledge of it which entitles a man to judge of its excellencies and defects'. It is rich in elegancies, moral and entertaining, replete with sublime, though fanciful imaginations.⁵

The book extensively provides details of many Persian poets and their works and achievements. As the title suggests, he also gave critical comments on their works to give a deeper sense of understanding and appreciation of their contribution to Persian literature. He also provides translations of some Persian couplets while quoting exact Persian lines to share the literary taste of Persian poets.

The book serves as a basic source for having an overall insight into Persian poetry and for that, he concentrates on a particular poet or a group of poets and discusses their lives and works such as *Firdausī*, *Sa'adī*, *Hāfīz*, *Rūmī*, *Qāsim al-Anwar*, and his *Dīwān*, the Diwan of Meghrabi, Odes of 'Abdul Wasa and many more. In biographical details, he highlights mystical aspects of their lives which introduced them as *Ṣūfīs*. The information he gathered from different people about the life of these poets, becomes the biographical knowledge. About the life of Meghrabi, he writes:

Hājī Lutf 'Alī in his "Memoirs of the poets" says that the poet Meghrebi was a *Ṣūfī* of some celebrity at Tabraiz. His name was Muhammad Shirān and he flourished in the reign of Sulṭān Shahrukh, the son of Amīr Taimūr (Tamerlane).⁶

Overall, this book became a valuable source on Persian literature, history, culture, and Sufism.

4. Edward Henry. Palmer

He was the son of a schoolmaster, born in Cambridge in 1840. He is considered to be one of the pioneers of publishing and introducing Islamic Sufism in the West. He was well-versed in Arabic and Persian languages and produced Arabic poems. He was known as a scholar on Islam.

He wrote an Arabic poem in the metre ramal, describing the cataloguing and ended it by fitting his own name and that of Trinity into the metre. This was characteristic of Palmer, who, as one of the first major Islamic scholars not to be in religious order.⁷

He worked extensively on Sufism translating Persian *Ṣūfī* poetry in the Eagle magazine At Cambridge University. One of his notable works on Sufism is *The Diwān of Abul-'Ala*. It is a translation of the poetry of famous Arabic poet and philosopher *Abul-'Ala al-Ma'arrī*. He discusses philosophical and mystical themes.

In the same year, 1867, he published his *Oriental Mysticism*, curiously dedicated to the Emperor Napoleon III. He had become interested in Sufism while preparing his catalogues of manuscripts, and books summarizing the works of Aziz b. Muhammad al-Nasafi with carefully chosen paragraphs.⁸

"The Qur'ān" is another book, although it does not primarily talk about mysticism but it includes many of the *Ṣūfī*-inspired passages to describe the inner journey of the soul and how to achieve nearness of divinity. "*The Mystical Poems of Rumi*" - This book is a translation of the poetry of *Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī*. Palmer's translation includes an introduction in which he discusses the *Ṣūfī* concepts of love, union, and spiritual transformation that are central to Rumi's work.

5. E.H. Winfield

He worked on Persian poetry and translated the poetry of famous Persian poets. Like many other Western scholars, he also had deep relations with poetic literature alongside its philosophy. He introduced *The Mystic Rose Garden* written by *Sa'ad ud dīn Mehmūd Shabistrī*. This introduction developed the concepts of Sufism in Europe about theosophy, metaphysics, and *Ṣūfī* poetry only with Persian reference. His translations of Rumi's poetry were published in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and helped to introduce Rumi's work to English-speaking audiences. Winfield also translated the works of other Persian poets, such as Hafiz and Saadi, who were influential in the development of *Ṣūfī* literature. His translations of these poets helped to popularize Persian concepts of Sufism in the West and contributed to the growing interest in

Sufism among Western scholars and writers.

Mathnawī M'anawī (The Spiritual Couplets of *Maulānā Jalāl ud Dīn Muhammad Rūmī*) is his well-known translation with abridgment published by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Lt. Paternoster House, Charing Cross Road. London in 1898. In the introduction, he writes a special note on Sufism which developed an idea of what Sufism could be. He explains it as renouncing the world and working for a mystical union with God.

It is specially addressed to *Ṣūfīs*, men who aimed at following the more perfect way as opposed to the moderate practice of average Muhammadans, men who professed to renounce the world and seek knowledge of God and union with Him in a life of self-mortification and spiritual meditation.⁹

Through such an introduction, Sufism is perceived as having some links with pantheism and is the life that leads toward an ascetic tendency detached from material worldly affairs. He understood Sufism as something similar to the Christian conception of spirituality.

6. Robert Alfred Vaughan

He is a nineteenth-century British writer and theologian whose works of Sufism are known as "*The Hours with the Mystics': A Contribution to the History of Religious Opinion*". It was so popular in the West that from 1856-1895, that its seven editions were published. When we look at the content of the book it is extracted from the works of his three predecessors i.e., F.R. Tholuck, Sir John Malcolm and Sir William Jones. These writers are the main sources of his concepts of Sufism; thus, he rearranged their ideas and combined them in this book.

In the preface of this book, he writes about the objectives of his work in the following words:

It should be borne in mind that my design does not require of me that I should give an account of all who are anywhere known to have entertained mystical speculation, or given themselves to mystical practice. I have endeavored to portray and estimate those who have made epochs in the history of Mysticism, those who are fair representatives of its stages or transitions, those whose enthusiasm has been signally benign or notoriously baneful.¹⁰

A brief overview of the content reveals that he was intellectually influenced by earlier contributors in the field of Sufism who introduced Sufism with different perspectives and he combined them with a holistic image of Sufism such as definition, etymology, and understanding of Christian mysticism, classification of mystics, Theopathic Mysticism, Book II. Early Oriental Mysticism, Book III. The Mysticism of The Neo-Platonists. Book IV. Mysticism In the Greek Church. Book V. Mysticism in The Latin Church. Book VI. German Mysticism in The Fourteenth Century. Views of God and the Universe, Immanence of God.

The book was well-received at the time of its publication and is still considered a classic of Christian mystical literature. Vaughan's writing is known for its clarity and accessibility, and his insights into the works of the mystics have helped to shape the modern understanding of comparative mysticism.

7. Adam Olearius

He was a German orientalist and traveler. He is one of the most important figures who introduced Persian poetry not in Europe. Later romantic poets of Europe were

influenced by Persian poetry. He belonged to the 16th century time period and worked as a diplomat in Iran. He was skilled in Russian and Persian language and transmitted his works to Russian readership.

Adam Olearius was a little of all that himself. A doctor of philosophy of Leipzig University and the assistant headmaster of a good school he was already a scholar of renown when, at 35 years of age, he joined the Holstein mission as its chief secretary. On the journey, he added to his store of classical and modern Western languages a considerable knowledge of Russian and Persian, and also proved to be a skillful diplomatist.¹¹

He is one of the early orientalist who is known to be the pioneer of introducing Persian Sufism in the West.

Olearius's most significant work is his translation of the Persian poet Sa'adī's "*Gulistān*" (The Rose Garden) and "*Bostān*" (The Orchard), which were published in 1654 under the title "Garten der Rose" (The Garden of the Rose). These translations helped to introduce Persian poetry to German readers the Persian aspects of Sufism to the philosophical world of Germany.

But two books which had earned him European acclaim: the first translation into a Western language of the *Gulistan* by the 13th-century Persian poet Saadi, and a detailed narrative of the trade mission's journey to Russia and Persia.¹²

As a secretary to the Ambassador, he visited Iran in 1633 and worked on *Sa'adī's* book *Gulistān* the first book ever published in German language in 1654 and 1660. Later, in his notes and commentaries, he introduced many Persian poets like, *Firdausī*, *Sa'adī*, *Ḥāfiẓ Shirāzī*, and *Nizāmī* etc. His book, *the voyages & travels of the ambassadors sent by Frederick Duke of Holstein* is the basic source of introduction to these poets in Europe. It describes the diplomatic mission of two ambassadors, Adam Olearius and Heinrich von Danckelmann, who were sent by Frederick III, Duke of Holstein-Gottorp, to explore and establish trade relations with the Persian Empire in the 17th century. Primarily it is divided into two parts. The first part describes their journey from Altona, near Hamburg, to *Isfahān*, the capital of Persia, which took place between 1633 and 1639. The second part substantiates their return journey, which took place between 1641 and 1647. One glimpse of his impressive introduction to *Sa'adī* and his *Gulistan* captioned as the best authors from this book is as under:

For the excellency of their Language, Pregnancy of conceit, and Elegance of expressions, they read the *Gulistan* of Sheik Saadi, whom they prefer before all their other Authors. It is a very Eloquent piece, though in Verse, full of figures and enriched with History, and Maxims of Policy and Morality. Accordingly, there is not any one almost, but hath this Book; nay some have perused and studied it so much, that they have it by Heart, and apply the Passages, Sentences, and Comparisons thereof, in their ordinary Discourse, so pertinently, that it is no small pleasure to hear them talk.¹³

Similarly, he writes about other best poets of Persia with the same novel style and highlights the literary standards that one can no longer wait to have them all to read and understand their themes. This was a major contribution of Adam that even, Western poets were influenced by these poets and copied their expressions in their poetry. These vivid details about the culture, customs, politics, religion, studying the Qur'ān, and memorization of *Sa'adī's* poetry in long sittings gave it popularity that the book was accepted as the best travel literature.

The above-mentioned discussion reveals the fact that overall; these books were introduced as primary source books of Islamic Sufism. They do not primarily contain substance on Sufism except *Rūmī* and *Sa'adī*, since they were very scholarly personalities who wrote on Sufism but they also discussed other subjects like philosophy, metaphysics, comparative studies, and brought far-fetched ideas from various cultures and traditions to achieve the objectives of their writing i.e., moral and spiritually uplifting the society. They added fables from China, and India and the stories of kings, *Ṣūfī* masters, and their disciples. In the history of Sufism, these books were not considered as a basic textbook to comprehend the principles of the subject.

8. Joseph von Hammer

He translated *Dīwān e Ḥāfīz* in two volumes and added introductory notes and commentary of almost two hundred Persian poets. This was another impactful work on Persian poets comprehensively introduced in Europe. He was well-recognized in German academia and his works were celebrated by a large number of readers.

Joseph von Hammer (1774–1856), Hammer-Purgstall after 1835, was without exaggeration the most eminent scholar of Oriental Studies Austria can boast. This is due to his tremendous productivity on the one hand and the vast variety of his interests and activities on the other. It is hard to imagine any scholarly enterprise concerning Oriental matters in the first half of the nineteenth century without Hammer-Purgstall being involved.¹⁴

Hammer's translation of the *Dīwān e Ḥāfīz* was regarded for its accuracy and attention to detail. It was also praised for its literary quality, as Hammer was not only a scholar but also a poet in his own time. His translation introduced *Ḥāfīz's* poetry to wider readers in Europe, and it played an important role in the development of the European Romantic movement. He writes in his introduction that almost he wrote seven hundred poems of *Ḥāfīz* from his Diwan. Some scholars viewed *Ḥāfīz* as a free thinker and he did not intend to write from a religious perspective, however, some modern scholars such as Schimmel gave a different opinion and argued that vivid mystical elements were incorporated in his poetry.

Annemarie Schimmel stressed the multifaceted and manifold possibilities of interpretation of *Ḥāfīz's* poetry. She was very much convinced that *Ḥāfīz's* poetry was strongly embedded in the mystical literary tradition of *Shīrāz* and had a strong mystical element and gave several examples of the diverse possibilities for interpreting his poems.¹⁵

After these sources were published in the West, many British and American poets and writers introduced the works and mystical philosophies of Persian literary figures such as Samuel Taler, Coleridge, Emerson, etc. This long period established that the extensive link of the West with the East especially with Muslim world was only through Persia and Persian literature. Original texts of Sufism written in Arabic were not accessible to the West since they were not published and were lying in the libraries as manuscripts. We cannot find a reasonable example that during this period any mother source of Sufism was introduced to the West. Had there been any source, it must have been quoted and mentioned in this travel history.

To conclude, one can say that the first main source of introduction to Sufism in the West was Persian poetry which developed its conception, its evolution history, and its thoughts from the lens of Persian history.

Conclusion

This research provides a comprehensive analysis of the publication trends in *Ṣūfī*

studies in European languages, revealing significant insights into the development and evolution of this field. The study highlights how *Ṣūfī* studies have evolved from early Orientalist approaches to more nuanced and interdisciplinary methodologies that incorporate cultural, historical, and philosophical perspectives. It also underscores the impact of socio-political contexts on the level of scholarship of these writers who did not have access to classical *Ṣūfī* texts that explain the origin of Sufism with reference to the Quran and Sunnah in shaping discourse on Sufism within European academia. The findings suggest that while there has been a notable increase in the diversity and depth of *Ṣūfī* studies, challenges remain in ensuring that these works reflect the understanding of Sufism in the context of its original sources unpublished in that era. There is a need for greater inclusivity in the Western discourse, involving voices from within the Muslim world and a fresh look at Sufism and its origin adopting approaches that go beyond traditional Eurocentric frameworks. Future research should focus on expanding the geographical scope and methodological approaches to *Ṣūfī* studies, promoting a more holistic understanding of Sufism as a dynamic and multifaceted spiritual tradition. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper appreciation of the evolving landscape of *Ṣūfī* studies in European languages and offers a foundation for further scholarly inquiry in this vibrant field.

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