

Sufi Arabic writings in India: An introduction

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Background

This is an established fact that the Muslim *Ummah* has almost collapsed spiritually throughout the world; the aggressive wave of materialism has uprooted the weak-rooted *Imān* of the *Ummah*. The relations of human heart with the Almighty, the creator of the universe have become feeble. The same happened with the relations of human life with the soul and the relations of society with the ethical values; the sense of sincerity and introspection is lost somewhere, internal diseases such as; jealousy, parsimony, show off, pride, egoism, flattery, psycho fancy, hypocrisy and the slavery to money and muscle spread all over. The heart & soul fell sick, the physician is missing, people piled in the wreckage of the world, the learned people engaged in competing each other in gathering wealth & gaining status and they were engulfed with lust and greed. Thus, one of the important parts of the prophetic tradition came to a halt. That is refinement of soul, call to *Ihsān* and internal reform. Similarly, the work of Islamic *D'awah* came to standstill since long, superstitions spread in the Muslim society and the countries where Islam entered recently. The remedy to all the diseases mentioned above is:

و لكن نونوا ربانيين بما كنتم تعلمون الكتاب و بما كنتم تدرسون (سورة آل عمران: 79)

It is not [possible] that a man, to whom is given the Book, and Wisdom, and the prophetic office, should say to people: "Be ye my worshippers rather than Allah's":

on the contrary [He would say] "Be ye worshippers of Him who is truly the Cherisher of all: For ye have taught the Book and ye have studied it earnestly. (¹)

Introduction

The Arabic literary treasure in India contains writings pertaining to various fields especially, Islamic sciences. However, *Sufi* literature has all along been a grey area, seldom drew the attention of scholars comparing to its sister Persian or for that matter Urdu for obvious reasons. The history of Arabic *Sufi* writings in India finds its origin in the works of 14th century Sufi, a poet and a prominent Shafi'i Muslim scholar Mir Syed Ali bin Shahab-ud-Din Hamadani. He preached Islam in Kashmir and influenced its culture. He was followed by number of noted writers such as; Sirajuddin Umar b. Ishaq (²) the author of *لوائح الأنوار العارفين من لطائف الأسرار* *Lawaih al anwār fi al radd-i ala man Ankara ala al ʿarifeen min latʿaif al asrār* (Regulations of lights in response to the one who denies those who know the Divine secrets). Later on, many eminent scholars stepped into this arena like; Shah Waliullah of Delhi, Sheikh Sanaullah of Panipat, Sheikh Mohammed b. Fadlullah of Burhanpur, Sheikh Mohibbullah of Allahabad, Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi and many others.

Most of the books deal, quite often, with specific issues for example ; the work of Sirajuddin elucidates the zeal and vigour of Sufis to *Laylatul Qadr*. Shah Waliullah reveals some important aspects of Sufism and its different orders. Sheikh Sanaullah of Panipat underlines the relations between *Murshid* and

¹ Abdullah, Yusuf Ali, The English Tra. Of the Holy Qur'an, P. 26.

² Sirajuddin al Hindi, Abu Hafs, Umar b. Ishaq b. Ahmed al Ghaznavi , The chief justice of Hanafite Creed in Cairo was one of the eminent Indian scholars . He shot to fame for his expertise in Islamic Jurisprudence. He is considered at par with al-Wajeeh al Razi, Siraj al Thaqafi and Al Zeen al Badwani the Indian scholars became famous in different parts of the Arab nation. He was born in 704 H and died in the night of 7th Rajab 773H.

Murshad. Sheikh Muhibbullah draws the life sketch of 18 eminent Sufis. The work of Ali Miyan tries to remove the misconception revolves around the terminology “Sufi” and reckons with the valuable contribution of eminent Sufis to the social reform. Other Arabic works on Sufism deal with other aspects of Sufism. Thus, the works, though not much in number, assume much significance as; they cover almost dimensions pertaining to this specific genre and hold a sublime place in the Sufi literary corpus.

Contributions

The Arabic *Sufi* writings in India start its journey from commentaries on the noted works of Arab and Non-Arab writers. They simplified the complicated issues discussed by those writers and made them accessible to the learners and to those who wanted to venture out in this specific branch of learning. The given short list of commentaries written by Indian *Ulema* gives us an insight to the valuable services made by them. ⁽³⁾

List of commentaries written in Arabic in India

Commentaries	Authors
1. <i>Ainul Fusus sharhul Fusus</i>	Sheikh Abul Mahasin shrfuddin of Delhi
2. <i>Sharhul Fusus</i>	Sheikh Muhibbullah al Umari of Allahabad
3. <i>Al- Marif Sharhul Awarif</i>	Sheikh Mohammed Yusuf al Huseini of Delhi (died in Gulbarga)
4. <i>Izahatut Daqaiq Sharh Jan-e-Jahan Numa</i>	Sheikh Alauddin b. Ahmed al Shafei al Mahaemi
5. <i>Al tahliya Sharh al Taswiyah</i>	Maulwi Abdul Haleem b. Ameenullah of

³ Al Hasani, Abdul Hai, *Al thaqa al Islamiyah fil Hind*, P.187-192.

<i>of Muhibbullah of Allahabad</i>	lucknow
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Their efforts did not remain confined to the commentaries and expositions rather they also penned down some treatises and books on the topic. The following small list of books is sufficient to underline their engagement with this discipline dawn the ages in India. ⁽⁴⁾

List of treatises and books written in Arabic in India

Books	Authors
1. <i>Mazharun Noor</i>	Sheikh Qamruddin of Aurangabad
2. <i>Al Raudh al Majud fi Haqeeqatil wujood</i>	Sheikh Fazl Haq of Khairabad
3. <i>Sirajul Qulub wa Ilajuz Zunoob</i>	Sheikh Ali Zainuddin Ali al M'abari
4. <i>Hadyatul Adkiya (An Ode)</i>	Sheikh Ali Zainuddin Ali al M'abari
5. <i>Sharh Maslakil Atqiya</i>	Sheikh Ahmed al M'abari
6. <i>Tanqeehul Maram</i>	Sheikh Inayatullah of Lahore (1110H)
7. <i>Al Qaul al Jemeel fi Bayani Sawais Sabeel</i>	Sheikh waliullah of Delhi
8. <i>Majmaus Salekeen</i>	Sheikh Khairuddin Mohd. Zahid
9. <i>Siratut Takmeel</i>	Sheikh Mohd. Kamil of waleedpur
10. <i>Umdatul wasail li kashfil Fazail</i>	Sheikh Abdur Razzaq b. Jamaluddin of Lucknow
11. <i>Al Minah al Madaniyyah fi Mukhtaratis Sufiyyah</i>	Sheikh Abdul Baqi b. Ali of Lucknow
12. <i>Azkarut Tariqa al Naqshbandiya</i>	Sheikh Tajuddin of Sambhal

⁴ Al Hasani , Abdul Hai, Al thaqafa al Islamiyah fil Hind, P.193-201.

<i>wa Ashghaluha (Treatise)</i>	
13. <i>Al Rawaih (Treatise)</i>	Sheikh Mohad. b. sayeed al Huseini
14. <i>Al waridat (Treatise)</i>	Sheikh Mohad. b. sayeed al Huseini
15. <i>Al hazrat al khams</i>	Sheikh Husain b. Muiz al Balkhi al Bihari
16. <i>Al Tuhfa al Mursala ila al Nabi al Mustafa</i>	Sheikh Mohd. Fadlullah of Burhanpur

As stated above the history of Arabic *Sufi* writings in India find its origin in the works of 14th century Sufi Mir Syed Ali Hamadani who wrote almost 25 treatises in Arabic on Sufism. A few of them can be discussed here.

Asrarun Nuqta (Secrets of the point): This treatise deals with monotheism, secrets of *irfan*, characteristics of *sufis* & *urafa'* as well as the attributes of *Allah*, the Almighty. It speaks of latent wisdom of monotheism containing treasures of secrets revolving around *Tawheed-e-Khalis* and *Ikhlās-e Niyyat* of true believer. This secret can be understood only by the one who has knowledge or minimum level of understanding of *irfan* or the one who has been bestowed upon by Allah the knowledge and *irfan*, or he has truck with mysticism and equipped with knowledge of the science of Theology.

Manazilus Salekeen (*Saalikeen's* Abodes): This treatise describes the conditions of those *Sufis* and pious people who spent their lives in purifying the hearts, maintained their proximity with their Creator, believed that they would meet their lord and return to Him only. This work is divided into 10 parts.

The first part underlines initials of *Sufism* such as; state of awakening, repentance, introspection, contemplation etc. The second one elucidates different states of human life such as; sadness, fear, compassion, humility, charity, asceticism and

piety. The third one peeps into care, surveillance, loyalty, decency, integrity and trust. The fourth one touches the chords of ethics, namely: patience, gratitude, modesty, honesty, selflessness and humility. The fifth one deals with important principles such as; determination, love, belief, affection, remembrance of Allah, poverty and prosperity. The sixth one describes medicines of soul, namely; charity, knowledge, wisdom, insight, intuition, veneration, inspiration, tranquility and protection. The seventh one discusses some basic ideas such as; the ordeal, longing, meditation, fear and slavery. The eighth one talks about features of sainthood such as; tenderness & purity of heart, happiness and self-isolation. The ninth one unravels realities such as; discoveries, observations, inspections and emotions. The last one ends with the perception of knowledge, survival & death, investigation & personification etc.

Al Insan al Kamil (The Perfect Man): Keeping in mind the importance and virtues of man, his difference with animals in terms of his ability to touch the pinnacle of humanity, dominated by soul and humiliated by wild desires the treatise is also known as *Al-rooh Al a'zam* (The great soul). This brief treatise consisting of four-pages looks into the properties of the perfect man i.e. the man who follows the footsteps of the Prophet and his righteous caliphs.

Taleqaniyyah: This treatise describes the condition of *Urafa* and pious people belonged to Taliqan (A city in Iran). The author listed some of the descriptions of these *Urafa* as they adhere to repentance, humility, trust, gratitude, patience, certainty, meditation, slavery, integrity, sincerity, honesty, modesty, love & longing, and others. Then he quotes a tradition of the prophet in the virtue of poverty and vice of prosperity:

" لعن الله من أكرم غنيا لغنائه وأهان فقيرا لفقره، لا يفعل هذا إلا المنافق، فمن أكرم غنيا لغنائه وأهان فقيرا لفقره يسمى في السماوات والأرض عدو الله وعدو الأنبياء"

(God damn the one who respects affluent man for his affluence and insults the poor for his poverty. None can do it except a hypocrite. Thus, the one who graced the affluent for his affluence and humiliated the poor for his poverty, on the whole earth and skies he will be known as Allah's enemy and the enemy of His prophets.)

Fi Khawas-e- Ahlil Batin (The properties of the pious people): This brief treatise covers some *malfoozaat* of *Urafa* , their admonitions and advices for general people, for example: " The man neither should be satisfied with what he has, nor should he be sad for what he doesn't, Nothing is in his hand that can take him to Allah or force him to leave the world's love".

" أن لا يفرح بموجود، ولا يحزن بمفقود، وأن ليس عنده من ذاته أن يوصل بالله و ترك محبة الدنيا."

Al dikriyyah al Sughra (The small *Dikr*): This brief treatise containing 12-pages describes the virtues of *dikr* and its kinds in the light of Quranic verses. This is divided in three sections. The first one illuminates the virtues of *dikr*; the second one is base on *Mujahadat* while the third one sheds light on its variations.

Al dikriyyah al Sughra is like **Al dikriyyah al kubra in** Persian; rather it is an abridged form of the Persian version. However, in Arabic version some Arabic couplets describing the virtues of *Urfa* are added, for instance:⁵

رجال أطاعوا الله في السر والجهر وما باثروا اللذات ضامن الدهر

⁵ Qadeera Saleem (Dr) Syed Ali al Hamadani wa khidmatuhu al Ilmiyyah wal fikriyah, Magazine , Department of Arabic , University of Punjab, Lahore- Pakistan, No.19, Issue 2012.

The literary activities of one of the best scholars of Arabic zainuddin al Ma'bari (d.1522) embrace nearly every field of Islamic learning; from mysticism and homiletics to Hadith and Fiqh. He wrote also wonderful Sufi poem *hidayatu adkiya* (Guidance of the intelligentsia).⁽⁶⁾

Though, the work of Sheikh Ashraf Ali thanwi is not mentioned in the table but it is said that he too has many books to his credit in this discipline such as; (مسائل) *Masailush Shukook ma'a raf'ish Shukook* and (التكشف عن) *Al takashshuf an Ummuhatit Tasawwuf* . However, their language is yet to be ascertained. Moreover, his work (التشرف بمعرفة أحاديث التصوف) *Al Tasharruf bi ma'rifati Ahaditit Tasawwuf* with its translation in Urdu (تكميل التصوف) deals with issues of *tadkiyah* in four sections known as ; *ibad'at* (acts of worship), *a'd'at* (habits), *munjiy'at* (acts that save human being) and *muhlik'at* (acts that destroy human being). The entire points discussed in the book written with the text of the traditions of the prophet only. In other words he supported his all arguments with *Hadith*.

The first section deals with knowledge, worship, *zakah*, fasting, *haj*, etiquettes for the recitation of the Holy Qur'an, *dikr* and the methods of calling to Islam. The second section elaborates the manners for eating, *nikah*, earning, *halal* & *haram* and love & affection. The third section underlines the importance of repentance, patience & thanks, fear & hope, poverty & asceticism, love & longing and remembering of death. The last section talks about discipline of soul, sins of the tongue and evil of anger, stinginess, position and pride.⁽⁷⁾

⁶ Ahmad Zubaid, Contribution of indo Pakistan to Arabic Literature, p.244.

⁷ Shakeb, Ziyauddin , Preface of the book *Al Tasharruf bi ma'rifati Ahaditit Tasawwuf*.

This is also worth mentioning that a noted book entitled “al Nafha al Imaniyyah wal Minah al Rabbaniyyah ila al Hikmah al Islamiyyah” (النفحة الإيمانية و المنح الربانية إلى الحكمة الإسلامية) on this topic was written by Prof. Head Department of Theology, Osmania University, Hyderabad sheikh Abdul Qadeer Mohammad Siddiqui. Originally the book was in Urdu but it was rendered into Arabic by Sheikh Saleh b, Salim ba Hattab, sheikh of rational sciences in Jamia Nizamia. This was published in 1999 by Hasrat Academy, Hyderabad and contains 137 pages in medium size.

The writer elucidates the concept of *tasawwuf* in the light of its different meanings. He discussed various kinds of Allah’s *Wujood* (existence) and elaborated issues such as; destiny (good or bad) and the question of reparation & destiny and the entire process to be the perfect man *al insan al kamil* .

This will be a sheer failure on my part if I don’t mention the most important work ربانية و لا رهبانية (Divine and not monastic) by Syed Aabul Hasan Ali Nadvi. He starts his book with the description of the connotation *Tasawwuf* in the light of the Holy Qur’an and the traditions of the prophet.

The term *Tasawwuf*, Sufism, mysticism or other equivalents that we use in our day-to-day life has been the point of dispute among the Islamic scholars dawn the ages. These fallacious terminologies invented during the course of time, and stories & anecdotes pertaining to it fabricated in various languages, literatures and religions, they come out with altogether different pictures that cause suspicion in the minds of the people, lead to rivalries amongst various sections and give birth to new schools of thoughts that appear with arguments and counter arguments.

If we leave all these modern terminologies and customary names and look back to the words the early Muslims used to express these realities in the simplest manner, and the expressions prevalent among them the enigma could be solved.

Now the whole debate among the scholars is centered on the origin of the term right from صفاء، صوف or الصفو in Arabic or the Greek word صوفيا which is linked with the notion of wisdom. When these terms crept into Islam is yet to be ascertained as; neither can we trace it out in the Holy Qur'an nor in the traditions of the prophet. Neither they were prevalent among the companions nor in the best Islamic periods. However, these realities are available in the Holy Qur'an and the Islamic doctrine with the name of *Tadkiyah* and *Ihsan*. Thus, the Holy Scripture mentions *Tadkiyah* as one of the four assignments entrusted to the prophet to accomplish in the world, it says:

هو الذي بعث في الأميين رسولا منهم يتلوا عليهم آياته و يزيههم و يعلمهم الكتاب و الحكمة و إن كانوا من
قبل لفي ضلال مبين (سورة الجمعة: 2)

It is He Who has sent amongst the Unlettered a messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom, although they had been, before, in manifest error. ⁽⁸⁾

The purpose is to refine the soul, to polish it and adorn it with virtues, clean it of vices. We observe this refinement in the sincerity and morality of the companions. This could not be possible in the absence of an ideal Islamic society and just righteous government which has no parallel in the human history.

⁸ Abdullah, Yusuf Ali, The English Tra. Of the Holy Qur'an, P. 286.

To express the same reality the prophet used the word *Ihsan*, a sort of belief and notion of Allah's omnipotence where the people will compete each other. Thus, when he was asked by one of his companions what is *Ihsan*? He said:

أن تعبد الله كأنك تراه، فإن لم تكن تراه فإنه يراك

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال: كان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم بارزا يوما للناس، فأتاه رجل فقال: ما الإيمان؟ قال: (الإيمان أن تؤمن بالله وملائكته وكتبه وبلقائه ورسله وتؤمن بالبعث). قال: ما الإسلام؟ قال: (الإسلام: أن تعبد الله ولا تشرك به، وتقيم الصلاة، وتؤدي الزكاة المفروضة، وتصوم رمضان). قال: ما الإحسان؟ قال: (أن تعبد الله كأنك تراه، فإن لم تكن تراه فإنه يراك) (صحيح البخاري، كتاب الإيمان، ص: 28)

Narrated Abu Huraira (RA): One day while the Prophet (PBUH) was sitting out for the people, there came a man and asked, “What is Faith?” Allah’s Messenger replied, Faith is to believe in Allah, His angels, (the) meeting with Him, His Messengers, and to believe in Resurrection”. Then he further asked,” What is Islam? Allah’s Messenger replied, To worship Allah alone and none else, to perform *Iqamat-as- salat* [the offering of *salat* (prayers) perfectly], to pay the *zakat* and to observe *saum* [fasts (according to Islamic teachings) during the month of *Ramadan*”]. Then he further asked, what is *Ihsan*? (Perfection), Allah’s messenger replied, **To worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion then you must consider that He is looking at you**.”⁽⁹⁾

Thus, this is in the fitness of thing that the knowledge that guarantees the refinement of soul, its cultivation and adornment with virtues, cleaning of moral and psychological vices, inviting to the perfection of *Imān* and attainment of a degree of charity, embellishment with prophetic morality, following the prophet in his internal features and modes of faith to call it *Tadkiyah* or *Ihsan* or *Fiqh al Batin*

⁹ Khan, Mohammad Mohsin (Dr), summarized English translation of Sahih Al Bukhari , PP.76-77

if we could do it the disputes will be vanished away, reconciliation will be established among the people who are at loggerheads due to terminologies coined during the course of time. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Tadkiyah or *Ihsan* or *Fiqh al Batin* are established realities and religious connotations approved by the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the prophet. This would be acceptable to all Muslims. To reach the destination what we call *Tadkiyah* or *Ihsan* or *Fiqh al Batin* the modus operandi may change keeping in mind the requirements of time & space and the nature of generations and the atmosphere wherein they are brought up. Thus, they will focus on the end not on the means; establish it as an important part of our faith. This will become the spirit of our *Shariah* and the crux of our religion and the necessity of life. Hence, without attainment of this reality none can dream of perfection in religion and no reform in the social life would be possible. In true sense, no individual can enjoy his life.

The need to renew the covenant of Islam and attain the characteristics of *Iman* through *Tadkiyah* and *Ihsan* was realized by Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani in Baghdad. He influenced the method of teaching and preaching the people, focused on the nodal feature of Islamic teachings i.e. oneness of Allah, the almighty. He gave a call to return to Him alone. Then Sheikhul Islam al Hafiz Ibn Taymiyyah who came out with various means to reach one end, gave an scale to measure the perfection of man and his attainment of the Degree of *Wilayah*. Similarly, Allama Zahabi paid due attention to this dimension and talked about the happiness that he derives through worship and the man's dedication to it. He deliberated upon asceticism in this mundane world, generosity & altruism, modesty & the denial of self, tranquility & satisfaction, physiognomy and dignity etc.

¹⁰ Nadvi, Abul Hasan, *Rabbaniyyah wa la Rahbaniyyah*, PP.13-14

Ali Miyan also touched at the reform brought out by these great people in India and their impact on society, their relations with general public. To reckon with, he evaluated the services of Sheikh Ahmad b. Abdul Ahad al Umri al Sirhindi to defend and protect Islam in India, his tremendous success in his objective and mission. He preceded with the scheme of reform adopted by Shah waliullah of Dehli and his success in his mission. He also underlined the services of Syed Ahmad Bareilvi and Syed Ismael Shaheed.

He pointed out to the sacrifices made by these Sufis to fight against the western colonizers. Their resistance to these despotic forces was highly appreciated in the history. The resistance posed by the great Sufi Amir Abdelkader Eldjezairi, Syed Mahdi al Senussi of Sudan, Sheikh Hasan al Banna of Egypt and Imam Syed Ahmad Bareilvi from India. They bade good bye to their worldly life and hugged *Akhirah* through martyrdom for the sake of the truth.

Recently, in 2007 two books appeared in the Indo-Arab literature in this discipline. The first one is authored by Maulana Wadeh Rasheed Nadvi entitled *Adab-o-Ahlil Quloob* (أدب أهل القلوب) that deals with the life and services of 13 eminent Sufis, including two Indians sheikh Nizamuddin Awliya and Sheikh sharfuddin Yehya Maneri. This is published from Dar al Rasheed, Lucknow and contains 240 pages in medium size.⁽¹¹⁾ The second book is authored by Sheikh Sayeed Azami Nadvi in two volumes entitled “ Saatun ma al ِArifeen (ساعة مع العارفين) the first one deals with 13 Indian Sufis and the second one deals with the life and services of 38 Sufis from outside India. The book is published from Maktaba Firdaus, Lucknow .The Vol.1 contains 286 pages while Vol.11 contains 340 pages in medium size. ⁽¹²⁾

¹¹ Nadvi, wadeh Rasheed, Adabo Ahlil Quloob, Lucknow.

¹² Nadvi, Syeed Azami, Saatun ma'al Arifeen, Lucknow.

Conclusion

This is evident from the above description that the works on *Tadkiyah* and *Ihsan* as a specific genre in Arabic are very few in numbers for obvious reasons needless to be discussed. Within the available works most of them are either commentaries or treatises. Further, many works are waiting to see the light of the day as they are still in the manuscript form. Secondly, names of the books are also quite confusing as a great deal of Persian books carry Arabic names as a part of customary in the medieval ages. However, the little works available caused a revolution to reform the society. Al Qaulul Jameel of Shah Waliullah and Rabbaniyyah wa la Rahbaniyyah of Ali Miyan are sufficient to prove this point. These works, in fact, placed this phenomenon in the correct and true fashion and removed the misconception gathered around the people.

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