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## THE MANIFESTATION OF SUFI POETRY IN PERSIAN LITERATURE

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### Abstract

The study of the emergence of the Sufi poetry in Persian literature has been of interest to all Persian historians. Sufism is a special School of thought which was formally introduced from the second century AD. The first thing that was important among them was the denial of the world and then, love for God was the ultimate goal of their deeds. Therefore, their teachings are divided into two categories: educational literature and romantic literature. Subsequently, the great heritage left behind which was nourished from this School of thought. Therefore, in this essay, the manifestation of the Sufi poetry in Persian literature will be investigated, without paying attention to the romantic poems written by non-mystical poets who mean human love for mankind, which have been whispered by the mystics in a certain way. Meanwhile, the attempt will be made to mention the masters of Persian Sufi poetry.

**Key words:** Sufism, Persian Literature, Persian Sufi Poetry, Persian Sufi Poets.

### Introduction

The emergence of Sufi poetry in Persian is undoubtedly one of the most important events in the history of this language, unfortunately; no one has addressed it separately; an incident that turned people's language into the deep one. The introduction of the mystical poems to Persian has begun from the beginning of the fifth century; it has inspired a new spirit in the body of Persian poetry, and thanks to that, the domain of meaning in this language has gradually expanded to the extent that the Persian language carries profound mystical and metaphysical meanings thus became a sacred and deep language.

The mystical literature or Sufi literature is part of the literary heritage that the mystic poets have been influenced by Sufism and includes a huge part of the Persian literature. In order to understand this kind of literature, it must inevitably recognize the creators of it, namely, the Sufis and the mystics. So it is better to understand what Sufism is and who is a Sufi?

#### 1. Sufism

The word 'Sufism' is an interpretation of the Arabic expression *Tasawwuf*, which initially has

been found in the nineteenth century, and refers to be a Sufi. *Tasawwuf* or with its general meaning, *Irfan* is as old as Islam itself, and first, has been used in the eighth century (the second century of Islam). It is the spiritual or inner dimension of Islam. So, "as long as there is Islam, there will be Sufism" (Williams, 1994, P.123). The outer or esoteric dimension may be considered a religious world – view. However, both inner and outer aspects of religion are the important aspects of Islam. They can be considered as the two sides of the same coin.

According to Chittick, "The word Sufism refers to a range of theories and practices that have been present in one form or another within the Islamic tradition from its inception" (Chittick, 1995, P. 132). In general, Sufis consider themselves as the individual Muslims, who recognize God's vicinity both in the universe and in the self and called themselves "Ah al – Haqq" the followers of the real (Nicholson, 2002, P. 1). Martin Lings in his book *What Is Sufism* said:

Sufism is nothing other than Islamic mysticism, which means that it is the central and

most powerful current of that tidal wave which constitutes the Revelation of Islam; and it will be clear from what has just been said that to affirm this is in no sense a depreciation, as some appear to think. It is on the contrary an affirmation that Sufism is both authentic and effectual (2005, P.15-6).

## 2. Persian Sufi Poetry

To find the date of the first mystical poems, we have to obtain the correct definition of mystical poetry. The mystical poem is a poem written in the formulation of the spiritual principles and truth. So the mystical poem is the one written with a mystical intention, not a love poem [man to man] which is interpreted mystically.

Sufism which originates from the inspiration has the same affinity with poetry that comes from the same inspiration, nevertheless, the Sufis, who at first was ascetic, at the beginning of the same period, did not show much interest in poetry. Many believe that the history of this incident is not clear. Some consider Baba Tahir as the first mystical poet; some people say that the beginning of the mystical poetry coincides with the beginning of Sama; another theory that has many supporters considers Sanai as the founder of the mystical poems. It is clear that in this essay, we are referring to the Sufi poems of Persia.

### 2.1. Baba Tahir

Although the history of the life and death of Baba Tahir is not known, surely he has preceded the others. "The first Sufi who can be identified individually as a poet would have been Baba Tahir, nicknamed 'Uryan ('the Naked')" (De Bruijn, 1997, P.13). Because Ru'ba'i is considered the first genre of poetry which was used used by mystics to express their thoughts and experiences, Baba Tahir as one of the most celebrated Iranian poets of Rubai was the forerunner of this style of mystical poetry. Because the poetry of Baba Tahir is not reliable, he cannot be the originator of the mystical poem. In one of his poems, he appears as a dervish who is searching his mystical ideas:

While I wander through the desert, night and day,

Tears are streaming from my eyes, night and day.

No fever do I feel, nor pain in any place;  
I only know that I am crying, night and day.  
(De Bruijn, 1997, P.15)

### 2.2. Abu-Saiid Abul-Khayr:

Abu Sa'id Abu al-Khair is one of the great wise mystics of the fifth century, whose word "Sama" is the companion of his name. Undoubtedly, the Sema ceremony, which was held in the presence of Abu Sa'id Abu al-Khair has no meaning without poetry; the mystical poetry was one of the essential items of the Sufi ceremony. Two arguments are here: First, the ceremony of Sama needed poetry and forced Abu Sa'id to compose a mystical poem. Second, there is a collection of Rubaiat showing that Abu Sa'id is the first mystical poet. But it's easy to reject these two arguments. Although in sema ceremony, mystical poems have been read, these poems may have been written by poets who mean human love, in sema ceremony, mystic had another meaning from the same poem. There is no doubt that Sufism used poetry as a great tool in the sema ceremony to influence the audience's morality; Abu Saiid expressed many teachings by poetry for the mystic audience. However, the point is whether there was at that time a Persian mystical poem which could easily express concepts like Arabic Ghazal.

Secondly, the poems which attribute to Abu Sa'id are not significant. If the assignment of these poems to Abu Sa'id Abu al-Khair was not a problem, we could have cited him as one of the serious options for the creation of mystical poetry. The following poem is an example of his poetry:

I have my eyes filled by the vision of the Beloved.

My eyes rejoice when the Beloved is there.

Between eye and Beloved one cannot distinguish:

He is in the eye, or the eye is nothing else but He.

My body became all tears and my eyes wept.

Loving you, one should live without a body.

No trace remained of me; why is there Love?

Now I became the Beloved entirely, where is the Lover?

When I shall be dead for twenty years or more,

Do you think that my grave holds no love anymore? When you touch the ground and ask: Who lies here? You will hear a voice crying out: How is my Beloved? (De Bruijn, 1997. P.19)

### 2.3. Sanai:

The first great writer of Ghazal in Sufism is Sanai. He is the first poet who used Ghazal to express mystical thoughts. Sanai's services are enormous in the progress of Sufi poetry. We need to know him as the leading of this kind of poetry. The first person to introduce the interpretation of the true and virtual love into the language of the Persian Sufi love poetry was Sanai. Sanai is one of the earlier Sufi poets. "The whole of Sanai's poetical works amount to more than thirty thousand distiches, of which the most important is the "Hadika," or Garden, a mystical work on the unity of God, self-mortification, and the attainment of the knowledge of spiritual truth" (Field, 1942, P.160).

Sanai's works are of particular importance to historians of poetry and mysticism. Sanai's *Hadiqa* is the beginning of the new style of poetry, and his *qasidas* are also the beginning of another style; his *ghazals* have the unique style in comparison to his previous *ghazals*. A poet can rarely be found like Sanai, who is the beginner of the new style of poetry. With Sanai, the path of the Persian poetry changes, the first time poetry enters the field of mysticism; he is the "founder of mystical poetry."

#### a. Attar:

After Abu Saeed, the Sanai in the sixth century, by introducing the mystical concepts into the solid structure of *qasida* opened a new window to mystical literature. In addition to his sonnets, full of zeal, Sanai introduced the theme of mysticism in the structure of the *Qasida*, after him, Attar Nishapuri in the form of *Ghazal* and *Masnavi* introduced the great mystical concepts. "Attar, well known as the Persian mystic poet standing between Sanai and Jalal-uddin Rumi" (Arbuthnot, 1887, P. 77).

It is worth mentioning, however, mystical literature is divided into two types of literary

education and romance. Sufi poets generally write secrets and excitement in the form of sonnets, preaching and asceticism in the form of *Masnavi*; accordingly, Sanai and Attar, as well as other mystic poets have both *Ghazal* full of passion and educational *Masnavi* such as Sanai's *Hadiqa* and Attar's *Mantiq al-Tayur*. Attar dedicated much of his literary output "to honoring the Sufis and glorifying their doctrines" (Hodgson, 1974, P. 305).

#### b. Jalal al-Din Mohammad Rumi:

The great mystic poet is Maulana Jalaluddin Mohammed Rumi, not only in the field of mystical romance but also in the field of mystical teaching. Rumi's *Masnavi* is the most important work which is considered to be the richest heritage of Sufism. "To Jalaluddin Rumi might be applied Dante's phrase regarding Homer: "He flies above other poets like an eagle"" (Field, 1942, P.175).

"He seems to have been influenced by the religious and mystical ideas of al-Ghazali, by the famous Sufi poet Sana'i (d. ca. 525/1131) and by 'Aḡḡar" (Knysh, 2010, P.159). Rumi has underlined the importance of both. "Attar appears to Rumi as the (*asheq*) 'lover'; Sanai as the 'king and superior' (*faeq*), whereas he himself is 'neither this nor that' but has lost himself completely" (Schimmel, 1993, P.36). In general, after Rumi, mystical literature didn't have special flourishing; the works which were later created were based on the imitation of Rumi, Attar, and Sanai. In general, Sufis have had a very important influence on the formation and transformation of Persian literature. They have led the *Qasida* from the flattery to the peak of preaching and research; they have given the *Ghazals* from the erotic love to the spiritual affection; *Masnavi* has been a means of education, mysticism, and morality; *Rubai* has become the expressive form of the transient and temporal suffering; the prose is made in depth and simplicity; they made stories in the form of meanings and judgments.

#### c. Conclusion

The main reason for the emergence and prevalence of Sufism in Iran is that the Iranians have made the highest progress and reached the highest levels as a result of centuries of living in

the material and spiritual civilization. They were superior in aesthetics to all the Asian nations; they had reached perfection in fine arts, such as painting, poetry, music, and handicrafts, including metalworking, knitting, and other industries. The limitation which followed the Sassanid era in Iran was not compatible with the beauty of Iranian taste that inherited the matter in the centuries from their ancestors; they knew it a precious jewel; they were looking for a way to sweep these conjectures, thus regained their old freedom. Sufism was the best way to reach this freedom of thought; that's why from the beginning, music and dance, which the Iranians were accustomed to them, not only perceived as legitimate but also in some of the branches of Sufism were considered as the form of worship, a means of approaching the source, refining the soul, and purifying the inner being.

One of the earliest means by which Sufis took over the concern of Iranians was by means of poetry, which is the subject of discussion in one of the chapters of the history of the intellectual movements of Iranians. The first person from the Sufi leaders of Persia, who accepted Persian poetry for his education, was Abu Sa'id Abu al-Khair. With the advent of Hakim Sanai Ghaznavi, the path of Persian Poetry changed. He was the first poet to find that there is a close connection between Islamic poetry and mysticism. At the time of Sanai's death, Attar was born and continued his journey. For Sanai and Attar, poetry is a platform for the presentation of ideas that ultimately leads to human salvation. After Attar, Rumi, who had great dedication to Attar and Sanai, continued the way. This dedication is apparent in the *Divan Shams* and the *Masnavi Manavi*.

The special attention that the great Sufis of Persia had in Persian language and were especially obliged to give their teachings in Persian language show what the desire of the great majority of the Iranian people was.

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