

OPEN ACCESS

AL-EHSAN

ISSN(E) 2788-4058

ISSN(P) 2410-1834

www.alehsan.gcuf.edu.pk

PP: 3-26

ANALYTICAL STUDY OF WESTERN CRITICISM ON THE ORIGIN OF ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

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Islamabad**Abstract:**

Islam is a universal religion with a great following across the globe. It has its own salient features and characteristics that mark its distinction among other religions of the world. Islamic mysticism has attained wide popularity since its inception not only in Muslim world but increasingly in the western academic circles equally. The first encounter of Islamic mystical sciences in the western world commenced during the sixteenth century. History reveals that first connection of the west with the Muslim world after crusade restored through Persians. Western travelers businessman, diplomats frequently visited Persia and later developed interest to learn about Persian culture, religion, philosophy and poetry. Persian Sufi poets like Saadi, Hafiz and Umer Khayyam were popular poets who were translated in European languages. This academic connection shifted Persian literature into their languages along with travelogues, and personal diaries of the visitors. This developed the hypothesis that Islamic mysticism was produced by Persians who borrowed it from external sources like Christianity and Hellenistic sciences.

Present study aims to analyze this point of view and is focused to trace the origin, nature and objectives of Islamic spirituality.

Keywords: Islam, Mysticism, Western, Persia, Poets, Languages, Sufi, Christianity.

Introduction

The academic world in which western scholars emerged and developed their thoughts is a scientific and empirical with no exposure of real esoteric background. Islamic mysticism is a blend of theory and practice and covers its literal, philosophical and

theological aspects along with inner and spiritual side as far as its scope is concerned. The sources that became the foundation of studying the concepts and subject of Tasawwuf in the west are mostly imprisoned to Iranian side. The works of some good celebrated authors who produced good substance on Islamic mysticism in the west requires it to be reevaluated after many original sources have been printed that had no access during the period when Sufi literature was in the process of making there.

Orientalistic method of Sufi studies

Orientalist study has different perceptions and connotations about the phenomenon of Tasawwuf. The derivation that identifies its nature, origin, roots and evolution by western scholars is different from what is unfolded by Islamic sources of Tasawwuf based on the Quran, Sunnah and classical authorities on Sufism. The reason about why had they not approached Islamic sources to grasp their ideas about the reality of Tasawwuf. Classical period of orientalists focused and produced literature on Islamic Sufism that reflected as it has been borrowed by external sources. Goldziher, One of the influential western writers corresponds some facets of Islamic mysticism as Christian origin:

“We have already mentioned that this attitude was nourished by the observation of Christian monasticism, with whose goals the principles cited above match almost to the word.”⁽¹⁾

The author links the features of Islamic mysticism like renunciation, abstinence and ascetic aptitude to be taken from Christian conception. He presumed and concocted this theory of detaching Islamic mysticism from its origin and connecting it with various other sources including Christianity, neoplatonism and Hellenistic sciences. He is most important figure in explaining classical Islamic sciences. Many other western scholars and researchers relied on him while discussing Islamic mysticism. Their thoughts are more or less extension of Goldziher specially Joseph Schicht who also promoted and influenced overwhelming majority of later scholars. Goldziher interprets one of the root words of Tasawwuf (Soof) the woolen dress as it is the mimicry of Christian ascetics.

“Imitating the dress of Christian hermits or monks, these Muslims who renounced the world to turn penitents and ascetics were given to clothing themselves in rough wool (Suf).”⁽²⁾

The works of Goldziher seems to have intentional stray away in connection with exploring true meanings of Tasawwuf. He does not comment about the primary sources of Tasawwuf where overwhelming verses and apostolic traditions substantially explain the origin of such Sufi practices. He takes a big plunge to Christian sources leaving the nearest sources i.e the Quran and Sunnah while mentioning the evolution of spiritual science of Islam. After making mixture of various philosophies and bringing for fetched presumptions, he argues that Sufi thoughts have been reproduced by benefitting other external sources of Gnosticism, but interestingly, he does not unveil the Quran and Sunnah, spiritual conduct of companions.

“A comprehensive historical view of Sufism cannot deny that these influences were determinant. I have in mind Indian influences, which made themselves felt as the eastward expansion of Islam to the Chinese border put Indian thought more and more within the horizons of Islam.”⁽³⁾

Goldziher has almost gone up to an extent to establish Sufism and all its forms, rituals, practices, modes and manifestations something fabrication and concoctions prepared from other religions and philosophies. Amazingly, he did not quote any classical Sufi text for getting information and understanding about where Tasawwuf has emerged and evolved from. There are inconsistencies and difference among Sufi texts and sources explored by him that have been harmonized when taken extensively.

The Heritage Of Sufism is an important work consists of three volumes edited by Leonard Lewisohn. The author collected various articles on Sufism written by western and eastern scholars. The subject of Tasawwuf is introduced to Europe through the channel of Iranian poets and moralists. The first encounter of the west with eastern legacy of knowledge was through Iran that created confusion and misperceptions in the mind of a reader and a researcher that Tasawwuf has no links with original Islamic history instead it is the product of cross fertilization with non-Arab land particularly Iran

and India. The same is reflected in the writings of many western researchers. Saadi, Umer Khyam and many other Persian poets have been translated in European languages. This is how they developed the presumptions and ideas about Sufism as something that has no connection with origin of Islam. Appreciation and acceptance of these Persian poets can be reflected by the following lines.

“Sa'di's "simple but elegant style, his practical wisdom, his charming anecdotes made him a poet who appealed greatly to the Europeans, especially during the Age of Reason, and has rightly been considered the Persian poet whose works is easiest for Westerners to understand”⁽⁴⁾

There is common universal spiritual, moral and ethical heritage that is to be found in every religion of the world like, the concept of virtue and vices, lie is not accepted as praiseworthy attribute in any philosophy, justice, kindness, being good and kind to people, generosity, sacrifice, humility, softness in speech are to be appreciated universally. There also exists the concept of some supreme deity and power, and the concept of reward and punishment etc. It is not logical to relate such common universal values with a particular religion and philosophy, but it looks as the research interests of many western writers especially orientalist were to identify similarities and common values of eastern cultures, literature, philosophies traditions and religions. Likewise, they associated moral and spiritual values of Islam as to be borrowed from external sources for, instance about Saadi he says:

“He excelled in producing what are ordinarily called the Christian virtues; humility, charity, gentleness, and the like...”⁽⁵⁾

Their main interest was to study literature, philosophy and poetry of east but when they approached to study them together while Mixing and intermingling literature, philosophy, poetry and Tasawwuf together brought none of the four to desired ends. One point that is admirable here that he tried to distinguish the difference between Tasawwuf, Philosophy and politics. Tasawwuf is neither a philosophy nor politics or poetry rather it is primarily concerned with the purification of inner self by following injunctions of the Quran and Sunnah of the prophet (pbuh). Some western researchers distinguished these subjects and correlated in order to

understand it through the channel of philosophy or poetry. Commenting about Saadi he says:

“in general, Sa'di cannot be regarded as a follower of "the Sufi doctrine" because of his closeness to philosophers and men of politics on certain issues, as well as the priority given by him to religious matters in certain respects.”⁽⁶⁾

This segregation of academic disciplines makes it easy to understand the reality of Tasawwuf because it considers the nature, scope and objectives of each subject while studying and doing objective research.

While living within temporal world and sustaining lawful livelihood, a true seeker strives to inhale Contentment, trust in God, volunteer poverty, negating lust of power, money, and fame to achieve higher spiritual grades which is a true concept of Islamic mysticism. Quoting few such examples in isolation without their contextual location, western researchers interpreted and correlated these concepts with Christian monasticism where an ascetic is not permissible to go for worldly needs. Christian concept of spiritual life is different as it does not allow adherents to involve in worldly desires and same propagation is continued. In the same book, the editor collected an article by Ahmad Mahdavi Damghani, where he connects Persians to be the originators and producers of literature on Sufism in Arabic language too. So western scholars concluded that Persian writers and poets become the sole criterion and source for the foundation of text books on Sufism.

“Here, we should note that the Persian Sufis were among the first to set hand to pen and make substantial contributions to the development of Arabic literature (adab-i 'arab) in respect to both of these branches mentioned above”⁽⁷⁾

To them, all two types of Tasawwuf speculative and practical have been originated by Persians. The association of Tasawwuf as a origin and its major contribution is traced back with Persians in many western writings. The writer goes to the extent of mentioning them as the first who contributed in original Sufi texts. The fact is that The books written on the subject by early scholars with the titles of Zuhd are not quoted as the original sources of Sufi texts like, Al-zuhd wal-Raqaiq, Abdullah bin Mubarak (181 A.H), Kitab Al-Zuhd by Waki bin Jarah(197A.H), Kitab Al-Zuhd by Imam Ahmed bin

Hamble,(241 A.H) and dozens of many other books on renunciation, abstinence and purification of heart have already been produced in first two centuries after the advent of Islam. The prophetic traditions, sayings of his companions, and of their successors could be taken as big fountain in countless that hold extraordinary spiritual treasure and nourishment for the seekers of this path. Referring this credit to Persian sufi poets alone may deny this early contribution in this circle. However, he mentions Hazrat Salman Farsi, Habeeb Al-Ajami as the pioneers and their sayings as origin for Sufi literature.

“These sayings represent not only some of the finest examples of literary eloquence and style of their period, but also are key texts and primary sources in the science of the 'discipline of the soul' (adab-i nafs).”⁽⁸⁾

The access of western scholarship to the study of Persian Sufi literature was so common that every second writer discusses the realities of Tasawwuf in context and relationship within Persian circle. There is hardly a point where their attention goes back to the study of the Quran and Sunnah and that of companions of the prophet (ﷺ) in order to understand real perception of the subject.

Gerhard Bowering another contributor of Sufi heritage describes the origin of Islamic mysticism in the similar lines as of his predecessors. He also inclined towards the Persian in shaping and developing the inner side of (mystical dimensions) Islam.

“In the realm of mysticism, more dominantly than in many other domains of Islamic culture, the Persians have been at work creating the inner religious sphere of Islam.”⁽⁹⁾

Making this mind as considering Persians to be the originator of Islamic mysticism is because of studying some Sufi poets of Persia. Tasawwuf is neither a philosophy nor a poetry and it requires a lot of additional elements when prose is transferred in poetry. The poetic expressions have their own requirement to embellish simple phrases up to literary level where sometimes spirit and original message is also shadowed. Poetry is not considered to define the objectives and realities of any subject. For getting true perception and insightfulness of Sufism, it is necessary to understand it in context and in relationship of the time in which it was born, introduced and evolved i.e the beginning period of Islam and not to be traced through later centuries. However, it is

admirable that western scholars realized the need of reevaluation of Sufi concepts beyond Persian literature referring to its original Arabic sources for gaining the true picture of where Tasawwuf has emerged from. Gerhard Bowering, in this regard, expresses his views in the words:

“It may be appropriate to take a fresh look at the beauty of Persian mysticism and to select a new road into the depth of Persian religiosity by examining the idea of time that propelled Sufism throughout the history of Islam.”⁽¹⁰⁾

Tracing the foundation of Sufism from a particular region, literature and scholarship may not justify the true understanding of the subject in terms of its origin until large number of books, manuscripts lying in many libraries are to be explored and published. Due to the lack of transportation sources, publishing houses and research tendencies such material could not be traced and accessed to identify the real meanings of Tasawwuf. William C. Chittick makes the reader realized about this important phenomenon to wait until new researches appear describing Sufism with extensive view.

“Sufi literature is still largely unexplored. Many texts have long been recognized as classics and many others have been brought to light by contemporary scholars, but still others are lying neglected in manuscript libraries or private collections waiting to be discovered” ⁽¹¹⁾

It may be noted here that some western authors identified Sufis as those who choose to live a life of asceticism to achieve mystical union. The purpose and higher objectives of Tasawwuf are to attain divine gnosis and this union is basically the end point of all this spiritual struggle that commences with strictly adhering to divine commands and imperatives to the fullest. An Encyclopedic work classifies Sufis in a variety of groups with the same objectives as they define it:

“Sufis comprise a variety of groups of Muslims who engage in ascetic and moral practices in an attempt to achieve mystical union with God.”⁽¹²⁾

The editors directly start from the point of later stages that is the developmental stage where different spiritual outcomes emerge as a result of their personal experiences.

The conscious effort and voice raised for consulting original sources of Islam in terms of understanding Islamic mysticism, heard and researchers in the west have turned their attention to explore the phenomenon of Sufism from the Quran and correlate it with what is propagated and practiced by Sufis. This paved the way for getting closer to the Quran to search about the basic ingredients and elements that shape the origin and spirit of Islamic mysticism. Some western writers unveiled it through the Quran. One such definition of Tasawwuf is as under:

“In the Koran, God presents Himself as, at the same time, the Outer (al-Zāhir) and the Inner (al-Bātin),¹ under seemingly opposite Names which the Sufi will have to reconcile during his spiritual search. Are not the human soul and the cosmos in God’s image? For the Sufi, the outward proceeds from the inward, as the peel of a fruit encases the pit.”⁽¹³⁾

The reference of one of the divine attributes Zahir and Batin is linked with exoteric and esoteric dimensions of Shariah and Tariqah. The Quran states many a time about outer and inner aspects of human personality and a Sufi strives to experience it and address the same inner or esoteric side of his personality by putting struggle to attain highest purity. The author explores the relations of Sufism from within the primary sources i.e the Quran and Sunnah to know about the origin of Sufism. He disagrees with many western writers who hastily connected Islamic mysticism with common universal spiritual values found in every religion thus denying this legacy as originated from the Quran and Sunnah. He quotes Qur’anic verses and sayings of mystics to establish the fact that Tasawwuf emerged from these roots and that it is not the mixture of foreign elements.

“Certain orientalists have too hastily deduced from this that Sufism was of foreign origin, that it was non-Islamic. They wondered how such a rich and universalistic spirituality could emanate from “the religion of Muhammad.” These orientalists competed to find either a Christian source, or a Hindu source, or a Hellenistic source for Muslim mysticism.”⁽¹⁴⁾

The reason of such remarks about western orientalists concerning their notion and hypothesis associated with Islamic mysticism exhibits and invites to one thing that these research

findings have to be revisited with new analysis after many documents have been published to redefine the origin of Tasawwuf in terms of its connection with Christian, Hindu or Greek sources or it has its own permanent and independent sources. The shift of views about identifying the correct history of Sufism by later western scholars raises questions about the classical period of orientalism and the reliability of Sufi literature produced during this period where one method is applied to find out the history and origin of Islamic mysticism. Many original manuscripts and writings of Muslim Sufi authorities lying in number of libraries, when published and became accessible at large scale, have made new avenues and demand a fresh look at already prevailing theories and hypothesis attached with the history and origin of Tasawwuf. The study of primary sources of Islam made it easier to acknowledge the spiritual heritage existing in it that was lacking in classical period of orientalism. Eric quotes many Qur'anic verses that provide foundation for Islamic Sufism as he says:

“The Koran is strewn with verses which have an obvious spiritual or esoteric dimension. “He [God] is with you wherever you are” (2:115); “We [God] are closer to him [man] than his jugular vein” (50: 16); “On the earth there are signs for those who have certain vision. . . . And within yourselves, do you not see?” (51: 20). In the sūra “The Cave,” the superiority of mystical knowledge, “emanating directly from God” (al ‘ilm al-ladunī) is affirmed in comparison with human thought.”⁽¹⁵⁾

The new research approach from merely Iranian sources to the original sources i.e the Quran and Sunnah and practical demonstrations of the companions is clearing the doubts raised by western scholars to get the understanding of Tasawwuf as it is originating from within Islam and not the product of non-Arabs. After discussing literal and syntactical meanings of Sufi terminologies Massignon a well-known western researcher and author defines and perceives Islamic mysticism as something that includes nothing but remembrance, recollections, renunciation, austerity and longing for divine union. He also concludes that origin and foundation of Islamic mysticism lies the teachings of the Quran.

“The long inventory above allows us to affirm that the Quran, through constant recitation, meditation, and

practice, is the source of Islamic mysticism, at its beginning and throughout its growth. Complete recitals (qira'a)¹ and frequent "rereadings" of the text, which is considered sacred, were the foundation of Sufism, and from these activities developed its distinctive characteristics"⁽¹⁶⁾

More exploration of Sufism takes a researcher closer to the basic sources and provides self-sufficient evidences on the credibility of earlier researches on it and its relation or lack of relation with foreign elements because those hypothesis were based on guesswork with no concrete arguments of that claims. The purpose of Islamic teachings is to experience its outcomes in outer and inner world of a practitioner. Sufis are one special group amongst Muslims who excel in this dimension to achieve esoteric states. Sufi's life is fully in consonance and harmonized with injunctions of Islamic law hence exhibiting a beautiful blend between Zahir and Batin (inward and outward). Massignon in this regard speaks his heart and puts research findings in the following words:

"I have pursued this work in details for the first three centuries of Islam.³³ the results confirm the existence of a strict parallel in development between Islamic dogma and mysticism."⁽¹⁷⁾

The study of primary sources reveals the fact that origin and root of Islamic mysticism emerged and evolved from the Quran, Sunnah and the practices of early Muslims during the period of first three centuries as it is rampant on hundreds of academic writings. This construction and development with new truths about Islamic mysticism is turning point of its perception in western thoughts that is replacing the findings identified by early scholars on Sufism. The analysis of previous research with new exploration of published works in this domain exhibits that it was based on possibilities, probabilities and opportunities with no concrete evidences to establish their hypothesis into reality. New researches lead to the directions that not only the base and foundation of Tasawwuf is traced and established by primary sources but the subject developed and grew to an extent that its jargon and technical language was also coined and used to explain this discipline in its early phase as well. Massignon further explains:

"It is clear from the preceding chapters that a study of the lives of the first Muslims called to Mysticism is of primary

importance to anyone wishing to analyze the formation of Sufism's technical language"⁽¹⁸⁾

These findings are important because the author himself is academically sound, well recognized and influential in his thoughts and philosophies in comparison to his contemporary scholars.

Titus Burckhardt born in Germany, is well celebrated intellectual in the western world. He specializes in comparative studies of spiritual sciences in various religions like, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. He defines and distinguishes Islam amongsts other religions with its outer and inner aspects and terms Sufism its esoteric dimension.

"Sufism, Taṣawwuf, which is the esoteric or inward (bāṭin) aspect of Islam, is to be distinguished from exoteric or "external" (ẓāhir) Islam just as direct contemplation of spiritual or divine realities is distinguishable from the fulfilling of the laws which translate them in the individual order in connection with the conditions of a particular phase of humanity."⁽¹⁹⁾

What is explicit from the above quote is that the author's views about Tasawwuf is that it purifies inner self of an individual without being noticed of its external requirements. Islamic injunctions related to inner purification emphasize on both inner and outer aspects of human personality. There is no segregation between sharia and Tariqah. Both are interlinked in such a tied way that none can be separated from the other. Sharia with its all pre requisite serves as inevitable path that leads to the highest ranks of Tariqh i.e Divine Gnosis. Sharia (Exoteric part) not only sets an objective for every act but also substantiates the way of achieving it and Tariqah (esoteric side) ensures to achieve those objectives with letter and spirit keeping intact sincerity, humility, good attention and faithfulness without allowing any external thought, idea and feelings to make changes and corruption in the attention during the whole journey. Tariqah serves as protector and strong shield from satanic whispering and negative propensities otherwise, sharia remains only a nut shell without crux. A verse in the Quran well indicates to both sides. Almighty Allah says:

"And those who strive hard (and struggle against the lower self vehemently) for Our cause, We certainly guide them to

Our ways, and verily Allah blesses the men of spiritual excellence with His companionship”(20)

Sharia is the name of striving hard by way of strictly complying with the Quran and Sunnah and the outcome of this struggle is mentioned in the end i.e spiritual excellence and guidance to His companionship. The true companionship according to Sufi philosophy is not possible when one is not aligned with sharia. Abn Abbas explains it as to strive for divine words that takes a seeker to His path.

“Ibn 'Abbas said this means: those who strive for Our Word, (We surely guide them to Our paths) i.e. whoever acts upon what he knows, We shall give him success to know that which he do not know;”(21)

Titus differentiates between English word ‘mysticism’ and original term Tasawwuf and is of the view that the formal can befits only if the later has only one dimension which is esoteric side.

“None the less the term Taṣawwuf is applied in the Islamic world only to regular contemplative ways which include both an esoteric doctrine and transmission from one master to another”(22)

In practicing Islamic mysticism, there emerge certain experiences of individuals that may suspend their contemplative ways but it is not so general to be applied as an example to define the nature of Tasawwuf. Above mentioned transmissions of Sufi masters and deep meditation and contemplation are the modes and methods to be applied for attaining the desired objectives and not themselves are objectives. The real purpose of Islamic mysticism is substantiated earlier through original Sufi texts. Lower self has deep tendencies towards evil and animalistic traits that keeps nourishing if it is not curbed through effective methods. It instigates for the commission of acts that displeases Allah. The Quran states its nature in the following words:

“Certainly, the self commands much evil except the one on whom my Lord bestows mercy.”(23)

Sufis interest and focus of attention is to address this aspect of self by way of formulating various spiritual strategies required as per the level and intensity of spiritual ailments.

Carl W. Ernst’s book on Sufism is a comprehensive analysis of almost various aspects of Tasawwuf. It includes his perceptions on

Sufism, sacred sources, mystical themes, sainthood, spiritual states and stations of a seeker, sufi orders and sufi poetry etc. His research and findings are more relevant since he lived in Pakistan for his research on the subject and had to encounter with diversified views about Sufism. He admits that the subject is too complicated to be addressed comprehensively and thoroughly with true justice. He writes about the aims and objectives of western writers and their interests in eastern and Asian cultures, religions and customs. Western scholars look at Sufism from Christian perspectives. The colonial mind in the west aimed to study the east in order to extend their rule, thus, their research is designed to gain their political goals as well.

“I would like to point out that scholars who work on non-European studies, particularly in relation to cultures of the Middle East, sooner or later find that their studies have political relevance.”⁽²⁴⁾

The literature produced with such set targets becomes partial when such observations are made by intellectuals of their own fellow intellectuals and thus invites the attention of a researcher to revisit such a literature of Islamic mysticism written in the west as well. The unclear and indefinite relations of the west with the east because of various reasons like series of wars that prepared a particular mindset on both sides. Resultantly, a neutral research free from biasness and prejudices which is pre requisite to for an authentic research paralyzed and eclipsed. Certain concepts and notions applied in common universal spiritual heritage were intermingled to extract as Islam has borrowed from either Christianity or Judaism or Hindu vadic philosophy. Such existing notions of various western scholars about Islamic sciences and particularly of Sufism emerged with this background. Many confusions can be resettled when these researches outputs are to be analyzed and compared with original sources of Tasawwuf. Travelers and story tellers who saved their own experiences in the form of their personal diaries published later and were quoted as a sources on Islamic Sufism as witnessed below.

“The modern concept of Sufism emerged from a variety of European sources, including travelers’ accounts of exotic lands and Orientalist constructions of Sufism as a sect with a nebulous relation to Islam. When this picture of Sufism is

compared with the internal documentation of Sufi tradition, a number of mismatches appear.”⁽²⁵⁾

Construction of terminologies and various other ideas related to Tasawwuf in the west appeared on weak footings as they relied on personal accounts, travels and their observation to a layman life to get the understanding of Islamic mysticism since they encountered. The writer disagrees with this approach and takes a critical note of how this thought developed, promoted and influenced many scholars of later times including the east and the west. He describes Tasawwuf not only with different angle but also reviews earlier literature by the western scholars with critical appreciation. He defines Tasawwuf from etymological perspective with its infinitive in the words:

“The Arabic term that we translate as Sufism is Tasawwuf* literally “the process of becoming a Sub.” Tasawwuf is a verbal noun from the particular grammatical structure (fifth form verb) used in Arabic for assimilating or taking on a religious or ethnic identity; thus, ta- nassur means “to become a Christian [nasrani],” and tafarnus means “to become French”⁽²⁶⁾

He quotes various classical authorities like Sulami, Ansari to establish to give research a new direction i.e linking it with early centuries where it has emerged from. He views that definition of this subject was introduced with a variety of root words by Qushairy. The group was then so well-known later that every scholar introduced Tasawwuf in terms of its origin with from main derivatives like safa, safwa, soof and saff.

The inevitable relationship of Tasawwuf with self-purification and inner cleanliness takes this subject to the definition that its aim is to clean the hearts of seekers to get rid of all negative propensities that include lust for fame, power, money, feelings of jealousy, enmity and hatred and other negative exercises in order to place him on the highest ranks while applying various methods. The whole exercise is made to receive God,s grace, blessings and His proximity and finally His gnosis. Strong ties and adherence to these principles gradually cultivate qualities that make him a perfect man who surrenders and submits all his personal desires before the will of the Creator. The writer appreciates Qushayri that he collected various sayings of early Sufis who identified these high moral goals

to this discipline. After quoting examples from his book, the author comments:

“Instead, they accomplish a powerful rhetorical transaction; the person who listens to or reads these definitions is forced to imagine the spiritual or ethical quality that is invoked by the definition, even when it is paradoxical. Definitions of Sufism are, in effect, teaching tools.”⁽²⁷⁾

Regarding the original sources of Tasawwuf, the writer explains sacred sources specially the Quran while describing number of verses and relating them as basic and fundamental fountain for the spiritual nourishment of a Sufi. Unlike many orientalists, he does not hesitate to accept the Quran and Sunnah as basic and fundamental sources of Islamic mysticism. He brings new chapter to discuss these sources under the separate caption of *The Sacred Sources of Sufism*. He goes through various verses of the Quran to analyze the point where mystical dimensions can be discovered like mentioning sura al-Qadr and sura-al-Najam where ascension journey is described. He also investigates and distinguishes between two types of Quranic texts as real and symbolic or allegorical where Sufi interpretation is also considerable. One vivid story of Moses and his servant is seen as the base of mystical teachings where he comments:

“A potent example of mystical knowledge in the Qur’an is found in the story of Moses’ encounter with an unusual “servant of God” who is commonly identified with the deathless prophet Khidr (or Khizr, “the green one”).”⁽²⁸⁾

The extensive study of this work reveals that Islamic mysticism is getting considerable attention in terms of its various aspects from the perspective of original sources i.e the Quran and Sunnah that were ignored in earlier research of his predecessors. The work has paved the way for further steps in this direction to understand Sufism as real Islamic phenomenon with no external influences of any kind.

Reynold Alleyne Nicholson is one of the very influential western scholar in connection with his remarkable contribution of spreading and introducing Islamic mysticism in the western world. He is an Orientalist, expert on Rumi and translated various Sufi texts into English language including celebrated magnum opus *Kashf al Mahjoob* by Al.Hujweri. He born in U.K and lived from 1868 to 1945. He is very significant western researcher and scholar who is a

junction and an embodiment of all what has been written for the understanding and defining of Tasawwuf in the west. His books and thoughts serve as a compendium and crux of all previous theories which have been developed in the study of Sufism. The study of *The Mystics Of Islam* first published in 1914 unveils the understanding and perception of Tasawwuf in the west. Nicholson like many of his predecessors developed the theory that Tasawwuf and its teachings have been cultivated on non-Arab lands especially Iran or Persia. Textual study of this book reveals that the theories forwarded by this academic circle related to the origin of Sufism are found to be deficient concerning the level of authenticity of arguments. In the first chapter, he perceives that the constituent element of Tasawwuf have been borrowed from Christianity.

“Many Gospel texts and apocryphal sayings of Jesus are cited in the oldest Sufi biographies,”⁽²⁹⁾

The evidence in favor of this theory is quoted that the word Sufi is derived from soof which is borrowed from Christianity:

“We have seen that the woollen dress, from which the name ' Sufi ' is derived, is of Christian origin: vows of silence, litanies (dhikr), and other ascetic practices may be traced to the same source.”⁽³⁰⁾

As discussed in the first chapter, there are almost seven different roots and origin of the word Tasawwuf and soof is one of them. Nicholson relates this root and few other Sufi practices like silence and recollections etc as may be derived from Christianity. He makes this linkage on probabilities and opportunities when he uses the phrase **may be traced**. It is very amazing that he relates some traces that are common in all universal spiritual heritage. The Quran has repeatedly mentioned various injunctions in connection with Gospel, Psalm and Torah. Is it justifiable to infer from these references that whole quranic teachings have been borrowed from these divine scriptures? Most authentic source of information and stories related to Moses, Jesus and Maryam have been related in many surahs of the Quran like Al-Baqarah, al- Nisa and Maryam etc. A question arises that is it permissible to infer that the Quran is Christian origin? These teachings have been borrowed from Christianity, Judaism etc? Islamic stance in this regard is that Din before Allah is always Islam and none else as stated in Al-Imran:

“Truly, Islam is the only Din (Religion) in Allah’s sight.”⁽³¹⁾

Basic guidance in the form of divine revelation has been the same in all religions like the concept of monotheism, prophet hood, Day of Resurrection, predestination and decree and faith of being accountable before Allah etc is mentioned in connection with number of prophets. The origin of these articles of faith has to be considered as common point in all prophetic history and may not be associated as origin of a specific religion. One of the roots of Tasawwuf is that it is derived from suffah which is commonly known with reference to the people of bench who had high degree of trust with God and lived a life of contentment renouncing the comfort of life. This is reported by Hazrat Abu Huraira (R.A) compiled in Bukhari:

"I saw seventy of As-Suffa men and none of them had a Rida' (a garment covering the upper part of the body). They had either Izars (only) or sheets which they tied round their necks. Some of these sheets reached the middle of their legs and some reached their heels and they used to gather them with their hands lest their private parts should become naked."⁽³²⁾

The word suffa mentioned here is one of the roots for the word Tasawwuf. Prophet Moses wore woolen dress when he secluded on Mount Sinai for divine communication. The method applied by him can also interpret that woolen dress seems to the Jewish and not of Christian origin because Moses lived before Jesus. The following narration is of worth attention that explains that woolen dress was already in practice before Jesus as well.

"Ibn Mas'Ud narrated that the Prophet said: "On the day that His Lord spoke to him, Mtisā was wearing a wool Kisā', a wool Jubbah,¹¹ a wool Kummah, wool pants, and his sandals were made of the skin of a dead donkey."⁽³³⁾

Likewise, in cases of various other common spiritual values, there are hundreds of apostolic traditions that mention the excellences of silence, humility and other attributes that are incumbent for believers to practice to attain higher moral and spiritual grades. Linking Islamic Sufism with Christian origin on the bases of mere supposition and probabilities may be questioned as for as its reliability is concerned. Litanies or recollection is similarly a famous subject scattered in various surah of the Quran. The research findings presented by Nicholson seems to be one-sided as

he did not refer any single verse of the Quran from where Muslim Sufis received the commands and injunctions of recollections. He ignores nearest source i.e the Quran and takes a plunge back to Jesus time to establish these Sufi rituals borrowed from Christianity. The Quran states:

“O believers! Keep remembering Allah abundantly.”⁽³⁴⁾

The Quran from beginning to end is loaded with teachings of remembrance and thousands of traditions likewise. It is not expected for the followers to quit this first source and jump back to Christian teachings. He gives a passing reference of two incidents pertaining to a meeting of a Christian hermit and a Muslim Sufi and assumes that Islamic Sufism is derived from Christian sources. Had it been there in the history, he would have brought it. It is interesting fact that such link is not mentioned in any of the original Sufi texts of first two centuries when Tasawwuf was developing and getting recognition as spiritual sciences within Islamic disciplines. Same may be applied to rest of the assumptions related to Neoplatonism as one more source of Tasawwuf especially its theory of illumination. Many verses of the Quran identify Allah and Truth with light. Number of Sufi texts defined Sufism extensively as it includes seeking divine proximity while living within the parameters sharia and selfless service of humanity based on pious intentions with no hidden objectives however, Nicholson believes that the subject is not definable as it varies from person to person in terms of its experience. He states:

“Although the numerous definitions of Sufism which occur in Arabic and Persian books on the subject are historically interesting, their chief importance lies in showing that Sufism is undefinable.”⁽³⁵⁾

It is manifest that all Sufi authorities primarily defined Tasawwuf as the subject that is meant for the purification of mind, heart, and soul from all types of impurities and defilements to gain divine gnosis and nearness. Few definitions that are quoted are certain important traits that help reaching the spiritual destination like, generosity, renouncing worldly pleasure, moral disposition, sincerity in deeds, etc.

A.J Arberry another important figure of twentieth century who contributed in the field of Islamic culture and Sufi thoughts in the west. *An Introduction to the history of Sufism* is one of his academic contributions which is primarily based on his three

lectures that he delivered on Sir Abdullah Suharwardi memorial lectures arranged at Calcutta in 1942. His conclusions and thoughts about Sufism is different from his predecessors and seems to be quite realistic. He is of the opinion that we must not confine our research to link the origin of Tasawwuf and its growth with Iran because there exists vast material in the Quran and traditions that provide ample evidences that Islamic mysticism has its roots in these sources.

“In the course of my own studies of Sufi life and thought it has, of course, always been abundantly apparent to me that, without the twin foundations of the Quran and the Hadith, the whole vast and beautiful structure of Islamic mysticism could never have been erected nor preserved”⁽³⁶⁾

Arberry delivered these lectures in 1942 and after giving summery of his research regarding the history of Sufism in Europe he states that whatever is produced by western scholars to identify the origin and development of Tasawwuf is not to be considered final because much of the manuscripts preserved in various parts of the world, are not yet available for giving final judgement about its origin and evolution.

“A number of desultory attempts have already been made by various scholars to write a history on Sufism, but it cannot be pretended that anything really satisfactory has yet materialized.”⁽³⁷⁾

He emphasizes that no research has been presented with solid evidences to give judgement about the origin or constituent elements of Tasawwuf. While giving very honest opinion he comments that present state of knowledge is not sufficient to make minds that Tasawwuf is originated externally from Hinduism, Buddhism, and Greek philosophy, Neoplatonism or Christianity and has no links with the Quran and Sunnah. All such theories and researches have no solid foundation to be considered as reliable or authentic ones. He remarks that even partial account of the phenomena of Sufism, its origin, development, doctrines and practices is not taken with satisfaction because of the present state of knowledge. Literature produced to understand Sufism during the last three, four centuries is the result of European encounters with Iran and their Sufi poets with no access to classical sources of first and second centuries. He describes this reason that.

"It is unhappily the case that a very large volume, perhaps even the greater volume, of the primary and secondary materials indispensable to the scientific analysis of the Sufi movement is still unpublished, being contained in manuscripts scattered over the libraries of Europe, Africa, and Asia."⁽³⁸⁾

This is his final conclusion in first lecture while explaining the history of Sufism. He is very categorical on the point that without having access to the original and even secondary sources of Sufism that are still lying in the libraries of Europe, Africa and Asia, no definite and scientific analysis is possible. Well-designed point of view about Sufism can be constructed after these manuscripts get published. It is appreciable that academic prejudice and biasness in previous literature produced about Sufism is reduced in twentieth century and many manuscripts have been edited and published that changed the view point of Sufism. The old theories and hypothesis about Sufism have been paralyzed with new research from the western scholars of later period. It is now appropriate to look again that the seed of Tasawwuf was cultivated in Hijaz rather in Iran and it was nourished, developed and grown with the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah and with spiritual demonstrations of Companions and their immediate successors.

Annemarie Schimmel a celebrated German scholar on Islamic mysticism in twentieth century, has produced extensive literature on Islam especially on Islamic mysticism. Her voluminous work *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* throws ample light on the concepts of Sufism. Her ideas and perceptions about mysticism are well elaborated in this work. She defines and understands Islamic mysticism.

"That mysticism contains something mysterious, not to be reached by ordinary means or by intellectual effort, is understood from the root common to the words mystic and mystery, the Greek *myein*, "to close the eyes."⁽³⁹⁾

English word for Tasawwuf is generally mysticism that expresses the meaning what she derives and discusses its etymological root from Greek. Basing her stance on Greek origin, she substantiates that it is something that pertains to high secret and mysterious phenomenon which cannot be achieved by common means or by applying intellectual efforts. While getting these meanings, she traces commonalities in all religions and brings their

concepts under one title of mysticism. She perceives that such ideas can be found in all religious mystical approaches. Western scholars have had common access to Iranian literature especially mystical poetry that was first introduced in Europe. She is vocal on the reality that The constructions of Sufi literature and theories relating to non-islamic sources in the west is because of the frequent contact with Persian literature. Schimmel explains the same in the following words.

“Most of the information about oriental spirituality, however, was derived from the translations of Persian classical poetry— Sacdi's Gulistdn has been one of the favorite books of European intellectuals since Adam Olearius produced its first complete translation into German in 1651.”⁽⁴⁰⁾

She discusses and highlights many approaches and theories that existed in early period of mystical history in the west. It is from Gold Ziher till the end of classical period of orientalism. The purpose of putting these thoughts together as she describes is to have short glimpses of European understanding regarding the phenomenon of Sufism which is not unanimous till today. She admits that since vast literature from original sources of Islam is continuously publishing, it would be hard to fix any single definition of Sufism and source as it has been the practice of earlier scholars from the west.

“The libraries of the Islamic countries, and those in the West, still contain many works that may shed new light upon any of the problems at stake. Even now there is so much material available in the different languages of Islam that any generalization seems impossible.”⁽⁴¹⁾

This conclusion made by an eminent German scholar is worth taking. This is interesting co-incident that A.j Arberry has reached the same conclusion that on the basis of general information with no strong evidences, no specific theories about the perception of Sufism are to be floated because there is much more to appear from eastern and western libraries.

The history of searching about Sufism in the west during fifteenth and sixteenth centuries come to new point. The beginning was that all ideas related to Sufism have been borrowed from external sources and ended on the point that whatever was perceived by western scholars was in haste with no space to

accommodate more literature to further explore Sufism and its teachings being produced from the Quran and Sunnah.

The later period of western research changed when unpublished works of many original Sufi texts appeared and it established that Islam had its own system of every science including Sufism or spirituality.

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