



## Sa'di Shirazi in India: Reception and Translation

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**Abstract:** Sa'di Shirazi (1213/19- 1291/1294) has been a presence in India for more than seven centuries. His most famous works such as *Gulistan* and *Boustan* were part of the main syllabus of Indian Madrasas during the Muslim dynasties in India and then he gained the attention of Western orientalist who were posted in India as officers of East India Company. Sa'di was first translated into English from Persian in India by Sir Richard Francis Burton in 1888 and translators such as Francis Gladwin was responsible for introducing Sa'di to the literary circles of America in the seventeenth century.

This Paper attempts to trace Sa'di's reception and translation in India during both pre-colonial and colonial eras by discussing the influence of Persian literature in India in general and introduction of Sa'di's works in particular.

**Keywords:** Sa'di Shirazi, Reception, Translation, India, Iran, Madrasa.

**Bio of the Author:** Ali Rafiei is an Iranian PhD Student in Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi. I have been working on Sa'di's works in English translation and their issues such as cultural and linguistic challenges. My research is done under the supervision of Prof. M. Asaduddin who is a prominent scholar of India and also my mentor and a source of inspiration.

### Introduction

Abu-Muhammad Muslih al-Din bin Abdallaah Shirazi better called Sheikh Sa'di Shirazi is a thirteenth-century Iranian poet and one of the most celebrated writers both in prose and poetry. His didactic works have been the subject of study for a long time both inside and outside of Iran. Sa'di's *Gulistan* was taught to the children in the schools of Iran as a perfect model for the rule of conduct and his *Boustan* was considered to be a guide to a righteous and honest life.

Sa'di left a tremendous impact on the later poets and writers and until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he retained his place as the best Persian poet of all time. Sa'di and later Hafiz both from a city in the south of Iran called Shiraz, are among the top idols

in the classical Persian poetry that started in the tenth and settled in the fifteenth century. From the fifteenth century till the end of the eighteenth century, many styles of Persian poetry appeared which attained their culmination with Indian genre of poetry or Sabk-e- Hindi. This style was the result of the migration of many Iranian poets and writers to Indian courts<sup>1</sup>. Sabk-e- Hindi which thrived on sophisticated imagery and analogy was exhilarating first and created at least one prominent poet (Saib Tabrizi, 1592-1676)<sup>2</sup> who can be likened with classical Persian poets. "The life of the Indian style of poetry in Iran did not last long. Due to lack of support from the kings of Safavid dynasty (1501- 1736) in Iran, this new style of poetry declined and this caused a reversal of old classical styles (the so-called literary renewal) in Iran" (Katouzian 5). In this new movement, Sa'di became a major character and generally, all his works were emulated by poets and writers of the movement.

Hence, through the nineteenth century, Sa'di was viewed as the most celebrated figure of Persian literature. James Morier in his book titled *Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (1824) refers to Sa'di Shirazi as "The national poet of Iran" (Morier 13). Morier was a diplomat who ridiculed Iranian social customs and ways of life in his book. His description of Sa'di is based on what he heard from the locals in Iran. The goal of this paper is to trace Sa'di's Reception in ancient India and the

<sup>1</sup> Shamsur Rahman Faruqi in his article *Stranger in the City: The Poetics of Sabk-i Hindi* Says "...Iranian here means a native of greater Iran, a cultural entity that was generally meant to comprise of all present day Iran and Azarbaijan and also Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan" (Faruqi 2).

<sup>2</sup> Saib Tabrizi was the founder of Sabk-e- Hindi. He travelled to India in the year of 1626 and entered the court of Shah Jahan in Agra. Saib's reputation is mainly because of his epic collection of poems called *Qandehar Nama* or (The campaign of Qandahar).

translation of his works into English by Orientalists of East India Company.

To achieve this goal, this paper is organized into three sections. The first section will discuss Sa'di's narration of his travel to India to highlight his familiarity with Indian culture. The following sections will focus on the reception and translation of Sa'di's works in two periods of Muslim Kings (pre-colonial India) and the establishment of East India Company during the British rule of India.

### THE TALE OF SA'DI'S TRAVEL TO INDIA

Sa'di Shirazi in the last tale from the eighth chapter of *Boustan*, narrates a long story from the Somnath temple, in which he himself assumes the role of the first person narrator. In this tale, Sa'di narrates his travel to India and a visit to Somnath where he encounters a Hindu temple. People from the far-off lands come to this temple for worship and their dedication to the idols in the temple surprises Sa'di. As Sa'di shares his surprise with a person who according to him is a Brahman and his companion, the Brahman dislikes Sa'di's disbelief in the sanctity of the idols. As a result, the Brahman calls his companions to face Sa'di. However, Sa'di refraining from controversy, pretends to like the Hindu idols and praises them.

The Brahman who is amused by Sa'di's curiosity says that the idol in the temple can raise its hands and pray every morning and Sa'di should sleep in the temple for one night and witness the idol coming to life at dawn. The next morning, to Sa'di's surprise, the idol suddenly raises its hands and excites a large group of people who were standing by the Hindu God. A few days passed and Sa'di remained in the temple until one day he discovered that another priest hidden from the eyes of the worshipers, sits behind the idol every day and moves its arms with a rope. The Brahman who did not like to see such secrets revealed, attacked Sa'di. In the battle with Brahman, Sa'di fatally throws him into a ditch and finishes the story forever in his favor.

Although Sa'di narrates a story about India, many critics disagree with the facts narrated in this tale and argue that Sa'di never travelled to India or lived in a Hindu temple. His story resembles to a historical event during the reign of Yazdegerd I (399-420) of Sasanian Empire in which a Christian Bishop named Maruthas finds patronage in the court of Yazgerd I only to the

distaste of the Zoroastrian priests who try to remove him by appointing a person with the task of convincing the king during religious ceremonies in the temple.

Sa'di probably knew about this story and tried to rebuild the story by introducing himself as the main narrator. But his story is not as effective as he wants it to be. Some critics use this story as proof that Sa'di never travelled to India. Hasan Emdad, an Iranian critic and university teacher in an article titled *Sa'di's Travels* on the website of *The Centre for Sa'di Studies* explains "...Sa'di's travel to India as it is described in both *Gulistan* and *Boustan* is not clear and until no concrete evidence is shown, we assume his stories on India travel to be imaginary" (Emdad).

Sa'di's knowledge of Hinduism seems to be poor since he mixes the Hindu and Zoroastrian priests throughout the story. In this tale, one cannot see Sa'di's toleration and liberal thinking towards other faiths. Edward Browne says "...Sa'di for all his wide readings and extensive travels cannot tell a story about a Hindoo idol-temple without mixing up with it references to Zoroastrian and even Christian observances" (Browne 345). However, his works are full of didactic teachings and conduct of life and this is the reason why *Gulistan* and *Boustan* have been received widely.

### THE RECEPTION OF PERSIAN LITERATURE IN INDIA

As long as the history of literature shows, to search for the adaptation of Persian literature in other countries and tracing the influence of Persian language and literature on other languages, first one should study the Iranian-Indian literary relationship and discuss the impact of Persian language on Indian literature. The literary relationship between Iran and India is really old and many scholars believe that Iran and India have had a common language in ancient times. This belief is based on the similarity between the Avesta and the Sanskrit languages. The Avestan language, which was spoken by people during Zoroastrian times, is very similar to the Sanskrit language, that is, the literary and the ancient language of India. Therefore, some linguists like Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), Robert Anderson Hall (1911-1997) have commented that Iran and India have had a common language in very far periods of history, which Avesta and Sanskrit have taken roots from. Thus, from the ancient periods of history, Iran and India have been closely related in terms of literary

relations, and from thousands of years ago, there has been an intellectual and philosophical relationship between the two countries.

Iran has similar traditions and beliefs as India, and for these similar traditions and beliefs to emerge, language and literature have played a very influential role. There are many instances to show that during the Sassanid era, Iran had literary and artistic contacts with India, and many Persian words were absorbed in the Hindi language, which is now considered as Hindi vocabulary. The history of literature in the following periods shows that the Persian language and literature has had substantial influence on the language and literature of India and has maintained its influence over several centuries.

In the sixteenth century, Raja Todar Mal, the Finance Minister of the Mughal empire during Akbar's reign in India, in order to organize administrative affairs, considered that financial and accounting offices were set up in Persian, the same as in the Islamic period, which the Arabs considered and discussed. The Persian language and literature expanded its circle of influence in India to a point where, during the reign of Akbar, the great emperor of India, the Persian language became the official language of the country and for centuries remained the official language. "... The classical works of Persian poets such as Sa'di's *Gulistan* were continuously read to Akbar" (Khan 84). Some scholars believe that the similarity of thoughts and ideas in ancient Iran and India originates from the influence of language and literature. In a number of cases, thoughts and beliefs of Iran and India are very similar to each other. The worship of the fire and the sun, as well as the philosophy of Vedanta and the philosophy of Sufism and mysticism, are examples of this influence.

Many of India's poets and writers, whose number exceeds hundreds, have written in Persian, some of whom, like Iqbal Lahori (1877–1938), have become more famous than some Iranian poets.

Some of the Indian literary treasures gained fame in the world with the help of translation into Persian. The first recorded translation of *Panchatantra* (270 BCE) was done by Borzuya, an Iranian origin physician. Many cultures around the world have become familiar with *Panchatantra* in the past centuries. This book, titled in Persian as *Kalila wa Demnah* (570 CE),

has been translated into many languages. Every major language of India has a version of Panchatantra, and also there are 200 translated versions of the text in more than 50 languages around the world and this text could be a source of inspiration for many great writers. The Pahlavi translation of this book by Borzuya the physician is the oldest translation from the Hindi language.

After the Arabs dominated Iran, Roozbeh, known as Ibn Moghifa, translated the Pahlavi version of this book into Arabic in 748, and then Rudaki provided a versified version in (941-42). Unfortunately, Rudaki's version is lost and only a few lines from Rudaki's versified *Kalila wa Demnah* are preserved in other sources.

With the presence of Muslim culture in the region, Persian poetry and prose became common in India and had a profound influence on Indian thought and works. These poets and writers took the path of India in the wake of various incidents and events, and the court of India became the centre of Persian literature. The presence of Iranian poets in the Indian courts not only affected the thoughts and literary cultures of India, but also the Indian environment influenced the Persian poets and some scholars believed that the Indian style in Persian poetry was born in the courts of the Indian kings.

Ghiyas ud din Balban (reign: 1266–1287) and his son Nasiruddin Bughra Khan (reign: 1281–1287) were among the first Muslims kings of Delhi who were interested in Persian. It is known that the son of Ghiyas ud din Balban invited Sa'di to India and promised to consider a special place for him in his court, but Sa'di, due to age and exhaustion, refused to accept the invitation. Yet he made a point that India did not need Sa'di because "dar Hind Khusru bas ast" (For India, Amir Khusru is enough).

#### INDIA'S MADRASA SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

To assume that India had no education system before colonial rule is a mistake. "Education is no exotic in India. There is no nation where the love of learning has so early an origin or has exercised so lasting and powerful an influence" (Thomas 1). Both Hindus and Muslims in India developed their own system of education which was mainly based on spiritual and classical texts. "Educating students was done by ancient and sacred languages such as Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian" (Ghosh 4).

The Muslim system of education in medieval India was considerably dominated by the expansion of Ghaznavid dynasty in the immediate regions. Mahmud of Ghazni (reign: 998-1030) founded Madrasa system of education in Ghazni (traditionally known as Ghaznin). Such notable intellectuals like Abū Rayhān Birūni (973–1050), the cosmologist and chronologist, Abu Nasr al-Farabi (872-950), the jurist and philosopher; Abu'l-Husain Utbi (died 982), the statesman, Imam al-Bayhaqi (994-1066), the prominent writer; Farrukhi Sistani (980-1038), one of the founders of Persian poetry restoration movement and most importantly Firdowsi (940–1020), who were connected with the court of Ghazna helped in advancing the scholarly exercises of Madrasas.

Under Mahmud's son and successor, Masu'd, many madrasas were established. At the time when Lahore was chosen to be the capital of Ghaznavid dynasty, numerous mosques with madrasas were available there.

The standard of training and education presented by the Ghaznavid Sultans in Delhi was based on the model of the madrasa at Ghazna. A similar model was then selected in different parts of India. Due to the Mongol assault against many parts of Islamic lands, numerous Arabic and Persian intellectuals fled to Delhi. These intellectuals were hired in the madrasas which were particularly traditional in nature and mainly focused on religious matters, Hadith and Tafsir. These madrasas helped the State in training Qadis and Muftis for administrations in the governmental departments.<sup>3</sup>

Many Turkish kings in India were supporters of knowledge and learned men. Ghiyas al-din Balban (1266-128) held scholars such as Burhan al-din Balkhi and Sharaf al-din Lalwaji in high regard. Amid the rule of 'Alā' ud-Dīn Khaljī (1296-1316), a popular Egyptian Scholar Shams al-din came to India for spreading the teaching of Islamic Hadith. The Moroccan explorer and scholar Ibn Battuta visited Delhi during the rule of Muhammad B. Tughluq (1321-1388) and was delegated as a judge and later sent as Tughluq's envoy to China. Tughluq's cousin Firoz Shah who was loved by his people, established and supported thirty madrasas in Delhi alone. Among them, the

most acclaimed was "Madrasa-I-Firozi" built at Hauze-e-Khas in Delhi in 755 A.H. Private quarters for both the instructors and the pupils were considered in order to support individual contacts between them.

Prominent researchers from Samarqand, Bukhara, Herat and Khorasan were hired in the Mughal court. The educational programs at the madrasas initially comprised of philosophical and religious instruction (Manqul), exegesis and religious jurisprudence. It was during the reign of Akbar (1556- 1605) until the reign of Aurangzeb (1658- 1707) when subjects, such as, ethics and also Sufism were added to the courses being instructed at the schools. During the eighteenth century, the syllabus of the schools in India was concentrated on ethics and Sa'di's *Gulistan* and *Boustan* became part of the main subjects for prose and poetry teachings.

The wise poet of Shiraz, Sa'di, was studied through three of his books in India: *The Karimah*, *The Boustan*, and *The Gulistan*. All of these books contained stories with ethical teachings such as sincerity and sharing. Poetry was used to repeat, strengthen or delineate these qualities in easily intelligible language. Another important book which was examined in the Indian schools or Islamic "Madrasas" was the *Anwar-i-Suhaili* (15<sup>th</sup> century) or (The Lights of Canopus), a collection of tales which emphasized on good deeds. Persian elites and writers in India considered Sa'di's works and *Anwar-i-Suhaili* as models of literary diction.

It was until 1832 that the Mughals and the British, directed government business in Persian. After Persian lost its political significance, it retained its importance in social circle. It provided the material and the necessary tradition for a great part of the Persian poetry written in India. Many of the Indian aristocracies were of the view that preference and enthusiasm for Persian verse were necessary for elite status in the society. "Both Muslims and non-Muslims went to Islamic schools to procure the fundamentals of Persian Language" (Kozlowski 64).

Thus as it has been discussed the syllabus of Indian Madrasas contained many books written in Persian as well as Arabic. The courses offered initially involved religious teachings and also sciences like mathematics. Later Persian poetry was added as the main course and Sa'di's *Gulistan* and *Boustan* and also *Noor Nameh Sa'di* were part of this syllabus.

<sup>3</sup> A qadi is the governor or judge of a Shari'a court, who likewise practices extrajudicial tasks, for example, reconciliation, custody and protection of orphans and minors, and supervision and reviewing of civic works.

## SA'DI DURING COLONIAL INDIA

Ta'mim Dari, an Iranian Professor in Alama Tabatabai University, Iran, referring to the history of the study of *Gulistan* and *Boustan* of Sa'di in India, explains that "...By engaging in India and its colonization, Britain hired a number of anthropologists to learn the culture of India. One of their ways was to extract books that the Indians read more and found *Gulistan* and *Boustan* of Sa'di and *Divan-e Hafiz* are among the books that the people of India read more than other works. Therefore, English officers and judges had to learn Persian literature to rule the Indian people" (Dari).

He further says that Great Britain sent its officers to Basra to learn Persian and began translating *Gulistan* into English. In fact, this was done in order to familiarize themselves with the ethics and behavior of the people of India. Thus, *Gulistan* was one of the first works translated into English in India. It was Sir Francis Richard Burton who first translated *Gulistan* of Sa'di completely from Persian into English in 1888. After him, Francis Gladwin and James Ross, the two officers of East India Company, published a free translation of *Gulistan*.

## THE LANGUAGE POLICY OF GREAT BRITAIN IN INDIA

In order to use a language in power domains, it should be systematic and standardized. The language imperialism alludes to a procedure by which a language is given more importance than other or indigenous languages. Although at the beginning of the British colonial rule in India, there seemed to be a policy of promoting indigenous languages, yet their policies were influenced by a number of changes. These changes ultimately led to the promotion of the English language. The orientalist believed that Indians should study languages such as Sanskrit, Farsi and Arabic, and they were interested in restoring the ancient Oriental knowledge and languages. On the other hand, Anglicists wanted Indian intellectuals to study English language and advocated the dominance of Western knowledge and education.

Prior to 1780, the education policy of the East India Company was unclear. The main goal of the company was trade, but this policy changed in 1783 when the British parliament announced its plan to teach the officers of this company the Indian languages. "In 1773, Warren Hastings, the former governor general of India, proposed the

creation of a Persian Council at Oxford University so that future English officials could learn this language before travelling to India" (Ghosh 252).

William Jones, a well-known 18th-century orientalist, spoke about the culture and heritage of the East while staying in India, and considered living in the East as a great honor for himself. Jones believed that the proper knowledge of the Persian language was necessary for anyone who wanted to be known as an Orientalist in the field of Indian history and literature. Given the efficiency of Jones in Persian, he succeeded in introducing two stars (Hafiz and Sa'di) of the Persian literature to the West for the first time.

Since Persian was the official language of the Indian courts, the East India Company officers had to be fully acquainted with Persian literature even before entering India. Recently there have been new suggestions that the main reason for British officers' engagement with Muslim affairs in India was the Persian language being the central mode of communication in diplomacy and war affairs. This familiarity helped the East India Company to manage the financial and political affairs in India. In this way, the Persian language had a functional role and was effective in gaining a more complete understanding of administrative matters and important aspects in the history of the writings of the Mughal and Turkish kings in India.

It was because of their familiarity with the Farsi language that the famous Orientalists such as Francis Gladwin, Charles Hamilton, David Anderson, William David and Jonathan Scott, were able to translate and compile a comprehensive Mogul history in English in 1792

Sa'di Shirazi has always been at the centre of attention for British Orientalists. The books of this famous Persian poet were studied by orientalist in the Indian colonial period in order to become more familiar with the culture of the Indian people. Francis Gladwin, Edward Rehatsek, Richard Francis Burton, Edward Eastwick, and James Ross were all Orientalists who learned Persian and travelled to India through the East India Company. These people provided various translations of Sa'di's *Gulistan*, which, after three centuries, are still being studied by Sa'di's enthusiasts. It should be noted that the purpose of the translating *Gulistan* and *Boustan* from Persian into English by British Orientalists was political and the audience of these translations were high-ranking officials of the East India Company and

Indian elites. In the following section, the translations of Sa'di's *Gulistan* by the officers of East India Company is discussed.

The translation of *Gulistan* of Sa'di by Francis Gladwin is important because of its impact on American literary circles. His translation was the first English version of *Gulistan* that found its way to America and impressed Ralph Waldo Emerson, who presented an introductory note in the Gladwin's edition. Francis Gladwin knew Persian very well and later, in 1788, he published an English translation of "Compendium of Ethics" which apparently was a collection of excerpts from *Bousthan* and *Gulistan*. Gladwin, who was a famous writer of Persian language and founder of Persian studies in Bengal, also published dictionaries, including *The Persian Guide, Exhibiting the Arabic Derivatives* (Calcutta 1800) and *A Dictionary, Persian, Hindoostanee and English, including Synonyma* (Calcutta 1809). His deep interest in Oriental studies is visible in the introduction to *Gulistan's* translation. Referring to his enthusiasm, he has stated that he wishes to provide the Fort William College with the best Persian classics though his wish was never to be fulfilled.

Edward Rehatsek (1819-1891) was a Hungarian who chose to live in India. During his 44 years of living in India, he supported himself by teaching oriental languages at Wilson College in Mumbai. However, he generally maintained a distance from Europeans. He translated some other Persian works e.g. Jami's *Baharistan* (translated in 1887) and his profound sensitivity for Asian culture is obviously shown in his translations. The version distributed under the name of the well-known traveler and explorer Richard Burton whose knowledge of Persian language appears to have been slight is, in fact, Rehatsek's.<sup>4</sup>

The best translation for Sa'di's *Gulistan* is provided by Edward Rehatsek in the nineteenth century. The English language in the translated version of Rehatsek is polished. His translation presents a mixture of poetry and prose, however, Rehatsek seems to deliberately translate Sa'di's difficult poems into prose and he fails to identify the changes done to the structure of original poems

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<sup>4</sup> J.D Yohannan in his paper titled *Did Sir Richard Burton Translate Sadi's Gulistan?* argues that this translation actually belongs to Edward Rehatsek. Comparing the two translations also shows identical lines. However, Iran Chamber Society has published the translation authored by Burton and many websites identify the translation with Burton.

and the target readers cannot distinguish which part in the original book is in poetry or prose.

The translation of *Gulistan* by James Ross (1759-1831) has been done in 1823. He was posted in India from 1783 to 1804. The translation of *Gulistan* was distributed among the directors of East India Company and private subscribers. His other works include a rendering of *Bousthan*, a volume containing one of the heroic poems of Firdowsi and selections from Nizami, Anwari, Hafiz etc. He has also authored a dictionary of Persian words. From his Introduction to the book, one understands that Ross has met and was in contact with Francis Gladwin, another translator of *Gulistan*, and actually made the effort to get a consultation from Gladwin.

Edward Backhouse Eastwick (1814 – 1883) was a British orientalist and Conservative Member of the British parliament. He composed and edited various books on South Asian nations. He joined the Bombay infantry in 1836, at the same time, due to his skill in learning languages, was given a political post. In 1843 he translated the Persian *Kessahi Sanjan* or *History of the Arrival of the Parsees* in India; and he composed a *Life of Zoroaster*, a Sindhi vocabulary, and different papers for the Bombay Asiatic Society. In 1845 he was appointed a professor of Hindustani at Haileybury College. After two years he distributed a Hindustani grammar, and in subsequent years a new release of Sa'di's *Gulistan*, with an interpretation in prose and verse. The First edition of Eastwick's translation was published in 1852, however, the second edition of translated *Gulistan* was published in 1880.

Henry Wilberforce Clarke (1840– 1905) was the translator of Persian works by mystic artists such as Sa'di, Hafiz, Nizami, and Suhrawardi, as well as authoring a few works himself. He was an officer in the British India corps Bengal Engineers. Wilberforce Clarke was the translator of a basic interpretation of *The Divān* of Hafiz, printed at the Central Press of the Government of India, Calcutta (1889– 1891). He also translated *The Bustan of Sa'di* from Persian to English in prose which was published in 1879 in London for India Office. G. S. Davie translated *Bousthan* from Persian into English in 1882. Davie tried to maintain the difficult task of keeping the rhyme.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, Sa'di has been at the centre of attention for the enthusiasts of poetry and literature in the course of history in India. During the reign of the Mughal and Turkish kings in India, Sa'di's books, including *Gulistan* and *Boustan*, were selected as part of major syllabus in Islamic schools in different parts of the country. Sa'di in his major works, deals with topics such as forgiveness, human emotions, ethics and didactic teachings which are accepted by all cultures. Another reason why his books were chosen as the main syllabus in Madrasas in India is that Sa'di includes a lot of Quranic references in his *Gulistan* and *Boustan*.

During India's colonial era, British Orientalists have paid special attention to the works of Iranian poets, especially Sa'di Shirazi, as these works had extensively infiltrated in Indian society. The Persian publications of the East India Company were used in a very effective way to learn the methods, traditions and practices of the Indian community. Persian texts were used to improve the administration of India. Persian manuscripts were printed in the form of books to allow the transfer of skills from past rulers of India to its future rulers. This is comparable to the British colonial education policies in India in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

The task of translating Sa'di's works in India, was taken by the officers of East India Company who were posted in India. Orientalists such as William Jones, Francis Gladwin, Edward Rehatsek, and James Ross translated many Persian works to English as they were familiar with the Persian language. Their translations initially were meant for the officers of East India Company and elites. Yet they were successful in introducing Sa'di to the English-speaking world through translation.

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