

# THE IMPACT OF THE ORIENT ON THE WORKS OF GOETHE

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**Abstract** – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is considered as one of major representatives of not only German literature, but also World literature. The masterpieces created by him like “The Faust”, “The Sorrows of Young Werther”, “Iphigenia in Taurus” and others are well known around the world. The special feature of Goethe, unlike other German literary figures, is that he created the work harmonizing the West and the East. Goethe’s spiritual travel to the east and getting acquainted with the works of Hafiz greatly influenced on the creation of the work “West-Eastern Divan”, which includes 12 sections. “West-Eastern Divan” dedicated to the topics of Eastern literature and culture.

**Index terms:** Goethe, the Orient, Hafez, West-Eastern Divan, masterpiece, works, Persian poetry.

## INTRODUCTION

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was a German poet, dramatist, writer, scientist, theatre director, criticizer, and as well as being considered to be the greatest German literary figure of the modern era. Suffice it to mention that from the point of European perspective, he appears as the central and incomparable representative of the Romantic Movement. Unlike some writers and poets who originated from the West, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe looked at Islamic culture with an open heart and the influence of the East and Eastern literature affected on the masterpieces of Goethe brilliantly. Before moving to connection of the East and the works of Goethe, suffice it to mention the life of adorable poet and playwright.

Goethe (1749-1832) was born in Frankfurt. He was the offspring of the lawyer and the daughter of the mayor. With the help of his father and personal tutor, he graduated primary and secondary education. As a talented and gifted child, he learnt languages such as Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Italian and French fluently from his childhood. When he was about 16, he engaged in acquiring higher education in the field of Law for the sake of accomplishing his father’s wish. This period was significant for being influential to the first poems and plays. Later, Goethe got acquainted with Johann Gottfried von Herder, who was the philosopher and poet in Strasbourg. Herder enabled Goethe to be aware of the major works world literature like the

masterpieces of Rousseau, Shakespeare, Homer and others. Herder was the person who had great influence on Goethe in the process of getting interested in literature.

In 1774, Goethe completed one of his major works, “The Sorrows of Young Werther”, that was about committing suicide of the youth. Additionally, his later dramas, “Iphigenia in Taurus” and “Torquato Tasso” were also famous and significant for their classical essence. The author did not limit himself with literature only, but also proceeded to study the other fields like natural sciences, especially mineral materials, botany, anatomy and others. In 1790, Goethe’s masterpiece “Faust” was published which the work was originally unfinished. Till the end of his life, the edited version of “Faust” came into existence. This play is rather philosophical and the theme is focused on the search for the meaning of existence and of the soul. The play includes not only the topics of psychology, history and politics, but also to mystical and philosophical viewpoints were vividly expressed. Goethe is considered one of adorable representative of literature with his brilliant pieces of writing. However, as the theme of the article is devoted to the association of the East and the works of Goethe, it is expedient to mention that the place of Eastern culture and Eastern literature is of high importance in terms of investigating Goethe’s masterpieces.

The distinctive feature of Goethe's work from other representatives of western literature is its coverage of topics of Eastern literature. This specificity of the works of Goethe is what makes always return to the work of Goethe and investigate deeply. Goethe's attention and love for Eastern culture and literature are not manifested only in his work, and not in a number of his works, but in several stages of the formation of the poet's creativity. Many scientists consider the cause of such brilliant association to be the tolerance.

Nowadays, some people are of hesitating opinion about the necessity of studying Goethe and his works. As today the world is witnessing turmoil, political and cultural conflicts such as religious, ethnic, tribal and other forms, Goethe is one of good example, who showed example through his relations with Eastern literature and culture on tolerance and building bridges with new worlds.

As many scholars investigated Goethe's works, it is worth of mentioning the name of German-American researcher, Katharina Mommsen, who cannot be ignored when talking about Goethe and the Arab-Muslim world. The reason is that she devoted her scientific and academic life for decades to study the works of Goethe and his relations with Eastern and Islamic culture. In his book "Goethe and the Arab world", Mommsen writes that Goethe would not have achieved what he achieved if he had not turned to Arab and Islamic culture. Mommsen firmly proves the fact that Goethe was well acquainted with the Holy Quran, the tales of the "One Thousand and one nights", Arabic poetry as well as Persian poetry presented in the poetry of Hafez Shirazi and other Muslim poets.

Those who have studied the work of Goethe will undoubtedly find Arabian and Islamic influence on his work. According to some scientists, Goethe, from his early years, had been attracted to the poetry of the East. In the period of his writing plays, he had chosen Mohammed as the central figure of a dramatic poem. As a result, he had prepared himself for the task that is a study of the Koran, which is difficult to be accomplished.

There are some evidences that Goethe translated Solomon's "Song of songs", which is considered to be

the most glorious collection of love-songs ever fashioned by God. Additionally, he had been charmed by "Sakuntala", which was famous Indian drama. What is more, Saadi's "Garden" and Jami's "Loves of Laila and Majnun" enabled him to enter to Persian poetry. The strong interest to Eastern literature began when his acquaintance Joseph von Hammer translated "Divan" of Hafez and published.

As Hafez's poetry was completely stories of love and passion, even after about four hundred years, was devolved in Goethe, who was the famous author and poet of Germany. As the poetry of Hafez exerted a strong impact on him, Goethe created a gorgeous gathering in German language. After getting acquainted with the poetry of Hafez, Goethe wrote in his diary: "...at present, after reading the whole of his poems, I become touched by them in such a manner that I engaged to compose the poems in their response, because I could not endure against this magnificent phenomenon. These poems exerted a strong and vivid influence on me. Their German translations were in front of me and I must have prepared ...". There are other quite serious causes for transferring into the topic of the East and its literature. Although the journey to the East was formed only in the imagination of Goethe, it was a means of escape from the political issues and the stresses. Besides, it was a way of finding the security and the tranquility of his inner world.

Consequently, Goethe's "West-Eastern Divan" appeared under the inspiration by Hafez's poetry. The compilation was the echo of love toward Hafez's works. On the other hand, there are some people who exaggerate mistakenly by considering that "West-Eastern Divan" is a concrete translation of Hafez's poetries or it is a manuscript about Hafez and his life. Although it may be noticed that, Hafez had been a source of inspiration for Goethe in the process of compiling of "West-Eastern Divan", but this masterpiece has his own special style and context.

In terms of the relationship and spiritual closeness of two poets, Swiss orientalist, Johann Christoph Bürgel states that: "One of the most beautiful events of the world literature history is the contact of these two speech stars with each other." The spiritual

closeness of Goethe with Hafez also manifested in the poems included in the collection of Divan. The examples are the followings:

“And up and down the rough rock ways

My comfort, Hafiz, be thy lays,

When the guide enchantingly,

From his mule-back seat on high,...”

“In bath or inn my thought would be,

Holy Hafiz, still of thee;...” and others.

By means of continuous repetition and addressing of Hafez, Goethe proved the respect and worship toward him and his works.

When the title of his masterpiece is under research, it should be noted that “West-Eastern Divan” is the fourth and the last preferred one among others. As a bright example of the effect of the East on the works of Goethe, “West-Eastern Divan” is of high significance among the followers of literature. The poetical part of the Divan is divided into 12 sections and each of them was given both a Persian name and a German title. Let us see in details:

1. Moganni Nameh (Book of the Singer)
2. Hafiz Nameh (Book of Hafiz)
3. Uschk Nameh (Book of Love)
4. Tefkir Nameh (Book of Reflections)
5. Rendsch Nameh (Book of III Humour)
6. Hikmet Nameh (Book of Maxims)
7. Timur Nameh (Book of Timur)
8. Suleika Nameh (Book of Zuleika)
9. Saki Nameh (Book of the Cupbearer)
10. Mathal Nameh (Book of Parables)
11. Parsi Nameh (Book of the Parsees)
12. Chuld Nameh (Book of Paradise)

According to the naming above, one can notice that Goethe was the master in transferring the names from one language to another sensibly. Additionally, it is necessary to note that the character Suleika in “West-Eastern Divan” was based on Goethe’s own wife, Marianne who had bright social gifts and graceful cultivation, besides good humor and good sense.

Moreover, as it is mentioned above, Goethe was well aware of Islamic culture and his attitude toward Islamic world was represented in the following poem brightly:

“God’s very own the Orient!

God's very own the Occident!

The North land and the Southern land

Rest in the quiet of His hand.”

In the poem above, the meaning is realized like that the Orient and the West are the two faces of the same coin. In fact, there is not any difference between them. This is the God, who has power, which unites the west with the east, the south and the north and is situated above all. In the condition where God is, all things are useless to appear. With the help of the poem above, it is noticeable that Goethe was highly interested in Islamic culture and religion as well.

At the end, it should be mentioned that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was not similar to other German poets, novelists and playwrights. His eminence was that he was investigating continuously as well as trying to cover many other sciences. The vital part investigated in the article is the association of his works with the Eastern literature. It is worth of mentioning that Goethe is worshipped for brilliant masterpieces as well as the harmonization of the West and the East.

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