

Dr Aloys Springer: An Eminent Orientalist in British India

Sk Jahangir Hussain,
Research Scholar, Cotton University, Ghy-1

Abstract

Dr. Aloys Sprenger, a prominent player in the field of oriental studies throughout the nineteenth century, goes beyond the usual description of an "Orientalist." His impressive amount of scholarly work positions him as a leading authority on Arabic and Islamic history, as well as a specialist in different areas of Islamic culture. Notably, his contributions are regarded not just by Western academics, but also by Muslim thinkers. As a result of his academic efforts, he rediscovered and reintroduced Islamic source literature into the world. The mystical treatises by Muhasibi, a prominent Sufi of the ninth century A.D., were among the rediscoveries of Seerat Ibn Hashsham, Wagidi's Futuh-ush-Sham, and Gurgani's Vis-o-Rameen.

These priceless discoveries have cemented Dr. Sprenger's place in the annals of oriental studies. His remarkable research is acknowledged to reach beyond the usual confines of Orientalism. His expertise in Arabic and Islamic history, as well as his unearthing of missing Islamic source literature, has earned him significant acclaim among Western and Muslim academics alike. His outstanding contributions ensure that he will be remembered in the subject of Eastern studies for the rest of his life.

Keywords: Dr. Aloys Sprenger, eminent orientalist, British India, Oriental Studies, Calcutta Madrasah etc.

Introduction

Aloys Sprenger, a well-known orientalist of Austrian ancestry, was born on September 3, 1813, in Nassereith, a town in the Tyrol area. He acquired his early schooling in his birthplace before enrolling at Innsbruck College, where he studied for six years. Later, he attended Vienna University, where he studied Philosophy, Physical Science, Medicine, and Oriental Languages, among other things. Among them, his genuine interest was Eastern languages, which fueled his ambition to do comparative research across many linguistic systems.

Sprenger committed himself to learning an incredible number of languages in order to achieve his goal. He studied the complexities of numerous Eastern languages such as Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian, in addition to Latin, Greek, English, French, Italian, and Spanish. Sprenger's scholastic path was profoundly impacted by his exposure to the writings of prominent Austrian orientalist Joseph von Hammar-Purgstall, a crucial player in supporting oriental studies within German-speaking nations. Sprenger's chosen path was also greatly influenced by Vincenz von Rosenzweig-Schwannau's (1791-1865) translations of Jami and Jalaluddin Rumi's poetry into German as well as his versified translation of Diwan-e-Hafiz in three volumes.

Sprenger studied Arabic and Persian languages under the tutelage of these eminent scholars, culminating in the production of various books on a variety of topics related to these languages. Sprenger was not ably exposed by Hammar's writings to the great contributions of Indian Muslims in literature and culture. Furthermore, Friedrich Rueckert's German translation of the Persian dictionary's eighth book, "Haft Kulzum" broadened Sprenger's understanding of Indian Muslims' intellectual pursuits.

Description:

Sprenger's contributions to Western intellectuals, particularly those interested in Islam, will never be forgotten. In contrast, Muslim scholars strongly disagree with certain of his viewpoints. The fact that he questions the veracity of the Traditions (Hadith) has lowered his standing among Muslims. This is due to his attempt to demonstrate that some Traditions can't be relied on uncritically. Due to Goldziher's influence, certain Muslim Modernists have continued Sprenger's critique of

Traditions as developed by Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921).

Sprenger withdrew out of Vienna University and sought employment, but was denied down and relocated to England. The Earl of Munster (1794-1842) commissioned him to write a complete history of Muslim warfare. Sprenger acquired passages from Arabic and Persian writings for the project. Earl of Munster and Sprenger investigated libraries in Germany, Italy, France, Austria, and the Netherlands. Upon his return, Sprenger devised a comprehensive strategy for the endeavour, including a reference list, battlefield photographs, weaponry, and so on.

Sprenger became a British citizen in 1838. At Vienna University, he was required to study medicine as a course topic. But he is currently pursuing his studies at a number of European colleges, including those in Paris and Oxford, and undertaking research on Muslim medical services. After submitting a short thesis in Latin titled "Origin of Medicine under the Caliphate" to Leiden University, he was appointed as an assistant surgeon in the East India Company's army. In 1843, he came in India. He became principal of Delhi College in 1845 and established *Quranus Sa'dain*, an Urdu monthly periodical published in Delhi. His appointment as Extra Assistant Resident in Lucknow was made in 1847. Lord Hardinge directed him to compile a list of ten thousand manuscripts from the Royal Library of Lucknow. Sprenger intended to publish them in five volumes, but only one was feasible.

Sprenger arrived in Calcutta in early 1843. Calcutta, which was surrounded by multiple cantonments at the time, was the heart of British authority. Sprenger spent a round year and a half working at several military hospitals. During this period, he encountered several powerful people who immediately noticed the brilliant scholar in him. They were startled to meet a physician who knew so many languages and was so well-versed in Islamic studies. They recommended school administrators to maximize his scholarship. Soon after, the French head of Delhi College, Felix Boutros (d. 1864), returned to England on medical leave, and Sprenger took his position.

It was a watershed moment in the history of Indian education when Delhi College was founded. Since its founding in 1792 A.D., it was known as "Madrasah Ghazi Ud-Din Khan". In the beginning, it offered instruction only in Islamic sciences. A reorganization and renaming of the institution took place in 1825. Additionally, the new system required courses in English and other Western languages. The overall goal of these modifications was to provide Indians with access to Western sciences, especially scientific ones.

These modifications were well received, and there was a rush for admission to the College. The Delhi College not only provided an important contribution to education, but it also played an important part in the intellectual and patriotic awakening of Muslims. In reality, the majority of the leaders who later sparked a new surge of activity in the domains of education, literature, and religion were either instructors or alumni of this college.⁴

During Sprenger's stint as principal, all of these people were his college students. Sprenger hoped to instill a genuine sense of knowledge in every teacher and student, and it was this attitude that motivated him to change the College's structure, teaching, and syllabi. Sprenger managed the religious institutions of various Northern Indian cities, including Agra, Banaras, and Bareilly, and did everything he could to keep them working on modern lines. Sprenger was the head of this school for around three years, during which time he also had control of the vast majority of Madrasahs in Northern India. On December 6, 1847, he was transferred to Lucknow as an additional assistant. In his stead, F. Taylor (d. 1857) was named as acting principal.

Wajid Ali Shah (r. 1847-56, d. 1887) was the final king of the Awadh Kingdom at the time, and Lucknow was its capital. He was a lover of art and luxury and had little interest in official matters. Some important British commanders, like as Henry Elliot, who was aware of Awadh's three Imperial Libraries (e.g., Moti Mahal, Topkhana, and Farah Bakhsh), may have predicted the kingdom's demise.

As a result, they wanted to protect the precious texts in these libraries before the monarchy ended. With this in mind, they charged Sprenger with cataloguing these manuscripts in order to establish their contents and worth.

Henry Elliot personally directed the project, and Sprenger used to furnish him with a quarterly progress report. "Sprenger was well-versed in the art of cataloguing and was able to prepare, in a little more than a year and a half, a comprehensive catalogue of ten thousand manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Hindi, and Pushto." He planned to publish this collection in five volumes, but only the first (Calcutta, 1854) was finished. Nobody knows what happened to the rest of the books. Sprenger was sent back to Delhi in January 1850 to resume his previous job, but he only stayed for a short time before being named Principal of Madrasah Aliah (Calcutta) in May. A major contributor to the intellectual and educational growth of Muslims in West Bengal, this Madrasah was founded in 1780, making it one of India's oldest institutions.

Aliah University sprang out of Aliah Madrasah, also known as Calcutta Madrasah or Mohammedan College, which was established in 1780 AD. Until 1927, Aliah Madrasah's principals were Europeans, some of whom were orientalists. Aloys Sprenger, William Nasau Lees, Henry Fardin and Blochmann, Sir Edward Denison Ross, and the final European principal, Alexander Hamilton Harley, were among the notable orientalists who served as Aliah Madrasah principals. During his stay at Aliah Madrasah from 1850 to 1857, Sprenger endeavoured to modify the course of study by deleting Mantiq and Hikmat and adopting some modern courses in their stead. However, due to student opposition, the project was scrapped.

In addition to this College, Sprenger was in charge of the Hugli College in Bengal. During this period, he was also named Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta. He received the initial publishing of the texts of several Arabic literature from this Society while in this capacity. He served in this capacity for four years. In 1854, he went on leave. He relocated his family to Germany and toured the Middle East. He spent over a year and a half touring in several Middle Eastern countries. In truth, it was an intellectual journey.

During this long and arduous tour, he had certain aims in mind, such as meeting intellectuals, learning about the real conditions in those countries, visiting large public and private libraries, and looking for rare manuscripts. He accomplished his goal by touring Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Muscat, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. Sprenger's voyage was a watershed moment in his life, although his biographers have paid little attention to it.

Sprenger's private archives, which are preserved at Berlin's State Library, chronicle this voyage. The tale is written entirely by him and contains many private facts about his life. "Sprenger moved to Switzerland in 1858, where he became Professor of Oriental Studies at the University of Bern, where he remained until 1881. He returned to Heidelberg and wrote alone for the rest of his life. He died at Heidelberg on December 19, 1893.

Aloys Sprenger was a renowned scholar of Arabic and Persian. He was said to speak 25 languages fluently. In addition to his formal duties at Madrasah Aliah, he was an active member of the Asiatic Society, serving as its General Secretary. From 1851 until 1854, he was also the Government's Persian Translator. Despite his administrative responsibilities in the principal's office, Aliah Madrasah, Sprenger contributed significantly to the academic pursuits.

With the support of a number of colleagues from the parent institution, especially Maulavi Abdul Hai, he developed a critical edition of Al-Isabafi-Tamyiziz Sahaba, which is considered mandatory reading for Hadith scholars. As a result of major Sprenger's hard efforts, Ibn Hajar Asqalani's (d. 852 AH) greatest masterpiece was made available in print for the first time. Later, in Cairo, further editions of Isaba were released. Nonetheless, serious scholars and critics will value the aforementioned Calcutta edition.

By critically editing Jalaluddin Suyuti's *Al-ligani'Ulumal-*

Qur'an, Sprenger has made significant contributions to the study of Qur'anic sciences. His laborious editing efforts resulted in numerous academic pieces being submitted to the Journal of the Asiatic Society, some of which are briefly mentioned. The Journal of the Asiatic Society published an essay titled "Foreign terms occurring in the Quran" in 1852, followed by a paper titled "Notices on the *Duadul Qulub* of Mahasebi, the earliest book on Sufism that has ever been written" in 1856.

According to him, he founded an illustrated journal similar to Penny Magazine in 1845. It was called *Qiran 'us-Sa'dain*. His imagination turned East and West into Jupiter and Venus, whose conjunction was described in this diary. There had never been a project of this kind before. When I left India eleven years later, I was delighted to see that more than a dozen periodicals were published in this style--"In my opinion, the best reward of my efforts was that those for whom I had struggled were so inspired by my efforts that they produced things that would prove useful for them and their country that they exceeded even the original model."

In India, Dr. Sprenger has made substantial contributions to the field of oriental studies. He is most known for writing the Dictionary of Arabic Technical Terms Used in Musalman Sciences, which was published in Calcutta in 1854. In collaboration with Agha Ahmad, he also rewrote Nizami Sikandar Nameh Bahri's manuscript of *Utfi's Kitabul Yamini History of Mahmud of Gaznah*, Ali. He is also credited with the production of other books, including *Geography English-Urdu Grammar*, *Life of Mohammad* (Allahabad, 1851), *English Translation of Gulistan* (Cal. 1851) and *Meadows of Gold*, a translation of Masudi's *Muruj-al-Dhahab* (London, 1849, Vol. 1).

During his time, Aloys Sprenger was instrumental in editing and publishing several Arabic manuscripts, including "*Tarikhul Khulafa*" by Jalaluddin Suyuti in 1856 and "*Futuhush Sham*" by Mohammad b. Abdullah al-Azdi al-Basari in 1854. He also helped to compile a catalogue of Arabic, Persian, and Hindustani texts from the libraries of the Oudh monarchs. In its initial edition, published in 1854, this catalogue concentrated on Persian and Hindu poetry.

In addition to his noteworthy contributions to Arabic, Persian, and Urdu studies, Sprenger left a lasting impression on the field. With his successor, Principal William Nasau Lees, he contributed significantly to the intellectual and academic landscape of the entire Indian subcontinent through these editorial and scholarly endeavours that brought glory to Madrasah Aliyah and the Asiatic Society. Orientalists recall Sprenger as a great orientalist whose services continue to be highly regarded.

Discussion:

During his tenure in British India, Dr. Sprenger made substantial contributions to the subject of Oriental Studies. He was well-known for his knowledge of Arabic and Islamic history, as well as his understanding of numerous Islamic rites. His intellectual contributions were recognised not just by Western scholars, but also by Muslim scholars. Dr. Sprenger, in fact, uncovered and reintroduced numerous major Islamic source works that were previously thought to be lost. A number of such works are found in the historical works of the Sufi philosopher Muhasibi, Wagidi's *Futuh-ush-Sham*, Gurgani's *Vis-o-Rameen*, and *Seerat Ibn Hashsham*. As a result of his discoveries, he has cemented his place in oriental studies history.

Dr. Sprenger's work advanced our understanding of Arabic and Islamic history by giving vital insights. He was instrumental in bridging the gap between Western academics and studies of Islamic culture and tradition. Scholars in the subject continue to recognise and value his skills and contributions.

Conclusion:

Dr. Aloys Sprenger stands out as a prominent Orientalist whose scholarly contributions in British India have made a lasting impact on Oriental Studies. His expertise in Arabic and Islamic history, combined with a deep understanding of various Islamic services, distinguishes him as a respected authority in the field. Noteworthy accomplishments of Dr. Sprenger include the rediscovery and reintroduction of lost

Islamic source books, offering fresh insights into their significance and expanding our understanding of the subject matter.

In addition to Western scholars, his scholarly endeavours have gained the interest of Muslim intellectuals, securing his position as one of the discipline's foremost experts. We have significantly advanced our understanding of Arabic and Islamic history and culture as a result of the enduring legacy left by Dr. Aloys Sprenger, an eminent orientalist in British India. Future scholars will be inspired to learn about this rich and nuanced field.

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