

# A Brief Historical Perspective of Persian Language and Literature In The Subcontinent

*Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Saqib*

## **ABSTRACT:**

The Subcontinent, which constitutes a major part of South Asia, has grown up seeds of a few foreign languages in its soil. Among these languages Persian is very important. The presence of thousands of Persian manuscripts in the libraries of the Subcontinent and countless Persian books composed and compiled by the natives of this land, indicate that Persian language has played a pertinent role on the development of civilization and culture of this region.

Persian language entered in the Punjab with external invaders and traders in the first century hijri and soon introduced as court language by the rulers of this territory. Due to extraordinary interest of the kings of the different eras, a number of important centers of the Persian language came into existence and this language progressed and was recognized as the language of knowledge and literature.

Later on, the inhabitants of the Subcontinent, without any discrimination of caste, creed and religion, have recorded the history and culture of this land into their Persian compilations. Moreover, in this part of South Asia such masterpieces of prose and poetry have been created, for which Persian language can be denoted as a language of heart and soul. Without any doubt, in the Subcontinent no other foreign language can claim such honour.

**Key Words:** History, South Asia, Subcontinent, Persian, Court Language, Language of Knowledge and Literature, Language of Heart and Soul.

**Advent of Persian Language in the Subcontinent:**

The first century Hijri had not yet ended when the Muslims entered India through the coast of Mālābār and Sind Pass and presented the gift of Persian Language to this land. Most of the soldiers of the army of Muḥammad bin Qāsim who conquered the Indus Valley, were inhabitants of Fars province and its surroundings and Persian was their mother tongue. These soldiers were the first group that sowed the seeds of Iranian language and culture in the soil of the Indus Valley. Similarly, many Muslim traders who landed on the coast of Mālābār, were familiar with Persian language and literature and they also played an important role in the development of Persian language.(1)

**The State of Persian Language and Literature  
in Early Islamic Era Till the Era of Bābar**

After the attack of Muḥammad bin Qāsim, Amīr Sabuktagīn (k: 388-421-A.H/998 - 1030 A.D) attacked India seventeen times and gradually conquered the northwestern part of India up to Lahore and appointed a Governor there.(2)

In the period of Sabuktagīn the Persian language entered Pishāwar and its surroundings and in the period of Sultan Mahmūd of Ghaznī, spread to the North Western part of India and for the first time it was recognized as the official language of this region. In this very period some of the people of grace and skill in the field of Persian literature, rose from the Indian Subcontinent. Abū-al-Faraj ibn-e-Mas'ūd Rūnī (d: Bet. 492-508 A.H) and Mas'ūd bin Sa'ad Salman Lāhorī (d: 515-A.H.) are well-known. In addition, Abu Abdullah Rūzbih Nuktī Lāhorī was born in India and was known as the first Indian Persian poet. Abu'Ali Ibn-i-'Usmān Jullābī Hajvirī of Ghaznā (d: 465-AH) also completed his famous book "Kashf-ul-Mahjūb" in Lahore.(3)

In 582 A.H/1186 A.D, the Ghaznavid Government was overthrown by Shahāb-ud-Dīn Muḥammad bin Sām Ghaurī (K: 569-602 A.H.) and all of Northern India came under the control of Ghaurīds. After the death of Shahābuddin, his slave Qutb-ud-Dīn Aibak (k: 602-607 A.H) became the ruler of India and ruled till 607 A.H. After this, the slave of Qutb-ud-Din Aibak, namely Shams-ud-Din Altutmash (k: 607-633 A.H) became ruler of India and defeated his rival Nāsir-ud-Dīn Qabāchā, the ruler of Sindh. Mamluk Sūltanat of Delhī continued till 1290 A.D /689 A.H.(4)

In India, during this period the Persian influence increased a lot. It was due to two reasons:

Firstly, when the Ghaznavid era ended and the Gaurī rulers became weak, a few Iranian families succeeded in forming Governments in different parts of India.

Secondly, in 616 A.H / 1219 A.D, Changhiz Khān started bloodshed and violence in Bukhārā and “Mongol Violence” came into the boundaries of Iran by 1234 A.D/ 632 A.H. People who were well known in the field of Persian Literature, due to this upheaval, migrated to India. For this reason, the Persian Language and Literature progressed more in 7<sup>th</sup> Century Hijri as compared to 6<sup>th</sup> Century Hijri.(5)

When in 582 A.H/ 1186 A.D the Ghaurī Kings, annexed the Ghaznavid dynasty, a large number of poets migrated from Lahore to Delhī and Multān. Abdur Rāfi’ Hirvī and Abu Bakr Khusrawī are famous among them.(6)

In the short era of Nāsir ud-Dīn Qabāchā, Multan and Uch, were the main centers of Iranian literature and culture. (7)

When Nāsir-ud-Dīn Qabāchā was killed by Altutmash in the conflict, his court poets and scholars, including ‘Aofi and Minhāj Sirāj

Jozjānī came to Delhī. After this time up to 12<sup>th</sup> century Hijri, Delhī remained a centre of Persian poetry and literature. Tāj ud-Dīn Sangrizā, was a notable court poet of Altutmash, who was an Indian and a contemporary of Shahāb-ud-Dīn Mamrā. (8)

In the early era of the sultāns of Delhī, among other Sufi poets, Jamāl-ul-Dīn Hānsvī (d: 685 A.H/ 1259 A.D) is a very well known poet. He wrote an elegy of the Sultān Altutmash, because according to some sūfis Altutmash was a pious king. (9)

In seventh century Hijrī, Amīr Khusrō Dihlavī (D: 725 A.H/ 1325 A.D) was a well-known Persian poet, who in all respects can be called a pioneer of the Persian poets of India.

It is clear that if Sa'dī had not been born in Iran in this century, Khusrō Dihlavī would not have come into existence in India, because in Ghazal, Khusrō followed Sa'dī with the only difference that subject matter of Sa'dī is easy to understand, whereas the subject matter of Khusrō needs deep thinking. Since the seventh century Hijri up to now, Khusrō Dihlavī has wielded a deep influence on the Iranian poets, especially in love inciting anecdotes (Hikāyāt) and Mathnavīs. The style of Khusrō was followed by many Iranian poets like Jāmī, who always had an ardent desire to match his standard. In the same period, another poet, Khājā Hasan Dihlavī became very popular but here he is not very well known in Iran. Hasan adopted a special style in Ghazal, about which it can be argued that in fact he has brought closer the style of Hāfiz to the style of Sa'dī.(10)

Hasan Nizāmī Nishāpūrī, is another famous poet. He is author of "Tāj-ul-M'āsar". He lived in the seventh century Hijri. Muḥammad bin Abu Bakr bin Ali bin Hamīd Kūfī, is another well known writer, who translated "Chach Nāmā" into lucid Persian from Hindī language.(11)

Jalāl-ud-Din Firōz Khiljī (k: 689-696 A.H), deposed the last king of Mamlūks in 689 A.H and announced himself as Sultān of Hind and founded Khiljī dynasty.(12)

After Khiljīs, the families who ruled the greater part of India, were the Tughliqs (720-818 A.H) and Lōdhīs. In addition, some other families also established permanent governments in Bengal, jaunpur, Mālwah, Gujrāt and Kashmīr. The last king of Lodhī family, Ibrāhīm was defeated by Bābar.(13)

Due to successive wars among these families, no great writer appeared. The kings mentioned above could not support and encourage scholars and artists. In this period Sultān Muḥammad Tughlaq (K: 725-752 A.H) composed verses in Persian language. In addition, another poet named Sharf-ud-Dīn Pānī-Patī, was also a well known person of this period. Among writers of this period, the names of Zia-ud-Dīn Barnī and Shamas Sirāj Afif can be mentioned.(14)

In the period of Tughlaqs, style of Amīr Khusrō and Mas'ud Sa'd Salmān ended and new poets, by taking inspiration from other sources tried to describe their emotions. Badr ud-Dīn Muḥammad Chāch and Zia ud-Dīn Nakhshab are known as representatives of both the styles.(15)

In the last period of Tughlaq era, Mutahir Muallam, Mas'ūd Baig and Sayyid Muḥammad Husainī Gaisū Drāz, became famous and earned great respect.

#### **From the Beginning of the Babrī era (932 A.H)**

#### **To the end of Shah Jahānī period(1068 A.H)**

Zahīr-ud-Dīn Bābar defeated Ibrāhīm Lodhī in the battle of Pānīpat in 932 A.H / 1526 A.D and founded Timūrid dynasty in India.(17)

After Bābar, Nāsir ud-Dīn Humayūn (K: 937-962 A.H) succeeded his father, but he was defeated by Shir Shāh Sūrī in 963 A.H and was forced to run away from Delhī. Initially he stayed in Sindh for some time, but eventually took refuge in Iran. After fifteen years, Humayūn regrouped his army, attacked India and recaptured his lost country in 961 A.H. Sadly, he died after a year.(18)

After Humayūn, his son Jalāl-ud-Dīn Muḥammad Akbar (K: 962-1014 A.H) who was only 14 years old at that time, succeeded to the throne. Bairam Khān, Khān-i-Khānān was appointed tutor of Akbar Shah. He fulfilled his responsibilities with full zeal and zest.

Eventually, in 968 A.H Akbar, took the affairs of the state in his own hands, and ruled the country till his last breath.(19)

Akbar's son, Nūr-ud-Dīn Muḥammad Jahāngīr (K: 1014-1037 A.H) became successor to his father, and after Jahāngīr, his son, Shahāb-ud-Dīn Muḥammad Shah Jahān (K: 1037-1069 A.H) ascended the throne of India.(20)

Zahīr-ud-Dīn Bābar, a scion of the Timūrid had great love for Persian language. For this reason, his successors who ruled India, became great promoters and patrons of the Persian language and literature.(21)

Humāyun's travel to Iran and his 14 years stay with Shāh Tehmāsab Safavī had a tremendous effect on him and played an important role in the expansion of Persian Language in India. Bairam Khān, a very important person of Humāyun's period and his son, Abdul Rahīm Khān-i-Khānān who was one of the Amīrs of Akbari court, patronized Persian poets.(22)

When the Akbar's reign reached the heights of glory, he opened the gates of his treasures for the poets and writers. For this reason, a flood of Irānian scholars and men of letters came to Akbarī Court and settled in

India. Since Akbar was extremely interested in Persian poetry, his court was full of Persian poets.(23)

Akbar was the first king who followed in the footsteps of Irānian Emperors and introduced the position of the Poet Laureate “Malik-ushu’arā” in his court and selected Ghazālī Mashhadī, for this position for the first time. After that the title of “poet laureate” was given to the Indian born poet, Abu-al-Faiz Nāgūrī with the pen-name Faizī.(24)

Faizi’s brother Abu-al-Fazl, was the minister of Akbar’s court and author of the famous book “Ayīn-i-Akbarī”. He provides a long list of the poets in the court of Akbar, which includes 60 names who came to India from Iran. Among those, Qāsim Ghanī, Nazīrī Nishāpurī and Urfi Shirāzī are the most important.(25)

In this era not only Muslims of India and Iran played an important role in the development of Persian language and literature, but Hindū scholars were also not lagging behind in this regard. Pandat Dongar Mal is one of them, about whom Abdul Qādir Badayūnī has written in his history that he was a Brahman in the period of Sikandar Lodhī, and was employed for the teaching of Persian language.(25)

In addition, Mirzā Manōhar Tosnī was another poet, the specimen of whose poetry has been given in ‘Mā’asrul Uamrā’ ‘Ayīn i-Akbarī’ and ‘Tuzak i-Jahāngīrī’. In the period of Akbar there was another Persian poet named, Karishnā Dās who was obviously a Hindu. Chandar Bhān Brahman was also a Hindu poet and courtier of Dārā Shikoh.(27)

In Bābrī period modern trends came into Persian Poetry. The poets of central Asia, namely ‘Fārghī’ ‘Nādir Samarkandī’ and ‘Tāhir khānī’ came along with Bābar. The presence of these poets added to the lyrical element in Persian poetry. The poetry of Faizī was also very much influenced by Urfi Shīrāzī. Another talented poet Nazīrī Neshāpurī

(d:1022 A.H), along with Faizī and Urfi made Akbari period a golden age of Persian poetry. The court poet of Bijāpur, Nūr-ud-Dīn Zāhūrī was a contemporary of Nazīrī. Tālib Amlī (d: 1036 A.H) and Sai'b Tabrizī was also among great poets of this period. They were of Irani origin. Tālib Amlī was a court poet of king Jahāngīr. His poetry has a philosophical colouring.(28)

Munīr Lāhorī, another famous poet of this era, is an average poet as compared to immigrant Iranian Poets, where as the poetic style of one of his contemporaries Qudsī Mashhadī (d: 1056 A.H) is more diverse and pleasing. Abū Tālib Kalīm (d: 1056 A.H) who was attached to the court of Shāh Jahān was adept in the art of personification and analysis. Sarmad (d:1071 A.H) was a sūfī poet. He was a close friend of prince Dārā Shikōh. Though basically he was a scholar of religion, sects and Sufism, he was a great poet also. His Ruba'yāt are famous for poetic excellence and beauty. Ghanī kashmīrī (d: 1072 A.H) was fond of allegorical ideas.(29)

### **From the Reign of Aurangzaib 'Alamgīr to the Beginning of British Rule (1068 A.H to 1274 A.H)**

This period is remembered as an era of political disturbance and social decline. Aurangzaib 'Alamgīr (K: 1067 to 1119 A.H), the last great king of Taimūrīd dynasty was serene and a bigoted Muslim. Contrary to the traditions of his ancestors, not only he was reluctant to patronize the writers and poets but also showed hatred towards them. The court which used to be a centre of knowledge and art became devoid of scholars and artistes in the period of Aurangzaib. If someone of this era, like Ni'mat khān 'Alī, remained attached to the court, it was not for poetry and literature but for some other reasons.(30)



Near the end of Aurangzaib's reign most of government officials revolted against the king and left the central Government. As a result, no successor of Aurangzaib could keep the rebels in check. Eventually, the influence of the British increased a lot and by and by they succeeded in forming the English government in India. (31)

In the reign of Aurangzaib Persian poetry was on the decline. But despite this great poets like Mirza 'Abdul Qādir Bidil (d: 1134 A.H), Ghanīmat Kunjāhī (d: 1107 A.H) and Nāsir 'Alī Sarhandī (d: 1109 A.H) appeared and earned fame during this reign. (32)

Ghālib's (d: 1285 A.H) Urdū and Persian poetry enjoys a special importance. It contains subtle thoughts and has beautiful style. Ghālib gives preference to his Persian poetry over his Urdū poetry. (33)

In spite of the general deterioration and neglect of art and literature Persian language and literature made significant progress in some parts of India. Especially in the reign of Bahādur Shāh Zafar (k: 1253-1275 A.H) despite the intrigues of the English, literary meetings were held, in which poetry was recited. There were many bilingual poets who wrote poetry both in Urdu and Persian. Among them Mirzā Asadullah khān Ghālib, Sirājuddīn 'Alī Khān Ārzū and Mus'hafī are very well known. (34)

### **From 1857 to 1930 A.D**

In this period the English succeeded in capturing India through intrigues and machinations. They won the war waged by the Indian for independence and annexed India to the territories already occupied by them. They appointed a viceroy to administer the country.

In this period English language replaced Persian as formal and official language .but still Persian did not lose its charm completely. Due to encouragement and motivation by semi-independent state like

Hyderabad Deccan and Bhopal literary taste flourished and people continued writing poetry and also books in prose. (35)

Last great poet of Persian language in the Subcontinent who chose Persian to express his thoughts and emotions was Allāmā Muḥammad Iqbāl. Though he wrote poetry in both languages i.e. Urdū and Persian, he preferred Persian to express his philosophical thoughts. “Asrār i-khudī” and “Romūz i-Bikhudī” in which he presented the concept of “Khudī” (self) have been written in Persian in the form of Mathnavī. His well known book is “Jāvid Nāmā” whose subject is the other world. Two other Persian books are “Musāfir” and “Pas Cheh Bāyid Kard”. Their background is mostly political. Besides Iqbāl, two other books “Piyām i-Mashriq” and “Zabūr i-‘Ajam” are political and gnostic (spiritual) in content. (36)

### **From 1930 A.D to Date.**

This period has a special importance in the political history of the sub-continent because the independence movement which resulted in the creation of two independent states Pakistan and India had reached its zenith in this period. Pakistan came in to being on 14 August 1947 27 Ramadān 1366 A.H. and India the next day i.e. 15 August-1947. (37)

In this period Urdū is an equal partner in the dissemination of literature in the sub-continent. Sadly very few people in Iran known about the services rendered to the Persian literature in this country. Besides many Persian books, especially books of poetry were published in great number in this period. It can be said without exaggeration, that there is no Persian book whose manuscript is not present in the libraries of the Subcontinent. In this period some Iranian writers especially those of southern Iran sent their books to India for printing. Matba Nawalkishur topped the list of the printing press over here. (38)

Shams ul-Ulama Allāma Shiblī Nu‘mānī is very famous for his writings. One of his books namely Shi ‘r ul-‘Ajam about Persian literature is a masterpiece and is very well known. It has been written in Urdu language. Almost all Persian writers and poets have been researched and discussed in this book. It is known as a reliable source of information among orientalists. (39)

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