

PROMOTION OF PERSIAN LITERATURE
IN KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT

The cultural relations between Kashmir and central Asia are very old. The advancement of Islam in Kashmir after the 14th century is related to the missionary activities of a group of accomplished mystics of Iran and central Asia. These missionaries not only propagated their religion but also introduced Persian arts, crafts, language and literature in Kashmir. These efforts made the Persian, official language of Kashmir till 1907, when it was replaced by Urdu. With the coming of the Muslim preachers and scholars from Iran and central Asia, Islamic influence penetrated deep into the valley. The cultural, political and religious relations among Kashmir, central Asia and Iran are very old. As a result of the establishment of all relations with Iran and central Asia, the Persian language and literature spread rapidly in Kashmir. The religious and official language during Hindu period in Kashmir was Sanskrit, but it was replaced by Persian from the times of Sultan Sikandar (1389 to 1413 A.D.). Persian continued to remain the official language of Kashmir till 1907, when it was replaced by Urdu.

Kashmir, where the world ends and paradise begins, is a land of lofty mountains, snow clad peaks, wonderful water falls, astonishing lakes, capturing flowers and natural beauty. Historically, it was free and its kings ruled over large parts of India and Afghanistan. It was ruled at least five thousand years under Hindus, Buddhists, Muslim Shahmiri Sultans, Mughal emperors, Afghan, Sikh and Dogra rulers. During Hindu period from (2180BC to 1320AD), Kashmir remained the seat of Sanskrit learning and master pieces of history, poetry, romance, fable and philosophy issued from this paradise.¹ Sanskrit was also the official language of Kashmir during this era.

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Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin had a greater contribution towards the spread and development of Persian language and literature. The popular ruler of Kashmir made Persian, the state language. Though his mother tongue was Kashmiri, yet he specialized in Persian language. He was also well versed in Persian prose and poetry and versified under the pen-name of Qutb. He himself wrote two books in Persian language entitled “*Shikayat*” and “Composition and Preparation of explosives”.³ Learning and literature was greatly promoted by this famous king. A galaxy of poets, writers and scholars were among his courtiers. Mulla Ahmad Kashmiri was a profound scholar, a distinguished poet and an excellent historian of Zain-ul-Abidin’s reign. He translated “*Mahabharata*” and “*Rajatarangni*” into Persian language under the command of the Sultan.⁴ The books in Persian language on medicine were also written under the personal care of Sultan Abidin. Mansur-bin-

Ahmad wrote a book in Persian entitled “*Kifayatul Mujahideb*” on medicine and dedicated it to the Sultan. Another book on medicine wrote in Persian entitled “*Tashrib*” and dedicated to the grand child of Amir Timur.⁵ The Chak rulers, who succeeded the Shahmiris, also were great lovers of Persian language and literature.

Sultan Hasan Shah Chak showed favours to the poets and himself also composed verses in Persian. He also wrote a book in Persian language entitled “*Persian and Zaban-a-Hindustani*”.⁶ The famous ruler of Chak dynasty, Yusuf Shah Chak had a talent and taste for Persian poetry besides music. After the decline of Chak rulers, the Moghal emperors remained in power in Kashmir. During Moghal dynasty, Persian language and literature promoted on the large scale in the valley.

The most distinguished thinker of the Moghal period who personified the spirit of Kashmiri culture in Persian literature was Mulla Mohsin Fani, who wrote an important book, “*Dabistan-i-Mazahib*” in 1645. It consisted of twelve parts.⁷ He has left behind a collection of poems in Persian language. A manuscript copy of the *Divan-i-Muhsin Fani* is also available in the Punjab University Library. Some biographies have written during the Moghal period in Persian language. Among them are *Tazkara-i-Murshadin* by Kh. Miram Bazaz in 1575, *Asrarul-Abrar* by Baba Daud Mushakani in 1653 and *Shaura-i-Kashmir* by Mulla Zihni in 1655.⁸ The emperor Akbar in 1596 ordered Jamal-ud-Din Anju to compile the Persian Lexicon afterwards known as the *Farhang-i-Jahangiri*. This work took twelve years for completion in Jahangir’s reign. The daughter of emperor Auranzeb Alamgir, Zibun Nisa Begum, translated the gigantic Arabic *Tafsir-i-Kabir* into Persian language and named it after her patroness, the *Zib-ul-Tafsir*.⁹ The Moghal period in Kashmir was favourable for the promotion of Persian literature.

One of the most important figures of Moghal period was Mirza Akmal-ud-Din Kamil, whose prodigious work “*Bahar-ul-Urfan*” was written in reply to that of Maulana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi. This work was in four volumes and comprised 80,000 verses.¹⁰ The best Persian poetry was produced in Kashmir during Moghal era. A good number of Persian poets who came to prominence during this age were: Zafar Khan Ahsan, Mulla Mohsin Fani, Nazir Nishepuri, Ashraf, Tayib, Mazhari, Sarfi, Salim, Fitrati, Najmi, Sati, Yakta and Ghani etc. The greatest poet who composed in Persian language during Moghul period was Mulla Muhammad Tahir Ghani. In the whole history of Persian literature, probably he was alone in not having composed a Qasida in praise of any human being.¹¹ He composed no less than 20,000 verses. Persian poetry found another home in Kashmir during his time.

After the decline of the Moghals, Kashmir remained a dependency of Kabul rulers more than a half century. The Afghan rule is the darkest period in the history of Kashmir. The rulers of Kabul were great despots and they ruled all the parts of their kingdom ruthlessly and with an iron hand. But on the other hand, Persian poetry and literature promoted too in this era. A prominent Hindu Poet, Munshi Bhawani Das Kachru, who was associated with the court of Abdulla Khan Alokzai, highly regarded for his new style of Bahr-i-Tawil in Persian language.¹² Khawaja Azam was considered a scholar and a saint of his day. He wrote a book of history in Persian language entitled, "*Tarikh-i-Kashmir Azami*".¹³ An Urdu translation of this work was lithographed by Munshi Ashraf Ali in 1846. The remarkable poet of Afghan period was Mulla Hamidulla. He wrote a long poem *Chai-nama* in reply to the famous poet Zuhuri's *Saqi-nama*.¹⁴ Zuhuri's poem was in praise of wine and Mulla's response, went on admiring tea. Sukh Jiwanmal, the ruler of Afghan dynasty was fond of Persian poetry. He had gathered several prominent poets of his age, among them were Mulla Rafi, Mulla Lal, Mulla Taufiq, Mirza Jan, Salic and Shahadbi etc. During more than a half century of Afghan rule, the rulers focused no more of cutting off heads than plucking a flower.

After the decline of Afghan rule, Kashmir was annexed by Sikh ruler of Punjab, Ranjit Singh. Sikh rule also proved to be oppressive. This rule lasted for only twenty seven years, during this period ten governors administered Kashmir one after another. During the Sikh rule, official language of Kashmir was Persian. Therefore, many Pandits also wrote in Persian language. They composed verses in Persian. Pandit Taba Ram Turki Betab was prominent figure of Sikh reign, whose *Jung Nama* stood at Par with *Shah Nama* of Firdusi. Moreover, Munshi Bhavani Das kachru Nikku's original style of "Bahar-i-Tavil" and Pandit Raj Kak Dar's "Farrukh" held high esteem in Sikh period.

The two Anglo-Sikh wars led to the final extinction of Sikh sovereignty in the Punjab and Kashmir and by virtue of the Treaty of Amritsar, the British sold the valley of Kashmir to Dogra Maharaja Gulab Singh. Thus he laid the foundation of the modern Jammu and Kashmir. Persian remained the official language of Kashmir till 1907, whereas, Dogra rule lasted in Kashmir till 1947. After 1907, the official language Persian was replaced by Urdu. Yet the first two Dogra rulers Gulab Singh and Ranbir Singh made efforts to promote Persian language in Kashmir. The governor of Kashmir Kripa Ram wrote a book about the life of Maharaja Gulab Singh in Persian language entitled, "*Gulab Nama*".¹⁵ This book could rank, though not

with Wassaf and Zuhuri, but with any really fine piece of Persian literature. Maharaja Ranbir Singh, who was patron of learning and literature. He established a school in Kashmir in 1874, where the medium of instruction was only Persian.¹⁶ Pir Hasan Shah was the well-known literary personality of the Dogra period. He wrote three ponderous volumes on the history of Kashmir in the Persian language entitled, “*Gulistan-i-Akblaq*, *Kharita-i-Asrar* and *Ijaz-i-Ghariba*.”¹⁷ This work is preserved in Khanqah-i-Mualla, Srinagr. Persian was also taught in Makhtabs and Patshalas of Kashmir, where both Hindus and Muslims showed a keen interest in learning this language.

Thus Persian remained at least five centuries the official language of Kashmir. During these centuries, Persian language not only transformed the Kashmiri culture but also the Kashmiri literature to the Pattern of Iranian culture and literature.

NOTES AND REFERENCE

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