

Chapter 53: Persian Literature

A. Persian Literature of Early Times

The earliest remnant of the Aryan languages of Iran which antiquity has bequeathed to us is the language of the Avesta, the sacred book of the Zoroastrian religion.

For About 900 years the people of Iran had no script in which they could write the Avesta. So they continued to learn it by heart and thus communicate it from generation to generation right from the seventh century B.C. to the third century A.D.

A special script was at last invented for this book in the third century A.D. The Avesta written in this particular script has been known as the Zend Avesta. At times it has been just mentioned as the Zend. The French scholar Anquetil du Perron who was the first to have studied it in India at the end of the 12th/18th century, introduced it to the West. For a considerable time it continued to be known as the Zend language in Europe. At present, however, the more accurate term of “Avestic language” is in vogue. The script in which the Avesta was recorded should be known as the “Zend script.”

Much as been speculated on the origin and times of Zoroaster, and different theories have been advanced in this respect from the earliest times. What appears to be most authentic at present, however, is that Zoroaster preached his religion between 660 and 583 B.C. in the north-eastern zone of the Iranian plateau in Central Asia. It is plausible that he sprang from the Median stock, lived in the north-west of the present day Iran, and from there he travelled east to Central Asia. Of the extant languages and dialects of the Iranian plateau Pashto or Pakhto has the closest affinity with the Avestic language.

This lends support to the view that the Avestic language was spoken in the north-eastern regions of the Iranian plateau in the seventh century B.C. The Avesta is a massive work, a major portion of which has been destroyed and forgotten owing to the vicissitudes of time and the domination of Iran by foreign nations. What remains today of this book was compiled in the early days of the Christian era. It comprises 15 out of the 21 original parts and if the extinct parts were proportionate in volume to those present about one-fourth of the book may be said to have perished.

From the philological point of view, the extant parts of the Avesta were not written in one period of history. On the contrary, its composition may be divided into three sections. The Gathas, which are composed in poetry, doubtlessly constitute the earliest part of the book. The Avesta is a collection of the Canon Laws and decrees of the Zoroastrian faith which were formulated in different ages. The last of these is contemporaneous with the rise of the Achaemenian power in the sixth century B.C. Possibly when Old Persian, i.e. the language of the coins and inscriptions of the Achaemenians, was current in the western and southern regions of the country, namely, Media and Parsa, Avestic happened to be the language of the eastern or at any rate of the north-eastern provinces of Iran.

Philologically speaking, the Avestic language runs parallel to and is contemporaneous with Sanskrit and, apparently, the origin of both these languages can be traced back to yet another ancient language which was perhaps the original language of the Indo-Iranian Aryan stock.

The language of the coins and inscriptions of the Achaemenians, ever since they came to power in the middle of the sixth century B.C., is distinctly Aryan in character and is known as Old Persian. This language is also contemporaneous with Avestic, and the growth and development of the two dates back to the same age. There are reasons to believe that when Avestic was passing through the early stages of development in the eastern provinces of the Iranian plateau the Old Persian language was also making headway in the west and south-west of Iran.

With the establishment of the Achaemenian Empire the people of Iran suddenly found themselves to be the neighbours of various Semitic nations of western Asia including the regions of western Iran. The Semitic languages made an inroad into the country and their influence was so strong that the Aramaic language and script were officially adopted by the Iranians. The Achaemenian kings were men of liberal views and they guarded full freedom of belief to their subject races as well as liberty to develop their own languages. That is why the cuneiform Achaemenian inscriptions are recorded not only in Old Persian but also a parallel translation of the same runs of Syriac, Elamite, Nabataean, and Aramaic languages.

The establishment of the Achaemenian Empire saw the people of western Iran divided into two main groups, namely, the Medes and the Persians ("Parsis"). It appears certain that either they spoke the same tongue, i.e. Old Persian, or their languages had very close kinship with each other. We find no traces of the Median language in the Achaemenian inscriptions. Apparently, if the Medes had spoken a different language, the Achaemenian emperors who had employed the Syriac, Elamite, and Nabataean languages in their inscriptions would certainly not have ignored Median. Moreover, a couple of words of this language and the names of the Median chiefs that have come down to us suffice to establish the close affinity of Median with Old Persian.

From 330 B.C. when the Macedonians conquered Iran, Greek became the official language of the country and continued to enjoy the status for a long time. Right down to the Christian era Greek is the only language to be seen in the Seleucid and Parthian writings. Needless to say that during this span of three and a half centuries the Iranian languages continued to flourish. Old Persian, however, is an

exception, which gradually went out of use. We can witness definite marks of decay in the Old Persian writings of the later Achaemenian period in contrast with those of the earlier one.

At the dawn of the Christian era we find two languages in the Iranian plateau running parallel to each other. One of these grew and developed in the eastern regions. This has always been called “Dari” by the Iranians. The other which flourished in the western parts of the country was known as “Pahlawi.” These two languages have come down to our own times. Many dialects of “Dari” still continue to exist in the eastern regions of the Iranian plateau as far as the Chinese frontiers: the most important of these are spoken in the Pamir region.

The Pahlawi language has lived in the form of verse known as “Fahlaviyyat,” in the books written in Persian on the art of poetry and in dialects spoken in the north, south, and west of the country.

The above-mentioned two languages have very intimate relationship and these have apparently stemmed from the same origin. A number of Aramaic words, however, entered Pahlawi and these have been known as “Huzvaresh” or “Zuwarishn.” These words found their way also into books of lexicography. In the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent these have been erroneously given the name of the “Zend and Pazard” language. “Dari” was too far away to receive the impact of the Aramaic language. On the contrary, it accepted the influence of the eastern languages such as Tukhari, Sughdian, and Khwarizmi.

At first the Aramaic script was adopted for both the languages. Later, however, a change took place and certain Aramaic letters were put together in Pahlawi to form what later came to be known the Pahlawi script.

The Orientalists did not fully grasp the significance of these subtle technical differences and they have been treating old Pahlawi and Dari as one language. Consequently, they have been employing the terms Northern Pahlawi or the Parthian Pahlawi for the later language. In recent times, however, some of them have defined it as the Parthian language whereas Pahlawi itself has been referred to as the Southern or Sassanian Pahlawi.

The number of the extant pre-Islamic works of these two languages is very small. The most important ancient work in Dari consists of the Manichaean texts and translation of parts of the Avesta into old Dari known as “Pazand.” The contemporary Dari has also been employed in some of the inscriptions of Sassanian kings.

Both Dari and Pahlawi possessed literature of their own before the advent of Islam. This literature, unfortunately, has not come down to us.

The history of the earliest Iranian dynasties during the Islamic period begins from the year 205/820. The dynasties which sprang up in the eastern regions raised the structure of their national politics on the basis of language. Since the language of these tracts was “Dari,” the literature produced in it was bound

to outshine Pahlawi literature.

In 429/1038 the Saljuq Turks poured out of Turkestan to invade Iran. They gradually conquered the whole country. Since they hailed from the east and their officials also belonged to this region, it was natural that they should adopt “Dari Persian” as their Court language, which they carried to the farthest corners of Iran. Consequently, in the first quarter of the fifth/11th century, Dari had attained the status of the common literary language of the whole country. It gained supremacy in other regions also where Pahlawi had been the popular spoken language until then.

From this date Dari became the undisputed literary language of Iran and, like many other dialects prevalent in the country, Pahlawi was reduced to the status of a dialect. The last vestige of Pahlawi in the form of inscriptions and coins in Tabaristan in the north of Iran date back to the middle of the fifth/11th century.

The first specimens of Pahlawi literature which belong to the early centuries of the Hijrah consist of a number of books of religious nature which the Iranian Zoroastrians had written with the specific object of preserving their Canon Law. These books were taken to the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent when the Zoroastrians migrated there. European scholars have been publishing their texts since the last century. Amongst these, certain books are claimed to have belonged originally to the pre-Islamic Sassanian era. There is ample evidence, however, to prove that these were composed during the Islamic period.

What is now known of Pahlawi literature is confined to these very books and treatises. They suggest that Pahlawi literature had, at any rate towards the end of the Sassanian period, flourished on a vast scale. It is an undeniable fact that, while during the 400 years which immediately preceded the Saljuq period, Dari had been recognized as the literary language of the country; Pahlawi had flourished on the north, south, and west of the present day Iran. Of this only a specific form of verse known as “Fahlaviyyat” has come down to us, the quatrains of Baba Tahir-i ‘Uryan of Hamadan being its most remarkable specimen.

B. The Beginning of Modern Persian Literature

The present day language of Iran is the latest evolutionary of “Dari” and is known as “Farsi” or the Persian language. The people of Iran themselves, however, have always employed the word “Persian” for whatever languages have flourished in the country. In the past the two languages under discussion which flourished simultaneously have been known as the “Dari Persian” and the “Pahlawi Persian.”

The Persian language of today, namely, Dari, originated, as mentioned above, during the Muslim period in the east of Iran. The important centres of this language were the cities of Transoxiana and Khurasan, to wit, Samarqand, Bukhara, Balkh, Merv, Herat, Tus and Nishapur. These centres extended even to Sistan. This explains why the most eminent poets of this language down to the Saljuq period hailed from these particular cities. Gradually, Dari expanded from Khurasan and Transoxiana to other parts of Iran,

so that by the Ghaznawid period it had extended to Gurgan, Damghan, and Rayy, and by the Saljuq era it had travelled as far away as Adharbaijan, Isbahan, and Hamadan.

In the province of Fars it did not achieve the status of a popular language even in the days of Sa'di and Hafiz. That is why these two great poets have revelled in the mastery of this language and in the expression of their poetic genius through it. Both of them also composed verse in the Pahlawi dialect of Fars, popularly known as the Shirazi language.

The rules of prosody of Arabic poetry were formulated by Khalil ibn Ahmad. These were assiduously observed by the Iranian writers in their Persian works. Considerable literature was produced on the subject both in Iran and in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. Consequently, the same Arabic names were retained for Persian metres and rhymes, so much so that even the same Arabic word *afa'il* was employed for purposes of scansion. Metres can be classified into three groups, i.e. metres common to both Arabic and Persian, metres which were the outcome of the Iranian genius and did not exist earlier, and metres which were, on the reverse, typical of and exclusive to Arabic poetry.

Amongst the exclusively Persian metres the most well-known is the one employed in the quatrains of Baba Tahir 'Uryan of Hamadan. In the pre-Islamic times right up to the Achaemenian period the only verse known was the blank verse. Specimens of poetry preserved in the Avesta and Old Persian are all composed in blank verse. This type of poetry was also in vogue in Pahlawi and Dari, the two languages so closely related to each other.

The forms of Persian verse have also an independent character and they have not always followed the Arabic pattern. The "*mathnawi*," "*tariji'-band*," "*tarkib-band*," "*musammat*," "*muthallth*," "*murabba'*," "*mukhammas*," "*mustazad*," and "*ruba'i*" are all exclusive to Persian poetry, and they have originated solely in the Persian genius. Persian verse has also influenced Urdu and Turkish poetry. Similarly, the rhymed verse and many figures of speech own their origin to the creative genius of the Iranian mind. "*Muwashshah*" and "*mulamma'*" are also Persian in origin.

C. Different Epochs of Persian Poetry

The oldest extant specimens of Persian verse date back to the middle of the third/ninth century. But these fragments are not sufficient to afford us a true picture of the contemporary Persian poetry. What emerges beyond doubt, however, is the fact that the Tahirids (205/820 – 259/872) and later the Saffarids (254/867 – 296/908) played a worth role in ushering in a new era of Persian literature.

Throughout the fourth/tenth century Persian literature continued to flourish with remarkable success at the Samanid Court and in the vast regions lying between the Chinese frontiers and Gurgan on the Caspian Sea. The court of Nasr bin Ahmad, the Samanid ruler, is especially famous for the large number of poets associated with it. Since then the current of Persian literature has flowed continuously.

Modern Persian poetry, in its earliest stages, was characterized by a note of realism. The realist school held its own for 200 years until the end of the fifth/11th century. The greatest Iranian poets of this school who flourished during the fourth/tenth century were Rudaki (329/941), Shahid Balkhi (325/937) and Daqiqi (341/952). Early in the sixth/12th century it gave way to naturalism. Meanwhile, the Iranian Sufis had discovered in poetry a most suitable vehicle to disseminate their philosophical message to the people. Sufism or Islamic mysticism had become popular in Iraq in the middle of the second/eighth century. In the earliest stages it merely laid emphasis on piety and godliness and no elaborate system had yet evolved.

Kufah and Basrah were the earliest centres of this movement. Later, however, Baghdad stole the limelight and became associated with great names in mysticism. From Baghdad it spread out in two directions, viz, North Africa and the “Maghrib” on the one side and north-east of Iran, that is, Khurasan and Transoxiana on the other. In the West it came to be linked up with Greek thought, especially with Neo-Platonism and with certain Israelite doctrines. In the East, especially in Khurasan and Transoxiana, it developed kinship with the teachings of Manichaeism and Buddhism which had enjoyed wide popularity in these regions for centuries. From here it travelled to India and developed in what may be called the Indo-Iranian school of mysticism.

This latter school gained immense popularity and through Iran it spread to Western Asia and even to North Africa. It still continues to exist in the entire Islamic world from the borders of China to Morocco. The great mystics of Iran chose Persian for imparting their noble thoughts to all classes of people. That is why most of the books of the Indo-Iranian school of mysticism were written in Persian prose or verse and the language of mysticism in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent has always been Persian. Symbolism inevitably enjoys profound importance in the mystic cult. For fear of opposition at the hands of the devout the mystic poets were constrained to express their views and beliefs in the language of symbols.

They were, thus, destined to contribute to the special school of symbolism in Persian poetry. The earliest amongst the great Sufis to compose verse in this fashion is the celebrated poet Abu Sa’id Abu Khair (357/967 – 440/1049). Sana’i (437/1046 – 525/1131), Farid al-Din ‘Attar (627/1229), and Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi (604/1208 – 672/1273) may be considered the greatest of the symbolists among the poets of Iran. *Hadiqat al-Haqiqah* of Sana’i, *Mantiq al-Tair* of ‘Attar and the *Mathnawa* of Rumi may be regarded as the most important books of mysticism ever written in Persian.

On account of this great tradition Persian poetry produced during the whole of this period in Iran and the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent is steeped in mysticism. The recital of this kind of verse in the assemblies of prayer and devotion among different sects of Sufis, at times to the tune of music and occasionally to the accompaniment of dance, has been regarded as one of the most important observances of the mystical creed. Even men who did not belong to any school of mysticism had to compose, whether they liked it or not, their poetical works, especially their “ghazals,” in a mystical strain.

Mystic poetry of Iran and the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent forms a subject that requires a very elaborate

discussion. In fact, it is one of the most profound literary and philosophical themes of all times. The Iranian mystics, apart from expounding the fundamental doctrines and essential principles which have deep academic and philosophical significance and are the especial concern of those wholly steeped in mysticism, have also instructed the common folk on what is popularly termed as generosity and manliness (*futuwwat*).

This teaching mainly consisted of certain moral precepts and aimed at inculcating amongst the common mass of people the feeling of manliness, courage, forgiveness, and generosity, and might be compared with the institution of knighthood or chivalry prevalent in Europe in the Middle Ages. Many books were produced on this subject in Arabic and Persian and these have been known as books of generosity and manliness (*Futuwwat Nameh*). This particular institution travelled from Iran to all the Islamic countries as far away as North Africa and the “Maghrib” and is still lives in many parts of these lands.

It may be pointed out that mystical verse in the Persian language has provided the civilized humanity with the most cosmopolitan type of poetry, and this branch of Persian literature excels all other kinds of poetry both in sweep and charm.

In the pre-Islamic Iran epic poetry and national sagas had always enjoyed wide popularity. In the Islamic period this tradition was not only maintained but it also received further impetus. Initiated by a few earlier poets it found its culmination in Firdausi's (411/1020) great classic *Shah Nameh*, which remains to be one of the most outstanding epic poems of all times. He completed its first narrative in 384/994, and the second in 400/1010. In this field, as in many others, Persian literature is immensely rich. A number of epic poems were composed in successive ages in Iran and in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, and this tradition was maintained until a century and a half ago.

Amongst the most important of these are, chronologically speaking, *Garshasp Nameh* of Asadi (465/1073) which was completed in 458/1066, *Wis-o Ramin* of Fakhr al-Din Asad of Gurgan (middle of the fifth century A.H.) and the quintet (*khamseh*) of Nazami of Ganjeh who remained devoted to its composition from 572/1176 to 599/1202. Nizami's style in epic poetry won especial favour both at home and in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent and a number of poets wrote under this unique influence, amongst the most notable of them being Amir Khusrau of Dhelhi (651/1253 – 725/1325), Khwaju-i Kirmani (689/1290 – 763/1362), and Jami (817/1414 – 898/1493).

This typical epic style has left a deep impress on the Turkish language, and many Turkish poets have imitated it, some of them merely translating the same contents into their own language. Amongst these may be counted the epic poems of Mir 'Ali Sher Nawa'i (844/1440 – 960/1500) composed in the Chaghata'i, i.e. the eastern dialect of Turkish, and the epics of Fuzuli of Baghdad (970/1562) in the Azari, i.e. the western dialect of the Turkish language.

Among the other chief characteristics of Persian poetry are the composition of philosophical verse and the introduction of philosophical generalities in poetry composed in simple language. We have it on the authority of the oldest specimens of Persian poetry that poetry and philosophy had forged a close link

together ever since Persian poetry originated in Khurasan and Transoxiana. The most important book on practical philosophy to have gained immense popularity amongst Muslims in general and the Iranians in particular in the early Islamic period was *Kalileh wa Dimneh* which was at first translated from the original Sanskrit work *Panchatantra* into Pahlawi and presumably brought to Iran in the sixth century A.D. in the reign of Khusrau Anushirwan (Nushirwan the Just).

It was translated from Pahlawi into Syriac about the same time. In the early Islamic period the famous Iranian scholar ibn al-Muqaffa' rendered it from Pahlawi into Arabic. It was later versified by Rudaki, the greatest poet of the Samanid period and one of the great names in Persian poetry in its whole history of the last 1200 years. Only a few couplets of this long poem have survived.

Another book which dealt with practical philosophy like *Kalileh wa Dimneh* was the famous work *Sindbad Nameh*. This was also rendered into verse by Rudaki. That is why his name has been prefixed with Hakim or philosopher since old. This also suggests that there was a considerable element of philosophy in this poetical works. Another great contemporary of Rudaki, namely, Shahid Balkhi, was known as one of the famous philosophers of his time. He had also entered upon a controversy with yet another famous physician-philosopher Muhammad bin Zakariya Razi and composed some treatises in refutation of his views.

Afterwards, many Iranian poets expounded valuable philosophical themes in their works and were known as philosophers. Kisa'i of Merv was one of them. Firdausi and 'Unsuri also enjoyed the title of Hakim or philosopher for having introduced philosophical themes in their works. The great poet Nasir Khusran (394/1004 – 481/1088) expounded philosophical thought in all his poetical works in addition to a few books of philosophy that he wrote in Persian prose from the Isma'elite point of view. The Isma'ilites of Iran always attached great importance to the Persian language in disseminating and inculcating amongst others the philosophy of their own sect. That is why they were even known as the "educationists" or "Ta'limites."

The poets of this sect always introduced an element of philosophy in their works. Amongst the eminent Iranian philosophers and thinkers, Persian verse has been ascribed to Abu Nasr Farabi (d. 339/950), ibn Sina (d. 428/1037), Khuwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi (597/1201 – 672/1274), Imam Fakhr al-Din Razi (554/1159 – 606/1209), Afdal al-Kashani (d. 615/1218), Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi Maqtil (d. 587/1191), Jalal al-Din Dawwani (830/908 – 1426/1502 – 1503), Mir Sayyid Sharif Gurgani (740/816 – 1339/1413), Mir Muhammad Baqir Damad (d. 1041/1631), Sadr al-Din Shirazi, i.e. Mulla Sadra (d. 1050/1640 – 1641), and Haji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari (1212/1295 – 1797/1878).

One can say that there was hardly any philosopher in Iran who did not express his beliefs in poetry. Some of them like Afdal al-Din Kashani composed a considerable amount of verse. Philosophical thought also found expression in the quatrains of the famous scholar and philosopher 'Umar Khayyan (d. 517/1123 – 1124). The collection of these quatrains forms today one of the most famous books in the world, and has been translated into almost all the civilized languages including many dialects of Pakistan

and India. One of the most important features with which we are confronted in Persian literature, irrespective of prose or poetry, is the effort on the part of the Iranian philosophers to affect Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, the Stoics, Zeno, and scepticism as well as a part of the philosophical teachings imparted in Alexandria and Edessa, and the fundamentals of Islam. Some of them harmonized mysticism with philosophy and divine law, and in this field Persian is decidedly the richest language in the world.

In the eighth/14th century Hafiz, the great immortal poet of Iran, while following the naturalist school which had reached its highest point of glory in Rumi's poetry (606/1200 – 691/1292) had laid the foundation of impressionism in Persian poetry. This school did not find its roots in Iran for about a hundred years and it was only at the end of the ninth/15th century that a few great Persian poets lent it a new charm and colour. This was the time when the Mughul dynasty had reached the height of its power and splendour in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. Persian enjoyed the status of official language of the Mughul Court. All notable men of the sub-continent had fully imbibed Persian culture in all walks of life.

Every year a large number of Iranian intellectuals and artists would travel to the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent either to settle down there permanently or to make it a temporary home. These scholars introduced this school of poetry in India where it won immense popularity. It found its highest expression at the Courts of Jalal al-Din Akhbar (r. 963/1556 – 1014/1605) and his successors, namely, Jahangir (r. 1014/1605 – 1037/1628), Shahjahan (r. 1037/1628 – 1068/1658), and Aurangzib (r. 1069/1658 – 1118/1707). Under the patronage of these Courts, rich and exquisite works of poetry were produced. There are a large number of poets who attained eminence in this style, popularly known in Iran as the Indian School of Poetry.

Among them 'Urfi (963/1556 – 999/1591), Naziri (1023/1614), Zuhuri (1024/1615), Talib Amuli (1036/1627), Qudsi (1056/1646), Kalim (1061/1651), and Sa'ib (1012/1603 – 1083/1672) had been attracted from Iran and they provided both stimulus and schooling in numerous well-known poets of the local origin. The most brilliant amongst this galaxy of poets were Faidi (953/1546 – 1004/1596), Abu al-Barakat Munir (1055/1645 – 1099/1688), Ghani (1072/1661), Nasir 'Ali (1108/1696), Ghanimat (1107/1695), Ni'mat Khan 'Ali (112/1709), Bidil (1134/1722), Nur al-'Ain Waqif (1191/1776), Siraj al-Din 'Ali Khan Arzu (1169/1756), Ghalib (1213/1798 – 1285/1868), 'Ubaidi Suhrawardi (1306/1889), Shibli Nu'mani (1274/1857 – 1332/1914), Girami (1345/1926) and many others. The literary tradition bequeathed by them still lives in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent.

The last great poet of the Persian language in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent was Muhammad Iqbal (1289/1873 – 1357/1938) who infused a new life in Persian poetry, rejected the impressionist school that had preceded him, and revived the symbolist traditions with magnificent results.

In Iran a new movement in poetry made itself manifest at the end of the 12th/18th century which promised pastures anew. As a consequence, most of the poets returned to naturalism. The tendency to revitalize and revivify Persian verse and to bring it closer to Western poetry is distinctly visible in Iran.

There are even attempts at going to such extremes as surrealism. The younger Iranian poet is, however, passing through a period of transition and has yet to determine his final attitude. Nevertheless, one comes across exquisite pieces of poetry produced by some of the poets and poetesses of the younger generation. This augurs well for a great future. It is not unlikely that a new school of poetry will emerge before long.

One who wishes to study the evolution of Persian poetry and its different schools and styles in minute detail will perforce have to make a deep study of the works of quite a few hundred poets of Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Pakistan, India, and Turkey – men who selected this language as their medium of expression and stuck to the Iranian tradition of poetry.

It may be observed that all the important poets of Persian language, whether they were of the Iranian or Indo-Pakistani origin, or whether they hailed from certain Central Asian and Caucasian regions formerly treated as parts of Iran, were Muslims. Only with regard to Daqiqi, the celebrated poet of the Samanid period, it has been contested by a few scholars that he belonged to the Zoroastrian faith. Be even this cannot be taken for granted. In the eight/14th century, however, a Zoroastrian poet Bahram bin Puzdhu rendered two books of the Zoroastrian religion into verse, namely *Zartusht Nameh* and *Arda Viraf Nameh*.

D. Persian Prose

Modern Persian is today one of the richest languages in the world. It retains a link, close or distant, with all the Aryan languages in the East as well as those in the West. It, thus, bears a close resemblance to all these languages in respect of grammar, syntax, and composition. However, on account of the deep attachment of the Iranian scholars to Islamic learning and sciences on the one hand and to Arabic language on the other, Persian became progressively richer and vaster language.

In the middle of the first/seventh century when the people of Iran embraced Islam, the Arabic language gained a complete hold on that country. It came to be looked upon not only as the language of religion but also one of arts and letters. During the early period of the 'Abbasid Caliphate when a strong movement was launched to produce scientific and literary works in Arabic, the Iranians played a very important role in it. They were also conspicuous in rendering translations of Pahlawi, Syriac, and at times even Greek works. They also composed a large number of original works in Arabic. After this Arabic became so widely popular and gained such an immense hold on Iran that the most important books in the field of Arabic grammar and lexicography were written by the Iranians.

Many of the Persian poets composed Arabic verse and some of their works have been acknowledged amongst the finest and most exquisite specimens of Arabic poetry. The Iranian philosophers adopted Arabic as the medium of their expression from the very beginning. Only a few of them ever attempted to compose their philosophical works in Persian. Books produced in Iran on the subjects of astronomy, mathematics, and medicine was mostly written Arabic. Some of the Iranian historians also selected

Arabic as their vehicle of expression. Most of the religious literature, including jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), Hadith, and commentary on the Holy Qur'an, were also produced in Arabic.

From the earliest period the Persian language had imported Arabic elements. Especially in the domain of technical terms Persian was completely overwhelmed by Arabic. Incidentally, the Iranians have given special meanings to many Arabic words which have also passed into Urdu in their changed Persianized sense. The overwhelming influence of Arabic on the Persian language is traceable in different epochs of Iranian history.

However, we find that some of the great scholars of Iran like ibn Sina, Nasir Khusrau, Afdal al-Din Kashani, and Abu Raihan al-Biruni have at times shown in their Persian works a tendency to coin fresh Persian words instead of employing the current technical and scientific Arabic terms. Certain other writers have also shown a tendency to employ new compound epithets of purely Persian origin in their works. The outstanding specimens of this trend in the Indo-Pakistani Persian literature are visible in *A'in-i Akbari* of Abu al-Fadl.

The excessive use of Arabic words in Persian prose started in the fifth/11th century. *Kalileh wa Dimneh* which was rendered into Persian by Nasr Allah b. 'Abd al-Hamid from the Arabic version of bin al-Muqaffa' may be regarded as the first specimen of this type of writing. Amongst other books written in this style may be enumerated *Marzban Nameh* of Sa'd al-Din of Varavin, *Tarikh-i Wassaf*, *Tarikh-i Mu'jam*, and *Durrah-i Nadirah*, the last being the work of Mirza Mehdi Khan, the historian of the Court of Nadir Shah. But the number of such books is very small. In fact, 99 Persian books out of 100 have been written in simple and direct style and they have always reflected the contemporary idiom, except where a writer has deliberately digressed from the natural style to employ Arabic phrases, a tendency which had been regarded as a kind of literary treat.

As a result of the systematic development of Persian poetry and use of symbolism, Persian prose evolved a new style in which the writer would lay the highest emphasis on allusions, metaphors, and rhetorical devices. We notice the same trend in the recent prose styles of some European languages. This is exceedingly sophisticated style of Persian prose in which the content was obscured by vague rhetoric and long repetitious sentences reached its zenith in the ninth/15th and tenth/16th centuries. It also penetrated into the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent where we find in *Seh nathr-i Zuhuri* and *Rasa'il-i Tughra-i Mashhadi* its most outstanding specimens.

This style won remarkable popularity in the field of Court documents, royal commands and decrees, and official correspondence. The tradition passed on to the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent and found its finest expression in *Manshaat-i Abu al-Fadl Allami*. It also found its way to Turkey and during this period the official correspondence of the Ottoman Caliphs was wholly conducted in the same style as that in Persian. The "Court style" originated in Iran in the sixth/12th century, enjoyed a large, uninterrupted era of popularity and found its best specimen in *Manshaat-i Mirza Tahir Wahid* composed in the 11th/17th century. It was, however, dealt a fatal blow by Mirza Abu al-Qasim Qa'im Maqam Farahani (1193/1779

– 1251/1835) whose prose was distinguished for the simplicity and purity of its style.

The contemporary Persian prose has a highly simple, facile, and elegant expression. It has freed itself from the conventional ornate and abstruse style. Today it has drawn itself far closer to the idiomatic and colloquial Persian expression than ever before.

During the long history of Persian prose a very large number of books have been written in all branches of knowledge such as jurisprudence, commentary on the Holy Qur'an, scholastic theology, mysticism, philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, arts, ethics, tales and fables, and even such subjects as handicrafts. However, a majority of prose works in Persian have always been confined to history and practical ethics. That also explains why all books on the history of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent during the Islamic period have been produced in Persian. On this very account some knowledge of Persian may be regarded as an essential pre-requisite for learning history of some of the Asian countries. In fact, Persian literature may be divided into poetry and history as its two main component parts.

E. Persian Grammar and Lexicography

For a long time the Iranians paid no heed to Persian grammar since they were no strangers to the rules of their mother tongue. The only expositions of Persian grammar in the past consisted of brief notices which some of the grammatical works started in right earnest when during the Mughul rule in India Persian became the literary as well as the Court language of the subject were for a considerable time confined mostly to the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent alone.

In the field of Persian lexicography as in grammar, not much interest was shown in the past. The works produced contained a rather limited number of uncommon words employed in poetry. When a proof was required regarding the authenticity of a certain word, it was furnished from the couplets in which it had been used.

It is quite apparent that at first the necessity for such dictionaries arose in the western parts of Iran where Dari was not the language of the people. The first dictionary to have ever been produced in Persian was compiled by Qatran Urumawi, the famous poet who lived in Tabriz and died in 465/1075. This book is now extinct. After him Asadi of Tus, who also lived in Adharbaijan and died in the same year as Qatran, completed his famous dictionary which is the oldest extant work on the subject.

As mentioned earlier, the Saljuqs had carried their official language, Dari, right into Adharbaijan in the wake of their conquests. Since the people of this province spoke Pahlawi, they found it difficult to understand meanings of certain words which were familiar to Dari but did not exist in Pahlawi. Hence, the urge to compile these works in Adharbaijan.

The most important role in the compilation of dictionaries was undoubtedly played by lexicographers of

the Indo–Pakistan sub–continent. During the Mughul period the Court language of the Empire was Persian. People, for whom it was not the mother tongue, stood in need of books for guidance and help. In the 11th/17th century special attention was paid to this work, though dictionaries had been in the process of compilation since a hundred years earlier.

For a long time the works of the Indo–Pakistani lexicographers or those of the Iranian scholars who had migrated to the sub–continent continued to be the most authentic source of reference even for the Iranians themselves. The most outstanding of these books are *Farhang’i Jahangiri* of Jamal al–Din Inju, *Farhang’i Rashidi* of ‘Abd al–Rashid of Thatta, *Burhan–i Qati’* of Muhammad Hussain Tabrizi, *Asif al–Lughat* of ‘Aziz Jang Bahadur, *Bahar–i ‘Ajam* of Tek Chand Bahar, *Chiragh–i Hidayat* of Siraj al–Din ‘Ali Khan Arzu, *Ghiyath al–Lughat* of Muhammad Ghiyath al–Din, *Farhang–i Anand Raj* of Muhammad Padshah Shad, and *Mustalihat al–Shu’ara* compiled by Varasteh.

The number of lexicographical works compiled in the Indo–Pakistan sub–continent exceeds 100 of which the oldest, viz. *Adab al–Fudala’* of Qadi Khan Badr Muhammad of Delhi, was completed in 822/1419. In other words, the period during which these works were diligently and assiduously produced extends to about 500 years.

The necessity of compiling such dictionaries was also felt in Turkey where Persian enjoyed the status of a literary language at the Turkish Court of the Ottoman Caliphs and many a Turkish scholar produced literary works and composed poetry in Persian, so much so that even some of the Turkish emperors composed poetry in the language. As a consequence, a few dictionaries, to wit, *Lughai–i Halimi*, *Lughat–i Sha’uri*, *Dasinah–i Kabir* and *Lughat–i Shah–nameh* of ‘Abd al–Qadir Baghdadi, were edited in Turkey. But as against the dictionaries produced in the Indo–Pakistan sub–continent in which the meanings of words were also explained in Persian, in Turkey the meanings and explanations were given in Turkish. The Iranians themselves, therefore, have not been able to utilize these works.

To no other area of the world does the Persian language and literature owe so profusely as to the Indo–Pakistan sub–continent. Not only have the scholars there written hundreds of very useful books on subjects as varied and diverse as history, lexicography, grammar, mysticism, biographies of poets, and commentaries on certain Persian texts, and have preserved and jealously guarded many books lost to posterity in other countries and even in the Persian language. There is hardly any big city in the Indo–Pakistan sub–continent where a number of Persian books have not been published. The number of such published works stands at 2,000.

F. Influence on Persian Literature

The history of modern European powers in the East dates back to the Renaissance period. Iran was one of the earliest countries to have come into contact with the West. At first it was the Christian missionaries who set foot on Muslim lands with a view to propagating their religion. They were, thus, introduced to the rich treasure of advanced sciences that had accumulated there through centuries but were unknown to

the West. They learnt the Arabic and the Persian languages in order to acquaint themselves with the rich philosophical thought and the subtle beauties and artistries of Persian literature. At first works of Persian classics were rendered into Latin and soon after these were published in some other prominent European languages such as French, English, German and Italian.

The earliest Persian work to have translated into a European language was *Gulistan* of Sa'di. Gradually, the works of Firdausi, Hafiz, 'Umar Khayyajm, Nizami, Jami, Jalal al-Din Rumi, Farid al-Din 'Attar, Nasir Khusrau, and others were translated. These eminent stars on the firmament of Persian literature are now regarded in all Western countries as amongst the great immortals of world literature. It was the dissemination of their thought which provided stimulus to numerous European poets and writers of the 13th/19th century to take inspiration from Persian writers. This influence was at times fully revealed in their works and at others was reflected in their thought.

One of the earliest amongst them was Dante, the Italian poet, who was inspired to write his *Divine Comedy* in which he describes his spiritual flight into heavens and the next world under the influence of Iranian literature. Next, it was the great German poet Goethe who was thrilled by the sheer beauty of Persian literature through German translations of Persian poetry, and who had even pursued for some time the study of Persian language in order to have a fuller appreciation of its literature. He even dedicated to it one of his works *West-östlicher Divan*, and gave to a section of this book the title of "Kitab-i Hafiz."

The well-known English poet Edward Fitzgerald also published a small collection known as *Rub'iyat-i 'Umar Khayyam* which he claimed to have translated from the Persian collection of Khayyam's quatrains. Actually, however, not all these quatrains are by Khayyam himself; some of these are the work of other Persian poets. As such, this collection reflects the thought of a number of Iranian philosophers.

Many of the European poets and writers who acquainted themselves with the thought of Persian poets through translations in Western languages have produced delightful works associated with Persian literature. Mainly, however, they have come under the spell of Khayyam, Sa'di and Hafiz.

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