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KASHMIR'S PERSIAN POETRY: PROBLEM OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

The adoption of Islam by the great mass of population in Kashmir, which became an accomplished fact during the later half of the fourteenth century but which began towards the close of the Hindu rule may initially seem to have affected, as Stein observes, "neither the independence of the country nor its political and cultural conditions"¹ but it ultimately proved to be the genesis of a new social and cultural order. Historians have traced the roots of this new order to a long continued missionary movement inaugurated and carried out mainly by "faqirs, darvaishes and ulema among whom were islamian preachers from Alamut",². And it is also argued that by the reign of king Shadava (1301-20) perhaps as much as two-thirds of the valley's population had converted to Islam.³ However, the credit of converting richana, who became the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir under the title of Sultan Sadruddin, goes to a Musavi Saiyid from Tukistan, Sharfuddin Abdul Rahman, popularly known as Bul Bul Shah in Kashmir. Ultimately, it was the dominating personality of Mir Saiyid Ali Hamadani, the great sufi saint and a scholar of missionary zeal who, along with his seven hundred companions – followed by his son Mir Muhammad Hamadani and his three hundred followers – spread Islam, initiating what can be called 'the cultural Renaissance' of Kashmir. Acknowledging this Dr. Iqbal writes in 'Javaid Nama'.

سیدالسادات سالار عجم
تاغزالی درس اللہ گرفت
دست او معمار تقدیر امم
ذکر و فکر از دودمان او گرفت
مرشد آن خطہ مینو نظیر
میر و درویش و سلاطین را مشیر

خطہ را آن شاہ دریا آستین

و اولم صنعت قہذیب دین

Since most of these missionary saints were Persian speaking people, the Persian language gradually displaced Sanskrit as the official language or court language. Persian became a court language to an extent that from Rinchana to Sardar Jabar Khan there was hardly any ruler who did not speak Persian or who did not patronize it. Hence for almost six hundred years Persian in Kashmir was a language of official public affairs, of intellectual and academic debate, though it could hardly become a language "to feel and think, bless and curse, quarrel and kiss". During this period Kashmir produced hundreds of poets who wrote in Persian and as Sufi rightly points out, it appeared "as though the Kashmiri were staging themselves not in their national pheran but in the clear cut fashionable and up-to-date Persian draperies flounced here and there with the Arab thread-work".⁴ Should Kashmiri's Persian poetry be treated as an extension of Persian Literature in general or should it be considered as part of Kashmiri literature? What is the real value of Kashmir's Persian poetry? What are its characteristic features as well as its limitations? And How seriously it must be taken by the students of Persian literature? – these are some of the vital issues discussed in this paper.

In spite of Dr. Sufi's assertions that "the Persian language entered the valley of Kashmir with the advent of Islam" and struck its roots "deep into the soil of Kashmir" during the reign of Sultan

Zain-ul-Abidin,⁵ it is to be kept in mind that Persian is a foreign language, not even the second language, such as in the Persian writing tradition has never been the representative of Kashmiri cultural ethos. While differentiating between a foreign and a second language, Professor Paul Christo Pherissen argues that the former is "a language which is not one's own, though one may have a good knowledge of it; second language is a language which is one's own, though not one's first in order of importance, nor usually, the first to be learnt. A foreign language is used for absorbing the culture of an other nation, a second language is used as an alternative way of expressing the culture of one's own".⁶ Viewed in this perspective the bulk, variety and sometimes even maturity of the Persian poetry produced by educated elite of Kashmir⁷ should not lead one to neglect the vital truth that most of these poets were "conveying in a language that was not their own the spirit that was their own",⁸ which for all practical purposes is a difficult task. Similarly, as a literature Kashmir's Persian poetry had no tradition to lean on, particularly during the early stages, and was merely a synthetic creation of the imperial encounter without indigeous cultural roots. In fact, the rise of Persian poetry occurred at a time when the Kashmiri poetry had made a remarkable growth in the hands of poets like Sheikh Noou-ud-Din Noorani and Lalla Arifa⁹. Persian had, therefore, entirely either of these non-literary fascinations: it was the language of the rulers, and to have a good command of it was to find for oneself lucrative opening; to know Persian came to be regarded as having a status in society; Persian provided a window for Kashmiri intellectuals to have a look at the wide world; it not only erected a bridge between Kashmir and Central Asia but also provided a common medium of communication among the educated elite of different countries. It is why most of the Persian literature written by Kashmiris lies hidden in manuscripts which have hardly seen the light of the day. It has neither been analysed dispassionately nor appreciated properly, and even the outside world knows very little of what the

“genius of Kashmir has done for the muse of poetry in the language of its adoption”.¹⁰

The dominant theme of Kashmir's Persian poetry has been tasaw-wuf, a sort of contemplative mysticism and ecstatic ritualism by means of which purity of life and soul, as well as unity with Allah can be achieved. This tendency of seeking refuge in the regions of abstract thought as a solace for the worldly repression, (it is very important to note) is itself a Persian legacy. Historians have proved that most of the saints and Saiyids who came to Kashmir had left Central Asia in order to escape from the wrath of timer, and even Mirza Akmaluddin once said:

گر نہ تیمور شور و شد شر کردی
کی امیر این طرف گزر کردی

Kashmir at that time had already its own tradition of mysticism based on the Buddhist and Hindu Philosophy and religious thought. Persian poetry has born in this cultural environment of interacting traditions exhibits complex multiculturalists. Zain-ul-Abidin's translation Burea, in which Rajatarangini, Katha Sarit Sagar, Upanishadas and other Sanskrit texts are believed to have been translated, and his patronization of a language number of Persian scholars only added to this multiculturality.¹¹ However, it provided an impetus for a number of scholars like Baba Dawood Khaki, Sheikh Yaqoob Sarfi, Khwaja Miram Bazaz, Khwaja Ishaq Qari, Khwaja Hassan Qari, Molvi Muhammad Jaffar, Mir Haider Tailmullah, Sheikh ahmad Chagli and others who wrote Persian masnavis, ghazals, qasaid and even khamsas. A critical analysis of their Persian poetry would reveal that most of them were content to play a sedulous ape to their masters and preceptors and only few of them utilized the Persian idiom for expressing the emotions born out of a proper

understanding of and respect for their own cultural heritage. Let me illustrate this by referring to one of the vital concepts in tasawwuf, the concept of the preceptor-disciple relationship. In tasawwuf we believe that just as we need a well-read scholar to teach us theology and religion, similarly we need a Preceptor (pir) to guide us in the ways of spiritual realization and the attainment of sanctity and gnosis. This sanctity and spirituality cannot be attained even after reading thousands of books on morality and spirituality. If one attempt to achieve it without a Preceptor (pir) he will be like a doctor who reads all the books on medicine without even attending the laboratory or even going through required training. This concept has been beautiful explicated by Maulana Rumi in the following couplets:

ہیچکس از نزد خود چیزی نشد ہیچ آہن خنجر می تیزی نشد
تا کہ شاگرد شکر ریزی نشد ہیچ حلوائی نشد استاد کار
مولوی ہرگز نشد مولای روم
تا غلام شمس تبریزی نشد

This is conveying an experience to the reader by exploiting not only the vitality and rhythm of a language but also using it precisely, nobly and with a sense of purpose. However this concept has been expressed by Kashmiri poets, for whom Persian was the language of intellectual make-up only and not of their emotional make-up, can be understood from the following verses written by the leading Kashmir – Persian poets: Khaki, Fani, and Auji

شکرا اللہ حال من ہر لحظہ نیکوتر شد است
 شیخ شیخان شیخ حمزہ تاملر ہر شد است
 ہفت گردون غلوتی از خانقاہ پیر ماست
 از گداتاشہ مرید پیر عالم گیر ماست
 مراد امن خویش زنجیر شد
 مرادست در آستین پیر شد

These verses may have a power of forming, sustaining and delighting us but they fall short of high standard.

It has been argued by Sufi, Sarwari and a number of critics that the survival and growth of Kashmiri's Persian poetry, steadily enriched by shifting patterns and new traditions during the Mughal rule, betokens an innate potentiality which makes it capable of having its own identity and sustenance. In fact, the galaxy of great Persian poets (during the Mughal Period) including Sarfi, Fani, Ghani, Auji and others did not write in vacuum as their predecessors did; their poetry was the product of an indigenous cultural situation and the consequence of an organic process of cultural negation and assimilation – a process of synthesis. Instead of playing a sedulous ape they studied Persian with devotion and preservance, and had at the same time, an understanding of and respect for their own cultural heritage. According to G.M.D. Sufi "The effect was peculiar and exquisite – peculiar because Kashmiri poet utilized the Persian ways of expressing the emotions in the Persian idiom ready to his hand, and suited to his purpose exquisite, because unlike the ordinary Persian poetry, his sentiments were quickened directly by the natural phenomena amidst which he lived day and night and therefore more realistic, true and simple".¹² Such poets are very few – Ghani, Fani, Sarfi, Auji and Saalim – but their attainments are of a high order.

primarily because it is a faithful representation and true interpretation of facts observed at first hand and Persian idiom remains only a vehicle for expressing a felt thought, experience or emotion. The following couplets (of sa'ib, Ghani and sa'ib) clearly illustrate my point:

عمر و حشت زده آهوی بیاجانی هست روز و شب ز گس قہلانی گلستانی هست
 ز شعر من شدہ پوشیدہ فضل و دانش من چو میوہ کہ بماند بزیر برگ نہان
 تا توانی عاشق معشوق ہر جانی مشو می کند خورشید سرگردان گل خورشید را
 در صد ہزار آئینہ یک دوست جلوہ گر
 در ہر چہ بینم آن رخ نیکوست جلوہ گر

There are, no doubt, a number of such verses which convey exquisite thoughts and feelings very convincingly but they are comparative small in number against verses that appear pure imitation and fall short of high standard. To argue, like sufi and others, that sa'ib – the last great Persian poet, superior in originality to Qaani, the greatest and most famous of the moderns¹³ – was willing to barter away all his devan for a single couplet of Ghani

حسن سبزی بہ خط سبز مرا کرد اسیر
 دام ہمرنگ زمین بود گرفتار شدم

does not lead anywhere.¹⁴ Such hyperbolic statements are very common in oriental literature and even Mirza Galib is believed to

have said the something about a couplet of Momin. It never implies that, on the basis of one such couplet, Momin is either superior to or at par with Galib.

It seems to me that most of these leading poets, particularly Ghani, were caught in a crucial dilemma: should they write for the audience which their counterparts in Iran had in mind, or should they write for the educated people of Kashmir among whom they lived. Ghani's use of "Krala pun" – a Kashmiri phrase meaning porter's thread – in the following verse clearly exemplifies this:

It was very natural for Persian poets of Kashmir to use Kashmiri words and phrases in their Persian poetry, and this convention was even followed by such poets as Saba, Khushdil, Azad Qadri and a number of others. One obvious reason, of course, was what saalim indicates:

دلم به سایه گل می کشد چو گل سالم
سرشته اند به آب و هوای کشمیرم

It is Kashmiriness of Kashmiri's Persian poetry. There is, however, another important implication for a student of literature. Ghani's use of "Krala pun" symbolically signifies his understanding of how difficult, rather impossible it is to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement in an alien language because 'an alien language can be the language of ones intellectual make-up but it looks maltreated when it is made the language of ones emotional make-up; The mechanical use of an alien language can be understood from the following couplets by Mustagni, Aajiz and Azad Qadri

دوشینہ پشمول نہان از مردم دیدم نہ بہشت بلکہ کشمیر دوم
خاکی ز عبیر و مشک آگند نمیر آبی ز صفا و جو د خود یافتہ کم



چہ کشمیر آبروی ہفت کشور غلط گفتم ز جنت تا زوتر
عجب آب و ہوائی دارد این خاک کہ دل را از کدورت میکند چاک



ہزار داغ بدل لالہ زار کشمیر است پس از وفات مرآدگار کشمیر است
درین حدیقہ خزان بہتر از بہار بود بہ از شکوفہ اور فیہ زار کشمیر است



A proper analysis of these couplets will reveal that the poets themselves are not conscious of the job of poetry, which is to convey an experience to the reader which the reader himself has not experienced, or experienced without sufficient sensibility, but to which he is rendered sympathetic by the rhythm, linguistic precision and incantation of the poem he is reading. Ghani's poetry clearly reveals this quality:

جنونی کو کہ از قید خرد بیرون کشم پارا کتم زنجیر پای خویشستن دامن صحرا را
 اگر شہرت ہوس داری اسیر دام عزت شو کہ در پرواز دارد گوشہ گیری نام عنقا را
 غنی روز سیاہ پیر کنعان را تماشا کن
 کہ روشن کرد نور دیدہ اش چشم زینجا را

I do not mean that Kashmir has produced only one poet, Ghani, but he verily is the true and original genius who used an alien language with much simplicity and precision.

This leads me to the most important part of this paper: to place Kashmiri's Persian poetry, as well as other literary genres, in a clear, national and linguistic boundary. We know that the conventional habit of treating Kashmiri's Persian poetry as an extension of the global Persian literature has died a natural death. The 80,000 couplets of Abdul Wahab; dozens of masnavis written by leading Kashmiri poets ; and the Khamsas of Sarfi, Mulla Bahauddin, Mulla Ashraf and Mulla Hamid of Kashmir, which have yet to enter the precincts of a printing press, substantiate my point. Hence, the next alternative – and certainly the most viable one – is to treat it as an off-shoot of Kashmiri literature trying to establish roots in rocky ground and having a small and gradually dwindling public. Only then can we appreciate its rendering of the fundamental truths of ethics, philosophy, practical wisdom, religious dogma, social and psychological experiences and above all the beauty of Kashmir. This is most probably what Sufi implies in his assertion: "If Persia is proud of its Firdausi, its Hafiz, its Rumi and its Nizami, Kashmir is equally proud of its Shaiq, its Ghani, its Kanil, and its Sarfi".¹⁵ The deliberate, conscious and persistent use of the qualifier "its" clearly reveals that even Sufi wants us to take the poets of Kashmir who have written in Persian

language primarily as Kashmiri, who very skillfully used an alien idiom in order to express their feelings and sentiments, love impressions and yearnings of heart, natural phenomena and Kashmiri's exquisite beauty and culture. This approach will lead us to evaluate it properly as a faithful representation of first hand experience in a foreign language. According to me the most valuable service to Kashmir's Persian poetry will be to look upon it as part of Kashmiri literature and make its Kashmiriness as the main issue of critical focus rather than talk of its contribution to the native Persian literature. For Kashmir's Persian poets the roots can only be Kashmiri, the roots that were sustained by the soil of Kashmir.

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10. *Islamic Culture* p. 182;
11. See Sarwari pp. 56-73 and *Islamic Culture* p. 182;
12. *Islamic Culture* p. 183;
13. Maulan Shibli, *Shir-ul-Ajam* Vol. III, P. 189 quoted by Sufi in *Islamic Culture* p. 185;
14. See *Islamic Culture* pp 185-87;
15. *Ibid* p. 182.