

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

In our valley the dearth of teachers and scholars devoted to the studies of Persian language and literature is not so acute that the organizers of this seminar could not have chosen a better person than myself to present the keynote address. It is perhaps due to severe cold and lack of time that they pounced on me. It is because of the feeling of my old brief connection with the Persian Department of Kashmir University that my friend Professor Masoodi persuaded me to stand up before you. I worked as a humble teacher in the Persian Department some twenty four years ago. Since then, I have been wandering in wilderness Ghalib puts it beautifully.

گوواں نہیں پرواں کے نکالے ہوئے تو ہیں
کعبے سے ان پتوں کو بھی نسبت ہے دور کی

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is in the context of that old connection that I want to present to you a few ideas whose relevance may be a little doubtful. Yet some points may attract you or prove provocative enough to arouse your interest. Saidi says:

گاہ باشد کہ کو دَکِ نادان
بہ خلط بر ہدف زند تیری

However, this is also true that sometimes a man's lack of taste can lead knowers of languages and literature to judge the real value of taste. It would be a matter of great satisfaction for me if during the proceedings of this seminar the participants, apart from throwing light on the various aspects of the topic, discussed those neglected issues as well which pertain to the usefulness and relevance of this seminar to the present-day world.

The topic chosen for discussion has three dimensions. The purpose is to determine the contribution Kashmiri writers have made to this three pronged topic. The contribution cannot perhaps be made explicit by what the Persian-speaking world has lent us politically and culturally, nor can it be appreciated by the depth and extent of our interest in Persian language and people involved are not only the Iranians, Afghans, Tajiks and Uzbeks but also the contributors of the Indian subcontinent. Relations between nations happen to be active as well as passive. As regards the interest and seriousness shown in Persian language and literature, the Kashmiris have not lagged behind at all. Lisanul Gaib says:

بشعر حافظ شیرازی نازندومی رقصند

سیہ چشمان کشمیری وترکان سمرقندی

Kashmir has been labeled as Iran Minor. The statement has an active aspect to it. We have found Persian language, literature and culture so appealing that the Persian – speaking world finds its own image reflected in our Persian artifacts and writings. Partly due to pride and partly due to love, the greater Iran glorified the valley of Kashmir by calling it Iran Minor. We did not earn this honour without much ado. We had to undergo tremendous hardships. Persian was a strange language to us. We had to learn it with great effort. We had to understand the mysteries, subtleties and conventions of Persian poetics. We tried to grasp the

nomativity of Persian culture. Our familiarization with Persian and our appreciation of Persian poetry and prose proved very fruitful. As a result, poets like Ghani, Fani, Sarfi, Hbi, Toufeeq, Shams, Hamidullah Shahabadi and Gul Mohammad Shah Ful emerged on the horizon of our civilization. In the field of thought and history we have Haider Malik Chadora, Beerbal Kachroo, Mohiud-Din Miskeen, Anzam Demeri, Peer Hassan Shah Khohihami, Baba Ali Raini and Beharistan Shahi to pride on.

Our cultural ties with Iran, Afghanistan and the Middle East were diverse and deep-rooted. This not only made the masses here to embrace Islam gleefully but also led us to construct mosques, educational institutions and homes in accordance with the architectural designs transferred through the Persian language. Persian was our official language. It influenced our mother tongue (Kashmiri) in several ways and enriched its creative potential substantially.

All these happenings are self-evident. One just cannot ignore them. Persian has had a lion's share in developing our habits of thought, rhetorics, aesthetics, scholarship and civil code of conduct. Our national history will remain incomplete without giving proper place to these ineradicable effects of the Persian language. But, at the same time, there is something, amiss that has not been properly accounted for.

We have talked about all this before. Seminars were conducted and workshops organized. I agree with all that we have done. Yet I humbly submit that these efforts were by and large passive. We always considered only what we received, that is the manner in which Persian helped shape our collective psyche and build our national character. A moment's thought would, however, bring it home to us that we have always been discussing the contribution of Persian to us and not the other way round. To say that we too have made a significant contribution in response to what have borrowed from the Iranians, Afghans, Tajiks and Uzbeks, is a question yet to be squarely dealt with.

The questions of our homeland, identity and mode of existence have amply been explained by our local historians to the Persian – speaking world. We can call this our privileged domain, and in this consists our substantial contribution to Persian. This achievement can be subsumed under the category of interpretation rather than simple comprehension. And if I am correct, the basic thrust of this seminar should be on identifying the manner of this interpretation between the two poles. To say that we have the potential to understand the other side is not enough; instead, we should enable the other side to recognise our contribution in such a way that, besides us, they assess the value of our contribution to them in terms of their own standards of judgement.

Baidil, Galib and Iqbal were considered as representative poets of Persian because of their novelty of experiment and peculiar mode of expression, which proved valuable and significant to the Persian – speaking world. When Gani, our representative Persian poet, was heard and read in Iran, we heaved a sigh of relief as he, in spite of being a non-native, rubbed shoulders with the natives of Iran and master poets of the Persian language. So far so good. But now we should try to examine the poetry of our original contributors and that too from a point of view which can enable us to determine their position in face of Firdousi, Saidi, Hafiz and Nizami, or Sanai, Attar and Romi, or Anwari, Khakani and Saaib. The point of view should also encompass whether the contribution of our Persian writers is one of the excellence or not. This aspect of the issue is still to be fully unearthed. We hope the papers to be presented in this seminar and in particular the arguments that arise lead the participants to atleast make a veginning in this direction, if not to think over it adequately right now.

One more point. It would not be out of place to say that today we should expect from this seminar something which can encourage further research in future rather than rest content with what we have done in the past. We have a few things to offer to

the Persian – speaking world which can be, under changing circumstances, of great relevance and significance to the two sides in terms of projects based on a comparative study of our language and literature and their language and literature.

As regards our understanding, we have translated some masterpieces of Persian into Kashmiri, a process which should continue somehow. We all fully grasp the importance of lighting our candles with the flames of Persian. But there is one more thing to be done: interpretation like us, there might be people in the Persian – speaking world who would value the knowledge of our culture and literature. Prior to the advent of Islam, we had Sanskrit as our institutionalized language. According to linguists, Persian, Kashmiri and Sanskrit are not each other offspring but sisters. The initiative of translation and interpretation will benefit all of us. Our University can lend it impetus by paving the way for co-ordination and interaction between its departments of Persian, Kashmiri and Sanskrit. At least a translation bureau can be established, which can somehow identify the trafficking of linguistic, literary and cultural exchange. I would request the teachers and researchers in the Persian Department that, on the one hand, they study poetry, prose and criticism written by Kashmiri writers here and, on the other, undertake the task of translating Kashmiri poetry and short fiction into Persian. I know that some attempts have already been made, as is evident from the journal *Danish* published by the Persian Department. The Department of English is also making commendable arrangements for the advancement of such a programme. The dean students Welfare, by bringing out his magazine *Gulala*, has taken appreciable steps in this direction. We can benefit from them both. The project would work as an effective means to introduce our old and modern Kashmiri to the world at large. This is the need of the hour. This could be honoured and liked everywhere. Kashmiri literature is as beautiful as the eyes of the beloved and for that matter heart-warming too. The Persian language should be exploited skillfully

and in a masterly manner. Then you will see how the Persian – speaking world will be overwhelmed with joy, chanting this verse of Ghani:

چومیلِ سرمه برآمد ز چشم جانان، گفت
که سیر میکند ه شود غبارِ خاطر با

Meaning: The Kohl – like cream sprouted from the intoxicant eyes of the beloved to say that the heart unburdened itself by really having visited the tavern.

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