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INDO - IRANICA

A LITERARY AND CULTURAL LINK BETWEEN INDIA AND IRAN

Political, social, cultural, literary and commercial relations between India and Iran have their deep roots in the past. Racially the Aryans of India and the ancient Iranians clearly appear to have been two branches of one and the same people who spoke one and the same language. Sanskrit and Persian are derived from the same linguistic stock. From ancient times there was considerable trade between the two countries and also intellectual co-operation. Many Vedic deities have their counterpart in Avesta and there are striking similarities of rituals.

Persian literature is one of the most treasured gift in the rich store-house of Indian culture. It was the creative expression of cultural synthesis achieved during the medieval times in India. The coming together of the two cultural streams the Indian and the Iranian gave rise to the mighty flow of a composite national culture in different parts of India. These two traditions, which were woven into the multicoloured fabric of Indian culture, had their roots in these ancient civilizations of India and Iran, which contributed significantly to world civilization in the past. When they came together on Indian soil they acted and reacted on each other, gained a new creative vigour and vitality in this process and produced a cultural synthesis, which left a deep impression on

Indian life and tradition. Under the impact of this cultural phenomenon, the creative spirit of India bloomed and flowered, producing new forms in architecture, music and new style and approaches in literature. Iran's cultural influence spread from the eastern shore of the Mediterranean to the borders of Burma and the farthest points of Uzbekistan and Turkistan in Central Asia. Persian literature and specially its poetry vibrates with sentiments of love and affection throughout these areas. Persian poets like Rumi, Hafiz, Saadi, Amir Khusraw, Chandra Bhan Brahman, Ghalib, Iqbal, Kalyan Singh, Hira Lal Chopra, Bhagwat Saroop, Harumal Sadarangani, to speak a few, have always stood for the supreme cause of universal brotherhood and humanism.

It must be recorded with sense of pride that India has played a dynamic role in the development of Persian language and literature for about 700 years. Persian has been the official language of this country and the majority of documents pertaining to the medieval India is preserved in this language. Although Persian ceased to be an official language in the 19th century but still the literary associations, universities and academic institutions produced a galaxy of eminent poets, writers and scholars of excellence. The language which had won the hearts of Hindus and the Muslims alike and penetrated into their day-to-day life could not lose its charm and beauty even today.

The real set back to Persian struck in the second quarter of the twentieth century. Persian was reduced to the status of a classical language. The year 1947 brought with it holocaust and destruction. The people from every walk of life had to bear the brunt of partition but it should be noted that the quest for knowledge did not remain dormant for long. The scholars of Persian, both Muslims and Non-Muslims, kept up their literary activities and in this respect it is pleasure to mention a few names like Nazir Ahmad, Mohammad Ishaque, Syed Amir Hasan Abidi,

Hira Lal Chopra, Bhagwat Saroop, Harumul Sadarangani, Satyanand Hava, Ata Karim Burke and Gulwant Singh. Their fame traveled beyond the boundaries of India. Even women did not lag behind in Persian studies and one may mention Razia Akbar, Sharifun Nesa Ansari, Asfa Zamani, Azarm Dukht Sefavi, Dr. Bilquis Fatema Hussaini and many others.

It is necessary to make a thorough and scientific study of Indo – Persian literature in order to bring to light the glories of a hitherto neglected chapter of India cultural history. The Iran Society has been playing a pivotal role in the promotion of Persian studies in this region since its inception in forms of seminars, symposia and lectures. Its journal, the Indo-Iranic has got commendation as a storehouse of Iranology.

Among galaxy of Indian scholars of Persian who played vital roles in promoting and cementing Indo-Iranian cultural relation and unity and development of Persian Studies in the Sub-Continent in the 20th century, the very name of Dr. M. Ishaque is like a glittering star. His greatest achievement lies in fostering fraternal relations between the people of India and Iran through the medium of his valuable literal works on Persian literature. He was in fact, a symbol of Indo-Iranian cultural unity and friendship.

To fulfill this mission he founded the Iran Society in 1944 on the model of Iran Society of London; which he had visited during his research journey abroad. He was not only the Founder of the Society but also its life and soul and his unstinted devotion and vast erudition transformed the Society into a first – rate academic institution in India, and its journal into – Iranica, one of the learned and leading journals of the Sub-continent. The Indo-Iranica, a quarterly bilingual (English – Persian) journal of the Iran Society deserves congratulations of all lovers of Iranian culture and Indo – Iranian Cultural relations for bringing the two countries

closer to each other. The object of this journal was not only to provide Persian Studies in India specially in Bengal, but also to bring about closer intellectual collaboration and cultural understanding between India and Iran. In the 1st opportunities for the publication of the ripe fruits of scholarly labours and antiquarian researches without any bias or prejudice". (Indo - Iranica, 1946 Editorial).

To evaluate the contributions of Indo - Iranica in cementing the ties of cultural relation between India and Iran and promoting the study of Persian during 60 years of its existence, volumes have to be written. The pages of the journal are replete with the articles of Scholars of Persian History, Comparative Languages, Sufism and many other disciplines, from different corners of the world.

Before the contributions of Indo - Iranica are discussed, it will be necessary here to describe its importance in the eyes of both the Iranian and Indian diplomats, scholars and intellectuals.

The Indo-Iranica has already become a store-house of information of Iran and Iranology. Its importance lies in the fact that it is read with much interest and love in India as well as the UK, USA, USSR France, Iran and other Persian knowing countries. This journal has been patronized by eminent orientalists, Iranologists, and by the India Council for Cultural Relations through the good offices of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Professor Hymayun Kabir. Almost all the Iranian ambassadors of India even the scholars and academicians of Iran, have appreciated the role of Indo-Iranica in strengthening cultural and literary ties between the two ancient countries. Some views expressed by the Iranian ambassadors about the Indo-Iranica will not be out of place here.

Syed Mohit Tabatabai, Cul.tural Counsellor writes in his article:

Speaking in the Annual General Meeting of 1329 AH the Cultural Counselor further said:

From the royal Court of the Shahnshah Aryamehr this message came to Dr. M. Ishaque:

The Cultural Minister of Iran on receiving Indo-Iranica's special issue writes:

Almost all the Iranian ambassadors in India have appreciated the Indo-Iranica and its services in maintaining cultural and literary relations between the two ancient countries. His Excellency Aqa Noury Isfandiary says:

"The interest taken by the India Cultural Council under the patronage of the Hon'ble Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Minister of Education of the Government of India, for the regular publication of the Indo-Iranica, the organ of the Iran Society, manifesto the intense desire of friendship in this country to promote the aims of the Society and to consolidate the cultural relation between the two countries".

His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Goodarzi, Ambassador of Iran in India was of the opinion:

"The journal has, indeed, been instrumental to quite a great extent in acquainting its readers with the richness of Persian literature and in promoting goodwill and understanding among the people of Iran, India and other countries of the world".

Assadollah Alam, Minister of the Imperial Court expressed his views in this way:

"The Indo-Iranica magazine which is known in all Iranologists circles of the world as one of the best of its kinds and which is welcomed everywhere with interest and zeal in the course of 25 years of its life. The collection of articles of Indo-Iranica in the course of the past quarter for a century is one of the most precious contributions to world studies on Iranology. Indo-Iranica has brought Iran and India close to each other by inspiring real pride in their great and common literary, cultural & religious traditions".

In one of his speeches H.E. Jallal Abdoh, the Ex-Ambassador of Iran in India has expressed his views about the Iran Society and its journal *Indo-Iranica* in this way:

"I have been known the Iran Society through its journal *Indo-Iranica* and its publication. Today I have been such impressed by seeing with my own eyes the achievements which the Society has been able to make so far".

On the completion of 50 years of *Indo-Iranica* H.E. Mir Mohammad Mousavi, the Ex-Ambassador of Iran wrote to the General Secretary of Iran Society:

"It is a matter of great pleasure for me to congratulate all those who are associated with this periodical on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its publication which has been continued and fruitful no doubt, the age-old cultural relations between the two great nation India and Iran, make it obligatory that such sort of literacy activities expand more than ever".

(*Indo-Iranica*, Golden Jubilee Number, 1997)

When *Indo-Iranica* celebrated its Silver Jubilee the Council of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland by the unanimous resolution praised the contribution of the journal for the Iranian Studies.

Dr. Sayyied Hossein Nasr, Former Professor, Dean and NC, Tehran University & University Professor of Islamic Studies, George Washington University, in his message of goodwill is of the opinion.

"Through Lectures, books and specially its journal, the *Indo-Iranica*, the Society has provided one of the major force in the whole world for the study of these rich culture which have dominated over the Indo-Iranian world for so many centuries".

It the views and words of appreciations are recorded we will come to know that the *Indo – Iranica* and its contacts were liked and appreciated by all the Iranian Scholars, diplomats, Indian Presidents, Prime Ministers and Education Ministers.

The importance of this journal lies in the fact that it brought out special numbers in memory of Maulana Azad, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Dr. Md. Iqbal, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Amir Khusraw, Khayyam, Maulana Rumi, Al-Beruni, Mulla Sadra, Silver Jubilee Number, Saadi, Hafiz Sir Jadu Nath Sarkar, E.G. Browne, Golden Jubilee Number, Millienium Number, Diamond Jubilee Number and many others, besides a few special issue of this Journal having been dedicated to some of the benefactors of the Iran Society including Dr. M. Ishaque, B.C. Law, Jagdish Narayan Sarkar, Poladian T. Sakiath, Hiralal Chopra, Ata Karim Burke, Mohibul Hasan, Rabadi and Gimi. It has published 36 Numbers and Speical issues so far. No Persian journal of the sub-contient can boast of such numbers of its special issues except the Indo – Iranica.

In its 56 volumes the Indo Iranica has published 258 articles in Persian dealing with specially in the cultural, political, religious and historical relations between India and Iran, informing the intellectual world about the close affinity and friendship between two countries of the same family. A comprehensive Index of all the artiges, profiles, reports and other features have also been published.

The Indo-Iranica is the only bilingual journal of the world which records the lives and activities of almost all the Iranian ambassadors in India with their Photographs. I am sure that no Society in India has preserved the full bio-data and Photographs of the Iranian ambassadors in India. Even the cultural houses of Iran in India do not posses all these records. If some one wants to delve deep into the ocean of Persian Languages and literature no other journal except Indo-Iranica can help him in this respect.

This journal recapitulate all the activities of Iran Society. It is a mirror in which the faces of the scholars of Iran and India and their scholarly activities are reflected or manifested. It is like a

literary and cultural bridge which connects India and Iran with each other on cultural, philosophical, literary and ethical fronts. Role of Indo-Iranica in bringing the two sister countries close to each other is more significant than that of the efforts done on political ground by both the countries.

Books-review forms an important feature of the journal. The Indo-Iranica has published in 56 years of its establishment reviews on 213 books by different scholars. It has the privilege of publishing reviews on the books of scholars like, Ali Akbar Mushir Salimi A.J. Arbery, Dr. Sayyed hossain Nasr, R. Levy, Reynold A. Nicholson, Humayun Kabir, Radha Krishnan, Iraj Afshar, Taraporewals, F.C. Davar, Michael Came, Dr. Nazir Ahmed and many others. These reviews written by experts are considered to be the fine specimens of review literature. Besides book-reviews, the Indo-iranica has published obituary notes of great personalities. It has published the obituaries of 50 great men so far. Among them the obituaries of Syed Hassan Askari, Prof. Bekhud, Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Hiral Lal Chopra, Hadi Hassan, Dr. Zakir Hussain, Hymayun Kabir, Dr.M. Ishaque, V.E. Minorsky, A.K. Burke, Jadunath Sarkar, Taraporewala, Raza Ali Wahshat and Zakir Hussain are the best specimens of obituary writing. These obituaries take us to the inside biographical notices and activities of the demised persons.

The "Persian Scene" published until many years ago presents glimpses of the day-to-day development of Iran. Similarly, 'Ourselves' and now "Iran Society News" is a mirror in which all the activities of the Iran Society are manifested, such as "Reception to Iranian ambassadors' Journalists, Musicians and others; detailed report of Foundation Day Celebrations, Seminars and Symposia, Memorial Lectures, Award of Scholarship to Persian students, Library and Reading Room and Membership, release of books, Multi-Lingual poetic Symposium etc.

Another note worthy aspect of India-Iranica is its being in Persian and English languages. The biographical notes together with short literary criticism, have been recorded in English while specimens of Persian, Ghazals, Poems, Qitas and English translation of Persian poems have also been recorded, Scholarly articles from eminent writers of International repute carved a niche for itself. Articles on the History, Geography, Economics, Sociology and Literature of Iran as well as cultural, social, political and philosophical relations between India and Iran are like gems scattered on the pages of Indo – Iranica. Articles in Pre-Islamic, Post Islam, Religion and culture of ancient and modern Iran and Vice – versa adorn the pages of Indo – Iranica. The journal is a treasure house which has preserved information's of language, religion, art, architecture.

Another achievement of the Indo-Iranica is that it has published 11 articles in Persian and 15 in English purely on the cultural and literary relations between India and Iran. These articles are based on authentic sources and have played a positive role in cementing relations between the two sister countries.

In short, after independence the Indo-iranica played and still it has been playing very positive role in creating cultural and social ties between India and Iran at the same time promoting Persian studies in India.