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An Analysis of Persian Influences on Bengali Language

Abstract: *The emergence of Persian language in the undivided Bengal occurred during the pre-Islamic period. The pre-historic Achamenian Empire established its sway over the whole of the Indian sub-continent along with Bengal. The Indian sub-continent along with Bengal was a tax-paying subordinate state during the mighty Emperor Kurush or Cyrus. The old Persian language which was the official language of the Achamenian dynasty entered the Indian sub-continent including the Bengal province. Again much later than that during the adventurous campaign of Malik Ikhtiyaruddin Bakhtiyar Khilji from Lakhnauti to Tibet, the existence of Turks were found in Bengal whose forefathers settled in Bengal during the Achamenian rule. In the course of time Persiaan speaking preachers of Islam, conquerors, troops, and businessmen used to come to Bengal and settled them here. The Chinese traveler Ma- Huan who came to Bengal in 1432 A.D. found two languages Persian and Bengali spoken by the people in Bengal. In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the influence of Persian*

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language on the Bengali language and its everlasting impact in almost every sphere of life and culture of Bengal.

Key Words: *Persian, Bengali, influence, culture, vocabularies, etc*

Introductory concept:

From the times immemorial India and Persia have been developing close cross cultural affinities. During the medieval period these affinities encouraged a number of emigrations which is said to have been ended with the extinction of the Mughal Empire. Persian have been the medium of expression of the intellectuals and literary ideas of numerous scholars for several centuries. Relations between India and Persia became distinct during the Achamenian Empire (550-330 B.C.). In many of the inscriptions of Darius the Great (522-486 B.C) at Persipoolis, Naqsh –i- Rustam and Bisutoon India is mentioned. This relation even continued during the Sasanian Period (226-642 A.D). Anusherwaan the famous king of the Sasanian sent his personal physician and philosopher Barzuaya to India who took with him a large number of articles from India which included the famous Indian story book 'Panch Tantra' of Vishnu Sarma. He translated it into Pahlawi with the title "Kartaak wa Damnak".

With the establishment of Muslim rule in India by Muizuddin Muhammad Sam, Persian language and culture proved more popular in India. Persian earned its

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reputation as the official and cultural language of India at the very outset of Muslim rule. Due to the liberal patronage of the rulers a hordes of scholars, poets, Sufis, Divines and others from the Persian world pavd their way to India. Persian influence grew steadily since the beginning of the 13th century and reached its zenith during the Mughal rule especially during the rule of Emperor Akbar who imparted a new vision to Persian language and culture. During the 12th century to the 18th century a host of literature on History, Tazkira, Poetry, mathematics, administration, warfare, medicine etc. have been produced in India in Persian language. All official and administrative documents such as Akhbarat/ Farman/ Parwans etc. addressed to different provincial set ups such as Gujarat, Deccan, Bengal, Kashmir etc. were written in Persian language. Apart from this Persian played an important role in the transmission of the historical heritage and classical Sanskrit literature to the outside world. For example we may quote the translation works of Upanishads by Dara Sikoh and translations of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana at the instance of Emperor Akbar.

Persian language had influenced Indian polity, social life, architecture, languages and literature. its role is highly significant in the evolution of the composite Indian culture. In this paper a humble attempt has been made to trace the influence of Persian language on the Bengali language.

Persian inroads to Bengal:

As Persian was the state language the preachers of Islam introduced general education in Bengal through the Persian language. The Government job aspirants irrespective of their religion were bound to learn good Persian.[1] Like other parts of India for the inhabitants of Bengal too Persian mixed with Arabic wasa the cultural language.[2] Due to the expansion of teaching of Persian language there were hardly any people illiterate in Bengal during the Muslim rule. This was the scenario till the middle of the 19th century. The Mosques and Imambaras were the centre of learning and literature. in his report (1835-1838) William Adam had mentioned that there were one hundred thousand primary schools for forty million population of Bengal and Bihar i.e. one primary school per four hundred people of Bengal during that period of time. [3]

It must be mention here that the first book written in Bengal was the Persian translation of the celebrated Sanskrit book Amrita Kunda which was done by Qazi Ruknuddin in the second decade of 13th century A.D. The Persian title of the book was Bahrul- Hayat.[4] During the following centuries hundreds of books were written by a number of poets and writers in Bengal. Even the first newspaper and journal "Hablul Matin" published from Calcutta was in Persian. The root of Persian language in Bengal was to such an extent that when the British substituted Persian by English as the state language, intellectuals irrespective of their caste creed and religion

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protested for changing the decision of the colonial government.[5]

Apart from these Prof. Nazir Ahmed in his book "Essays on Persian Literature" has rightly pointed out some of the other factors which were responsible for the deep rooted impact of Persian on Bengali language. The translation of a number of Persian classics like Yusuf- wa -Zulaikha, Laila- wa- Majnun, Sikandar Nama, Haft- Paikar, Shahnama, Rubaiyat-I Khayyam, Gulistan, Bustan, Diwan-i- Hafiz and others played a vital role in increasing popularity of Persian in Bengal.

Secondly, poems composed on Satya Pirr, who was admired by both Hindus and Muslims of Bengal and who occupied an important place in Bengali literature contained a number of Persian vocabulary. Thirdly, Muslim poets like Qazi Dulat, Saiyid Alaul and others appeared on the scene of Bengali literature and naturally their compositions were full of Persian and Arabic vocabularies. Fourthly, Muhammad Abid, Abid Ali, Ejazud-Din, Inaya ullah Sarkar, Qurbal Ali and others were group of modern short stiry writers who used large number of Persian words in their prose. They introduced the Musalmani Bangla style in Bengali literature. The poems of poets like Qazi Nazrul Islam who is also the national poet of Bangladesh contained a very deep influence of Persian. In his poems he used Persian cultural terminologies, Persian symbols and adopted some of its verse forms.[6]

Persian Influences on Bengali language:

As discussed above the language of Persia significantly contributed for the enrichment of Bengali language and culture. Persian had left indelible mark and contributed for the growth and perfection of the Bengali language.[7] At the very first stage the influence of Persian on Bengali was merely confined to religious terminologies, but later on it tinged the entire socio-political and cultural life of the land of Bengal. It became a fashion to use the Perso-Arabic vocabularies in the Bengali literary circle. For example Ramai Pandit the 11th century scholar in his Sunyapurana used words like Khoda, Pegumbar, Kaman, Gaji, Sekh, Maulana etc. from Persian origin.[8] Another poet of the 16th century Kovi Kanan Mukundaram in his religious poem Chandimangal used Persian origin words like, Saiyad, Mugal, Kitab Nishan, Shirni, Koran etc.[9] Chandidasa has also liberally Perso- Arabic wordings in his epic Srikrishna Kirtan.[10]

Persian influence on Administration related terms:

With increasing popularity of Persian in Bengal some of the Sanskrit terminologies were replaced by Persian. The words like Dharmadhikari was replaced by the word 'Qazi', Nishanth by 'Kotwal', Pai by 'Wazir', Nagar by 'Shahr', Bhumi by 'Zamin', Uttalika by 'Imarat', etc. here are some example of Persian terms used in Bengali with minor changes in their pronunciations:

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Persian	Bengali	Meaning in English
Zamindar	Jamidar	Landlord
Munsif	Munsif	Magistrate
Darugha	Daroga	Police officer
Jurmana	Jurmana	Fine
Diwaani	Diwani	Civil
Amin	Amin	Keeeper of trust
Faujdari	Foujdari	Criminal
Sarkar	Sorkar	Government
Rasid	Rashid	Receipt
Peshkar	Peshkar	Dealing Assistant
Jari	Jari	Issued
Safarish	Suparish	Recommendation
Hazri	Hajira	Attendance

Land Revenue Administration:

Persian	Bengali	English Meaning
Abkari	Abgar	Irrigation
Bandobast	Bandobasta	Arrangement
Zamin	Jomi	Land
Khazana	Khajna	Rent
Dakhl	Dokhal	Occupation

Persian words which are still sued as surnames were designated for specialized services in the administration system.

Perso-Arabic	Bengali	Meaning in English
Qanungo	Kanungo	Land record keeper
Khan	Khan	Chief
Lashkar	Laskar	Army
Shiqdar	Sikdar	Head of the Pargana
Fotadar	Fotedar	Treasurer
Khwanindekar	Khondakar	Learned
Majumdar	Mojumdar	Collector
Mastaufi	Mustafi	Head of the Expenditure

Religious Words:

This is a known fact that in the Aryan or non Aryan vernicilar languages of India, the emergence of Arabic element were due to the popularity of Persian language.[11]

During the early days of Muslim rule in Bengal some of the Perso-Arabic religious terminologies entered in Bengali language with certain changes in their pronunciations. For example:

Persso-Arabic	Bengali	Meaning in English
Dua	Doa	Blessing
Paighambar	Poigambar	Prophet
Khuda	Khoda	God
Kalma	Kalima	Statement or Declaration By a Muslim on his faith on Allah and His Prophet
Roza	Roja	Fasting

Drgah	Darga	Shrine
Namaz	Namaj	Prayer
Nabi	Nobi	Prophet
Haram	Haram	illegal/unlawful

Persian vocabularies used in the Judicial System in Bengali:

Perso-Arabic	**Bengali**	**Meaning in English:**
Wakil	Ukil	Pleder
Arzi	Arji	Petition
Moqaddima	Mokodama	Case
Multawi	Multabi	Postponment
Vakalatnama	Ukalatnama	Power of Attorney
Dalil	Dolil	Deed/Evidence
Asami	Asami	Convict
Nalish	Nalish	Suit
Muharrir	Muhuri	Clerk
Adalat	Adalat	Judiciary
Dafa	Dafa	Section
Barkhast	Barkhasta	Adjournment

Some of the names of things of day to day use like clothes, furniture, ornaments, utensils, spices, sweets etc. are commonly used in Bengali language are derived from Persian language.

Perso-Arabic	**Bengali**	**English Meaning**
Jama	Jama	Dress/frock
Dastna	Dastana	Hand-glove

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Shal	Shal	Shawl
Rumal	Rumal	Handkerchief
Biryani	Biriyani	Fried rice
Kufta	Kofta	Crushed-meat
Qima	Kima	Crushed-meat
Badam	Badam	Almond
Sabun	Sabun	Soap
Gharz	Garaj	Objective
Tamasha	Tamasha	Fun
Angur	Angur	Grape
Tarbuj	Tarmuj	Watermelon
Chaku	Chaku	Knife
Qalaqand	Kalakan	One kind of sweet
Chamcham	Chamcham	One kind of sweet
Mej	Mej	Table
Balish	Balis	Pillow

Some of the Bengali compounds originated from Persian:

Persian	**Bengali**	**English Meaning**
Ain-Qanun	Ainkanun	Law
Naram-Garam	Naramgaram	Good and bad
Zamin-Jageh	Jami-Jaiga	Property
Zor-Zulm	Jorjulum	Oppression
Dildaryya	Dildarya	A river like heart

There are good numbers of slang word and abuses used in Bengali are originally from Persian.

Persian	Bengali	English Meaning
Haramzadeh	Haramjada	Bastard
Be-iman	Beiman	Dishonest
Badzat	Bidjat	Low-birth
Badmash	Bodmas	Wicked
Bihaya	Behaya	Disgraced
Ahmaq	Ahmak	Fool

There are a large number of Perso-Arabic words which have lost their original meaning are still used in Bengali.

Perso-Arabic with meaning	Bengali with meaning
Fazil (learned)	Fajil (notorious/ hopeless)
Chehra(face)	Chehara(body)
Barkhast(to terminate)	Barkhasto(re-trench)
Fasad(chaos)	Fechad(problem)
Qaida(method)	Kaida(manage)
Bazyaft(to trace out)	Bajeapt (to confiscate)

A few examples of idioms and phrases of Persian origin used in Bengali are:

Persian with meaning	Bengali with meaning
Qabul kardan(to accept) Bengali infinitive)	Kobul kora(to accept, kora
Khaneh(house), Talash (search)	Khana talashi kora (search the house)
Sabr(patience), Mewa (fruits)	Sobure Mewa phale(Patience bears fruits)
Zamanat(gurantee),	Jamanat Bajeapt Hawa(to loss

Bazyaft(oust)   guarantee money)
Zor(might), Mulk(country) Jor Jar Muluk tar(Might is
                                         right)

Some of the Persian terminologies which are used in Bengali language with little bit changes of pronunciation in the original are:

Persian	**Bengali**	**Meaning in English**
Hesab	hisab	account
Batel	batil	cancel
Bandobast	bandobasto	arrangement
Dalil	dolil	deed
Shart	Shorto	condition
Amanat	amanot	deposit
Ray	rai	judgment
Malekane	malikana	ownership
Asl	asol	original/actual
Peshe	pasha	profession
Chakeri	chakori	service/job
Jarib	Jorip	survey
Talb	talob	Requisition
Parwana	parwaana	warrant
Jari	jari	promulgation
Malek	malik	owner
Khalas	khalas	acquittal
Baqi	baki	balance
Naqd	naghad	cash
Da'vi	dabi	claim

Tahvil	tahbil	fund
Kar-khaneh	karkhana	factory
Dastaviz	dastavej	document
Hefazat	hefajat	custody
Qalam	kolom	pen
Sefaresh	suparish	recommendation
Daftar	doptar	office

A number of Bengali terminologies represent Persian words with little modificato in respect of consonant and vowel forms:

Persian	**Bengali**	**Meaning in English**
Baqiye	bakeya	arrear
Dallal	dalal	broker
Shakh	shakha	branch
Bay'ane	bayna	advance
Kharj	khoroch	expanse
Mahiyane	ma'ine	monthly (pay)
Shenavaye	shunani	earing
Chapkhaneh	chhapakhana	printing press
Mawquf	mokub	remission
Talash	talas	search
Maramat	meramat	repairing
Vazn	ojon	weight
Mahsul	masul	tarrif
Mowjud	mojut	stock
Mande	monda	dull (market related)
Ja'l	jaliyati	forgery

Bagh	bagan	garden
Amadan	amdani	import
Raftan	raptani	export

It must be mention here that both Bengali and Persian carries common grammatical phenomenon in the structure of sentences. For example:

Persian	**Bengali**	**English meaning**
Man bazaar raftam.	Ami bazaar gelam.	I went to market.
Wo kuja raft?	se kothai gelo ?	Where did he go?
Name shoma chist?	Apnar nam ki?	What is your name?
Man aab khordam.	Ami jol khelam	I took water.
Man khubam.	Ami bhalo achi.	I am fine.
Man shoma ra dost dram.	Ami tomake bhali bashi.	I love you.

Similarities between Persian and Bengali exists to such an extent that both the languages unlike Hindi and Urdu and some other Indian languages have no room for gender in their grammar. Dr Enamul Haque, in his most moderate estimate has mentioned 5134 words and expressions from Perso-Arabic origin and 3934 words of same origin with orthographic variations.[12] In another survey made by him he has mentioned that about 8% of the total Bengali vocabulary are constituted from Perso-Arabic origin.[13]

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Concluding Idea:

From the discussion above under different sections it is clear that the intermingling of Perso-Arabci words with Bengali is an epitome of integration of two different languages through a long process of seven centuries in a conducive environment of social and cultural syncretism. It was not just a passing phase in the history of Bengali language and literature. It is still exist in the present day Bengali language spoken by the people of West Bengal, Bangladesh and some parts of Assam and Tripura in their daily administrative as well as day to day life. It can be termed as the living evidence of preservation of Persian cultural heritage by contemporary Bengali speakers and society at large.

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