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India and Iran Literary Relation

Introduction

Literary relation of India and Iran is a very fascinating topic because of the richness of their exchanges by various means of literature and culture. To understand this theme in a better way we can describe it in another way that is the historical relation of India and Iran through their literary exchange and contribution. When we look up the history and try to define the proximity of culture between these two great Asian countries we perceive that these two countries of the Asian continent has been very much close to each other not only geographically but also culturally. Of course the language and literature of both the countries have played a vital role to form and maintain this friendly relation between these two countries. This linguistic proximity has always been a factor to maintain even civilizational and political ties between these two great ancient powers of the world. And most interestingly we find their language in every period and each epoch of the history crucial to maintain their political affinity as well. For Example the Elamo-Dravidian language suggests a

possible relation between Elamite of Iran and the Harappa of India. The Vedic Sanskrit language and Avesta of Iran is believed to have originated from the same Indo Iranian language of Aryan family. The relation of which is very much apparent in the literary genre through religious dialogue between them. The existence of Zoroastrianism in India and the popularity of Buddhism in Persia is an example of it. When we move to Achaemenian Period of Persia corresponding Ashoka and Mouryan time of India, we witness the exchange of forces time and again between these two neighbors beyond their trade and cultural relation. All these factors show that it was not possible without their literary exchanges as well. After that the dynasties of Parthians and Sassnians of Persia maintain all their possible affinity with the Guptas of India. There we find a huge body of literary exchange between these two dynasties. The affinity between Pahlavi and Sanskrit literature are prevalent in the field of literature because of their give and take factor. And finally after the coming of Islam into the global scene the whole debate took a new turn. It changed the political discourse of the continent fully and it affected each and every civilization and culture equally. At the same time we notice India and Persia 'separating out from the Arab Islamic upheaval' became much closer than ever. Here we see all the Sanskrit literature first transformed into Pahlavi then to Arabic this act in fact caused a greater proximity between India and Persia. But at the end after coming of Islam to

India through the Persian route it Persianized the whole India, as we can see in the efforts of Delhi Sultanate and Mughal periods in India. They declared Persian as official language and called the Persian scholars and poets to India and made all the major Indian texts translated into the Persian language including the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Thus here in my paper all these factors will be discussed in brief which ultimately will shed light of proximity and affinity between these two countries of Asia which are struggling to bring back their old time relation into the contemporary time as well. So here in this paper my attempt would be to show their relation from literary perspective. Of course it is a very tough task to discuss all these things in this very short period of time and space. To avoid complexity I have divided the topic into two periods, one is the pre Islamic India and Iran relation and the second is the Islamic India and Iran relation till the end of Moghal period. But it does not mean that the rare mention of scholars and their works of post Mughal period British India or the independent India will be totally barred. Here I would like to mention one more thing about my paper that main focus of the literary aspect has been given in the Islamic era because of the remarkable contribution of Sultans of Delhi and Moghal Emperors in this regard.

Pre Islamic Indo Iran Relation

To see their historical and literary aspects in more clear way this phase has been divided into three broader periods according to

their dynasties having parallel in each countries, first of which is the Iranian Elamite and Harappa of India. Thus we see The Indus Valley (Harappan) civilization, which is the oldest historically known civilization in India, contemporary with the Proto-Elamite and Elamite civilizations in ancient Iran. In terms of linguistics, it has been theorized that the Indus people spoke a Dravidian language. In the Baluchistan region in the southeast of Iran and in the southwest of Pakistan, the Brahui people traditionally speak a Dravidian language. The Elamo-Dravidian languages form a theorized, though disputed language family that includes the ancient Elamite language of Iran and the Dravidian languages of India (found mostly in the south), suggesting a possible linguistic relationship between the Elamites and Harappans before the arrival of Indo-Iranians. With the coming of the Indo Iranian language into emergence the cultural development between these two countries became very much stronger as we see the languages of the northern, western, central and eastern regions of India belonging to the Indo-Aryan family are believed to have originated from the same source as the Iranian languages, namely the Indo-Iranian language family, which in itself is a member of the Satem group of Indo-European languages. As a witness to this fact we see the affinity between their religious literature and civilizational proximity. Vedic civilization began in India around 1500 BCE, with the Rig-Veda being the oldest of the Vedas. The Rig-Veda was composed in

Vedic Sanskrit, which is very similar to Avestan, the ancient language of the Iranian Zoroastrian sacred text Avesta. According to the Vendidad the (Iranian) Aryans lived in sixteen countries, one of them being Hapta Hindu, which is the Avestan form of the Sanskrit Sapta Sindhu (Rigveda), meaning "seven rivers" and referring to the northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent.

Then Achaemenian Period as a contemporary to Ashoka and Mouryan period; they shared a proud relation in culture and trade and of course it could not be possible without linguistic relation as we see the exchange of forces time and again between these two neighbors. The dynasties of Parthian and Sassanians corresponding the Guptas of India and their relations. They shared a remarkable relation from every corner including art, culture and literature. Examples of which are very much wide spread throughout the history. But our focus here is literary one. When it comes to the linguistic term it is the relation between Pahlavi and Sanskrit. In this regard a wide spread literary relation is available most important among them is Panchatantara.

According to the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi (11th century CE), the 5th century Sassanian king Bahram V requested Indian king Shangol to select 12,000 "Gypsies", or Indian musicians, and introduced them to Persia. These Gypsies are believed to be the ancestors of the Persian Gypsies. They propagated Indian music and dancing in Persia, and may have travelled further west to Europe in the next four to five hundred years. It is possible that

these "Gypsies" are the ancestors of the modern Roma people in Europe. It is also believed that Bahram visited India in the 5th century CE. Persian poet Hakim Nizami Ganjavi has alluded to the Indian wife of king Behram in his famous work Haft Paikar (seven figures) indicating instances of inter-marriage. During the reign of the Sassanian king Khosrau (531-579 CE), the game of chess (Chaturanga in India) is believed to have been introduced to Persia (where it was known as Shatranj). Jundishpur was developed as a leading center of Persian medicine, in which the Indian Ayurvedic system was syncretized with the Greek system propagated there by the Nestorian Christians. Burzuya, the physician to Khosrau, was sent to India to bring back works on medicine and searched for the so-called "elixir of life". Burzuya on his return is said to have brought stories of the Panchatantra with him. The Panchatantra is an ancient collection of Indian fables, and it was translated from Sanskrit to Pahlavi by Burzuya, who called it Kalila-va-Demna. Also in the field of medicine, the Charaka Samhita, the famous Indian medical text by the physician Charaka was translated to Persian and then to Arabic in the 7th century. In the field of astronomy, an early Pahlavi book Zik-i-Shatro Ayar, which was an astronomical work based on Indian elements was translated into Arabic by Al-Tamimi. Indian Christians had embraced Nestorianism, which was then widespread in Persia. The Nestorians were active missionaries and crossed Central Asia to found churches even in China.

These missionaries following in the wake of Persian merchants are believed to be chiefly responsible for establishing a Christian community in south and here again we can see the Buddhist influence in this Iranian society of pre Islamic Era. Where we find Khurasan as one of its province declaring it as its religion. Where many biographies have been written in the Persian language on Buddha. So these are the three periods before coming Islam into the socio political and cultural sphere and in these periods both these two regions influenced each other. They contributed to each in all walks of their life.

Indo-Iran Relation in Islamic Era

The coming of Islam to Persia and the ruin of Sassanian dynasty of Persia resulted in fleeing some Zoroastrians to take shelter in India to save their old religious belief finding India a good abode for religious freedom. This journey of Parsis to India strengthened the relations between India and Persia once again. Now let us look in details of the literary and cultural relation after the coming of Islam to India through Persia as we witnessed a massive upheaval in the region after the emergence of Islam. It influenced each and every sphere of life of people. With the invasion of Mahmud of Ghazna in the 10th century, Persian was introduced into India in a massive manner. In case of India Islam created a new chapter in this regard by focusing on the Persian language and its culture as the Islamic one rather than giving a concentrated attention to the Arabic. Until 1168 Ghaznavi's

descendants continued to rule in northwestern India. They were followed by other Muslim houses, the Ghorids, the sultans of Delhi, Kashmir, Gujarat, and Bengal; the Bahmanids of North Deccan, and others. They extended Muslim rule, and with it Persian language and culture, to most parts of the subcontinent, as far east as Bengal and as far south as Hyderabad. Although most of these dynasties were not ethnically Persian, they were so culturally and therefore became propagators of Persian language, literature, and way of life. The coming of dedicated Muslim missionaries in large number from Persia as well as other Islamic land, also led to the spread of Persian in India. Persian or Persian speaking Sufi mystics were the most notable among them. The saintly bearing and passionate preaching of Sufis were important elements in spreading the Persian language as well as the conversion of many Indians to Islam. Persian lyric poetry has always been popular with the Sufis as a symbolic expression of their love of the divine and their longing for union with God. Therefore the Sufi brotherhoods and their hospices also became instruments for cultivating Persian poetry among the Muslim Indians. The patronage of Persian literature in India reached its culmination with the Mogul emperors (1526-1858), whose reign constituted a golden age of Indo-Persian literature. Some of the emperors, like Humayun and Jahangir, as well as many Mogul princes and princesses, governors, nobles, and high officials, were not only enthusiastic sponsors and promoters of Persian

letters but they wrote Persian poetry themselves. The court of Akbar (1556-1605) was studded with a large number of poets who wrote in Persian. Indeed, under the Moguls, India (rather than Persia) became the center of Persian literature. A large body of Persian poetry, historical works, mystical treatises, literary criticism, biographies of poets, works of theology and Koranic literature, and numerous Persian grammars and lexicons were produced in India during this period, many of these works still unpublished. During this period several Hindu and Jain religious and philosophical texts from Sanskrit and Prakrit were translated into Persian. These include the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Nalopakhya (Nala and Damayanti), Bhagavata Purana, Vishnu Purana, Shiva Purana, Skanda Purana, Vayu Purana, Brahmanda Purana, Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Harivamsa, Atharva Veda, Yoga Vashishtha, Sankara Bhasya, Atma Vilasa, Amrita Kunda, Prabodhacandrodaya and Vraja Mahatmya. Though the intention of Sultans and Moghal emperors was political it served cultural aspects as a key factor in developing their relation with the people of India. It was literature which played a pivotal role in cementing both the cultural and political ties. That is why we find a bulk of translation and interpretation of Hindu religious and cultural texts into Persian language.

Before proceeding further let us have a look to the importance and mutual influence of Persian and Indian literature both in India

and Persia which are prevalent in every sphere of knowledge system into both the Sultanate and Moghal periods. The coming of Islam to India was not a one sided activity because we see the century following the Arab conquest of Sind was one in which Hindu culture influenced Arab Islamic and Persian Islamic culture. The scientific study of astronomy in Islam commenced under the influence of an Indian work, Siddhanta, which was brought to Baghdad by 771 through translations. In about 800 CE, the Indian mathematician and astronomer Aryabhata's treatise Aryabhatiya was translated into Arabic under the title Zij-al-Arjabhar as Arabic was also growing in Persia as one of the major languages along with Persian. Before that, in 772 CE, Brahmagupta Brahmasphuta-Siddhanta and the Khandakhadyaka, were taken to Baghdad and translated into Arabic. The knowledge of Hindu numerals and the decimal place value system reached the Arabs along with other Indian mathematical-astronomical works rendered into Arabic in the 8th and 9th century, giving rise to the Hindu-Arabic numeral system. In the 10th century AD, a Persian pharmacologist Abu Mansur Muwaffaq ibn Ali al Harawi of Herat wrote Kitab'l Abniya an Haq'iq'l Adwiya (book of Foundations of the True Properties of Remedies). Believed to be the oldest prose work in modern Persian, the book utilized material from Indian sources among others.

It is worth mentioning that with the spreading of Islam and the

subsequent spread of Arabic it was the Sh'ubia movement in Iran that preserved Iranian non-Arab traditions. This in turn resulted in the translation of non Arabic works like Sanskrit works on mathematics, astronomy, medicine and other sciences into Arabic. They used their knowledge of Sanskrit grammar to systematize Arabic grammar. The Sahihs of al-Bukhari and the Sunan of al-Tirmidhi are collections of the Hadith, which in their Iranian version seems to have been influenced by Buddhist works. The Hadith begins with "Thus have I heard", which is also the usual beginning of Buddhist scriptures (evam maya srutam). The term srutam implies historic sanctity and glory, as does the hadith.

Due to the lack of space and time everything cannot be discussed in detail but still let me take up some specimen of the time in order to elaborate the point that the mutual literary exchange has reached to unprecedented heights in the post Gaznavid period up-to the end of the Mugal empire in India. I would take up three important figures namely Al-Biruni, Amir kusrow and Rumi to explain to what extent this mutual exchange has gone.

During the 11th century CE, Al-Biruni, believed to be a Shia Muslim of Iranian origin born in Khwarizm in northern Iran, visited India during the Ghaznavi period. He wrote his famous Kitab-ul-Hind in Arabic, which involved a detailed study of Indian customs, traditions and the Indian way of life. Earlier, many

Indian works on astronomy, mathematics and medicine had been translated into Arabic during the early Abbasid period, and Al-Biruni, who was also very interested in astronomy and mathematics, refers to some of these texts. Al-Biruni was a prolific writer, and besides his mother tongue Khwarizmi (an Eastern Iranian language) and Persian and Arabic, he also knew Hebrew, Syriac and Sanskrit. He studied Sanskrit manuscripts to check earlier Arabic writings on India. Al Biruni composed about 20 books on India-- both originals and translations, and a great number of legends based on the folklore of ancient Persia and India. He developed a special interest in the Samkhya Yoga traditions of Indian philosophy and the Bhagavad Gita. He was possibly the first foreign scholar to have seriously studied the Puranas, specially the Vishnu Dharma. Biruni also rendered the al-Majest of Ptolemy and Geometry of Euclid into Sanskrit. He composed in 1370 a treatise entitled Yantraraja. Based on Persian knowledge, it described the construction and use of the astrolabe, an instrument developed by Arab astronomers. Another Indian astronomer who made use of Arabic/Persian knowledge was Kamalakara, who wrote a treatise on astronomy called Siddhanta-tatva-viveka. Later it was Sawai Jai Singh II who showed the greatest interest in Arabic/Persian astronomy. Amir Kosrow established a new literary trend in the 13th century which lasted till the last century. It was in India that a new development of great significance in the history of Persian

narrative poetry first appeared as Amir Kosrow responded to the Nezami of Ganja. The five poems of Amir Kosrow was not a just copy but it was with a high degree of refashioning of the themes. The two Kamsas gave birth to a line of literature that was most widespread in the subcontinent. Kosrow is a poet of great fame and his works in Persian got translated to a number of world languages.

Mystical lyrics culminated in the ghazals of Rumi. Fired by an irresistible love of the divine and endowed with unusual poetic gifts, he wrote lyrics of extraordinary passion and musicality. The ecstatic fervor, explosive spontaneity, and rich but unconventional language of Rumi's lyrics place him in a class all his own. His Mathnavi, generally considered the greatest literary monument of Islamic mysticism, is a long poem of twenty-seven thousand couplets designed primarily to expound and preach his dynamic mysticism. His method is anecdotal, his tone frequently lyrical. The complexity of Rumi's mystical thought, wedded to a loose, "centrifugal" treatment, and his indifference to polishing his language do not make the Mathnavi easy reading, but the work contains many charming stories, moving passionate lines, and well-expressed profound thoughts that account for its great popularity.

The Indian Sufis drew inspiration from Rumi's moral and ethical ideals and admired his cult of 'Ishq (cosmic emotion), but an integrated approach to his work on which could be based

integration of individual personality and regeneration of human society was still far off. It was left to Iqbal to turn to Rumi for inspiration and guidance for this purpose. Iqbal's philosophy--his concept of khudi, his ideal of human excellence, his spiritual goals--were all determined by Rumi. Iqbal proudly calls himself a 'disciple of Rumi'. Throughout the centuries, no one in India has been so deeply inspired by the Mathnawí as Iqbal was and none has fathomed the depth of Rumi's thought as minutely as Iqbal did. Emotionally speaking, Indian Sufis have always been in the domain of Rumi.

While interest in Mathnawí was unabated throughout the centuries, it was Iqbal who found in Rumi a real guide in the arduous task of resurrecting the individual and the community. Iqbal saw Rumi in his imaginary excursion to the other world addressing him as zinda rûd (living stream). Inspired by Rumi's symbolic imagery, Iqbal adopted shâhîn as his symbol for selfless and persistent effort to achieve the goal and for hitching wagons to the stars. If there is any truth in Arnold's remark that noble and profound application of ideas to life is the most essential part of poetic greatness, Sa'adi and Rumi may undoubtedly be ranked among the great poets of all time.

This shows that every branch of Persian literature was present in India and new experiments and innovations producing original contributions, both in content and form were also made. The great traditions and beliefs in India was a fertile land for the

flourishing of the poets and writers who used the potentials of Persian. Amir Kosrow of Delhi has exhausted all the literary genres of that time in Persian with a stamp of ingenuity and originality with few equals in all Persian literature. Lyrical poetry deserves special attention as a number of great poets composing panegyric ode were present in India like the one of Abu'l-Faraj Rumi the panegyrist of Sultan Ebrahim Masud in Lahore. The father of habsiyat (prison poems) Masud Sad-e Salman also deserve special attention as he was a great innovator. One of the major developments took place in the field of Narrative and didactic literature.

At the end we can say that during his rule the cultural and literary exchange between the Muslim and Hindu worlds achieved new heights. Under the Moghul Empire Persian was elevated to the position of official language of India. But it was deliberately stripped off by the British in 1832 as Persian was banned. And the British army began conducting business in English. The status of the Persian was so high that it was considered just like English today and the elite and upper class was competing to get access and education in Persian. However, lack of patronage and the lack of contacts between India and Persia gradually led to the decline of Indo-Persian literature. But the still flourishing Urdu language and literature was given birth by Persian, which had been the official language of the empire from 1582 to 1835. Still there are a number of admirers of the Indian poets and

scholars are in Iran such as Amir Khosrow Dehlavi, Mirza Ghalib and Muhammad Iqbal.

Conclusion

The concluding point would be that from the literary perspective we witnessed overwhelming popularity of Persian poetry and prose in India in every epoch of the history and in the same way the acceptance of Hindu religious texts as well as its cultural writings has been witnessed in both ancient and medieval Iran. Of course the linguistic and geographical proximity was instrumental in this regard. Taking advantage of this natural possibility of affinity their literature flourished with the cooperation of each other and served the people in all epochs of the history. In this way we witness this factor working in their cultural sphere both in their heydays and the disappointing periods. Of course the political circumstances played a magnificent role in this regard, when one felt pressure from intruders they sought shelter in one another's abode which resulted in the refreshment of their neighborly friendship.

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