

Persian of India: Introduction

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The relationship between Persia and the Indian subcontinent is as ancient as the people who dwelled in these lands and the languages that they spoke. The articles in the present volume consider this relationship in the later times, in the years that followed the establishment of the Islamic culture in Persia and the advent of New Persian. Itself a recent development during the Post-Arab conquest, New Persian was taken to Sind as early as the ninth century and claimed a more dominant presence with the establishment of the Ghaznavid rule in North India. The centuries that followed witnessed an increasingly complex relationship between India and Persia: A relationship whose varied linguistic, cultural, and religious expressions are the subjects of this collection. *The Beginnings and the First Major Phases of Persian Literary Culture in Hindustan*, provides an inclusive context for the following discussions in this volume, as the author argues that understanding the influence of Persian in India is essential to understanding Indian literary and political culture. Muzzafar Alam elaborates this relationship through the evaluation of the famous Indian style or Indian usage in Persian (*sabk-i Hindī* or *isti 'māl-i Hind*). He contends that restricting this genre to “the comparison of the stylistic features” of the Indian style is undermining the “political and social factors that lie outside the strict framework of a literary narrative.” Accordingly, he evaluates this style within the context of its cultural history, arguing that the roots of this style are found in the Lahore of the Ghaznavid kings, and not the Mughal courts that are conveniently associated with the Indian style. Alam calls attention to the accomplishments of the early medieval poets who shaped the genre, including the eminent eleventh-century Ghaznavid poet, Mas‘ūd Sa‘d Salmān (d. A.D. 1121), and Amīr Khusraw Dihlawī (d. A.D. 1325), a royal poet at the court of seven North-Indian kings, and also a disciple of the powerful Chishtī religious leader, Khawaja Mu‘īn al-Dīn (d. A.D.

1236). Considering the style against a historical and cultural background, Alam argues that the Indian style grew through the medieval period and was informed by Sufism, “before being redeployed in Mughal times after a possible detour through Herat.” He asserts the urgency to consider this subject from a greater perspective that pays heed to the developments and nuances that are only comprehensible when viewed through a historical and cultural context throughout South Asia and in the post-Mongol Perso-Islamic world.

A continuation of this discussion, *Amir Khusraw, Fayzi, and the Geography of Indo-Persian Literature*, evaluates the development of a global literary culture that was represented by Indo-Persian poets and authors, who were attempting to define their place in the greater landscape of the Persian literary history. Sunil Sharma argues that the impetus to draw a distinguished space for Indo-Persian literature was the inevitable concomitant of the appearance of the New Persian literature in the subcontinent. This is witnessed in the work of the Ghaznavid court poet, Mas‘ūd Sa‘d Salmān, who drew parallels between Iran and India even in the early decades of the official presence of the Persian sovereignty in the subcontinent. The preoccupation with the status of Persian in India continued in the following years, and found one of its most powerful expressions in the work of Amīr Khusraw Dihlawī who boasted: “Persian in India is standard from the banks of the River Indus to the mouth of the great ocean [...] Our Persian is Dari. Although Hindavi has different registers at every *karoh* but Persian in more than 4000 *farsangs* is one [language].” Such instances are found in various works of poetry and prose literature, including introductions to poetic compilations (*dīvān*), biographical dictionaries (*tadhkira*), mystical and analytical treatises, historical narratives, and didactic and rhetorical texts. Against this background, Amīr Khusraw and Fayḍī (d. A.D. 1595) call for special attention as court poets who represented defining junctures in the life of the Persianate culture in the subcontinent. Amīr Khusraw is a most important early proponent of Persian literary culture in India, and Fayḍī an influential literary figure of the Mughal and the Safavid eras. Sharma considers their contributions in drawing a geography of the Persianate literature in light of marginality and, to borrow his own words, “the appropriation of the margin as the center of literary production, the particular and divergent views of a shared literary past at various historical junctures, and even the alienation inherent in an individual poet’s endeavor to be creative and to create a place for himself in the literary canon.”

Orientalism’s Genesis Amnesia is a thought provoking scrutiny of the Orientalist cultural appropriation of knowledge in colonial India. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi

considers this course in terms of the relationship between an assumed Orientalist “oblivion” and Oriental “silence.” That is, the Orientalists’ obliteration of their dependence on the indigenous scholars for producing texts that they claimed as their own original research. This intentional disregard is an expression of the aggression and the sense of entitlement that drive the academic activities of the Orientalists and justify their claims of novelty in investigating and documenting the cultural heritage of the colonized subjects. Tavakoli-Targhi examines these issues within the framework of the Persian and Persianate scholarship and with particular attention to Anquetil-Duperron (A.D. 1731–1805) and Sir William Jones (A.D. 1746–1794) whose intellectual accomplishments are the foundation for establishing an Oriental conception of the West “as the site of progress and innovation,” and the Orient “as the locus of backwardness and tradition.” Anquetil-Duperron, reputed as the “discoverer of Zend-Avesta,” Tavakoli-Targhi argues, lived in India for a brief six years, during which time he studied with Parsi scholars who made their Zoroastrian learnings in Old and Middle Persian available to him. The lexicographical work of Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Alī Khān Arzū (A.D. 1687–1756), and his learned predecessors, on the relationship between Persian and Sanskrit, was the source material for Sir William Jones whom the Orientalists celebrate as the foremost authority on the subject. Tavakoli-Targhi provides detailed information on the large circle of native scholars who assisted Jones in his writing, prior to his arrival in India, and in the years when he resided there. Through this kind of intimate detail, the author brings light to the obscured history of intellectual Orientalism in the Subcontinent, and offers greater perspective on the applications of this history in the subsequent development of Orientalism at large.

Anglo-Persian Taxonomies of Indian Religions, draws attention to the misconceptions that construed the prevalent understanding of the role of the colonial era and the British colonialism in conceptualizing religion and culture in the Indian subcontinent. Carl Ernst argues that the colonial regime promoted the European concepts of religion and culture in British India through a complex process that utilized an elaborate network of information collection and analyses with reliance on the collaboration of the indigenous scholars who worked for them. The administration used census, legal codes, and archives of Persian language source material that, for the most part, their Hindu administrators, functionaries, and scholars of the Mughal Empire analyzed and rendered it comprehensible. The colonial authorities also commissioned their elite native employees to create new Persian scholarship on the religions and cultures of India. In this manner, the formulation of Indian religious pluralism was derived from various categories of reference materials and taxonomies, which were

interpreted and presented to the colonial authorities. Ernst argues that the Anglo-Persian texts were particularly important because they functioned as “a bridge between Mughal notions of religious multiplicity and the modern European concept of religion, a concept that emerged from the religious wars of Christianity and was deployed in the colonial era through a logic of imperial domination.” In this context, Ernst highlights the contested nature of the assumptions on the subject, and the existing misconceptions on the quality of religious multiplicity during the reign of the celebrated Mughal emperor, Akbar (r. A.D. 1556–1605), famous for propagating “universal peace” (*ṣulḥ-i kul*) as a program of religious tolerance. Akbar’s universal peace—not unlike the imperial agenda of colonial Britain—grew out of the Mughal emperor’s design to advance his political hegemony. It is important to note that the source material from the Mughal era was, for the most part, the material that the British colonial authorities utilized in implementing their conception of religions and cultures in India. Another point to consider is that the Persian texts on Indian religions, which Hindu authors were commissioned by the British to compose, display diverse translation strategies, ranging from the preservation of the Brahmin privilege, to the application of Sufi metaphysics. The composite quality of “religion and culture in India” is also experienced through the work of the Indologist, H. H. Wilson, who demonstrates another stage of cultural translation in understanding the preceding material through applying the categories of Protestant Christianity to Indian religions. The Anglo-Persian texts from this epoch call for more detailed analysis as they reflect the complex intercultural encounters that took place during the British colonization of India and informed the colonial conception of Indian religions and cultures.

The intrinsic complexities of the cultural, intellectual, religious, and scientific heritage of India find a powerful expression in the medical references of this land. *The Encounter of Medical Traditions in Nūr al-Dīn Shīrāzī’s ‘Ilājāt-i Dārā Shikūhī* considers such an instance thorough an evaluation of this encyclopedic Persian medical manual of the Mughal era (A.D. 1526–1857). Fabrizio Speziale introduces *‘Ilājāt-i Dārā Shikūhī* as the most comprehensive medical reference of its kind, and a great confluence of Islamic, Ayurvedic and ancient Indian medical knowledge. *‘Ilājāt-i Dārā Shikūhī*, also known as *Dhakhīraya Dārā Shikūhī*, is composed in Persian by Nūr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, among the leading medical authors of the Mughal court, and is dedicated to the Mughal prince *Dārā Shikūh* (d. A.D. 1659). This text is an important example of the level of Persian language scholarship that is accomplished under the Mughal patronage. Moreover, *‘Ilājāt-i Dārā Shikūhī* is significant for the author’s geneology, a family of eminent scholars of Persian descent in the service of the Mughal court. Nūr

al-Dīn Shīrāzī was born in India and was either the son or a close relative of Ḥakīm ‘Ayn al-Mulk Shīrāzī (d. A. D. 1595), a descendent of the famous Iranian philosopher Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī (d. A.D. 1502). Moreover, Nūr al-Dīn’s maternal uncles were the historian Abū al-Faḍl ‘Allāma (d. A.D. 1602) and the court poet laureate Fayḍī (d. A.D. 1595), who worked for the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. A.D. 1556–1601). The majority of the physicians in the service of the Mughals were Persian. Ḥakīm ‘Ayn al-Mulk Shīrāzī was employed at the court of Akbar and his gifted son, or kin, Nūr al-Dīn, who also excelled in his office as the court physician, received his title of ‘Ayn al-Mulk from the Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān (r. A.D. 1628–57). Speziale highlights the importance of Nūr al-Dīn’s medical scholarship within the context of the intellectual milieu that was fostered by Darā Shikūh, through an analysis of Nūr al-Dīn’s discussion of the Muslim and Hindu medical traditions of India in a comparable and complementary manner.

The intellectual accomplishments of Indians define the renown of this vast and vastly splendid land. In the medieval period, the Islamic heritage of India is closely associated with Persian and the Persianate world. *Early Instances of Persian Historical and Mystical Scholarship of the Bahmanid Era* considers the advent of Persian high culture in the Deccan through an analysis of the first extant Persian historical and mystical works that evaluate the Bahmanid era (A.D. 1347–1537). These early texts were either produced during the reign of the dynasty or soon after the collapse of this first enduring Muslim dynasty in the Deccan region. Firoozeh Papan-Matin argues that the Bahmanids vested themselves in Persian as an extension of their pedigree and royal legacy. They sponsored scholarship in Persian, and periodically invited Persian teachers, poets, historians, scientists, administrators, and spiritual leaders to their court and welcomed Persian immigrants to their territory. In her analysis, she turns to significant instances in this category of Persian intellectual and courtly productions. The first is the earliest extant histories of the Bahmanid kingdom, and the second, mystical commentary of one of the eminent sufi scholars of the Deccan. The earliest surviving historical records on the Bahmanid dynasty were composed by three contemporary authors of Persian descent who were in the service of the post-Bahmanid rulers of the Deccan. These works were, *Burhān Maāthir* (Affirmation of Lineal Merits), *Tadhkirat al-Mulūk* (Biographies of Kings), and *Tārīkh Firishṭa* (History of Firishṭa). Narrating the stories of the Muslim rulers of India and the dynamic scholarly activities that were current during the Bahmanid reign and after their collapse, these early histories aspired to the epical narrative of Ferdawsi and its transmission into the historiographical style of the Timurid historians. The most eminent mystic of Muslim Deccan, Khawāja Banda Nawāz

Sayyed Muhammad al-Ḥusaynī Gīsudarāz (A.D. 1321–1422), the other focus of this study, composed commentaries and treatises in response to the mystical teachings of his colleagues in Persia. Papan-Matin argues that in the Muslim Deccan, Persian was treated as a dominant medium for addressing established mystical, literary, and historical genres.

The Pro-Āfāqī Policy of Aḥmad Shāh Walī Bahmanī: Its Impact and Consequences considers the political policy of the Bahmanid king, Aḥmad Shāh Walī (A.D. r. 1422–36), toward his immigrant Persianate subjects, known as the *āfāqīs*. Mohammad Suleman Siddiqi argues that after transferring the capital from the Bahmanid traditional seat of power in Gulbargar, to Bidar, the new king initiated a more welcoming approach toward these immigrants. Siddiqi explains, this political move as an extension of the new king’s attempt to offset the established power-center, geographically and politically. Aḥmad Shāh Walī increasingly favored the *āfāqīs* by bestowing elite administrative status on the choicest among them, as an alternative to the indigenous Muslim nobility of the Deccan. He even established a new military force that was composed exclusively of these immigrants. Moreover, he patronized a new sect of sufis from Kirmān and Māhān, in Persia, and invited Shāh Nūr al-Dīn Ni‘matullah Walī Kirmānī to his court in Bidar. In spite of being a Sunni, Nūr al-Dīn Kirmānī was a direct descendant of the fifth Shī‘ī imam—a lineage that made him compatible with the existing Shī‘ī *āfāqī* population of the region, and a possible affront to the traditional religious makeup of the Deccan. These pro-*āfāqī* policies antagonized the established Deccani religious leaders and the nobility and produced a volatile social environment that was increasingly intensified by the continued settlement of the immigrants in the Bahmanid region during the consequent years and after the establishment of the Shī‘ī Ṣafavīd rule in Iran. Siddiqi argues that the pro-*āfāqī* policy of Aḥmad Shāh Walī, and its continuation by his successors, was a major factor in the eventual downfall of the Bahmanid kingdom in A.D. 1538.

The presence of Persian heritage and Shī‘ī Islam is even more powerfully experienced after the establishment of the kingdoms that follow the collapse of the Bahmanid dynasty. *Legitimizing Power, Understanding the Religio-Cultural System of the Golconda Quṭub Shāhīs*, as the title suggests, concerns the diplomatic policy of this Shī‘ī dynasty toward its Sunni and non-Muslim subjects. Salma Farooqi explains that the Quṭub Shāhīs were successful in establishing their political hegemony through a policy of integrating their diverse populace. This was accomplished by patronizing the religious institutions that represented their respective communities. The Quṭub Shāhīs preserved the mosques, sufi hospices and shrines, ‘*āshurkhanas*,

mathas, and *agraharas*. The Quṭub Shāhīs and other powerful patrons, including the Muslim and non-Muslim members of the local nobility, supported these institutions and provided them with the financial means to operate, in turn, assuring their loyalty to the ruling dynasty. An indication of this loyalty was the broad participation of other religious communities in the annual Shī‘ī rituals.

Presence in Absence: Relics and Their Role in Hyderabadī Shī‘ism evaluates the significance of Shī‘ī material religious culture in Hyderabad, the seat of the Shī‘ī Quṭub Shāhī kings (A.D. 1518–1687). Karen Ruffle considers the subject through the re-presentational forms of commemorating the house of the prophet and the martyrs of Karbalā via “relics, replicas of tombs (*zarīḥ* and *ta‘ziyeh*), battle standards (‘*alam*), funerary biers (*nakhl*), sacred foot and handprints posters, and votive-talismanic objects.” She observes that these objects hold an important status in the Shī‘ī spiritual life and devotional rituals of the Deccan. During the annual Karbalā processions—honoring the martyrs on the decisive battle waged in A.D. 680 in order to claim the rule of ‘Alī and his descendants—the devotees experience the presence of the martyrs, and the twelve Shī‘ī imāms, through objects and mementoes reminiscent of those times. Ruffle argues that during the reign of the Quṭub Shāhī dynasty, the use of relics among the Shī‘ī settlers of the Deccan, the majority of whom were descendants of migrants from Persia, is transformed into a regional practice or “vernacularized.” The Quṭub Shāhī of Golconda and their contemporary Shī‘ī kings of Bijapur, the ‘Ādil Shāhī (A.D. 1490–1686), promoted this development into an Indic and Deccani re-presentation of Shī‘ism in the region.

Courting ‘Alī: Urdu Poetry, Shi‘ī Piety and Courtesan Power in Hyderabad highlights the prestige and significance of a Shī‘ī courtesan, Māh Laqā Bāī (A.D. 1768–1824), at the court of her Sunni patron rulers of Hyderabad. Scott Kugle introduces Māh Laqā Bāī, an accomplished poet and dancer, social philanthropist, and a devotee of Imām ‘Alī. Her compilation of Urdu lyrical poetry is filled with poems that are centered on her devotion to the Shī‘ī imām ‘Alī. Using Chandā as her nom de plume, she masterfully intertwines love for dance with her love and devotion for ‘Alī. In one instance she clearly captures her sentiments as follows: “Why shouldn’t Chanda be proud, O ‘Alī, in both worlds? / At home with you she eternally astounds with dance.” Motivated by her devotion to ‘Alī, Māh Laqā Bāī was able to use her personal resources and her influence among the Nizām rulers in founding the most monumental Shī‘ī shrine in Hyderabad. She was working with Sunni rulers whose dynasty had replaced the Shī‘ī Quṭub Shāhī kings a century early in A.D. 1686. Kugle evaluates the accomplishments of this powerful courtesan in the courts of the second and third

Nizāms of Hyderabad with special attention to her lyrical poetry. He argues that Māh Laqā Bāī had an important role in promoting Shī‘ī devotion in the Sunni dominant Hyderabad of her time, through her poetry, patronage, and resources. This analysis provides important insight into the gender and religious politics of the Hyderabad metropolis at the turn of the nineteenth century.

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