

The Evolution of Persian Language and Literature in the Indian Subcontinent: A Historical Analysis

Dr. Shahin Ahmed Barbhuiya, Assistant Professor,
Department of Persian, G.C. College, Silchar

Abstract

The Persian language and literature have had a profound impact on the Indian subcontinent, shaping the region's cultural, literary, and intellectual heritage. This article traces the historical development of Persian language and literature in the Indian subcontinent, from its introduction during the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526 CE) to its decline during the British colonial period (19th-20th centuries). The study examines the cultural significance of Persian literature in the region, its impact on local languages and literatures, and its enduring legacy. The analysis highlights the roles of Sufi mystics and poets, Mughal emperors, and renowned poets such as Mirza Ghalib in shaping Persian literature in the Indian subcontinent. By examining the historical context, literary trends, and cultural exchange, this study aims to demonstrate the profound impact of Persian on the region's cultural landscape.

Keywords: Persian language, Indian subcontinent, literary history, cultural heritage, Mughal Empire, Sufism, Urdu literature, Hindi literature, Bengali literature.

Introduction

The Indian subcontinent, a region of immense cultural and linguistic diversity, has been shaped by numerous languages and literatures throughout its history. Among these, Persian has played a unique and significant role, leaving an indelible mark on the region's cultural, literary, and intellectual heritage. From the 11th century onwards, Persian emerged as a dominant language in the region, particularly during the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. As a language of administration, literature, and culture, Persian facilitated the exchange of ideas, art, and architecture between the Indian subcontinent and the broader Persianate world. Since the Persian language is considered as one of the sweetest languages, and thus, there is a need to enliven the language with imparting of the academics in connection to the language. The Department has put all the endeavors to put the language in the fore and make the same gain the due recognition. By the 15th century, Persian was the official language in a region that stretched from Siberia to southern India, including the Indian subcontinent. Mughal Emperor Akbar made Persian the official language of his empire due to its non-sectarian nature, and it became a shared idiom for the empire's many languages. Knowledge of Persian was also required for many professional positions, and both Hindus and Muslims sought Mughal patronage by mastering the language. Persian was used as a second language in South Asia and was the language of culture and education in many Muslim courts. The Persianization of the subcontinent incorporated it into the Persianate world of Ajam, which is now known as Greater Iran. This gave many inhabitants a secular Persian identity. Persian provided a shared idiom for the polyglot empire, and the influence of Persian and other languages led to the development of Hindustani, which is the ancestor of today's Hindi and Urdu. Persian literature also evolved in the Indian subcontinent, with the Ghaznavid poets in the 11th century glorifying the sultan's army's raids into the subcontinent. Other Turkish rulers continued this tradition of patronage in the 11th and 12th centuries.

Historical Background

Persian language and literature have had a profound impact on the Indian subcontinent, shaping the region's cultural, literary, and intellectual heritage. From the Delhi Sultanate to the Mughal Empire, Persian was the language of the elite, influencing local languages and

literatures. The Indian subcontinent has been a melting pot of languages and cultures for centuries. The arrival of Persian in the region dates back to the 11th century, when Mahmud of Ghazni (971-1030 CE) conquered parts of northern India. However, it was during the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526 CE) that Persian emerged as a dominant language in the region. Indo-Persian literature emerged as a result of cultural exchange between India and Persia, facilitated by the Ghaznavid and Ghurid invasions. Persian became the language of the ruling elite, and its literature was patronized by monarchs, leading to a unique blend of Indian and Persian cultures.

The early Indo-Persian poets, such as Masud Saad Salman and Muhammad Aufi, laid the foundation for Indo-Persian literature. Their works reflect the influence of Persian literature on Indian poetry. Sufi poets like Amir Khusrau, Hasan Sijzi, and Baba Farid played a significant role in shaping Indo-Persian literature. Their mystical and spiritual themes resonated with Indian audiences, contributing to the growth of Indo-Persian literature. Court poets patronized by Mughal emperors, such as Akbar and Jahangir, further contributed to the growth of Indo-Persian literature. Poets like Faizi and Urfi wrote extensively on themes of love, nature, and spirituality. Major Indo-Persian poets like Amir Khusrau, Hasan Sijzi, and Mirza Ghalib made significant contributions to Persian literature. Amir Khusrau's poetry is still celebrated for its beauty and spiritual depth. Hasan Sijzi's works are known for their philosophical and mystical themes, while Mirza Ghalib's poetry is renowned for its romantic and introspective nature. According to historian Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Saqib, "Persian was the language of the ruling elite, and its literature was patronized by the monarchs, which led to the development of a distinct Indo-Persian culture" (Saqib, 2017, p. 12). The impact of Persian on Indian languages and literature was significant. Many Indian languages, such as Urdu, Hindi, and Sindhi, borrowed heavily from Persian vocabulary and literary styles. The Ghazal, a popular form of poetry in Urdu and Hindi, originated in Persian literature. The decline of Mughal power and the rise of British colonial rule led to a decline in Persian's popularity. However, efforts by scholars like Muhammad Iqbal and Allama Shibli Nomani helped preserve Persian literature. Muhammad Iqbal wrote extensively in Persian and promoted its study and appreciation. Allama Shibli Nomani worked tirelessly to preserve Persian manuscripts and promote the study of Persian literature.

Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526 CE)

The Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526 CE) marked the beginning of Persian language and literature's significant presence in the Indian subcontinent. Turkish and Afghan rulers introduced Persian as the language of court, administration, and literature, which became the dominant language of the region. This period saw the emergence of Persian as a lingua franca, influencing Indian languages, particularly Urdu. The early beginnings of Persian in the Indian subcontinent date back to the 13th century, during the Delhi Sultanate. As the language of the ruling class, Persian spread rapidly, becoming the lingua franca of the region. Sufi mystics and poets, such as Amir Khusrau, played a crucial role in popularizing Persian literature, blending Islamic and Indian themes.

Key events and figures of the Delhi Sultanate period include:

- **Qutb-ud-din Aibak (1206-1210 CE):** The first Sultan of Delhi, who established Persian as the language of administration.
- **Iltutmish (1211-1236 CE):** The third Sultan, who patronized Persian literature and poetry.
- **Amir Khusrau (1253-1325 CE):** A renowned poet, writer, and musician, known as the "father of Urdu literature." He wrote in Persian and introduced Indian themes and vocabulary.
- **Hasan Nizami (d. 1320 CE):** A historian and poet, who wrote in Persian and literature

Literary developments during this period include:

- ***Influence of Persian on Indian languages:*** Persian's introduction led to the development of Urdu, a blend of Persian, Arabic, and local Indian languages.

- ***Emergence of Persian poetry:*** Poets like Amir Khusrau and Hasan Nizami popularized Persian poetry forms, such as the Ghazal and Masnavi.

- ***Historical writings:*** Persian became the language of historical chronicles, with works like Hasan Nizami's "Taj-ul-Masir" and Zia-ud-din Barani's "Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi."

The Delhi Sultanate period laid the foundation for Persian language and literature's growth in the Indian subcontinent, paving the way for its flourishing during the Mughal Empire. The patronage of Persian literature and poetry by the Sultans and nobles led to a flourishing of literary activity, with poets and writers making significant contributions to the language and literature. The impact of Persian on Indian languages and literature was significant, with many Indian languages borrowing heavily from Persian vocabulary and literary styles. The Ghazal, a popular form of poetry in Urdu and Hindi, originated in Persian literature. The Delhi Sultanate period also saw the emergence of Sufi literature, with poets like Amir Khusrau and Hasan Sijzi writing extensively on mystical and spiritual themes. The Delhi Sultanate period marked the beginning of Persian language and literature's significant presence in the Indian subcontinent. The patronage of Persian literature and poetry by the Sultans and nobles led to a flourishing of literary activity, with poets and writers making significant contributions to the language and literature. The impact of Persian on Indian languages and literature was significant, shaping the literary traditions of India.

Mughal Era (16th-19th Ce):

The Mughal Era (16th-19th centuries) marked the zenith of Persian language and literature in the Indian subcontinent. Under the patronage of Mughal emperors like Babur, Akbar, and Shah Jahan, Persian literature flourished, attracting scholars and poets from across the Islamic world. This period saw the emergence of renowned poets like Mirza Ghalib and Abu Talib Kalim, who enriched Persian literature with Indian flavors. The Mughal Empire's patronage and cultural achievements led to the widespread dissemination of Persian language and literature, making it an integral part of Indian cultural heritage. The 18th and 19th centuries saw the decline of Mughal power and the rise of British colonial rule, which significantly impacted Persian language and literature in the region. Despite the decline of Mughal power, Persian continued to be an important language in literary and cultural circles. However, the loss of royal patronage, shift to English language, decline of Persian language schools, and reduced cultural exchange impacted literary developments. Significant figures like Ghalib and Muhammad Iqbal adapted to changing literary trends and patronage, reviving interest in Persian literature and its classical forms. The influence of English literature grew, with translations and adaptations of English works, while regional dialects and themes gained prominence in Persian literature. The Mughal Era's legacy in Persian language and literature is profound, with its impact still visible in Indian cultural heritage. The period saw the flourishing of Persian literature, with poets and writers making significant contributions to the language and literature. The patronage of Mughal emperors and the cultural achievements of the period solidified Persian's position in the region, making it an integral part of Indian cultural heritage.

Mughal Empire (1526-1858 CE): Patronage and Flourishing of Persian Language and Literature: Under the Mughal Empire (1526-1858 CE), Persian reached its zenith. Emperors like Babur, Akbar, and Shah Jahan patronized Persian literature, attracting scholars and poets from across the Islamic world. This period saw the emergence of renowned poets like Mirza Ghalib and Abu Talib Kalim, who enriched Persian literature with Indian flavors. The

Mughal Empire (1526-1858 CE) further solidified Persian's position in the region. Mughal emperors like Babur (1483-1530 CE), Akbar (1542-1605 CE), and Shah Jahan (1592-1666 CE) were patrons of Persian literature and culture. The Mughal court attracted scholars, poets, and artists from across the Persianate world, leading to a cultural renaissance in the region. The Mughal Empire marked the golden age of Persian language and literature in the Indian subcontinent. Mughal emperors, particularly Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan, patronized Persian literature, leading to its flourishing.

Patronage by Mughal Emperors:

- **Babur (1526-1530 CE):** A poet and writer himself, Babur introduced Persian literature to the Mughal court.
- **Humayun (1530-1556 CE):** Humayun's court attracted Persian scholars and poets, fostering a cultural renaissance.
- **Akbar (1556-1605 CE):** During Akbar's reign, Persian was established as the official language, with a focus on literature, art, and architecture.
- **Jahangir (1605-1627 CE):** Jahangir's court continued to patronize Persian literature, with a focus on poetry and historiography.
- **Shah Jahan (1627-1658 CE):** During Shah Jahan's reign, iconic monuments were constructed, featuring Persian inscriptions and literary works.

Flourishing of Persian Literature:

- **Poetry:** Ghazal, Masnavi, and Qasida forms reached new heights, with poets like:
 - Tansen (1500-1589 CE)
 - Abul Fazl (1551-1602 CE)
 - Ghalib (1797-1869 CE)
- **Prose:** Historiography, biography, and travelogues emerged, with notable works like:
 - Abul Fazl's "Akbarname" and "Ain-i-Akbari"
 - Jahangir's "Tuzk-e-Jahangiri"
- **Sufi Literature:** Persian Sufi poetry and prose flourished, influencing Indian Sufism.
- **Translation and Adaptation:** Indian epics, like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, were translated into Persian, while Persian works were adapted into Indian languages.

The Mughal Empire's patronage and cultural achievements led to the widespread dissemination of Persian language and literature, making it an integral part of Indian cultural heritage. The 18th and 19th centuries saw the decline of Mughal power and the rise of British colonial rule. However, Persian continued to be an important language in the region, particularly in literary and cultural circles. Persian's impact on regional languages was profound. Urdu, Hindi, and Bengali borrowed heavily from Persian, adopting its literary forms, vocabulary, and idioms. The ghazal, a Persian poetic form, became an integral part of Indian literature.

The 19th and 20th centuries witnessed a significant decline in the prominence of Persian language and literature in the Indian subcontinent. This decline was largely attributed to the loss of royal patronage and the shift to English language during the British colonial rule. Additionally, the decline of Persian language schools and reduced cultural exchange with Persia further contributed to its decline. However, despite this decline, the legacy of Persian language and literature continued to endure. Scholars like Muhammad Iqbal and Allama Shibli Nomani played a crucial role in preserving Persian literature through their writings and promotions. Iqbal's extensive works in Persian and Nomani's efforts to preserve Persian manuscripts helped revive interest in classical forms. The influence of Persian language and literature on Indian languages and literature remained significant, with many Indian languages continuing to borrow from Persian vocabulary and literary forms. The legacy of

Persian language and literature in the Indian subcontinent is still visible today, a testament to the enduring impact of this rich cultural heritage.

Decline of Patronage and Support

- Loss of royal patronage: With the decline of Mughal power, Persian literature lost its royal patronage, leading to a decrease in literary productions.
- Shift to English language_: British colonial rule promoted English as the language of administration, education, and literature, relegating Persian to secondary importance.
- Decline of Persian language schools: Madrasas and maktabas, which taught Persian language and literature, declined in number and influence.
- Reduced cultural exchange: The decline of Mughal power and British colonial rule reduced cultural exchange between India and Persia, impacting literary developments.

Impact on Literary Trends

- Decline of classical forms: Classical Persian forms, such as the Ghazal and Masnavi, declined in popularity.
- Emergence of new forms: New literary forms, such as the Nazm, emerged, reflecting changing cultural and social contexts.
- Influence of English literature: English literature's influence on Persian literature grew, with translations and adaptations of English works.
- Regionalization of Persian literature: Persian literature became more regional, with local dialects and themes gaining prominence.

Notable Figures:

- Ghalib (1797-1869 CE): A prominent poet, who adapted to changing literary trends and patronage.

Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938 CE): A poet and philosopher, who revived interest in Persian literature and its classical forms.

The evolution of Persian language and literature in the Indian subcontinent is a testament to the region's rich cultural heritage. In recent times, efforts have been made to revive interest in Persian language and literature. Universities and cultural institutions have established Persian language courses and cultural programs. Scholars have translated Persian works into Indian languages, making them accessible to a wider audience. Indo-Persian literature emerged as a result of cultural exchange between India and Persia, leading to a unique blend of Indian and Persian cultures. The impact of Persian on Indian languages and literature was significant, shaping the literary traditions of India. Efforts to preserve and promote Persian language and literature continue, ensuring its rich legacy endures for future generations.

Conclusion

The evolution of Persian language and literature in India is a rich and complex phenomenon spanning eight centuries, from the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526 CE) to the British colonial era (1858-1947 CE). During this period, Persian had a profound impact on Indian languages, literature, and culture, shaping literary forms like the Ghazal and Masnavi, and influencing languages like Urdu, Hindi, and Bengali. Despite declining patronage, Persian literature continued to evolve, with notable figures contributing to its survival. This historical analysis highlights the complex dynamics of cultural exchange, patronage, and power, and suggests future research directions to explore Persian's impact on Indian languages, identity, and contemporary relevance.

The Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire (1526-1858 CE) patronized Persian literature, attracting scholars and poets from across the Persianate world. This led to a flourishing of Persian literature, with notable figures like Amir Khusrau, Hasan Sijzi, and Mirza Ghalib making significant contributions. Persian literature also influenced Indian languages, with the

Ghazal and Masnavi forms being adopted into Indian literary traditions. Despite declining patronage during the British colonial era, Persian literature continued to evolve, with notable figures like Muhammad Iqbal and Allama Shibli Nomani contributing to its survival. This historical analysis highlights the complex dynamics of cultural exchange, patronage, and power that shaped the evolution of Persian language and literature in India.

Future research directions could explore the impact of Persian on Indian languages, identity, and contemporary relevance. For instance, how did Persian influence the development of Urdu and other Indian languages? How did Persian literature shape Indian identity and cultural heritage? What is the contemporary relevance of Persian language and literature in India, and how can it be preserved and promoted? This study demonstrates the significance of Persian language and literature in Indian history and culture, highlighting its enduring impact on literary forms, languages, and identity. By exploring the complex dynamics of cultural exchange and patronage, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of India's rich cultural heritage.

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