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The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics

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The Mughal literary culture has been noted for its notable achievements in poetry and a wide range of prose writings in Persian. In terms of profusion and variety of themes this literary output was also perhaps incomparable. The court's patronage has rightly been suggested as an important reason for this. This patronage, however, was not consistent throughout; much of the detail of its detour thus requires a closer scrutiny. The phenomenal rise of the language defies explanation in the first instance. The Mughals were Chaghtā'i Turks and we know that, unlike them, the other Turkic rulers outside of Iran, such as the Ottomans in Turkey and the Uzbeks in Central Asia, were not so enthusiastic about Persian. Indeed, in India also, Persian did not appear to hold such dominance at the courts of the early Mughals. In his memoir, Bābur (d. 1530), the founder of the Mughal empire in India, recounted the story of his exploits in Turkish. The Prince was a noted poet and writer of Turkish of his time, second only to 'Alī Shēr Nawā'i (d. 1526).¹ Turkish was the first language of his son and successor, Humāyūn (d. 1556), as well. Turkish poetry enjoyed an appreciable audience at his court even after his return from Persia, when he came reinforced with

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¹ Fuād Koprulu, 'Bābur—Literary Works' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, vol. 1, pt 2, pp. 848–85; Mohibbul Hasan, *Bābur: Founder of the Mughal Empire in India* (Delhi, 1985), pp. 192–3; for a recent study of Bābur's poetry, see 'The Poetry and Autobiography of the *Bābur-nāma*', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 55, no. 3 (August 1996), pp. 635–64.

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Persian support to reconquer Hindustan.² Further, Bairam Khān—a most notable early Mughal noble virtually in full command during the early years of Akbar's time (1556–1605)—also made his mark as a poet of Turkish.³

One may conjecture that in matters of language the Mughals had no other choice, and that they simply inherited a legacy and continued with it. Such a conjecture sounds plausible, in a measure. Long before the coming of the Mughals, Persian had established itself in India as the language of the Muslim elite. Northern India had seen many poets and prose writers, including Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmān, Zīa-ud-Dīn Nakhshabī, Amīr Khusrau and Hasan Sijzī, in the Ghaznavid Punjab and in the territory of the Sultāns of Delhi.⁴ The famous line of Hāfiz of Shiraz (d. 1389)⁵

Shakkar shikan shawand hama tūtiyān-i Hind

Zīn qand-i Pārsī ki ba Bangāla mī rawad

(All the Indian parrots will turn to crunching sugar with this Persian candy which goes to Bengal)

was a testimony of the receptive audience that the Persian poetry had in India.

But pre-Mughal northern India also witnessed the rise of Hindavī which gradually incorporated much of Persian culture, in particular through sufic hospices, and then expressed it forcefully in its poetry. There was hardly any notable Persian writer in the late fifteenth–early sixteenth centuries, while in Hindavī Malik Muhammad Jāyāsī's *Padmāvat*, recording an Indian fable, represented the best expression of Islamic ideas in the period.⁶ Persian did not appear to be very strong under the Afghāns from whom the Mughals took over the keys of power. In spite of their close association with Persian,

² Sidi Ali Reis, *The Travels and Adventures of Turkish Sidi Ali Reis*, translated from the Turkish with notes by A. Vambéry, reprint (Lahore, 1975), pp. 47, 49–51 and 52–3.

³ Cf. Bairam Khān, *Dīwān*, edited by S. Husamuddin Rashidi and Muhammad Sabir with Introduction by Mahmudul Hasan Siddiqi, Karachi, Institute of Central and West Asian Studies, 1971.

⁴ M. A. Ghani, *Pre-Mughal Persian in Hindustan* (Allahabad, 1941), pp. 155–233 and 381–485, for Persian literature under the Ghaznavids and the Khaljīs and Tughlaqs.

⁵ Hāfiz Shīrāzī, *Dīwān*, edited with notes by Qazi Sajjad Husain (Delhi, 1972), p. 172.

⁶ For the history of Persian in the period, S. B. F. Husaini, *A Critical Study of Indo-Persian Literature during Sayyid and Lodi Period, 1414–1526* (Delhi, 1988). Annetmarie Schimmel, *Islamic Literatures in India*, part of vol. VII of Jan Gonda (ed.), *A History of Indian Literature* (Wiesbaden, 1973), p. 21.

most of the Afghān chiefs could not speak Persian.⁷ Hindavī was recognized as a semi-official language by the Sūr Sultāns (1540–55) and their chancellery rescripts bore transcriptions in the Devanāgarī script of the Persian contents. The practice is said to have been introduced by the Lodīs (1451–1526).⁸

For the growth of Persian under the Mughals, the explanation may thus be sought more in the convergence of factors within the Mughal regime than in the Indo-Persian heritage of the earlier Muslim regimes. I have tried to identify some of the factors which created the conditions for the extraordinary rise of Persian in Mughal India and to examine the trajectory of its development. Since Persian occupied the indubitable position of the language of the empire, I have asked if it had any intrinsic strength to explain its wide use and if because of the Mughals' nearly total association with it their empire confronted any difficulties. Did Persian have any bearing on the formation of Mughal political identity? In what way did Persian influence the vicissitudes of Hindavī in northern India? Does religion come in anywhere in this politics?

Early Mughal Contacts with Iran

A large number of Iranians accompanied Humāyūn on his return from Iran where he had taken refuge following his defeat by the Afghāns. They assisted him in reconquering Hindustan. Later, Akbar needed their help further and encouraged them to join the imperial service to overcome the difficulties he faced from the ambitious Chaghtā'ī nobles. Earlier the Iranians had also helped Bābur in his fight against the Uzbeks following the destruction of the Tīmurid power in Herat.⁹ All this contributed to the expansion of the frontiers of Persian in Mughal India. Particularly to be noted is Akbar's unusual interest in promoting social, cultural and intellectual con-

⁷ Zahīr-ud-Dīn Muhammad Bābur, *Bābur-nāma*, translated by A. S. Beveridge, reprint (Delhi, 1970), pp. 459–60.

⁸ Momin Mohiuddin, *The Chancellery and Persian Epistolography under the Mughals, from Bābur to Shāhjahān, 1526–1658* (Calcutta, 1971), p. 28. Mohiuddin cites from Maulavi Muhammad Shafi's article in *Oriental College Magazine* (Lahore), May 1933, for a reference to a UP State Archives Document, No. 318, an edict of Sher Shāh dated 947 AH.

⁹ J. F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire: The New Cambridge History of India*, 1.5 (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 11 and 19; for Shāh Ismā'īl Safavī's help to Bābur, see Mohibbul Hasan, *Bābur*, pp. 40–3.

tacts with Iran. In 994 AH/1585–86 Hakīm Humām, a brother of the famous Hakīm Abul Fath Gīlānī, was sent to Tūrān and Iran with a mission to persuade the people there for increased friendly contacts (*dostī-o-āshhāʿī*) with his empire.¹⁰ The purpose of this mission was to identify the literati and persuade them to come and settle in India. Later the Emperor commissioned the famous poet Faizī (about 999/1591) to submit a report on the literati in Iran. After making enquiries from travellers and traders arriving from Iran, Faizī prepared a report which he submitted to Akbar in which he says:

Chalapī Beg is a savant of excellent disposition and wide culture, and he deserves a place in His Majesty's *majlis*. Educated at Qazwin, he has during the last twelve years made a great name for himself and is universally well-spoken of. He now lives at Shiraz.

Evidently, it was in consequence of this report that Akbar sent an invitation to Chalapī Beg and issued orders to an Iranian trader to make arrangements for the scholar's journey to India.¹¹ On his arrival, Chalapī Beg was made the principal teacher at a royal *madrasa* at Agra.¹²

Even prior to his invitation to Chalapī Beg, Akbar sent an invitation to Mīr Sadr ud-Dīn Muhammad Naqīb who had communicated his wish to join Akbar's service. The *farmān* inviting him was issued in 1591 and reads:¹³

This court's patronage of men of learning . . . is well-known. Now Ghiyāth ud-dīn Naqīb Khān of this court has spoken highly of Mīr Sadr ud-dīn. Therefore it is hereby commanded that 100 Iranian *tūmāns* (*tūmān-i rāʿijī-i ʿIrāqī*) be paid at once to the distinguished trader Khwāja Chalapī Qazwīnī who is forthwith given congé so as to carry the money to the Mīr who is to use it as travelling expenses.

If the amount thus remitted was insufficient, Mīr Sadr ud-Dīn was authorized to take more money from Khwāja Qazwīnī or from the traders who had business in India.

Akbar received an encouraging response. A very large number of Persian writers and poets came to India, many of them in search of

¹⁰ Abul Fath Gīlānī, *Ruqʿāt-i Abul Fath Gīlānī*, ed. Muhammad Bashir Husain (Lahore, 1968), pp. 116–20.

¹¹ Riyazul Islam, *A Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations, 1500–1750* (Karachi, 1979), I, pp. 117–20.

¹² Abul Fazl, *Akbar-nāma*, ed. Agha Ahmad Ali and Abdur Rahim, III (Calcutta, 1886), p. 747; Mullā Qātiʿ Heravī, *Tazkira Majmaʿ-ush-Shuʿarā-i Jahāngīr Shāhī*, ed. Saleem Akhtar (Karachi, 1979), pp. 35 and 203.

¹³ R. Islam, *Calendar*, I, pp. 106–7.

better fortunes, others fleeing from religious or political persecutions of the sectarian Safavid regime.¹⁴ Akbar's India earned the distinction of being the place of refuge and abode of peace (*dār ul-aman*) where the wise and the learned received encouragement.¹⁵ How Akbar succeeded in creating conditions in his territory to welcome the Iranian scholars, be they non-conformists, is illustrated from the way Mullā 'Abd-ul-Qādir Badāonī, the well-known historian of Akbar's time, records Mīr Sharīf Āmulī's arrival in India. Āmulī was a Nuqtavī and he, in Badāonī's view, was made welcome by Akbar and his courtiers because of the extraordinarily tolerant atmosphere in India.¹⁶ This was largely true, but generous welcome to the Iranian scholars may have been caused by the Emperor's desire to pay back the debt the Mughals owed the Iranians for their support in reconquering India.

Iran under the Safavids had turned Shi'ite, in a very narrow sense of the term. In Mughal India, on the other hand, the space for accommodating oppositions and conflicts was widening, subsequent to the Mughal policy of *sulh-i kul* (peace with all). The policy, as we know, was a result of Akbar's bold initiatives, but it could also be explained in the light of the nature of the country where people with diverse beliefs and social practices had learnt to live together, their clashes notwithstanding. The non-conformist and dissident Iranians then found a natural refuge in India. As an ambitious ruler in obvious competition with the Iranian Shāh, Akbar thus also tried to exploit this situation to extend the frontiers of his authority into the Safavid domain. Akbar intended thus to neutralize the awe and the impact the Iranian Shāh had exercised over the Mughal household because of the Iranians' help to Bābur and Humāyūn. The following letter of the Emperor (Akbar) to Amīr Ahmad Kāshī is of special interest here:¹⁷

¹⁴ Aziz Ahmad, 'Safavid Poets and India', *Iran*, 14 (1976), pp. 117–32; see also Hadi Hasan, *Mughal Poetry: Its Cultural and Historical Value* (Madras, 1952), *passim*, and Zabihullah Safa, *Tārīkh-i Adabiyāt-i Irān* (Tehran, 1363), pt 1, for some Iranian poets in India.

¹⁵ 'Abd-un Nabī Qazwīnī, *Tazkira-i Maikhāna* (Tehran, 1340), p. 809.

¹⁶ 'Abd-ul-Qādir Badāonī, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawārīkh*, tr. W. H. Lowe, reprint (Delhi, 1973), II, p. 253.

¹⁷ R. Islam, *Calendar*, I, pp. 101–2, emphasis added; see also his 'Akbar's Intellectual Contacts with Iran' in Milton Israel and N. K. Wagle (eds), *Islamic Culture and Society: Essays in Honour of Aziz Ahmad* (Delhi, 1983), pp. 351–73, for the text of the letter.

The supremely important thing is spiritual relationship and proximity. God be paised that Safī ud-dīn Amīr Ahmad Kāshī has realised this truth, and has placed himself under the guidance of this humble servant of God (sc. Akbar). Let Amīr Ahmad be not discouraged by the spatial distance, for the writer is [spiritually] close at hand to give him succour. *Love of the people of Iran has been deeply ingrained in his (Akbar's) heart from the very beginning; it is his desire that this exalted community should come close to him spiritually as well as materially, and thereby prosper materially and spiritually, and the high and low (that is, all classes) of that community should partake of imperial favour.* It is indeed fortunate that Amīr Ahmad is there among them to guide them on the right path. He should write regularly and seek guidance about his spiritual experience (*wāridāt-i ghaibiya*, lit. things coming in from the heavens) and mystic problems to the Emperor who is indeed the solver of problems spiritual and universal. He (Amīr Ahmad) should assure Sadīd ud-dīn Darwesh Khusrau, whose excellence has been brought to royal notice by Abul Fazl of royal esteem and favour. He (Amīr Ahmad) should look after the guidance of the group for the Emperor is deeply impressed by what he has come to know about that capable young man. It will be desirable if Rashīd ud-dīn Ishāq who is a man of great talent and ability and has partaken of the divine *mashrab* in a large measure, should come in person to the imperial court. It will be appropriate if the enlightened one (sc. Amīr Ahmad) keeps the Emperor posted of the affairs of the *tabaqa-i illīya-i umanā'* in that country (Iran). *Blessed be the person who comes to this (Akbar's) sacred presence (huzūr-i muqaddas-i ma). If for some reason, this desire (umniyat) is not fulfilled, the members of the group will nevertheless be remembered in the sacred assembly (of Akbar).*

Persian at the Mughal Court

To what extent Ahmad Kāshī and Safī ud-Dīn, or for that matter the other scholars to whom Akbar chose to write in person, could extend his influence in Iran is a matter of debate. They were executed by the Shāh together with many others like them.¹⁸ However, the Mughal emperor's desire of bringing 'the exalted [Iranian] community close to him spiritually and materially' prepared the grounds for many of them to make India their second home. The Iranian talents flourished more in Mughal India. Surely, Iranians never accepted Akbar's claim of being 'the solver of their spiritual problems' which pertained to the life hereafter; soon, however, the belief in literate Iran was widespread that a visit to India promised material comforts and honoured position in this world:

*Nīst dar Irān zamān samān-i tahsīl-i kamāl
ta nayāyad sū-i Hindustān hinā rangīn na-shud*

¹⁸ Israel and Wagle (eds), *Islamic Culture*, p. 356.

(The means of acquiring perfection do not exist in Iran.
The henna does not acquire colour till it comes to India)

In the process India drew close to Iran culturally, and this, among other things, helped Persian attain the status of being the first language of the king and the court in Mughal India.

Among the first literary works of the reign of Akbar, at a time when he was consolidating Mughal power in India, was the preparation of a Persian translation of *Bābur-nāma*. Ironically, the translator was 'Abd-ur Rahīm Khān, Khān-i Khānān, the son of Bairam Khān, who, as we noticed above, was also a poet in Turkish. But it was not simply that Bābur's memoir was to be rendered into Persian, the Emperor also desired that the sources of the new court history recording Mughal achievements be compiled in Persian. Humāyūn's sister, Gulbadan Begum's *Humāyūn-nāma*, was written in Persian, even though Turkish was the native tongue of the Princess and her husband, Khizr Khwāja Khān. Indeed, Mrs Beveridge, who translated Gulbadan's account into English, suspects that the book was originally composed in Turkish.¹⁹ Similar was the case with the other two accounts of Humāyūn's time, *Tazkira-i Humāyūn wa Akbar* and *Tazkirat ul-Wāq'iat*, meant to serve as sources of Abul Fazl's history, *Akbar nāma*, while their authors, Bāyazīd Bayāt and Jauhar Aftābchī, could manage little beyond a 'shaky and rustic' spoken Persian. Jauhar, in fact, got the language of his account revised and improved by Ilāhdād Faizī Sirhindī before presenting it to the Emperor.²⁰

Akbar did not have any formal education. Important books were therefore read out to him regularly in his assembly hall. His library consisted of hundreds of prose books and poetical works in Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Greek and Kashmiri. But the books which the Emperor heard repeatedly were all in Persian.²¹

Akbar, according to a report, could also compose verses in Persian and Hindi; but Mughal sources record generally only his Persian couplets, and we have to wade through them to find just a few Hindi verses attributed to him. Further, only Persian poets had the privilege of enjoying royal patronage at Akbar's court.

Among the Muslim rulers of northern India, Akbar was possibly the first to institute a formal position of *malik-ush-shu'arā'* (poet

¹⁹ Gulbadan Begum, *Humāyūn-nāma*, tr. A. S. Beveridge (London, 1902), p. 79.

²⁰ Compare H. Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office* (Oxford, I, 1903), 222, ff. 2. Sirhindī was a reputed littérateur and philologist. Cf. his *Madār ul-Afāzil*, ed. Muhammad Baqar (Lahore, 1345).

²¹ Abul Fazl, *Akbar-nāma*, I (Calcutta, 1873), p. 271.

laureate) at the court. To be awarded to a Persian poet only, this position continued until Shāhjahān's time (1626–56). The *malik-ush-shu'arā'* during the period were—Ghazālī, Mashhadī, Husain Sanā'ī, Tālib Āmulī, Kalīm Kāshānī and Qudsī Meshhadī—all Iranians; Faizī (1547–95) was the sole exception. Further, only nine out of fifty-nine rated as the best amongst the thousand poets of Persian who completed a *dīwān* or wrote a *masnawī* could be identified as non-Iranians.²² Again, a large number of other Persian poets and writers—eighty-one according to Nizām-ud-Dīn Bakhshī and one hundred and sixty-eight according to Badāoni—received the patronage of the Emperor or his nobles.²³ Over a hundred poets and thirty-one scholars were associated with the establishment of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm Khān-i Khānān alone.²⁴

Persian thus emerged as *the language* of the king, the royal household and the high Mughal elite. Akbar's son and successor, Jahāngīr (1605–26), was not good in Turkish, but he had his own style in Persian and wrote his memoir in an elegant prose. He was also a good critic of Persian poetry and composed several verses and *ghazals*.²⁵ It was for him that Jāyāsī's *Padmāvat* was translated into Persian, but the work was recognized only as an Indian fable (*afsāna-i Hindī*) and not as a book on Islamic mysticism in Hindi.²⁶ Still later, with volumes of letters and edicts, Aurangzeb (1656–1707) established himself as a fine prose writer of his time.²⁷ The formal aboli-

²² Abul Fazl, *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, ed. H. Blochmann (Calcutta, I, 1872), pp. 617–80.

²³ Badāoni, III, pp. 171–388; Khwāja Nizām-ud-Dīn Ahmad, *Tabaqāt-i Akbarī*, ed. B. De (Calcutta, II, 1927), pp. 484–520.

²⁴ 'Abd-ul-Bāqī Nihāwandī, *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī*, ed. H. Hosain (Calcutta, III, 1931), pp. 9–114 and 115–1576. Evidently many of these poets were also from Central Asia, but few of them could earn a coveted place in Mughal courts. Mutribī Samarqandī also notes some Central Asian Persian poets in his report on his meetings and conversations with Jahāngīr, cf. *Khātirāt*, ed. A. G. Mirzoyef (Karachi, 1977).

²⁵ Cf. Nūr-ud-Dīn Jahāngīr, *Tuzak-i Jahāngīrī*, ed. Syud Ahmad, Allygurh (Aligarh, 1863–64), pp. 103, 245, 303, 316 and 431; *Tazkirat-ush-Shu'arā'*, ed. Abdul Ghani Mirzoyef (Karachi, 1976), *passim*; Mutribī Samarqandī, *Khātirāt*, pp. 44, 48–9, 56–61 and 66; see also Shibli Numani, *Shi'r-ul-'Ajam* (Azamgarh, 1945), III, pp. 5 and 148.

²⁶ Compare 'Abd-ush-Shakūr Bazmī, *Dāstān-i Padmāvat*, ed. A. H. Abidi (Tehran, 1350). See also editor's Introduction for twelve other renderings of *Padmāvat*, pp. 16–26.

²⁷ Compare recently edited published volumes of Aurangzeb's writings, e.g. Shaikh Abul Fath Qābil Khān, *Ādāb-i 'Ālamgīrī*, ed. Abdul Ghafur Chaudhari, 2 vols (Lahore, 1971); 'Ināyatullāh Khān Kashmīrī, *Kalimāt-i Tayyibāt*, ed. S. Azizuddin Husain (Delhi, 1982); Ashraf Khān Husainī, *Ragā'im-i Karā'im*, ed. S. Azizuddin Husain (Delhi, 1990); see also Najib Ashraf Nadvi, *Muqaddima-i Ruq'āt-i 'Ālamgīr* (Azamgarh, 1981).

tion of the institution of *malik-ush-shu'arā'* affected little the supreme status of Persian. Indeed, later seventeenth-century northern India witnessed numerous native poets of high standard in Persian, including the great Mirzā 'Abd-ul-Qādir Bīdil (d. 1719) and Nāsir Alī Sirhindī (d. 1696).

Language of the Empire

The frontiers of Persian, however, extended far beyond the circle of the emperor, the princes and the high nobles. Akbar was also the first among the Indo-Islamic kings of northern India formally to declare Persian to be the language of administration at all levels. The proclamation to this effect was issued by his famous Khatri Hindu revenue minister, Todar Mal, accompanied by reorganization of the revenue and the other administrative offices by the equally famous Iranian noble, Mīr Fathullāh Shirāzī. How an eighteenth-century historian, Ghulām Husain Tabatabā'ī remembered and recorded this changeover is significant;

Earlier in India the government accounts were written *in Hindi according to the Hindu rule*. Rāja Todar Mal acquired new regulations (*zawābit*) from the clerks (*nawīsindagān*) of Iran, and the government offices then were reorganized as they were there in *Wilāyat*.²⁸

These Iranian clerks remained in noticeable control of accounts and carried their jobs with unmatched efficiency and integrity throughout the heyday of the Mughal empire. Aurangzeb, the last of 'the Great Mughals' writes:

No other nation is better than the Persians for acting as clerks. And in war, too, from the age of Emperor Humāyūn to the present time, none of this nation has turned his face away from the field, and their firm feet have never been shaken. Moreover, they have not once been guilty of disobedience and treachery to their master. But, as they insist on being treated with great honour, it is very difficult to get on well with them. You have anyhow to pacify them, and should employ subterfuges.²⁹

Thus, it was not simply the royal household and the court which bore the Iranian impress. The Iranians as *mutasaddis* and minor functionaries could also be seen everywhere in the government offices,

²⁸ Ghulām Husain Tabatabā'ī, *Siyar-ul-Muta' akhkhiri'n* (Lucknow, 1876), I, p. 200.

²⁹ Hamīd-ud-Dīn, *Ahkām-i 'Ālamgiri*, ed. and tr. J. N. Sarkar (Calcutta, 1912), p. 53.

even though they were not in exclusive control of these offices. A substantial part of the administration was carried out by the indigenous Hindu communities who had hitherto worked in Hindi. This was of greater consequence for our purpose. They learnt Persian and joined these Iranians as clerks, scribes and secretaries (*muharriṣ* and *munshīs*). Their achievements in the language were soon to be extraordinary. To this development Akbar's reform in the prevailing *maktab* and *madrasa* education, influenced again by the Iranian Mīr Fathullāh Shīrāzī, contributed considerably. The Hindus began to learn Persian in Sikandar Lodi's time. Badāonī mentions one Brahman as an Arabic and Persian teacher of this period.³⁰ Akbar's enlightened policy and introduction of 'secular' themes in the syllabuses at middle levels 'stimulated a wide application to Persian studies'. Hindus—Kayasthas and Khatris in particular—joined *madrasas* in large numbers to acquire excellence in Persian language and literature, which now promised good careers in imperial service.

Akbar's reform pertained in the first place to the learning of the Persian alphabets and the basic words. Children were not to spend too much time, as was the practice, on alphabet. After learning and practising the shape and name of the words they were required to commit to memory some Persian couplets or moral phrases directly and thus appropriate the ethos of the language at a very young age. Then they studied the prescribed curriculum which included ethics (*akhlāq*), arithmetic (*hisāb*), notations peculiar to arithmetic (*siyāq*), agriculture (*falāhat*), measurement (*masāhat*), geometry, astronomy, physiognomy, household economy (*tadbīr-i manzil*), the rules of government (*siyāsat-i mudun*), medicine, logic, mathematics (*riyāzī*) and physical and metaphysical (*tab'ī* and *Ilāhī*) sciences.³¹

At an advanced level works of classical masters were studied in order to acquire proficiency in Persian composition and poetry. Texts prescribed at this stage were *Būstān* and *Gulistān* of Shaikh Sa'dī, *Akhlāq-i Nāsirī* of Khwāja Nasīr-ud-Dīn Tūsī, *Akhlāq-i Jalālī* of Jalāl-ud-Dīn Dawwānī and *Akhlāq-i Muhsinī* of Mullā Husain Wā'iz al-Kāshifī. Among chronicles the students generally read *Habīb-us-Siyar*, *Rauzat-us-Safā*, *Tarikh-i Guzīda* and *Zafar-nāma*. Later, Abul Fazl's *Akbar-nāma* together with his *inshā* also figured in the essential read-

³⁰ Badāonī, III.

³¹ Abul Fazl, *Ā'in*, I, pp. 201–2; see also N. N. Law, *Promotion of Learning in India during Mohammadan Rule* (London, 1916), pp. 161–71.

ings.³² Most of the students discontinued their studies after completing their secondary education, since that was a sufficient qualification to secure employment on the clerical staff in local *daftars*. The accountancy department attracted them most because it promised better salaries. The art of a *munshī* (secretary) was a difficult task, 'a whole life was required to acquire proficiency in that art'.³³

The teachers in charge of these *madrasas* were initially often the masters of Fars and Shiraz (*ustādān-i Fārs-o-Shīrāz*). But in the course of time, Indians including Hindu masters also began to teach. Their writings, in particular the specimens of their *inshā*, formed part of Persian syllabi.³⁴

In India there was always a 'set ready and a fixed caste (*jāmi*)' of workmen of every profession and trade, for any employment, to whom vocation descends as a family heirloom'.³⁵ These trainees, like many other workmen, thus crystallized into 'a fixed caste' of scribes, accountants and secretaries. The son of a clerk (*muharir*) was destined to be a clerk not because he may have preferred this profession but in order to keep up the family tradition, and if he worked hard, he would rise to the stature of a chief secretary (*mīr munshī*). In most cases the *munshī* families trained their own relatives as a father would do his son, either under his own direct care or through correspondence. This is illustrated best from Chandrabhān's advice to his son Khwāja Tej Bhān.³⁶

From the middle of the seventeenth century, the departments of accountancy (*siyāq*), draftmanship (*inshā*) and the offices of revenue minister (*dīwān*) were mostly filled by the Kayastha and Khatri *munshīs* and *muharirs*. Harkaran Dās Kambuh of Multan is the first known Hindu *munshī* whose writings were taken as models by later *munshīs*.³⁷ Chandrabhān was another influential, rated second only to Abul Fazl. Chandrabhān also wrote poetry of high merit.³⁸ And then

³² Bālkrishan, *Arzdāsh* . . . , Br. M. Add. 16859 cited in Mohiuddin, *Chancellery*, p. 41; see also Syed Muhammad Abdullah, *Adabīyāt-i Fārs men Hindū-on kā Hissa* (Lahore, 1967), pp. 240–3.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁴ Abul Hasanat Nadvi, *Hindustān kī Qadīm Islāmī Darsgāhēn* (Azamgarh, 1971), pp. 28–9; Abdullah, *Adabīyāt*, p. 240.

³⁵ *Bābur-nāma*, p. 518.

³⁶ Chandrabhān Brahman, *Chār Chaman*, cited in Abdullah, *Adabīyāt*, pp. 241–3.

³⁷ For an analysis, see Mohiuddin, *Chancellery*, pp. 215–20.

³⁸ Muhammad Abdul Hamid Faruqi, *Chandra Bhān Brahman: Life and Works with a Critical Edition of his Dīwān* (Ahmadabad, 1966); for his prose, see Mohiuddin, *Chancellery*, pp. 228–34.

followed a large number of Kayastha and Khatri *munshīs*, including the well-known Madho Rām, Sujān Rāi, Malikzādah, Ānand Rām ‘Mukhlis’, Bindrāban ‘Khushgo’, who made splendid contributions to Persian language and literature and whose writings formed part of the syllabi of Persian studies at *madrasas*. Certain fields hitherto unexplored or neglected found skilled investigators, chiefly Hindus. On the philological sciences the Hindus produced excellent works in the eighteenth century. *Mir’āt ul Istilāh* of Ānand Rām, *Bahār-i ‘Ajām* of Tek Chand ‘Bahār’ and *Mustalahāt-us-Shu‘arā* of Siyalkoti Mal ‘Wārasta’ are among the most exhaustive lexicons compiled in India. Their Persian Grammars and Commentaries on idioms, phrases and poetical proverbs show their keen interest, admirable research and accomplishments in the Persian language.³⁹

The masters of the Iranian classics thus found an increasingly appreciative audience even among the middle-order people in big and small towns as well as among the village-based revenue officials and the other hereditary functionaries and intermediaries. All Mughal government papers from the imperial orders (*farmāns*) to the bonds and acceptance letter (*muchalka*, *tamassuk qabūliat*) that a village intermediary (*chaudhuri*) wrote were prepared in Persian.⁴⁰ On the other hand, there was no bookseller in the bazaars and streets of Agra, Delhi and Lahore who did not sell the anthologies of Persian poetry. The *madrasa* pupils in general were familiar with the Persian classics.⁴¹

In two separate letters, one, an *arzdasht*, addressed to the Emperor Akbar and the other, a *dastūr-ul-‘amal*, meant to be a manual for the officials, Abul Fazl, the premier ideologue and the *mīr munshī* of the Mughal empire, had suggested *Akhlāq-i Nāsiri*, *Kimyā-i Sa‘adat*, *Masnawī* of Maulāna Jalāl-ud-Dīn Rūmī, as essential readings.⁴² In Abul Fazl’s own time only the high nobles could have read them. By Shāhjahān’s time (1626–56), these books and many more similar titles began to figure as routine readings even among the middle-order Hindus associated with the Mughal state.

³⁹ Abdullah, *Adabiyat*, pp. 121–68.

⁴⁰ Even in Bengal, the administrative papers prepared and issued in the name of the local Hindu intermediaries were in Persian. Persian *inshā*, indeed, had influenced the Bengali prose, Promesh Acharya, ‘Pedagogy and Social Learning: *Tol* and *Pathśāla* in Bengal’, *Studies in History* (New Series), 10, 2 (July–December 1994), pp. 255–72.

⁴¹ Badāonī, II, pp. 285.

⁴² *Inshā-i Abul Fazl* (Lucknow, I, 1280 AH), pp. 57–67; *Majma‘-ul-Inshā* of Muhammad Amīn Banī Isrāil, MS Paris, Persian Supplement, 461, ff. 38a–41a.

Persian was then their first language. They appropriated and used the Perso-Islamic expressions like *Bismillāh* (with the name of Allāh) *lab-ba-qūr* (at the door of the grave) and *ba-jahannam rasīd* (damned in *jahannam* = hell) as their Iranian and non-Iranian Muslim counterparts did. They would also now look for and like the Persian renderings of their texts and traditions. Lest they be forgotten, the religious scriptures were then rendered in full into Persian by individual Hindu authors.⁴³

If, on the one hand, for the Hindus, prospects of good careers and also possibly of direct access to the ancient scriptures now available in Persian provided incentives for learning Persian, on the other, the language acquired a kind of religious sanctity for the Muslims. Jamāl-ud-Dīn Injū, author of *Farhang-i Jahāngīrī*, the first comprehensive Persian lexicon, dwells at length on the point that Persian together with Arabic is the language of Islam. The Prophet of Islam, he reports from various sources, knew and spoke Persian. The Prophet, according to Injū, spoke highly of the merits of the people of Pars; he cites verses from the Quran in appreciation of the people of Pars for their bravery and courage to fight for a noble cause. Faith (*īmān*) according to Injū is integral to their (people of Pars) character. They would have acquired faith even if it were far in the sky.⁴⁴ Injū began to compile the *Farhang* at Akbar's instance and since it was completed after the Emperor's death, it was dedicated to his son, Jahāngīr.⁴⁵

The message through such construction was possibly intended to be communicated to the Indian converts, whose native language was some form of Hindavī. There was certainly wide application of Persian studies among the *shurafā*, the Muslim landed magnates, the revenue-free land holders in the rural areas, those who had daily allowance (*a'ḥmma*, *wazīfa*) in towns and petty officials. Even ordinary literate Muslims like soldiers, for instance, were expected now to read simple Persian. In Shāhjahān's time treatises on religious disputations in simple prose were written for common poor Muslims in order to prevent them from falling into the Brahmanical 'trap' and thus leaning towards innovation, idolatrous practices and infidelity.

⁴³ Compare Gopāl bin Govind's Preface to his Persian translation of *Rāmāyana*, Paris, MS, Blochet, I, 222.

⁴⁴ Mīr Jamāl-ud-Dīn Husain Injū Shīrāzī, *Farhang-i Jahāngīrī*, ed. Rahīm Afifi, 3 vols (Meshhed, 1972), I, pp. 14–22; Sirāj-ud-Dīn Alī Khān Ārzū, *Muthmir*, ed. Rehana Khatoon (Karachi, 1991), pp. 6, 7 and 14–17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 4 and 10.

One such treatise, *Hujjat-ul-Hind*, as the author claims, was translated from Hindavī into simple Persian for the benefit of ‘the Muslims who live in the villages’ where ‘the elites are generally the infidels’.⁴⁶

Persian, Prestige and the Mughal Political Culture

Learning, knowledge and high culture began to be associated with Persian at many levels in Mughal Indian society. Command over good Persian was a matter of pride; deficiency in elegant self-expression in Persian meant cultural failure. For Mirzā Muhammad Bakhsh Āshūb, a noted poet and writer of the later Mughal era, a major failure of Samsām-ud-Daulah, Khān-i Daurān, the well-known early eighteenth-century Mughal noble, was his inability to speak good Persian; Khān-i Daurān generally spoke in ‘Hindi’. On occasion he would embellish his conversation with Persian couplets and hemistichs, with a remark that ‘to speak in Persian for an Indian is to make oneself a butt of ridicule’.⁴⁷

Khān-i Daurān was, however, an exception. In general, Persian was held to be the only effective language to express cultural accomplishments. Persian came to be recognized as the language of politics in nearly the whole of the sub-continent.⁴⁸ This status received nourishment from the Mughal power it sustained, and the belief that Persian was the most functional pragmatic and accomplished vehicle of communication remained unshaken even after the virtual demise of the Mughal empire. Mirzā Asadullāh Ghālib (d. 1869), the last of the great Mughal poets, believed that the depth, complexity and variety of his ideas could be conveyed only through Persian words. Note the poet’s plea with his audience to evaluate him on the strength of his Persian compositions, even as he earned a high place in literature due to his Urdu poetry:⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *Hujjat-ul-Hind*, British Museum, Add. 5602, ff. 11.

⁴⁷ Mirzā Muhammad Bakhsh ‘Āshūb’, *Tārīkh-i Shahādāt-i Farrukh Siyar wa Julūs-i Muhammad Shāh*, Br. M. Or. 1832, ff. 726.

⁴⁸ For Persian’s position in the East India Company territories in the late eighteenth century, see Bernard Cohn, ‘The Command of Language and the Language of Command’ in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi, 1985), pp. 284–95.

⁴⁹ Mirzā Asadullāh Khān Ghālib, *Kulliyāt-i Ghālib*, ed. Syed Murtaza Husain (Lahore, 1967), vol. 1, p. 161.

Fārsī bīn tā ba-bīnī naqshahā-i rang rang
ba-guzār az majmū'a-i Urdū ki bi-rang-i man ast
 (See my Persian [poetry] so that you may see colourful pictures,
 Leave my Urdu collection which has no colour)

With a section of the fallen Mughal elite Persian was now to stay also as a symbol of the glory of the past. Noteworthy here is the way a minister in Hyderabad in the Deccan in the nineteenth century reacted to the suggestion for a changeover from Persian to Urdu as the language of government. One Maulavi Mushtaq Husain, who hailed from North India and held a high office in Hyderabad, had suggested this change to Sālār Jang. Subsequently, Sālār Jang mentioned it in the course of a conversation with Sarwar ul-Mulk, who was also from North India and held an important position in Hyderabad. Sarwar ul-Mulk supported Maulavi Mushtaq's idea. Thereupon Sālār Jang who was reclining against a pillow, got up with a jerk and said:⁵⁰

You Hindustānī (Northern Indian) people have little practice in Persian speech and writing. Persian language is the symbol of the victory of the Muslims. We have conquered this land with the sword. Having destroyed this symbol in your own country [North India], you people now want darkness here too. Persian shall remain here and flourish so long as I am alive.

Long association of the Mughals, their supporters and successors with Persian in political and military management created a memory of the language as an instrument of conquest. The memory was not a nineteenth-century construction. Persian did facilitate the Mughal triumph. The intrinsic strength of the language, combined with the emperor's decision, prepared the ground for forging the links between the court and the remote village. We may ask here if Persian offered anything positive for its being favoured by the Mughals as the language of their empire.

The Mughals were not content with establishing a mere paramount and imperial authority over the numerous local and regional power groups. They aspired also to evolve a political culture, overarching the diverse religious and cultural identities. Persian, in the existing circumstances, promised to be the most appropriate vehicle to communicate and sustain such an ideal. Persian was known to the Indians, from the banks of the river Sind to the Bay of Bengal. If Amīr Khusrau is to be believed, as early as in the fourteenth century, 'Persian parlance enjoyed uniformity of idiom throughout the length

⁵⁰ S. M. Kamal, *Hyderabad men Urdū kā Irṭiqā* (Hyderabad, 1990), p. 102.

of four thousand parasangs, unlike the Hindavī tongue, which had no settled idiom and varied after every hundred miles and with every group of people'.⁵¹ As late as the eighteenth century Hindavī did not evolve a uniform idiom even in northern India. Sirāj-ud-Dīn 'Alī Khān Ārzū (d. 1756), a noted eighteenth-century poet, writer and lexicographer, mentions Gwaliorī, Braj, Rājputī, Kashmīrī, Haryānavī, Hindi and Punjābī as diverse authentic forms of Hindavī, besides the dialects of Shāhjahānabad-Delhi and Akbarabad Agra.⁵² Sanskrit or *Hindi-ye kitābī* (Hindi of the Book) as Ārzū calls it could have been a choice in place of Persian as a language of the empire. But Sanskrit, as Mirzā Khān, the author of *Tuhfat-ul-Hind*, noted in Aurangzeb's time, was not taken as an ordinary human tongue; it was a *Deva-bānī* and *Ākāsh-bānī*. The language was too scared, too divine. No *mlechha* would perhaps have been allowed to pollute it by choosing it as a symbol and vehicle of his power. The *mlechha* could not have used it to create the world of his vision. On the contrary, Prakrit, which was *Pātāl-bānī*, the language of the underground, of the snakes, was considered too low for the Mughals to be appropriated for lofty ideals. Braj or Bhākhā, the language of this world, was also a regional dialect. Furthermore, Bhākhā, in the Mughal view, was suitable only for music and love poetry.⁵³

Again, in Persian, in particular in the poetry produced during the second phase (6th–8th centuries AH/12th–14th centuries AD) of its history which belonged to the *Sabk-i 'Irāqī* (the Southern Iranian Diction), the tradition of non-sectarianism had been very strong.

Persian poetry, which had integrated many things from pre-Islamic Persia and had been an important vehicle of liberalism in the medieval Muslim world, helped in no insignificant way in creating and supporting the Mughal attempt to accommodate diverse religious traditions. Akbar must have got support for his policy of non-sectarianism from the verses like the ones of Jalal-ud-Din Rumi whose *masnawī* the Emperor heard regularly and nearly learnt by heart.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Compare Amīr Khusrau, *Nuh Siphir*, ed. Wahid Mirza (Oxford, 1950), Preface and p. 173.

⁵² Sirāj-ud-Dīn 'Alī Khān Ārzū, *Nawādir-ul-Alfāz*, Preface cited in Syed Muhammad Abdullah, *Mabāhis* (Delhi, 1968), pt I, p. 75.

⁵³ Mirzā Khān bin Fakhr-ud-Dīn Muhammad, *Tuhfat-ul-Hind*, ed. Nurul Hasan Ansari (Tehran, 1356), vol. I, pp. 51–2.

⁵⁴ Jalāl-ud-Dīn Rūmī, *Masnawī-ye Maulāna Rūm*, ed. Qazi Sajjad Husain, II (Delhi, 1976), p. 173. For Akbar's administration and fondness for the *Masnawī*, Abul Fazl, *Akbar-nāma*, I, p. 271.

Tū barā-i wasl kardan āmdī
ne barā-i fasl kardan āmdī
Hindiyān rā istilāh-i Hind madh
Sindiyān rā istilāh-i Sind madh
 (Thou hast come to unite,
 not to separate
 For the people of Hind, the idiom of Hindi is praiseworthy
 For the people of Sind, their own is to be praised)

The echoes of these messages and the general suspicion of mere 'formalism' of the faith are unmistakable in the Mughal Persian poetry as well. Faizī had the ambition of building 'a new Ka'ba' out of the stones from the Sināi:⁵⁵

Biyā ki rūi ba mihrāb-gāh-i nau ba-nihīm
Binā-i Ka'ba-i dīgar ze sang-i tūr nihīm
 (Come, we turn our face toward a new alter
 We take stones from the Sināi and build a new Ka'ba)

The Mughal poets, like their predecessors, portrayed, for instance, the pious (*zāhid*) and the Shaikh as hypocrites. It was with the master of the wine house (*mughān*) and in the temple, instead of the mosque, they believed, that the eternal and Divine secrets were to be sought:⁵⁶

Shi'ār-i millat-i Islāmiān ba-guzar gar khwāhī
ki dar dair-i mughān ā'i wa asrār-i nihān bīnī
 (Give up the path of the Muslims, come to the temple, to the master of
 the wine house
 so that you may see the Divine secrets)

The idol (*but*), to them, was the symbol of the Divine beauty; idolatry (*but-parastī*) represented the love of the Absolute; and, significantly, they emphasized that the Brahman be held in high esteem because of his sincerity, devotion and faithfulness to the idol: to Faizī it is a matter of privilege that his love for the idol led him to embrace the religion of the Brahman:⁵⁷

Shukr-i khudā ki ishq-i butān ast rāhbaram
bar millat-i brahman-o bar dīn-i Āzaram
 (Thanks God, the love of the idols is my guide,
 I follow the religion of the Brahman and Azar)

⁵⁵ Abul Faiz Faizī Faiyāzī, *Dīwān*, ed. A. D. Arshad (Lahore, 1362), p. 470.

⁵⁶ Muhammad Jamāl-ud-Dīn 'Urfī Shīrāzī, *Kulliyāt*, ed. Jawahiri Vajdi (Tehran, 3rd reprint, 1369), p. 152.

⁵⁷ Faizī, *Dīwān*, p. 53.

The temple (*dair*, *but-kada*), the wine-house (*mai-khāna*), the mosque and Ka'ba were the same to 'Urfī; the Divine Spirit pervaded everywhere:⁵⁸

Chirāgh-i Somnāt ast ātish-i Tūr

buwad zān har jihat rā nūr dar nūr

(The lamp of Somnath is [the same as] the fire at the Sināi,
the light spreads all around from that)

This feature of the Persian poetry remained unimpaired even when Aurangzeb (1658–1707) tried to associate the Mughal state with Sunni orthodoxy. Nāsir 'Alī Sirhindī (d. 1696), a major poet of his time, echoed 'Urfī's message with equal enthusiasm:⁵⁹

Nīst ghair az yak sanam dar parda-i dair-o haram

kai shawad ātish du rang az ikhtilāf-i sangahā

(The image is the same behind the veil in the temple and *haram*
With diverse firestones, there is no change in the colour of the fire)

In fact, neither the mosque nor the temple were illumined by Divine beauty; it is the heart (*dil*) of the true lover in which it abides. The message was thus to aspire for the high place of the lovers. Tālib Āmulī then called to transcend the difference of Shaikh and Brahman:⁶⁰

Na malāmat-gar-i kufr am na ta'assub-kash-i dīn

khanda-hā bar jādī-i Shaikh-o Barhaman dāram

(I do not condemn infidelity, nor am I a bigoted believer,
I laugh at both, the Shaikh and the Brahman)

Persian thus facilitated the Mughal conquest in India even though not necessarily in the way Sālār Jang of Hyderabad remembered it in the nineteenth century. In fact, this conquest, as 'Urfī declared, was intended to be bloodless:⁶¹

Zakhm-hā bardāsh-tīm o-fāth-hā kardīm lek

harqiz az khūn-i kas-e rangīn na-shud dāmān-i mā

(We have received wounds, we have scored victories,
but our skirts have never been stained with the blood of anyone)

The desire to build an empire, where both Shaikh and Brahman could live with minimum possible conflicts, necessitated the generation of adequate information about the diverse traditions of the land.

⁵⁸ 'Urfī Shīrāzī, *Dīwān* (Kanpur, 1915), p. 44.

⁵⁹ Nāsir 'Alī Sirhindī, *Dīwān* (Lucknow, 1872), p. 15.

⁶⁰ Tālib Āmulī, *Kulliyāt-Ash'ār-i Malik-ush-Shu'ra Tālib Āmulī*, ed. Tahiri Shihab (Tehran, 1967), p. 668.

⁶¹ 'Urfī Shīrāzī, *Dīwān*, p. 3.

Akbar's historian, Abul Fazl, is not content in his *Akbar-nāma* with a mere description of the heroic achievements of his master; he concludes his account in what he calls the *Ā'in* (institutes) of Akbar. In particular are notable the third book of the *Ā'in* which contains the survey of the land, the revenues, the peoples or the castes in control thereof, and, above all, the fourth book which 'treats of the social conditions and literary activity, especially in philosophy and law, of the Hindus, who form the bulk of the population, and in whose political advancement the emperor saw the guarantee of the stability of his realm'.⁶² Further, to make the major local texts accessible and thus to dispel the ignorance about the Hindu traditions Akbar took special care in rendering *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana* into Persian. The translations of these religious texts were followed in Akbar's own time and later in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Persian renderings of a large number of texts on Indian religions, Hindu law and ethics, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, romance, moral fables and music.⁶³

Persian generated and promoted conditions in which the Mughals could create out of heterogenous social groups a class of their allies and subordinate rulers. Like the emperor and his nobility in general, this class also cherished the universal human values and visions. But we ought not to ignore the fact that with Persian as the sole privileged language of the state and its 'apparatus', it also drove a wedge between the Mughals and the people. Persian was not an Indian language, but it had begun to assume an autonomous Indian identity in pre-Mughal India. Under the Mughals the Indian Persian diction matured, with some of the most brilliant writings in Persian. However, the Iranian idiom of Persian also emerged as the favoured reference point in Mughal India.

Indian Persian vs. Iranian Persian

Amīr Khusrau (1253–1325), with whose poetry and writings the Indian diction assumed a distinct personality of its own, had disap-

⁶² H. Blockmann's Preface to his translation of the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, I (reprint, Delhi, 1965).

⁶³ S. A. A. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign* (Delhi, 1975), pp. 203–22; F. Mujtabai, *Aspects of Hindu-Muslim Cultural Relations* (Delhi, 1978), pp. 60–91, for a brief description of Persian translations of religious texts.

proved of the 'Khurāsānī' idiom and had noted that in India Persian was written and pronounced according to the standard of Tūrān.⁶⁴ The models in particular in prose then were the authors of Transoxiana. The writings of Rashīd-ud-Dīn Watwāt and Bahā-ud-Dīn of Khwārizm, for instance, were read and imitated by the Indian Persian writers. Khusrau then innovated a new Indo-Persian style.⁶⁵ To the pre-Mughal lexicographers the languages spoken in Shiraz, Māwarā-an-Nahr and Farghana were just dialects of the same Persian tongue. They incorporated in their lexicons the words used in 'Fars, Samarqand, Māwarā-an-Nahr and Turkistan'. They also give as a matter of routine their Hindavī synonyms.⁶⁶

The Mughal court, on the contrary, was concerned with the purification of Persian (*tathīr-i Fārsī*). The objective of the lexicon Akbar asked Jamāl-ud-Dīn Husain Injū to prepare in his name was to clean the Persian of non-Persian words and expressions.⁶⁷ The drive at purification continued later. Injū's *Farhang* together with *Majma-ul-Furs Surūrī* were taken as the sole standard lexicons in the first half of the seventeenth century. By the middle of the century Mullā 'Abdur-Rashīd Thattawī felt the necessity of compiling a new dictionary, among other things, because (a) in the existing two major dictionaries (*Jahāngīrī* and *Surūrī*) certain Arabic and Turkish words were enlisted without clarifying that they were not Persian, and that (b) many words were wrongly pronounced by Injū and Surūrī.⁶⁸

If in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the most sublime and the best poetry of the time was produced in India, the eighteenth century was the richest in terms of the number and varieties of prose and poetic works in Persian. Take, for instance, the poetry. Seventy-seven of the Persian poets who lived during the earlier half of the century found the place of honour in the *tazkira*, titled as *Majma'-un-Nafā'is* of Sirāj-ud-Dīn 'Alī Khān Ārzū who was the best and the most revered scholar, poet and critic of the period.⁶⁹ Many

⁶⁴ Amīr Khusrau, *Dibācha-i Dīwān Ghurraṭ al-Kamāl*, ed. S. Ali Haider (Patna, 1988), p. 92; Wahid Mirza, *The Life and Works of Amīr Khusrau* (Calcutta, 1935), p. 160.

⁶⁵ Mohiuddin, *Chancellery*, p. 23. Later, however, Watwat's *Hadāiq-us-Sihr* inspired Warasta's *Matla'-us-Sa'dain*. Cf. Abdullah, *Adabiyāt*, p. 144.

⁶⁶ Husaini, *Indo-Persian Literature*, pp. 201–26.

⁶⁷ Injū Shīrāzī, *Farhang-i Jahāngīrī*, Preface, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Zahuruddin Ahmad, *Pakistan men Fārsī Adab ki Tārīkh* (Jahāngīr to Aurangzeb) (Lahore, 1974), p. 542.

⁶⁹ Cf. a selection (*intikhāb*) of the work, India Office Library, London, MS., I.O. 4015.

tazkiras were written in this period. Among these, ‘Alī Ibrāhīm Khalīl’s (d. 1793) *Suhuf-i Ibrāhīm*, which was a most comprehensive one, at least, for the northern Indian poets, notes no less than four hundred and sixty poets from amongst those who lived in the eighteenth century and whose works he considered of any worth.⁷⁰ No less than fifty-six of them were non-Muslims.⁷¹

Much more significant was the height of excellence the Persian poetry scaled under the Mughals. The Mughal age signals a significant stage in the development of the Persian literary sensibilities. The poetry was marked by an outspoken spirit of innovation and experimentation, showing due regard to the past literary heritage of Iran as well as Central Asia. In Central Asia, at the court of the late Tīmūrids, Daulat Shāh Samarqandī and ‘Alī Shēr Nawā’ī tried to establish a canon which, in a measure, was represented in the poetry of ‘Abd-ur-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 1492) and which later was refined and reformulated by Bābur. In this tradition emphasis was on rhetorical artistry, even as Bābur pointed to the importance of meaning (*ma‘nī*) and ecstasy (*hāl*), together with colour (*rang*), in a good poetry. In Iran, too, there were attempts like the one by Sām Mirzā to evolve the standards of literary criticism, close to Herat School. Simultaneously, however, Bābā Fughānī Shīrāzī (d. 1519) made a plea for concerns in the poetry for the routine matters of love, but with an eye for new meanings of old words.⁷²

The Mughal poetry signified a fine blending of the two, with judicious balance (*tawāzun*) between the rhetorical excellences (*mazāyā-i balāghat*) and the grandeurs of thoughts (*jalā’il-i ma‘ānī*).⁷³ The thought was to occupy a distinct and uncontested superior position; and while Abul Fazl emphasized the splendours of ideas, his poet brother, Faizī advocated their sublimity and emotional texture.⁷⁴

Gar durd nīst dar sukhan-i man ‘ajab madār
kīn bāda rā ba parda-i dil sāf kardā-īm

(Do not be surprised if there are no dregs in my poetry
because I have refined this wine by filtering it through the heart)

⁷⁰ Cf. *Suhuf-i Ibrāhīm* (portion dealing with the accounts of the twelfth century AH), ed. A. R. Bedar (Patna, 1981).

⁷¹ S. Abdullah, *Adabīyāt*, pp. 169–84.

⁷² Abdul Ghani, ‘Tanqīdī Shu‘ūr kā Irīqā’ in Maqbul Beg Badakhshani (ed.), *Tārīkh-i Adabīyāt-i Musalmānān-i Hind-o-Pāk* (Lahore, 1976), pp. 455–61.

⁷³ Abul Fazl, *Akbar-nāma*, II (Calcutta, 1879), p. 381.

⁷⁴ Faizī, *Dīwān*, p. 405.

Elaborate style and ornate phraseology with artistic devices and sensuousness both in words and meanings together with magnificent and sublime thoughts thus symbolized the Mughal poetics. The following verse of Ghanī Kāshmīrī (d. 1688) perhaps best expressed the all-sided splendour of the Mughal poetry:⁷⁵

Jalwa-i husn-i tū āwurd mārā bar sar-i fikr
tū hinā bastī wa man manī-ye ranqin bastam
 (With the brilliance of your beauty I began to think
 You applied the henna and I created the colourful meaning)

The resplendent thought or the serious philosophical reflections expressed in pleasingly florid diction was a marked feature of what has been noted as the *tāza-gū'ī* (speaking the fresh) of the Mughal poets. *Tāza-gū'ī* was the major tenet of the Mughal poetry.⁷⁶ The call for new and fresh meaning is reiterated throughout the Mughal age. Faizī detested imitation (*taqlīd*).⁷⁷

Qasd-i khayāl-i dīgarān tā ba kai
jūd ba māl-i dīgarān tā ba kai
 (How long will you look to others for ideas?
 How long will you be generous with the wealth of the others?)

He then invited his audience to rise to break from the past.⁷⁸

Biyā wa raunaq-i bāzār ba-shikan
ba chashm-i baghbānān khār ba-shikan
za had ba-guzasht nāz-i kaj-kulāhān
ba-shūkhī gōsha-i dastār ba-shikan
qadah nūshān za pīsh-i Ka'ba ba-guzar
za bad mastī dar-o-diwār ba-shikan
 (Come, destroy the glitter of the bazaar.
 Extricate the thorn with the eye of the gardeners
 Exceed the limits of the beloved's coquetry
 Defiantly tear the loop of the turban
 Go across the Ka'ba, sipping the goblet
 Pull down the structures in drunkenness)

Poetry and the poetic imagination to Faizī was something beyond this world. The poet was to scale the heights, insurmountable for an average human soul.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Muhammad Tāhir Ghanī Kāshmīrī, *Dīwān* (Lucknow, 1931), p. 101.

⁷⁶ Nihāwandi, *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī*, p. 848; Shibli Numani, *Shi'r-ul-'Ajam*, IV, p. 21; Abdullah, 'Tāza-gū'ī: Ek Adabī Tahrīk' in *idem*, *Fārsī Zubān-o-Adab* (Lahore, 1977), pp. 114–26.

⁷⁷ Cited in Safa, *Tārikh*, V, p. 852.

⁷⁸ Cited in Nabi Hadi, *Mughalon ke Malik-ush-Shu'arā* (Allahabad, 1978), p. 150.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

Man ba-rāh-i mī rawam k-ānjā qadam nā-mahram ast
az maqām-i harf mī gūyam ki dam nā-mahram ast
 (I walk where steps hesitate treading
 I speak from a place where breathing is stifled)

With his poetry the Mughal poet thus aspired to unearth 'the secret treasures of the unseen world' (*ganjīna-i asrār-i ghaibī*).⁸⁰ The poetry to Nazīrī was divine.⁸¹

Tū ma-pindār kīn qissa ba-khud mī gūyam
gūsh nazdīk labam ār ki āwāz-i hast
 (Do not think the story I tell you comes from within me
 Come close to me, and you will hear a voice (divine))

This *tāza-gū'ī* was inspired in a measure by the poetry of Bābā Fughānī;⁸² but its most distinguishing feature in our period was its humaneness and here its achievements were unprecedented. While Faizī gave a call to go beyond 'the limits of the beloved's coquetry', 'Urfī celebrated the enlargement of self where the line between the success and failure of the individual on the one hand, and his concerns for humanity, on the other, blurs:⁸³

Dar dil-i mā gham-i dunyā gham-i ma'shūq shawad
bāda gar khām buwad pukhta kunad shīsha-i mā
 (The worries of the world turn in my heart into the ones
 for the loved one.
 If the wine is unripe, it matures in our goblet)

The sufferings of others the poet thus narrated with the same intensity as he lamented the afflictions of his heart. Then poetry did not simply echo the zest of the conqueror, offering a way out from the prevailing social turmoil; it gave expression to the susceptibilities of others as well.⁸⁴

Hamīsha girya-i talkhī dar āstīn dāram
ba nirkh-i zahr firosham gar angbīn dāram
kas-e ki khāna ba hamsāyagī-ye man dārad
madām khush-dil-ash az nāla-i hazīn dāram
za dāir tā but-o-butkhāna mī burad ishqam
khajālat az rukh-i mardān-i rāh-i dīn dāram
 (I have nothing but tears of distress in my sleeves)

⁸⁰ Badakhshani (ed.), *Tārīkh-i Adabīyāt*, p. 467.

⁸¹ Muhammad Husain Nazīrī Nishāpūrī, *Dīwān*, ed. Mazahir Musaffa (Tehran, 1340), p. 101.

⁸² For a discussion around this view, see Razia Akbar, *Sharh-i Ahwāl-o-Asār-i Bābā Fughānī Shīrāzī* (Hyderabad, 1974), pp. 133–49; see also Abdullah, 'Tāza-gū'ī . . . '.

⁸³ 'Urfī Shīrāzī, *Dīwān*, p. 4.

⁸⁴ Nazīrī Nishāpūrī, *Dīwān*, p. 294.

I sell it as a poison [even] if have honey
 Whosoever has his house in my neighbourhood
 I keep him happy with my cries of woe.
 My love takes me from temple to the idol and idolhouse
 I am ashamed over the attitude [lit. face] of the people who follow the
 path of Faith)

The wounded ego of the vanquished in this poetry then found consolation for what they lost, and, more than that, an exaggerated appreciation for the things of their world.⁸⁵

*Rumūz-i ātish mihri ki brahman na-shigāft
 za ahl-i dil na-shunādam ki nām mī guftand*
 (The mysteries of the fire of love which the brahman did not disclose
 I did not hear from the people of heart any [other] name [competent to
 unveil them])

Throughout the Mughal age, the poet thus showed awareness of the fact that the realm of the new poetry expanded much beyond its erstwhile frontiers. In relation to their predecessors, they saw themselves collectively as original, creative and innovative, even though each of them diverged from the other and experimented with new images and tropes in his/her own individual style. Enthralled with the poetry of his own time, the Mughal poet is obsessed with a sort of collective ego. Mirzā ‘Abd-ul-Qādir Bīdil (d. 1712), for instance, had not much in common with ‘Urfī, and yet he seems to be conscious of the fact they both belong to the same group.⁸⁶

*Ba fikr-i tāza-gūyān gar khayālam partav andāzad
 par-i tāūs gardad, jadval-i aurāq-i diwānhā*
 (If my fantasies radiate the vision of the fresh-speakers
 The pages of the *divāns* become [colourful like] the wings of the peacock)

Nāsir ‘Alī Sirhindī (d. 1696), sensitive to the accomplishments of the Mughal poet, emphasized the difference between the Indian diction and the one popular with the Iranians and declared boastfully that ‘The Iranian nightingale possessed little [similar] to the grandeur of the Indian peacock’.

*Bulbul-i Irān nadārad jalwa-i tāūs-i Hind*⁸⁷

Still, the Iranians’ enviable strength enabled them to dictate terms in Mughal India as much as in their own home in Iran. The incomparable accomplishments of hundreds of Indian Persian writers and

⁸⁵ ‘Urfī Shīrāzī, *Diwān*, p. 87.

⁸⁶ Mirzā ‘Abd-ul-Qādir Bīdil, *Kulliyāt* (Kabul, 1341), p. 81.

⁸⁷ Badakhshani (ed.), *Tārīkh-i Adabiyāt*, p. 465.

poets and the enthusiasm of thousands of their audience apart, the Iranians generally rejected outright the Indian usages (*istimāl-i Hind*, *tasarruf-i Hind*), following the Indians' centuries-old contact with, and command over, Persian. This was the case not simply with the Indian words and phrases; Indian ideas translated into Persian, Indian pronunciation and spellings of certain words were also unacceptable. The principal Persian philological works of the period, including *Sirāj-ul-Lughat* of Ārzū, *Mir'āt-ul-Istilāhāt* of Ānand Rām 'Mukhlis', *Mustalahāt-ush-Shu'arā'* of Siyālkotī Mal 'Wārasta' and *Bahār-i 'Ajam* of Munshi Tek Chand 'Bahār', were all oriented to update the language in the light of the current usages in Iran.⁸⁸

True, there were some attempts for Indian Persian to acquire an autonomous position, but these were feeble and exceptional. Ārzū, for instance, defends the *tasarruf* of masters like Mirzā Bīdil. In fact, in a bid to legitimize the use of the Indian words in Persian he earned the distinction of being the first to discover and point out the correspondence (*tawāfuq*) between Persian and Sanskrit. Besides *Sirāj-ul-Lughat* and *Chirāgh-i Hidāyat*, he discusses this at length in *Musmir* to show how these two languages are identical. He is conscious of his achievement. He writes:⁸⁹

To date no one, excepting this humble Ārzū and his followers, has discovered the *tawāfuq* (lit. agreement, concord) between Hindi and Persian, even though there have been numerous lexicographers and other researchers in both these languages. I have based on this principle in assessing the correctness of some of the Persian words, which I have illustrated in my books like *Sirāj-ul-Lughat* and *Chirāgh-i Hidāyat*.

It is strange that even the author of *Farhang-i Rashīdī* and those others who lived in India have neglected the *tawāfuq* between these two languages.

However., Ārzū's own writings are largely free from this *tasarruf*, implying, perhaps, that the ideal Persian was the unalloyed Iranian one.⁹⁰ Even if it may not sound very much relevant here, Amīr Khusrau's pride in his Hindavī is noteworthy:⁹¹

Shakkar-i Misrī na-dāram kaz Arab gūyam sukhan

⁸⁸ H. Blochmann, 'Contributions to Persian Lexicography', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal (JRASB)*, vol. 37, pt 1 (1868–69), pp. 1–72.

⁸⁹ Sirāj-ud-Dīn 'Alī Khān Ārzū, *Muthmir*, ed. Rehana Khatoon (Karachi, 1991), p. 221; see also Abdullah, *Mabāhis*, I, pp. 70–1. Interestingly, Ārzū's theory of *tawāfuq* is similar to, perhaps an earlier Indigenous of, William Jones's declaration of the relationship between the classical languages in 1785, which in turn laid the ground for the development of comparative philology.

⁹⁰ I.O. 4015, f. 44b.

⁹¹ Mohiuddin, *Chancellery*, pp. 23 and 26.

Turk-i Hindustāni-yam dar Hindavī gūyam jawāb.

(I have no Egyptian sugar with which to talk to an Arab,
I am an Indian Turk, I reply in Hindavī)

And he assertively boasted of the style mixed with the Indian delightful artifices, unmindful of how the Tranxonians and the Khurasanis reacted.

Possibly eighteenth-century social and political conditions had a bearing on Ārzū's position, which can be called ambiguous. On the one hand, there was pressure from the high Mughal culture which was more in support of an unmixed Iranized idiom, on the other, as a reaction to this influence, the newly risen Indian 'upstarts' threatened, sometimes, to dislodge the established elite.⁹² Ārzū attempted a kind of a compromise. He discovered Hindi's affinity with Persian, which incidentally was not a mere political ploy, and thus satisfied the urge of the upcoming elite. But in practice he maintained a position close to the one favoured by the established elite.

Ārzū also led a literary debate against Shaikh 'Alī 'Hazīn' (d. 1766), the eminent Iranian poet who came and settled in India in the period and who was generally dismissive about the Indian Persian poetry just because in his assessment it did not come up to the contemporary Iranian linguistic standards. But, interestingly, here again, Ārzū ventured to correct Hazīn in the light of the old established Persian usages,⁹³ or he simply pointed out the illogicality of some of the expressions in Hazīn's verses. At any rate, Hazīn had many followers (*kāsa-līsān* = cup-lickers) among the Indians. Some were unhappy with Ārzū's criticism and wrote rejoinders in support of Hazīn.⁹⁴

Persian, Hindavī and the Mughals: Indifference and Appropriation

Persian in Mughal India, its wide use, long career and unparalleled contributions apart, continued to be taken as a foreign language.

⁹² Compare, for some evidence, Khwushal Chand, *Nādir-uz-Zamānī*, British Museum Ms. Or. 1654, ff. 95b–96a and 111a–13a; see also M. Alam, 'Eastern India in Early 18th Century Crisis', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 28, no. 1 (January–March 1991), pp. 69–71.

⁹³ Compare, Ārzū, *Tanbīh-ul-Ghāfilīn*, ed. S. M. Akram, 'Ikram' (Lahore, 1981).

⁹⁴ Wārasta, for instance, wrote *Rajm-ush-Shayātīn*; Āzād Bilgrāmī was also critical of Ārzū, cf. Ikram's Introduction to *Tanbīh-ul-Ghāfilīn*.

Indeed, it was through the vicissitudes of its growth under the Mughals that it acquired a rather unequivocal Iranian identity. And as Persian signified high culture, being a language alien to the vast number of people, it perpetuated the distance between the rulers and the ruled. The Mughals in their fascination for Persian failed to give meaningful patronage to any language of the land. It was only in the late seventeenth century, when the regions began to assert their autonomy, that there seems to be a kind of Mughal policy to learn and encourage Hindavī.

This is not to suggest that the Mughals were totally indifferent to the Indian languages. Far from it. In fact Bābur mentions many Hindustānī words in his Memoir, and in a *dīwān* of his preserved in Riza Library, Rampur, scholars have also noticed a Hindavī couplet.⁹⁵ There is not much information for this purpose from Humāyūn's reign. Akbar grew up in India, married a Rajput princess and therefore it is not illogical to believe that he spoke good Hindavī, at least in its Rajputana form. Akbar's chroniclers attribute to him a large number of words and expressions, for almost every occasion, while many phrases in the Memoir of the next Mughal ruler, Jahāngīr, who was born to a Rajput mother, appear to be the obvious translations of Hindavī expressions.⁹⁶ Both Akbar and Jahāngīr were also fond of giving Hindi names to their pets and favourite animals. We come across elephants in the royal stable called Rūp-sundar, Ratan-gaj, Ran-rāwat, Gaj-rāj, Fauj-singār, etc. A very special deer of Jahāngīr was called Hans-rāj.⁹⁷ It is interesting to note that Jahāngīr sometimes distinguishes common Hindavī from the language of the Hindus.⁹⁸ Jahāngīr's successors, Shāhjahān and then Aurangzeb, according to their court chroniclers, had full command over 'Hindustānī'.⁹⁹ With the Great Mughals are also associated the names of

⁹⁵ Denison Ross's edition of *Dīwān-i Bābur Padishāh* with comments and Introduction in *JRASB*, vol. 6, New Series (Extra number, 1910), pp. 1-43.

⁹⁶ Note, for instance, *zada zada* in *Tuzak-i Jahāngīrī*, p. 103: *wa zada zada ān makh-zūlān rā dar mahall-i ki dāira karda būdand, dar mī āwurdand*; and *surkh surkh* on p. 105; *waqt-i ki dar mastī ast, surkh surkh ast, gūya ki tamām rā ba marjān-i murassa' sākhā*; and *kalān kalān* on p. 240; *wa mauja-hā kalān kalān ba-nazar dar-āmad*.

⁹⁷ *Tuzak*, pp. 44, 66, 141, 167 and 189.

⁹⁸ *Tuzak*, p. 144.

⁹⁹ 'Abdul Hamīd Lāhorī, *Badshāh-nāma*, ed. by Kabiruddin and Abdur Rahim, Bibl. Ind. (Calcutta, 1866) vol. I, p. 132; Muhammad Kāzim, *Ālamgīr-nāma*, ed. Khadim Husain and Abdul Hai (Calcutta, 1873), p. 1095; for Aurangzeb's and his son Muhammad Ā'zam's interest in Hindi, see also Suniti Kumar Chatterji, 'A Verse by Guru Nanak in the *Adi Granth* Quoted by Emperor Aurangzib Alamgir', *Selected Papers*, II, New Delhi, May 1978, pp. 185-93.

some Hindavī poets and of a couple of Sanskrit lexicographers.¹⁰⁰ Further, the compositions of the Indian musicians encouraged so generously by the Mughals were, in general, in Indian languages.¹⁰¹

However, there is little in our sources to suggest if Hindavī at any stage in the seventeenth century was regarded as a language of the Mughal court or administration.¹⁰² This was in sharp contrast to the developments in the regional Sultanates. Ibrāhīm ‘Ādil Shāh, who ascended the throne in Bijapur, the Deccan, in 942/1535–36, is reported to have proclaimed Hindavī (in this case Marathi) as the language of his government, entrusting all the important administrative and financial offices to the Brahmans.¹⁰³ Further, from the Barīd Shāhī Sultanate of Bidar (1503–1619), we have at least some inscriptions both in Persian and Marathi,¹⁰⁴ while local language had the honour of being the language of the Sultān in Golconda. Ibrāhīm Qutb Shāh encouraged the growth of Telugu and his successor Muhammad Qulī Qutb Shāh patronized and himself wrote poetry in Telugu and in Dakhni.¹⁰⁵ Abdullāh Qutb Shāh instituted a special office to prepare the royal edicts in Telugu (*dabīrī-ye farāmīn-i Hindavī*). While administrative and revenue papers at local levels in the Qutb Shāhī Sultanate were prepared largely in Telugu, the royal edicts were often bilingual.¹⁰⁶ The last Qutb Shāhī Sultān, Abul Hasan Tānā Shāh, sometimes issued his orders only in Telugu, with a Persian summary given on the back of the *farmāns*.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ Compare, for instance, Keshavdās’s *Jahāngīr Jas Chandrika* in *Keshavdās Granthāvalī*, ed. V. P. Misra (V. Samvat 2026), and a Sanskrit–Persian dictionary by Karnpur prepared on Jahāngīr’s order. The dictionary has been edited by Narharinath Yogi and published in 2009 Vikram Samvat from Gorakshpith, Nepal.

¹⁰¹ *Dhruṇpad* and *Khayāl* compositions, for instance, from Shāhjahān’s time.

¹⁰² Some historians of Urdū language, however, claim that in Shāhjahān’s time familiarity with Urdū (Hindavī) was an essential requirement for state service. Cf. Jamil Jalibi, *Tārīkh-i Adab-i Urdū*, reprint (Delhi, 1989), I, pp. 69–70.

¹⁰³ Muhammad Ibrāhīm Farishta, *Tārīkh-i Farishta* (Lucknow, 1281/1864), II, p. 49; see also Muhammad Hāshim Khāfi Khān, *Muntakhab-ul-Lubāb*, ed. K. D. Ahmad and Woseley Haig (Calcutta, 1925), III, pp. 206–7.

¹⁰⁴ G. Yazdani, *Bidar: Its History and Monuments*, pp. 140–203, cited in P. M. Joshi and H. K. Sherwani (eds), *History of Medieval Deccan* (Hyderabad, 1973), I, pp. 395–6.

¹⁰⁵ H. K. Sherwani, *Muhammad Qulī Qutb Shāh: Founder of Haiderabad* (Bombay, 1967), pp. 44–55.

¹⁰⁶ Mirzā Nizām-ud-Dīn Ahmad al-Sā‘idī al-Shīrāzī, *Hadīqat-us-Salātīn*, ed. S. Asghar Ali Bilgrami (Hyderabad, 1931), pp. 36 and 41; see also Joshi and Sherwani (eds), *History of Medieval Deccan*, I, pp. 40 and 48.

¹⁰⁷ Andhra Pradesh State Archives, *farmāns* dated (a) 1088/1677 about a land grant; (b) 1090/1679 pertaining to the weekly marts of Wanepur, Ibrahimpattan; (c) 1093/1682 about a land grant; and (d) 1087/1676 about the construction of a temple at Wanipur, Ibrahimpattan.

On the contrary, the memory about the Great Mughals in the regions was that they discouraged the local languages. Legend goes that when Akbar conquered Gujarat, all the poets and writers of the local language of the province fled to, and took shelter in, the courts of the Deccan Sultāns.¹⁰⁸ However, the compilation of *Tuhfat-ul-Hind* by Mirzā Khān later in Aurangzeb's reign possibly signified a serious and organized effort to persuade the Mughal elite to learn the local language and script. The book, divided into seven chapters dealing with different popular branches of Indian sciences, begins with an analysis of Hindi alphabets, script and essential grammar. At the end of the book (*khātima*) is a detailed glossary of the words, phrases, idioms and similes used by the people of Hind.¹⁰⁹ Mirzā Khān wrote the book for the princes with an intention to inspire them and equip them to learn current traditional Indian sciences (*'ulūm-i mutadāwila-i Hindīyya*). The noted late seventeenth–early eighteenth-century Hindi poet, Vrind, was reportedly among the teachers of Prince Muhammad 'Āzīm.¹¹⁰ Again, the preparation of formal Hindi–Persian dictionaries, in particular *Gharā'ib-ul-Lughāt* by Mīr 'Abd-ul-Wāsi' of Hānsī, at this stage was also perhaps an attempt in this direction, even though the principal objective of these dictionaries, as their compilers stated, was to provide Persian equivalents to the Hindavī words in common use.¹¹¹

There is evidence of increasing interest of the Mughals in Hindavī/ Braj poetry in the early eighteenth century. Aurangzeb's grandson, Prince Muhammad Rafī-ush-Shān wrote poetry in Hindi under the pen-name of 'Nyāyi'.¹¹² 'Abd-ur-Rahmān Premī, a well-known *Reetikal* poet, was patronized by the Emperor Farrukh Siyar (1712–19).¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Abdul Majid Siddiqi, *Tārkh-i Golconda* (Hyderabad, 1964), p. 395.

¹⁰⁹ Compare, for instance, the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris MS., Blochet I, 235. Nurul Hasan Ansari edited the Introduction first five chapters and published the book from Tehran, 1536. In this edition, however, the first part, Introduction (*muqaddima*) is not printed in full. The Hindi alphabets in Nāgrī character have invariably been omitted.

¹¹⁰ Compare Vrind, *Vrind Satsai*, ed. Bhagwandeem (Allahabad, 1908), editor's Introduction; see also R. C. Shukl, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās* (Kashi, Samvat 2035), p. 225.

¹¹¹ Compare Masud Husain Rizvi Adeeb, 'Urdū kī Qadīm Lughat', reprinted in the *Journal of the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library* (Patna, 1993), Special No. *Intikhāb az Risāla Hindustānī* (Allahabad, 1931–48), p. 18, for the Preface of *'Ajā'ib-ul-Lughāt*, which Ajmerī Palwalī compiled, based on 'Abd-ul-Wāsi's *Gharā'ib*, sometime in the early eighteenth century.

¹¹² Muhammad Hādī Kāmwar Khān, *Tazkirat-us-Salātīn Chaghtā*, ed. Muzaffar Alam (Bombay, 1980), p. 157.

¹¹³ 'Abd-ur-Rahmān Premī, *Nakh-Sikh*, ed. Iqbal Ahmad (Bombay, 1959), editor's Introduction. For an analysis of his poetry, see also Sandhya Sharma, 'Aspects of

One of his nobles patronized Nawāz, a Braj poet, who rewrote *Shankuntala*, adapting from both the story of the *Mahābhārata* and the drama of Kālidās. Nawāz then earned the coveted title of ‘Kabīshwar’ or poet laureate from the Emperor.¹¹⁴ The title, in contrast to the one of *Kab-rāi* awarded by Shāhjahān, assumes special significance in view of the fact that at Farrukh Siyar’s court there was no poet laureate in Persian. Later, Emperor Shāh Ālam II (1761–1818) composed poetry in Hindi, using both the Nagri and Persian scripts.¹¹⁵ All this must have affected the dominance of Persian. A simultaneous drive at Persianization of Hindavī, however, offset the balance.

In the face of the asserting regional forces in the eighteenth century the Mughals accorded a respectable position to Hindavī by admitting it in their *sarkārs*, but many of them also saw to it that it was heavily Persianized. In the first place, even as Mirzā Khān prepared a manual for the Mughal elites to learn Hindi script, Hindavī, if it was to be a language of this class, was to be written only in Persian script. Secondly, it would thenceforth be given the name of the language of the imperial camp (*zubbān-i Urdū-i mu‘allā*, *zubbān-i Urdū-i Shāhī*). In other words, it was the language that evolved at the Mughal camp, and not the language of the region, which the Mughals recognized and appropriated.

Both these positions have been argued out fairly cogently in the writings of Ārzū, which represented best the Mughal stand during the period. He prepared his own Hindi–Persian dictionary, *Nawādir-ul-Alfāz*, and even if he based it on Mīr ‘Abd-ul-Wāsi’s *Gharāib*, he dismissed many words used by him as the ones belonging to ‘the tongue of the illiterates (*zubbān-i juhāl*)’. While ‘Abd-ul-Wāsi’ characterized as correct and lucid (*fasīh*) in Hindavī many of the Indianized or rather locally corrupt spellings/pronunciations of the Persian words, Ārzū insisted on their original Persian forms. In a discussion on Persian, Pahlavī and Darī, Ārzū says that the most accurate and elegant form of a language is the one spoken at a royal camp. For it

Society and Culture in *Reeti Poetry*, unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi, 1991).

¹¹⁴ Nawaz Kabishwar, *Shakuntala* (Varanasi, 1924). See also an Urdu prose version of the same prepared by Kāzīm Alī Jawān in 1801, reprinted with Introduction and notes by Muhammad Aslam Quraishi (Lahore, 1963); Masud Hasan Rizvi Adeeb, ‘Nawāz aur Shakuntala Nātak’, *Nuqoosh* (Lahore, June 1963).

¹¹⁵ Compare Shāh Ālam II, *Nādirāt-i Shāhī*, ed. Imtiaz Ali Khan Arshi (Rampur, 1944).

is the language of the camp which the king and his nobles speak, and which is distinctly different from the language of the villagers and the people of petty towns. Prose and poetry of high standards are written only in this language.¹¹⁶

Again, Hindavī poetry was made to conform to the Persian standards. The transition in the poetry of Walī Dakkanī (d. 1712), which was composed earlier, dominantly in 'Indo-Aryan traditions', to a diction full of 'Persian subjects and themes', illustrated the extent of Persianization of Hindavī.¹¹⁷

By Persianizing Hindavī, the Mughals intended to purify the language and thus raise it to a level commensurate with their culture and life-style. We have seen how Ārzū refused to incorporate in his 'language of the royal camp' the Hindavīized Persian words. Here, again, Ārzū's position deserves special notice. In the matter of Persian he defended, even if with a reservation, *tasarruf-i Hind* or Mughal Indian Persian in the face of the onslaught against it by the Iranians and their Indian 'cup-lickers' and thus asserted the sovereignty of the Mughals. In the matter of Hindavī, he took a position of reconciliation and, having done assiduous research on *tawāfuq* and thus legitimating his stand, adjusted to the demands of the rising regions. None the less, he firmly declined to compromise on the supremacy of the culture of the Mughal court.

Ārzū found strong support for this in Shāh Hātim, another notable Mughal writer and poet of the period. In 1755, Hātim laid down principles to replace the local words by Perso-Arabic ones with their original spellings.¹¹⁸ Ārzū and Hātim's positions echoed the deliberations of the meetings which used to take place at the *havelī* of Amīr Khān (d. 1744) and where a number of nobles and notables assembled to listen to Persian poetry and consider 'reforms' of Hindavī poetry and prose.¹¹⁹ Amīr Khān, it may be noted, was a patron of Persian poets and an important leader of 'the Iranian lobby' in Muhammad Shāh's reign (1719–48). It was Amīr Khān who first welcomed Hazīn and arranged his *jāgīr* on the latter's arrival from Iran.¹²⁰ As the Persianized Mughals adopted Hindavī, they

¹¹⁶ Ārzū, *Muthmir*, p. 9; Abdullah, *Mahāhis*, pp. 59–82 and 76–7.

¹¹⁷ For a discussion on Persianization of Hindavī, see Amrit Rai, *A House Divided: The Origin and Development of Hindi/Hindavī* (Delhi, 1984), pp. 226–84. Amrit Rai's argument is, however, centred on cultural (read religious) factors only.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 249–50.

¹¹⁹ S. Nasir Husain Khan, *Mughal aur Urdū* (Calcutta, 1933), pp. 50–61.

¹²⁰ Ahmad Alī Sandilavī, *Makhzan-ul-Gharā'ib*, ed. Muhammad Baqar (Lahore, 1968), I, p. 801.

changed its direction as well. From the language of a region it turned to be the language of the royal camp.

Conclusion

There may have been many reasons for the unprecedented rise of Persian in Mughal India—a desire on the part of Akbar to pay off the debt the Mughals owed to Iran, the necessity to counteract the ambitious Chaghtāi nobles and thus promote Iranians in Mughal service, an urge to compete with and excel the Iranian Shāh, among other things by encouraging the Iranian intellectuals and poets to come over and settle in India, the sheer force of the Persianized Muslim civilization of Central and West Asia and its inevitable and logical extension to Mughal India. All of them may have influenced the trajectory of the development of the language; or just one of them or a combination of two or three would have been decisive for its dominance at a given stage. It is a moot point if Akbar by patronizing the Iranians could neutralize the awe the Iranian Shāh had exercised over the Mughal household in the early phase. In his regime, certainly, a process set in to rapidly Iranize the Mughal literary culture. However, the choice of Persian, as the language of the empire was, in a very large measure, also in consideration of the specific Indian conditions. The non-sectarian and liberal feature of Persian made it an ideal forum through which the Mughals could effectively negotiate the diversities of the Indian society. The culture and the ethos of the language matched with their vision of an over-arching empire. Persian became a particularly useful instrument for political manoeuvrability, also because pre-Mughal India had developed familiarity with the language.

A large part of the long spell of Mughal rule saw the evolution of the language from a merely state-building tool to a social and cultural signifier, and eventually to a major definer of Mughal identity. Knowledge of Persian, to begin with, remained confined to the court, from the exalted portals of which it demarcated the conquerors from the vanquished. But soon it moved beyond and percolated down to the lower rungs of administration.

With the popularization of Persian along the chain of administrative and political command also continued its Islamic overtone. Persian, like Arabic, was seen as the language of Islam. The elite Mughal identity which was not necessarily religiously defined then

came to acquire an Islamic tinge as well. However, in the Mughals' efforts to purge Persian from the non-Persian, including the Arabic, words, conflict between the Indian and Iranian diction and in the eventual domination of the latter over the former one could also see a continuous endeavour to define their power and political identity in non-religious idioms.

Late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century politics brought to the fore a serious threat from the region to the central elite identity. The initial Mughal response to this danger was one of modifying the provincial institutions. Soon, however, the increasing cultural affirmation of the region expressed in its linguistic diversity had to be accommodated in more meaningful ways. They recognized the need to culturally integrate and accommodate with, and not simply to dominate, the regions. This could be illustrated from the interest they showed in Hindavī. Yet Hindavī was first Persianized before its entry into the charmed circle of the Mughal echelons. The linguistic contestations had no religious bearings; they reflected, however, once again the tensions between the peoples in the regions and the Persianized Mughal elites. It is difficult to say if it was because of the intrinsic strength of the language or just in consideration of its association with power and prestige that the indigenous subordinate ruling groups and 'bureaucracy' appropriated Persian.