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HINDU PERSIAN POETS

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HINDU PERSIAN POETS

From the late 16th century Hindus contributed to the development of Indo-Persian literary culture in general, and to the output of Persian verse in particular. They made such a substantial and wide-ranging impact that Henry (Heinrich) Blochmann (q.v.) went so far as to claim that “before the end of the 18th century the Hindus had almost become the Persian teachers of the Muhammadans” (Abu’l-Faḡl ‘Allāmī, pp. 377-78). Among the factors favoring this phenomenon was the establishment in 1582 of Persian as the official Mughal administrative language at all levels at the behest of Akbar (q.v.; 1556-1605), promulgated by his finance minister Todar Mal (d. 1589). In some ways anticipated by the active pro-Persian cultural policies of the ruler of Kashmir, Zayn-al-‘Ābedin (1420-70) and Sekandar Lōdi (1489-1517), one of the results of formally adopting Persian was to encourage the large Hindu communities, which had previously carried out their administrative work in Hindavi, to learn Persian and work alongside the Persian clerks used by the Mughal government (Alam and Subrahmanyam, p. 62). Employed as scribes and secretaries and linked to the dominant Muslim classes, the members of these groups were largely responsible for the Hindu contribution to the various fields of Indo-Persian literature. The caste communities were, in order of importance, the Kāyastha, Khatri, Kashmiri Pandits, and Sindhi ‘Āmils (Ahmad, pp. 105-7). The more open cultural and religious policy begun by Akbar through the initiatives of the minister, Abu’l-Faḡl ‘Allāmī (q.v.; 1551-1602), also encouraged Hindus to write literary works in Persian; a fundamental role in this context was played by the translation into Persian of very varied works from the Indian tradition, and by the influence exercised by the philosophical circle of the prince Dārā Šokōh (q.v.; 1615-58) on the Hindu intellectual elites associated with the Mughal court. The opening of various schools of Sufi poetry to non-Muslim disciples, such as that of the *naqšbandi* Mirzā Maḡhar Jān-e Jānān (d. 1781), was equally important. The phenomenon was not limited to the period and territories of Akbar and his successors but also extended to the independent Deccan (q.v.) principalities in the 17th century before their annexation to the Mughal Empire, the various regional states created by the break-up of the empire from the beginning of the 18th century and, lastly, to British India.

According to Ferešta (q.v.), the beginning of a serious Hindu interest in Persian can be traced back to the period of Sekandar Lōdi (Ferešta, 1831, p. 344; Idem, 1981, p. 344). The first evidence of a Hindu author writing Persian verse dates to that time, to ‘Abd-al-Qāder Badā’uni’s (q.v.) comment that a learned Brahmin, probably called Pandit Dungar Mal (‘Abd-Allāh, p. 36), was said to have composed Persian poetry. Badā’uni also quotes a line of verse attributed to this author (Badā’uni, 1868, p. 323; Idem, 1898, p. 426). To find more substantial information about a Hindu Persian poet we must go directly to Akbar’s day, when the Rajput noble Mirzā Manōhar “Towsani” composed a *divan* (*divān*) and a *mathnawi* (*mathnawi*; both lost). His poetry seems to have been so greatly appreciated that, according to the *Tadkera-ye gol-e ra’nā*, “he was the first Hindu poet whose fame reached Iran, and Mirzā Šā’eb granted him the honor of having some of his verse included in his own *bayāz*” (Šafiq Awrangābādi, p. 40). As far as we can judge based on the surviving evidence, from the linguistic-stylistic point of view, his work would seem to fall into the prevalent style of the late 16th-century Mughal court led by Akbar’s poet laureate Fayzi (q.v.; d. 1595).

The earliest surviving complete Persian verse works of Hindu origin date to the reigns of Jahāngir (q.v.; 1605-27) and Shah Jahān (1627-57). From 1626 there is a versified abridged translation of the *Rāmāyana* (Rieu, I, pp. 56-57, Or. 1251) by Girdhar Dās, a Kāyastha from Delhi of whom very little is known (Sharma, p. 673). Čandra Bhān “Barahman” (q.v.; d. 1662-63) is probably the first Hindu author of whom we have a complete divan (Fāruqi, 1967), as well as some important works in prose. A Brahmin from the Panjab, Čandra Bhān was a munshi (*monši*) at the court of Shah Jahān, which he sensitively and elegantly portrayed in his historical-autobiographical work *Čahār čaman*. Focused on traditional themes of mystical gnosticism (*‘erfān*), his poetic style was praised by the critics for its classical elegance and forthright manner (e.g. Sarkuš, p. 36). Another, albeit poetically less talented, Hindu writer was Banwāli Dās “Wali” (d. 1674). A contemporary of Brahman, he had close links with Dārā Šokōh, and his works include a mystical divan (Storey, p. 451) and a philosophical mathnaw entitled *Omnāma* (Monżawi, IV, p. 2135, no. 3871). Little is known of Mathurā Dās “Hendu,” an author from the period of Shah Jahān. He composed a divan (Ethé, col. 852, no. 1559) and two mathnawis: *Laylā o Majnun* and *Ķosrow o Širin* (Sachau and Ethé, col. 686, no. 1101). His divan of around 1000 lines was composed in a style similar to that of Čandra Bhān Barahman and he does not indulge in the subtle wordplays of the Indian Style, which was growing in popularity as a style at the time. Hendu did, however, make use of extended *radifs* and difficult rhymes.

The end of the 17th and the whole of the 18th century saw a considerable rise in the number of Hindu authors who tried their hand at all the Persian poetic forms, producing a great variety of works. From the thematic point of view, there was a greater tendency to identify various aspects of the Vedānta monist philosophical system with the Sufi and *‘erfāni* concepts from the Islamic tradition. At the same time there was a growing number of mathnawis dedicated to typically Indian subjects. The Hindu authors of ghazals (*gāzals*) from this period, like their Muslim counterparts, showed a predilection for the Indian Style. The Hindu interest in lexicography and biographical sketches of poets with an anthology of their poems (*tađkeras*) also grew. In these disciplines Hindus played a leading role in India at least until the mid-19th century (although beyond our scope here, it is worth mentioning the *Bahār-e ‘ajam* by Lāla Tēk Čand “Bahār” (d. 1766), and the *Moštalahāt al-šo ‘arā* by Siālkōti Mal “Vārasta,” d. 1766, in the field of lexicography, and for the *tađkeras*, the *Safina-ye Ķ’ošgu* by Bindrāban Dās “Ķ’ošgu,” (d. 1756), and the *Gol-e ra ‘nā* and *Šām-e ġaribān*, by Lačhmi Narāyan “Šafiq” Awrangābādi (d. after 1808).

Some of the many Hindu poets associated with the circle that formed around Mirzā ‘Abd-al-Qāder “Bidel” (q.v.; 1644-1720) at Delhi deserve mention: Anand Rām “Moĳ-leš” (q.v.; d. 1751), who not only produced a fine divan (Ethé, col. 925, no. 1707), inducing Wāleh Dāgestāni to hail him as the best Hindu Persian poet of his own time (Wāleh Dāgestāni, p. 706), but he also wrote various works in prose including the *Mer ‘at al-eštelāh*, a major lexicographic text dedicated to the Persian poetical phrases and proverbial sentences used in Mughal India; Lāla Amānat Rāy “Amānat” (d. 1732-33), whose main work was the *Jelwa-ye dāt* (Ethé col. 918, no. 1696), a mathnawi of around 8000 lines interspersed with *robā’is* and ghazals, based on the *Bhāgavata Purāna* and of great interest because it tends to an Islamic interpretation of the figure and deeds of Krishna; and Lāla Šivrām Dās “ĤOayā” (d. 1731-32), who wrote a work dedicated to Mathurā, the holy city of the Hindus, entitled *Golgašt-e bahār-e eram*, modeled on Bidel’s *Čahār ‘onšor* (‘Abd-Allāh, p. 202), and a divan (Sachau and Ethé, col. 713, no. 1171) mainly consisting of ghazals, strongly influenced by the style of his master. On the evidence of some *tađkeras* (e.g. Ķ’ošgu, p. 158), one of Bidel’s most important disciples seems to have been the Hindu Lāla Sukh Rāj “Sabqat” (d. 1725) from Lucknow.

The already mentioned Mirzā Mazhar Jān-e Jānān, stated that the Hindus had been favored by Divine Revelation (Rizvi, pp. 400-3), and brought Hindu disciples into his circle, including Basāwan Lāl “Bidār” (d. after 1734-35), mentioned in *tađkeras* for his good poetic skills (Ķ’ošgu, p. 310). One very important figure in this context of spiritual and poetic schools open to non-Muslims is Bhōpat Rāy

“Biḡam Bairāgi,” a Khatri from Jammu (d. 1719), described as a devout disciple of both a Vaishnava wandering ascetic (*bairāgi*) known as Narāyan Bairāgi (K̄vošgu, p. 101; according to Šafiq Awrangābādi, p. 32, his name was Narāyan Rām) and a Muslim shaikh, the Sufi Moḥammad Šādeq (‘Abd-Allāh, p. 314). In poetry, he was instructed by Mirzā Afzal “Sark̄voš” (d. 1715: Sark̄voš, p. 37). His main work, a long mathnawi (Biḡam, 1868) sometimes described as *Qeşaṣ-e foqarā-ye hend*, clearly fuses Rumi’s thought with Vedantic conceptions (‘Abd-Allāh, pp. 321-34). Among the many other 18th-century Hindu authors of Persian verse whose works have survived to the present day are: Jaswant Rāy “Monši” (d. 1785-86), a Kāyastha from Lahore who emigrated to southern India, where he was employed by Sa‘adat-Allāh Khān, the governor of the Carnatic, and composed various prose works and a short lyrical divan in the Indian Style (Ethé, col. 917-18, no. 1695); the prolific lyrical writer Rāy Sarab Suḡ- “Divāna” (d. 1788), who emigrated from Delhi to Lucknow and became a disciple of Mirzā Fāker “Makin” (d. 1806) and who in turn was a reference point for various followers (Anis, pp. 170-74; for his divan see Rampur Raza Library, p. 359); and Sāḥeb Rām “K̄āmūš” (d. 1810), a monšifrom Delhi at the time of Shāh ‘Ālam II (1759-1806) and a disciple of the Persian emigrant poet ḤOazin Lāhiji (q.v.; d. 1766), who left a very large divan containing qaṣidas, qeṭ‘as, mathnawis, ghazals, and robā‘is (Rieu, II, p. 724, Or. 459).

From the late 17th century some Sikhs also contributed to the Persian poetry of India, such as Bhāi Nand Lāl “Guyā” (d. ca. 1712), a Hindu from Ghazna who later became a keen follower of Guru Gobind (the tenth guru of the Sikh-Panth) and who wrote various poetic works which are now part of Sikh canonical literature (Fenech, 1994, p. 49; on this poet’s enigmatic historical identity see Fenech, 2005), and Diwān Singh “K̄aliq” from Lahore (18th cent.), of whose life we know practically nothing (Z’ . Aḥmad, p. 236-39; K̄aliq, pp. 24-30) but have an interesting divan of around a hundred ghazals in the Indian Style as well as a mathnawi on the story of Ṣayf-al-Moluk and Badi‘-al-Jamāl (Ashraful Hukk et al., p. 228, no. 322). Guru Gobind himself is also credited with having written a Persian mathnawi, entitled *Z’afarnāma* (‘Abd-Allāh, p. 216; McLeod, p. 80; Shackle and Mandair, pp. 137-44).

In a non-exhaustive list, ‘Abd-Allāh cites over 130 names of Hindu Persian poets who lived in the late 18th and 19th century (‘Abd-Allāh, pp. 253-59). Among them mention must at least be made of Rāja Ratan Singh “Zaḡmi” (d. 1851), a descendent of a Kāyastha family for generations in the service of the nawābs of Oudh. He wrote various prose works (e.g. a taḡkera of poets entitled *Anis al-‘āšeqin: Srivāstāvā*, pp. 127-29) and a divan containing ghazals, *moḡ-ammasāt* and robā‘is (Zaḡmi, 1837). Another important figure was Har Gōpāl “Tafta” (d. 1879) of Sekandarābād, he too a Kāyastha and a favorite disciple of Mirzā Ġāleb, who left as many as four collections of Persian verse of great stylistic value (Tafta, 1869). Lastly, of special note is Mirzā Moḥammad ḤOasan “Qatil” (d. 1817). We mention him here because he was born into a Hindu family and converted to Islam at the age of eighteen and so abandoned his previous name, Diwāli Singh. Having moved from his native Delhi to Lucknow, he became a key figure for Persian culture in the capital of Oudh, attracting many disciples. In addition to a divan of lyrical verse (Rampur Raza Library, pp. 362-63) which was a great influence on poets of the next generation, he wrote several prose works dedicated to the Persian language and poetics, such as the *Šajarat al-amāni* and the *Nahr al-faṣāḥat*, dealing with grammar, rhetoric, styles of writing, and, very interestingly, the peculiarities of Indian Persian.

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(Stefano Pello)

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