



The Role of Persian Language before Independence in India

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Abstract

The role of Persian language in India was very important and it was used as the second official language of India, the Persian language considered as the language of culture and science of subcontinent, before the British colonized India. The Persian language was replaced by English Language in India in 1832. Before 1832, the Persian language was spoken by people from Sind to Bengal. The Farsi language is used among the Indian people as only the same language among them where as Indian languages differed from group to group and the people had the different dialects in every place of Subcontinent. The Farsi was never an indigenous language of India. It was used as a lingua-franca of many middle-eastern and Asian countries, from around 1000 A.D. - 1800 A.D. In India particularly, it was used as a language of culture and education in several Muslim courts. It was customary to know Farsi, along with Sanskrit, by both Hindu and Muslim scholars in those times, chiefly because the rules of the game demanded it.

Keywords: Britishers, Persian, Indian languages.

1. Introduction

In the case of the history of Persian language, Persian language is known as one of the oldest languages in the world, this language is directly related to Indo-European language and it is known in the world as a branch of Indo-European language and it has root in the history of human being and came back to Aryans group were an old group arrived to Persia area from western Asia. *Rashidvash* (2012) mentioned that among the earliest civilizations in Mesopotamia, Iran was inhabited by human. But Iranian history dates back to 3200 BC. The first dynasty was *Achaemenids*, and the great founder of this empire was Cyrus. In addition, he was the first emperor established the charter of human rights and this empire was overthrown by *Alexander the Great* in 330 BC was empire of Seleucid Greek Dynasty. In this discussion, we consider briefly the history of the Persian language from Old Persian language to Modern Persian language. Old language in Iran is referred to *Achaemenid* Iranian language (until 400 BEC); this language is related to *Avestan* or *Zarathshtra* language. *Fekri- Ershad* and *Mehrabi* (2006) divided the Iranian old language into the four parts:

1. Old Persian
2. Avestan
3. Sacian
4. Median.

Abolghassemi (1994) indicated that in the beginning of the first Millennium B.C., one of the Iranian Arian groups settled down in the high grounds of Iran, thus; old Persian language became independent language and the language prevailed in the area along with the other local dialects were used by the people. The use of Persian in the domains of power was the part of the Orientalist language policy. The East India Company's modest patronage of traditional Oriental studies was one manifestation of the prevailing policy of Orientalism; that was the official ideology of British India from the time of *Warren Hastings* (1773-85) until the arrival of the liberal reformer *William Bentinck* (1828-35), whose Governor- Generalship witnessed a decisive shift towards Anglicism in official workings. The policy of Orientalism interwove the company's political need to reconcile Indians to the emerging British Raj with the scholarly interest of individual British officials in Indian languages and culture.

Orientalists in India used material both in Sanskrit and in Persian to access India's textual traditions. According to *Gauri Viswanathan*, Orientalism was adopted as an official policy because the British had a political sense that an efficient India administration rested on an understanding of 'Indian culture. The Orientalist position was that a Western political tradition could be successfully grafted upon Indian society without having to direct itself toward the transformation of that society along western lines. Thus, the convergence of British political and intellectual interests is revealed in the establishment of the Calcutta Madarsas, to which Hastings contributed personally, and the Sanskrit College at Banaras, which owed its foundation to the initiative of the Company official Jonathan Duncan. For the first two decades of nineteenth century, the British education policy in India retained a predominantly Orientalist character. At the forefront of the campaign to anglicize Indian education and society was the Evangelical movement, followers of which believed that the introduction of Western education and Christianity would transform a morally decadent society. One of the best-known Orientalist scholars, *Sir William Jones*, described his impression in 1798 in the following terms:

.. *India lay before us, and Persia on our left, whilst a breeze from Arabia blew nearly on our stem ... If gave me inexpressible pleasure to find myself in the midst of so noble an amphitheatre almost encircled by the vast regions of Asia, which has ever been esteemed the nurse of sciences, the inventors of delightful and useful arts, the scene of glorious actions, fertile in the productions of human genius, abounding in natural wonders, and infinitely diversified in the forms of religion and government, in the law, manners, customs, and languages, as well as in the features and complexions, of men ... I have ever considered languages as the mere instruments of real learning, and think them improperly confounded with learning itself: the attainment of them is, however, indispensably necessary.*

Parsi or Persian was the language of the Parsa people who ruled Iran between 550 - 330 BCE. It belongs to what scholars call the Indo-Iranian group of languages. It became the language of the Persian Empire and was widely spoken in the ancient days ranging from the borders of India in the east, Russian in the north, the southern shores of the Persian Gulf to Egypt and the Mediterranean in the west. Writing letters and drafting documents was an important business of the state administration in the Mughal state. This was taken care of by *Darul Insha*. *Ilm al-insha* refers to the art of drafting letters and documents and also means the creation and construction of letters, documents and state papers. It has been a part of Muslim literary and politico-diplomatic world from the very beginning. The term is also applied to the writings of a refined prose style. According to one scholar, 'the final aim of *insha* is to acquire a knowledge of the virtues and faults (*muhasin wa ma 'aib*) of prose composition, but the principal forms involved in the study of *insha* are *khutab* (sermons) and *rasa 'if* (epistles)'. *Insha* in this respect takes two forms: one is addressed to the general reader (without specifying any name) and can be called individual style; the other is addressed to a specific person can be named as chancellery style. Amongst the *Munsha 'at* (anthologies) which were prescribed or read were the *Ruqa 'at-i-Jami*, *Bada' 'i al-isha*, *Mukatabat-i- 'Allami* or *Insha '-i- Abu 'l Fazl*, *Sahifa-ishahi* and the *Nami-i-nami*. All the rules and conditions related to the art of epistolary composition, and the manners of writing and composing (*a 'in-i-kitabat wa a 'in-i- 'ibaraat*) as formulated by the great exponents of the art, were thoroughly dwelt upon before a *munshi* could enter the service in that capacity. Thus, the process involved considerable training over a long period of time, and apprenticeship had an elaborate code of conduct and learning. Even hindu *munshis* were trained and educated in the ethos of Persianized composite culture. During the Mughal rule, and subsequently right up to the full establishment of British rule, Persian was widely adopted by the Bengali elite as the language of administration and high culture. Members of families of the landed classes who had dealings with the Mughal court and desired to positions in administration studied Persian.

As Persian was the language of the court, much of the literature produced in this period was written in Persian. *Amir Khusrau* and *Amir Hasan Dehelvi* wrote superb poetry in Persian. Historians like *Minhas-us-Siraj* and *Zia Barani* and *Ibn Batuta* who came to India during those days wrote accounts of rulers, important political events and incidents in this language. In the medieval period, Persian was adopted as the court language. Several historical accounts, administrative manuals

and allied literature in this language have come down to us. The mughal rulers were great patrons of leaning and literature. *Babar* wrote his tuzuk (autobiography) in Turkish language, but his grandson *Akbar* got it translated into Persian. *Akbar* patronized many scholars. He got Mahabharata translated into Persian. Jahangir's autobiography (Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri) is in Persian and is a unique piece of literature. It is said that *Noorjahan* was an accomplished Persian poetess. Quite a fair amount of Persian literature has been produced by the courtiers of the Mughals. *Abul Fazl's* Akbarnamah and Ain-e-Akbari is a fine piece of literature. From there we get a good deal of information about Akbar and his times. *Faizi* wrote beautiful Persian poetry. Several collections of letters of the Mughal period (insha) have come down to us. Besides shedding light on Mughal history, they indicate different styles of letter writing. Another name in prose and history writing is that of *Chandra Bhan*, a writer of Shahjahan's days. Similarly, we have a work named Tabqat-i-Alamgiri, shedding light on Aurangzeb. *Badauni* was another writer who belonged during Akbar's time. In the twentieth century, *Iqbal* wrote good Persian poetry. All this has now become a part of Indian heritage and culture.

The Britishers were entirely dependent on the Indian *munshis* for record keeping and writing letters of administration and court correspondence. In 1800, the British started training *munshis* at colleges of Fort Williams in Calcutta and Haileybury in Britain. Later, between 1820 and 1850, a new generation of *munshis* appeared who were educated in English in addition to vernacular languages. The British also realized that even their English employees needed to have a working knowledge of the Persian language. The prestige of Persian as the best language for an ambitious British cadet or junior writer continued into the early nineteenth century. Hastings; who had lobbied unsuccessfully in 1765 for the establishment of a Chair in Persian at Oxford, vigorously argued that Persian and Arabic should be the keystone of curriculum at the newly established Company's College at Fort William. When *Lord Wellesley* opened the College at Fort William in 1801, he expressed the opinion that no civil servant should be nominated to certain offices of trust and responsibility until it was ascertained that he was sufficiently acquainted with the laws and regulations of the government, and the language of the country. He allowed the young men two years to acquire these qualification and fixed January 1801 as the period after which no appointment would be given except to those who had passed an examination in the native languages. In the years between 1813 and 1857 the East India Company was obliged to make and state a clear policy for Persian. With the establishment of a General Committee of Public Instruction (henceforth GCPI) in 1823 the task at hand, pertaining to educational institutions and grants became clearer. In accordance with this policy, the GCPI in Bengal introduced modern science and English established new colleges at Calcutta, Agra and Delhi whose curricula were intended to blend Indian and Western learning. In 1829 *Lord William Bentinck*, wrote to the GCPI that

"to promote the great object of improving India by spreading abroad the lights of European knowledge, morals, and civilization ... it is the wish and admitted policy of the British Government to render its own language gradually and eventually the language of public business throughout the country."

The last phase of such a policy started in 1837 with the replacement of Persian. In this and subsequent sections we will discuss the struggle between the supporters of education in Indian languages and in English, and how this struggle culminated in the removal of Persian as an official language in 1837.

The period between 1820 and 1835 is known as the period of the Orientalist Anglicist controversy in writings on educational history. The Orientalists, like *Colebrooke* (himself a former Persian Secretary), sided instinctively with men of traditional Arabic and Sanskrit learning and the wealthy and distinguished families who patronized them. The Anglicists; on the other hand, *Trevelyan* and *Macaulay* being the foremost among them, proclaimed their desire to let the light of Western knowledge flood in upon all Indians, without regard to cast or creed. In particular they hoped to break the stranglehold of Brahmans on government-backed education. The Orientalists were to remain the dominant influence on education policy in Bengal until 1833, when Bentinck appointed Charles Trevelyan to the General Committee of Public Instruction in place of Wilson. Trevelyan immediately set about attacking the Oriental colleges and at the same time initiated a vigorous campaign in support

of the Anglicist cause in the press, in which he publicized his controversial scheme to romanise the Indian vernaculars.

2. Conclusion

The Farsi was never an indigenous language of India. It was used as a lingua-franca of many middle-eastern and Asian countries, from around 1000 A.D. - 1800 A.D. In India particularly, it was used as a language of culture and education in several Muslim courts. It was customary to know Farsi, along with Sanskrit, by both Hindu and Muslim scholars in those times, chiefly because the rules of the game demanded it. For example, *Ram Mohan Roy*, who is also known as the Father of Indian Renaissance, was fluent in Farsi, Arabic, Sanskrit and English, and his knowledge in these languages was crucial to him becoming a revered scholar in those times. Farsi was the language of the educated elite and the ruling elite. Farsi got replaced with English by the British colonizers in India. So, one widely-spoken, official foreign language was replaced by another foreign language, which would become widely spoken and official language of India. At the same time, Hindi and Urdu were being encouraged to develop as vernacular languages in India, as a colonial project to increase rapport with the natives, and as a mode to replace Persian or Farsi as a spoken language. An act of 1837 replaced the use of Persian with Indian vernacular languages. The act called for administration in local and provincial levels to be done in a local Indian language. The proponents of the Act argued that Indians should be administered in a language which they understood, and Persian was a foreign language which was only accessible by the educated elite and therefore no longer sufficient. Though no vernacular language was specified as such, it was made clear that a spoken language of an area should be the language of its governance. In the early nineteenth century, when Persian was being increasingly replaced by Urdu as the vernacular that served as the administrative language in the colonial bureaucracy, certain Hindu elites and British educators, started creating pressure on having a standardized Hindi, as an alternative to Urdu, which was thought to have too much of a Persian influence. Urdu was seen as a language that still created a distance among the natives and the colonial masters, far removed from the language of the people. This pressure situation took shape in the 1860s as opposing language movements, which supported either Hindi or Urdu. Ultimately, Hindi movement got a stronghold among the Hindu majority while Urdu, with its "foreign" script, was used among the Muslim minorities. Persian print was used by the East India Company in a very effective way, so as to acquire knowledge of Indian customs and usages. Persian texts - specifically *insha* - were used to improve the administration of India; they were printed in book form so that these skills from India's past rulers could be taught to India's future rulers. This can be traced with colonial educational policy in India in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

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