

## **The Genesis of Persian and Urdu Languages and Literatures in India**

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### **Abstract**

The Indian subcontinent has contained a vast array of ethnicities, cultures, traditions and languages since the beginning of civilisation. While classical Indian civilisation was based on Sanskrit, the sacerdotal language of the Brahmins, this sacred language did not affect the general mass of people, nor literature beyond a privileged elite. The first true lingua franca that transcended caste barriers to a certain extent was Persian, which was adopted by the ruling dynasties of Muslim India (who themselves were generally Turks or indigenous Indians rather than Persians), their Hindu peers, as well as the civil servants. However, from the beginning of the seventeenth century Urdu began to form around the lower echelons of society as a pidgin common tongue to enable communication between the myriad ethnicities of the Mughal Empire, ultimately restricting Persian to a refined language of culture and courtly life in the Mughal court and becoming a vibrant and dynamic language in its own right, thus becoming the first literary language with a substantial original contribution from Indians since ancient Sanskrit. This article charts the adoption of Persian and later the emergence of Urdu as spoken and literary languages in the Indian subcontinent using original sources in those languages.

### **Keywords**

India, language, Muslims, Sanskrit, Persian, Urdu

### **Introduction**

Language is an essential attribute of human life not only in terms of basic communication, but in terms of manifesting, reflecting and shaping the culture and thought of a civilisation. India has always been of particular importance to studies of language as the eastern representation of the Indo-European language group, particularly in terms of the sacred language Sanskrit, in addition to the plethora of other indigenous languages. The many human migrations and

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encounters between peoples, and the ebb and flow of South Asian civilisations, have left an indelible mark on the peoples of the Indian subcontinent, including their languages. The uses to which languages are put, themselves tell a story. For instance, English arrived in India as the language of the imperialist English East India Company, but now it serves as one of the official languages of India, enabling all citizens to access government services and facilitating the globalisation of the national economy.

During the classical era of Indian civilisation, in which the main official language of modern India, Hindi (Prakrit), had not taken its current form (Lal 12-13), there was a similar *modus operandi* whereby Persian served as the main official language of governance and of art and intellectualism, reflecting the Persian orientation and Central Asian origin of many ruling families, and the close connections between indigenous Indian elites and that region. Later, Persian itself came to be partly incorporated by the emergent language Urdu, which drew on diverse strands including Hindi, Arabic and Turkish languages as an organic living language created from below. This ultimately came to represent the main literary and common language of the Indian masses by the late Mughal period, and it survives as a living and vibrant language to the present day (Abdul Ghani xi; Lal 6-7).

Drawing on the historical chronicle of literary advancements in both languages as well as the societal changes in South Asia over the centuries, this paper charts the rise of these two languages and the eclipse of Persian by Urdu, using original sources in those languages, such as the *divan* of Masud Sa'd Sulaiman, Awfi's *Lubab al-Albab*, Amir Khusrau's *Tughluq-Namah*, Barani and Afif's *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* and Abul Fazl's *Akbar-Namah* in Persian; and Saiyid Muhammad Gesudaraz's *Mi'raj al-Ashiqin*, Nusrati's *Gulshan-i-Ishq*, a love poem in Deccani Urdu, and the poetry of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah and Wali Deccani in Urdu.

### **The Development of Persian Language and Literature: Establishment of Persian in India under the Ghaznavids**

Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi's conquest of northern India was signalled by the seizure of Multan from Abul Fath Daud ibn Nasr, an Ismaili ruler of Multan in 1010, and Lahore from the Hindu Shahis in 1022; thus, he incorporated the whole of Punjab into his domain. He renamed Lahore as Mahmud Pur (Gardizi 70; Sherani 30) and garrisoned the area, as well as preparing for settlement and the entrenchment of Ghaznavid culture in the subcontinent. The Ghaznavids themselves were originally Turkish vassals of the Samanids (819-999), the Central Asian dynasty appointed as Abbasid governors of Khurasan, which is well known as the centre of the Persian renaissance of the Middle Ages; when their power disintegrated and numerous Turkish dynasties arose in their place (including the Ghaznavids) Persian retained its pre-eminence as the language of

government, culture, learning and religion throughout the Islamic East. By the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Persian was the most prestigious official and literary language of elites from Arabia to northern India (Abdul Ghani 59, 63).

Lahore became the second city of the Ghaznavids in India and was known as “little Ghazna,” becoming a cultural centre with the presence of such notable Persian poets as Abu Abdullah Ruzbeh (d. 1091), who was a panegyrist to Sultan Masud I (r. 1030-40). His poetry has been mostly lost with the exception of some excerpts in Awfi’s *Lubab al-albab*, the earliest bibliographical dictionary of Persian literature. Awfi’s encyclopaedic *magnum opus Jawamia al-Hikayat wa-Lawamia al-Riwayat* and his Persian translation of the famous Arabic book *al-Faraj ba’d al-Shiddah* by Qadi Abu al-Hasan ibn Ali Muhammad ibn Daud (d. 994) are of great merit. Another important Arabic source on the history of Sindh, *Kitab Futubus-Sindh wal-Hind* or *Fathnama-i-Sindh*, commonly known as *Chach-Namah*, was translated into Persian by Ali ibn Hamid ibn Abu Bakr al-Kufi in 1216. The Persian translation of al-Biruni’s *Kitab al-Saydanah* (Pharmacology) was by Abu Bakr bin Ali bin Usman al-Kashani (Awfi 382-86; Browne 477; Kufi 8; Sherani 32; Baihiqi 744; Bosworth 127-28; Sharma 17; Siddiqui 70-71). The practice of royal patronage for poets was continued in the case of Abul Faraj Rumi, who joined the court of Sultan Ibrahim (r. 1099-1114) in Lahore, and spent his whole life there; his *divan* is still extant. Mas’ud S’ad Salman (1046-1121) was another prominent poet attached to the Ghaznavid court of Sayf al-Dawla Mahmud and Arsalan Shah (r. 1115-18) at Lahore; he wrote glowing panegyrics in Indo-Persian and Hindi (Hindustani), a precursor to Urdu and probably the vernacular used in northern India under the Ghaznavids (Abdul Ghani 63; Sherani 38-39; Aziz 6, 224; Sharma 5, 17, 25). Two more poets attached to the Ghaznavid court in Lahore were Abu Ala Ata ibn Yaqub Nakok and Jamal al-din Yusuf ibn Nasr al-Katib. Both of them worked for Ala al-din Husain (r. 1149-61). A ruler of Ghur accused him of usurpation and barbarism for razing and plundering Ghazna in 1151, resulting in the epithet *Jahansuz* (the “World Burner,” a pun on the traditional Turkic concept of a great leader as a “World Conqueror”) (Harold 160; Donzel, 181; Siddiqui 112). Abd al-Rauf Harvi and Abu Bakr Khusravi recorded a vivid description of the decline of the Ghaznavid state and the subsequent rise of the Ghurids in 1186 in the Persian language (Sherani 39; Aziz 224).

### The Delhi Sultanate

The shift of power from the Ghaznavids to the Ghurids had a great impact on the progress of Persian literature in India. From the 1210s onwards the Mongol conquests in Turkistan, Transoxiana and Khurasan caused many Muslim elites and religious notables to flock to Indian cities like Deopulpur, Ajodhan, Hansi and Siyalkot, resulting in a large Persian diaspora in South Asia. Juzjani and Awfi joined the court of Nasiruddin Qubacha (r. 1210-28) in Uchh and Multan,

and after Qubacha's fall they attached themselves to the court of Sultan Shamsuddin Iltumish (r. 1210-36) in Delhi (Sherani 43; Sharma 18). The Khanqah of Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya (1169-1266) in Multan became another centre for the development of Sufi literature. Amir Khusrau (1253-1325), Ziauddin Barani (1287-1357) and Shams Siraj Afif (d. 1388) have left great writings in Persian. At this juncture Persian was clearly at its apogee as the intellectual and cultural language of the Delhi Sultanate, epitomised by poets like Taj al-din Sangriza (d. 1266-76?) and Amid Sannami, and Indian literary production in Persian by now surpassed whatever was being produced in Iran and Greater Persia itself (Sherani 43; Aziz 225).

Amir Khusrau, a prolific Sufi poet, scholar and musician, wrote a notable *mathnavi* (elegy) on the heroic martyrdom of Prince Muhammad (d. 1285), son of Sultan Balban, fighting against the Mongols in Multan (Shibli II 97-100). Khusrau was the pioneer of *mathnavi*. *Futubal-Salatin* (c. 1350, a collection of poems regarding Delhi Sultans) by Abd al-Malik Isami, a versatile poet active during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Tughluq (r. 1325-51), was another example in Khusrau's rhythmical style (Aziz 225). Muhammad Tughluq was a radical in politics and rationalist in religion; under his rule prominent scholars like Shihab al-din Ahmad and Badr-i-Chach, a native of Tashqand, developed the new Indo-Persian poetry. The culture of Persian writing continued to flourish under the Tughluqs with Amir Khusrau's *Tughluq-Namah*, a great work encompassing Ghazi Malik's victory over Nasiruddin Khusrau (d.1320), a usurper to the Khalji throne, appearing during this period. Zia-ud-Din Barani's (d. 1357) *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* and *Fatwa-i-Jahandari* and Shams Siraj Afif's *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* are two of the greatest testimonies to Indian Persian literary accomplishment from the period (Sherani 45; Nizami 39; Aziz 225; Chaurasia 146).

Increasing Hindu assimilation into Muslim governance began under the Lodis (1451-1526). For example, Sikandar Lodi (r. 1489-1517), the second Lodi ruler, appointed a Hindu professor of Sanskrit at a Muslim college,<sup>2</sup> and during Sikandar Lodi's rule the uptake of Persian by Hindus was accelerated due to the proliferation of the use of Persian among Hindu administrative officials. Despite this, in a way, the increasingly "Indian" flavour of the Lodis reflected the gradual waning of Persian dominance in the Muslim administration of India from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, as Sikandar Lodi's open-mindedness gave much freedom to local Hindus to join in the administrative service. However, the symbiotic cultural and linguistic relationship between the subcontinent and Central Asia resurged under the Mughals (Farishta I 344). Due to continuous encouragement and support from the Lodis, Hindus achieved a high degree of

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<sup>2</sup> Hindus had always been welcome in the Islamic culture of learning, to which they contributed significantly; indeed, Harun al-Rashid (r. 786-809), the fifth Abbasid Caliph, used to be treated by Indian physicians.

literary talent in Persian, and it became a mark of distinction for Brahmins to compose verses in the language (Badaoni 323; Lal 27; Abdul Ghani 73-75).

### The Mughals

Persian cultural influence was intensified with the coming of Mughals to the Indian subcontinent. Zahiruddin Babur (r. 1526-30), the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India, introduced a new era in Indo-Persian literature. Many renowned poets (for example, Atishi Qandhari, Abul Wahid Farighi, Nadhiri Samarqandi and Tahir Khwandi) and historians (for example, Zainuddin Khawafi and Mirza Haidar Dughlat), who wrote their most important works in Persian, accompanied Babur into India. However, by this time Persian had lost ground even in Central Asia; Turkish was the mother tongue of both Babur and Byram Khan (d. 1561). Byram Khan was an important military commander, powerful statesman and regent in the court of the Mughal emperors Humayun and Akbar; he was also Akbar's guardian, chief mentor and advisor during the latter's youth. Byram Khan wrote primarily in Turkish, but Humayun (r. 1530-56), the second Mughal emperor, has left behind a *divan* in Persian (Shibli, III, 4; Aziz 226; Hadi 212). After his visit to Persia, a number of Persian scholars joined Humayun's court and strengthened the link between their homeland and India. Celebrated Persian poets like Muhammad ibn Badr al-Din Urfi Shirazi (1555-90), Muhammad Husain Naziri Nishapuri (c. 1560-1612/14), Nur al-Din Muhammad Zuhuri (1537-1616), Maulana Malik Muhammad Qummi (d. 1615), Saiyid Muhammad Talib Amuli (c. 1580-1627) and Qudsi Mashhadi and Kalim Kasani (1581/85-1651) migrated from Persia to India under Mughal patronage, and have left behind a rich store of Persian literature, including several *divan* and *mathnawi* (Abdul Ghani 75; Shibli, III, 26-29; Navina 29; Aziz 226, Nabi Hadi 339; Alam 127, 161).

Although Akbar (r. 1556-1605), the greatest of the Mughal emperors, was famously illiterate, he loved poetry recitation and patronised renowned poets in his court. He introduced the special position of *Malikal-Shu'ara* (literally "King of Poets," equivalent to poet laureate) in his court and bestowed it first on Ghazali Mashhadi (1527-72), a renowned Iranian poet. Due to the Emperor's generosity, poets flocked to India. Abul Fazl (1551-1602), the court historian, and one of the Nine Jewels (Hindi: Navaratnas) of Akbar's royal court, maintains in *Ain-i-Akbari* that at one time or another there were fifty-one poets attending Akbar's *divan* (Shibli III, 4-5; Naim 115) including, of course, indigenous South Asians such as Faizi (1547-95), who with Mirza Ghalib (1796-1869) made some of the most original contributions to Persian literature and poetry. Apart from poetry, a large body of literature relating to history and biography was also produced in Persian during this period (Aziz 230; Pollock 161).

During Emperor Akbar's reign, Abul Fazal's *Akbar-Namah* and *Ain-i-Akbari*, Mulla Abdul Qadir Badaoni's *Muntakhab al-Twariikh*, Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah and Farishta's *Tarikh-i-Farishta* were all written in the Persian language. *Tuzuk-i-Babri*, was originally written in Turkish by the Mughal emperor Babur and later translated into Persian by Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan (1556-1627), a poet and one of Akbar's nine ministers; and *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, an autobiography, was composed in Persian by the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605-27) himself (Abdul Ghani 74). A number of biographies were also produced in Persian during the Mughal period, including *Ma'thirul Umara* (a detailed biography of the Mughal nobles) by Shah Nawaz Khan, a renowned noble under Mughal rulers Shahjahan (r. 1628-58) and Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707). Furthermore, many historical and literary works were composed in Persian during their rule; these include *Shahjahan-Namah* and *Amal-i-Salih* of Muhammad Salih Kambo, *Badshah-Namah* jointly by Muhammad Amina Qazwini and Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Ruqat-i-Alamgiri* by Aurangzeb Alamgir, *Muntakhab al-Lubab* by Khafi Khan and *Alamgir-Namah* by Muhammad Kazim. *Fatwa-i-Alamgiri*, a masterpiece of Hanafi jurisprudence, known for its particularity and significance in addressing universal problems, also appeared during this time.

The first Persian masterpiece on Sufi doctrine, *Kashfal-Mahjub* (Revelation of the Mystery), was written on Indian soil by Ali b. 'Uthman al-Hujwiri (c. 1071) (popularly known as *Daata Ganj Baksh*). The Persian translation of Shaikh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi's *Awarif-ul-Ma'arif* (written c. 1244) by Qasim Daud Khatib, a disciple (*murid*) of Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya, became a fundamental book for *tassawuf* among Indian Sufis. Many other religious works were produced in Persian as well as in Arabic by Indian scholars at this time. These include Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi's *Maktubat-i-Imam Rabbani*, Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddis Dehlavi's *Akhhbarul-Akhyar*, Amir Hasan Sijzi's *Fawaidul-Fawaid*, Hamid Qalandar's *Khairul Majalis*, and Shah Waliullah Dehlavi's Persian translation of the Qur'an (*Fath al-Rahman*), as well as his magnum opus, *Hujjatullah al-Baligha* (Aziz 232).

Lavish patronage of social welfare, scientific learning and artistic creation was a hallmark of classical Islamic dynasties, but the Mughals particularly excelled in this regard. Scions of the Mughal ruling dynasty themselves paid great attention to the education of their children (including women), and the royal family both enjoyed and contributed to the lively literary scene of Mughal India. Mughal princesses wrote many literary works, such as Emperor Babur's daughter Gulbadan Begum (1523-1603), who wrote *Humayun-Namah*, about the career of Mughal emperor Humayun, and Jahanara Begum (1613-81), daughter of Emperor Shahjahan, who wrote *Munis-ul-Arwah*, a biography of Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti. Aurangzeb's daughter Zeb-un-Nisa (1639-1702), whose *nom de plume* was *Makhfi*, was a noted patron of scholars and poets, and she herself

penned *Divan-i-Makbfi*. A *hafiz* (memorizer) of the Qur'an, she was one of the most educated Mughal princesses and had a profound knowledge of Arabic and Persian. Due to her illustrious reputation, many renowned writers and intellectuals became her courtier-scholars. Mulla Said Ashraf Mazandrani, who was one of her famous teachers, became her tutor when she was only 21 years of age. She was a great poetess and a renowned scholar of the Mughal era, who offered lavish prizes for skilled poems and academic compositions. She was greatly respected by Aurangzeb himself. She established an academy of research and a well-equipped library to which a number of renowned scholars were attached as writers and as translators of classical tomes. Under the patronage of the Princess, Imam Razi's *Tafsir Kabir* was translated into Persian by Mulla Safiuddin Urdubeli, entitled *Zeb al-Tafasir* (Shibli 100-6; Mukherjee 72-73).

In addition to elite women, the Mughal literati included many non-Muslim intellectuals (generally from distinguished Hindu families of the Brahmin caste) who continued to be conversant in Persian from the time of the Lodis into the late Mughal era. The notable Hindu Persian poet Mirza Manohar Tausani and others received a stipend from Akbar for their work (Bakhshi 388). During the reign of Jahangir (r. 1605-27) the most prominent Hindu Persian scholars were Kayasthas, including Munshi Harkaran, an expert in *insha* (epistolography) (Lal 27; Aziz 234). Under the Mughals, notable contributions to Persian literature included the *Chahar chaman* genre pioneered by Chandra Bhan Brahman, and the *divan* by his contemporary, Jaswant Rai Munshi. Munshi Sujan Rai Bhandari wrote *Khulasat al-Twarikh* (1695), a prominent history of India, which was completed during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb. In addition to writing original works in Persian, a continuous activity undertaken by Hindu scholars throughout the period of Mughal rule was the translation of classical Sanskrit works into Persian, which made these works accessible to intellectuals throughout South, Central and West Asia (Aziz 236-37).

### **The Rise of Urdu**

While Persian was essentially imported wholesale into India as a language for the elite, the history of the development of Urdu in the subcontinent is more complex and more closely related to historical and political issues of South Asia, particularly the encounter between peoples with Islamic/West Asian influences and indigenous cultures. While there was an Arab-Islamic political presence in Sind from the incursion of Muhammad ibn Qasim al-Saqfi in 712, this was of negligible importance to South Asia as a whole, and maritime trading relations were likely more instrumental in the remarkable influence of the Arabic language on Indian culture prior to the substantive conquest from the Ghaznavids onwards (Lal 15). When Al-Istakhri visited Sind in 915 he reported that so prestigious and far reaching was the influence of Muslim culture on the

locals that both the Hindus and Buddhists communicated in Arabic along with their mother tongue, while the Arab Muslim sovereigns also spoke the local languages, wore local dress, and embraced many local customs and other aspects of social life (Al-Istakhri 105). Unfortunately, this era is relatively undocumented, in contrast to the mainly Persian civilisation of Muslim India from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards, in which classical Arabic remained only as a religious language, albeit a vibrant one in continuous production through to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Prior to the assimilation of India into Western imperialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the major turning points in the political history of South Asia following the conquest of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna in 1026 were the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate in 1206, and the Mughal ascendancy (1526-1857), which brought drastic changes in the socio-cultural life of the people (Abdul Ghani 63; Lal 17-18). During this long span of time, the Muslims (many of whom were indigenous converts) assimilated to the local culture while locals of all denominations sought to speak Persian (which was spoken fluently by the elite, as their first language). The most cosmopolitan force in the Mughal state was the army, composed of indigenous Indian groups and Central Asian peoples; the military garrisons (Turkish *ordu*, “army” or “camp”; the origin of the English “horde”) were thus a melting pot of many tribes and peoples. Given this pluralistic environment, the officer class and their subordinates began to seek an expedient means of communication, borrowing from each other’s languages; the resultant pidgin language incorporating elements of diverse languages and dialects onto a “Hindi” base thus became a common mode of communication among Muslims and the locals. This later came to be known as Urdu or *Urdu-i-Mualla* (“the language of the exalted camp”), its development attributed to the Muslim army encamped in Delhi just after its conquest by Qutb al-Din Aibak in 1191 (Lal 34; Sherani 21, 28, 34, 44-45; Bailey 5-7, 11; Aziz 244). This has always been the classical explanation, but languages do not emerge overnight, and the long-term history of the development of Urdu is much more complex.

### **Origins of the Language**

It should be noted that there are disputing claims of cultural ownership over “Urdu” reflecting modern political interests, as part of which etymologists (or rather, politicians using etymological arguments) trace possible origins of the term *urdu* itself. One substantive claim is that it arose from the Mongols, as reflected by the widespread adoption of the term “horde” in many languages. The Mongols were a multi-ethnic confederation of Turkic tribes (with drafted Chinese siege engineers and Persian soldiers) who swept through Central and West Asia deep into Europe. In this regard, “horde” and its equivalents are clearly derived from *ordu*, which means army or encampment (*lashkar*); the controversial aspect of this thesis is whether Urdu as the concept of a pidgin



language that forms the basis of classical Urdu arose from the Mongol hordes themselves, rather than from the later Turkic manifestation of the Mughal armies (Sherani 29-30). Emperor Babur learnt hundreds of Hindi and Urdu words and frequently recorded them in his memoir *Tuzuk-i-Babri* (Abdul Ghani 58-59).

Also, as is common in the increasingly nationalistic history of India by indigenous historians, there is a claim of Sanskrit precedence in the word *birday* (meaning “heart” or “capital city”) (Zafar Syed 1). Turner’s *Comparative Dictionary of Indo-Aryan Languages* defines this more comprehensively as *ur* meaning “chest, heart,” and *urad* meaning “a high projecting breast” (Turner 110, 841). Similarly, the paleo-Turkic word *urta* means “centre,” similar to the Sanskrit *ur*, but this would suggest a Central and Inner Asian provenance for the word *urdu*, as well as for Sanskrit itself, supporting the Aryan origin of Hinduism. Thus, Indian nationalist historians will be unlikely to pursue this matter unless they finally reverse traditional history to allege that in addition to Indo-Europeans, the Turks and the Mongols themselves originated in India (Zafar Syed 2-3).

Archaeological evidence traces the word *urdu* to the Orkhon inscriptions, Turkic runes (a precursor of the “Kultigin” old Turkic alphabet) inscribed on a stone stele during the early 8<sup>th</sup> century in the Orkhon valley in Mongolia. This monument was erected in honour of two Turkish princes, Bilga Kagan (683-734) and his brother Kul-Tegin (684-731) in 732 CE, by their brother King Gokturk, using 66 runic characters. The words *urtu* and *urdu* appear several times in the script, but with different meanings; generally these are in the semantic cloud of “centre.” Later manifestations connoted “government,” used in the sense of palace or capital, similar to the use of *sadr* (“chest”) for “leader” in Arabic (Ross 861-76; Zafar Syed 1).

However, the origin of the Urdu language itself is the primary concern in this article rather than the etymology of the term *urdu*. As mentioned previously, there is a local base for the language, conventionally referred to as “Hindi,” but according to the renowned scholar Muhammad Husain Azad it is Braj Bhasha (explained in detail below), a dialect of Western Hindi. Persian elements were later integrated into this base to create the new hybrid language of Urdu. According to Jo’amal Va’iz Lal, Sanskrit and Prakrit were commonly spoken in ancient India as parallel tongues of the spiritual elect (i.e., the intellectual and court language) and the subordinate commoners, respectively. From Prakrit the four prominent indigenous languages of Maharashtra, Paisaci, Shuarseni and Magadhi arose. Braj Bhasha originated from the Shuarseni, but with a marked Persian and Arabic influence; it is this strand which became the mother of Urdu when catalysed by the Ghaznavid development of Delhi and Agra. According to Lal, Urdu is fundamentally an amalgam of four primary languages: Sanskrit, Dravidian, Arabic and Persian (Lal 14, 38).

Mehmood Sherani maintains that Urdu originated from the interaction and intermixing of Muslim soldiers and locals (Hindus) after the conquest of Punjab and Sindh by Mahmud of Ghazni. During this era many Punjabi words and idioms got interwoven with the Hindi of Delhi, and thus a new language came into being, formed from Hindi and Punjabi before the incorporation of Persian and Turkic elements into it (Sherani 29-30).

Classical Urdu as it emerged from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onward clearly displays strong elements of Arabic (the ritual language of all Muslims), Persian, Pashtu, Turkish, Hindi and some other local dialects of India (Abdul Ghani 63; Sherani 35). It took over five centuries of concerted effort, comprising spontaneous linguistic realisation and intellectual genius, to harness this conglomeration into a major Indian language with a standardised grammatical structure. The proto-Urdu of the 11<sup>th</sup> century saw no significant literary or grammatical work, although this hybrid language (called “Hindvi” or “Dehlvi”) had its own distinctive “Devnagri” script. It quickly spread, and by the 14<sup>th</sup> century it was introduced in Southern India (the Deccan). According to Sherani, Urdu had already reached the Deccan during the conquest of South India by Sultan Alauddin Khalji (r. 1296-1316), and it came to maturity after Muhammad Tughluq (r. 1325-51) moved his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad in 1328 (Lal 22; Sherani 45).

After the establishment of the new capital city in Daulatabad, the vocabulary of Hindvi (Hindustani) expanded rapidly to include many words and idioms from the local languages. People started calling this new version of the language spoken in Southern India “Deccani.” The expansion of vocabulary continued and it changed from “Deccani” to “Rekhta” (a Persian word meaning “poured,” because it mainly consisted of “Hindi” into which Arabic and Persian words had been poured); Rekhta (or Urdu) is believed to be the forerunner of the modern Urdu language. The standardisation of Rekhta took place in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries during the reigns of Shahjahan and Aurangzeb Alamgir, when the synthetic character of Urdu acquired a complete form and greater content and power. Like most other languages of the world, Urdu also started its literature with poetry (Lal 34; Sherani 11-13, 21; Saksena 12).

### **Urdu from Braj Bhasha**

People in Delhi and the surrounding areas spoke the dialect of Braj and Khari Boli (“standard language”). The development of Urdu mostly occurred from the daily interactions and activities carried out by soldiers and others in garrison towns, drawn mainly from indigenous, Persian, Arabic and Turkish words. In terms of the literary development of Urdu, the spiritual literature produced by the Sufis played a crucial role. They used this language in their daily sermons, *aqwal* (sayings) and in the dissemination of Islam among the ranks and in their general proselytising activities (Lal 13-14; Bailey 8-9; Aziz 245; Sohail 145).

Although Urdu is often related to the arrival and settlement of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent, it is important to note that the Muslims did not bring Urdu with them; rather it emerged from the interaction of international peoples, including Muslims and others from among the local populace. Urdu soon became the lingua franca for easy communication with and among the masses, which was why it was adopted by the Sufis in their poetry and for preaching. Their intellectual contributions tended to reinforce the Arabic and Persian elements and styles in the language, with the result that Urdu became one of the most widely spoken and dynamic languages in the subcontinent (Bailey 3-4; Sohail 143, 166).

### The Rise of Urdu Poetry

The beginning of Urdu poetry is generally attributed to Amir Khusrau, the first notable Urdu poet. He was also a well-known Persian poet, having carved a niche in Persian literature. Due to his distinguished poetry and other writings he gained the title *Tuti-i Hind* ("Paroquet of India"). The first verse in Urdu is attributed to him, as is the first example of that most distinctive Urdu meter, the *ghazal*, in a hybrid composition mixing Persian and Urdu. He invented many riddles, rhymes, enigmas and punning verses that remain popular. In his Urdu verses he often used Hindi words. He was not only a great poet but also a distinguished musician who invented his own musical rhythms. He is credited with introducing Persian, Arabic and Turkish elements into Indian classical music, and was the originator of the *khayal* and *tarana* styles of music. He was a luminary in Urdu literature and he set the direction for its future progress (Abdul Ghani 67; Bailey 8; Aziz 244; Saksena 11-12).

Saiyid Muhammad Gesudaraz's (1321-1422) *Mi'raj al-Ashiqin* is regarded as the first prose work written in Urdu. The Sufi saints and the rulers of the Deccan were steadily nurturing Urdu poetry in their courts. The first outstanding Urdu poet in the Deccan was Muhammad Nusrat, popularly known as Nusrati (d. 1684); he wrote a long Mathnavi, *Ali-Namah* (1665), a historical account of the reign of Sultan Ali Adil Shah II (r. 1656-73), in tribute to his patron, for which the Sultan bestowed the title of poet laureate on him. While employed at the Bijapur court, Nusrati wrote *Gulshan-i-Ishq* ("Bouquet of Love") between 1650 and 1670, a collection of *dakhini* odes and amatory poems dedicated to Sultan Ali Adil Shah II. Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (r. 1581-1611), the Sultan of Golkunda and the founder the city of Hyderabad in Deccan, was credited with the compilation of a *divan* of Urdu *ghazals* (poems). Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah (r. 1611-25), Abdullah Qutb Shah (r. 1625-72) and Abul Hasan Qutb Shah (r. 1672-87) were not just patrons but also poets of great merit. They wrote *Ghazal*, *Rubai*, *Mathnavi*, *Qasida* and *Marthia* in the *Dakhini* dialect. Ali Adil Shah I (r. 1558-80) and Ibrahim Adil Shah II (r. 1580-1626) of Bijapur were men of literary taste and they liked to draw together the

literati in their courts. Ibrahim Adil Shah II himself penned a Hindi work on music, and his court poet Maulana Zuhuri wrote a prose introduction in Persian, which became a magnum opus of style in Urdu prose writing (Bailey 10-11; Saksena 12; Aziz 244, 247-51).

During the reigns of the Mughal Emperors Shahjahan and Aurangzeb (late 17<sup>th</sup> to early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries), particularly during the latter's drives into the Deccan, Urdu and Deccani took their place in court and Urdu began to combine the dialects of the north and south. Following the Mughal conquest of the Deccan, the Muslim elites of the region were more exposed to the newly spoken language. Although it was already the main mode of communication in the streets, Urdu made a relatively late entry into the Mughal court of Delhi, where Persian continued to be regarded as more prestigious; however, the Sufi saints and the rulers of the Deccan were already using it as the de facto official language. Wali Muhammad Wali, popularly known as Wali Deccani (1667-1743) and *Baba-i-rekhta* ("the father of Urdu poetry"), used the standard Urdu spoken in the Mughal camp during Aurangzeb's long campaigns in the Deccan. This marked the establishment and institutionalisation of the tradition of writing Urdu poetry, with extensive court patronage. Subsequently Urdu made rapid growth and ultimately replaced Persian as a court and literary language by 1835, during the East India Company's encroachment into India (Saksena 12-13; Aziz 251).

### **Conclusion**

India has always been a region of multiple cultures and ethnicities comprising a multifaceted, colourful and genuinely diverse civilisation of innumerable peoples, beliefs and languages. The political domination of Muslim dynasties from Central Asia from the Ghaznavid conquests onwards led to Persian being grafted into the Indian subcontinent as the official language of governance and high culture. As classical Persian culture fell into abeyance during the Middle Ages and the Islamic West disintegrated into chaos, India fostered a Persian cultural renaissance of unparalleled literary achievement by émigrés to India as well as by Indians themselves; they made innumerable original contributions, becoming more expert in Persian than many Iranians (Shibli III 26) (as they in turn became more expert in Islam than many Arabs), forming the exemplar of an increasingly rarefied Persian civilisation that was cloistered in the Mughal courts and ultimately crushed by the industrial capitalism of the British East India Company.

Conversely, the mass of the people, both indigenous and foreign, began to spontaneously form their own lingua franca, including local Hindi and other South Asian languages, military Turkic elements and Arabic, all of which were languages of the everyday men and women ruled by the Persian-speaking elite. The catalyst for the development of Urdu as a recognisable phenomenon of

Indian civilisation was its adoption by Sufi preachers and other intellectuals who formed a bridge between the high culture of the Persian court and the utilitarian parlance of the markets and garrisons, leading to a synergy of spoken language accelerated by the codification and standardisation of the language into a literary form (mainly by authors trained primarily in Persian).

While the Indian contributions to classical Persian literature will never be rivalled (particularly as this intellectual tradition is all but dead), it is Urdu that represents the most original and truly Indian contribution to world languages, and it remains a living tradition in which hundreds of millions of people continue to think, write and dream. Perhaps it has endured while the exquisite culture of the Indian palaces has vanished because of the strength of Urdu as a complex and expressive tapestry whose composite threads can be traced back variously to the nomads of Inner Asia, the Bedouins of Arabia, the Shahs of Iran and the Maharajahs of the Indian subcontinent.

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