

The Contribution of Sufis of Allahabad towards Urdu Literature

MOHD ARIF

ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY

Urdu¹ has a rich literary tradition that dates back many centuries, and this tradition is inextricably tied to the composite culture of India. The Sufis gave patronage to the literary traditions and provided a liberal intellectual sphere that helped emerge local languages and dialects. It also played an immense role in developing the Urdu language and literature. The Urdu literature beautifully expresses the centuries-old socio-cultural traditions of Indian history. The Sufi thoughts and poetry profoundly influenced Urdu literature. According to the Sufi poets, 'worldly love was a ladder leading to spiritual love'. "Sufism is responsible for the curious blend of spirituality and sensualism which marks the love songs of Persia and India."² Urdu literature depicted the nuances of composite culture more beautifully than any other language in India.³ Owing to their imagination and inspiration from Persian poetry, early Urdu poets used the Sufi themes and metaphors profoundly in their writings.⁴ They followed the literary themes widely used by famous Persian poets like Hafiz Shirazi, Saib, Naziri, Omar Khayyam and Maulana Rumi.⁵ Urdu and Sufism got interwoven in the later phase of their expansion in India. Most of the Sufis tried to convey their message to the local masses in lucid and straightforward form, and in this process, they tried to use the regional dialects and words in their preaching. Thus, the local dialect and vocabulary also enriched the Urdu language and gave them an enlarged canvass to simultaneously deliver their message to the masses. Early Sufis like Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, Khawaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Hazrat Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khusro used local dialects in their preaching to address the masses and promoted use of 'Hindawi'.⁶

The starting points of Urdu can be traced back to the time of Ghaznavid control in the Panjab in the 6th/twelfth century. The Muslims used the Persian script for writing. While they retained a lot of its syntactic structure and basic verbs, adjective and adverbs, borrowings from Persian, and through Persian from Arabic and to some degree Turkish, gave it an articulated Muslim linguistic and literary character.⁷ From the 13th to the 18th century, 'Urdu' was referred to as 'Hindawi' or 'Hindi' or given dialectal names, 'Dakhani'⁸ and 'Gujarati'. This is somewhat confusing as its philological and literary growth remained quite distinct from the languages known today as Hindi or Gujarati.

During the 13th century, Delhi became the nerve centre of the newly founded Sultanate, and it also became the focal point in the development of the Urdu language.⁹ Under the Khaljis, Muslim armed forces conveyed it to the Deccan and Gujarat, where it created a literary character sooner than in northern India. In Delhi, from the seventh/thirteenth to the tenth/sixteenth century, its scholarly utilise seems to have been unusual and half-genuine. The majority of the pre-Urdu (Hindawi) work credited to Amir Khusraw (651-725/ 1253-1325) has now been shown to be of apocryphal origin, composed considerably later, conceivably in the eleventh/seventeenth century.¹⁰

The improvement of Urdu for literary purposes was made amid these centuries, far from the northern court, in the Sufi hospices of remote regions. The Sufi Shaikhs, occupied with the double undertaking of changing over the non-Muslims around them and developing a strategy of religious correspondence with their less-educated devotees, utilised an early type of Urdu for their prevalent works, holding the utilisation of Persian more for learned disciples.¹¹

Sayyid Muhammad Gesudaraz (c.750/1350) is generally considered the first prose writer in Urdu. His treatise *Miraj al-ashiqin* was probably the first Urdu prose work. This work was written for the instruction of masses in *Dakhni*, a south Indian branch of Urdu. Sayyid Muhammad Gesudaraz was a pioneer, the first Sufi to use this vernacular extensively by his successor Sufis of South India in later centuries.¹² Sayyid Muhammad Gesudaraz also wrote many treatises on the works of Ibn Arabi and Suhrawardi, making them accessible to the Indian scholars, and it played an essential role in influencing later mystical thought. Shah Miranji Shams (d.1499) was another prominent Sufi of South India who played an indispensable role in the development of Urdu. Miraraji Shams established Urdu as a recognised medium of Sufi narrative verse. These Sufi saints freely transplanted Persian and Arabic religious vocabulary and forms of thought and experience into Urdu.¹³

Unlike South Indian Development of Urdu, the School of Delhi rose in the early 13th century under very inhospitable circumstances. The Mughal capital was attacked and looted many times by Nadir Shah, Jats and Marathas. This school imbibes the sensibility and suffering of individuals. Two of its early representatives, Mirza Mazhar Jan-i-Janan (1699-1781) and Khwaja Mir Dard (1720-84), were venerated Sufis who enriched Urdu verse with the sublimation of pained love and resignation. Mirza Mazhar Jan-i-Janan was a renowned Naqshbandi Sufi saint and well-known poet of Delhi. He is regarded as one of the “four pillars of Urdu poetry”.¹⁴

Allahabad, anciently known as Prayag, is a famous Hindu pilgrimage and one of the most sacred places of Hindu religion, but this fact is often forgotten that Allahabad emerged as a great centre of mystic learning during the Mughal period, and Muslim Sufis settled here. They made such an aura of Allahabad that it became a social and cultural centre in north India. Sufis and saints from both Hindu and Muslim religions settled here. They contributed very much to the cultural synthesis, tried to bridge the gap between the two communities, developed co-existence values, and contributed to making what we call composite culture or *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzib* today. These *khanqahs* were very important and influential in developing communal harmony. These hospices were also crucial as centres of learning and cultural activities. Some of these *Khanqahs* had a decisive role in developing Urdu literature as they gave patronage to the learning of different languages and literature.

The origin of the Indo-Islamic literary culture in Allahabad can be traced to Shaikh Muhibbullah Iahabadi (1587-1648).¹⁵ Shaikh Muhibbullah was a great saint and scholar. He was a master of Arabic and Persian languages and wrote many works. But he realised that Arabic was too difficult for an ordinary man, so he also wrote in Persian. He wrote copiously in Persian and Arabic on abstruse Sufi subjects, and due to his knowledge and scholarship, he was called *Shaikh-i-Kabir* (the great master). Shaikh Muhibbullah has written many works related to religion and philosophy. Even today his *khanqah* in Allahabad is a rich source of Sufi literature and Persian texts.

Another great centre of Sufi thought and Persian literature, and later also Urdu literature in Allahabad, was founded by Shaikh Muhammad Afzal (1628- 1712/14).¹⁶ Shah Muhammad Afzal was a master poet in Persian¹⁷, and he seems to have enjoyed universal esteem, even from Aurangzeb, who ordered the governor of Iahabad to build a mosque for the Shaikh. Later he called to construct the *khanqah* of the Shaikh; both of these buildings are in use to this day.

Khanqah of Shah Muhammad Afzal emerged as a critical literary centre in Allahabad as all of his descendants were prolific writers, and they had excellent command over Persian languages and poetry. Shah Muhammad Yahya (also known as Shah Khoobullah), who was the nephew of Shah Afzal, was a good poet in Persian. Shah Azmal was very well versed in the different styles of Persian poetry.

Shah Muhammad Fakhir Zair was also a proficient poet of Persian, and he was regarded as one of the best poets in his times. The origin of Urdu poetry in Allahabad can be traced to Shah Ghulam Qutbuddin Musib¹⁸ (1726-1773). He was the son of Shah Muhammad Fakhir Zair. He wrote poetry in Arabic, Persian and Rekhta or Hindi. Another son of Shah Khoobullah, Shah Muhammad Nasir Afzali, was a prominent Persian poet¹⁹ and was often described as “second Nasir Ali”.²⁰ Daira Shah Afzal remained an essential centre of literary works, and many great poets and writers were also associated with it to this day. It contributes to the Urdu literature by organising a yearly Urdu Poetry conference (Mushayera).

According to Dr Tarachand, the influence on the literature of Indian languages is quite unmistakable. Indian languages received with open arms numerous Persian words. “What is remarkable about the Indian languages is the variety and wealth of literature produced in these times. Much the greater proportion of this literature owed its inspiration to religion, and naturally, some of the greatest names in literature are those of religious devotees and reformers who belonged to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”²¹ Another fascinating literary tradition was incorporated in the romances created by Muslim poets like Malik Muhammad Jayasi, whose story of Padmavat is a fusion of Hindu and Muslim doctrines and concepts. Similar in intent were Manjhan’s Madhumalati, Usman’s Chitravali, Kasim Shah’s Hams Jawahar, etc.²²

One such example was Nur Muhammad, who was born in the east near Sarai Mir Azamgarh. He had praised Emperor Muhammad Shah in his poetical work known as Indravati, composed in 1744 A.D.²³ Indravati, like Padmavati, is an allegorical poem narrated by an imaginary love story. The dialect used by the poet is Awadhi.²⁴

Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri was a great Sufi and the founder of the Mahdawi movement in India. He was also known for using Hindawi in his sermons. Dr Abdul Haqq has quoted several verses in his book, *Urdu Ki*

*Nashw Wa Numa Men Suftiya-i-Kiram Ka Kam.*²⁵ Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri and his 12 *Khulfah* carried his traditions and preached and wrote in Hindi and other dialects.

Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi (1453-1518) was a disciple of Shaikh Muhammad Sabri of Manikpur and, at one time, enjoyed the patronage of Sharqis.²⁶ Mughal Emperor Humayun was his disciple. He was a great scholar of Persian and an erudite writer. He was a great supporter of Hindi, and as a poet, he composed under the name of Alakhdas (invisible servant). In his *Rushad Nama*, a Persian work on Sufism, we also find Hindi/Urdu words.²⁷ Many poet-saints have written during this period, and an essential feature of their writings was their sincerity. They were deeply connected with the masses, and they all were concerned about solving problems that society faced. They abandoned the language and the methods of the learned and conveyed their messages in simple, lucid poetry form to the masses. They garnered joy and created a love bond that grew by sharing. They sang of it, and their faith and love found an echo in the listeners' hearts.²⁸

Thus we can see that these Sufis *khanqahs* also promoted the use of local dialects and words in their messages, and great Sufi masters used Hindi/Urdu words in their writings. These *khanqahs* were a vital centre of mystical learning, literature, and cultural synthesis. These *khanqahs* had an immense role in moulding society's views towards communal harmony and co-existence. These *khanqahs* had a very active role in the development of composite culture. These Sufi *khanqahs* are important not only as spiritual centers but also as centers of learning and acculturation in the region.

References:

¹ The name 'Urdu' is of Turkish origin, familiarized in Persian by the Il-Khanid historians, and adopted in India by the Sayyid ruler Khizr Khan (817-24/1414-21) for his army and court under Timurid influence. See. Aziz Ahmad, *Urdu Literature* in P. Holt, A. Lambton, & B. Lewis (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol 2B, 2008, Cambridge: Cambridge University, pp. 695.

² Ram Babu Saksena, *A History of Urdu Literature*, Ram Narain Lal Publication, Allahabad, 1940, p. 27.

³ S.K. Chatterjee, *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, p. 12

⁴ Ram Babu Saksena, *A History of Urdu Literature*, Ram Narain Lal Publication, Allahabad, 1940, p. 23.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Raifya Sultana, *Urdu Nashr ka Aagaz aur Irtaqa*, p. 23.

⁷ Aziz Ahmad, *Urdu Literature* in P. Holt, A. Lambton, & B. Lewis (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol 2B, 2008, Cambridge: Cambridge University, pp. 695.

⁸ Dakhni is freer of Persian and Arabic loans than Urdu. Both are written in Arabic script. Rekhta is a form of Urdu used in poetry. See *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* 12th edition, Barbara, F. Grimes. Summer Institute of Linguistics, Inc. Dallas, Texas, 1992, p. 564

⁹ Ram Babu Saksena, *A History of Urdu Literature*, Ram Narain Lal Publication, Allahabad, 1940, pp. 1-3.

¹⁰ Ahmad, A. *Urdu Literature* in P. Holt, A. Lambton, & B. Lewis (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol 2B, 2008, Cambridge: Cambridge University, pp. 695.

¹¹ Aziz Ahmad, *Urdu Literature* in P. Holt, A. Lambton, & B. Lewis (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol 2B, 2008, Cambridge: Cambridge University, pp. 696.

¹² Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension of Islam*, p. 351

¹³ Aziz Ahmad, *Urdu Literature*, In P. Holt, A. Lambton, & B. Lewis (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam* (1977), Cambridge: Cambridge University, pp. 696

¹⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger :The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic piety*, Chappel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

¹⁵ Shamur Rahman Faruqi, *Urdu and Persian Literature*, ed. Neelam Saran Gaur, Allahabad where the rivers meet, Marg Publication, 2009.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid,

¹⁸ Shamur Rahman Faruqi, Urdu and Persian Literature, ed. Neelam Saran Gaur, Allahabad where the rivers meet, Marg Publication, 2009.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Nasir Ali Sarhindi is (d.1696) widely regarded as a Persian poet who took the “Indian Style” of Persian poetry to new heights. See Shams ur Rahman Faruqi, Urdu and Persian Literary, ed. Neelam Saran Gaur, Allahabad where the rivers meet, Marg Publication, 2009.

²¹ Tarachand, *Society and the State in the Mughal Period*, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel Lectures, The Pub. Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, July 1961, Faridabad, p. 100.

²² Ibid, p. 101.

²³ Shri Ganesh Prasad Dwiwedi, *Hindi ke Kavi aur Kavya, Vol III, pp. 1-2*

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 3-5, and pp. 75-33.

²⁵ Dr. Abdul Haqq, *Urdu Ki Nashw Wa Numa Men Sufiya-i-Kiram Ka Kam, p. 25*

²⁶ M.M. Saeed, *The Sharqi Sultunate of Jaunpur A Political and Cultural History*, University of Karachi, Pakistan,1972, p. 201-2

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Tarachand, *Society and the State in the Mughal Period*, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel Lectures, The Pub. Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, July 1961, Faridabad, p. 102.

