

Contribution of Mumbai in the Development of Persian Language and Literature

Dr. Mazhar Alam Siddiqui

Head, Department of Persian, Vasant Rao Naik Government Institute of Arts & Social Sciences, Nagpur, (MS) India

Abstract

Mumbai, a well-known cosmopolitan and multi-cultural city had been one of the important centers of Persian literary activities of India. Mumbai has produced many scholars of national and international repute of Persian language. The most important contribution of Mumbai lies in the fact that, Mumbai has produced third Ferdowsi of Persian language who wrote Geornameh. However, so far not a single research article has been written on this topic. Therefore, in this article an effort has been made to show that to what extent Mumbai has contributed in the development of Persian language and literature.

Key Words: Contribution, Ferdowsi, Geornameh, Mumbai, Persian

Introduction

Situated on the bank of Arabian Sea Mumbai is a well-known cosmopolitan and multi-cultural city and capital of Maharashtra State and being regarded as financial capital of India. This city derives its name from the name of a local Goddess called Mumba Devi. The temple of Mumba Devi, the Goddess of Koli Fishermen can still be seen in Mumbai near CST. In 1348 AD Mumbai became part of the territory of the Sultanat of Gujarat. In 1534 Sultan Bahadur Shah ceded it to the Portuguese but in 1665 A.D. Mumbai passed into British hands as part of the dowry of the infants of Portugal after her marriage to Charles-II in 1662 A.D. Gerald Aungier transferred the seat of government from Surat to Mumbai in 1672 A.D. and is treated as real founder of the city of Mumbai. (1) Gerald Aungier proclaimed complete religious tolerance and his policy resulted in bringing the Parsee merchants

from Gujarat to Mumbai who played a distinct role in the development of the city's trade. With the fall of Maratha Empire in 1818 Mumbai emerged as the capital of the new presidency. (2)

Persian language was adopted as court language by Qutbuddin Aibek (1206-1210 A.D.) (3) and continued as court language till the dethronement of last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, in 1857 A.D. During six hundred and fifty one year's Persian language continued functioning as court language and thus reached in the remote areas of India and hence Mumbai would also have not been aloof from its impact. But on the basis of available evidences, it can be said that literary activities in Persian in Mumbai began with the arrival of Parsees in Mumbai. This is a well-known fact that Parsees migrated in India from Iran and settled in Sanjan in 785 A.D., in Kathiawad of Gujarat and from there further migrated

to Mumbai in around 1672 A.D. and settled there as merchants. Due to their connection and emotional attachment with Iran though they adopted Gujarati language and culture they also preserved their religion and culture they had brought from Iran and therefore some of them also started literary activities in Persian. Thus it is recorded that a Parsee poet had sent a thanks giving letter in Persian to Shah Jahan, the Mughal Emperor. Similarly the history of arrival of Parsees in India was also composed in Persian. (4) According to Prof. Dalvi in 19th century a number of Parsee poets composed their verses in Persian and their verses are available. (5)

Literary Activity

Among Parsee poets of 19th century of Mumbai Mulla Firoz Bin Kaus is quite important and deserves attention. He composed the history of the arrival of British in India on the instance of Jonathan Duncan, the then Governor of Mumbai and named it "George Nama" which is dedicated to King George III, the king of England. George Nama is in three volumes and contains forty thousand verses. This work commenced in the year 1807 A.D. and came to an end with the victory of Pune and defeat of Peshwas in 1818 A.D. Mulla Firoz was born in Lower Parel, a locality of Mumbai. When he became ten years old his father took him to Iran where he remained for twelve long years. He died in Mumbai in the year 1837 A.D.

He had left his own library in which rare published books and manuscripts were collected. This library was famous as MullaFeroz Library in Lower Parel and it has got a mention in Macleans Guide to Bombay, a rare book on Mumbai which

was part of Mulla Firoz Library and presently it is kept in Cama Oriental Library, Mumbai. (6) The first edition of George Nama was published in 1837 A.D. by his nephew and heir Mulla Rustam Bin Kaikobad from Zubdat-ul-Akabar-ul-Masihya press. According to Mulla Firoz Kaus, the most flattering testimony has been long borne by eminent oriental scholars and by several eminent personages. But no one ever appreciated with more taste and critical acumen the style, genius, and various beauties of the Shahnama than himself. Hence he became desirous to emulate Ferdowsi (940-1020 A.D) (7), a well-known poet of Persian language who wrote Shahnama and for this purpose he selected a theme, the conquests of the English in India. Before his death he completed an animated description of the principal events which have occurred in India since its discovery by the Portuguese until the capture of Puna by the English on the 7th November 1818 A.D.

After demise of Mulla Firoz in 1837 till the foundation of Ismail Yusuf College in Mumbai in 1930 by Ismail Yusuf, so far, author of this paper has not come across any Persian poet or writer who can be mentioned here. The University of Mumbai was established in the year 1857 so it might be possible that some professors of the referred university would have left some works in Persian to which the author of this paper has not seen but the evidences show that the vacuum created in literary field by the death of MullaFiroz was filled with the establishment of Ismail Yusuf College in Mumbai.

Prof. Abd-us-Sattar Dalvi, the ex-Head of the Department of Urdu, University of Mumbai, in his book “Ismail Yusuf college, Mumbai Aur Hindustan Mein Mashreqi Uloomke Mutaleki Asri Manviyat” published by Dayera-t-ul-Adab, Mumbai in 2004 has mentioned a galaxy of scholars in Ismail Yusuf College e.g. Dr. Bazlur Rahaman, Dr. Mohammad Umar Daudpota, Prof Najeeb Ashraf Nadvi, Prof. Mohd. Ibrahim Daar and Dr. B.M. Gai. The above mentioned scholars were writers of national and international repute. The author of this paper could not see any literary work of Dr. Bazlur Rahman who obtained his higher education from Cambridge University and wrote his Ph.D. thesis on Al Jahiz under the guidance of Prof. Edward Browne and being the first principal of Ismail Yusuf College. (8) Before joining Ismail Yusuf College he was Reader and head, Department of Arabic, Persian and Urdu, University of Lucknow.

Dr. Umar Daudpota was a great scholar of Arabic and Persian language. Like Dr. Bazlur-Rahman he also wrote his Ph.D. thesis under the guidance of Prof. Browne from Cambridge University. The scholarship of Prof. Daudpota is proved from his book Tarikh-e-Masumi, the history of Sindh to which he edited with textual criticism with foreword by Dr. Bazlur-Rahman. His another book to which author of this paper has seen is named “The Influence of Arabic Poetry on Persian Poetry”. This book was published by the Fort Printing Press, Bombay in 1934. The referred book of Prof. Daudpota is equally important and worthy of reading by the student of Persian language and

literature. Apart from these books he has left several articles in Persian as well.

Prof. Mohd. Ibrahim Daar was originally from Kashmir. In 1931 he joined Gujarat College, Ahmadabad as Persian teacher and in 1939 he was transferred to Ismail Yusuf College, Mumbai. He died on 17th May 1953. Though Prof. Daar has not left any book but he published several scholarly articles in reputed journals of his time. After his death Dr. Sayed Zahir-ud-Din Madani collected his scattered articles and published in a book with the name “Mazamin-e Daar” but some articles remained unpublished. Now once again Prof. Abd-us Sattar Dalvi has re-published his articles under the title “Maqalate Prof. Mohd. Ibrahim Daar” which has been published by Anjuma-ne-Islam Urdu Research Institute Publication, Mumbai, in April 2014 in which eight articles of Prof. Daar on different topics of Persian literature have been published.(9)

Prof. Najeeb Ashraf Nadvi is a well-known figure in Persian literary circle. Basically he was a scholar of history. He had worked as assistant of the great historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar while he was writing Mughal history. Thereafter he was appointed as research fellow in Darul Musannefin Azamgadh, UP, where he compiled “Ruqqate Alamgir” in two volumes. The first being “Muqaddema-e Ruqqate Alamgir” and second “Ruqqate Alamgir”. He wrote several articles on Mughal history while he was in Calcutta and in Darul Musannefin, Azamgadh, which were published in Maarif and other journals. When he was transferred in Ismail Yusuf College, Mumbai he continued his research work

and wrote several articles which were collected and compiled by Prof. A. Sattar Dalvi with the title “Maqalate Prof. Najeeb Ashraf Nadvi” and was published by Anjumane Islam Research Institute, Mumbai (10)

Dr. B.M. Gai, Head, Department of Persian, Ismail Yusuf College was product of Ismail college. He translated the book “Ahwale Jange Sevume Panipat” of Kashiraj in English. (11)

Prof. Abdul Qadir Sarfaraz who served as professor of Persian language in Elphinston College Mumbai and Deccan College Pune had also published several articles in reputed journals. His most illustrious work is “Descriptive Catalogue of Arabic, Persian and Urdu Manuscripts in the University of Bombay Library”. Prof. A. Dalvi has written a book with the title Prof. Khan Bahadur Shaikh Abdul Qadir Sarfaraz Ahwalaur Asaar (12)

Prof. Daud Akbar Bargeer who was a Professor in Ismail Yusuf College has also written two articles related to the teachers of Arabic and Persian, University of Mumbai, but the author of this article could not see those articles. (13)

Sadiq Hedayat, the great short story writer of Iran had spent several years in Mumbai. Collection of his best short stories entitled “Bof-e- Kor” was published from Mumbai. (14)

Prof. Ansari ex Head, Department of Persian, University of Mumbai had been

End Notes:

1. Encyclopedia Britannica, vol.3, London, (1958) P 830
2. Ibid.
3. A Comprehensive History of India, Vol.V, Edited by Mohammad Habib and Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, (New Delhi 1970) PP.199-205

actively involved in Persian Literary works and some way or other he has also greatly contributed in the development of Persian language and literature.

Among Persian scholars of present time Prof. Havewala, Prof. Nurus Saeed Akhtar, Prof. Mehrun Nisa Khan, Dr. Mrs. Shaista Akhtar Khan and Prof. Abd-us Sattar Dalvi are well known names in Persian literary circle. Each of them has greatly contributed in the progress and expansion of Persian language and literature. This is to mention here that in this article many names might have been left but my sincere effort to discover other scholars if any and collect information is continued and as soon as any new name associated with the literary activities of Persian language and literature in Mumbai is found the same will be incorporated in this article.

Conclusion

During centuries Mumbai has produced a number of scholars who authored books and renowned articles and translated renowned books from Persian into English. However, the most important finding of this article is that Mumbai has produced third Ferdowsi of Persian language. Hence in the light of above fact and findings it may not be wrong to say that Mumbai has considerable share in the development of Persian language and literature and can feel proud for producing third Ferdowsi in India in the shape of Mulla Firoz Bin Kaus.

4. Prof. Abd-us Sattar Dalvi, Ismail Yusuf College, Mumbai Aur Hindustan Mein Mashreqi Uloomke Mutale Ki Asri Manviyat, (Mumbai-2004) PP 17-18
5. Ibid,
6. Ibid, P 18
7. Dr. Razazadeh Shafaq, Tarikhe Adabiyate Iran, Urdu translation by Sayed Mubarizuddin Rafat, (Delhi.2005) PP.102-108
8. Professor Abd-us Sattar Dalvi, Ibid, P22
9. Maqaalate Professor Mohammad Ibrahim Daar, Prof. Abd-us Sattar Dalvi, (Mumbai, 1914)
10. Prof. A. Dalvi, Ismail Yusuf College, Mumbai Aur Hindustan Mein Mashreqi Olum Ke Mutale Ki Asri Manviyat, Ibid, P-24
11. Ibid, P 21
12. Ibid, P-25
13. Ibid, PP-25-26
14. Mahmud Katirai, Kitabe Sadiq Hedayat, (Tehran 1349) P (Preface) 39

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