Literary Development during Sur Afghan period

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ABSTRACT

The Medieval India saw a great advancement in the progress of Indian language and literature. Persian and Arabic are the most important literary works of the Afghan period. Hindi literature also made a significant progress during this period. Braj bhasha and khari boli Begun were usage in literary compositions. This article attempt to examine that there are many scholars and theologians who contribute in the growth of literature. Malik Mohammad Jayasi and Surdas are the most famous figure from this period.

Keyword: Literature, Afghan, development, progress, Scholar, Theologian, Poet.

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Introduction

Literature is the mirror, which reflects the culture and character of people. It is equally applicable on the literature of both classes, the elites and that of the masses. The Sur Afghan rule occupies a significant position in literary history. In this period, a prominent progress in Arabic and Persian learning is observed. It witnessed a momentous development of the Hindi language and literature.¹ Like the Muslim poets, Hindi poets were also attached to the Sher Shah's court. After his death his successor Islam Shah continued the policy and progresses the name and fame of the dynasty. The poets and writers of this period are classified as under:-

Arabic and Persian Scholars and Theologians

Mir Sayyid Rafiuddin, Mullah Jalal Bhim Danishmand, Shaikh Mubarak and Shaikh Budh Tabib Danishmand were some of the celebrated men of the Sur period.

Mir Sayyid Rafiuddin: Syed Rafiuddin Shirazi was among the ninth century (AH) authorities on Hadith and a great man of learning. According to *Akhbar al-Akhyar*, Rafiuddin's family was greatly respected in Shiraz, so much so that Allama Dawwani himself would come to his house to teach him. Rafiuddin himself went to Cairo and stayed there for a long time as his disciple. In his book, *Zau-ul-Laame fi A'yan-ul-Qarn-al-Tasey*, Sakhawi has written a detailed treatise about him. He came to India during the reign of Sultan Sikandar Lodhi and settled there. All kings from Sikandar Lodhi to Salim Shah were his murids (disciples). Great ulama also were his disciples in the Science of Hadith. Mir Sayyid Rafiuddin the renowned and unique traditionalist whom Sher Shah used to consult on vital matters, religious as well as temporal.² Defeated by Sher Shah, Mughal king Humayun came to Agra and met Rafiuddin at his residence seeking his blessings and supplications. *Tazkirat al-Waqiaat* says that Rafiuddin had suggested to Humayun to go to Iran.

Shaikh Mubarak: Shaikh Mubarak is the illustrious father of the great historian Abul Fazal and Shaikh Faizi. He occupied a prominent position among the scholars. His views were angrily debated by the orthodox, who blamed him of opportunism and flattery. He was the author of many books

¹ Abdur Rahim, *History of the Afghans in India A.D. 1545- 1631*, Karachi, 1961, p. 145

² Abdul Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhab- al- Tawarikh*, vol. I (tr.) Ranking, Calcutta, Asiatic Society, 1925, pp. 479- 81

in Arabic and Persian. A commentary on the Quran, *Manba-i- nafais- ul- uyum* and translation into Persian of the classical work zoological science written by Kamaluddin Muhammad B. Isa Damiri (d.808/ 1305); *Hayat- ul- haiwan*.³

Shaikh Budh Tabib Danishmand: He was a distinguish theologian of this time. According to **Badauni**, Shaikh Budh Danishmand was distinguish for learning and piety and Sher Shah had so much respect for him that he often helped the Shaikh in putting on his shoes.

Maulana Abdullah Sultanpuri: The outstanding figure of the Sur period in Arabic, Persian and Islamic learning was Maulana Abdullah Sultanpuri. He was also a great theologian of that time. Humayun distinguishes him with the title of Makhdum- ul- mulk and allows him considerable power in religious matters. Sher Shah made him the Shaikh- ul- Islam and Islam Shah gave him the post of Sadr- us- sudur.⁴ In matters relating to religion and grants to religious learned persons and educational institutions, the king usually took advice from him. Islam shah had great respect for the learning of his Sadr- us- sudur. His beneficence of the learned was unlimited. **Badauni** highly appreciated his literary and intellectual attainments. He says that Maulana was one of the vastly learned men of the age and was in -comparable especially in the knowledge of the Quran and hadith, theology and law. He wrote two important books *Ismat- i- ambiya* and a commentary on the *Shamali- un- nabi*, which were considered the best of his compositions. He had great influence in the state and society.⁵

Shaikh Hasan and Shaikh Nasr Allah: Hasan, father of Shaikh Alai and his uncle Shaikh Nasr Allah also were learned men of the Sur period. Originally, they belong to the Bengal, later settled in Biana and devoted themselves to teaching and preaching.⁶

Jahangir Hashmi: During the reign of Sher Shah Suri, the Afghan monarch, Jahangir for few years stayed in Delhi, the imperial capital and treated with respect for his pious background. He composed a masnavi on the pattern of Shaikh Nizami and named it *Mazhar- ul- asar*.⁷

³ Nabi Hadi, *Dictionary of indo- Persian literature*, New Delhi, 1995, pp.361-62

⁴ Ibid., p. 393

⁵ *Muntakhab- al- Tawarikh*, vol. III, p.70

⁶ *Muntakhab- al- Tawarikh*, op. cit. p. 395; see also, *History of the Afghans in India A.D. 1545- 1631*, op.cit. p.146

⁷ *Dictionary of Indo- Persian Literature*, op. cit. p.275

Shaikh Alai: He was also a great Islamic learner of that time. He excelled in Islamic learning and he rose above in religious debate with all the other celebrated scholars of that period.

Persian poets

Persian poetry occupied next place in this period. Badauni gives the name of some talented poets who flourished in the Sur court. Mir Sayyid Naimatullah, Shaikh Abdul Hai, Haiti, Saifi earned fame in verification and learning.⁸

Mir Sayyid Naimatullah: Badauni says that Mir Sayyid Naimatullah, known by his poetical name as Rushuti, who was an incomparable learned man of the age, was his constant companion.⁹

Shaikh Abdul Hai: He was the son of Shaikh Jamali Kanbawi of Delhi. He was a vastly learned man and a poet, and was a devout man. Sayyid Shah Mir of Agra invented the following chronogram:-

My name in itself would furnish the *Tarikh*

At such time as 'abd (the slave) was not in the midst of it.¹⁰

Hindi poets

The Hindi language and literature made unprecedented progress in the Sur afghan period. The afghan rulers extended liberal patronage to the Hindi poets and scholars. They were keenly interested in the promotion of Hindi and they advanced it in every conceivable way. They were the first to accord it a status of dignity in the state and society. The court of Islam Shah Sur in particular was by all indications a congenial place for Hindi writer. The Sufi concerned were Malik Muhammad Jayasi author of *Padmavat*, Mir Sayyid Manjhan composer of *Madhumalati* and Shaikh Qutban writer of *Mirgavati*. They were the three sixteenth century Sufi poets of Hindi. **Shaikh Kabir Batni** in his *Afsana-i-shahan* mentions the name of Surdas along with Muhsin who were also attached to the royal court.¹¹ Some other great Hindi poets, such as Shah Muhammad Farmuli, Haridas and Tulsidas also flourished in the Sur period.

⁸ *Muntakhab-al-Tawarikh*, op. cit. p. 410

⁹ Ibid., p.415

¹⁰ Ibid., p.410

¹¹ Muhammad kabir, *Afsana-i-Shahan*, f. 105b

Sufi Poets

Malik Muhammad Jayasi: Malik Muhammad Jayasi was the oldest vernacular poet, composed his famous work *Padmavat* in 1540 CE, when Sher Shah was the Sultan of Delhi. The other work composed by him was *Akhravata*. Both of his works are written in Awadhi language. *Padmavat* is the only romantic epic of Hindi literature in masnavi form of poetry. The epic poem is a fictionalized version of the historic siege of Chittor by Alauddin Khilji in 1303 CE, who attacks Chittor after hearing of the beauty of Queen Rani Padmini, the wife of King Rawal Ratan Singh.¹² It is a 'tale of love'. It is an allegory depicting transcendental love through the medium of unearthly love-story.¹³

According to Jayasi, *Chittor* stood for body, *Raja* for mind, *Ceylon* for heart, *Padmini* for wisdom, *Alauddin* for lust. For this, *Ashraf Jahangir Semnani* as an ideal spiritual guides.

Though fanciful, the *Padmavat* is however a master-piece of the Hindi literature. It reveals Jayasi as a mystic. Some part of the work is dedicate to Sher Shah (1486–1545 CE). Jayasi compares Sher Shah with Umar the second Caliph of Islam for his love and justice.¹⁴

Mir Manjhan: Mir Manjhan wrote his famous *Madhumalati* during the reign of Islam Shah, in 1545 CE. The *Madhumalati* is a mystical Indian romance. Similarly, Mir Manjhan praises Islam Shah in his prologue as the king of the time that every person benefited from his impartial justice and peace and prosperity prevailed everywhere in his empire due to his just rule.¹⁵

Qutban Shaikh: He completed his work in 1558 CE and dedicated his work to Alauddin Hussain Shah of Bengal, whom he calls the one well versed in the

¹² Padmavat ; the Imperial Gazetteer of India, vol. 2, 1909, p. 430

¹³ Amaresh Dutta, *Encyclopedia of Indian Literature*, vol. II, New Delhi, 1988, p.1178

¹⁴ Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqui, *Some Aspects of Afghan Despotism in India*, Aligarh, 1969, p.87

¹⁵ Mir Manjhan, *Madhumalati*, ed. Mata Prasad Gupta, Allahabad, 1861, p. 12

Purana and whose courage and justice he compares to Hindu heroes of the Mahabharata fame.¹⁶

Bhakti Poets

The Bhakti Movement of that time also made a significant contribution to the development of Hindi language and literature. The eight disciples of Goswami Vallabhacharya, known as *hast-chap*, were also notable poets of the Braj Bhasa Hindi.

***Suradas*:** Surdas was the sun in the sky of Hindi literature. Surdas flourished under the court patronage of Islam Shah.¹⁷ Surdas knew the Persian and used Persian words and idioms in Hindised forms. He has earned undying fame for his poetical work *Sursagar*, *Sursravali*, *Sahityalahri*. His chief fame as a poet rests on his *Sursagar* being a verified rendering of the *Bhagvat Purana* originally containing 125,000 verses. The theme of *Sursagar* is the boyhood of Krishna in Virindaban as described with such vividness and naturalness as to give the reader an impression that almost likes an eyewitness.¹⁸

***Swami Haridas*:** He made a remarkable contribution in this field. Swami Haridas was a spiritual poet. He was born sometime during the latter half of the fifteenth century. Swami Haridas compositions include *Hridas Ji Ki Pad*, *Haridas Ji Ki Granth*, *Swami Haridas Ji Ki Bani* many of his songs have been quoted by Pandit Krishnanand Vyasdeva in his *Sangi- ta- raga- kalpa- druma*.¹⁹ His work influenced both the classical music and the Bhakti movements of North India, especially those devoted to Krishna's consort Radha. He describes Radha and Krishna is sporting beautifully:

*Two beams of light are playing,
Unique their dance and music.*

¹⁶ Dr. A. Halim, *Three sixteen century Sufi poets of Hindi*, Proceeding Of Pakistan History Conference, Peshawar, 1958, p. 227

¹⁷ Afsana- i- Shahan, op. cit. f. 154a

¹⁸ Dr. A. Halim, *A peep into the patronage of Hindi literature at Akbar's court*, proceeding of Pakistan history conference, Khairpur, 1955, p. 186

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 185

*Ragas and raginis of heavenly beauty are born.
The two have sunk themselves in the ocean of raga.*

Tulsidas: The celebrated Hindi poet Tulsidas the author of *Ramcharitmanas*, began his poetical career in the fostering atmosphere of the Sur afghan rule. Surdas, a devotee of Krishna and a contemporary of Tulsidas, called Tulsidas as *Sant Shiromani* (the highest jewel among holy men) in an eight-line verse extolling *Ramcharitmanas* and Tulsidas.²⁰ Specifically about his poetry, Tulsidas is been called the "emperor of the metaphor" and one who excels in similes by several critics. The Hindi poet **Ayodhya Singh Upadhyay 'Hariaudh'** said of Tulsidas:-

"Tulsidas did not shine by composing poetry, rather it was Poetry herself that shone by getting the art of Tulsidas."²¹

The Hindi poetess **Mahadevi Verma** said commenting on Tulsidas that in the turbulent middle Ages, India got light from Tulsidas. She further went on to say that, "the Indian society as it exists today is an edifice built by Tulsidas, and the Rama as we know today is the Rama of Tulsidas."²²

Narhari: A Braj poet Narhari, who had been one of several vernacular poets to attract the patronage of Islam Shah Sur (1545-1554 CE).²³

Vittalnath: He was a prose- writer who wrote *Sringar Rasa Mandana*. He was the son of Vallabhacharya.

Shah Muhammad Farmuli: A noble of Islam Shah who composed excellent verses in Hindi.²⁴ He was a vernacular poet. Persian literary biographer

²⁰ Usha Devi Shukla, *Gosvami Tulsidas and Ramcharitamanasa*, New Delhi, 2002, p. 34

²¹ Ram Ganesh Pandey, (*The Birthplace of Tulasidasa: Investigative Research*), Uttar Pradesh, 2008, p.10; Uday Bhanu Singh, (*Investigation into the poetry of Tulsidas*), New Delhi, 2008, p. 339

²² *Gosvami Tulsidas and Ramcharitamanasa* p. 11

²³ Allison Busch, *Poetry of kings: a classical Hindi literature of Mughal India*, New York, 2011, p.134

²⁴ Afsana- i- Shahan, f. 146a

fondly remembers his vernacular poems. For his wit and humour he was the favourite companion of Islam Shah.²⁵

Ahmad Al Umri: He composed a songstress on the love of Baz Bahadur and his beloved Rupmati under the title '*lady of the lotus*'. He also composed many other songs, the most remarkable of which were those written in commemoration of the delights of the spring festival and of the infatuation of the gopis of Vrindaban for the melodious reed- pipe (bansi) of Krishna.²⁶

Islam shah was also a friend of learned. He was happy among the scholars and pious people. In his patronage to learning Islam Shah surpassed his father. An indeed his encouragement gave a great stimulus to literary activities and development of the Persian language and poetry in particular. Islam shah was a good poet, and took interest in poetry, competed with great poets of the time in composing elegant verses and was highly esteemed by the learned.

Naimatullah while enumerating the traits of Islam Shah says, "He was wise, accomplished, learned, possessed of sound judgment, far- sighted, God fearing and the protector of his subjects. He memorized the Gulistan and Bustan of Sadi and very often recited the poetry of Hafez. In his gatherings, strange stories, fables and verses of the bye- gone poets were recite. He took delight in composing verses; if any verse cited, he could easily complement extempore with another verse. He had acquired acknowledge of the fundamental points of canon law from Makhdum- ul- Mulk, attended and took part in theological discussions."²⁷

Conclusion

The period of Sur Afghan rule saw an excellent development of the literature in Arabic and Persian but it is particularly rich in the works of the Hindi

²⁵ *Muntakhab- al- Tawarikh*, Op.cit. p. 387

²⁶ *History of the Afghans in India A.D. 1545- 1631*, op. cit. p. 148

²⁷ *Muntakhab- al- Tawarikh*, Op.cit. p. 416

language and literature. The poet like Jayasi, Sur, Tulsi was a product of this period. Islam shah's patronage to the learned and his interest in philosophical discussions with them can be witness latter in history with the dawn of the intellectual renaissance that took place in the reign of Akbar.

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