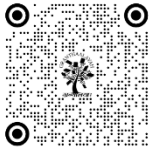


PERSIAN STUDIES IN INDIA: THE ENDURING LEGACY OF PERSIAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN INDIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the enduring legacy of Persian language and literature in Indian universities, tracing its historical development and contemporary relevance. The study begins with the arrival of Persian in the Indian subcontinent through successive invasions and cultural exchanges, particularly during the Achaemenid, Ghaznavid, Ghurid, and Mughal periods. Persian established itself as the language of administration, literature, and high culture, leaving a profound impact on Indian languages, especially Urdu, as well as on art, architecture, and cultural practices. The paper highlights the significance of Persian in shaping India's linguistic and literary traditions through figures such as Mirza Ghalib and Allama Iqbal, and historical texts like the Akbarnama and Baburnama. It also examines the institutional role of Indian universities like Aligarh Muslim University, Delhi University, and Jawaharlal Nehru University in preserving and promoting Persian studies. Despite a decline in interest among students due to limited career opportunities and outdated teaching methods, the study emphasizes the potential of digital resources and interdisciplinary approaches to revitalize Persian studies. Through comprehensive academic programs, international collaborations, and cultural initiatives, Persian continues to be a vital part of India's educational and cultural landscape. The paper argues that with adequate support from academic institutions, cultural organizations, and government policy, the Persian language can maintain its relevance and continue to enrich India's cultural heritage.

Keywords: Persian Literature, Cultural Integration, Indian Subcontinent, Interdisciplinary Approaches

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of Persian language and literature in India has a long and rich history, reflecting the deep cultural and historical ties between the Indian subcontinent and Persia (modern-day Iran). This legacy continues to thrive in Indian universities, where Persian studies are an important part of the curriculum in various departments, especially in the humanities and languages.

The Persian language and its literary tradition hold a distinguished place in the cultural and historical fabric of the Indian subcontinent. Its arrival in India, spanning centuries of invasions, dynastic rules, and intellectual exchanges, marks one of the most profound examples of linguistic and cultural integration in South Asia. From the early incursions of the Achaemenid Empire to the flourishing courts of the Mughals, Persian not only served as the administrative and literary language but also influenced local languages, arts, and societal structures in transformative ways (Ghani, 1941).

The Mughal Empire, in particular, heralded a golden era for Persian in India, with emperors patronizing poets, scholars, and artists, making the language central to governance, high culture, and education.

This historical legacy did not end with the Mughal decline. Even during the British colonial era, Persian retained scholarly and literary significance, although English gradually replaced it as the language of administration. Today, the legacy of Persian endures through its continued study in Indian universities such as Aligarh Muslim University, Delhi University, and Jawaharlal Nehru University. These institutions have played a vital role in preserving the classical tradition of Persian literature while also encouraging modern research and cultural engagement.

Despite facing challenges such as declining student interest and limited professional avenues, Persian studies in India remain an essential academic field. The language's deep imprint on Indian languages like Urdu and its significant contributions to Indian architecture, art, and music reaffirm its relevance. This paper explores the rich historical journey of Persian in India, its academic presence in modern institutions, and the challenges and opportunities in sustaining this heritage. By understanding the evolution and influence of Persian, we gain deeper insights into India's multicultural identity and the enduring bonds between Persian and Indian civilizations.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, historical-analytical approach to explore the enduring legacy of Persian language and literature in Indian universities. The research methodology is grounded in the examination of primary and secondary sources, including historical texts, archival records, academic articles, and institutional data from Indian universities that offer Persian studies. The aim is to trace the trajectory of Persian's influence in India from ancient times through the medieval and Mughal periods, up to its contemporary academic presence.

Primary sources, such as classical Persian texts, historical chronicles like the Baburnama and Akbarnama, and the literary works of Indo-Persian poets such as Mirza Ghalib and Allama Iqbal, form the foundation of the historical analysis. These sources provide insight into the socio-political and cultural contexts in which Persian thrived in India. Additionally, institutional records and academic syllabi from prominent Indian universities—such as Aligarh Muslim University, Delhi University, and Jawaharlal Nehru University—are analyzed to assess the current structure and content of Persian studies programs.

Secondary sources include scholarly books, journal articles, and credible web-based resources that discuss Persian's historical, linguistic, and cultural contributions in South Asia. These are used to supplement and contextualize the primary findings, offering broader academic perspectives.

The study also incorporates a thematic review of literature to identify recurring patterns and challenges in the teaching and preservation of Persian in India today. This methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of how Persian language and literature have shaped, and continue to influence, Indian academia and culture, while highlighting the contemporary challenges and opportunities for its revival and sustenance.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The beautiful and creative Persian language entered into India with a gradual process marked by a series of invasions and the establishment of Persian-speaking dynasties. The Persian language had a very strong presence in India where it mixed with the native languages and influenced much of the modern Indian languages in a way that these languages would not exist in the form today without the beauty of the Persian language. The fact that a foreign language like Persian found its footing in India despite India having a very strong cultural influence particularly languages like Sanskrit is because Persian did not come all of a sudden, rather it came to India in a gradual stage wise process (Abidi,1984). From the early incursions of the Achaemenids and the Ghaznavids to the Ghori conquest and the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, each wave of Persian influence deepened the presence of the language in the subcontinent. The Mughal Empire's adoption of Persian as the language of administration and high culture cemented its place in Indian society, creating a legacy that would influence the region for centuries to come.

The entry of the Persian language into India is a story of multiple invasions, cultural exchanges, and the establishment of dynasties that carried the language with them. The roots of Persian influence in India can be traced back to the ancient periods of the Achaemenid Empire. During the reign of Cyrus the Great and Darius I, parts of north

western India, particularly the region of present-day Pakistan, came under Persian control. These early interactions were primarily commercial and administrative, setting the groundwork for later, more profound influences.

The significant influx of Persian began with the advent of the Ghaznavid Empire in the 10th century. Mahmud of Ghazni, the most prominent ruler of the Ghaznavid dynasty, launched numerous invasions into the Indian subcontinent. Although his primary motivation was plunder, the establishment of Ghaznavid rule in parts of northern India brought Persian administrators, scholars, and poets with him. These individuals carried their language and culture, marking the beginning of Persian as a language of administration and high culture in the region. (Alam, 1998)

Following the Ghaznavids, the Ghurid dynasty, based in present-day Afghanistan and eastern Iran, played a crucial role in further embedding Persian into Indian society. Muhammad of Ghor, the Ghurid ruler, defeated the Rajput king Prithviraj Chauhan in the Second Battle of Tarain in 1192, which led to the establishment of Ghurid rule in northern India. The Ghurids established a network of Persian-speaking officials and scholars who administered their new territories, further entrenching Persian as a significant language in the Indian subcontinent.

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the early 13th century marked a pivotal moment in the history of Persian in India. The sultanate, founded by Persianized Turks, saw the continued use of Persian as the language of administration, culture, and literature. The early sultans, such as Qutb-ud-din Aibak and Iltutmish, promoted Persian culture and literature, inviting poets and scholars from Persia to their courts. These interactions fostered a rich environment for the growth of Persian literary traditions in India, influencing local languages and cultural practices (Ashhar, 2010).

The most profound and lasting impact of Persian on India came with the establishment of the Mughal Empire in 1526. The Mughals, who were of Central Asian origin but had become heavily Persianized through their long association with Persian culture, made Persian the official language of their empire. Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire, was a patron of Persian literature, but his memoirs, *Tuzuke Babori*, is written in Turkish Language (Farooqi, 2009). His successors, including Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb, continued this tradition, making Persian the language of administration, culture, and high society.

Under the Mughals, Persian became deeply embedded in the fabric of Indian society. The Mughal court attracted poets, scholars, and artists from Persia, who found patronage and a receptive audience in India. Persian became the language of the elite, used in administration, literature, art, and education (Banoo, 2017). The Mughal emperors' patronage of Persian culture led to a flourishing of Persian literature and arts in India, with many Indian scholars and poets contributing to this rich tradition.

The Mughal Empire's extensive bureaucracy used Persian for its records, correspondence, and administration, further entrenching the language in the Indian subcontinent. Persian was taught in madrasas and used in the literary circles of major cities such as Delhi, Agra, and Lahore. The influence of Persian was so profound that it significantly shaped the development of several Indian languages, particularly Urdu, which emerged as a syncretic language combining elements of Persian, Arabic, and local dialects.

4. PERSIAN STUDIES IN MODERN INDIAN UNIVERSITIES

India, a country with a wide range of languages and cultures, has a long-standing historical relationship with the Persian language. Persian, which is renowned for its complex poetry, deep literature, and historical relevance, is still flourishing in India's academic environment (Dadvar, 2000). With the aim of preserving and celebrating this linguistic history, a number of prestigious universities across the nation have developed extensive academic programs in recognition of the lasting significance of Persian language and culture.

These academic programs, provided by prestigious universities, offer a wide range of opportunities for both students and scholars. They offer a thorough investigation of Persian literature, language, and historical ties to India. Although particulars may differ, these institutions' shared dedication to advancing Persian studies endures.

Students in these courses engage on a linguistic journey that gives them the knowledge and abilities to read, write, speak, and comprehend Persian. The academic programs accommodate a wide spectrum of learners, offering everything from beginner-friendly introductory courses to advanced studies for individuals with prior experience (Habib, 1999). Students become proficient in the Persian language and learn to traverse its difficult grammar, syntax, and vocabulary through intensive education and committed staff.

However, these programs' importance goes far beyond linguistic training. They serve as thriving hubs for examining the centuries-old cultural connections between India and Persia. Students are invited to examine the complex works of classical Persian poets like Rumi, Hafez, and Saadi as part of courses that dig into the worlds of Persian literature, poetry, and history (Jaisi, 1985). The lyrics of these prominent poets provide a rich tapestry of human emotions, philosophy, and spirituality that can be explored via the study of Persian literature. Students learn language skills through literature, but they also develop a deep respect for Persian civilization's aesthetic and cultural accomplishments.

Dedicated academics who actively pursue research and intellectual endeavors are at the core of these programs. Our knowledge of Persian language, literature, and culture has been enriched by their work, which has been published in academic publications and presented at conferences. These academics are the guardians of an international tradition that fosters an atmosphere where the pursuit of knowledge is linked with protecting cultural heritage (Khansir, 2014).

Additionally, Persian academic programs are dynamic communities of cultural enrichment outside of the traditional classroom setting. Cultural celebrations of the Persian language and culture are frequently held in universities through lectures, seminars, workshops, and other events. These events encourage students and academics to become fully immersed in the exquisiteness of Persian music, art, and traditions by acting as a link between the past and the present. Through these activities, the Persian culture is brought to life, helping students develop a stronger bond with the civilization they are learning about.

Persian studies now have departments or institutes at several prestigious universities in India. These academic institutions provide a variety of courses that investigate and honor Persian language and culture. The Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), University of Calcutta, Osmania University, University of Delhi, University of Mumbai, University of Madras, University of Allahabad, University of Lucknow, Department of Persian, Karnatak University, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Gauhati University, Guru Nanak Dev University, Moulana Mazharul Haque Arabic and Persian University, Panjabi University, Gujrat University, The Maharaja Sayajirao University and the University of Hyderabad are few of these institutions.

In conclusion, Persian academic programs at prestigious universities in India are more than just academic endeavors; they are doors to a better understanding of culture and connections that cut beyond space and time. The courses equip students with language proficiency, cultural awareness, and a deep understanding of the links between India and Persia throughout history (Mukherjee, 2016). These institutions make sure that Persian studies remain a viable and essential component of India's academic and cultural landscape, spanning the past, present, and future, through demanding coursework, scholarly research, and exciting cultural events.

4.1. LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

The literary contributions of Persian in India are monumental, producing a rich corpus of poetry, prose, and historical texts. Persian became the language of the court and intellectual discourse during the Mughal era, leading to the production of numerous literary works. One of the most celebrated figures in Indo-Persian literature is Mirza Ghalib. Ghalib's Persian poetry is renowned for its depth, wit, and philosophical musings. His work has been extensively studied and remains a cornerstone of both Indian and Persian literary heritage (Naim, 2006).

Another towering figure is Allama Iqbal, whose poetry in Persian has left an indelible mark on the literary world. Iqbal's philosophical and visionary verses inspired movements and continue to resonate with readers across India and beyond. His works, such as "Asrar-e-Khudi" (Secrets of the Self), explore themes of self-identity, spirituality, and the collective consciousness of the Muslim world.

Indo-Persian literature is not confined to poetry alone. Historical texts like the *Tabaqate Naseri* of Minhaj Seraj, "Akbarname," authored by Abu'l-Fazl, the court historian of Akbar, provide invaluable insights into the history and culture of the time (Nizami, 1992). These works are not only significant historical documents but also masterpieces of Persian prose.

4.2. CULTURAL INTEGRATION

The cultural integration of Persian traditions into Indian society is evident in various forms of art, architecture, and cultural practices. Persian aesthetics profoundly influenced Mughal architecture, resulting in iconic structures like the

Taj Mahal, Humayun's Tomb, and the Red Fort. These monuments showcase the intricate artistry and grandeur of Persian design, combined with local Indian elements, creating a unique architectural style that is celebrated worldwide.

Persian art, particularly miniature painting, also flourished in India under Mughal patronage. Artists like Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd al-Samad, who were brought to India by Emperor Humayun, played a crucial role in developing the Mughal school of painting. These artworks often depicted scenes from Persian literature, royal life, and nature, blending Persian techniques with Indian themes and aesthetics (Qasmi, 1992).

Cultural practices such as festivals, culinary traditions, and clothing were also influenced by Persian culture. The celebration of Nowruz (Persian New Year) and the use of Persian-inspired attire, such as the Jama and Sherwani, highlight the cultural amalgamation. The Persian style of gardens, characterized by their geometric layouts and water features, was adopted in India, leading to the creation of famous Mughal gardens like Shalimar Bagh in Kashmir.

In music, Persian classical styles merged with Indian traditions to create unique forms such as Qawwali, a devotional music genre popularized by Sufi saints. This synthesis of musical traditions exemplifies the deep cultural integration that has occurred over centuries.

5. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The study of Persian in India, despite its rich legacy and significant contributions to the country's cultural and linguistic heritage, faces several contemporary challenges and opportunities. Addressing these challenges while capitalizing on the opportunities is essential for ensuring that the Persian language and its literary treasures continue to thrive.

Declining Interest

One of the most pressing challenges is the declining interest in Persian studies among students. This trend can be attributed to various factors, including the perception of limited career opportunities for graduates specializing in Persian. In an era where students are increasingly gravitating towards fields with clear professional pathways and high earning potential, the humanities, and classical language studies often struggle to attract and retain students. Persian, despite its historical significance, is no exception to this trend.

Furthermore, the lack of integration between Persian studies and broader academic and professional fields exacerbates this issue. Many students view Persian as a niche area with limited applicability outside of academia. This perception discourages them from pursuing it, despite an interest in the language or its cultural heritage.

Digital Resources

Another significant challenge is the need for modernizing Persian studies to make them more accessible and engaging for contemporary students. Traditional pedagogical methods, which often rely heavily on rote memorization and classical texts, may not resonate with today's learners. There is a growing need for digital resources, such as online courses, interactive learning platforms, and digital archives, to revitalize interest in Persian studies.

The development of digital resources can transform the way Persian is taught and studied. For instance, online platforms can offer multimedia content, interactive language exercises, and access to a vast array of Persian literature and historical documents. This approach can make learning Persian more engaging and flexible, allowing students to learn at their own pace and according to their interests.

Moreover, integrating technology into Persian studies can help bridge the gap between classical language education and contemporary applications. Digital tools can facilitate connections between Persian language skills and various professional fields, such as international relations, history, literature, and cultural studies. By demonstrating the relevance of Persian in these areas, educators can attract a broader range of students.

6. PROMOTION AND PRESERVATION

Efforts by academic institutions, cultural organizations, and governments play a crucial role in promoting and preserving Persian language and literature studies in India. Academic institutions need to develop and implement strategies to attract students to Persian studies. This could include offering interdisciplinary programs that combine Persian with other fields such as history, political science, and cultural studies. Such programs can highlight the relevance

of Persian in understanding historical and contemporary issues, thereby attracting students who might not have considered Persian studies otherwise.

Cultural organizations also have a vital role to play. Events such as literary festivals, poetry readings, and cultural exchanges can generate interest and appreciation for Persian language and literature. These events can provide platforms for students and scholars to engage with the rich legacy of Persian in India, fostering a deeper connection and commitment to its study and preservation.

Government support is equally important. Policies and funding aimed at promoting Persian studies can make a significant difference. Scholarships, research grants, and funding for academic programs can alleviate some of the financial barriers that students and institutions face. Additionally, government initiatives that promote cultural heritage can raise public awareness about the importance of preserving and studying Persian.

Another opportunity lies in international collaborations. Partnering with universities and cultural institutions in countries where Persian is widely spoken, such as Iran and Afghanistan, can provide valuable resources and expertise. Exchange programs, joint research projects, and collaborative digital initiatives can enrich Persian studies in India and provide students with broader perspectives and opportunities.

The challenges facing Persian studies in India, including declining interest among students and the need for modern pedagogical methods, are significant but not insurmountable. By embracing digital resources and integrating Persian studies with broader academic and professional fields, educators can revitalize interest in the language. Additionally, the combined efforts of academic institutions, cultural organizations, and governments are crucial in promoting and preserving Persian language and literature studies (Siddiqui, 1968).

Addressing these challenges and seizing the opportunities requires a multifaceted approach that combines traditional and modern methods, highlights the contemporary relevance of Persian, and fosters a supportive environment for students and scholars (Zubairi, 1934). Through these efforts, the rich legacy of Persian in India can be preserved and passed on to future generations, ensuring that this invaluable cultural heritage continues to thrive in the modern world.

7. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The study of Persian language and literature in India reflects deep cultural and historical ties between the Indian subcontinent and Persia, with a legacy that continues to thrive in modern Indian universities. This relationship began with a series of invasions and the establishment of Persian-speaking dynasties, starting from the Achaemenid Empire and culminating in the Mughal Empire. These invasions brought Persian administrators, scholars, and poets who embedded the language into the administrative and cultural fabric of the region. The Mughal Empire, in particular, cemented Persian as the language of administration and high culture, influencing the linguistic landscape of India profoundly.

Today, Persian is studied in various Indian universities, such as Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi University, and Aligarh Muslim University, where dedicated departments offer comprehensive programs in Persian language and literature. These institutions preserve linguistic skills and encourage the exploration of historical and cultural ties between India and Persia. Research in Persian studies focuses on historical documents, literary works, and Indo-Persian cultural exchanges, ensuring that Persian remains a vibrant subject of academic interest.

The influence and legacy of Persian in India are profound, encompassing linguistic impacts, literary contributions, and cultural integration. Persian significantly influenced Indian languages, particularly Urdu, which evolved during the Mughal period with a substantial Persian vocabulary. Persian also enriched other regional languages like Assamese, Bengali Hindi, Punjabi, and Sindhi. The literary contributions of Persian in India are monumental, producing a rich corpus of poetry, prose, and historical texts. Renowned figures like Mirza Ghalib and Allama Iqbal made significant contributions to Indo-Persian literature, while historical texts like the "Baburnama" and "Akbarnama" provide invaluable insights into the history and culture of the time.

Culturally, Persian traditions have been integrated into Indian society, evident in art, architecture, and cultural practices. Mughal architecture, miniature painting, and cultural practices like Nowruz and Persian-inspired attire highlight this integration. The synthesis of Persian and Indian musical traditions, particularly in forms like Qawwali, further exemplifies the deep cultural amalgamation.

However, Persian studies in India face several challenges, including declining interest among students and the need for modern pedagogical methods. Many students perceive limited career opportunities in Persian studies, which, combined with traditional teaching methods, contributes to declining interest. To address this, there is a growing need for digital resources and modern teaching methods to make Persian studies more accessible and engaging. Efforts by academic institutions, cultural organizations, and governments are crucial in promoting and preserving Persian language and literature studies. Interdisciplinary programs, cultural events, government support, and international collaborations can help revitalize interest in Persian studies.

In conclusion, while Persian studies in India face significant challenges, the rich legacy of Persian in India continues to be celebrated and studied. By embracing modern methods and fostering a supportive environment, educators and institutions can ensure that the Persian language and its literary treasures continue to thrive, preserving an invaluable cultural heritage for future generations.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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