

Artistic and Cultural exchange between India and Iran in 16th&17th century

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Abstract. Rich in historical background and cultural heritage, India and Iran, down the ages, have presented several art works in various fields to the world, using these qualities and methods. The aforementioned countries also have a lot in common. The Aryans inhabited Iran and India; consequently, there have been many common grounds in languages, religions and costumes of the two countries. The relationship between cultures of Iran and India is best manifested in art; although, this relationship has suffered various vicissitudes.

Keywords: India, Iran, Relation, Art, Culture

The general method used in this research work is based on rationality, academic origin and realism. The approach of this general method is historical, comparative which due to its descriptive manner has a particular importance.

1. Introduction

“Few people have been more closely related in origin and throughout history than the people of India and the people of Iran¹”. The peoples of India and Iran, two ancient neighbouring civilisations, have enjoyed close historical links through the ages. They had a common homeland and share a common linguistic and racial past. Over the several millennium they interacted and enriched each other in the fields of language, religion, arts, culture, food and other traditions.

Before 2000-3000 BC, the inhabitants of modern Iraq and southern Iran as also the people of west and North West India came from the same region. Later, around 1500 BC Aryan tribes from north invaded and defeated these people and marched further to south Asia. The Iranian group moved into the highlands of Iran through the flat passable area south-east of Caspian Sea, while the Indian tribes migrated into the Indian sub-continent. These people brought with them their patrilineal¹ system, their worship of sky gods, their horses and chariots. Also there was close agreement between the language and mythology, religious traditions and social institutions of Indians and Iranians on the one hand and those of the Greeks, Romans, Celts, Germans and Slavs on the other.

Old Persian language was a member of the Indic branch of the Indo-European languages. Sanskrit and Avesta² have a common basic vocabulary and common grammar. The myths that appear in the part of the Avesta include some tales of very ancient pre-Zoroastrian origin, probably belonging to the pagan Indo-Iranian era. Many of these myths re-appear in the Shahnameh⁸, an epic in rhyme by the Poet Ferdowsi⁹, which was completed in A.D. 1010.

2. India and Iran after Islam

The Islamic conquest of Persia (637-651) led to the end of the Sassanid Empire. Persians remained Persians. And after an interval of silence, Iran re-emerged as a separate, different and distinctive element

within Islam, eventually adding a new element even to Islam itself. Culturally, politically, and most remarkable of all even religiously, the Iranian contribution to this new Islamic civilization is of immense importance. In 712 CE, the Arabs also invaded Sind from the west. Sind was one in which Hindu culture influenced Arab Islamic and Persian Islamic culture. In the 11th century AD, Islam came to India from the side of Persia through Sultan Mohammad Ghaznavi. The subsequent influence of Islam when it reached India had a rich Persian influence. The magnificent art and architecture of Iran came to be associated with Islam. Islam became the common element that linked the Persian and Indian elites. Ghaznavi brought along a number of poets, artisans and religious persons who settled down in India. During the 11th century CE, Al-Biruni³, believed to be a Shia Muslim of Iranian origin born in Khwarizm in northern Iran, visited India during the Ghaznavi period. He wrote his famous Kitab-ul-Hind in Arabic, which involved a detailed study of Indian customs, traditions and the Indian way of life. Between 1206 AD and 1687 AD many Muslim dynasties appeared in different parts of India. During this period, the Turks, the Tartars and some Arabs who had imbibed Iranian influence came to India. In 14th century AD several Persian scholars from Tabriz, Esfahan and Ray visited the royal courts in India. During this period several Hindu and Jain religious and philosophical texts from Sanskrit and Prakrit⁴ were translated into Persian. These include the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and etc. There are 24 different translations of Ramayana and 8 different versions of the Bhagavat Gita, 11 of Bhagwat Puran and 6 of Mahabharat in Persian language written by Hindu and Muslim scholars.

In the 1300s, the Ilkhanids, a dynasty founded by the "Genghis Khan's" grandson, Holagu Khan, had been an influential factor in Persia. During these turbulent years of 13th century, the Persians had submerged themselves deeper in Islamic devotion and Sufism. Sufism was the result of spiritual interaction between Persia and India. Some mainstream scholars of Islam define sufism as simply the name for the inner or esoteric dimension of Islam. In this time, some Muslims consider Sufism outside the sphere of Islam. The mysticism of Islam came under the impact of Hinduism and its philosophy of Vedanta. Hinduism also accepted some Islamic elements such as equality and monotheism. Many Hindu saints combined tenets of Islam and Hinduism. Islamic mysticism has been the inspiration of its refined romantic poetry, its ethereal architecture and painting. Mowlavi, the famous Persian mystic, was inspired by Upanishad's monism thoughts and is believed to have adopted the method of storytelling of the Indians in his book Masnavi. There is affinity and several similarities among the Hindu and Muslim mystical thought. A Persian verse of 'Attar was inscribed on temples of Kashmir. The love of Sufi poetry cemented relationship between Hindus and Muslims. Hafez's literary reputation reached India during his lifetime. The great Persian poet Sa'di, in 13th century, travelled to Punjab, Somnath, Gujarat and Delhi. In 1220 when the Mongols ransacked the Muslim world destroying Bukhara, Samarkand, Gurganj, Balkh, Marv and Ghazni, Islam went into eclipse in Persia, Iraq, Ma Wara'un-Nahr⁵ and other regions. India also largely escaped the Mongol invasion.

3. India and Iran in 16th-17th century

In the 16th century, Iran witnessed the rise of the Safavi dynasty after a period of upheaval and India saw the rise of the Mughal Empire. India and Iran became great powers under these two dynasties. The intercourse between India and Iran was manyfaceted, covering politics, diplomacy, culture, literature, trade, and religion. The Mughal patronage of culture constantly attracted Persian scholars; talented Persians were absorbed in the expanding services of the Mughal Empire. The ties between the Safavids and the Mughals were marked by the alliance of Shah Ismail I with Babur and the friendship of Tahmasp and Humayun.

Babur, received help from the Safavid King Shah Ismail I and established himself first in Kabul and then in Delhi and Agra. Babur, himself an accomplished Persian poet was a patron of Persian poets. In the early 16th century, The Iranians King Shah Ismail Safavi sent an Embassy to his court keeping in view the growing maritime and commercial importance of Gujarat. Several Iranian travellers wrote about Gujarat, its people, their religion and customs. During this time, several Persian poets left Iran for India.

Humayun, the son of Babur, after being defeated by the Afghan Sher Shah Suri, fled to Iran and was only able to return to India with the military help of the Iranian Safavid king Tahmasp I. Humayun visited several places during his stay in Persia. Humayun's stay in Iran further stimulated Mughal interest in Persian literature and art. Because of his long stay in Iran, several Iranian poets, artist and scholars later migrated to

India. Persian artists like Abdus Samad, Mir Seyyed Ali, Faroukh Qalmaq, Muhammad Nadir Samarqandi, Mir Hashemi and Mohammad Faqirullah Khan worked with their Indian colleagues in royal Mughal courts combining the form, lines and colours of Herat and Samarkand with those of India. At the royal Mughal courts, Indian craftsmen worked with Persian and Turkish masters to create a new harmonious art and architecture. The Indian flora blended with Islamic calligraphy. New colour palette of turquoise blue, emerald green, and lapis, viridian and brilliant white was added to the Indian saffron, indigos and vermilions.

The relations with Persia were the most important aspect of the foreign policy of the Mughal rulers of India. The cultural relationship between the courts of the Mughal and Safavid monarchs strengthened their diplomatic relations and envoys were exchanged. Even the Muslim rulers of Golconda and Ahmednagar in south India sent envoys to the court of Shah Tahmasp of Iran. Apart from the issue of diplomatic links between the Safavids and the Deccan kingdom, the Mughal and Persian interests conflicted over Qandahar, which changed hands several times.

Jahangir was the ruler of the Mughal Empire from 1605 until his death. The name Jahangir is from Persian, meaning "Conqueror of the World". Mughal rule under Jahangir and Shah Jahan was noted for political stability, brisk economic activity, beautiful paintings, and monumental buildings. Jahangir married a Persian princess whom he renamed Nur Jehan (Light of the World), who emerged as the most powerful individual in the court besides the emperor. As a result, Persian poets, artists, scholars, and officers include her own family members—lured by the Mughal court's brilliance and luxury, found asylum in India. Jahangir had friendly relations with Shah Abbas I which went back to Akbar's lifetime. He had Shah Abbas's picture depicted with his own in his picture gallery. Several embassies were exchanged between Jahangir and Shah Abbas. Dara Shikoh, also the eldest son of Shah Jahan was a great Persian scholar and a Sufi. While the Persians became influential in the politics and culture of the Mughal Empire, the Indians attained a strong position in the economic life of the Persian capital (Esfahan) and ports.

During the Mughal period, classical Sanskrit literature translated into Persian. The translations from Sanskrit enriched the Persian vocabulary, and new stories of Indian origin added to the reservoir of classical imagery.

Persian architects and artisans were brought to India to design and construct palaces and forts, mosques and public buildings. The Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri and Humayun Tomb are among the finest examples of the synthesis of Indo-Iranian style in architecture. Beginning with Qutab Minar, the Iranian influence is visible. The arcuate forms, domed structures, plane and smooth walls, slender polished pillars and spacious halls with squinches and stalactites were Iranian. Babur initiated the laying out of gardens to conserve water and greenery. Mughal Gardens as extensions of monuments like Taj Mahal or Humayun's Tomb in Delhi and pleasure gardens like the Shalimar in Kashmir are fine examples of landscaping introduced by the Mughals. The tradition and style in the garden design of Persian gardens has influenced the design of gardens from Andalusia to India and beyond. Persian inspired gardens have been made all around the world. The garden from Taj Mahal is one of the largest Persian gardens of the world, but the gardens of the Alhambra equally show the influence of Persian garden style on a more intimate scale.

The Mughal School of paintings owed much to Iran and blossomed under Akbar's patronage. Iranian painters introduced the art of portrait and miniature paintings in Mughal courts. There were major developments in the technique of miniature painting, portraits, and scenes of war, social events and illustrations of manuscripts.

The Indo-Iranian links had started to decline during the reign of Aurangzeb. In the 18th century the Iranian ruler Nader Shah drove out the Afghans, Turks and Russians from Iran and invaded Delhi.

4. Conclusion

The relations between Iran and India have gone through numerous vicissitudes. But Strong historical and cultural relations between India and Iran have always played a significant role in bringing the two countries closer to each other. Civilizational bonds between the two countries were further strengthened in the period of Mughal rule in India, with the migration of large numbers of Iranians to India, the use of Persian as the

language of the imperial court and the impact of Persian culture on north Indian literary and artistic traditions. As a consequence, the people of India and Iran share significant cultural, linguistic and ethnic characteristics.

5. Appendix

1- Patrilineal is a system in which one belongs to one's father's lineage.

2- The Avesta is the primary collection of sacred texts of Zoroastrianism, composed in the Avestan language.

3- Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī was an Iranian Khwarezmian Chorasmian Muslim scholar and polymath of the 11th century.

4- Prakrit is the name for a group of Middle Indic, Indo-Aryan languages, derived from Old Indic dialects.

5- Ma Wara'un-Nahr or Transoxiana is the ancient name used for the portion of Central Asia corresponding approximately with modernday Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southern Kyrgystan and southwest Kazakhstan.

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