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Persian Manuscripts in Bengal

(The Hub of Indo-Persian Cultural Heritage)

Abstract

Persian language came in contact with Bengal in 13th Century and continued till 1837 when it was finally abolished as the official language of India . In this vast period of six hundred years, thousands of books were written in Persian, and tens and hundreds of poets composed their poems in this sweet language. During this period, Persian language and literature reached the highest stage of its development, which yielded a huge collection of manuscripts, documents, miniature paintings and other artifacts to Bengal and made her Sonar Bangla.

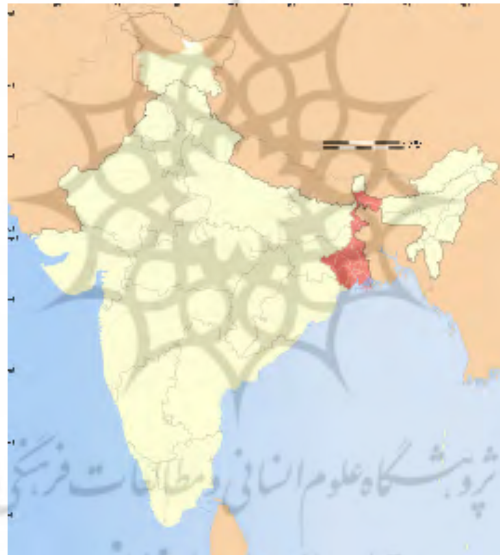
The large-scale acquisition of manuscripts by Indians and British officials in Bengal gave birth to rich library collections that can sustain academic research in Persian Studies not only in Bengal but internationally. The cataloguing of these collections has preserved the fruits of knowledge of Persian literature. The most important collections of Persian manuscripts are to be found at the Asiatic Society, Victoria Memorial, National Library and Hazarduari Palace Library in Murshidabad etc. Though these collections have been documented to an extent by their cataloguers but many of them still need proper documentation, care and conservation treatment. But their best fruition lies in their consumption for cultural studies as it is proverbially believed that the proof of pudding lies in its eating.

Keywords:Bengal , Catalogues, Cultural Heritage,Persian Manuscripts & Books.

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Introduction

Bengal has always been a seat of Persian learning and has played vital role in preserving and promoting Indo-Persian cultural heritage. The Nawabs, British Officials of the Raj or the great Orientalists and the Indian Scholars have played their respective role in collecting oriental manuscripts, documents, miniatures and other artifacts which are now in the treasure trove of the Asiatic Society (1784), Indian Museum (1789), Victoria Memorial Hall (1906), Hazarduari Palace Library at Murshidabad (1820's) and the National Library (1903) to name but a few. The setting up of Calcutta Madrasa (1781), Asiatic Society, Indian Museum, Fort William College (1800), Hazarduari Palace, National Library, Victoria Memorial Hall in the last two centuries are the pioneer institutions in India which are in fact the repository of Indo Persian cultural heritage.



(Bengal)

The history of Persian Studies in Bengal dates back to early thirteenth century when at the dawn of the Sultanate Period, Ikhtiyaruddin bin Mohammad Bakhtiyar Khilji led an expedition to east of India and set up his court there. Ever since then Persian became the court language of the province of Bengal. Besides the court, traditional centers of learning like the Mosques, Madrasahs and Maktabas in Medieval period and the State, the Nawabs and the Zamindars in the Modern times also promoted the development of literary writings both in Arabic and Persian.

Persian Language During The Delhi Sultans

The Mughals were the veritable successors of the Delhi Sultans and they too were great patrons of Persian language and literature. They even patronized the local poets, scholars and nobles besides extending patronage to a large number of poets, historians and

from Iran and Central Asia who visited their courts or settled in Bengal. During this period, Persian language and literature reached the highest stage of development, which yielded a huge collection of manuscripts, documents, miniature paintings and other artifacts to Bengal and made her Sonar Bangla. Persian language came in contact with Bengal in 13th Century and continued till 1837 when it was finally abolished as the official language of India. In this vast period of six hundred years, thousands of books were written in Persian, and tens and hundreds of poets composed their poems in this sweet language. Copies of these rare works have been preserved in different libraries in Bengal as well as in the subcontinent in the form of manuscripts, etc. The State Archives of Bengal as well as the National Archives of India are teemed with these rare documents. "It is estimated that in 2003, India possesses nearly one hundred thousand manuscripts in Arabic script spread over a number of libraries in various parts of the country", remarks Omar Khalidi (1981, 1). These manuscripts and documents are not only the national heritage but also constitute as an authentic source of cultural study.

The subject range is wide, including: theological texts, prayer-books, commentaries on the Qur'an, works on Sufism, and the lives of saints and prophets; literary and poetic texts dealing with romances, chronicles and fables; manuals of writing, books on grammar, dictionaries; volumes of books on the history of India and the local history; diaries and works on philosophy, medicine, general history, geography, astronomy and astrology. There are numerous calligraphic and lavishly illuminated, gilded and illustrated texts and some of the copies of manuscripts are unique and rare in Bengal. The Persian manuscripts produced great impressions not only by their miniatures and calligraphy but also by their overall design: ornamental illuminations and margins as well as stamps, seals and embossments and patent leather bindings which constitute elements of cultural study. These manuscripts are looked upon as the national heritage and are authentic sources for further research in the field of cultural study. On the contrary it is quite unfortunate that after the revolt of 1857 some of these manuscripts were taken away from India:

“Manuscripts produced in India but taken away illegally to Europe is another category altogether. Should curious cultural properties of Indian Islamic origin found in foreign countries ever be returned to their place of origin, preeminence of many European museums and libraries would be diminished. For instance, most of the Arabic and Persian and Urdu collections in the British Library are of Indian origin”(Ursula 1981:47-52).



(Victoria Memorial Hall)

Bengal and Persian Manuscripts

Like the Mughals, their predecessors, the Sultans of Bengal were also notable collectors of manuscripts who left behind these works of cultural value, which are preserved in various libraries and museums of Bengal. The tradition of book production, patronage and collection continued until the 19th century when modern printing press replaced manuscript production (Khalidi 1981: 4).

The large-scale acquisition of manuscripts by Indians and British officials in Bengal gave birth to rich library collections that can sustain academic research in Persian Studies not only in Bengal but internationally. The cataloguing of these collections has preserved the fruits of knowledge of Persian literature. The most important collections of Persian manuscripts are to be found at the Asiatic Society, Victoria Memorial, National Library and Hazarduari Palace Library in Murshidabad etc. Though these collections have been documented to an extent by their cataloguers but many of them

still need proper documentation. But their best fruition lies in their consumption for cultural studies as it is proverbially believed that the proof of pudding lies in its eating.

Furthermore the deterioration of manuscripts is technically another discussion but it has direct link with the conservation and preservation as these manuscripts looked upon as Indo-Persian cultural heritage. The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 deals exclusively with moveable objects of two different categories- antiquities and art treasure. While the definition of antiquity has a history- has an evolution, the idea of art treasure is a new introduction, and does not even warrant its inclusion in the antiquarian laws though it does form a part of India's cultural property. According to the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 "antiquity" includes-

... any article, object or thing illustrative of science, art, crafts, literature, religion, customs, morals or politics in bygone ages;

...Any manuscript, record or other document which is of scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value and which has been in existence for not less than seventy-five years;(Sarkar 1981: 129).

Orientalism (1772 to 1835) was a unique phenomenon in British India as it was intended by the East India Company to train a class of British administrators in the language and culture of India so as to govern the colony with comfortable ease. This period of British India began in 1772 when rulers like Warren Hastings and Lord Wellesley began to show interests in Persian Studies in Bengal (Fisher 2001: 24). This period of British Orientalism marks the formative years of a century of intense intellectual, religious and social changes in Bengal that is now known as the Bengal Renaissance.

The battle of Plassey in 1757 has brought a great change not only in the Indian politics but it has affected the education system too. If on one hand the Orientalist policies stressed Persian education, then it also increasingly demanded British control over education on the other hand. The Calcutta Madrasah, The Asiatic Society, Indian Museum and Fort William College etc, which the British colonial government had established in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, were the major steps towards British supremacy over Indian education system. Very soon the "Macaulay's famous 1835 Minute" on education and the replacement of Persian language by Urdu first English subsequently as the official

language of British India in 1837 attests to this fact (Fisher 2001: 24). Initially the intention of East India Company was not to accept and promote the culture inherent in established Persianate education and tradition but to make British rulers to understand Persian and dislodge it from Indian soil and promote British paramountcy in the garb of Orientalism. Bernard S. Cohn in *Colonialism and its Forms for Knowledge* explains in the following words:

“The British realized that in seventeenth-century India, Persian was the crucial language for them to learn. They approached Persian as a kind of functional language, a pragmatic vehicle of communication with Indian officials and rulers through which, in a denotative fashion, they could express their requests, queries, and thoughts, and through which they could get things done. To use Persian well required highly specialized forms of knowledge...” (Cohn 1996:18).

However a host of scholars in Calcutta having proficiency in Persian translated for the Company, judicial and revenue regulations and classics were William Chambers, Francis Balfour, William Kirkpatrick, Francis Gladwin, Jonathan Duncan, Henry Vansittart, Major William Daury, J. H. Harington, Joseph Earles, George Frederick Cherry, Joseph Champion, Rev. Donald Mackinnon, Robert Jones, Neil Benjamin Edmondstone, Henry Pitts Forster, Lieutenant John Mulock and others and left Persian impressions in Modern times (Nair: 17).

The Asiatic Society

In 15th January 1784, a group of British scholars and enthusiasts in Calcutta founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the premier Orientalist institution of its time with the object of prosecuting an “enquiry into the History and antiquities, arts, science and literature of Asia” (Aurthur 1942: 15B). William Jones had the honour to become its first President and continued in this position until his death in 1794. Warren Hastings became the first Governor-General of British India. Hastings strongly supported collecting knowledge of Indians and their customs, laws, and languages. He became proficient in Bengali, Urdu, and Persian and encouraged a generation of Orientalists in their research.

The Asiatic Society contains several thousand Persian documents and also bears records of several scholars associated with Persian researches. Sizeable collections of Persian manuscripts bear impressions from which the cultural life of Bengal can be gathered. A recent addition Radha Kanti

Deb Collection to the Asiatic Society can be of great help to delve into the cultural past of Bengal.

The Asiatic Society has reconstructed and preserved the Indo-Persian cultural heritage through its edition, translation and publication of Persian manuscripts. The great scholars and Orientalists like William Jones, Charles Wilkins, H.T. Colebrook, Francis Gladwin, B.H. Hudson, H.H. Wilson, James Prinsep, Henry Ferdinand Blochmann, Alexander Cunningham, Henry Beveridge, Edward Denison have contributed their intellectual inputs to the Society in the promotion of the Persian studies, which gave them a forum for their investigation through its publication facilities and Journals. The membership of the Asiatic Society was thrown open to learned natives in 1829 when five of them - Prasanna Kumar Thakur, Dwarkanath Tagore, Shibchandra Das, Rasamoy Datta and Ram Kamal Sen - were elected members. Now it was open for all nationalities irrespective of religion, race and caste to apply for its membership.

The importance of the library of the Asiatic Society lies not in numerical strength but in its rich and unique contents. The collection has been built up mainly with gifts received from individual and institutions. The earliest gift received by the society was seven manuscripts from Henry Richardson (Sibadas Chaudhuri 1980: 22).

The most prestigious and influential work of the Asiatic Society is its publications under the Bibliotheca Indica series. It consists of an extraordinary series of oriental texts in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Bengali, Tibetan and other Asian languages and their translations. The series provided the means of publishing innumerable Persian texts and translations, which would otherwise have remained in manuscripts (Aurthur 1942: 15B).

The publications of authentic texts and translations of historical works relating to India mention may be made of:

1. The Ain I Akbari (Eng. tr. Vol. I, H. Blochmann, Vol. II & III. Jerrett) and Akbar-namah (tr. Beveridge) of Abu'l Fazl 'Allami (text and translation in three volumes each).

2. The 'Alamgir-namah of Muhammad Kazim, son of Muhammad Amin Munshi and Amal I Salih (or Shahjahan-nama) of Muhammad Salih Kanbu, covers the period of Aurangzeb and Shahjahan respectively.

3. Badshah-nama or Padshah-nama of Abdul Hamid Lahuri supplement this period. Jahangir is not neglected, for this Tuzuk I Jahangiri of Mutamad Khan has been issued in its incomplete translation.

4. Muntakhbat Tawarikh of Abdul Qadir Badauni, in three volumes, translated by Ranking, Haig, Lowe

5. Qanun I Humayuni of Khwandamir.

6. Tarikh I Bayhaqi of Abul Fazl Bayhaqi.

7. Ma'sirul Umara of Shahnawaz Khan.

Amongst the regional history of India we may mention:

8. Tarikhi Gujrat by Mir Abu Turab Wali.

9. Riyazus Salatin of Gholam Husain Salim, tr. Abdus Salam.

10. Tarikh I Bangala I Mahabatjungi of Yusuf Ali Khan, tr. Abdus Subhan.

11- The Haft Iqlim of Amin Ahmad Razi (Geographical and biographical encyclopedia in five volumes)

Some other works are:

12- The Rubaiyat I Umar Khayyam, edited from a manuscript dated 1505, in the collection of Professor S. Najib Ashraf Nadvi with a facsimile of the manuscript and 57 plates by Maulavi Mahfuzul Haq.

13- Majmaul Bahrain (or Mingling of the two oceans) edited in the original Persian, with English translation, notes and variants by Maulavi Mahfuzul Haq.

14-Farhang I Rashidi (book on lexicon) of Abdu Rashid Tatawi

15-Mubanil Lughat (book on lexicon) of Muhammad Mahdi Khan.

The ninety percent of the society's publications in non-Indian languages are Persian since its inception. For the printed catalogue of Persian manuscripts in the collection of the Asiatic Society mention may be made of:

1. Fihrist-i kutub-i qalami wa matbuat-i kutubkhanah-i Asiatic Society, edited by Zahir Ali (Calcutta, 1837)

2. Catalogue of Persian Books and Manuscripts in the Library of the Asiatic Society, edited by Mirza Ashraf Ali (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1890)

3. Catalogue of Persian Books and Manuscripts in the Library of the Asiatic Society, edited by Mirza Ashraf Ali, (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1895)

4. Catalogue of Arabic and Persian Books and Manuscripts in the Library of the Asiatic Society, edited by Kamaluddin Ahmad and Abdul Muqtadir (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1905)

5. List of Arabic and Persian Manuscripts Acquired by the Asiatic Society of Bengal during 1903–1907, edited by M. Hidayat Hosain (Calcutta, 1908)

6. List of Arabic and Persian Manuscripts Acquired by the Asiatic Society of Bengal during 1908–1910, edited by N. Ahmad and H. Razawi (Calcutta, 1911)

7. Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, edited by Wladimir Ivanow (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1924, reprinted 1985).

8. Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Curzon Collection, edited by Wladimir Ivanow, (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1926).

9. Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Collection of the Asia Society of Bengal, Supplements 1 & 2, edited by Wladimir Ivanow (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1927–1928).

Fort William College

Fort William College, an academic centre for Oriental studies established by Lord Wellesley then Governor General of British India in 1800. Its purpose was to impart language training to the writers recruited by the Company for civil service in their establishment in south and South-east Asia (Nair, vol.55,no.1-4, 23).

A Department was established for each major language and culture of India. The Professors, Munshis and Assistant teachers were appointed for each department. Incentives were given to the writers, besides assistance of Munshis and Professors. Its expenses were designed to have been met by a contribution from all the civilians in India and an uncertain allocation that was to come from the operation of the Government Printing Press.

The Persian establishment attached to the College of Fort William from 1800 to 1830 was the biggest as compared to any other language. Persian was continued to enjoy as the court language of India, had a Department headed by Neile B Edmonstone, then a Persian translator to the Government. College of Fort William had good number of native Munshis in Persian. Civilian trainees were given Munshi for learning Persian from them directly. Professors always paid personal attention to their trainee (Fisher 2001: 26).

On the abolition of Fort William, a much larger collection of historical and other works relating to India, the whole of its Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and Urdu works mostly in manuscripts, were presented to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, subject only to two conditions, namely:

1. Safe and careful preservation
2. Unrestricted accessibility to the public at all reasonable hours (Sibadas Chaudhuri 1980: 47).

The Persian works issued by Fort William College (Das 1978:161-163) are:

1. Persian Guide, 1802, Francis Gladwin- Elementary Grammar for the students at the College.
2. Persian Munshis, 1802, Francis Gladwin, Elementary Persian Syntax and Arabic Grammar.
3. Unwari Soohuelee, 1805, written in the fifteenth century by Mullah Hudain Waizi Kashefi. A book of fables, printed under the superintendence of Major Charles Stewart.
4. Hidayat I & II, 1807, III & IV, 1808. Translated from Arabic- A Compendium of Islamic Law, edited by Maulavi Muhammad Rashid.
5. Mujmooue Shumsee, 1807. Translated from Arabic. A concise view of the Copernican system of Astronomy. Maoulvi Abul Khair under the superintendence of W. Hunter.
6. Miscellaneous Works of Prose and Verse. Vol. I. Sections of Ukhlaq I Moohsine and Zuleekha, 1809, vol. II. Sections of Goolistan and Boostan, 1809. Vol. III. Sections of Buhari Danish and Deewan I Suadi (Sa'di), 1809, Vol. IV. Section of Inha I Abool Fuzl and Sikundur Nama, 1810. Vol. V. Ukhlaq I Julalee and Luelee and Mujnoon of Amir Khusrau, 1811. Vol. VI, Rooqat I Jamee and Soobhutool Ubrar, 1811.
7. Dubistan I Mazahib, 1809. This book is about different religions of the world. Written by Maulavi Nazar Ashraf.
8. A Grammar of the Persian Language, 1810, by M. Lumsden.
9. Sirajeeyu, 1811, translated from Arabic. Law of succession and inheritance, translated by Mufti Muhammad Rashid.
10. The Shahnama, vol. I, 1811.
11. Sikandar Nama, 1812. A Short Epic written by Nizami. This was published by Badar Ali and Mir Husain Ali with a selection from the works of well known commentators.
12. Khoolasut-ool-Hisab, 1812. A book on arithmetic and geometry written in Arabic by Bahauddin of Amul in Syria translated into Persian by Maulavi Roshan Ali. Revised and edited by Tarini Charan Mitra. Maulavi Jan Ali and Gholam Akbar.

13. Museeri Talibee, 1812. Travals in Europe by Mirza Abu Talib Khan in 1795. Captain Stewart of Hertford College translated this into English. Edited by Husain Ali and Qudrat Ali under the supervision of H.H. Wilson.

14. Kitabool Junayatohudood, 1813, translated from Futavae Alumgeeree, by Qazee-ool-Koozat of Calcutta. Originally written by Muhammad Najmuddin Khan.

15. Hadiqool- Bulaghut, 1814. The title means the 'flowers of eloquence', written by Mir Shamsuddin Faqir of Delhi, published by Maulavi Jan Ali and Abdur Rahman.

16. Boorhani Qatiu, 1818. Dictionary. Originally compiled by Muhammad Husain Inni Khalif of Tabrize. Prepared by T. Roebuck with the help of Maulavi Karim, Tarini Charan Mitra, Hayder Ali, Nizamuddin, Gholam Qadir and a few other in the College. A short Grammar of Persian was prefixed to it.

17. Hatim Tae, 1818 ?. Corrected and published under the supervision of James Atkinson.

18. Soohrab, 1820. Translated into English from Persian by James Atkinson.

Victoria Memorial

Victoria Memorial started acquiring Persian manuscripts as soon as it was conceived in 1901 after the death of Queen Victoria. The Victoria Memorial was the brainchild of Lord Curzon, and the endowment graciously granted by him has been judiciously used to enrich the Indo-Persian manuscripts collection of the institution. The foundation stone of the Memorial was laid by King George V, then Prince of Wales On 4th January 1906 and His Majesty King Edward VII as Prince of Wales visited India and formally opened the Victoria Memorial for public on 28th December 1921 (Ganguly 1953: 8). By the time it was officially inaugurated in 1921 it had accumulated 40 such manuscripts, 7 of them being from Palace Library of Nawab Bahadur of Murshidabad collection. The largest acquisitions were made due to the successful efforts of the Lord Curzon and Sir Edward Denison Ross, the Principal of Calcutta Madrasah (1780) and the Trustee of Victoria Memorial, wanted to enrich and preserve the Oriental heritage in Victoria Memorial Hall. Further the growth of this collection became possible due to collective activities of the trustees and members through Art Purchase Committee and donation from

such as West Bengal Board of Examiners, Sultan Jahan Begum of Bhopal and others.

As a trustee of the Victoria Memorial his correspondences in connection with the collection of valuable artifacts in India and England became so great that he was allowed a special clerk for this work. Dr. Ross in his autobiography "Both Ends Of The Candle" in one of his correspondences with Lord Curzon on the issue of Victoria Memorial collection narrates a story: he says

"One day he (Lord Curzon) and I being together over some matter of the Victoria Memorial, Curzon suddenly said: 'Oh, by the way, Ross, there is another great library of Arabic and Persian mss. at Rampur in the United Provinces. Go sometime and see it. And let me know if there is anything we out to do. I next saw the viceroy after he had made a speech at banquet in honour of a retiring Commander-in-Chief. Many other matters had engaged his attention that day: only that morning important dispatches had come from one of the frontiers, and there had been a meeting of the Executive Council. As we filed part Curzon that night, saying 'Good night, Sir', the instant I stood opposite him, he said, the question coming as sharp as a pistol shot: 'Have you been to Rampur yet, Ross? I had not been'" (Ross, 138).

There are more than forty correspondences between Lord Curzon and Dr. Ross on the various issues related to Victoria Memorial exhibition and collections.

Presently Victoria Memorial has 46 Persian manuscripts consisting of 53 volumes. It also has a very good number of Persian documents, miniatures having Persian inscriptions etc. The collection of Persian manuscripts in the Victoria Memorial dates back to 15th century but most of them belong to the later Mughal period. All these documents speak volume for Bengal past.

Published catalogue

There is a published catalogue of Arabic, Persian and Urdu manuscripts in the collection of Victoria Memorial, 1973, compiled by Mr. Jawaid Iqbal. It is not a descriptive catalogue but the primary information is well recorded. The catalogue is out of stock.

A descriptive and illustrative Monograph (catalogue) of entire collection of 46 Persian manuscripts consisting on 53 volumes has jointly been prepared by Dr. Syed Akhtar Husain of J.N.U. and myself, which is expected to be published very soon.

National Library

Syed Sadruddin Ahmad of Buhar, District Burdwan has left valuable collection of Persian manuscripts, which are preserved in the Buhar Collection of the National Library of Kolkata and hold out immense materials for the present researcher to carve out the glorious past of Bengal. His great grandson, also known as Munshi Sayed Sadruddin Ahmed (1843-1905) had great interest in collecting manuscripts and printed books to the Buhar Library. It grew to 468 Arabic, 483 Persian, 1 Turkish, 1 Urdu manuscripts and 940 Arabic 400 Persian and 140 Urdu books. It is interesting to note that Victoria Memorial Exhibition was held at Indian Museum in 1904 and the Imperial Library (Present National Library) presented two of the Arabic manuscripts namely:

- 1) Illustrated manuscript of the Holy Quran copied by Emperor Aurangzeb and
- 2) Gilded manuscript of Panj Surah copied by Prince Dara Shikoh.

Both manuscripts are now in the collection of Victoria Memorial, Kolkata (Illustrated Catalogue of Exhibits, 1925).

Sir Jadunath Sarkar's Collection

There is another collection of Persian manuscripts belonged to Sir Jadunath Sarkar, the eminent historian of medieval history, shifted to National Library. Sir Jadunath Sarkar died in May 1958 and National Library acquired his entire collection of 1,161 (691 Persian, 467 Arabic, 2 Urdu, 1 Turkish) in August 1959.

There are two printed catalogues in the National Library, Calcutta. They are:

11. Catalogue raisonné of the Buhar Library, 2 vols, edited by Wasim Nasir Rizawi, Maulvi Abdul Muqtadir, and M. Hidayat Hosain (Calcutta: Imperial Library, 1921–1923; revised edition 1982) — Volume 1 covers the Persian manuscripts and volume 2 the Arabic.

12. Catalogue of the Persian Mss. of Sir Jadunath Sarkar Collection, edited by S. M. Hasan (Calcutta: Imperial Library, 1972).

Hazarduari Palace Library

Murshid Quli Khan founded the city of Murshidabad in 1717. The Nawab Nazim Humayun Jah Bahadur, in the presence of the agent of the Governor General, the Commandant of the British troops, all the European inhabitants of the station and a large concourse of natives laid the foundation stone of Hazarduari Palace on the 29th August 1829. The city had hub of cultural life in the 18th and 19th century. The Persian manuscripts and documents in the collection of the Palace Library of Murshidabad are a source of profound materials on life, letter and society of Bengal. Many of them are unknown and still required to see the daylight of the publication.

The library has considerable number of Arabic, Persian and Urdu manuscripts in its collection. A descriptive catalogue of Urdu manuscripts in its collection has recently been published from Calcutta (Ghazali, 2005). It is very unfortunate that even after one and half century, the library has failed to produce a printed catalogue of the priceless and invaluable Persian & Arabic manuscripts. However some of the important manuscripts may be mentioned here.

Siyalru'l Muta'akhhirin (View of Modern Times)

A very comprehensive history of India especially focusing on the detail account of Bengal and Oudh between 1707 and 1782. The library of Hazarduari has the authors' handwritten manuscript copy in its collection. The book was inscribed to Warren Hastings two years after his departure from Bengal (Majumdar 1905: 89).

Muraqqa I Qit'at I Shikasta (Specimens Of Shikashta)

This beautifully illustrated Persian manuscript written by Mirza Abul Qasim Wisal Shirazi better known as Haji Darvesh, a noted poet and a master calligrapher of the 19th century Persia. The scribe has taken great effort in copying verses from the lyrics of classical Persian poets Iraqi, Hafiz and Jami in an artistic Shikashta script. The manuscript also contains four illustrations, which are portraits of Hindu females beauty, etc. The Nawab Bahadur of Murshidabad presented this manuscript to Victoria Memorial in 1904 (Illustrated Catalogue of Exhibition, 1925).

Khamsa-e-Nezami (The Five Epic Poems Of Nezami)

This is an illuminated and gilded manuscript copy scribed by Syed 'Ali in 898 A.H. On the first page of the folio an endorsement is seen, from which it appears the ms. was purchased at Aurangabad at the time of Dewani. It seems that Mushid Quli Khan purchased it when he was Dewan in the Deccan and brought it with him to Bengal*.

Huft Band Kashi

Written in very fine script for Khan Khanan Monaim Khan, subedar of Bengal in 1574.

I have had the privilege to pay a visit to the Library once in 2005. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has taken the charge of the Museum, restoration of the building and the conservation of the artifacts as well.

Besides above mentioned institutions there are a small but good number of Arabic, Persian and Urdu manuscripts preserved in the Indian Museum, Iran Society, Maulana Azad College, Vishwabharati University etc. to name but a few.

Conclusion

The manuscripts and documents, which are primary sources, shall be surveyed and classified as Bengal specific and general. The general documents bearing seals, endorsements, embossments, dates etc shall be studied in the context of Bengal and having established their cultural values shall be used for the cultural study. The documents having direct bearing on the Persianate culture of Bengal shall be utilized to conjure up the cultural past of the province.

All the manuscripts must be digitized and online digital catalogue must be provided to researcher for easy access to the primary sources. Preventive and curative treatment must be given to the manuscripts for the preserving it from further deterioration. However the time has come that besides universities and institutions, the Persian section of the Indian museums must take stock of the situation and apply all its resources and energy to hold a national seminar for the assessment and review of the manuscripts under the broad theme Indo-Persian Manuscripts: A National Heritage.

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