



AFGHANISTAN XII. LITERATURE

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xii. Literature

The constitution of 1343 Š./1964 names Paštō and Darī as the official languages of Afghanistan. The revival of the ancient term *darī* was intended to signify that the Afghans consider their country the cradle of the language. Hence the word *fārsī*, the language of Fārs, is strictly avoided. With this point in mind, we can consider the development of Darī or “Persian” literature in the political entity known as Afghanistan. For Paštō literature, see under Paštō.

After the collapse of Nāder Shah Afšār’s regime and the establishment of the independent Afghan state under Aḥmad Shah Dorrānī, Afghanistan continued to play its long-standing role as a center of Persian literature and a transmitter of literary currents between Transoxiana and Islamic India. Before the Safavid period, literary contacts between Iran and India had taken place through Khorasan and Afghanistan. Later developments, both in Afghanistan and in Iran after Nāder Shah Afšār’s death and during the 13th/19th century, resulted in the minimization and even severance of Afghan literary contacts with Iran. But Afghanistan’s role in the transmission of culture and literature between Transoxiana and India was maintained until ca. 1338/1920.

During the period under consideration, the so-called Indian style of Persian



verse (*sabk-e Hendī*) was completely dominant in Afghanistan, Khorasan, and Transoxiana. Among the poets who wrote in this style, the Indian Mīrzā ‘Abd-al-Qāder Bīdel (or Bēdel; 1054-1133/1644-1720) may be considered the founder of a new school. His works (Bombay, 1299/1882; Kabul, 1340-44 Š./1971-75) were taken as models by a large number of later poets in Afghanistan and Transoxiana, although he has remained virtually unknown in Iran. Among other authors who provided inspiration for the writers of this period was the Indian theologian and mystic Shaikh [Aḥmad Serhendī](#).

Mīān Faqīrallāh Jalālābādī Nangarhārī Šekārpūrī (d. 1195/1781) wrote *Qoṭb al-ersād* in Arabic and *Ṭarīq al-ersād* in Persian (Kabul, 1360 Š./1981); together with his letters (selection repr. Kabul, 1360 Š./1981, from an Indian ed.), these works provide a veritable encyclopedia of religious and mystical subjects (see R. Farhādī, preface, *Ṭarīq al-ersād*; idem, *Afghanistan* 3/3, 1980, pp. 77-87). Shaikh Sa‘d-al-dīn Aḥmad Anšārī (1140-1225/1727-1810) of Kabul wrote *Ma‘dan al-asrār*, a Koranic commentary (completed 1173/1759-60), *Haqā‘eq al-ma‘āref*, a versified work in the style of Rūmī’s *Maṭnawī*, and a *dīvān* entitled *Šūr-e ‘ešq*, which has twice been printed (see M. N. Anšārī, “Notes on the Life and Works of Shaykh Sa‘duddin Aḥmad Anšārī of Kabul,” *Akten des 24en Intern. Orientalisten-Kongress*, Wiesbaden, 1959, pp. 509-12). In the field of lyric verse, Persian poems in the styles of Ḥāfeẓ, Šā‘eb, and Kalīm were composed by many poets, including Tīmūr Shah Dorrānī (r. 1187-1207/1773-93), his son Shah Šojā‘ (killed 1258/1842), and one of Tīmūr Shah’s courtiers, Mīr Hōtak Pōpalzā‘ī, who used the pen-name Afḡān. A poetess, ‘Āyeša Dorrānī (d. 1235/1819-20), also wrote poems of this type (her *dīvān* was printed in 1305/1887-88). The devotion of the Dorrānīs to literature was such that two poets from the west, Šehāb-al-dīn Toršizī and Forūgī Ešfahānī, sought patronage at Tīmūr Shah’s court.

Among the vast number of poets whose names and verses appear in biographical collections and anthologies, Jonaydallāh Ḥādeqī Heravī (d. 1259/1843) holds a high place. He has left a *dīvān* and a versified rendering of the story of Yūsof and Zolaykā which he completed in 1239/1823 (printed at Tashkent in 1905). Sardār Mehrdel Mašreqī (1212-71/1798-1854), one of Sardār Pāyanda Khan’s many sons, was another poet in the styles of Šā‘eb and Bīdel; his *dīvān* is extant. Two other followers of Bīdel were the important poet Sardār Ġolām-Moḥammad Ṭarzī (1830-1900, see M. Schinasi, *Afghanistan*, pp. 47-54), and his son Moḥammad-Amīn ‘Andalīb (1272-92/1855-75), who left a *dīvān* in spite of his short life. Mīrzā Moḥammad-Nabī Wāšel



(1244-1309/1828-92), the *dabīr* (secretary) of the rulers Šēr ‘Alī Khan and ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Khan, wrote poems in the style of Ḥāfeẓ, which recently have been printed (*Aš‘ār-e Wāṣel*, Kabul, n.d.).

In Afghanistan, two basic literary changes took place: from about 1850 onward, when books printed in India, and later also at Kabul, Bokhara, Kokand, and Tashkent became available to an increasing number of Afghan literati; and from the start of the 20th century, when the introduction of typography at Kabul made possible a wider use of printing, including newspaper production.

Several treatises in Persian showing a marked similarity to Indian publications were printed during the reigns of Šēr ‘Alī Khan and ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Khan; among them were histories of the Afghans by Ya‘qūb ‘Alī Kāfī (*Pādešāhān-e mota‘akkerīn-e Afġānestān*; completed 1307/1889-90; reprinted at Kabul, 1336 Š./1957), Sayyed Jamāl-al-dīn Asadābādī, known as Afġānī (*Tatemmat al-bayān fī ta‘rīk al-Afġān*), and Fayż-Moḥammad Hazāra (*Serāj al-tawārīk*; three parts printed at Kabul, 1331-34/1913-16, MSS. of the other two parts preserved in the National Archives of Afghanistan). The *Serāj al-tawārīk*, which deals mainly with the 18th and 19th centuries, was so named in honor of the amir Ḥabībballāh, who held the title *Serāj-al-mella wa’l-dīn*. Afghanistan’s first newspaper appeared at Kabul in 1280/1863-64 during Amir Šēr ‘Alī’s reign, the short-lived *Šams al-nahār*. Its language was Persian, but its style and set-up were modeled on the Urdu press of India.

Modern writing and journalism in Afghanistan begins with Maḥmūd Ṭarzī (1282-1385/1865-1933), who spent his youth at Damascus and Istanbul and whose influence was responsible for the development of Persian prose in Afghanistan on Middle Eastern rather than Indian lines. He translated from Ottoman Turkish several western books, including some by Jules Verne and an account of the Russo-Japanese war (Kabul, 1336/1917-18). From 1329/1911 to 1336/1918 he edited the newspaper *Serāj al-akbār*, which exerted a profound cultural and political influence throughout Afghanistan and also in northern India and Transoxiana. In later years, the newspapers *Amān-e Afġān* (1337/1919), *Anīs* (1345/1927), and *Eslāḥ* (1347/1929) followed in the footsteps of *Serāj al-akbār*. The influence of Iranian journalism and academic writing only began to be felt during and after World War II.

One of Maḥmūd Ṭarzī’s aims, not altogether successful, was to persuade poets to write on modern social, cultural, and political themes. Admittedly some



poets, such as ‘Abd-al-Ġanī Mostaġnī (1292-1352/1875-1933; *Dīvān*, Kabul, 1334 Š./1955), and even ‘Abdallāh Qārī (1288-1322 Š./1871-1943; *Dīvān*, Kabul, 1302 Š./1923, 1334 Š./1955) and Şūfī ‘Abd-al-Ĥaqq Bītāb (*Dīvān*, Kabul, 1330 Š./1951), wrote a few poems in praise of modern advances, but for the most part they wrote *ġazals* in the Indian style. Qārī, and after him Bītāb, held the title of poet laureate (*malek-al-šo‘arā*) during Zāher Shah’s reign. Similarly faithful to the Indian style were the works of other poets, among whom may be mentioned Mīr Moḥammad-‘Alī Āzād Kābolī (fl. 1258-1323 Š./1842-1944; *Montakabāt-e aš‘ār*, Kabul, 1342 Š./1963); Pāyanda Moḥammad Farḥat (*Maǧmū‘a-ye aš‘ār*, Kabul, 1339 Š./1960); ‘Abd-al-Ġafūr Nadīm (1298-1344/1881-1926), also the author of a printed Persian grammar; Ġolām Ḥazrat; Šā‘eq Jamāl; Şūfī ‘Aşqarī (*Dīvān*, Kabul, 1358 Š./1979); and Ġolām-Moḥammad Navīd. Also worthy of mention is the humorous and satirical poet Ḥāǧǧī Esmā‘īl Sīāh, whose *dīvān* was printed at Herat in 1310 Š./1931.

The leading contemporary poet is Kaḷīlallāh Kaḷīlī (b. 1288 Š./1909), who basically follows the Korāsānī style. Two volumes of his poems have been printed in Iran, and he is preparing a third collection. Other leading poets, such as ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Pažvāk (*Golhā-ye andīša*, Kabul, 1344 Š./1965), ‘Abd-al-Ḥakīm Zīā‘ī and Moḥammad-‘Oṭmān Şedqī (*Sorūd e hastī*, Kabul, 1343 Š./1963), all cherished and followed the traditions of Darī literature. Various old and new styles have been tried by the poets Zīā‘ Qārīzāda, Moḥammad-Yūsof Ā‘īna, Raḥīm Elhām, Solaymān Lāyeq, Bāreq Şafī‘ī, ‘Abd-al-Ḥayy Āryanpūr Rostāqī, Moḥammad-Āşaf Fekrat Heravī, Ḥaydarī Woǧūdī Panǧsīrī, Wāşef Bāktarī, and others.

Other fields of literature to which noteworthy contributions have been made are historiography (Mīr Ġolām-Moḥammad Ġobār, ‘Abd-al-Ḥayy Ḥabībī), literary history and criticism (‘Abd-al-Ḥakīm Rostāqī, Khan Moḥammad Kaṣta, Şalāḥ-al-dīn Salǧūqī, Fekrī Salǧūqī, Ġolām-Ḥabīb Nawwābī, Ġolām-Rezā Māyel Heravī, Moḥammad Ya‘qūb Wāḥedī Jūzǧānī, Ravān Farḥādī, Nakhat Sa‘īdī, Sayyed Maḳdūm Rahīn), folklore and popular culture (Shah ‘Alī-Akbar Şahrestānī, Qayyūm Qawīm, Fayzallāh Eymāq, ‘Enāyatallāh Şahrānī, drama (Raşīd Laṭifī, Moḥammad-‘Alī Rawnaq), visionary fiction (S. Bahā‘-al-dīn Maǧrūḥ), and short stories (Asadallāh Ḥabīb, M. A. Rahnavard Zaryāb).

In addition to modern journalism, radio (since 1319 Š./1940) and television (since 1356 Š./1977) have imposed fresh responsibilities on Afghan writers. Since the Marxist take-over of the government in 1357 Š./1978, literature and writing in Afghanistan have been directed on the lines normal in the Soviet



Union. The terminology of the Iranian Tūda party, which had been discernible in the writings of the Afghan Kālq party since around 1339 Š./1960, is now in general use in state publications.

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