



AVADH

AVADH (English also Audh or Oudh), an ancient cultural and administrative region lying between the Himalayas and the Ganges in North India, named after Ayodhyā, the setting of the Sanskrit epic Ramayana. By the 700s/1300s, Avadh proper had become a province of all the major Islamic dynasties in India (except the Šarqī sultanate of Jaunpur, which controlled only the eastern half of it). What may be called Greater Avadh emerged as an autonomous political system in the process of Mughal decline in the 12th/18th century, expanding to more than twice its original size under the rule of Nīšāpūrī sayyeds. In 1189/1775 it was almost as large as the modern state of Uttar Pradesh.

Throughout seven centuries of Muslim domination in North India, Avadh remained a fertile area in which military and administrative elites from Iran and Transoxiana could settle and develop the legal, intellectual, and religious activities of their *qaṣabas*. The best known of these settlements is Belgrām, in Hardōī district near the Ganges in southwest Avadh, which has produced a number of remarkable men such as the poet in Persian and Arabic ‘Abd-al-Jalīl Belgrāmī (fl. 1071-1138/1660-1725), the author in Persian and Arabic *Āzād Belgrāmī* (fl. 1116-1200/1704-86), and the historian Belgrāmī, author of *Sawāneḥ-e Akbarī*.

On the opposite side of Hardōī district lies the isolated *qaṣaba* of Gopāmaw, which contains the ruins of numerous *kānaqāhs*, *madrasas*, tombs, and inns, bearing testimony to earlier cultural activities.



Nine miles west of Lucknow lies Kākorī which for many generations has been the home of eminent scholars of theology, law, and literature; some families have a 600 year-long tradition of scholarly activities. In Lucknow itself, a relatively small settlement until the late 12th/18th century and the home of Turkic immigrants who came during the Delhi Sultanate, scholarly training has been uninterrupted since high Mughal times.

It was with the decline of Delhi in the early 1700s that Avadh came into its own as the main source of literary, artistic, and religious patronage in North India. Its rulers, called nawabs, were Iranian Shi'ites from Nīšāpūr, who not only encouraged the existing Persian-language belle-lettrist activity to shift from Delhi, but also invited, and received, a steady stream of scholars, poets, jurists, architects, and painters from Iran. Although Urdu was at this time becoming more widely used both for artistic expression and for everyday speech, Persian remained the medium of government, academic instruction, high culture, and the court language until the mid-13th/19th century. The best Urdu poets produced *dīvāns* in Persian, often under a different pen-name from that used in their Urdu composition, competing with the Iranian immigrants who criticized the relatively ornate *sabk-e hendī*, or “Indian style.”

A primary source of patronage and encouragement was, naturally, the nawabi family itself. Šojā'-al-dawla (r. 1754-75), though primarily interested in military affairs, nevertheless supported the cultural and scholarly activity at his capital in Fayzābād. There jurists at his court, Sayyed Sarī'-al-dīn, Mollā 'Aṭā'allāh, and Mawlawī Majīd, were famous well beyond Avadh's borders, and two Hindu historians, Haṛčaran Dās and the Marāthā Kāšī Rāj, wrote polished Persian narratives of his important reign. One court physician, Ḥakīm Šādeq Moḥammad Mo'ālej Khan, was also a scholar of Hadith and *feqh*.

Several poets in Persian at Šojā's court, or supported by his Mughal in-laws, deserve mention: Serāj-al-dīn 'Alī Khan Ārzū who received a monthly allowance of Rs. 300 (30 pounds sterling) from the nawab's treasury; Rāe Sarap Singh Khatrī Dīvāna and Mīrzā Moḥammad Fāker Makīn, both refugees from Delhi; Shaikh 'Abd-al-Rezā b. 'Abdallāh Matīn Ešfahānī, himself the author of a 5,000-verse *dīvān* and sometime tutor to Dīvāna, spent decades wandering around India in search of a Sufi master, until he found Sayyed Moḥammad 'Āref Ne'matallāhī of the Qāderīya *selsela* (who received a stipend granted by Šojā's uncle, the nawab Šafdar Jang) in Lucknow. An interesting bilingual poet was the Belgrāmi aristocrat, Moḥammad-'Āref Jān, who wrote in Persian as 'Āref, and in Hindi as Jān; he was a close friend to Āzād, and studied Sanskrit



as well as Arabic.

Early in Āṣaf-al-dawla's reign (1775-97), the realm changed from a military patronage state to a partially demilitarized protectorate under the subsidiary alliance with the English East India Company. By controlling Avadh's foreign policy, border security, and army, the British guaranteed the survival of the regime against external and internal enemies, while in effect depriving it of all but cultural and internal administrative activity. Lucknow, Āṣaf's new capital, became as a consequence the major source of patronage in all of North India, a haven for writers and artists fleeing unsettled conditions elsewhere. Although Urdu was strengthening its hold on the public imagination, partly due to a reaction against the growing attacks on *sabk-e hendī* by Iranians, Persian retained a large following and remained the supreme test of literary accomplishment.

Shi'ite influence grew immensely from this period. Moḥarram becoming a lavishly sponsored ceremony for all communities, including non-Muslims, as well as a rite of cultural legitimacy for the regime. With it arose the genre, increasingly however in Urdu, of the *marṭīa* (q.v.) or tragic elegy on the martyrdom at Karbalā of Imam Ḥosayn and his family. Āṣaf supported theologians such as Deldār 'Alī b. Moḥammad Mo'in-al-dīn Lakhnavī, whose sermons are preserved in *Mawā'ez-e Ḥasanīya*, and whose son, Mawlawī Sayyed Moḥammad, founded a *madrassa* for Shi'ite theology called the Solṭān-al-madāres. To this Mīrzā Bahādōr Mīrzā added the *Madrassa-ye mašā'eḳ al-šarā'ī*, also in Lucknow.

The poets of Persian retained their social position throughout the reigns of Āṣaf, his brother Sa'ādat 'Alī Khan (r. 1798-1814), and the latter's five descendants—who ruled Avadh until its annexation by the British in 1856—yet no author or poet wrote exclusively in Persian.

Until Ġāleb in the 13th/19th century, Persian was primarily employed in the compilation of *taḍkeras* or biographical anthologies, dictionaries, compendia of usages and idioms, commentaries, and histories. A plateau in literary creativity in Persian had been reached in the late 12th/18th century, in which writers sought to preserve, compare and evaluate the works of their predecessors, reform their own use of language, and influence the direction of Urdu itself; as a matter of fact, our present knowledge of much Arabic and Turkish as well as Persian poetry owes much to the conserving and evaluative work of this period. At the same time the genre of literary memoirs gained



momentum with the Persian *Dekr-e Mīr* of the poet Mīr Moḥammad-Taqī Mīr, known primarily for his Urdu compositions.

The enthusiasm for defining and appreciating Indian Muslims' classical literary and religious traditions led Qāzī-al-dīn Ḥaydar (r. 1814-27) to found the Maṭbaʿe Šāhī or Royal Press in the Dawlat-kāna on the Gomtī river. One of its first publications was the *Haftqolzom*, a seven-volume Persian dictionary compiled under the king's own supervision. The *Tāj al-loḡāt*, an Arabic-Persian dictionary in seven large folio volumes, was the result of the work of scholars under the reigns of three successive rulers. In the 1830s publishing expanded greatly as lithography was introduced, and works of classical literary, artistic, and religious importance gained wide acceptance along with more popular tracts and minor works. By the late 1840s there were no fewer than twelve private lithographic publishing houses in Lucknow and Kanpur, which produced over 700 separate works, some of them in more than ten editions. This was especially important for Qurʾān and Hadith studies, which contributed to the social and religious reform movements launched by Indian Muslims, in Avadh and elsewhere. Thus, by mid-century, the political and military importance of the region had been eclipsed by its more lasting achievements in the realms of social awareness, literary conservation, and religious reform.

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See also C. Collin Davies in *EI*² I, pp. 756-58.

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