



BIHAR

BIHAR (Behār), a state in northeastern India, bounded by Nepal in the north, West Bengal in the east, Orissa in the south, and Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in the west. This article treats the influence of Persian language and culture in Bihar.

While there was an Achaemenid influence on the Mauryan empire of ancient Bihar (322-185 b.c.), the impact of the Persian language and certain cultural features began in 1197 a.d. and continues to the present day. Speaking of the palace ruins of Pataliputra, Rowland (p. 39) calls them “the first indication of the tremendous influence exerted on Mauryan India by the art of the Achaemenid Empire,” and adds that “the conscious adoption of the Iranian palace plan by the Mauryas was only part of the paraphernalia of imperialism imported from the West.”

The next wave of influence began when the swash-buckling Baḳtīār Ḳaljī swept through Bihar, during the period 1197-1202, establishing Turkish rule there. Although Persian was neither his mother tongue nor that of his soldiery and although both he and his troops came from a nomadic background, the imperial traditions and language of Persia were accepted in the eastern portion of the Islamic world. Thus during the Sultanate period (1206-1526) Bihar, whether under the sway of Delhi or Bengal, used Persian as its administrative language, as well as for historical writings. It was also the language of the Sufis of Bihar. Outstanding among them by virtue of the eminence of his sanctity, as well as his literary output in Persian, was Shaikh Šaraf-al-Dīn Manērī (d. 1381). His various collections of letters, especially his



Maktūbāt-e šadī, show a mastery of the language in his direct yet profound exposition of the Sufi path. His prose is devoid of artificiality and is enhanced by the inclusion of apposite verses. His cousin, Aḥmad Čarmpōš, has left behind a *dīvān*, while his chief disciple, Moẓaffar Šams Balkī, left a noteworthy collection of letters, as did his nephew, Ḥosayn Mo‘ezz Balkī. There were also several aphoristic anthologies (*malfūzāt*) devoted to Manērī, including *Ma‘dan al-ma‘ānī*, *Kvān-e por ne‘mat*, and the moving death account, *Wafāt-nāma*, all produced by Zayn Badr ‘Arabī. There was also a *malfūz* devoted to Ḥosayn, *Ganj-e lā yakfā*. The corpus of Ferdowsī writings forms the high-point of the Persian literary output of Bihar during this period. While Persian reigned in the retreats (*kānaqāhs*), it is instructive to notice that Manērī’s preference for a Koranic commentary in Persian attributed to Imam Zahid was shared by others (Jackson, 1986, pp. 84, 130, 137-39, 141).

A study of inscriptional slabs of the period shows that, while they normally begin in Arabic, the main body usually consists of Persian verse.

During the Mughal period the use of Persian for administrative purposes, e.g., in issuing edicts (*farmāns*, *ḥokm-nāmas*), documents (*parvānas*), medals (*nešāns*), etc., increased. There was also a conscious literary cultivation of Persian. The language was not only entrenched in the *kānaqāhs*, but also in the religious schools (*madrāsas*), such as the Zaynabīya in Phulwari Šarīf, near Patna; Sayf Khan’s *madrasa* in Patna itself; and others in Behār Šarīf, Gaya, and Barh, where Persian was both taught to the students and used as the medium of instruction. Phulwari Šarīf was also a Qāderī center and produced a long line of saintly men eminent for their Persian writings, e.g. Waḥīd-al-Ḥaqq Abdālī (d. 1785).

While Mollā Šāleḥ of Chapra was Awrangzēb’s (Aurangzīb’s) earliest teacher, it was Mollā Mohan Behārī who was his tutor for twelve years, and when Awrangzēb appointed a twelve-member syndicate to draw up the *Fatāwā-ye ‘ālamgīrī*, Mollā Šafī’ and his brother-in-law Mollā Fā’eq of Amathua, near Gaya, as well as Mawlānā Rażī-al-Dīn of Bhagalpur and Mawlānā Ḥafīz-Allāh of Phulwari, represented Bihar.

It was Patna’s fame as a center of Persian and Arabic studies which led to Raja Ram Mohan Roy’s being sent there from Bengal about 1772. He acquired enough proficiency in Persian not merely to gain employment in the East India Company but also to compose *Toḥfat al-mowahḥedīn* in Persian and a foreword to it in Arabic.



The Shuttari order also produced a considerable output of Sufi writings, such as *Moqtabes al-anwār* and *Malfūz-e roknī*, the life and teaching of Qāsem-Allāh Shuttari by his son-in-law, K̄vāja ‘Alī of Rajgir. Nor can the works of the eminent celibate Sufi, Moḥammad Moṇ‘em Pāk (d. 1771), *Elhāmāt-e moṇ‘emī*, *Mokāšefāt-e moṇ‘emī*, and *Mošāhedāt-e moṇ‘emī* be overlooked but see also Marshall, *Mughals in India*, p. 353. Historical works include Moḥammad-‘Alī Anṣārī’s *Tārīk-emozaffarī* and Baḥr al-mawwāj, and Ġolām-Ḥosayn’s *Sīar al-mota’aḳkerīn*, while Ḥosaynqolī Khan’s *Neštār-e ‘ešq* is a compendium of biographical notes on Persian poets. ‘Alī-Ebrāhīm Khan was the author of many Persian anthologies, e.g., *Golzār-e Ebrāhīm*, *Kolāṣat al-kalām* and *Šoḥof-e Ebrāhīm*, as well as *Tārīk-eMarātha*.

While it is not possible to enumerate all the noted figures of Persian literature during this period, special mention has to be made of some Hindu authors who attained eminence, e.g., Raja Ram Narayan “Mauzoon” and his brother, Dhiraj. The correspondence of the former with his tutor, Shaikh ‘Alī Ḥazīn, is worthy of mention. Raja Piyare Lāl “Olfatī”, was famous for his *gāzals* as also for his *maṭnawī*, *Neyrang-e taqdīr*, while his maternal grandfather, Raja Ujagar-chand “Olfat” has left two fine collections of ornately written letters, *Enšā-ye ḡarīb* and *Enšā-ye olfat*, in addition to his *dīvān*.

The use of Persian verses as decorative inscriptions on monuments continued, as did the use of Persian encaustic tiles, e.g., in the mosque built by a follower of

Šāyesta Khan, as also on the grounds of the fourteenth-century Tughluq mausoleum of Sayyed Moḥammad Sīstānī in Behār Šarīf.

Patna was renowned as a center of ivory painting, where the rendering of birds, animals, and human beings showed Persian influence. Persian calligraphy was also practiced and highly prized and ‘Ezz-al-Dīn, a great calligrapher, produced a work containing specimens of the various forms of scripts.

Even under British rule, Persian continued to be used. For example, Buchanan’s map of Patna—doubtless produced for him, and dated 1812—is in Persian. At the beginning of the present century such Hindu lawyers as Baijnath Singh knew enough Persian to render some of Manērī’s writings into



English. Even today Patna has scholars steeped in Persian, such as ‘Aṭā’-al-Raḥmān ‘Aṭā’ Kakovī and Sayyed Ḥasan, as well as others.

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Most of the works referred to are found in the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna, in manuscript form.

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