



CORRESPONDENCE IV. ON THE SUBCONTINENT OF INDIA

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The chancellery of official and diplomatic correspondence was an organ of Indian Muslim political organization. At various times it was known as *dīvān-e resālat*, *dīvānal-enšā'*, *dīvānal-rasā'el*, or *dār al-enšā'*. Under the Turkish Ghaznavids (366-582/979-1186), who ruled much of northern India, the chief secretary was designated *dabīr-e kāṣṣ*, in contrast to *monšī-e nāẓer* or *monšī al-monšīyāt*, titles used in some other Muslim countries (Mohiuddin, 1971, pp. 3-10). In addition to directing state correspondence and drafting royal orders (*tawqī'āt*), the *dabīr-e kāṣṣ* was expected to be a master of calligraphy and literary style (*ṣāḥeb al-qalam*), responsible for “the supervision of “the pen” and (official correspondence) . . . in order to protect the ruler’s secrets and to preserve good style” in the epistolary art befitting the royal grandeur of his master (Ebn Kaldūn, II, p. 10).

In the 13th century, at approximately the same period in which the Mongols came to power in Central Asia, Turkish Muslim rule in India was in full flower. The sultans at Delhi and other centers had adopted the bureaucratic system already familiar to them; Ġazna was the immediate model for organization and administration of state departments. The head of the *dīvān-e enšā'* in the



sultanate of Delhi was designated *dabīr al-mamālek* or *dabīr-e kāṣṣ* (Qalqaṣandī, IV, p. 92). During the reign of the Ẓaljis (689-720/1290-1320) in Delhi the post became extremely important politically, but a gradual decline in the literary standards of the *dīvān-e enšā'* began (Baranī, pp. 153, 337). By the time of the advent of the Mughals in 932/1526 the post of *dabīr-e kāṣṣ* had been reduced to a merely political one, and its occupant did not necessarily have to be a literary figure.

Under Akbar I (963-1014/1556-1605) the office of state secretary again came to be regarded as the prerogative of a fine stylist. The role of the *monšī*, or secretary, in the Mughal period was based on that of the *kāteb* under the early caliphs and the *dabīr ii.* in the eastern Muslim kingdoms, but it differed in important respects. The essential qualification for a *monšī* was skill in drafting chancellery edicts (*farāmīn* and *aḥkāṃ*) in elegant and refined prose style (cf. Mohiuddin, pp. 10, 235-36). At the time of the emperor Awrangzēb (q.v.; 1068-1118/1658-1707) the state secretary bore the title *monšī al-mamālek*, as under the contemporary Safavids (see ii, above), a title already attested under the Mongols (*Taḍkerat al-molūk*, ed. Minorsky, p. 132).

In the Mughal period the development of Persian *enšā'* (ornate prose) and *tarassol* (epistolography) was closely allied to literary trends and diplomatic policies (cf. *Čahār maqāla*, ed. Qazvīnī, pp. 13-25). These genres provided fertile ground for the cultivation of refined prose and the secretarial art. Secretaries who were both learned scholars and well versed in statecraft used the pen as an instrument of practical politics and a means of displaying their erudition. Already under the Great Saljuqs (429-552/1063-1157) and Ẓvārazmšāhs (ca. 470-628/1077-1231) Persian epistolography had reached a high degree of perfection, and several eminent secretaries had produced collections of epistles that could serve as manuals for the secretarial art (see ii, above). No doubt some of the earlier collections, like Montajab-al-Dīn Jovaynī's *Atabat al-kataba* and Neẓāmī 'Arūzī's *Čahārmaqāla*, were taken as models by Indian secretaries, but in the course of time a distinctive Indian style evolved, including elements of local dialects and vernaculars. H. Blochmann collected a number of words and phrases peculiar to Indian usage (*este'māl-e Hend*), as distinct from that of Persia (*este'māl-e Fārs*). Such changes in spelling, form, expression, and construction (*taṣarrofāt*) contributed to the development of a characteristic Indian prose style (*sabk-e hendī*; Mohiuddin, 1959). The famous poet Amīr Ẓosrow Dehlaṃī (651-725/1253-1325), in his *Ejāz-e Ẓosravī* (British Library, London, ms. Add. 16,841), one of the earliest Indian treatises on the



art of epistolary composition and rhetoric, noted that, as the style of the earlier *monšīs* had become too conventionalized to permit innovation, a new kind of prose writing had begun to develop in India. He sought to introduce an original epistolary style, “a medley (*sekbā*) prepared with the flavor and spices of *ihām* (plays on words) and *kayāl* to the exclusion of all other verbal tropes.” He claimed that this style was distinct from “all the nine styles” employed in contemporary *enšāʾ* (fols. 25a, 28b, 321 a-b, 19b-22a). It was in fact based largely on word play and puns; two centuries later it inspired such followers as Mollā Zohūrī, the famous prose writer of the court of the ‘*Ādelšāhīs*’ (895-1097/1490-1686) at Bijapur; Abu’l-Barakāt Monīr (see below); Ne‘mat Khan ‘Ālī; and Mīrzā ‘Abd-al-Qāder Bīdel (Mohiuddin, 1971, p. 24).

Tarassol-e ‘ayn-al-molkī, commonly known as *Enšāʾ-e Māhrū*, written by Malek ‘Ayn-al-Molk Moltānī, a prominent political figure in the Tughluqīd period (7201-187/1320-1414), is perhaps the earliest Indian collection of state papers and private letters that has survived (Royal Asiatic Society, Bengal, ms. Ivanow 338; cf. *JASB* 19, 1923, p. 253). The most exhaustive, learned, and critical surviving treatise on Indian *enšāʾ* and rhetoric is certainly *Manāẓer al-enšāʾ* (British Museum, ms. Add. 22,706), compiled in 880/1475 by the Bahmanid (see [bahmanid dynasty](#)) vizier ‘Emād-al-Dīn Maḥmūd Gāvān, popularly known as K̄vāja-ye Jahān. This work, though largely theoretical and mechanistic in its treatment, is nevertheless a systematic presentation of the principles of elegant prose composition and the rigid rules of epistolography and was widely admired in India and Turkey. It contains guidance for the prospective *monšī*, particularly advice to avoid ambiguity resulting from words subject to more than one interpretation, considered a virtue by Amīr K̄osrow (fols. 11b-14a). The work also casts considerable light on the conventions and standards prevailing in Persian, Indian, and Central Asian courts and on the official ethics of Muslim chancelleries in the 15th century. These principles are abundantly illustrated with examples of his own work, collected under the title *Rīāz al-enšāʾ*.

The Mughal period in India was one of the great periods of eastern Islamic culture. Persian prose writing, especially *enšāʾ*, was cultivated by eminent writers under the patronage of the Mughal emperors and the contemporary rulers of the Deccan, continuing the tradition established in the Delhi sultanate (Ahmad, p. 227). Akbar’s reign has in fact been called the “Indian summer of Persian literature,” for it was in his reign that Abu’l-Faẓl ‘Allāmī laid the foundations for the new secretarial style (*sabk-e monšīāna*) of *enšāʾ*. His



predilection for *este'māl-e Hend*, distinctive phrasing, and novel compounds influenced a whole generation of Indian *monšīs* (Mohiuddin, 1971, pp. 157, 180-81). His *Enšā'-e Abu'l-Faẓl*, also known as *Mokātabāt-e Abu'l-Faẓl*, completed in the years 1011-16/1602-07, became very popular among intellectuals in Mughal society, particularly those with Sufi leanings. Abu'l-Faẓl's command of fine style is demonstrated by the different literary character of each of the three sections of the work. The first contains letters that he drafted for the emperor and addressed to the rulers of Persia and other countries; they reveal Abu'l-Faẓl as a "finished diplomatist, who guards and elevates the honour of his master in the eyes of the foreign rulers and refractory chiefs, with a decided political flavour and statesmanlike expressions of vague threats and a patronizing tone" (Blochmann, in 'Allāmī, 1867, preface). In a second epistolary work, *Roq'āt-e Abu'l-Faẓl*, he revealed yet another facet of his style.

Abu'l-Faẓl's elder brother Abu'l-Fayẓ (d. 1004/1595), who used the pen name Fayẓī, was equally distinguished in literary attainment, scholarship, and intellect (Badā'ūnī, p. 299). His *Laṭīfa-ye fayyāzī* (completed in 1035/1625) is a collection of letters addressed to scholars and men of letters, arranged in five sections. Fayẓī was the first to introduce a plain style (*sāda-negāri*) in correspondence. His Persian was generally simple and succinct, rarely encumbered with elaborate metaphors and learned diction. In this respect he was rivaled only by his contemporary Ḥakīm Abu'l-Faṭḥ Gilānī, author of the collection *Čahārbāg* (India Office Library, London, ms. 2063, fols. 2a, 15b, 17b, 20b, 27a; cf. Šebli No'mānī, III, p. 67).

Nūr-al-Dīn Moḥammad 'Abd-Allāh b. Ḥakīm 'Ayn-al-Molk Šīrāzī (d. 1003/1595), a nephew of Abu'l-Faẓl and Fayẓī, compiled two works on epistolography, *Enšā'-e ẓarab al-šebyān* and *Enšā'-e 'ayyār-e dāneš* (India Office Library, ms. 2066, fols. 46, 60-192 respectively). He imitated the style of Abu'l-Faẓl closely, and his work thus lacks originality, reflecting the rigidity that had already come to characterize the epistolary art under Shah Jahān (1037-68/1628-57). To the same period also belongs the *Enšā'-ye Kānazād Kān* of Amān-Allāh Kānazād Khan Fīrūz-jang (d. 1047/1637), who wrote under the name Amānī. He also compiled *Roq'āt-e Amān-Allāh Ḥosaynī* (British Library, ms. Or. 1410), a collection of his correspondence on mystical subjects with the famous Sufis and religious scholars of his day. Amānī's profound knowledge of Arabic, the religious sciences, and Persian poetry is reflected in the style of both works. Bāqer Khan Najm-e Tānī, who used the pen name Bāqer, in his *Enšā'-ye Bāqer Kān* (India Office Library, ms. 1535) followed the established epistolary style



without originality. The work includes two petitions (*arż-dāšts*), one addressed to the empress Nūr-e Jahān, expressing condolences at the death of Jahāngīr in 1037/1627, the other to Shah Jahān on his accession to the throne in 1037/1628.

Writing prose in Persian was fashionable under Jahāngīr and Shah Jahān. Even Hindus practiced the art and served as *monšīs*. They enriched the Persian language with Indian vocabulary, homely metaphors, and imagery drawn from indigenous life. In this connection two names figure prominently, Harkarn Das Kanboh and Chandra Bhan Barahman (d. 1068/1657-58). *Enšā'-e Harkarn* provides useful evidence on the drafting of official correspondence in the Mughal chancellery. Chandra Bhan was a more significant literary figure; although he adopted traditional Persian forms, he maintained his identity as a Brahman, and Hindu beliefs and ways of thought are common in his work in all genres. His *Monša'āt-e Barahman* (cf. Edinburgh University library, ms. 334) is a collection of petitions addressed to Shah Jahān; *Čahārčaman* (Four meadows; British Library, ms. 1892) is a collection of his *roqa'āt* and *enšā'*. Barahman wrote succinct and sober prose, though with considerable ease and fluency, apparently in imitation of the style of Sa'dī's *Golestān*. He did not indulge in secretarial pomposity, nor did he emulate the flowery diction and majesty of Abu'l-Faẓl. His influence can be perceived in the epistolary compositions of later Hindu *monšīs*, like Bal Krishn Barahman and [Ānand Rām Mokleş](#).

Abu'l-Barakāt Monīr, or Mollā Monīr, Barahman's friend and admirer, was a prominent poet and prose stylist (*enšā'-pardāz*). Like most *monšīs* in the time of Shah Jahān he was essentially a dilettante, who wrote in a very ornate style (see, e.g., *Enšā'-e Monīr*). Others in his circle included Toḡrā Mašhadī, 'Abd-al-Qāder Bīdel, Qatīl, and Mīrzā Asad-Allāh Ġāleb, all admirers of the style of Amīr Ḳosrow and his follower Mollā Zohūrī (see above), whose *Se naṭr-e Zohūrī* and *Panj roqa'āt* they considered models of pedantic *enšā'* and *tarassol* respectively. Among this group eloquence (*faṣāḥat*) meant indulgence in rhetorical devices, a diction chosen to match the rhythm of the phrases, and the revival of literary artifice.

With the decline of the Mughal empire in the later 17th century both prose and poetry became more affected and insipid. The decadence of the Persian language in Indian literature generated a controversy between Persian and Indian connoisseurs, focused on the prevailing idiom and proliferation of *monšīs*, particularly Hindus. The pretensions of Persian immigrants and visitors to literary superiority were countered by such Indian writers as



Mawlānā Monīr Lāhūrī, Moḥammad- Šāleḥ Kanboh, and Mollā Šaydā Faṭḥpūr. Mīrzā Jalālā Ṭabāṭabā'ī, author of *Rīāz al-fayẓ*, a treatise on epistolography, and *Enšā-ye Jalālā Ṭabāṭabā'ī* (Āsafīya Library, Hyderabad, *Fehrest* I, p. 132 no. 20), considered himself a more elegant chronicler than Abu'l-Faẓl, but he had to discontinue work on his *Šāh-Jahān-nāma* owing to rivalry at court. It was in connection with this controversy over style that critical dictionaries began to be compiled by Indian authors, mostly Hindus.

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