Published: December 15, 2004
Last Updated: March 27, 2012

INDIA VI. POLITICAL AND CULTURAL RELATIONS (13TH-18TH CENTURIES)

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vi. POLITICAL AND CULTURAL RELATIONS: FROM THE 13TH TO THE 18TH CENTURIES

Relations between peoples of the Iranian plateau and India were extensive and uninterrupted between the 13th and 18th centuries. Migration, commerce, and politics all led to a range of cross-regional influences, most of which flowed from Iran to India.

In the 13th century, Mongol invaders drove large numbers of Persianized Turks from greater Khorasan into north India, where they supplied the administrative and military manpower for the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526; q.v.). Another wave of migrants appeared in the late 14th and 15th centuries when the breakaway provinces of the Delhi Sultanate in Bengal and the Deccan, having been denied access to trade routes leading to Delhi, actively recruited Iranian administrators, soldiers, and men of letters (Golčin-e Maʿāni, passim). The poet Hafez (d. 1388) was solicited by rulers in Bengal and the Deccan. Sultan Firuz Shah (1397-1422) annually sent ships to the Persian Gulf to recruit Iranian talent for the Bahmanid kingdom (see BAHMANID

DYNASTY). His successor, Aḥmad Shah I (1422-36), recruited a body of 3,000 archers from Khorasan and the Persian Gulf regions to form the elite corps of his army (Ferešta, pp. 308, 322; Briggs, pp. 227, 249). Others came as merchants, such as Maḥmud Gāwān (d. 1481), a horse-trader who had migrated from Gilān to the Deccan in the mid-15th century, became the vizier of the Bahmanid Sultanate, and in turn used his influence and connections to encourage others from the Iranian world to follow in his footsteps (Nayeem, pp. 401-3).

Many Persianized Turks accompanied Ẓahir-al-Din Moḥammad Babor (q.v.) as he moved from Samarkand to Kabul to Delhi, where in 1526 he launched the Indo-Timurid, or Mughal, dynasty. When Afghan rivals drove his son and successor Homāyun (see HOMĀYUN PĀDŠĀH) out of north India thirteen years later, the exiled king found refuge in the Safavid court of Shah Ṭahmāsp. Upon his successful reconquest of north India in 1555, Homāyun brought with him numerous Iranian literati, administrators, and artists. The Mughals' taste for Iranian culture, and their considerable wealth compared to Safavid Persia's more modest resources, served as a magnet attracting many more Iranian to India. Whereas Shah ʿAbbās (1588-1629), for example, is known to have weighed but one poet in gold for a poetic eulogy he wrote, in Mughal India even high-ranking nobles are known to have done as much, while Shah Jahān weighed at least three Iranian poets in gold (Ahmad, pp. 120, 125, 127). News of such lavish patronage swiftly reached Safavid Persia, where Kawṭari, a panegyrist of Shah ʿAbbās I, complained of his homeland's meager patronage compared to that of India (Ahmad, p. 118). Indeed, nearly all the great poets of Safavid Iran migrated to India in this period, with only one of them, Ṣāʾeb, returning permanently to his homeland (Ahmad, p. 122). In 1563 Shaikh Ḥosayn Ḥariṭi, the first Shaikh-al-Islam under the Safavids, bluntly advised his son, "If you seek this world alone, then go to India" (Stewart, p. 390).

In the 17th century, as Iranian administrators, scholars, soldiers, clerics, artisans, and poets continued to find patronage in Indo-Muslim courts, many immigrants maintained their ties with Persia. Some even continued normal business transactions with their homeland. Around 1661, when Mirzā Neẓām-al-Din Aḥmad of Golkonda learned of the death of his uncle in Shiraz, he wrote to the Safavid court in Isfahan requesting that his late uncle's *aw-qāf* (religious endowment) property be seized from its present trustees (*wakil*s) and handed over to his own attorney in accordance with the principle of Islamic power of attorney (*wakālat-nāma-ye šarʿi*; Islam, pp. 172-73). Such arrangements hardly

suggest a permanent move from Iran to India. In fact, they resemble a more modern pattern, in which migrants move into overseas job markets and regularly send remittances to families back home.

Commercial contact between India and Iran was driven by such factors as India's chronic need for warhorses and Persia's demand for Indian textiles. Some of the most illustrious Iranians who served Indian courts had begun their careers exporting horses to India. Moving in the opposite direction were Indian spices, pepper, and textiles (linen, silk, muslin, chintz, calico), which found ready markets in Iran. It is estimated that in 1639 alone roughly 20,000 to 25,000 camels annually reached the Safavid capital of Isfahan, most of them carrying Indian cotton goods (Levi, p. 46, n. 110). Maritime and overland routes between the two regions flourished, because rulers generally encouraged, and even depended upon, the trade they carried. For centuries, permanent communities of Iranian merchants had settled along India's Gujarat, Konkan, and Malabar coasts, where they built mosques, established local social networks, and served as cultural and economic brokers between their Hindu overlords and the world across the Arabian Sea. In this way, as the memoirs of travelers like Ebn Baṭṭuṭa (d. 1377; q.v.) amply attest, Iranian culture quietly took root along India's coasts.

Politics formed the third mechanism of Indo-Iranian contact. From the 15th century on, most Muslim courts in India maintained embassies at, and correspondence with, their counterparts in Persia. Such contact was especially active whenever Indian rulers sought outside intervention against local rivals, as when the imperial Mughals expanded southward, inducing Deccani courts to appeal for aid from the imperialists' principal antagonist, Safavid Persia. In 1612, Bijapur's Sultan Ebrāhim II, though a Sunnite, wrote to Shah ʿAbbās professing the Deccan to be as much a part of Iran as Khorasan, Fārs, or Azarbaijan. He even described himself a mere *manṣab-dār* (office-holder) in service to the Safavid emperor, to whom he offered his "reverential prostration" (*sejda-ye taʿẓim*; Islam, pp. 131-37). Throughout most of this period, the Safavid and the Mughal rulers frequently contested their mutual border, lying athwart Afghanistan, until it was finally brushed aside by Nāder Shah's invading army with the subsequent sack and plunder of Delhi in 1739.

As a result of these contacts, a broad axis of distinctly Iranian influences emerged in the medieval period that stretched along the spine of South Asia from Kabul to Lahore to Delhi, with extensions running from Delhi east to Patna, southwest to Ahmadabad in Gujarat, and south into the heart of the

Deccan plateau. The steady influx of Persianized Turks and Iranians along the trade and migration corridors that comprise this axis, together with the identification of Iranian culture with prestige and cosmopolitanism, led to the further diffusion of that culture among aspiring ruling houses, both Hindu and Muslim. This is seen in the widespread assimilation of Iranian or Persianized styles of architecture, music, art, literature, technology, dress, and cuisine.

In areas lying along this geo-cultural axis—i.e., Punjab, the upper and middle Ganges plain, Gujarat, Deccan—ruling elites actively patronized all aspects of Iranian culture. When courts in these areas adopted Persian as the language of fiscal administration, as they typically did, there emerged upper-caste, non-Muslim clerks who learned and used the language, just as their 19th-century counterparts would do with English. Hindu clerical castes continued to cultivate Iranian language and literature well into the twentieth century, long after these courts had ceased to exist. In north India the local vernacular, Hindawi, assimilated a good deal of Iranian vocabulary while retaining its syntax and grammar, resulting in the emergence of a new, hybridized tongue, Urdu. Gradually, the Persian script was adapted to this language, which by the 16th century had begun to acquire its own literary status.

In regions lying beyond this Persianized axis, such as Bengal, Kashmir, or the coastal south, Persian was not adopted in the revenue administration. Yet even here, a host of Persian words became naturalized in languages such as Marathi, Telugu, or Bengali. At the same time, Persian romance literature seeped into popular culture whenever bilingual intellectuals translated such works into vernacular tongues. This occurred in places even as distant as the Arakan coast of Burma, where the 17th century poet Alaol translated Neẓāmi's *Eskandar-nāma* and *Haft Paykar* (qq.v.) into Bengali.

Iran's religious influences on India were equally profound. When the Bahmanid kingdom broke up in the early 16th century, the rulers of two of its five successor states, Bijapur and Golkonda, seized the opportunity to declare Shiʿism their state religion, imitating what Shah Esmāʿil (1501-24) had recently done in Persia. In 1537 Shah Ṭāher (d. 1546), himself an émigré from Shah Esmāʿil's court, converted to Shiʿism the ruler of a third successor state, Sultan Borhān Neẓām Shah I (1510-53) of Ahmadnagar, who in turn spent thousands of gold coins recruiting more Shiʿite clerics to his kingdom (Kazimi, p. 47). By the 1530s Shah Ṭāher reported to Shah Ṭahmāsp that the entire Deccan was on the way to a religious reformation (*eṣlāh*á; Islam, pp. 122, 124). Iranian Sufis, too, exerted profound influence on Indian politics and culture, especially

when internal politics made it desirable for Indo-Muslim rulers to seek external bases of legitimacy. Thus, when Aḥmad Shah I sought to re-invigorate the Bahmanid state, he sent a mission to Kerman to entreat the renowned mystic Šāh Neʿmat-Allāh Wali (d. 1431) to come and adorn his new capital at Bidar. Although that shaikh never left Iran, his entire family ultimately settled in Bidar, where they formed a powerful bloc of Iranian influence at the heart of the Bahmanid state (Ferešta, pp. 328-29; Briggs, pp. 258 ff.).

Notions of statecraft and sovereignty were among the most pervasive of Iranian influences on India. The Persianized Turks who established the Delhi Sultanate in the 13th century, especially Ēltotmeš (r. 1210-35, q.v.), projected ideas and symbols of kingship distinctly associated with pre-Islamic Iran. These included rules of court etiquette, the mystique surrounding the office of the sovereign, the naming of royal children after pre-Islamic Iranian heroes, and, beginning with Ēltotmeš, the image of the king as the "second Alexander." In the Deccan, ʿAbd-al-Malek ʿEṣāmi eulogized his Indo-Muslim patrons by modeling his historical poem *Fotuḥ-al-salāṭin* (1350) directly on Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma*.

Rulers also projected their authority through the "Circle of Justice," an ideology that linked power with wealth and wealth with justice. Traceable to ancient Mesopotamia and associated especially with the Sasanian monarch Ḵosrow I Anuširvān (r. 531-79), the notion was subsequently elaborated by medieval Iranian theorists like Neẓām-al-Molk (d. 1092), Abu Ḥāmed Ḡazāli (q.v.; d. 1111), Faḵr-al-Din Rāzi (d. 1209), and Rašid-al-Din Fażl-Allāh (d. 1318; Darling, pp. 3-19; Subtleny pp. 53-65). Among the Mughals, the idea was projected most prominently by Jahāngir (1605-28) and Shah Jahān (1628-58), with the latter going so far as to build "forty-pillared" audience halls in all his capitals in imitation of the "forty-pillared hall" of Persepolis (Koch, pp. 148-49, 152). The ideology of justice, which had no precedent in ancient Indian treatises on statecraft, possessed sufficient prestige to spread even into areas in India never exposed to Muslim rule (see Wagoner, 1993, p. 95). The same is true of Iranian administrative practices like the *eqṭāʿ* (q.v.), a military service land grant, the idea of which was voluntarily assimilated by non-Muslim Indian regimes as early as the 13th century (see the discussion of *nāyankaramu* tenure in 13th century Andhra, in Talbot, pp. 164-66).

Many revolutionary technologies arrived via Iran or Central Asia in the 13th and 14th centuries. The technology of paper-making and the use of lime-mortar for domed roofing both reached India in the 13th century. By the 14th

century the spinning wheel, six times more efficient than hand spinning, had arrived from Persia, as had the animal-powered Iranian wheel, which facilitated deep-well irrigation in India's arid northwest. The calico-printing technique and the bow and string for cotton-carding also reached India in the 14th century, probably from Persia. Also, in the 16th century Iranian immigrants in the Deccan seem to have introduced the upright loom, with colored woolen weft-threads based on patterns set in paper (Habib, 1969, pp. 141-60; Habib, 1980, pp. 3-10). Finally, a host of innovations in military technology—such as the use of stone ashlar masonry and bent-axis gateways in fortifications, the counterweight trebuchet (*manājiq*, *maḡrebi*) for siege engines, and the iron stirrup and horseshoe for cavalry warfare—appear to have entered India via the Iranian plateau in the 13th century.

The most visible form of Iranian influence in India is found in the hundreds of architectural monuments patronized by rulers who looked to Iran for their aesthetic inspiration, and often for their architects. The trend began with India's first sultan, Qoṭb-al-Din Aybak (r. 1206-10; q.v.), whose congregational mosque in Delhi followed the Iranian plan of a central open courtyard surrounded by cloistered halls on three sides, with a prayer chamber on the fourth side (Tsukinowa, pp. 54-60). When unruly provinces declared their independence from Delhi's authority in the 14th century, they sometimes sought to legitimize themselves architecturally by bypassing their former masters in Delhi and imitating Iranian imperial models. This appears to have happened in the case of Bengal's Adina Mosque (1375), which in structural terms recalls the third-century Sasanian palace, Ṭāq-e Kesrā (Eaton, pp. 40-47). Somewhat later, Mughal rulers readily assimilated the complex geometrical formulae, the vaulting techniques, and the intersecting arches associated with Timurid practices in Central Asia and Khorasan. In India these elements appeared first in Homāyun's tomb (1571), whose architect had himself come from Bukhara. Through Timurid influence, too, came the Iranian conception of the garden, symbolic of paradise, with water channels, poo1s, and pavilions (Subtleny, pp. 119-20). Already evident in Bābor's own memoirs, the aesthetic of the garden was translated into many Mughal architectural triumphs, most famously the Tāj Maḥal (1632-43; Golembek, pp. 43-50; Subtleny, pp. 120-21).

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