

Relations between the Mughals and the Safavid Dynasty

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Abstract

The Indus valley civilization had contacts with the contemporaneous civilizations of Iran and Mesopotamia. There was trade between the coast of southern Iran and India through the Persian gulf and the Arabian sea. The Mughals and Safavid societies relied on bureaucracies that drew inspiration from the steppe traditions of Turkish and Mogol people and from the heritage of Islam, they adopted similar policies, they looked for ways to keep peace in their societies which were made up of different religious and ethnic backgrounds, and they were associated with literary and artistic talents. The people of these countries have been enjoying close historical harmony through the ages. They had common motherland and shared a common linguistic and racial past. For the past many years, they interacted and enriched each other in the fields of language, religion, arts, culture, food and other traditions. They are rich in historical background and cultural heritage. The two countries also have a lot in common. Descending mountains, the Aryans inhabited in Iran and India; consequently, there have been many common grounds in languages, religions and custom of the two countries. Moreover, a close relationship between these countries is readily recognizable. The relationship between cultures of Iran and India is best manifested in art although, this relationship has suffered various vicissitudes. This paper focuses on the relationship that existed between the Mughal rulers of India and the Safavid dynasty.

KEYWORDS: Humayun, Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb, Persian, art and architecture.

Introduction

In history, India and Iran have emerged as culturally rich and the oldest civilizations. The two nations have the same origin which is traced back to the Aryans. As such a lot of likeness and similarities are found between these countries not only in their customs, traditions and languages but also in attitude towards life. One cannot deny the influence of Iranian culture on the Indian culture. In this connection, the late Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (15 August 1947 – 27 May 1964) writes in his book 'Discovery of India' among the many peoples and races who have come in contact with and influenced India's life and culture, the oldest and most persistent have been the Iranians. India and Iran have in the same racial stock share many things in common. They are Eastern Asians originate from the same race. The strong bondage and the same features are highly parallel between these two countries and such affinity is not found anywhere else.

India and Persia became great powers under the rule of two outstanding dynasties. The Safavids of Persia synchronized with that of the Great Mughals of India; hence, there were close relations between these two powerful dynasties. Shah Ismail-I (1501-1524) established Safavid Empire which was the first native dynasty to rule over the whole of Persia since the overthrow of the Sassanid Empire by the Arabs in the

seventh century A.D. Babur received help from the Safavid king Shah Ismail I and established himself in Kabul first and then in Delhi and Agra. In 1524 A.D. Shah Ismail-I died and Shah Tahmasp the eldest of his sons succeeded to the throne at the age of ten. Later on, Babur conquered Delhi and Agra in 1526 A.D. and became the Emperor of Hindustan. Thus a new dynasty was founded in India by Babur known to the entire world as Mughal; an adaptation of Mughal is from the Persian word for Mongol. Mughals were Muslims and followed Sunni sect of Islam. They were also strongly influenced by the Persians.

The Mughal patronage of culture constantly attracted Persian scholars, talented Persians were absorbed in expanding services of the Mughal Empire. Babur was an accomplished Persian poet.

Relations between Humayun and Shah Tahmasp

The premature death of Babur on December 26, 1530 A.D. created difficulties for his inexperienced son Humayun (1530-1540, 1555-1556), and he had to consolidate the gains that his father had left for him. It is well known that the life of Humayun, son of the founder of the Mughal Empire, was turbulent, alternating between successes and setbacks. Due to the non-co-operation of his brothers Humayun had to lose his throne in a confrontation with Sher Shah Suri, the Afghan leader, and went into exile in 1540 A.D. During a troublesome journey, Akbar was born in 1541 A.D. when Humayun was escaping as a fugitive towards Persia.

The account of Humayun in Persia forms also an interesting episode in the relations of the Mughal Emperors of India with the Safavid Court. To some the exile may appear as the account of the wanderings of an enthroned monarch, who had lost his throne, will appear as tragic as it is interesting. Humayun's stay at the Safavid Court though humiliating to some extent, but it also resulted in acquiring a great help from Persia for the recovery of Qandahar and Kabul, it later helped him for the recapture of his lost empire in India.

Shah Tahmasp of Persia (23 May 1524 – 25 May 1576), being only second member of his house to sit upon the throne of Persia. His reign of fifty-two-years was longer than that of any other Safavid monarch. He was much excited by the news of the emperor's arrival, being well aware of the prestige that would accrue to him and he should stand forth in the eyes of the world as the protector of Timur's descendant, the Badshah (King) of Hindustan. Shah Tahmasp, also found that for the Emperor of India to seek refuge at his Court was an historic event which gave additional glory to his reign and had to be celebrated with corresponding splendour. In July, 1544 A.D. the Shah himself welcomed him with all the observances of respect and honour, and had an interview with him in which all the conditions of reverence and veneration were fulfilled. In the course of conversation the Shah asked what had led to his defeat; Humayun incautiously replied 'the opposition of my brothers. In Persia, Humayun had to face a great difficulty when Shah Tahmasp demanded from Humayun, precisely as his father Ismail-I had done from Babur, the acceptance of the Ithna Ashariyah faith. At first Humayun resisted, but submitted when he was told that he is endangering not only his own life but also the lives of all his followers along with him. During his stay in Persia most fortunately for Humayun, that he had three steady and eminent friends, the Shah's sister Sultanam Khanum, the Shah's minister Qazi Jahan and the royal physician Nur-ud-Din, who constantly tried to establish

friendly relations between Humayun and Shah Tahmasp. Humayun, was relieved from the dangers that surrounded him, chiefly by the generous intercession of Sultanum Khanum, who strongly represented to her brother the off beam policy, as well as injustice, of using any severity towards an exiled emperor who had sought his protection and hospitality.

Shah Jahan and its relations with Safavid Dynasty

Shah Jahan's (1628-1658) reign occupies an important place in Indian history. Shah Jahan's Court represented the height of kingly splendour. In his reign the Mughal Empire attained to the zenith of its prosperity and affluence. The fame of the wealth of India attracted a stream of foreign visitors from across the seas, who were dazzled by the magnificent grandeur of the Emperor and his Court. The gorgeousness of his Court surpassed their imaginations, and drew from them unstinted admiration.

Under Shah Jahan's reign many of the great men of state were from Persia; Shaista Khan, Jaffar Khan, Makaramat Khan and most importantly, Ali Mardankhan, who, after surrendering the city of Qandahar, part of the easternmost territories of the Safavids to the Mughals in 1638, served with distinction in the Mughal administration, earning the highest honours of the Mughal court.

Persian domination continued under Shah Jahan, after his accession he promoted Asaf Khan to the highest rank of 9000 zat and 9000 sawar, and confirmed him in the post of Wakil which he held till his death in 1641 A.D. It is significant to note that after the death of Asaf Khan, Shah Jahan did not fill the post of Wakil. Shah Jahan's first diwan, Wazir Khan, who was an Indian Muslim, did not remain in office for more than a year. Sa'dullah Khan, indeed, held office for a number of years 1647-1656 A.D. but except this period of about ten years, for the other twenty years of his reign the office of Diwan was filled by Persians alone. The names of Persian Diwans were Iradat Khan, Afzal Khan Shirazi and Islam Khan Mashhadi. All the thirteen mir-bakhshis of Shah Jahan were Persians; Iradat Khan, Sadiq Khan, Islam Khan Mashhadi, Mir Jumla, Mu'tamad Khan, Salabat Khan, Asalat Khan, Jaffar Khan, Khalilullah Khan, Larshap Khan, Itiqad Khan, Danishmand Khan and Muhammad Amin.

Aurangzeb and its relations with Safavid Dynasty

The events at the end of Shah Jahan's reign did not go well for the future of the Empire. The Emperor fell ill in September 1657 A.D and rumours of his death spread. He executed a will bequeathing the Empire to his eldest son, Dara Shikoh. His other sons, Shujah, Aurangzeb, and Murad, who were grown men and Governors of provinces, decided to contest the throne. From the war of succession during 1658-1659 A.D Aurangzeb emerged the sole victor. He then imprisoned his father in the Agra fort and declared himself Emperor. Later on, Shah Jahan died as a prisoner on January 31, 1666 A.D at the age of 74. In Aurangzeb court out of 125 nobles of the mansab of 1,000 and above who are known to have supported Aurangzeb in the battle of Samugarh, 28 were Persians, 4 of them holding mansab of 5,000 zat and above. Mir Jumla and Shaista Khan, the leading Persian nobles, were Aurangzeb's partisans. Thus, the Aurangzeb's victory did not affect the position of the Persians in any way. Bernier says that the 'greater part' of Aurangzeb's foreign nobility consisted of Persians.

The Persians monopoly continued under Aurangzeb's regime. There were numerous Persian Governors posted in various provinces, some of them were Shahnawaz Khan and Mukhtar Khan as Governors of Gujarat, Amir Khan as Governor of Kabul, Fidai Khan as Governor of Oudh, Muhammad Beig as Governor of Doab, Kamgar Khan as Governor of Sikandarpur, Tarbiyat Khan as Governor of Orissa, Zabardast Khan as Governor of Hoshangabad, Shaista Khan as Governor of Bengal, Inayat Khan as Governor of Aurangabad, SafShikan Khan as Governor of Kahni, Asad Khan and Bahadur Khan as Governors of Deccan.

Spread of Persian Literature in India

The Muslim rulers in India patronized Persian language. Most of the Persian vocabulary was absorbed into this language that's Urdu. The grammar and essential structure of Urdu remained very close to the language of North India. Persian was the official and the court language under the Mughals. An Indian style developed in Persian poetry and literature. Many Persian poets and scholars came to India to seek employment at the courts of the Mughal rulers. An Indian style developed in Persian poetry and literature. Amir Khusrau Dehlavi and Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib were among the prominent Indian poets. Many Persian poets and scholars came to India to seek employment at the courts of the Mughal rulers. Akbar for the first time appointed a poet as poet laureate in his court.

In all the local languages of Northern India that's Punjabi, Kashmiri, Sindhi, Marathi and Bengali besides Hindu and Urdu there are a large number of Persian words and expressions including popular proverbs. Persian and Arabic vocabulary entered the speech of the common folk of Punjab. There were several Hindu poets and authors who contributed to Persian poetry and literature in India. Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib was a distinguished poet of Persian and Urdu and is immensely popular even today.

Art and Architecture

Indian crafts men worked with Persian and Turkish masters to create a new harmonious art and architecture. The Indian flora blended with Islamic calligraphy. Few colours like turquoise blue, emerald green, lapis, viridian and brilliant white were added to the Indian saffron, indigos and vermilions. Persian artists like Abdus Samad of Shiraz, Mir Sajjad Ali of Tabriz and so on worked with their Indian colleagues in royal Mughal courts.

Mughal architecture is the type of Indo-Islamic architecture developed by the Mughals in the 16th 17th and 18th centuries throughout the ever-changing extent of their empire in the Indian subcontinent. It developed the styles of earlier Muslim dynasties in India as an amalgam of Islamic, Persian, and Indian architecture. Mughal buildings have a uniform pattern of structure and character, including large bulbous domes, slender minarets at the corners, massive halls, large vaulted gateways and delicate ornamentation. The Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri and Humayun Tomb are the finest examples of the synthesis of Indo-Iranian style in architecture. The Iranian influence is visible in Qutab Minar. Persian architects and artisans were brought to India to design and construct palaces and forts, mosques and public buildings.

Iranian painters introduced the art of portrait and miniature paintings in Mughal courts. The Mughal schools of paintings owed much to Iran and blossomed under

Akbar's patronage. Mir Sayyed Ali and Khwaja Abdussamad from Persia were the founders of the Mughal School of paintings in India. There were major developments in the technique of miniature painting, portraits, and scenes of war, social events and illustrations of manuscripts.

The Kashmir carpet weavers absorbed the Persian design of the 'tree of life', mehrab, vase and floral medallion designs. In the 17th century, a kind of handmade carpets by the name of Indo-Esfahan carpets with designs inspired from heart were exported by the East India company to Europe and are frequently seen in Dutch paintings of that time. Indian bed sheets, curtains, and jah-namaz were being exported to Persia.

The Srikalahasti style of kalamkari (Kalankari), wherein the "kalam" or pen is used for freehand drawing of the subject and filling in the colours, is entirely hand worked. This style flowered around temples and their patronage and so had an almost religious identity - scrolls, temple hangings, chariot banners and the like, depicted deities and scenes taken from the Hindu epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas and the mythological classics.

CONCLUSION

The relations between Mughals and Safavids had fluctuated in varying degrees. It was normal as bilateral state relations, like those between two individual persons, do not remain static, nor do they run in straight lines as there were curves and verges.

The relations have gone through numerous vicissitudes. The strong historical and cultural relations have always played a significant role in bringing the two dynasties closer to each other. The civilizational bonds between the two countries were further strengthened in the period of Mughal rule in India, with the migration of large numbers of Iranians to India, the use of Persian as the language of the imperial court and the impact of Persian culture on north Indian literary and artistic traditions. They share significant cultural, linguistic and ethnic characteristics. The Mughal Empire attained a strong position in the economic life of the Persian capital and the Persians became influential in the politics and culture of the Mughal Dynasty.

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