

## 4. Migration of Persian literati from Delhi to Awadh

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### Abstract:

*Awadh always had been a cultural centre of India from times immemorial. The world famous Sanskrit epic Ramayana has been written here. The decline of Mughal Empire in the first half of 18<sup>th</sup> century lead to the disintegration of the center of political power and small provincial chieftains claimed independence, leading to the rise of independent princely states. As the centre of power shifted, scholars, poets, historians and men of letters who were bereft of the royal patronage started emigrating from the Delhi court to other parts of the country most notably to Awadh. It was during this milieu that Awadh resurfaced as one of the major centers of Persian language and culture. This paper seeks to provide a short introduction of notables who migrated to Awadh after the fall of Delhi and give a general overview of the life and contribution of these literary figures towards the development of the Persian literature.*

### Keywords:

*Awadh, Persian literature, Nawabs; Mughals; Urdu; Lucknow School.*

### Authors Note:

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# Migration of Persian literati from Delhi to Awadh

## Awadh in the eighteenth century

Awadh always had been a cultural centre of India and a seat of learning from times immemorial. It has a long literary, cultural and traditional history. The world famous Sanskrit epic Ramayana has been written here. During the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Awadh re-emerged as one of the major centers of Persian language and culture.

With the decline of Mughal Empire in the first half of 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the provincial rulers proclaimed independent governments in their respective regions, the Persian poets and scholars and litterateur started emigrating from Delhi court to other parts of the country most notably to Awadh.

After the demise of Aurangzeb, Delhi was ravaged by the wars. The wars of succession among the princes weakened and endangered the social and economic stability of Delhi. Seeing this, foreign invaders like Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali as well as indigenous rival powers started to challenge Delhi's power. After this tumultuous situation, litterateurs from Delhi began migrating to other safer provincial courts.

Awadh was one of those literary centers in India where the Persian language and literature made a tremendous progress and flourished enormously. Nawabs of Awadh being of Persian origin were themselves passionate about Persian culture, language and literature. Apart from playing a role in Indian politics they provided, to a great extent, a solid ground for literary activities. Almost all of them were learned scholars of the time. Awadh under its Nawabs emerged as the hub of cultural activity and assumed its place as the main centre of literary, artistic and literary activities in north India. The newly independent state of Awadh offered generous patronage to poets, writers and scholars of Persian and Urdu following the attacks by Iranian, Afghan, Maratha and Jat armies.

## Migration of Persian poets and litterateur

The phenomenon like migration not affects only one section of the society but it compasses each and every individual. Delhi from the year 1679 till 1712, when Aurangzeb left Delhi for Rajasthan and then marched to Deccan where he remained till his death in 1707, remained without a king (Chandra,

Satish, 107). His successor could not even enter the Delhi, embroiled in the wars with Azam at Jaju near Agra and Kam Baksh at Deccan and Sikh rebellion in Punjab. These all factors along with the foreign invasion by Nader Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali contributed to a mass depopulation of Delhi to safer parts of the country.

In the article 'Cultural and Political Role of Delhi, 1675-1725', published in 'The Delhi: Its Monuments and History' in which Prof. Satish Chandra while assessing the political and cultural role of Delhi in the last quarter of seventeenth and first quarter of the eighteenth century argues that despite the invasions of Nader Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1739 and 1756 respectively, and movement of Aurangzeb to Deccan where he led his ambitious campaign in south India, Delhi remained the literary and cultural seat as it had been earlier, to which I do not agree fully. I do believe that it did not fade off its cultural and literary aspect in totality. But the devastation and scourge that was unleashed by foreign invaders compelled these people to migrate and seek shelter to some safe and peaceful places. Awadh, was obviously the a better option in that respect, which therefore literally emerged as the Mecca for poets and literati.

Even before the proclamation of Awadh as an independent principality, the Awadh governors posited themselves very powerfully at Mughal court. They had upper hand in every decision by imperial court and that is because Awadh was one of the most fertile provinces and contributed to imperial treasure immensely. Sa'adat Khan—the governor and later on the first Nawab of Awadh—brought almost entire region under his control which was otherwise ravaged by warring tribes. As in the final years of Aurangzeb and under his powerless successor the Mughal centre declined and these landlords in the region armed themselves against each other to grab more and more power and hold on arable lands (Alam, *The Awadh Regime*; Lucknow: *Memories of a City*, 1999, 19). Sa'adat Khan made many changes in administrative setup in Awadh and subdued Sheikhzadas (claimed to be descendants of the first Mughal conquerors of the province; Muzaffar Alam) and powerful landholders very tactfully by alliances with their rivals.

This period is marked by bilingualism as far as the literary expression is concerned. Persian as well as Urdu was used for prose writing and versifications. Almost every poet of the time used both Persian and Urdu for poetry. Immigration of poets from Delhi to Awadh led to the foundation of a new school popularly known as Lucknow School, the followers of this school prided themselves on the legacy and high culture of Lucknow and perceived any external influence as an 'alien' intrusion. As quoted by C. M. Naim, "Lucknow and Urdu are, mentioned together only after the appearance of the independent state of Awadh and the eastward migration of the Delhi poets" (*Urdu in Lucknow*, 1999, 165).

During this period, Urdu poetry gradually overshadows the Persian poetry in Awadh. However as far

as the prose writing is concerned the Persian continued to be preferred over other languages i.e. Urdu and Sanskrit as far as writing in the fields of medicine theology, philosophy and other sciences is concerned. Nevertheless that does not imply that the poets stopped composing in Persian altogether. During the reign of Shoja-al Dawlah, Awadh continued to flourish as a rendezvous point for the Persian poets and scholars from India and Iran. Despite all this the Persian could not deal with the blow of being uprooted from the entre. For the Urdu was more in vogue as compared to Persian in Awadh as far as the literary expression in concerned (Trivedi, The Making of Awadh Culture, 2013, 91).

The phenomenon of migration was not only limited to litterateurs and poets, but the people of other crafts and arts like musicians, book binders, merchants and traders, nobles, manufacturers and painters also sought refuge in Awadh.

My chief concern in this paper is to make a mention of litterateur and poets who repaired for Awadh due to political instability and added to the intellectual and social life of the era. It is difficult to provide a comprehensive coverage of all the notables in the confines of a brief paper, therefore I have limited myself to some prominent personalities of the time. This paper seeks to provide a general overview of the life and contribution of these literary figures towards the development of the Persian literature in Awadh.

### **Sirajuddin Ali Khan Arzu (1099-1169 AH)**

Sirajuddin Ali Khan, popularly known by his pseudonym Arzu, was an eminent scholar, bilingual poet, lexicographer and a literary critic<sup>1</sup>, born in Gwalior, received education in Akbarabad, Agra, and settled in Delhi<sup>2</sup>. Arzu spent most of his life in Delhi where he held respectable positions at Delhi Durbar. Then later, although not immediately after the attack of Nadir Shah, he left for Lucknow. In the wake of these attacks, an exodus of the people of Delhi began towards Awadh. Khan Arzu was received at Lucknow, the place of his ancestors<sup>3</sup>, with kindness by Shoja-ul Dawlah, son of Safdar Jung<sup>4</sup>. He was highly proficient in Persian and Arabic. He used to write mainly in Persian, but he also wrote some Urdu couplets. He is also known to have achieved mastery over Hindi and Sanskrit languages. He is also known as indicating the links between Sanskrit and Persian much before the

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<sup>1</sup> His works namely *Dad-I Sokhan*, *Tambihul Ghafeleen* and *Seraj-I Moneer* are finest examples of his literary criticism

<sup>2</sup> Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature, pg, 87.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmad, Prof. Nazir, Sirajuddin Ali Khan Arzu, Sirajuddin Ali Khan Arzu Ek Mutala'ah, Ed, Shahid Mahuli, pg, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature, pg, 88.

Achaemenian rock inscriptions were deciphered by western scholars<sup>5</sup>. Prof, Zaidi<sup>6</sup>, argues that most of the critics confine themselves only to criticism, but Arzu has not only criticized but corrected the poems of many poets in his famous book *Majma-ul Nafayes*. He has got more than thirty books and treatises to his credit<sup>7</sup>.

The most important of them are: *A Diwan, Siraj ul Loghat, Chiragh-e Hidayat, Nawadir ul Alfaz, Khayaban, Siraj-e Moneer, Siraj-e Wahhaj, Mohebat-e Uzma, Tambihul Ghafelin, Majmaul Nafayis*.

## **Mirza Mohammad Rafi Sauda (1125-1195 AH)**

Mirza Mohammad Rafi, better known by his pen-name Sauda was born and brought up in Delhi in the year 1125 AH<sup>8</sup>. He was, according to the writer of the *Majma-ul Intekhab*, the maternal grandson of Nemat Khan Aali<sup>9</sup>. He initially composed in Persian but later on, at the behest of Arzu, started composing in Urdu<sup>10</sup> and in a very short period of time became the master of poets of *Rekhta*<sup>11</sup>. In poetry composition, Arzu was one of his mentors<sup>12</sup>. Sauda was very much influenced and inspired by Arzu's *Tambihul Ghafeleen* in writing his book *Ibrat-ul Ghafeleen*, in terms of name and content<sup>13</sup>. Mian Quli Khan and Shah Hatem were amongst his early mentors in composing poetry<sup>14</sup>. He is also known as being mentored in composition of poetry by Sheikh Nizam-ul Din S'ane Bilgrami (1139-1199AH). Apart from composing Ghazals in Arabic language, he was also a master Satirist. After the fall of Delhi he bid adieu to the city and travelled to Farukhabad, he finally settled down in Lucknow. Sauda associated himself with the court of Nawab Shuja-ul Daulah and then with A'saf-ul Daulah after the former died. The literary assets, he left behind, are comprised of: *A Diwan* and a treatise namely *Ibrat-ul Ghafeleen* which was written by him during his stay at Lucknow<sup>15</sup> which proves his credentials as one of the best talents of his time.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg, 88.

<sup>6</sup> Zaidi, Prof. Iraq Raza, *Watan Parast Khan Arzu ki Islahen*, Sirajuddin Ali Khan Arzu Ek Mutala'ah, Ed, Shahid Mahuli, pg, 104.

<sup>7</sup> *Majma-ul Nafayis*, pg. 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Safina-I Hindi* pg. 105.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibrat-ul Ghafeleen*, pg, 26, referencing from *Majma-ul Intekhab*, pg, 86.

<sup>10</sup> *Mashahi'r Shoara-I Urdu Ki Farsi Shayeri*, pg. 94- 95.

<sup>11</sup> *Tazkira-I Hindi*, pg. 133.

<sup>12</sup> *Majmua-I Naghz*, pg, 304.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibratul Ghafeleen*, Ed. By Prof. S. H. Qasemi, pg, 38.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pg, 26.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pg 36.

## **Mir Taqi Mir (1135-1225 AH)**

Mir Taqi Mir was another great poets of the era who at the request of Nawab A'saf-ul Daulah migrated to Lucknow. He was the nephew of Arzu<sup>16</sup>. He completed his education under the supervision of Arzu and one of his disciples. He has been often compared Sauda as far as his poetry in *Rekhata* is concerned, but in Ghazal and Mathnavi he achieved supremacy over Mirza Sauda<sup>17</sup>. His book *Zikr-I Mir* is not just an autobiography but it also contains a graphic account of numerous historical events of the time, the writer assumes a neutral and unbiased tone commenting on the historical events as a spectator as they unfold<sup>18</sup>. Mir is very well known for his satirical tone in poetry he didn't even spare the celebrated personalities of his time. He wrote more in Urdu than in Persian. His works include: *A Persian Diwan, Nukat-ul Shoara, Zikr-I Mir, Kulliyat-I Farsi and Faiz-I Mir*.

## **Syed Mohammad Mir Soz (-1213)**

Syed Mohammad Mir Soz another bilingual poet was an expert in calligraphy and wrote in a fine 'Shikaste' hand. He was also an expert of musicology<sup>19</sup>. After the turbulence and unrest of Delhi, he sought seclusion from worldly affairs and headed towards Lucknow. After staying in Lucknow for a short period of time he moved to Murshidabad, but returned to Lucknow and sought refuge in the court of A'saf-ul Dawlah where he died in the year 1213 AH<sup>20</sup>. He composed only ghazals and left behind a Diwan.

## **Sheikh Ghulam Hamadani Mus'hafi (-1240 AH)**

Sheikh Ghulam Hamadani Mus'hafi was also a major bilingual poet. He wrote more in Urdu than in Persian. According to him, his Diwan of Urdu and first Persian Diwan were stolen or lost<sup>21</sup>. He visited Lucknow for the first time in the year 1772 AD but returned to Delhi after a stay of one year. After which he returned back to Lucknow and settled down there permanently. His prominent works

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<sup>16</sup> Mirza Ali Lutf opined that he was a farther relative of Arzu, while the author of A'b-I Hayat wrote that he was son of Mir Abdullah but from his earlier wife. His father after the death of Mir's mother got married to the sister of Arzu. So this way, he is related to Arzu.

<sup>17</sup> Tazkira-I Hindi, pg. 212.

<sup>18</sup> Shakeeb, Shafqat Husain, Nigahi Be Zikr-I Mir Talif-I Mir Taqi Mir, pg. 205. Danish Vol. XXXI- 2013-2014, Kashmir University Srinagar.

<sup>19</sup> Makhzan-I Nukat, pg. 56.

<sup>20</sup> A'b-I Hayat, pg. 165.

<sup>21</sup> Tazkira-I Hindi, pg. 256.

are<sup>22</sup>: *Majma-ul Fosaha*, *Tazkira-I Hindi* and *Iqd-I Surayya*, he also left behind two *diwans* in Persian language.

### **Hakim Shafae Khan Arshad (-1230 AH)**

Hakim Shafae Khan, who used to write under the pseudonym Arshad, belonged to the family of physicians<sup>23</sup> a profession that he had chosen for himself too. After the invasion of Ahmad Shah Abdali, he chose to move to the court of Lucknow where he spent the rest of his life. He composed Persian poems and left a small but beautiful collection of poems.

### **Mirza Mohammad Husain Qateel (-1240 AH)**

Mirza Mohammad Husain Qateel was yet another poet born in Delhi who later on, moved to Awadh. Although he was born in a Hindu family he had embraced Islam at the age of eighteen and so abandoned his previous name, Diwāli Singh. He wrote in both Persian and Urdu. His works include: *A Diwan*, *Chahar Sharbat* and *Shajarat-ul Amani* (collection of poems) and *Nahar-ul Fasahat* which is a treatise on grammar.

### **Mir Qamaruddin Minnat (-1208 AH)**

Mir Qamaruddin wrote under the pen-name of Minnat. He was born and brought up in Delhi and later on moved to Lucknow. He acquired the Knowledge of Hadith and Jurisprudence from Shah Abdul Aziz. In composition of Rekhte he was disciple of Mohammad Qaim<sup>24</sup>. In the year of 1182 AH, he visited Farukhabad and became a friend of Nawab Ahmad Khan Bangash<sup>25</sup>. In 1192 AH he went to Lucknow and composed some odes in the praise of Nawab A'saf-ul Daulah. Later on, he visited Calcutta where he was awarded with the title of Poet Laureate by Governor General of Bengal<sup>26</sup>. He left behind a *Diwan* in Persian language, *Shakaristan* (Mathnavi), and a treatise on '*Rejection of Sufism*'.

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<sup>22</sup> Tazkira-I Hindi, pg. 256

<sup>23</sup> Tazkera-I Riazo-ul Fosaha, pg 31.

<sup>24</sup> Tazkira-I Hindi, pg. 231.

<sup>25</sup> Tazkira-I Farsigo Shoara-I Urdu, pg 81, Tazkira-I Shorish, Pg. 237.

<sup>26</sup> Tazkira- I Gulshan-I Bekhaar, p 56.

## Rai Sawaroop Singh 'Diwana' (-1203 AH)

Rai Sawaroop Singh 'Diwana' was a bilingual poet. In Delhi he was in touch with eminent poets like Khawaja Mir Dard<sup>27</sup>. From an early age he had shown inclination towards Urdu Poetry. He composed mostly in Urdu, but it was after migrating to Lucknow he thought of composing Persian poetry. In Persian poetry he consulted Abdul Rezayi Mateen and Mirza Mohammad Fakhir Makeen<sup>28</sup>. He also provided guidance to some Urdu poets. He composed a lot of poems, the number of his couplets reach around one Lac<sup>29</sup>. He arranged four Diwans. One '*Dardiye*' second '*Ishqiye*' and third as '*Sharqiye*' and fourth one was written following Radif and Qafiya of Ali Hazin. He had intended to write a fifth one but could not execute his plan as he passed away in the year 1203 AH<sup>30</sup>.

## Kazim Ali khan Mumkin

Kazim Ali khan wrote under the pen-name Mumkin. He served as Mir Bakhshi under Nawab Amir Khan. After the fall of Delhi, he migrated to Lucknow. At the Lucknow durbar he was entrusted with the duty of Darogha<sup>31</sup>. In poetry he took consultation from Mirza Fakhir Makeen<sup>32</sup>. Unfortunately except for a few couplets nothing can be found.

## Salamullah Khan Tasleem (unknown)

Salamullah Khan Tasleem son of Shah Kalimullah, was a great poet from Qasur, near Lahore<sup>33</sup>. After disturbances and chaos in Delhi, he migrated to Awadh and joined the services of Nawab Sher Jung Naser Mohammad Khan. After the death of aforementioned Nawab, he also graced the court of Nawab A'saf-ul Daulah. In poetry he was a disciple of Mullah Naseem. Like Kazi Ali Khan Mumkin, nothing of his poetry except a few verses remains.

## Mirza Mohammad Fakhir Makeen (-1221 AH)

Mirza Mohammad Fakhir was another Persian poet who left Delhi and settled down at Lucknow. He wrote under the pen-name of Makeen, and was a disciple of Mirza Azima Akseer<sup>34</sup> and a

<sup>27</sup> Iqd-I Surayya, pg. 126.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. pg 126.

<sup>29</sup> Safina-I Hindi, pg. 72.

<sup>30</sup> Safina-I Hindi, pg. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Tazkera-I Sobh-I Golshan, pg. 453.

<sup>32</sup> Safina-I Hendi, pg. 194.

<sup>33</sup> Tazkera-e-Roz-e-Roshan, pg. 152.

<sup>34</sup> A'b-I Hayat. Pg.160.



contemporary of Mirza Rafi Sauda. In Lucknow he joined the court of A'saf-ul Daulah.

Other prominent poets and writers who graced the Awadh courts were: *Mir Enayat Beig Saken, Mirza Abu Ali Hatif, Krishna Chandra Qareeb, Mir Zahik* and his son *Mir Hasan, Sheikh Abdul Raza Mateen, Mir Syed Abdul Ali Tale, Shah Fasih Afsah, Mirza Imam Quli Hashmat, Mirza Mohammad Afzal Sabit, Rai Chunni Lal Qareeb, Rai Kahem Rai Rend, Mohammad Siddiq Sukhanwar, Sheikh Mohammad Ashiq, Bandeh Ali Khan Sher Afgan Basti, Munshi Rai Tota Ram A'si, Rai Sanath Singh Beidar.*

To conclude, there were many pull and push factors that were responsible for the mass migration of poets and men of letters to Awadh. The major factor being the steady decline of Delhi Durbar which resulted in decentralization of power and rise of many semi-independent principalities, abolition of the post of Poet Laureate by the then Emperor Aurangzeb<sup>35</sup> and the extraordinary efforts of the Nawabs of Awadh who never left a stone unturned when it came to patronizing Persian art and literature. This attracted multitudes of men of letters and poets to the region. Setting aside the socio-political conditions, this period goes down as a literary golden age<sup>36</sup> in the annals of history as far as enrichment and spread of Persian language and literature is concerned under the Nawabs of Awadh.

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<sup>35</sup> A Politico-Cultural Study of the Great Mughuls, pg 120.

<sup>36</sup> Islamic Civilization in South Asia: A History of Muslim Power and Presence in the Indian Subcontinent, pg 143-144.

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