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Mir Amman: *Bāḡ o bahār* (1801)

The growingly apparent need for British officials of the East India to have a working knowledge of Indian languages led in 1800 to the official decision to open a training College at Fort William in Calcutta. The post of 'Professor of Hindoostanee' was given to Dr. John Gilchrist (1759–1842), the enthusiastic author of several pioneering works with such picturesque titles as '*The Hindee Roman Orthoepigraphical Ultimatum*'.

One of Gilchrist's main duties was to oversee the production by the staff of munshis assigned to him of translations of suitable books from often flowery Persian into simple Urdu prose. While most of these Fort William versions have the lifeless quality to be expected in a series of officially-sponsored translations, one work stands as an exception to this general rule. This is the Urdu version of the Persian '*Tale of the Four Dervishes*' attributed to the great Amir Khusrau (d. 1325), produced by Mir Amman, the member of an old Delhi family of munshis who had been attracted to Calcutta by the prospect of British patronage for his skills.

The passage is taken from Mir Amman's introduction, in which he has already bewailed at some length the personal hardships he had suffered in the political turmoil of late eighteenth century India before finding his present haven. The first paragraph outlines his own understanding of the formation of Urdu as a consequence of the social intercourse between the Muslim military cantonment of Delhi and the Hindu shopkeepers who operated its bazaar. The second paragraph evokes, in somewhat rambling fashion, the past glories of the Mughal imperial capital: and the third moves on to pay graceful tribute to the discerning patronage afforded by Gilchrist to Mir Amman, who ends by briefly praising the vernacular speech of his native city.

The *Bāḡ o bahār* (whose title not only means '*The Garden and the Spring*' but also incorporates a chronogram indicating the date of its composition) achieved a steady sale as a prescribed examination text-book until the end of the Raj, besides being reprinted many times in local editions to cater for its popularity amongst the Indian Urdu-reading public. A continuing life has thereby been ensured for the rather vague sketch of the origins of Urdu given by Mir Amman in this passage. The rather naive theories advanced are, however, now of less interest than the author's style in this, the first 'real' book of Urdu prose.

The text is based on the most popular of the nineteenth century text-book editions, *Bāḡ o bahār, consisting of entertaining tales in the Hindūstānī language*, ed. D. Forbes, 4th ed. (London: W.H. Allen, 1873), pp. 7–8. (Both Phillott 9 and Abdul Haq 10 subsequently produced their own editions.) Besides translations by Forbes himself and by his rival Eastwick, there is also the version 'into literal English with copious notes' by Adalut Khan, 9th ed. (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1905), pp. 5–7.

Gilchrist's work on Urdu at Fort William and elsewhere is surveyed in Sadiq-ur-Rahman Kidwai, *Gilchrist and the 'Language of Hindustan'* (New Delhi: Rachna Prakashan, 1972).

حقیقت اردو زبان کی بزرگوں کے منہ سے یوں سنی ہے کہ دلی شہر ہندوؤں کے نزدیک جو جگہ ہے۔ انہیں کے راجا پر جا قدیم سے وہاں رہتے تھے۔ اور اپنی بھاکھا بولتے تھے۔ ہزار برس سے مسلمانوں کا عمل ہوا۔ سلطان محمود غزنوی آیا، پھر غوری اور لودی بادشاہ ہوئے۔ اس آمد و رفت کے باعث کچھ زبان نے ہندو مسلمان کی آمیزش پائی۔ آخر امیر تیمور نے، جن کے گھرانے میں اب تک نام نہاد سلطنت کا چلا جاتا ہے، ہندوستان کو لیا۔ ان کے آنے اور رہنے سے لشکر کا بازار شہر میں داخل ہوا۔ اس واسطے شہر کا بازار اردو کہلایا۔ پھر ہمایوں بادشاہ پٹھانوں کے ہاتھ سے حیران ہو کر ولایت گئے۔ آخر وہاں سے آن کر پس ماندوں کو گوش مالی دی۔ کوئی مفید باقی نہ رہا کہ فتنہ فساد برپا کرے۔

۱۰۔ جب اکبر بادشاہ تخت پر بیٹھ تب چاروں طرف کے ملکوں سے سب قوم قدر دانی اور فیض رسانی اس خاندان لاثانی کی سن کر حضور میں آ کر جمع ہوئے، لیکن ہر ایک کی گویائی اور بولی جہی جہی تھی۔ اکٹھے ہونے سے آپس میں لین دین، سودا سلف، سوال جواب کرتے ایک زبان اردو کی مقرر ہوئی۔ جب حضرت شاہجہاں صاحب قران نے قلعہ مبارک اور جامع مسجد اور شہر پناہ تعمیر کروایا اور تخت طاؤس میں جواہر جڑوایا اور دل بادل سانچہ چوبوں پر استاد کرطنابوں سے کھینچوایا اور نواب علی مردان خاں نہر کو لے کر آیا، تب بادشاہ نے خوش ہو کر جشن فرمایا اور شہر کو اپنا دار الخلافت بنایا۔ تب سے شاہ جہاں آباد مشہور ہوا، اگرچہ دئی جہی ہے، وہ پرانا شہر اور یہ نیا شہر کہلاتا ہے، اور وہاں کے بازار کو اردوئے معطی خطاب دیا۔

۲۰۔ امیر تیمور کے عہد سے محمد شاہ کی بادشاہت بلکہ احمد شاہ اور عالم گیر ثانی کے وقت تک پیڑھی بہ پیڑھی سلطنت یکساں چلی آئی۔ ندان زبان اردو کی منجھے منجھے ایسی منجھی کہ کسو شہر کی بولی اس سے ٹکڑ نہیں کھاتی۔ لیکن قدر دان منصف چاہئے جو تجویز کرے۔ سواب خدا نے بعد مدت کے جان گلکرسٹ سادانا نکتہ رس پیدا کیا کہ جنہوں نے اپنے گیان اور اگت سے اور تلاش و محنت سے قاعدوں کی کتابیں تصنیف کیں۔ اس سبب سے ہندوستان کی زبان کا ملکوں میں رواج ہوا اور نئے سر سے رونق زیادہ ہوئی۔ نہیں تو اپنی دستار و گفتار و رفتار کو کوئی برا نہیں جانتا۔ اگر ایک گنوار سے پوچھئے تو مشہروالوں کو نام رکھتا ہے۔ اور اپنے تئیں سب سے بہتر سمجھتا ہے۔ خیر، عافلان خود میدانند۔

Besides carrying-over several features of P syntax, Mir Amman's style is based on the vernacular U of eighteenth century Delhi, thus differing from stricter later standards in several respects. Obsolete features of this kind are asterisked in the following notes to the passage.

1 *haqīqat urdū zabān kī*: 'the true story of the U language', half carrying-over the word-order of the P izafat phrase *haqīqat-e zabān-e urdū* (841). There are several similar instances in the passage.

2 * *cau-jugī*: 'as old as time', through having existed through the 4 aeons (S *yuga*) of Hindu cosmology. Mir Amman's casual use of obsolete semi-*tatsama* forms is equally illustrated by the following * *bhākhā* 'vernacular' = S *bhāṣā*.

3 The successors of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (d. 1030) were overthrown in the late twelfth century by the Ghori dynasty, who initiated the Muslim conquest of Delhi in 1192. The later Lodi dynasty (1451–1526) immediately preceded the Mughals.

5 Amir Taimur (1336–1405), E 'Tamberlane', was a Central Asian warlord who sacked Delhi in 1398 (well before the Lodis), and who was an ancestor of the first Mughal emperor Babar (1526–1530).

5 *ab talak* = modern *ab tak*.

5 *nām nihād saltanat kā*: 'the name and family of the empire', a reference to the vestigial survival of the Mughals in 1801.

6 *laškar kā bāzār*: cf. 17 *urdū-e mu'allā*.

6–8 The second Mughal emperor Humayun (1530–1556) was the son of Babar and the father of Akbar (1556–1605). Driven into exile by the Pathan ruler Sher Shah Suri, he returned to the throne with Persian support only in 1555.

7 *vilāyat*: 'home country', here in the classical sense of the Indian Muslims' homelands in Iran and Central Asia, before its transfer to 'Blighty'.

7 * *ān-kar* = modern *ā-kar*.

9 * *qaum*: 'people, tribe', always f. in modern U.

10 *qadar-dānī*: initiating a sequence of phrases ending in *-ānī*, in accordance with the traditional fondness for rhyming prose in P.

11 *huzūr*: 'royal presence'.

12 * *judī judī*: the f. inflexion contrasts with the modern rule which treats P *judā* 'separate' as an uninflected adj., like *dānā* 'wise', etc.

12 *len den*: introducing a set of three compounds (524).

13 *sāhib-e qirān*: 'Lord of the auspicious conjunction', a title shared by Akbar's grandson Shah Jahan (1627–58) with Amir Taimur.

13 *qil'ā-e mubārak*: lit. 'the August Castle', i.e. the Red Fort.

14 *taxt-e tāūs*: 'the Peacock Throne', the fabulously valuable Mughal throne looted in Nadir Shah's sack of Delhi in 1739, and subsequently broken up. While *javāhir* 'jewels' is technically the A broken p. of *jauhar*, it is often used as a s. in U, cf. 'Jawahar Lal Nehru'.

14 *dal-bādal*: lit. 'mass of clouds', a HU compound also denoting a large tent.

15 Navvab Ali Mardan Khan (d. 1657) was a prominent noble of Shah Jahan's court, chiefly remembered for the construction of this canal from the Yamuna.

16 *dārul-xilāfat*: an A possessive compound equivalent to the modern *dārul-hukūmat* (741), but implying Mughal aspirations to the authority of the Caliphate.

16 Shahjahanabad is now a dimly distinguished part of Old Delhi, situated to the south of the Chandni Chowk which runs west from the Red Fort.

19 The long reign of Muhammad Shah (1719–48) saw the Mughals' final collapse. He was followed by Ahmad Shah (1748–54), whose own successor adopted the grand regnal title of Alamgir II (1754–59). However nominal their power, the titles of king-emperors demand the use of P or A ordinals in U (824).

20 * *nidān*: 'finally', much used in eighteenth century U, now replaced by A *āxir*.

20 *manjte manjte aisi manjī*: ‘became so refined through such continual polishing’, a nice illustration both of the use of the adv. ptc. (532b), and of the way in which the natural patterns of HU differ from E, with its careful proscription of repetition.

21 * *kisū*: = modern HU *kisī*.

23 *gyān aur agat*: the use of *aur* to link this semi-*tatsama* pair is to be contrasted with the following P copula phrase *talāš o mihnat*.

23 *qā'idā*: ‘grammar, primer’, a meaning long since added in U to the original A sense of ‘rule’.

24 Hindustan here has its restricted sense of the U-speaking heartlands in North India.

24 *nae sir se*: ‘afresh’, a HU adv. phrase equivalent to P *az sar-e nau* (843a).

25 *dastār o guftār o raftār*: lit. ‘turban, speech and gait’, i.e. ‘the way he dresses, talks and behaves’, a triplet proverbial in P.

26 *nām rakhtā hai*: i.e. ‘gives them a bad name’.

26 * *apne tāin*: = modern *apne ko*.

26 *xair*, ‘*āqilān xud midānand*: ‘well, the wise are those who know best’, a P tag used to round off the argument in the same way as an equivalent A formula is cited at the end of passage [6].

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The chronogram or *tārīx* incorporated in the title *Bāğ o bahār* is based on the system called *abjad*, which allocates numerical values to each of the intrinsic letters of the A alphabet (71) in accordance with the ancient Semitic norms which prevailed before the arrival in the Middle East of the much more convenient Indian system of decimal numbers. The discrepancy with actual A alphabetic order necessitates reference to the mnemonic sequence whose first member gives the *abjad*-system its name:

ا ب ج د ه و ز ح ط ی ک ل م ن س ه ف ص ق ر ش ت ث خ ذ ض طغ

<i>abjad</i>	<i>havvaz</i>	<i>huttī</i>	<i>kaliman</i>	<i>sa'fas</i>	<i>qurīšat</i>	<i>saẖxaz</i>	<i>zazağ</i>
123 4	5 6 7	8 9 10	20 - 50	60 - 90	100-400	500-700	800-1000

The addition of the A letters required to write *Bāğ o bahār* (2 + 1 + 1000, + 6, + 2 + 5 + 1 + 200) consequently results in the total 1217, yielding the *Hijri* year of the work's completion, corresponding to A.D. 1801-2.

The *abjad*-system survives in U to indicate the equivalent of lower-case Roman numerals in introductory pages and sectional headings, thus e.g. *jīm* = (iii). It also continues to be used by practitioners of the elegant art of chronogram-writing or *tārīx-goī*, whose strict rules demand the reduction of the additional P letters *pe ce ze gāf* and the extra U letters *te dāl re* to those of their A originals, i.e. 2, 3, 7, 20 and 400, 4, 200.