

## **Persian Literature In The Ottoman Empire**

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### **Abstract**

In this article it has been attempted to highlight the importance of Persian poetry and literature of the Ottoman era. In this era in Turkey, the rulers were of Turkish race and Turkish was their language. However, they considered Persian language a literary language, and preferred to communicate in it. Persian language was also the official language in their court. Turkish rulers corresponded in Persian and had their rules written in Persian language. The poets of the court as well as the rulers who had poetic interest, preferred to write poetry in this auspicious language. Even today, Persian language is considered so important in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, central Asia, India and some other countries, that if it is brought back in these countries, understanding of religion, cultural and history will become easier. Furthermore, Persian language can be accepted as a common language of communication, in these areas.

*Key words:* Ottoman era, Poetry, Persian Language, Shah Suleman

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This article views Persian language and literature from an academic and historical perspective, without any personal or political bias. The article discusses Persian language and literature produced in the Ottoman era when their popularity and influence spread far and wide from the subcontinent to China, Japan and to the Middle East, Bosnia Herzegovina and Europe. Mawlana Rumi's Persian verses found on ancient tombs and flagues in Bosnia graveyards, are a witness to the popularity of Persian language and literature in this region. Similarly, Persian language and literature influenced the minds of both the common public and the educated, intellectual class in Europe through the mystic writings of Omer Khayam and Mawlana Rumi.

The phenomenal success of Persian language in the past, and the treasure of literature and knowledge produced in it, particularly during the Ottoman rule, inspires one to rediscover it. At this time, when much progress was made in all areas of knowledge, Persian was the language of literature, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, physics and chemistry. To study this language and literature and knowledge produced in it at different times in history with a renewed interest would particularly benefit our students.

The founder of the Safavid Dynasty, Shah Ismail (930 AD) was a good poet of Persian and Turkish languages. His pen name was "Khatai". His sons Shah Tahmasp, Sam Mirza and Bahram Mirza were also skilled poets, writers and artists (*"Irfan-o-Adab in the dynasty of Safvaid's" 1372/100*).

The Ottoman Sultans also took special interest in Persian language and literature from the beginning of their empire (*"Tarikh-e-Adabiyat-e-Iran" 1384, 4/34*).

As to the spread of the Persian language and culture before the Ottomans in Asia Minor, we find that this was due to the historical events that had begun since the early tenth century from the first period of Seljuk Dynasty, especially the Seljuk's of Asia minor (*"Irani Adab 1375/54*).

During the reign of Ilkhanites, interest in Persian language and culture developed decisively and so in the 7th and 8th centuries, Asia Minor was one of the most important centers of Persian literature. Many Iranian mystics who migrated to this land influenced the popularity of Persian. As a result, many master pieces of Persian poetry and prose were produced (*"Tarekhe-Adabiyat-e-Iran" 1955/139*).

The Ottoman government began with the proclamation of the literary adventures of the Roman Seljuk's Empire (*"Ameer Ali Sher Nawai's cife and his works" 202/2005*). There were always

a number of people literate in Persian. Persian speakers were employed in this rich court as Persian Language was one of the two main languages of the court. Consequently, the Masnavi “Hazrat Mawlana”, Shahnameh of Firdowsi, the works of Sa’di and Hafez and the master pieces of other great poets and famous books of Persian literature were collected, published and kept in various libraries. The Persian letters of the Ottoman sultans and the presence of the Persian masters at their court, show that they were the true followers of Anatolian Seljuk’s in preserving and promoting Persian language and literature. The collections of Monshaat-e-Fereydoun Bey, several Persian letters from the early days of the Ottoman Empire, which include the letters exchanged between Sultan Bayazid I Ilderm (from 792 to 805 AH) and Qarayusuf Turkman Qaraqoyunlu (810 to 823 AH), as well as the letters exchanged between Bayazid and Sultan Ahmed Jalire and between Bayazid and Timur are all written in Persian (“*Moshaat-e-Salateen*” 1274, 1/110).

The descendants of Ildrmam, like their forefathers, have left behind personal and official letters in Persian, including those in Monshat-e-Fereydoun Bey, ‘Mursallat’ of Sultan Muhammad I (805-824 AH) and Sultan Muhammad II Fatih (855-886AH), Bayazid II (886 to 918 AH), which were sent to Shahrokh Teimuri, Qayyosef Turkman Qaraqoyunlu Sikander Bin Qarayusuf (823 to 839 AH), Sultan Khalil Shervanshah and Jahanshah ibn Qarayusuf (839 to 872 AH), AqbikBin Shahrokh, Baisanqar ibn Shahrokh, Ameer Hasan Beyg Agh Qoyunlu, known as Ozon Hassan (872-882), and Shah Isma’il. These great sultans always patronised scholars whether they lived in their own courts or far away in Iran. For this reason, they always had some of the great Iranian scholars in their courts. References of this may be found in a book named Kashfol- Zenon by Haji Khalifa. Moreover, the verses of Ain-al-Hayat Safi al-Din Ali Sabzevari about Jami may be referred to as an example of how Iranian masters of Science and literature were Esteemed by the Ottoman Sultans.

Among the Ottoman kings of the early 10th century, we know some good poets of Persian, who sometimes also wrote humorous poetry in Turkish language. Sultan Salim I (918 to 926 AH), although famous as ‘Yavuz’ (‘the Fearful’, ‘theBloodthirsty’ and ‘the Inflexible’) was a good romantic poet of Persian language. He had a Dewan in which we can find out around 2000 verses in Persian (Dewan-e-Saleem1, 1904). Fakhri Heravi, in Roza-tul-Salatini, wrote about Sultan Salim Yavuz that he had read his poetry in detail and found him to be one of the best poets of Persian. He wrote his poems by the name of “Salim” and sometimes “Saleemi. The Ottoman kings liked to preserved their history in Shahnameh Firdowsi style so they encouraged

the poets to write Shahnameh of their history like Kashafi (Ghazanameh Room), Mir Syed Ali Bin Mozafar Toosi (Masnavi Khonak kar nameh), Fatoohat-e-Sulemani, Saleem Shahnameh, Saleem nameh Adai Sherazi (“*Majalaic-e-Nafaece*” 1320/ 364-366).

در عاشقی دو دیده ی من چون گریستند  
خوبان خجل شدندو همه خون گریستند

(Beautiful, romantic people shed tears of blood,

On seeing me weep for my beloved)

His son, Sultan Suleman Khan (926-974 AH), was also a good poet of Persian and Turkish languages. Sultan Salim the Ottoman, despite his malicious hostility towards Shah Ismail, and Shi’as, was an expert in Persian language and literature, Shahnameh, and Iranian history. He spent most of his nights reading Persian history and mythological stories of ‘Shahnameh Firdowsi’. Arif (Fath-ul-Allah Ajam) was the official Shahnameh reader of Suleman court. (“*Zaban-o-Adab-e-Farsi in Usmani dynasty*” 1390/144).

He changed the custom of wearing the hat by Ottoman Kings, to the crown like the Sasanian kings, which can also be seen on Ottoman coins.

When the Sultan was asked the reason for this change, he replied that the Ottoman Sultans had to have a crown like the kings of Iran. His collection of poetry had two thousand verses in Persian language, but only one Turkish poem.

As we have seen, the sultans and princes of the Ottoman Empire had a passion for Persian language. Persian was the official language of the Seljuk and Ottoman courts. The book of letters belonging to the Ottoman court during Sultan Mohammad Fatih’s reign was published by the Turkish researcher Nejati Okul in 1956 in Istanbul, in which the Ottoman records can be examined.

The Muslim historians consider the conquest of Constantinople as a great victory for Iran, as after this a new territory was opened for Persian language. The first poetry about this conquest was by Sultan Fatah himself. In the 14th century, when the Ottoman power in Asia Minor grew, the Ottomans promoted Persian literature for five and a half centuries and attracted a large number of writers and artists, especially in the 16th century, in their courts.

One of the most famous Persian poets in the Ottoman court was Fatahaullah Arif Chalabi (Robayat-e-Arif-Chalabi 1949/5). He was also a painter, a historian and the creator of

‘Suleiman Namah’, a magnificent biography of Sultan Suleiman. In the tenth century (16th Century AD) Ottoman Kings conducted correspondence and wrote manuscripts in Persian language. These collections are reliable documents of the importance of the Persian language in the political and diplomatic relations of the rulers of the region. The Iranian cultural heritage from the Ghazni Turks to the Saljuk Turkmen in the East, and from them to their Western counterparts, was now being spread by the Ottoman Turks to Europe. The result of these attempts for the promotion of Persian culture, language and literature in the Ottoman court for more than 500 years, was the development of a large group of Persian poets and speakers in the Asian and European territories of the Ottoman Empire.

Persian poetry also influenced the Ottoman literary taste. Some of the Ottoman sultans who wrote Persian poetry include Sultan Ildrum Beyazid Khan I (791-1398) and Sultan Mohammad Khan (Fatah) II (855-1444). Under Suleiman’s patronage, the Ottoman Empire entered the golden age of its cultural development. Hundreds of imperial artistic societies (called the *Ehl-i Hiref*

*اهل حرف* , the “Community of the Craftsmen”) were active at the royal court, the Topkapı Palace.

After an apprenticeship, artists and craftsmen could advance in rank within their field and were paid commensurate wages in quarterly annual installments. Payroll registers that survive, testify to the extent of Suleiman’s patronage of the arts, the earliest of documents dating from 1526 list 40 societies with over 600 members. The Ehl-i Hiref attracted the Empire’s most talented artisans to the Sultan’s court, both from the Islamic world and from the recently conquered territories in Europe, resulting in a blend of Arabic, Turkish and European cultures. Artisans in the service of the court included painters, book binders, furriers, jewelers and goldsmiths. While previous rulers had been influenced by Persian culture (Suleiman’s father, Selim I, wrote poetry in Persian), Suleiman’s patronage of the arts saw the Ottoman Empire assert its own artistic legacy.

Suleiman himself was an accomplished poet, writing in Persian and Turkish under the nomde plume of ‘Muhibbi’ ( - , “*محب*”). Some of Suleiman’s verses have become Turkish proverbs (“History of Persian Literature” 1383, 3/65). When his young son Mehmet died in 1543, he composed a moving chronogram to commemorate the year: “Peerless among princes, my Sultan Mehmet”. In addition to Suleiman’s own work, many great talents enlightened the literary

world during Suleiman's rule, including Fuzuli and Baki. The literary historian E. J. W. Gibb observed that "at no time, even in Turkey, was greater encouragement given to poetry than during the reign of this Sultan". One of the Sultan Suleiman's most famous verse is:

People think of wealth and power as the greatest of fortunes

But in this world, a spell of good health is the best estate.

What men call sovereignty is a worldly strife and constant war,

In the worship of God, is the happiest of all states.

Sultan Suleiman also became renowned for sponsoring a series of monumental architectural developments within his empire. He sought to turn Constantinople into a center of Islamic civilization by a series of projects, including bridges, mosques, palaces and various charitable and social establishments. The greatest of these were built by the Sultan's chief architect, 'Mimar Sinan' under whom Ottoman architecture reached its zenith. Sinan built three hundred monuments throughout the empire, including the two masterpieces, the Suleymaniye and Selimiye mosques—the latter was built in Adrianople (now Edirne) in the reign of Suleiman's son Selim II. Suleiman also restored the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Jerusalem city walls (which are the current walls of the Old City of Jerusalem). He also renovated the Ka'aba in Makkah, and constructed a complex in Damascus. The Ottoman kings and sovereigns who supported Persian poets and writers include: Prince Sulaiman Chalabi, son of the Sultan Beyazid I (813/1410); Ahmed son of Ibrahim Dai (Contemporary Sultan Muhammad II), Sultan Muhammad (Fatah) II (886/1418), Noor-u-Din Abdul Rehman Jammi (898/1492), Sultan Beyazid II (918/1512), Sultan Salim I (926/1520), Sheikh Abdullah Bin Mehmood Shabistari (926/1520), Muhammad Bin Sulieman Fozoli Baghdadi (970/1566), Amiri Samarqandi

Prominent Popular Persian poets in the Ottoman Empire in the region of Asia minor are:

Aziz Bin Ardashir Astarabadi (1398-800/8), Sayyed Emad u Din Nasimi Baghdadi (820/1417), Sheikh Tabeeb (9th Century/15th Century), Ahmed Bin Ibrahim Bin Muhammad Dai (The name of his 'dewan' is Aqud-ul-Jawahir); Molana Qaboli (1478-883/9); Mawlana Ispahani (9th Century/ 15th Century), Qazi Lotaf –Ul-Allah Bin Abi Yousaf Halimi (Contemporary of Sultan Beyazid II); Sayyad Shareef Moiemai (1502-908/3), Shams-u-Din Bardi Molazada (Sultan Salim I Contemporary), Shams-u-Din Mohammad Latifi (Contemporary of Sultan Salim I), Sheikh Abdullah Bin Sheikh Mehmood Shabistari (926/1520) Bahawo Din Ali (Mohammad) Adai Shirazi (928/1522), who wrote the history of Sultan Salim named "Salim Nama" Qazi Sheikh

Kabeer (1523-930/4) Shamas-u-Din Ahmed Kamal Pashazad (1533-940/4), Sheikh Ibrahim Bin Mohammad Bardaie (1533-940/4), Maulana Amini Samarqandi (Contemporary of Sultan Salim II), Ibrahim Shahid Qunavi (957/1550), who wrote the interpretation and description of Molana *Romi's Masnavi*, Mustafa Bin Shaban Sarwari (1561-969/2), Molana Baqi Chalabi, Mohammad Raza Pasha Tabrizi (10th AH/16th AD); Mawlana Ali Halaby Bin Amar Allah Qunalizada (979/1571); Mirza Makhdoom Bin Meyraseed Sharif popular as Ashraf (10th AH/16th AD) and Saeed-u-Din Mohammad Chalabi Afandizada (615/1024). ("Persian language and literature in Ottoman Territories" 2011/23-36). Ahmed Ata mentioned 37 books which were written in this particular area in Persian language. (Asirlarda Anadolu'da Farsa eserler 1945, VII/ 94-135).

Following are the popular writers of this era and their books:

Aziz Bin Ardsheer Asfar Abadi (1397-800/8), the writer of *Bazam-e-Razam* which he dedicated to Borhan-u-Din Ahmed Qaisari, Zain-u-Din (Alla-u-Din) Mola Ali Bin Mohammad Qoschi (1474-879/5) the writer of *Resolatul Hayyat*; Hassan Bin Mohammad Shah Bin Shamas-u-Din Fanari Chalabi (1481-886/2), the writer of *Almatalib-ul-Aaliya*, Ghayas-u-Din Bin Mohammad Motlib Isfahani (1490/896/1), who wrote an extra-ordinary book "*Marat-ul-Saha*" which he dedicated to Sultan Bayyazid II, Qazi Lotaf Ullah Bin Abi Yousaf Halimi, the writer of Persian dictionary "*Bahr-ul-Gharayab*" Khateeb Rustam Molvi the writer of Turkish-Persian dictionary "*Waseela-ul-Maqasid*" Khateeb Rustam Molavi Sayyed Sharif Molammi attributed his book "*Afkar-e-Sharief*" to Sultan Bayyazid II.

It was late in the 17th century, which the Ottomans abandoned Persian as the court and administrative language, replacing it with the Turkish language. Because of a strong Persian influence, the Ottoman Turkish language was also embellished with Persian vocabulary. Even now, after a passage of several Centuries, Persian vocabulary is an important part of the Turkish language. Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Afganistan share common heritage of Pakistan language, which can bring them closer together. It would be of much benefit and interest to these nations to devise a way to move forward by strengthening their ties of friendship and harmonious relationship through a revival of interest.

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