



## Sistan: The saviour of persian language

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### Abstract

The ancient language of Iranians was a branch of Indo-Iranian family; of which many other languages of civilized world viz. Sanskrit, Latin, Greek etc. were derived. During great Iranian empires viz Sassanid, Achaemenid or Parthian, not only different sciences made headway but art, language & literature passed through the different stages of its development. After the establishment of Arab rule in Iran, the Persian language got subjugated. The Arabic became the language of communication and scholarship so much so that the Iranian scholars became so well versed in Arabic that they penned down great works in religious sciences, philosophy, astrology, medicine and other disciplines during the 200 years of Arab domination. But after the end of Arab rule in 205 A.H, there was a revival of Persian language for what Sistan became the flag bearer.

In this paper, an effort has been made to develop an argument with the authentic sources unravelling the reality that after the end of Arab rule and what Iranian scholars call it the freedom of Iran, it was Sistan where consistent efforts were made to revive the Persian language subjugated during the Arab rule and how the pioneering verses in Persian were created in Sistan.

**Keywords:** arabic, persian, pehlavi, *sabk-e-iraqi*, *sabk-e-hindi* qaseeda, gazal, rubaie, mathnavi, tareekh-e-sistan, sistan, khorasan, urooz, hanzallah badgaisi, waseef sistani, ummayyads, yaqoob laith, kharijites

### Introduction

The history of Persian literature reveals the fact that Iranians started creating poetry around 3000 years back<sup>[1]</sup>. The Persian poetry passed through many stages of its metamorphosis through the centuries; chiseling out its form, selection of suitable vocabulary, allegories, similes, metaphors, ironies and style. The creation and development of literary genres; *Qaseedah*, *Mathnavi*, *Nazm*, *Gazal*, *Do-baiti* (*Rubaie/Quartet*), *Marsiyah* etc. for expressing and representing different scenarios of beauty, imagination and mystic experiences became standards of expression; though changed over the time both in form, content and context. This trend led to the formation and foundation of five main schools of poetry right through its development as "*Sabk-e-Turkistani* (*Sabk-e-Khorasani*), *Sabk-e-Iraqi*, *Sabk-e-Hindi*, *Sabk-e-Bazghasht* and *Sabk-e-Mashrootiyat* (*Sabk-e-Jadid*)<sup>[2]</sup>. The meters (*Wazn-e-Shear*) of Persian poetry reached to its gradual perfection from last 3000 years. During this era of evolution and development, the people continued to ornate the verses with sober, sweet and very sensitive numbers and notes. Many a scholars wrote upon the science and techniques of Urooz (prosody) which including *chahar maqala* of Nizami Urooz. So on its way to perfection, the varieties of meters were so abundant in Persian poetry that it left the scholars of other languages dumb founded<sup>[3]</sup>.

Persian poets chose particular genres for expressing different

situations. For the subjects of praise for kings, friends companions etc. they chose *Qaseedah*. For expressing love and extreme feelings and touch of heart they chose *Gazal*; for expressing patriotism, mysticism, bravery and ethical subjects they chose *Mathnavi*<sup>[4]</sup>.

Sistan has a distinction vis-a-vis its contribution in enriching Persian literature throughout the ages. Regarding the controversy whosoever created the pioneering verses in Persian after Arab invasion, some of the scholars consider Hanzallah Badgaisi to be the first Persian poet of the period but the scholars particularly from Sistan, disagree with anyone else to be considered as the first poet other than Mohammad-bin-Waseef Sistani, the court poet of Yaqoob Laith Saffar who was also his secretary and friend.

### Controversy over 1<sup>st</sup> Persian Poet of Iran

The historical records have suggested many a names to be crowned with as the creators of pioneering verses of Persian after the end of Arab control and what Iranians called it the Freedom of Iran. But among them, two names have been considered to be probably the poets who had created some verses before the fall of Arabs in 205 AH / 820 AD. One is Hakim Abul Hafiz Sagdi and other another is Abbas Marvi. The former became controversial as "*Kitabul Muaj'jam fi Asaril Ajam*" considers him to be the poet of 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.H. and for the later, it is said that the verses of his *Qaseeda* related to him, written on the arrival of Mamoon Rashid in Maru in 193 AH / 809 AD does not get established in literary context to be of that very time.

After the defeat of Amin by Tahir Zul Yaminain, a

1 Estelami Mohammad, "Bar"Rasi Adabiyat-e- Emrooz-e-Iran", Amir Kabir Publications, Tehran, 1349, p.131

2 Zareenkoob, Abdul Hossain, "Saire Dar Shaer-e-Farsi", Mosassa-e-Entisharat-e-Naveen, 1363 Shamsi, p.138-140

3 Qasmi, Sharif Hussain, "*Jadid Farsi Shairie Ek Mukhtasar Tajziya*", Indo Persian Society, Delhi, 1977, p.16

4 Ibid, p.7-8.

commander of Abassid ruler Mamoon al Rashid, Mamoon became full-fledged caliph of vast Muslim empire. Tahir was bestowed with the reign of Khorasan which had been always the centre of Iranian National Movements for the revival of Iranian culture as far as from Umayyad rule, under the name of *Shaoobiyah* movement and then in 129 AH / 747 AD, Abu Musa Khorasani gave it a new impetus by rising against Ummayyads towards raising the Abbasid to Power<sup>[5]</sup>. Tahir had not proclaimed freedom from central authority in Baghdad but more or less he was an independent ruler in every respect. He though, was very little acquainted to Persian language but many Persian poets in the aura of freedom created verses in Persian which led many scholars to believe that Hanzullah Badgaisi (d. 219 AH / 844 AD) to be the first Persian poet as Aroozi Samarqandi has recorded him a poet having *Deewan* (poetic compilation) in his famous work *Chahar Maqalah*<sup>[6]</sup>.

### Sistan the Saviour

There are authentic records revealing the fact that Persian language and the literary activities in Sistan, contrary to rest of Iran could not be completely wiped off and uprooted during 200 years of Arab Islamic rule for its geographical position happened to be far away on the eastern edge from central authority of Islamic Caliphate. It instead, continued to save the credibility of Persian language. *Tareekh-e-Sistan* has recorded five verses of Persian which Zoroastrians of Sistan would sing loud on the occasion of enlightening the famous Fire Temple known as *Aatishqadah-e-Karkooi*.

خنيده گر شا سب هوش	فرخت بادا روش
نوش کن می نوش	همی برست از جوش
بافيرين نهاده گوش	دوست بدا گوش
دی گذشت و دوش	هميشه نيکی گوش
بافيرين شاهي <sup>[7]</sup>	شاهها خدا يگانا

Zabihullah Safa endorses these verses to be of Persian Dari of the time of the Advent of Islam<sup>[8]</sup>.

The development of *Sabk-e-Khorasani* (Style of Eastern Iran) and Persian becoming not only official languages but the language of literature, science and politics was only possible when Yaqoob bin Laith Safar raised to power in Sistan; stretching its empire from East (Bamyan and Kabul to Ahwaz and Isfahan in the West. Yaqoob categorically ordered for establishing Dari (Persian) as the official languages of the court and administration; this way replacing Arabic after two and a half century. Moreover, Yaqoob never paid much attention to learn Arabic and this encouraged people to express and write in Persian in a new era of freedom<sup>[9]</sup>.

Though the Tahirids were predecessors of Saffarids, ruling over Khorasan, but no historical evidence suggest that they had ever tried to replace Arabic by Persian as their official language. Instead, records do reveal the fact that the

descendants of Tahir Zul Yaminain were very reluctant even to promote and make the Pehlavi works Public. The decision for proclaiming Persian as official language by Yaqoob put a new energy in *Shaoobia* Movement which could have been an indirect inspiration for Firdousi to create *Shahnama* as he was a flag bearer of the revival of Persian heritage. Qazi Noor-ul-Lah Shustari in "*Majalis-ul-Momineen*" has related the translation of "*Padshahan-e-Qadeem-e-Iran*" to Yaqoob. In this context he writes that the book was in the library of Yazdgerd-iii at the time of Arab invasion. Arab soldiers took it as bounty. In due course of time it reached to Habsba (Ethopia). Yaqoob got a copy of it from India and ordered Abu Mansoor Abd-ur-Raak bin Abdullah Farakh to translate it from Pehlavi into Persian which contains the history from Khosru Parvez to Yazdgerd-iii<sup>[10]</sup>. Firdousi consulted the book for the record of the history of that period in his *Shahnama*<sup>[11]</sup>.

### The Pioneering Verses in Persian

Sistan has a distinction vis-a-vis its contribution in enriching Persian literature throughout the ages. Regarding the controversy whosoever created the pioneering verses in Persian after Arab invasion as mentioned above, some of the scholars consider Hanzallah Badgaisi to be the first Persian poet of the period but the scholars particularly from Sistan, disagree with anyone else to be considered the first poet other than Mohammad-bin-Waseef Sistani, the court poet of Yaqoob Laith Saffar who was also his secretary and friend.

There is rich evidence available apart from "*Tareekh-e-Sistan*" to prove that the first ever Persian poet after end of Arab rule was Mohammad-bin-Waseef. Mohammad Oofi in his biography, *Lubab-ul-Albaab* has also endorsed the fact that before Safarid rule, none else had created a single verse in Persian<sup>[12]</sup>.

*Tareekh-e-Sistan* has explained how pioneering verses in Persian came into existence. After giving details of Yaqoob's conquests of Khorasan and Hirat and devastation of Kharijites or *Khawarij* (Amar Kharji), It further records that Yaqoob's court poet Mohammad-bin-Waseef Sistani recited a verse in his praise in Arabic as:

بملک يعقوب ذي الافضال والعدد	قد اکرم الله اهل المصر والبلد
سد من الله في الاقصار والبلد	قد آمن الناس بخواه عزته

But Yaqoob Laith Saffar objected, saying what was the fun of expressing anything which he (Yaqoob) could not understand. Hearing this, Mohammad-bin-Waseef immediately after, when Yaqoob killed Zambeel and Amar Kharji (Kharjite) and got control on Sistan, Kirman and Fars, created few verses in Persian. *Tareek-e-Sistan* strongly impresses upon the fact that these verses of Waseef are the first ever Persian verses created in *Ajam* (Iran). A few of the verses of that long poem are mentioned hereunder:

5 Ibid, p.41-51.

6 Sher-ul-Ajam, p.17-18.

7 Tareekh-e-Sitan, edited by Malik-o-Shora-Bahar, Mohammad Taqi, Entisharat-e-Muayan, Tehran, 1381, p.76.

8 Safa, Zabeehullah, "Tareekh-e-Adabiyat Dar Iran, Vol.I, Entisharat-e-Firdous, 1363, p.147

9 Opcit, "Sistan Nageen-e-Darakhsan", p.25.

10 Ibid, p.30

11 Hyderi Nasab, Hussain Ali, "Guzzari Bar Zindagi-e-Yaqoob Laith Sistani", Danishgah-e-Zabol, 1380 shamsi, p.17

12 Opcit, "Sistan Nageen-e-Darakhsan", p.33

<p>بنده و چاکر و مولای و سک بند غلام بی ابی یوسف یعقوب بن اللیث همام لتره شد لشکر زنبیل و هبا گشت کنام با قلیل الفیه کد زاد و ران لشکر کرم تبغ تو کرد میانجی به میان دد و دوام [13] بر آکار تن او سر او باب طعام</p>	<p>ای امیری که امیران جهان خاصه و عام ازلی خطی در لوح که ملکی بدهی به لتمام آمد زنبیل و لتی خور بلنگ لمن الملک بخواندی تو امیرا به یقین عمر عمار ترا خواست و زو گشت بری عمر او نزد تو آمد که تو چون نوح بذی</p>
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Basim Kurd (Koord), Mohammad-bin-Mukhal'lad a great intellectual poet of Sakzi (Sistan) and others followed the line. A few of Mohammad-bin-Mukhal'lad's verses are mentioned hereunder:

<p>شیر نهادی به دل و برمنشت به کنش و بمنش و بگوش [14] که همانم من که یعقوب کشت</p>	<p>جز تو نژاد حوا آدم نکشت معجزه پیغمبر مکی تویی فخر کند عمار روزی بزرگ</p>
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The verses of Mohammad-bin-Waseef mentioned by *Tareekh-e-Sistan* depict the fact that these verses are not technically superior. In another context, Dr. Zabihullah in his famous work "*Tareekh-e-Adabiyat Dar Iran*" has enlightened this reality that usage of Arabic vocabulary structures and style makes one believe that these verses are to be the pioneering verses ever created in Persian and therefore consider Waseef, the court poet of Yaqoob Laith as the first Persian poet of Iran. Therefore, the fact gets unravelled that Hanzala Badgaisi, the Tahirid poet could not be considered first ever Persian poet of Iranian revival from Arab dominance as his verses are devoid of Arabic constructions and are technically more advanced.

After analysing the various dimensions of the facts and findings of scholars including *Tahreek-e-Sistan*, the fact becomes well established that the creative minds all across Persian lands got encouraged and energized by the land mark attention of Yaqoob Laith towards the revival of Persian language and with the result, hundreds of Persian poets and scholars came to limelight in and around Sistan; especially in Khorasan which gave birth to famous literary Genere (*Sabk-e-Khurasani*) in Persian. Rabiya Ka'ab-e-Qazdari was the first lady from Sistan who created verses in Persian [15].

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13 Opcit, "Tareekh-e-Sistan", p214-216

14 Ibid, p.217

15 Opcit, "Sistan Nagin-e-Darakhshan-e-Farsi", p.34-36