



Evolution of Persian language & Arab encounter

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Abstract

Archaeological artefacts reveal that Sistan has been the cradle of most primitive civilizations on the earth which dates back to 4000 years B.C. 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. But in the Islamic-Arab invasion during the reign of Yazdgerd-111, the libraries got burned down and thousands of artefacts and books were plundered. After the establishment of Arab rule, the Persian language got subjugated. The Arabic became the language of communication and scholarship so much so that the Iranian scholars became so much well versed with Arabic that they penned down great works in religious sciences, philosophy, astrology, medicine and other disciplines during the 200 years of Arab domination.

In this paper an effort has been made to lime light the fact that how the feeling of revival of the language in Iranians gradually culminated and how Sistan proved to be Saviour of Persian language and literature.

Keywords: arabic, persian, dora-e-bastan, pehlavi, dari, avesta qaseeda, deewan, tareekh-e-sistan, sistan, khorasan, neemruz, ar yana va'ija sagdi, ummayids, abassids, tahirids, kharjeits, shahnama, tazkira

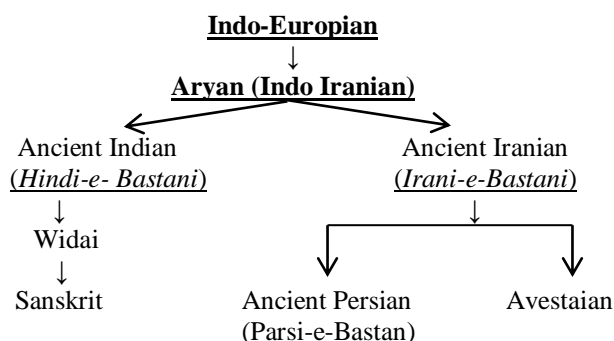
1. Introduction

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. The ancient language of Iran can be divided into three historical stages of its development.

1. The *Dora-e-Bastan* (Old Era) starts from the time when the writings started and it ended with the Achaemenid rule.
2. The *Dora-e-Miyana* (Middle Era) starts with Parthian (Ashkanian) kings till the Islamization of Iran but a few dialects though remained till 3rd century A.H.^[1]
3. The *Dora-e-Jadid* (Modern Era) starts with the Islamization of Iran passed through many stages of its orientation and development and today have attained a period of its zenith.

During *Dora-e-Bastan* (The Old Era), four languages viz. Maidean, Sakian, *Parsi-e-Bastan* (Ancient Persian) and *Avestai* were being spoken. In *Avesta*^[2] itself, the area where Avestai language was in vogue is mentioned as Aryana Va'ija. According to Dr. Khanlari, a group of scholars believe that Khawarzm mentioned in *Avesta* is the same Aryana Vai'ja. However, the boundaries of Aryana Vai'ja are not well defined but from Greek literature, the fact can be deduced that the mention of Khawarzm prior to Achaemenids gives a perception that this eastern part of Iranian empire at that point of history did include Maru or Maraw and Herat also. Further Dr. Khanlari opines that during 7th and 6th B.C, a Sistani royal dynasty known as Kawai ruled the area. Among them as

mentioned in *Avesta* was Wishtasap. So it is clear that the Avestai language did prevail in Sistan including adjacent areas. The *Avesta* which is available today does comprise the religious and theological texts in Avestai language; in turn compiled during Sassanid era. Around 300 AD, this language ceased to be the language of masses and it only existed in the places of worship and among Zoroastrian clerics as a language for communicating and propagating the religious beliefs. The *Ghathas* (songs) in *Avesta* are undoubtedly considered to be the pieces of most ancient creation of Persian literature; indeed a gift from the Iranian scholarship to the mankind. The serious endeavors of scholars could not have comprehended much of the real meanings embedded in these songs^[3]. The Avestai language has many similarities with Old Persian. So it could be generalized that actually these two languages were the two dialects with a fewer distinctions of *Iran-e-Bastan* (ancient Persian). Therefore, the chronology of these languages is as under:



¹ Khanlari, Parvez Natil, "Tareekh-e-Zaban-e-Farsi" Vol-1, Nashr-e-Nov, Tehran, 1366 (Shamsi), p. 157-159

² The religious scripture of Zoroastrians

³ Ibid, 160-175

On these bases, the relation between *Zabanha-e-Parsi-e-Bastan* (ancient Persian languages) and Avestai language and also their relation with Indo-Aryan languages can be traced.

The Avestai script which is believed to have been created during Sassanid era is one of the most ideal scripts of the world for depicting and pronouncing different voices and vowels of any language. This script which is named as *Khat-e-Aarami-e-Pahalavi* also known as *Deen-e-Debeeri* or Deeni script^[4] is comprised of 48 alphabets of which 14 are long vowels and 36 are consonants and short vowels^[5].

The famous languages and dialects spoken during the middle era (*Dora-e-Miyana*) were Pehlavi (*Pehlavanik-Parseek*), Sagdi, Khawarzmi and Khatani^[6].

During the time known as the *Dora-e-Jadid* (Modern era), three main languages were spoken in Persian lands. Pehlavi, Farsi and Dari. Among the ancient Iranian languages, Avestai language as believed was spoken in eastern Iran and the same became the language to propagate and preach the Zoroastrian religion and for a few centuries remained the language of clerics and Zoroastrian believers. But ancient Parsi as being the language of south west of Iran became the official language of Achaemenid rulers and was also used in their inscriptions. Some of the Muslim historians have recorded three languages Pehlavi, Farsi and Dari as three dialects spoken before Islamic rule of Iran. Among those, Hamza bin Al Hassan Isfahani has analysed the usage of these three languages in his book "*At'tanbeeh Ala Hadoothil Tasheef*".

Pehlavi or (Phelavi)

It was the language used by kings for discussion and discourses in the court. The language is associated with the word Pehlavi which is the term used for five cities of Iran viz Isfahan, Rey, Hamadan, Nahawand and Azarbaijan.

Farsi

It was the language which had the usage predominantly among religious clerics and monks and was the language of the cities of Fars.

Dari

The language was spoken in the cities of Madain and anybody who was affiliated to court, he would converse in Dari but the information revealed by the compilations after the success of Muslim rule in Iran, Farsi and Dari was considered one having no such remarkable difference and were together used for a particular meaning. Sometimes, Dari was considered as attribution of beauty of Farsi and would be used to mean *Fasheeh* (i.e. the use of choicest words to beautify a sentence) Muqad'dasi in his work "*Ahsan-ut-Taqaseem*" has recorded all Iranian languages as Farsi; and Dari meant as *Faseeh* Farsi. Masoodi and Istakhari also support the same argument^[7].

Regarding the usage of term Pehlavi during the Islamic era, would be applied in a wider context. In *Shahnama* and other poetic compositions, we find *Jama-e-Pehlavi*, *Jooshan-e-Pehlavi* or *Sanjak-e-Pehlavi*, the terms been used, also mean

Pehlavi, indeed a mark of distinction of an Iranian thing vis-a-vis a Turkish or Tazi. Even the Persian language Dari used by Firdousi, Farukhi and others would be termed as Pehlavi. Sometimes a word to communicate the natural meaning was called as Pehlavi as the tongue of Nightingale (*Bulbul*) in the following verse of Firdousi was called Pehlavi.

نگه کن سحر گاه تا بشنوی ز بلبل سخن گفتن پهلوی
(فردوسی)

The following verse also endorses the same argument.

بلبل به شاخ سرو به گلبنگ پهلوی می خواند روشن درس مقامات معنوی
(حافظ)

Sometimes *Pehlavi Khani* (Recitation of Pehlavi) is used for expressing the secret of heart and true expression as:

پهلوی خوان به سر کوی حبیب آمده ایم بهر درمان دل خود به طیب آمدیم
(شاه قاسم انوار)

پهلوی خوانان غزل می خواند دوش او به خود مشغول و جاتها در خروش
(شاه قاسم انوار)

The meaning of Dari before Muslim historian is clearer than that of Pahlavi who had recorded the term Dari used a synonym for *Darbari* (court language) which was official language of Sassanid power base. During the independent and Semi-independent rule around eastern Iran (Sistan and the adjoining areas), after the fall of Arab-Islamic control on Iran, Dari attained a status of official language and also find its usage in literature by the endeavors of Yaqoob bin Laith Sa'far.

Here, it becomes clear that the term *Farsi* is one which was in vogue among Zoroastrians of Fars which was in their religious books and therefore what is today known as Pehlavi and Dari is the same official literary Iranian language that attained the official status after Islamic (Arab) rule and is till date in vogue^[8].

Rezazadeh Shafaq in "*Tareekh-e-Adabiyat-e-Iran*" writes that the 3rd stage of ancient Parsi (Farsi) is Pehlavi. The change and the evolution in pronunciation, grammar, language structures and vocabulary; with the passage of time, depicted in Pehlavi language in its evolved form, gave birth to later (Modern) Persian. Therefore, Pehlavi can be termed as Persian's middle stage and also the inscriptions of Ardashir Babkan are written in the same language^[9].

Verses of Pehlavi

The incarnation of Sassanid period at Hajiabad is the clear proof of Presence of rhymed verses in Pehlavi language and also it gets confirmed that the musicians would perform in the Sassanid and Achaemenid courts; reciting verses and playing the *Chang* (A kind of musical instrument). Following are a few verses in Pehlavi which were found in city of Torman in Turkistan.

⁴ The script in which religious teachings were written and recorded

⁵ Ibid, p. 178-189

⁶ Ibid, p. 206.

⁷ Ibid, p.271-277

⁸ Ibid, p.278-280

⁹ Shafaq, Reza Zadeh, "Tareekh-e-Adabiyat-e-Iran" (Urdu transl.), Jamia Usmania, Hyderabad, India, 1949, p.27-3

آ پریوانی پرستگان
پرستگان روشنان فرهنگان کردگاران
بغان تهمان اود مهر سیندان استاودان
هیاران زورمندان

The pronunciation of these verses in today's words is

آفرین فرشتگان
فرشتگان روشنان فرهنگان کردگاران
بغان تهمان و مهر سیندان اوستادان
یاران زورمندان

The meaning of these verses in Persian is

^[10] فرشتگان روشن بافرو کردار نیرومند مهر سیندان ستوده یاران زورمند

Arab Persian Encounter

During Arab rule 21 AH to 200 AH (642 AD to 86 AD) upon Iran, Iranian excelled in Arabic to the extent that the great names of Islamic world that had created volumes of literature in different fields of Islamic sciences happened to be Iranians ^[11].

No relevant record of history of Persian language and literature from Arab Invasion to the freedom of Ira is available. However, it is evident that the prevailing language during that period was the same Pehlavi, which was under tremendous influence of Arabic for the later being very vast in expressing scholaristic dialecticians. The Pehlavi of that transit period of 200 years was in era of freeze and at receiving end which paved the way for the assimilation and acceptance of huge number of Arabic vocabulary in Pehlavi (Persian) and above all, the indigenous script was replaced by Arabic script. Apart from Arabic, the Pehlavi of that period assimilated words and terms from Greek, Armenian and other languages. It is therefore, this development and evolution which took place in the language during its subjugation of 200 years; carved out of it what is today known as Modern Persian (Farsi) ^[12].

During the Arab rule as mentioned, the Iranian language came under tremendous influence of Arabic both in view of assimilation of Arabic words as well as the accent also got affected to the extend conversation in Arabic got in vogue in western and central parts of Iran. But this was not the case towards Eastern Iran particularly in Sistan. The Arab influence could not stop the continuity of Persian language and the local accent in Sistan. Even after Arabs tried hard to wipe of the local dialects but in vain. They (Arabs) in order to deceive people for not to talk in Persian carved some fake *Ahadith* (saying of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W) to meet the said objective. One of the quoted *Hadith* was:

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم ابغض الكلام الى الله الفارسية وكلام الشياطين
الخونية وكلام اهل النار البخارية وكلام اهل الجنة العربية

“The most cursed conversation before Allah is Persian (Farsi). It is the languages of Satan (the Devil) and people thrown in hell fire and the language of Paradise (Jannat) is

¹⁰ Opcit, Tarikh-i-Adbiyat-e- Iran, p. 36-37

¹¹ Ibid, p.44.

¹² Ibid, p.47.

Arabic” ^[13].

The books on history and different sciences and literature in Pehlavi were destroyed by Arabs when they invaded Iran and only a few works were saved which were managed to be kept hidden ^[14]. Whatever was saved did prove very helpful to Arab invaders and they started translating those works in Arabic and this way the doors for many more sciences got opened for them. This influence was so immense that Arabs adopted Iranian ways of life to the extent that Abbasid Caliph Muttawakil used to wear Iranian clothes. The Iranian customs, rules of revenue and administration, history, tales, ethics etc became their part of life. The Arab scholars got attracted to this treasure and great Arab writers like Jahiz Basri and Abul Farz excelled in their endeavors ^[15]. One of the great scholars who translated the Persian works in Arabic was Abdullah bin Muqaf'fa. The most famous is his translation of *Kaleeleh Wa Damineh* and Pehlavi History *Khoda-e-Namak* in Arabic ^[16]. In his valuable work, Prof. Darmistrator of Germany has divided the literacy history of ancient Iran from Kiyomarth to Arab invasion in four periods and has explicitly deliberated upon the pros and cons of grammar, vocabulary and change of language structures throughout those centuries ^[17].

In many Arabic Persian works, there is clearly mention of many of the ancient works pertaining to ancient Iran which do not exist anywhere now. Among those, many books did pertain to different sciences and philosophy which existed in Sassanid period, particularly during Khosrau Anusherwan's reign. Some books were translated from Greek and Sanskrit into Persian. Other than religious books (Avesta etc.), a few of the famous works which remained untouched from the Arab wave of destruction were 1) *karnamak Ardashir Babkan* ^[18]. 2) *Khosrau Gowata* 3) *Yadgazarriran* ^[19]. Firdausi has consulted this work for recording the said combat in his *Shahnama*.

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¹³ Majoozi, Mohammad, “Sistan Nagin-e-Darakhshan-e-Farsi”, Danishgah-e-Zabol, Zabol, 1382 shamsi, p. 22

¹⁴ Shafaq, Reza Zadeh, “Tareekh-e-Adabiyat-e-Iran” (Urdu transl.), Jamia Usmania, Hyderabad, India, 1949, p.27-35

¹⁵ Ibid, 42-43.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.44

¹⁷ Nomani, Shubli, “Sherul Ajam”, (Vol-1), Muarif Publications, Azamgargh, India, 1962, P.17-18

¹⁸ It is primarily a tale but very helpful reference for Sassanid history

¹⁹ It is also called *Shahnama-e-Ghashtasab* which contains the records of the combats between Gashtashab, the follower of Zoroaster (Iranian Prophet *Zartosht*) and opponent of the religion of Arjasab