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The Persian-knowing Hindu

(Analysis of Chandarbahan Brahman's Life and his Book, 'Chahar-Chaman')

Abstract

As a result of the influence of the Persian language and literature on the Indian subcontinent and generous protection of the Indian kings from the Persian writers and poets, a great deal of works have been written in that territory including the book, Chahar-Chaman written by Chandarbahan Brahman, so called as 'the Persian-knowing Hindu'.

His complete works include lyric poems and quatrains. One of his most important works is Chahar-Chaman, a literary and historical work written in four chapters each of which is entitled 'Chaman'. His language in poetry is simple and his poems contain concepts such as love, affection, Sufism and unity of existence which have been composed in a mystic tone.

In the present research paper, in addition to providing a brief biography of Chandarbahan Brahman, we have attempted to study the most outstanding points of his book, Chahar-Chaman, and to show its significance and value.

Key words: Shah Jahan, subcontinent, Chandarbahan Brahman, Chahar-Chaman (Char-Chaman), Persian Language, Persian Prose.

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Introduction

The language bonds between the Hindus and Iranians have a long history. Regardless of the historical common roots, it seems that the prevalence of the Persian language in India is due to the immigrations of the Persian language speakers to that territory as well as their invasions on it.

It is said that the Persian language has been prevalent in this territory since the conquest of India by Mahmud Ghaznavi; then, many scholars and scientists from Iran went to the subcontinent and resided there. In this era, the Persian language prevailed up to Meltan and Bengal (Arya, 1986:15-16), but as the Persian language penetrated more in the governmental system and some urban-resident groups, it couldn't extend farther to gain standing among people. However, some of the Persian and Arabic words penetrated in the folk language, for example, the name of many articles and home appliances as well as administrative and taxing regulations and titles were in the Persian or Arabic languages and this was the reason why such words found a way among people. (Jaberi-nasab, 2009: 24-53)

Zoroastrians were the first people who introduced the Persian language to India, and in Akbar Shah's era, Zoroastrians were well known. (Ahmad, 1974: 9) The cultural association between the two countries always attracted the literary men and artists mutually, and the kings' attitude in receiving them warmly played a significant role in this regard. For example, the Gorkani Dynasty in India, similar to their ancestors, loved the Persian language and Iranian literature, and culture and a large group of Persian poets and writers were in their courts. (Poshtdar, 2011: 47-64)

Chandarbahan Brahman, the Persian Composing poet

Considering the biography of the outstanding and famous Iranian people since the Ghaznavid Dynasty until the Safavid era, we notice that not much literature has remained and we benefit more from the myths and oral stories.

The biography of Chandarbahan (whose pen name is Brahman) is not an exception to this rule. Among his contemporaries, we may refer only to Mohammad Saleh Kanbuh, the writer of the historical work

entitled, 'Amel-e Saleh' (Good Deed), also known as 'Shah Jahan Nameh'. He has written about him in p.336 of his book:

"Chandarbahan (whose pen name is Brahman) was born in Lahore and died in Dar al-Aman. He was an eloquent poet and his taste was pleasant. He wrote in cursive writing and followed the style of Abolfath in prose and composition. Although he was apparently a Hindu, he was a fan of Islam and was humble, similar to his poems which were simple." In Safa Literary Survey, it is stated: "Chandarbahan, son of Dahom Ras Lahori whose pen name is Brahman, is of the ancient Hindu race and Hindu religion who was as dexterous as his contemporary Iranian counterparts in poetry and prose." (Safa, Vol.5, 1985: 1236-1237)

Brahman's Writing Style as a License for Entering the Court

Darashokouh loved the writing style of Brahman very much. Since Darashokouh welcomed a group of Hindu scholars for translating the mystical and philosophical works of India, he absorbed Brahman to his court and appointed him as his own private secretary. (Amer, 2004)

Chandarbahan had a high prestige before Shah Jahan and he called him 'the Persian Knowing Hindu'. The king gave his condolence to him when his father passed away in Porea.

When Shah Jahan came to the throne, he ordered that the history of his era be written since Jamadi al-Sani, 1, 1037 Hegira and Some famous Iranian and Hindu writers and poets did the task. Although, Chandarbahan was in charge of tax affairs, he wished to become one of the members of the historiographers.

He writes about his mission in accounting as follows:

"His Excellency deemed me appropriate for court affairs and appointed me as the court auditor in dividing lands." (Chandarbahan Brahman, 2007: 16)

Whenever he found an opportunity, he composed lyric poems and quatrains praising the king; he writes:

"Since this Brahman is among the secretaries of this court and composes quatrains in great festivals such as New Year and on the occasion of anniversaries, I am honored to receive awards." (Ibid)

The powerful ruler dispatched military forces to conquer Balkh and Badakhshan and Chandarbahan participated in this military expedition

as a historiographer; however, this ruler who commanded the towers and castles of Chitavar to be ruined, was the same powerful king who was captivated by his son, Orang Zib, in the castle of Agra town. But his brother obliged Orang Zib to sit on a bare elephant and ordered to be taken around the town for humiliating him.

Chandarbahān witnessed these events and became so depressed that he focused his life on mysticism and divine love more than before. He moved from Shahjahan Abad (current Delhi) into Banaras in order to spend the rest of his life at the side of the Holy Ganga River. He passed away in the same place in 1072 Hegira. (Chandarbahān Brahman, 2007: 16-17)

Chandarbahān and Brahmans' Classification

Analyzing the contents of Chahar-Chaman, we can conclude that Chandarbahān Brahman was born in Lahore in 1023 Hegira. (Baraman Akbarabadi, 1992: 1; Chandarbahān Brahman, 2007: 11)

At that time Brahmans were classified into 13 categories each of which had a special task such as nomenclature of the newborns, looking up an auspicious day for marriage, preparing food in rich people's houses, palmistry, fortune telling, taking alms in lunar and solar eclipses and other ominous days, burning the dead, pouring the ashes of the dead into the holy river and holding ceremony of the last mourning day which is the 13th day after the death. The Brahmans who taught and were engaged in writing and reading were considered as the high-class ones. As he mentioned in the beginning of the third 'Chaman', he enjoyed a prestigious position among the Brahmans. (Ibid, 11-12)

Chandarbahān's Family

Concerning his family, we only know that he had two brothers and one son. His father was a skilful writer who had a good position in the government but he resigned and secluded.

The letters written by Chandarbahān to his brothers, Ray Behan and Oudi Behan, and his son, Tij Behan, is full of divine love, mysticism, and Sufism. He advised his son: "... it deems necessary for me as your father not to withhold from you my advices. My dear son, you are supposed to do good deeds all of the time and do not let the

materialistic aspects of the world deceive you. It is better to pay attention to this transient world but do not consider this representation of the real world, except as a dream. You should be aware that we were born in this transient world and we would pass away and this is the fate of all of human beings. Therefore, make the most of this opportunity you have in the transient world and spend your life on a fruitful matter. The lapsed times will not return and you should not trust on living in this world.” (Chandarbahan Brahman, 2007: 12-14)

Masters of Chandarbahan

He was the pupil and companion of Mir Abdolkarim, the chief of the court of Lahore at the beginning; then, he became one of the companions of Afzal Khan Molla Shokrollah Shirazi, the governor of that town. (Kanbuh, vol.3, 1967-1972: 337-343; Safa, Vol.5/2, 1985: 1237) In his own words, he was also the pupil of Molla Abdolkarim Sialkoti. (Abdolkarim, 1981: 75) Afzal Khan, the minister of Shah Jahan introduced Brahman to the King. Shah Jahan gave him the title of ‘the Hindu Knowing Persian’ due to his mastery in Persian Literature. (Ebrahim Khalil, Vol. 1, 2000-01: 131; Ahmad, 1974: 96) After Afzal Khan’s death, as it is said, Prince Darashokouh introduced him and he became one of the companions of Shah Jahan and occupied the position of the King’s special secretary and historiographer. (Safa, Vol.5/2, 1985: 1237) A group of Hindu scholars served Darashokouh for translating the philosophical and mystical works of India; Darashokouh summoned Brahman to become one of his companions and he was in this position till 1066 Hegira when he was summoned to Shah Jahan’s court again and the king entitled him ‘Ray’ (Raja). (Ibid, 1238) Brahman was at the service of the chiefs and ministers such as Asef Khan (died in 1021 Hegira), Islam Khan (died in 1057 Hegira), Allami Asadollah Khan (died in 1067), Enayat Khan and Moazam Khan. (<http://www.wikifeqh.ir>)

Chandarbahan’s Literary Style

The fame of Brahman is mostly because of his simple, eloquent, and laconic prose (Abdullah, 1967: 75), and unlike Kanbuh’s attitude, he has not followed the complexities and formality of Abolfazl Allami’s composition. (Ahmad, 1974: 118; Abdullah, 1967: 74) His

harmonic and rhymed composition is the reminiscent of Sa'di's work, 'Golestan' (Abdullah, 1967: 75), and his Monshaat and Chahar-Chaman were taught in subcontinent schools. (Abdulrashid, 1981: 75) His poetry is simple accompanied by beautiful similes and metaphors. (Ahmad, 1974: 108-109) He was entitled "Sahban and Hassan, and the Poet Laureate of Shah Jahan's era. (Iranica, 2010) The lyric poems of Brahman which mainly consist of five couplets (Ahmad, 1974: 107) express high thoughts and have mystic themes. A selected collection of his lyric poems has been re-mentioned in Abd ul-Ghader Bidel's work entitled, 'Bayaz' (Library of British Museum, Add.16, 802, Add.16, 803; Safa, Vol.5, 1985: 1238), and Saeb Tabrizi has also brought some of his couplets in his work, 'Bayaz'. (D. Urdu, under "Brahman" (<http://www.wikifeqh.ir>))

Mohammad Saleh Kanbuh, the author of the historical work entitled, 'Amal-e Saleh' so called as 'Shah Jahan Nameh', in p. 343, writes about the biography of composition authors as follows:

"Chandarbahān is humble as his simple speech and is skillful in composition, letter writing, and expressing claims. He was a companion of Mir Abdolkarim, the chief of the court at the beginning and then, of the Minister, Afzal Khan. After the minister's death, he accompanied by the ministers wrote materials. Since he had a gifted poetic talent, sometimes, he composed poetry, and his biography had been written in details in the biography of poets." (Chandarbahān Brahman, 2007: 10-11)

The collection of his works includes his lyric poems and quatrains. (Amer, 2004)

Samples of Chandarbahān Brahman's Poems:

The landlord of a house, pagoda, and all is the same Lord,
There are many places but the lord of each is the same one.
There is no durability for the palaces of the world,
Only the palace of Love is ever-lasting.
The flower, throne, branch, and grape vine are apparently different,
But before the sage, there is no difference between any plant and
twig.

I have a soul believed in blasphemy,
I have taken it to Mecca several times but it returned as a Brahman.

Heart is a tree bred with love,
It is always fructiferous of affection. (Wikipedia, Free Encyclopedia)

Chandarbahan's Calligraphy

Chandarbahan was dexterous in cursive calligraphy and he was the secretary in the courts of Shah Jahan and Prince Darashokouh. (Rampouri, 2007: 75) He was the pupil of Abdolrashid Deylami and Kefayat Khan who together with him brought cursive writing to the peak of perfection in the subcontinent of India. (Bayani, 1984: 1.132, 4.1260)

Chandarbahan's Works

There are many works remained from Brahman including: Brahman's 'Collection of Works', 'Chahar-Chaman', Brahman's 'Monshaat', 'Tohfat ol-Anvar', and 'Goldaste'. (Amer, 2004)

Brahman's Works in the Persian Language include: 1) Persian Collection of Works including 342 lyric poems and 36 quatrains in Farooghi's publication; 2) Several Short Ethical & Mystical Mathnavis (Couplet Poems). (Ahmad, 1974: 111) As stated by Zohouroddin Ahmad, he put no titles on his Mathnavis but at the end of a manuscript dated 1093 Hegira, they are entitled 'Haft Bahr' (Seven Seas); 3) Chahar-Chaman is a literary and historical work in four chapters each of which is called 'Chaman' and had been written before 1057, dedicated to Shah Jahan. In the first two 'Chamans', Brahman describes his historiography in Shah Jahan's court, the great tasks of ministers, governmental festivals held by the king, routine life of the king and his new capital city, Shah Jahan Abad, the top cities, and 17 well-known provinces of his territory. The third 'Chaman' includes the biography of the author and several letters written to Shah Jahan and his ministers. The fourth 'Chaman' contains the author's ideas about religion, ethics, and Sufism. (Safa, Vol.5/3, 1991: 1777) This book is very valuable for giving historical information and is considered one of the most documentary historical references of Shah Jahan's era (Aftab, pp.382-384); it was printed by lithography in Bombay in 1270 Hegira (Moshar, Vol.2, Col.1682; 4) Goldaste Chahar-Chaman, a selection of Chahar-Chaman; 5) Monshaat, in five chapters including Brahman's

programs given for kings, governmental officials, his friends and contemporary poets (Ahmad,1974: 115) arranged by chiefs' and statesmen's classes and ranks hierarchically (Safa, Vol.5/3, 1991: 1776; for being informed of its manuscript, please refer to Rio, Vol.1, p.397-398); 6) Tohfat ol-Vozara or Tohfat ol-Anvar ; 7) Memoirs: Monzavi (Vol.5, p.135) has mentioned of the works entitled, 'Negar Nameh' and 'Goldaste Eshgh' (Love Minaret; 8) Majma al-Foghara or the Al-Foghara Collection; 9) Roghaat (letters; 10) Shah Jahan's Monogram; 11) Haft Golshan Composition; 12) Darashokouh and Baba La'l Das Conversations, so called as Nader al-Nokat or Makhzan-e Nokat; 13) Resaleh, a pamphlet about the poets living in Akbar's era until the contemporaries of the author from which a copy is in the library of Master Azar Lahori (Golchin Maani, Vol.1, pp.631-632); Zohouroddin Ahmad(1974:121), Monzavi (Vol.5, p.135) have attributed to him the books entitled 'Tohfat ol-Fosaha' and 'Bahar-e Fesahat' (Spring of Eloquence) which are the other names of the same pamphlet. Chandarbahan has referred to some of his works including: 'A collection of Poetry', 'Chahar-Chaman', 'Goldaste' (Minaret), 'Tohfat ol-Anvar', 'Memoirs', 'Tohfat ol-Fosaha', 'Majma al-Foghara', etc... in the preface of the collection of his 'Monshaat'.

A Ponder on Chahar-Chaman

Chahar -Chaman is a literary and historical work written before 1057 in four chapters each of which is called as "Chaman" and is dedicated to Shah Jahan.

The editor used three copies of Chahar-Chaman for editing:

The copy kept in the library of British Museum, the transcriber of which is Brahman Keshmiri. This copy has been transcribed in cursive manuscript.

The copy available in Mowlana Azad Library in Aligra Islamic University in India entitled, "Chahar-Chaman" which is kept in "Adol Eslam" Depository under No.293 in drafted Nasta'ligh.

The third copy of this book is transcribed by Shankerdas in Orang Abad, Heidar Abad, in the south of India in 1142 Hegira and Mr. Seyed Mohammad Morteza Ghaderi published it in the Urdu language in 1912. (Chandarbahan, 2007)

Chandarbahan divided the work into four chapters and it deems that he began to write it in 1066 Hegira, the same year when he became one of the historiographers of Shah Jahan. During his travels and when he was in the court, he showed his manuscripts to the ruler. As he himself tells: “On the road to Kabul and Kashmir, I wrote the quality of any settlement and event including the road, weather, hunting, etc. everyday and showed them to the king.”

In the first ‘Chaman’, he writes about the ceremonies, festivals, ministers, and chiefs of the ruler, burning of his dear daughter, Jahan Ara Beygom, which happened in 1054 Hegira.

At the beginning of this ‘Chaman’, he refers to the Saheb Beygom’s disease and healing her by one of the mystics for thanksgiving of which the Excellency Shah Jahan commanded to hold eight magnificent feasts. Chandarbahan at the beginning of the first ‘Chaman’ writes: “...which includes the freshness of the evergreen plants of the everlasting government and expresses the characteristics of ceremonies, festivals, discourses, donations, and victories.” (Chandarbahan Brahman, 2007); then, he tells the fables such as Neshat-Afrooz (Hilarious) Tale, Ashraf-Pira, Farhat-Aeen, Maymanat-Gharin, Rangin, Shirin, Rahat-Bakhsh, Shadi-Amood, Eshrat-Seresht, Gham-zoday, Mobarak, Kamrani, Feiz-Taraneh, etc. and finally states “Balkh Victory” and the event associated with kings.

In any of these fables written by Chandar, a ceremony was held for any occasion in which he composed a quatrain; you will find some of these fables in the following samples:

The first is Neshat-Afrooz Fable in which obeying the command of the king, the relatives and dependents of the deceased minister, Afzal Khan, marched before the king, and when it was Chander’s turn, he offered this quatrain:

The king whom both worlds obey,
Wherever there is a man bends before him,
Since the humans found dignity in his era,
The angels wish to become humans.

In Ashraf-Pira Fable, on the road to Kabul, he offers a lyric poem to Shah-Jahan the opening verse of which is:

Your face makes the sunshine,

You are as generous as the sea and you give donations like the waves.

Farhat-Aeen Fable was composed for thanksgiving of the health of Saheb Beygom in which the following quatrain is read:

As long as there is a trace of the bright sun,
As long as the world exists,
As long as the moon is in the sky,
As long as the world exists, May Shah Jahan live.

In Maymanat-Gharin Tale, he wrote the following quatrain for coming of spring and the New Year.

Happy new day and New Year,
O, you who think of expanding your territory,
Happy new land and new property,
Congratulations for materialization of your ideal.

Rangin Tale refers to the auspicious festival of "Aeen Sharaf Aftab".

O, from you the happy days found dignity,
The sun of your face made the moon light faint.

O, the echo of the festival held for your government has been reflected in nine heavens, six directions and four sides.

Shirin Tale was composed while returning from Kashmir to Lahore:

The hilarious days and hunting joy have come,
The promise of happiness has risen from everywhere.
The old world became full of joy and happiness,

The great king of the quarters of the world reached from Kashmir.

Rahat-Baksh Tale composed in the festival for the auspicious anniversary at the tower entitled, 'Dolat-khaneh Falak' offers the following quatrain:

When the king came to the throne,
The king, the landlord of heaven and the four quarters of the world,
When the auspicious king came to the throne,
It found the position much higher than the others.

In Shadi -Aمود Tale, the following quatrain was composed:

O, your face as bright as the sunshine,
Your destiny is to be victorious over both worlds,

May you be more auspicious every year compared to the previous one,

May every day of your life be more joyful than the New Year.
(Summarized from Chandarbahan Brahman, 2007)

In the second 'Chaman', the focus is on routine occupations of the ruler where he describes his prayers and nocturnal devotion to God, sitting before a window in the morning so that the Hindus who believe that seeing his face will bring good omen for them in life would watch him. But concerning this, he made a mistake in one occasion.

He says: "...after finishing prayers, he eats rare meals in gold and silver dishes and sets which is forbidden according to the Islamic religion."(Ibid)

But he could not complete two 'Chamans' when Orang Zip ruined the royal family, and for occupying the throne, he not only killed his brothers, but also captivated his father in prison for some unknown reasons. Chandarbahan was the witness of all these events as a historiographer and composed the following poem:

The world will not be loyal to anyone,
Devote yourself to the Lord who has created the world.
Do not rely on the worldly property and your relatives,
As they have bred many such as you and then killed them.

As it may be concluded from his advices to his son in the third 'Chaman', his tendency towards divine mysticism and Sufism grew more than before. He came to the result that: "The real success is trying to know God and realizing awareness about himself and considering himself as a drop before an ocean and a photon before the actual sunshine as well as deeming only the being of God as eternal."
(Summarized from Chandarbahan Brahman, Chaharchaman, 2007)

In this chapter, he describes himself, his relatives and the chiefs who were in charge of financial affairs.

The fourth 'Chaman' is also full of mystical subjects and divine love. Although Abdolhamid Lahori and Mohammad Saleh Kanbuh have written books entitled, 'Padeshah Nameh' about Shah Jahan's life, none of them and others have discussed the Iranian calligraphers and the Persian speaking poets in India as detailed as Chandarbahan. Moreover, no one has already mentioned the names of elephants,

horses and artillery except for him. If he had succeeded in writing the events of Shah Jahan's era, he could certainly have provided more information about cultural and literary affairs. (Ibid)

Conclusion

There is a strong bond between the people of India and Iran which refers to a long history in the subjects such as common historical roots, but the language bond is more evident, the reason of which is the existence of the Persian speaking poets and writers.

Among these poets is Chandarbahan Brahman who was given the title of "the Persian-knowing Hindu". His language in poetry is simple and his poems contain the concepts such as love, affection, Sufism and unity of existence which have been composed in a mystic tone.

His complete works include lyric poems and quatrains. One of his most important works is Chahar-Chaman that is a literary and historical work written in four chapters each of which is entitled, 'Chaman'.

In the first two 'Chamans', Brahman has told about his historiography when he was a secretary in the court of Shah Jahan, about the great works of the ministries and the governmental festivals of that king, his routine works and his capital. The third 'Chaman' describes the writer's biography, the letters written to Shah Jahan and his ministers, and the fourth 'Chaman' includes the writer's thoughts about religion, morals and Sufism.

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