

During the early-modern period (roughly 1500-1800 CE), Persian was the language of the imperial court and a prestigious literary medium in South Asia. Not only did Persian connect the Subcontinent with intellectual and cultural trends across western and central Asia, but during the early-modern period, India was arguably the world's main center for the patronage of Persian literature and scholarship, attracting intellectuals from across western and central Asia (Ghani 1930, Gorekar 1970). However, our understanding of the social life of Indo-Persian (that is, Persian used in India) is still hazy because despite considerable evidence to the contrary, few scholars have questioned the insistence of colonial intellectuals and nineteenth-century Iranian nationalists that Indo-Persian had always been an ossified language in decline, symptomatic of a political system in decline, whose ineluctable destiny was to be replaced by more democratic and "properly Indian" languages like Hindi and Urdu.¹

My research is concerned with Indo-Persian scholarship from the eighteenth century that could serve as an important corrective to our received ideas about the role of language in early-modern South Asian society. Although we would nominally classify the works in question as "poetics," the English term does not do justice to the broad range of linguistic thought they contain. By better understanding how these treatises represent the ideology of Persianate literary culture, it will be possible to compare the

¹ Cf. Yarshater 1988, which tries to be fair and yet cannot avoid the paradigm of Indo-Persian decadence, and Arberry 1994, whose arbitrary chronological frame excludes the vast majority of Indian poets.

tradition's representation of itself to later social histories of language in northern India. I seek to deepen our knowledge of the relationship between Persian and Urdu because it is no coincidence that the great Persian scholars of the eighteenth century are also regarded as some of the most influential Urdu poets. Thus the commonly held view that Persian suddenly died as Urdu literature sprang to life is not correct.

My dissertation will trace the development of philology (the study of literary language, known in Persian as *'ilm-i luġhat*) within the Indo-Persian tradition, concentrating on its social and political ramifications, and the ways in which Indo-Persian writers smoothed the way for the adoption of the vernacular in contexts formerly reserved for Persian. The most prolific and arguably most influential Indo-Persian philologist of the early-modern period was Sirāj al-Dīn 'Alī Khān (c. 1689-1756 CE), whose *nom de plume* was Ārzū (Khatoon 1987; Alam 2003). Besides being a much-admired poet in Persian and Urdu, Arzu was a rigorous theoretician of language; his contributions to lexicography formed the basis for much later Indian scholarship, including colonial efforts to compile a Persian-English dictionary (Blochmann 1868). While Arzu's dictionaries were demonstrably influential in his time and afterwards, it is much less clear how his theories on language and rhetoric were regarded. I therefore focus my study on his comparatively neglected theoretical treatises on poetics [*sukhan-dānī*], namely *Dād-i Sukhan*, *Sirāj-i Munīr*, *'Aṭīyyah-i kubrā* and *Mauhibat-i 'uzmā*, and his more expansive text on language in general, *Muṣmir*. *Dād* deals with a variety of

technical literary questions as does *Sirāj*² while *‘Aṭīyyah* and *Mauhibat* both address literary narration [*bayān*], specifically considering rhetoric [*‘ilm al-bālaḡha*]. These works connect with a long Persianate linguistic tradition, whose relevance I hope to understand better in the eighteenth century context. I will also begin to address the place of Arzu’s thought in the works of his many colleagues and students.

Ultimately, my goal is relate Arzu’s observations on language to the corpus of later Indian and Western scholarship that has tried to conceptualize the rise of Urdu and the decline of Persian. The eighteenth century has long been regarded as a hinge between the pre-modern and the colonial modern, and yet our understanding of South Asian intellectual history for that century is much poorer than for the colonial period. The issues at stake are far larger than the compass of my project, but a better understanding of Arzu’s thought brings us nearer to answering a number of significant questions in South Asian intellectual history: Who in Islamicate South Asian society was concerned with questions of defining correct language? How and when did the perception arise that Indo-Persian was different from Persian as it was used in Iran? Was this perception related to an emergent sense of Indian national identity? Does the symmetry between Indo-Persian philology and the European tradition of philology force us to reexamine traditional claims about European philology’s unique suitability for developing into modern linguistics?

² *Sirāj* is a rejoinder to Munīr Lahorī’s (d. 1644) *Kārnāmah*.

Arzu was one of the most visible public intellectuals of his time. His circle included literary luminaries like Mīr Muḥammad Tāqī Mīr, Ānand Rām Muḥliṣ, Vārasta Māl Sialkoṭī, and other scholar-poets [*arbāb-i sukhan*, lit. “Lords of Speech”]. His friends and students included both Hindus and Muslims, contrary to the idea that Persian was necessarily a language of Islamic oppression in India. He embodies the spirit of the age in that his work depends upon a vast classical Perso-Arabic canon, and yet his thought marks a decisive conceptual break with previous interpretations of that canon. Arzu’s *Muṣmir*, for example, is structured on the pattern of an Arabic work by the polymathic Egyptian theologian Al-Suyūṭī (c. 1445-1505 CE), but it inevitably departs from the model because it addresses not just Arabic but Persian and Indic languages.³ Arzu’s work also hearkens back to the great Indian poet Amīr Khusrau (1253-1325 CE), who had reflected on language use in India centuries earlier, and Shams-i Qays (fl. early 13th c.), who wrote the first treatise on poetics in Persian (Mirza 1935, Clinton 1989). Arzu used these old sources ingeniously, and in particular, his spirited defense of Indians’ taste and judgment in Persian literature led to an efflorescence of new philological scholarship. However, Arzu’s contributions to the theoretical study of language (including the suggestion that Sanskrit and Persian share a common ancestor) are largely forgotten even in South Asia, seemingly because his work did not become part of the canon of Western linguistics

³ Arzu 1991 [preface], Czapkiewicz 1989. Apparently Al-Suyūṭī’s work was the first major philological text to be written in Arabic after a five-hundred year hiatus (Balhan 2001). It would be interesting to know why Arzu took this work as a model.

(Tavakoli-Targhi 2001). He is best known for a heated debate with Shaikh Ḥazīn, an ill-tempered poet hailing originally from Isfahan, that dragged most of Delhi's literati into a pamphlet war (Kia 2008). Far from being a personal spat, their disagreement represents a fundamental shift in how language was viewed: Although Persian had become essentially a mother tongue for many Indian elites, Hazin and others argued that it was the sole patrimony of the Persians because it was their national [*qaumī*] language (Faruqi 1998). Arzu developed a theory of the correspondence [*tavāfuq*] of languages to argue that as a cosmopolitan language Persian could not be the property of one nation—but in doing so he paradoxically helped instill a pride in Indo-Persian writers that set India apart from other places where Persian was used.

Significantly, Arzu's engagement with the Persian classics was matched by his enthusiasm for promoting vernacular literature. An often overlooked aspect of intellectual history, both in India and the West, is that advances in vernacular literary culture have usually come about not through a rejection of the classics but rather through a sustained engagement with the classics by bilingual writers. Arzu is credited with suggesting that Indian poets should compose in *rekhtah*, that is, in the local Hindi-Urdu vernacular (or in a macaronic mixture of Persian and Hindi-Urdu), rather than in Persian, and was one of the first Delhi-based poets to teach students Urdu composition (Mir 1999, Faruqi 2001). This particular student-teacher [*shagird-ustād*] relationship was the template for virtually all future Urdu poets, and yet it had not previously existed in

Indo-Persian circles, according to Shamsur Rahman Faruqi. Arzu may therefore hold as central a place in the development of Urdu literature as Dante does for Italian, in that both marshaled the resources of the classical language to give an imprimatur to vernacular composition. By changing attitudes about Urdu, some eight centuries of vernacular literary production could now be defined and systematized into what we now know as Urdu literature. The development of literary traditions is often represented with naturalistic imagery—e.g. birth, maturity and death as of a human-being or a plant—but in fact intellectuals (writing primarily in the classical language) are often responsible for making the vernacular acceptable in elite society (Faruqi 1998, 2001; Pollock 2001).

One recent publication that can provide a template for my project is a dissertation by Rajeev Kinra (2008). By tracing the career of Chandar Bhān Brāhman, a high-ranking secretary [*munshī*] in the Mughal Empire, Kinra draws conclusions about Indo-Persian literary culture in the seventeenth century and upends a number of ideas about Indo-Persian and its perceived value in the wider Persian-writing world at that time. Kinra essentially proposes my project as a follow-up to his because although we now better understand the Indo-Persian culture of the seventeenth century, the eighteenth century is yet to be systematically studied.

Preparation

My time conducting archival research in Britain and India will represent the culmination of years of preparation. I have had four years of training in each of the languages and literatures relevant to the project (Persian, Urdu and Hindi). I have begun making my way through the published editions of Arzu's texts, though of course a great deal of work remains to be done in this regard. I will participate in an exchange program at the University of Chicago this spring in order to make use of library resources there, since the Indo-Persian collection is larger and more accessible than at Columbia. I will also take the opportunity at that time to study with Professor Muzaffar Alam, one of the few historians working with Indo-Persian sources to have considered the ideology of the language itself (e.g. Alam 2003, 2004). Professor Alam and I have decided that in Chicago we will read Rehana Khatoon's Urdu biography of Arzu (Khatoon 1987) together and compare passages summarized in that work to the original Persian of *Musmir*.

As I was reading for my oral exams (passed November 2009), I began to expand my understanding of two bodies of knowledge which are significant for but not directly part of my dissertation research, namely Arabic poetics and Latin philology. Arzu writes with the confidence of someone well-versed in a rich, bilingual tradition stretching back to eighth-century Baghdad, and I (as a non-Arabist working only in Persian and Urdu) cannot trace his thought back in time as far as I would like to. Using the few available

translations of relevant works from Arabic (Cantarino 1975 being the most helpful), I now have a general sense of the milestones of the Arabic poetic tradition, which may be cited in Arzu's work. Most importantly this additional reading is helping me properly define the Arabic terminology used by intellectuals writing in Persian. When I confront a term like *'ilm al-bālaġha*, there is a two-fold analysis that must take place: first, there is the question of the term's "pre-history" in Arabic scholarship before even appeared in Persian and second, I must consider my own expectations (or "prejudices" in Gadamer's sense) in that this term is typically translated as "rhetoric" and the English equivalent may have valences that are completely foreign to Arabo-Persian literary culture. An understanding of what we mean by terms like "philology," "rhetoric," "poetics," "classic" and so on in the early-modern West (and of course in the present day) is critical to ensure that I do not come to the study of Arzu's work with false expectations about what the use of any of these terms should entail.⁴

Methodology

My dissertation project will involve an extended stay in South Asia⁵ because I require mentoring from Indian scholars as well as access to manuscript holdings. I will seek to

⁴ Along the way interesting parallels between Western and Islamic intellectual history can be noted, such as the similarity of Vico's definition of philology and early definitions of Arabic literary culture as "the mine of knowledge of the Arabs and the book of their wisdom, the archives of their history..." (Manson 1969: 1, Cantarino 1975: 24). However, proving the similarities in the traditions will not be an *idée fixe* for me because when one begins with such a presupposition then one tends to find what one is looking for even if the evidence would not, if the researcher had a more flexible mindset, support it.

⁵ I have been awarded the American Institute for Indian Studies Junior Research Fellowship, allowing me to commence research in India in June 2010, and I am waiting for notification from three other fellowships with similar terms.

build extensive professional connections with Indian scholars of Persian. At Delhi University, I have contacted Professor Rehana Khatoon, who is perhaps the world's greatest authority on Arzu, and Professor Chander Shekhar, whose research interests include Persian lexicography. Both have agreed to work with me and secure me an affiliation with the Department of Persian. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, who has done more research connecting Indo-Persian and Urdu literary culture than anyone else, has met with me several times during his visits to New York and has agreed to mentor me in Allahabad. Because Indo-Persian literature has a style distinct from Persian as it is used in Iran (and only Iranian Persian is taught in language courses in American universities), it is important that I study with South Asian scholars. It is both my strong desire and in the interest of my future academic career to participate in workshops in India and to contribute to scholarship there. I hope that my knowledge of classicism in the Western context will allow me to offer my Indian colleagues a useful comparative perspective on the global early-modern period. Furthermore, when my dissertation is complete I intend to find an Indian publisher for it.

I have identified a number of Indian manuscript libraries whose holdings include works of value to the project. These include the Asiatic Society of Bengal library, the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library (Patna), and the Maulana Azad Library at Aligarh Muslim University, and the Raza Library (Rampur). I will use the opportunity to read widely in eighteenth-century materials by Arzu, his circle, and his opponents in order

to map out an intellectual history of Indo-Persian linguistics and rhetoric, a project which has never been seriously undertaken. (The last comprehensive attempt, Blochmann 1868, looks only at dictionaries and provides little in the way of analysis). I will concentrate on the three extant manuscripts of Arzu's *Musmir*, the text which contains the most sustained, systematic discussion of the philosophy of language in any of Arzu's published works. It has been printed in a critical edition (Khatoon 1991), but the poor print quality of the text renders sections of it difficult to use without consulting the manuscripts (in Aligarh and Rampur) upon which it is based. I also hope to ascertain whether any of the unpublished works by a half dozen of the best-known members of Arzu's circle are worth more attention.

Before my stay in India, I will spend a month working in archives in London (the India Office Library and the Royal Asiatic Society) and in Oxford. A number of relevant manuscripts are available in the UK, of which the most important is the India Office Library's copy of *Tambih al-Ghafilin*, Arzu's broadside against Shaikh Hazin.

Much of my research in India will be basic but necessary manuscript survey work: I will compare catalogue entries to accessible manuscripts of Arzu's works and those of his closest collaborators, try to determine missing dates of copying, and note variations in the introductions and colophons of the texts. However, I will also be close-reading the texts to determine which examples Arzu considers definitive. Arzu's tradition valued the usages of previous writers and so he frequently quoted them either

approvingly or disapprovingly. By determining which previous works are cited as examples, we can get a sense of which texts Arzu considered to be important. A recent work has had success using such a method to understand the intellectual world of the sixteenth-century Persian poet Fighānī (Losenky 1998). Although there exists a detailed account from the seventeenth century of Persian authors considered important in India, there is no comparable source for the eighteenth century (Kinra 2008). It would be enlightening to compare that list with the canon as Arzu sees it. To what degree did he follow the tradition and to what degree—and why—did he depart from it?

It would also help to know better how Arzu's work was transmitted, and which texts written by members of Arzu's circle represent Arzu's own arguments about language. The historical record as it is presently understood suggests that there was little engagement with Arzu's theoretical writing from his death in the 1760s until the 1860s when Imām Bakḥsh Ṣahbā'ī wrote a pamphlet referring to Arzu and his nemesis Shaikh Hazin by name (Naim 2006). This apparent hiatus is almost certainly an illusion because Sahbai engages so deeply with Arzu's theory that it must have still been commonly known in his time.⁶ Furthermore, numerous biographical dictionaries [*taẓkirahs*] from the late eighteenth century, such as *Safīnah-i Khushgo* by Arzu's

⁶ The question of what constituted good Persian also obsessed Ġhālib (1797-1869), whom we know today more as an Urdu poet than Persian writer. Still Ġhālib thought of himself as a serious Persianist, and his embracing of "authentic" Iranian Persian and his categorical denial that India produced any good Persian stylists (with the begrudging exception of Āmīr Khusrau, Abū'l Faẓl and Faīẓī) is significant in light of the fact that as far as I can tell his Persian style easily fit into the same tradition as all the Indian writers he affects to disdain.

confidant Bindrāban Dās “Khushgo,” consider Arzu significant. There has been, as far as I can tell, no systematic study of what other writers wrote about Arzu, and I intend to begin to remedy this. My research into Arzu’s thought will augment recent scholarship that has tried to reevaluate Indo-Persian’s social roles (e.g. Faruqi 2003, Sharma 2004, Kinra 2007).

Although Arzu is given symbolic pride of place in the Urdu tradition, no scholarly study has yet explained how his extant treatises in Persian might have affected the fortunes of the vernacular (his Urdu writing survives only in a few fragments of verse). Indeed, several scholars with whom I have discussed the project (Alam, Faruqi, Kinra), have noted their surprise that so little research on Arzu exists given the fact that he is so often cited as “the father of Urdu poetry” in histories of Urdu literature (notably Azad 2001, which has been the most influential history of Urdu since its publication in 1880). Studies have looked broadly at the influence of Persian on the vernacular (e.g. Phukan 2000) but have not tended to engage with contemporary Indo-Persian texts’ theoretical framework. My dissertation will be one of the few accounts in English to examine changing attitudes towards language in northern Indian society during the early-modern period expressed in works in the erstwhile scholarly language, namely Indo-Persian. Furthermore, I hope that my work can emphasize the common intellectual heritage that links modern South Asia, and its deep ties to the Persian cosmopolis that existed until well into the colonial period.

Chapter Outline

Introduction – Here I will introduce Arzu to the reader with the biographical information available to us and will offer a reconstruction of his milieu in Delhi by way of explaining the Indo-Persian cultural dynamism this dissertation hopes to make more widely known. Furthermore, I will introduce the key terms of the study in order to establish what we mean by philology, poetics, rhetoric, and classics in Persian and English.

Arzu's Poetics – Since Arzu is primarily concerned with poetics, that is, with explaining the theory behind what makes for good poetry, this chapter will bracket off questions having to do with philosophy of language (to be dealt with in the next chapter) and will consider Arzu's poetic sensibilities and his relationship to the Persianate literary tradition. The conceptual problems arising from the later categorization of poetry into a so-called Indian style [*sabk-i Hindī*] will be addressed here. Much of this chapter will be devoted to a reconstruction of Arzu's intellectual horizon (in the Gadamerian sense) by noting which poets and scholars he considers important (we can determine this on the basis of his citations of their works).

Arzu on Language – This section will focus on *Muṣmir*, since that text deals most with the nature of language itself. How does Arzu analyze language? Indeed, does he ever afford it the status of an object of study separate from literature? The key "linguistic" question for Arzu is whether, as he contends, it is better to be an educated second-

language learner or whether, as some of his opponents argue, being a native speaker of a literary language is the only way to have good taste in that language.

Arzu’s Legacy and the (Re-)Birth of Urdu Poetry – This section will survey *tazkirahs* in Persian and Urdu that mention Arzu as a Persian or Urdu poet. It will examine both how his theories are represented in later works and how his biography as the supposed “father of Urdu poetry” is used to shape a narrative of the history of Urdu literature. The endpoints of the survey are two great Indian histories of Urdu and Persian literature, namely Āzād’s *Āb-e ḥayāt* (published 1880) on Urdu and Shiblī’s *Shi‘r al-‘Ajam* (published 1909) on Persian.

Conclusion – Besides doing the usual work of a conclusion, this section will consider some key cross-cultural comparisons: How is Arzu’s philology similar to and different from early-modern Western philology? Is Foucault’s description of the modernization of the human sciences applicable to South Asian understandings of language (1991)? Does the model of vernacularization proposed for the early-modern West apply to South Asia? Does the “death of Sanskrit” have relevance for Indo-Persian?

Theoretical Questions

My dissertation addresses two key theoretical questions that have interested me for my entire scholarly career and resonate beyond South Asian Studies. The first involves the definition of philology and the second asks whether there is any consistency across cultures in the way that key “classical” texts are identified and valued by a society. I

received my undergraduate degree in Classics from Princeton, but I was conscious of continually asking questions that, it was implied, were not within the purview of the Classics Department. I was interested not in how texts were read in ancient Greece and Rome at the time of their production but why those ancient texts kept reappearing as cultural touchstones over the centuries. It was not until I visited India in the summer of 2003 that I came to understand that the Western approach to marking texts as significant was not universal. Every society has various methods for appraising the value of texts, and too often these are taken as self-evident.

Philology, whose literal meaning is, of course, “having an affinity for words,” has taken on a negative cast in the West over the last century or so. This is a particular historical outcome, and I believe it is time to reclaim the word (on its nineteenth-century history see Davies 1998, on reclaiming the word cf. Pollock 2009). Philology is simply a sustained engagement with texts, and with this broad definition in mind, we can assess diverse reading practices. For example, Arzu’s philology is usually not interested in language *per se* but rather is concerned with providing the tools to compose good Persian poetry. In that regard, his reading practices are very different from ours and we must take note of that in order to avoid anachronism (Gadamer 2006). I believe that understanding Arzu’s philology can help us understand the limitations and peculiarities of the ways in which we define our own engagement with texts.

An important function of philology is to construct a canon of significant literary works which are often referred to as “the classics.” My dissertation’s analysis of the concept of the classical—a body of texts which Arzu helped define for eighteenth-century Indo-Persian—builds on my Columbia University M.A. thesis (Dudney 2008), which looks primarily at the thought of Sir William Jones (1746-94), a Classical scholar and Orientalist who is credited with popularizing the theory of an Indo-European language family. My thesis views the classical as a politically and socially determined category: A classical literary language like Persian or Latin had a complicated relationship of influence and cross-pollination with the vernacular languages with which it coexisted (Burke 2006, Auerbach 1993). The replacement of a classical language by the vernacular has always been a deliberate process, in which the vernacular absorbed the authority of the classical language (Oglivie 1964 and Waquet 2001). I aim to expand this problematic by using a comparative approach between early-modern South Asia and Europe, noting the uncanny parallels between many of Arzu’s conclusions and the state of linguistics in the early-modern West (Tavoni 1994). Such a comparison has been fruitfully undertaken in Sanskrit (Pollock 2006) but remains to be explored for India’s other great classical language, Persian. The case of Persian is especially interesting because unlike Sanskrit—but like Latin in Europe—it was an administrative language from the late sixteenth century across most of India (Alam 2004; Alam and Subrahmanyam 2004)

Timetable for Research

January until June 2010 – Study and research at the University of Chicago.

June 2010 – Research in the U.K. at the British Library and at Oxford University. Although the primary purpose of my research in Britain will be studying the world's only complete manuscript copy of *Tambih al-Ghāfilīn*, I will examine a number of biographical dictionaries that mention Arzu in order to record any significant marginal notes. Additionally, I will look at manuscripts of the lexicographical works by Arzu that were brought to England during the colonial period.

July until November 2010 – Based at Delhi University, visits to Aligarh Muslim University library. My primary affiliation during my stay in India will be the Department of Persian at Delhi University because the relevant scholars are based there. During these first few months of my time in India, I will arrange for a part-time tutorial in the Department, spending the rest of my time commuting to Aligarh, where the most important manuscripts for the project are located (including two manuscripts of Arzu's *Muṣmir*). Splitting my time between Delhi and Aligarh will ensure that I will be able to undertake my research soon after my arrival but also be properly mentored for the entire period.

December 2010 until February 2011 – Research at Asiatic Society of Bengal library (Calcutta) and Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library (Patna). The Asiatic Society library contains a number of unique and potentially useful manuscripts written by members of Arzu's circle. However, some of my colleagues have reported that it is very difficult and therefore time-consuming to actually access the manuscripts. The Khuda Bakhsh Library,

by contrast, is probably the easiest-to-access Persian collection in India. My schedule for visiting these two libraries will be determined by how much difficulty I encounter at the Asiatic Society.

March and April 2011 – Return to Delhi, working primarily in the Aligarh Muslim University library. At this point, I will complete whatever archival work remains to be done in Aligarh. This period will be a good opportunity to begin seriously writing my dissertation and to participate in any conferences that might be taking place.

May and June 2011 – Archival work in Rampur, studying with S.R. Faruqi in Allahabad. A third partial manuscript of the *Musmir* is held in the Raza library in Rampur, and I intend to take two weeks to study it carefully. After completing that, I will stay in Allahabad with S.R. Faruqi, whose personal library contains a great deal of Urdu works that pertain to the relationship between Persian and Urdu.

June 2011 until May 2012 – Return to Columbia and continuing to write the dissertation.

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