

Mir Mohammad Momin Astarabadi's Contribution to Qutb Shahi Deccan History

Abstract

Mir Mohammad Momin Astarabadi (1553-1626), was an immigrant who left a career at the Safavid court and came to the Qutb Shahi to serve as the top advisor at the Qutb Shahi's court from c. 1581 to 1625. He worked as *Peshwa* (prime minister) under Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah and Muhammad Qutb Shah. He was second in power only to the Sultan, in addition to being a noted poet and a respected and devout member of the *Ulama*. He contributed the Qutb Shahi Deccan period with his scholarship and the literature. The Persian manuscript *Insha-i Qasir-i Tabbasi*, in the Salar Jung Museum (A.N. 31) gives the information about the history of Qutb Shahi Deccan and the relations with Safavid Empire of Iran. The relations between Qutb Shahi, Mughals and Safavid Empires were very deep and historical. The Central Asia, Iran, Northern Hindustan and Deccan had a vast world of shared linguistic (*Persian*) and cultural practices. As Muzaffar Alam noted that, the Iranian could arrive in a strange, immediately find their bearings, and function with a great deal of ease; at Mughal or Qutb Shahi courts. Indians and Iranians had very relevant interconnections from Ancient to Medieval times in history. T. N. Devare, Muhiuddin Qadri Zore, H.K. Sherwani, Muzaffar Alam, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Laura Weinstein focused on the history and personality of Mir Mohammad Momin Astarabadi in their works and research articles. The proposed research paper focuses on the contribution of Mir Mohammad Momin Astarabadi in the field of Deccan heritage and the history of Qutb Shahi Deccan. The paper is re-assessing the role of Persian scholar in Qutb Shahi Deccan and urbanization, architecture of the town Hyderabad. It is very significant issue for the history of Persian currents in medieval Central Asia to Punjab – North India to Deccan history and Indo- Persian cultural study. In the term of methodology, the paper has been made by the use of both primary sources, manuscripts, translations and the standard secondary data from Aurangabad, Hyderabad Libraries and archives etc. The paper tried to understand the Qutb Shahi Deccan heritage, in the reigns of Muhammad and Abdullah Qutb Shahs, a golden age of Qutb Shah Deccan dynasty, a harmonious combination of the Indo Persian Culture and the State in the personality and scholarship of the *Peshwa* Astarabadi.

Background of Indo Iranian Relations in Deccan

The quotation was famous in medieval times, 'Great is India, the Mecca of all in need, particularly of those who seek safety. A journey to India is incumbent upon any man who has acquired adequate knowledge and skill'. The Persian verse was famous in medieval Indian Sub-continent during seventeenth century.¹ Indian – Iran had very cross cultural trade relations since ancient period. The Iranians are

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an important example of how trade and politics often went together in the medieval period, rather than being separated into hermetically sealed social spaces. The Iranian influences great part of Indian sub-continent and Deccan in this period. The medieval South Asia or Indian Sub-Continent had big sketch in broad term, the nature of Iranian migration and its extent from fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. From Sultanate period of Delhi to Mughal Empire, history was accompanied by waves of migration from West and Central Asia of warrior elites. The Turko Mongol elements or Turkish dialects influenced the court life of Delhi till Mughal Empire. As Jean Aubin writes, 'While neither theologians and jurists nor traders from the Arab speaking lands were absent, this enterprise of military and spiritual conquest is essentially due to Iranian Islam, which was to transform Indo Muslim civilisation into a civilization of Persian Culture'.²

The Bahamanis of Deccan established direct relations with the Persian Gulf through Chaul, Dabhol and Goa port. The Bahamanis had the soldiers, administrators, traders and artists from the Persian Gulf. Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Astarabadi Firishhta, the author of *Tarikh -i- Firishhta*, noted Persian historian from Adilshahi period, was the migrant from Astarabad, Iran region. He died at Bijapur in early times of Seventeenth century.³ Mir Muhammad Momin Astarabadi, an immigrant who left a career at the Safavid court in Iran and came to the Deccan to serve as the top advisor at the Qutb Shah's court from about 1581 to 1626.⁴ The Deccan sultanate had the friendly relations with Iran. Fuzuni Astrabadi was the author of *Futuhah -i- Adil Shahi*, basically from Iran. Rafiuddin Shirazi, the author of *Tadhkiratul Muluk*, was also migrated from Shiraz, Iran to Deccan sultanate.⁵

The Portuguese traveller Tome Pires noted the Iranian white people and their power status in Deccan politics.⁶ Also the Deccani Sutanate regularly imported horses from the Arabian and Persian Gulf in the medieval period. Muhammad Qasim Firishhta noted in his *Tarikh -i- Firishhta*, about the presence of Nimatullahi Sufis from Kirman to Bidar, Gulbarga during Bahamani period.⁷ The *Malik ut-Tujjar* (trade ministry) of Bahamani Empire and *Wazir* (prime minister) Khwaja Mahmud Gawan Gilani (d. 1481) migrated from Iran to Bahamani Deccan. He studied at Cairo and Syria. He developed trade, cultural and educational relations with Iran in his life for Bahamani Empire. Iranian migrants enjoyed major powerful posts and responsibilities at Bijapur, Ahmednagar and Golconda court. At Bijapur Adilshahi, number of key posts controlled by Iranians, and when not, remained with Marathi Brahmins.⁸ The Qutb Shahi Kingdom had very deep and close relations with Iranian Emperor Shah Tahmasp. Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah gave extensive patronage to migrant Iranians of Hyderabad. Sayyid Kamal uddin Husain Ardistani, was *Peshwa* (prime minister) during the reign of Ibrahim Shah as Golconda after 1563 and later, Sayyid migrated to Bijapur court under Ali Adil Shah on same post, *Peshwa* till 1580.⁹ Mir Muhammad Momin Astarabadi (1553-1626) migrated to Golconda in 1581. He was *Peshwa* under two Sultans, Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah and Muhammad Qutb Shah. The Belgium based jewel trader Jacques de Coutre, travelled in the Deccan in the Second decade of the seventeenth century. He had dealings with the *Malik ut Tujjar* of Golconda and also with *Peshwa* Astarabadi.¹⁰ He noted the personality of Astarabadi at Golconda and his powers in administration. The Dutch factor Lodewijk I'jsaacs

Eyloff noted in 1608, about the Iranians at key positions at Masulipatnam port and Qurb Shahi Deccan Administration.¹¹

The records of Dutch East India Company, French travelogues and the letter communication about Golconda Coast gave the historical information about Qutb Shahi Deccan history and Iranian presence into the reign. The seventeenth century was the period of Dutch expansion and their competition, struggle and wars with the British East India Company. The British Company was able to establish their factory at Masulipatnam in 1611; the Dutch Company had already established their factory at Pulicat two year earlier. The Dutch records consist of official letters from East Coast of India to Batavia (modern Jakarta). It was the Dutch who first acquired the right to keep a 'Residentary' at Golconda (Hyderabad) during Qutb Shahi period.¹²

Mir Muhammad Momin Astarabadi and his times

Mir Muhammad Momin Astarabadi acquired his early education from his maternal uncle Fakhrud Din Samaki. Later he became a disciple of Nuruddin Musaawi and learnt Traditions (*Hadith*), Quran and *Shia* Dogma. He had gained Astronomy, Physiognomy, Geometry and other sciences. Mir Muhammad was nominated as the guardian tutor to Prince Hayder by Shah Tahmasp. But on the death of Shah Tahmasp in 1576 and the murder of Prince Hayder, Mir Muhammad has abandoned Iran. Mir Momin arrived at Golconda some time in 1579, a few months after the demise of Ibrahim Qutb Shah. Mir Momin Astarabadi (1553-1626) was appointed Peshwa of the Qutb Shahi Kingdom as early as 1581. He held this position for forty years without a break. His *Peshwai*, regime is the Golden Age of the Qutb Shahi administration, towards whose glory, prosperity and enlightenment, he has made great contribution in Qutb Shahi Deccan history. Shah Abbas, the Great had treated Mir Momin as his trusted representative in the Deccan. Number of *Farmans* was generally sent in dependently to Momin by the Shah. Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah and *Peshwa* Astarabadi contributed the cultural heritage of Hyderabad Deccan region. Astarabadi was a great Architect, urban planner, a lover of culture and a poet. He constructed the *Badshahi Ashurkhana* and the *Charminar* at Hyderabad. Astarabadi was without doubt one of the chief advisors of the Sultan in planning the new capital city of Hyderabad.¹³ Mir Muhammad planned Hyderabad a new Isfahan in Deccan. He called '*Haidarabad*', as the 'new *Safahan*', in his writings.¹⁴ Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah and his *Peshwa* Mir Astarabadi developed the new plan of Hyderabad capital town. French traveller Jean Baptiste Tavernier made six voyages to the East and was in the Qutb Shahi Kingdom in between 1638 to 1663. His description of Hyderabad via the *Purana Pul* or the Old Bridge was very interesting. He also gives a clue to meaning of the enigmatic name of the new capital and says that while *Aider Abad* or *Haidarabad*, is the official name, the general public calls it *Bagnagar* or *Baagh Nagar* or the city of Gardens. Muhammad Quli Qutb died at 11 January 1612. He was a patron of literature, both prose and poetry, of music and dance as well as architecture, and had the distinction of being the author of the first *Diwan* in Dakhani Urdu language. He founded Hyderabad through the efforts of Muhammad Momin Astarabadi.¹⁵ The Iranian family had the marriage relations with the Qutb Shahi dynasty in Golconda. Ibrahim Qutb Shah gave his sister in

marriage to Mustafa Khan Urdistani. Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah married Mir Shah Mir's daughter while his younger brother Muhammad Amin was married to a girl from the *Tabatabai* family from Iran.

Literature

Mir Muhammad wrote the poetical compositions and his prose works with wealth of vocabulary command. He is highly respected for his works in Persian literature. He was a philosopher as well as a man of the world, a courtier as well as a statesman, a litterateur as well as a conversationalist. His works, it is a *Nazm* or *Ghazal*, it is full of allusions to the land of his birth, Astarabad (modern Gorgan in Golestan, Iran), Iran and is reminiscent of some of the famous cities of that country. He wrote, 'It is no wonder that I am able to imagine so many doomsdays, for my function with regard to it is just recreating'. 'When I was dead, there was no one who stood at my grave and said 'O thou art dead, be happy that tomorrow is thy doomsday'.¹⁶ He wrote *Risala-i-Miqdariyyah* into Persian language. The book divided into number of sections and dealing with scientific treaties, measures of weight, length, distance etc. This is a researched book. Every section is dealt with in a comprehensive manner with an enumeration of sources, arguments and conclusions. *Risala Miqdariyah* manuscript written by his own hand.¹⁷

"A Mile is less than a farsakh and barid. According to the Arabic nomenclature it means the distance which a human eye, which is neither afflicted with any disease nor is usually strong, can see. This meaning is attached to the word in the Surah, Qamus and Mu'arrabu'l Lughat and as well as in some of the books on the fiqh. On the other hand Shaikh Zainuddin has mentioned in his book, the Sharh Sharaih that (in order to determine a mile) 'the man whose eyes can penetrated the distance should be able to differentiate between a person walking and a person riding. In some places they have put up pyramidal pillars to indicate the beginning and end of a mile'. The mile which is determined by yards is called a Hashimi mile, and it consists of 4,000 yards. This yard begins with the elbow and ends with the tip of the fingers: It corresponds to six closed fists, the total being equal to 24 closed fists. The Mir goes on the say that a farsakh is equal to 3 miles and a barid to 24 closed fists. The Mir says that a yard is equal to six closed fists which equates with 24 finger breadth. Obviously the "Yard" of Mir Mumin, is roughly equal to one cubit".

In the second part of this book, a detailed definition of *Mil* (mile), *Farsaka* (league) and *Barid* (4 *Farsakhs*) is attempted and in the conclusion a general discussion on weights and measures is briefly given. Mir Muhammad Momin wrote *Kitab -i- Raj'at* in Persian language on the Traditions (*Hadith*) of the Prophet Muhammad of Islam. It was on the perfect Persian translation of the Arabic work, *Kathirul Miamin*, which was ascribed to the eighth apostolic Imam of the Shiah, Ali Ar Riza. In this book, Mir Muhammad Momin has tried to prove the prophecy regarding the reappearance of Imam e Mahdi with the help of the Traditions. Each Tradition has been cited on weighty authority and the names of reporters have been mentioned to substantiate their genuineness. The Prosody of *Nazm* and *Ghazal* poetry written by Mir Momin were famous those times. Some poetries of Mir are preserved in *Tarikh e Muhammad Qutb Shahi* and Mir Alam's *Hadiqatul Alam*. A copy of Mir Momin's poems comprising panegyrics, lyrics

and quatrains is preserved in the India Office Library, London in 175 folios. Mir Momin was excelled both in the panegyric and lyric forms. In his *Ghazals*, the poet depicts the true sentiments of lovers and as such he succeeds in widening the scope of popular appeal to his lyrics which are free from affection and rhetorical devices. *Hadaiqus Salatin*, the Persian book written by Ali bin Taifur Bistami, in the reign of Abul Hasan Tana Shah. Though this is the last chronicle of this period, its literary value is unique since it preserves poetical extracts of the Bahmani and the Qutb Shahi Sultans as well as of the eminent poets of Persia and Indian subcontinent. The special notices of Mir Muhammad Momin Astarabadi and Mir Muhammad Amin Isfahani in this work are of great value.¹⁸

The son in law of Mir Muhammad Momin, Mirza Sharif Shahrastani was the chief teacher of Qutb Shah Abdullah (1626-1672). According to T.N. Devare, Mir Momin Astarabadi legitimately deserves great credit for his constructive and cultural activities during his Peshwai which transformed Tellingana into Persia and Hyderabad into Isfahan, and made it a glorious seat of Shia learning.¹⁹

Conclusion

The medieval history of Deccan had influenced by the Iranian elites and the personalities whom worked within the area of socio cultural affairs and the polity. Muhammad Gawan, Ferishta, Rafiuddin Shirazi, Mustafa Khan Urdistani and Mir Tabatabai were the famous Iranian migrants in the Deccan Sultanate. After their exit from the scene, Mir Muhammad Momin Astarabadi came to historical sketch of Deccan. He controlled the destinies of Golconda for about forty years during the reigns of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah and Muhammad Qutb Shah and kept the torch of enlightenment and culture with renewed progressive administration. He contributed the Deccan heritage with the construction of new capital town of Hyderabad with Qutb Shah. He made the rich literature on technical and scientific terms on weights, measures and distances during Qutb Shahi Deccan, *Risala e Miqdariyya*. Also he acted as the pioneer on an all round movement for the popularization of the *Shiia* doctrine and thereby ushered in an era of *Shia* learning at Hyderabad. He contributed main role of the construction of Badshahi Ashurkhana at Hyderabad. Mir Muhammad was basically from an illustrious family of Sayyids of Astarabad, which has been a mine of lustrous gems of intrinsic merit. His family had established long tradition of erudition and learning, and was held in reverence by the Safawi rulers. Like same way, he worked for forty year without break for the development of new Hyderabad and the Qutb Shahi at Deccan region. It is the significance of such a personality in the history of Deccan. It was the unforgettable Indo Iranian portrait of cultural contribution in Deccan History.

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Map of Qutb Shahi Kingdom at Deccan and East Coast (c. 1670)