Deccan Sultanates and Persia: The Political and Cultural Relations in the Medieval Age

Ashiq A,
PhD Scholar,
Department of Political Science
Social science, University of Hyderabad, 500046
Email Id:ashiqneerad47@gmail.com, Mob: 08330960477

Abstract: The contacts between the peoples of two civilisations of India and Iran dates back to the prehistoric period and their ties flourished in the ancient and also medieval age. Simultaneously, Persia succeeded to maintain contact with Mughals as well as the Deccan Sultanates in India. Migration into both sides, Deccan and Persia, was easy and had no geopolitical restrictions, Pakistan was not formed in their period. Geographical contiguity, desire of Deccan rulers to enlarge their kingdoms, and their passion for art, architecture and literature were the major factors in the formation of such remarkable relationship between the two medieval dynasties. In this context, the present article is an attempt to understand the contact in the political and cultural fields between Deccan and Persian dynasties in the age of medieval.

Keywords: Art, Architecture, cosmopolitan, Civilisation, contiguity, Deccani-culture, Indo-Persian

Introduction

Since the 14th century with the arrival of Persians, a new Islamic synthesis has begun to emerge in Deccan, which was the important variable to develop Indo-Persian cultural sphere (Farooqui, 2011, p.162). The entire Deccan region was under the cultural influence of Persia in 16th and 17th centuries. Persian culture was considered to be prestigious and cosmopolitan in character, which had significant influence in the regional rulers of Deccan. Over the centuries this such cultural synthesis made Deccan as a place of different ruling groups and among them Perso-Deccan was important and it was an integration of Persia and Deccan culture. The Persian people migrated into the Deccan and spread their tangible and intangible culture in the region and it was known as the ‘Dakhni Culture’ between Bay of Bengal and Western Ghats region of the Indian subcontinent. George Michell and Mark Zebrowski, famous historians, shared their experiences in their book ‘Architecture and Art of Deccan Sultanate’ as

“the palaces and tombs at Bidar, Bijapur, and Golconda (Deccan Sultanates) invigorate them with exotic vision of the Middle East, a fantastic Arabian Nights atmosphere and direct reflections of distant Islamic culture” (Michell and Zebrowski, 2011, p.18)

The Deccan Kingdom comprises five sultanates namely Ahmednagar-Nizam Shai dynasty, Berar- Imam Shahi dynasty, Bidar-Barid Shahi dynasty, Bijapur-Adil Shahi-dynasty and Golconda- Qutb Shahi dynasty spread between the Krishna River and the Vindhya Range. These kingdoms were separated from each other by the decline of Bahmani Kingdom. Initially, Persians migrated into Deccan region from North India during the Delhi Sultanates administration, a small number, due to the change of capital by Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq from Delhi to Doulatabad. Then, a huge number of Persians arrived in Deccan region directly from Persia. The political instability in Persia (Mongolian threats) and the direct contact of Deccan Sultanates with Persian dynasties accelerated the migration of Persians into the Deccan region. Migrated Persians included Ulemas, poets, writers, architects, artisans, builders, calligraphers and tradespeople. The Persian language had considerable influence in the Deccan region and all Sultanates promoted the Persian as the court language.

Bahmani Dynasty

Allauddin Hasan Bahman Shah, the first ruler of Bahmani kingdom, invited the eminent poets and Ulema from Persia such as Isami, Futuhus-Salatin, Shaik Ainuddin, Mufti Ahmed Harvi, Saifuddin Ghor and Hakeem Tabrazi. He popularised the Persian language and culture in his kingdom and he opened the educational institutions at Elichpur, Gulberga and Doulatabad in Deccan region (Naqavi, 1994, p.9). The Bahmanis and Persian rulers and royals followed the marriage alliance with each other. The Persian ruler Shah Sahib’s grandson Mir Noonullah married the daughter of Bahman Sultan Shahbuddin.

1 Bahmani Kingdom or Bahmanid Empire (1347–1527) was a Muslim state of the Deccan in southern India and was one of the great medieval Indian kingdoms and founded by Alauddin Bahman Shah. It was an Islamic state(http://www.importantindia.com/541/bahmani-kingdom)
Mahmud Gawan, an eminent Persian was appointed by Muhammad III, ruler of Bahmani, as his Prime Minister. Persian architects, artisans, builders, calligraphers came into Bahmani and they made many constructions in various parts of Bahmani kingdom. Tombs, palaces, the minaret of forts, mosque, madrasa (Islamic study centres) and Dargah were the important architectural contributions of Persia. The Rangin and Takht Mahals, Solah Kamba mosque, madrasa of Mahmoud Gawan, tombs of Bahmani rulers like Firoz Shah and Ala-ud-Din Ahamad, Khalilullha’s Dargah, the minaret of Daulatabad Fort, Chand Minar and Takat-e-Kirmani. These monuments are the excellent examples of the fusion of Persian, Hindu and Delhi Sultanate architectures (Naqvi, 1992, p.18)

Political Contributions

The Persian immigrants not only contributed richly to the fields of art and architecture but also to the administration and military affairs. The Persian nobles occupied the highest position in the administration of Bahmani kingdom. Fazullah Inju was an eminent person and migrated into Deccan during the time of Sultan Muhammad II of Bahmani. Inju proved his potential in literature, military as well as civil administration. He was appointed by Muhammad II in various positions such as Sadar, Alim (religious teacher), Atalaq, Vakil-us-Sultanat (Administrator of state on behalf of the King). Inju’s strategies helped well the Bahmani Sultanate to succeed in the war against Devaraja I of Vijayanagara and Narsing Rai of kherala. Moreover, his son and son-in-law were also appointed in important posts of the administration of Bahmani kingdom.

Khwaja Mahmud Gawan Gilani, another noble man from Persia, was appointed as Vakil-us-Sultanat, military commander, member of Majlis-e-Vilayat (Council of administration). He was also appointed by Muhammad III of Bahmani Sultanate as his Prime Minister. Khwaja Gilani extended his Sultanate into Goa and Orissa and he also annexed the Godavari and Krishna. Gilani divided the Bahmani kingdom into eight regions for the easy administration and he brought many Persian Ulemas and scholars into his kingdom. Khalaf Hasan Basri, Khauja Hasan Ardastani, Shafiuddin Shustari were notable Persian nobles and Alim, the Sultan of Bahmani Kingdom appointed them in different fields like military, archery and civil administration.

Bijapur Sultanate and Shia Influence

The Persians arrived in Bijapur Sultanate at the time of its separation from Bahmani dynasty. A new kingdom formed in Bijapur and after that, Persian traders and nobles massively migrated into Bijapur. Yousuf Adil Khan, the first ruler of Bijapur kingdom, had a personal relationship with Persian ruler Ismail Safawi. According to Salma Ahmed Farooqi, medieval Indian historian refers that Bijapur becomes exposed to Persian influence in the 16th century when the Persian merchants used to bring horse trade from Persia to Bijapur. The proclamation of Shia as the official religion of state by Yusuf Adil Shah encouraged, even more, Persians to immigrate to the Deccan regions (Farooqui, 2014, p.174). The major remarkable incident of their period was the proclamation of Shia faith as a state recognised religion. Ismail Safawi declared Shia was the official religion of his kingdom. On the other hand, Bijapur Sultan could declare Shia as the state religion, and he faced resistance from the nobles and also the Sunni followers. Thus, Yousuf ordered Naqeeb Khan to climb the Pulpit (Stage inside the Mosque) and give Shia Azan, call for group prayer from Muslim Mosques and after that recite the Quta, religious speech in the name of Twelve Imams. Thus, for the first time in the long history of India, the Shia Azan and Quta was recited at the Bijapur Khans (Naqvi, 1994, p.31).

It was an important incident in the history of the Deccan religious profile. Adil Shah had no strict sense to follow Shia Azan and Quta in the Mosque and his son Ali Adil Shah reoriented the Shia ideology in his kingdom and forced the people to follow Shia practices. Subsequently, rifts in religion broke out between Bijapur and Persia however; they continued to have political, economic, cultural and literary relations. T. N. Devare, historian, mentioned in his work, ‘A Short History of Persian Literature 1961’, the Bijapur just as an extension of Persian kingdom. Bijapur Sultan was found the pleasure to know his kingdom as part of Persian dynasty. For the outstanding relation, both administrations had been exchanged ambassadors, official letters and also received advice and aid in political and economic affairs from each other. Ibrahim Adil Shah of Bijapur sought aid from Persian ruler Abbas I when his kingdom faced threat from Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Adil Shah succeeded to protect his kingdom from the attack of Jahangir by the diplomatic and political supports of Abbas I of Persia.

Persian merchants and traders settled in Deccan and they made massive imports as well as exports of goods each other. Sultan appointed many nobles of Persia in honoured posts and they served Bijapur kingdom well. Most of the Sultans of Bijapur kingdom learned art and literature from the Persian scholars. The prominent Persian scholars were Shah Fathullah Shirazi, Hakim Ahmed Gilani, Mahmud Isfahani and Abul Qasim Inju. Muhammad Qusim and they attracted the different position. Muhammad Qusim wrote the ‘Tareek-e-Farishtha, history of Kingdoms of Deccan’ and it was translated into Urdu and English. The period of Ibrahim Adil Shah,
Muhammad Adil Shah and Adil Shah II was the golden period of Persian art and literature in Deccan region. The tombs of all Sultans of Adil Shahi dynasty and rest of the monuments were built in Persian architectural style.

**Golconda Sultanate**

Qutb Shah's kingdom of Golconda was another notable Sultanate in Deccan plateau. It had significant political, economic and cultural contacts with the Persian dynasty. Shia was the connecting factor between Persian and Golconda and it brought close between them well. Muhammed Quli Qutab Shah was the founder of Hyderabad city and he had insisted on practising the Shia faith in the kingdom. Other rulers of Deccan dynasties had not put the restrictions on the faith and they let the people follow their religion and promoted freedom and tolerance. A huge number of Persian **ulemas**, poets, calligraphers, scholars and architects arrived Golconda. Sultans appointed potential Persian migrants in various administrative posts. Allam Meer Muhammed Momin Astrabadi, Allam Ibn-e-Khatoon, Mirza Raza Quli Beg Naik Naam Khan, and Hazrat Meer Mahmood were the prominent scholars of Qutb Shai kingdom. Among them, the first two were appointed as Peshwa-e-Sultanat, the high administrative post of the kingdom.

Dr Zareena Parveen, director, Telangana State Archives says, Astrabadi joined as hawaldar and was posted at Inderkonda Fort. A man from a respectable Al-Hussaini and Syed family he went on to become a trusted Prime Minister. The man who first came up with a sketch of the city with Charmin as the centre of attraction of Hyderabad and he also contributed to the construction of Hyderabad city. He was a good teacher and taught many Sultans, like Muhammad Sultan, the different subjects such as architecture, art, administration and politics. He acted as a diplomat between Golconda and Persia and he sent many envoys to Persia particularly during the period of Abbas Safawi. Meer Mahmood, a famous Persian architect, concentrated on the construction of tombs and building in Persian style in Golconda. Naik Naam Khan was the famous military commander of Sultan Abdullah Qutab Shah. Bijapur ruler Adil Shah sought Abdullaha of Golconda to give training of Naam Khan to his army. In addition, Abdulha sent the military to Bijapur under the command of Naik Naam Khan to fight against the Mughals.

In many occasions, Deccan kingdoms prevented the attacks of Mughals with the diplomatic and political interferences of Persian rulers. Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutab Shai sent his envoy to Persia with a complaint letter against the Mughals and he asked to find a political solution to stop the hostile attitude of Mughals against the Deccan rulers. Qutba Shai and Persian rulers shared the state’s power through the marriage alliances. In many junctures, marriage alliances not comfortable and it failed to reach a consensus in succession of state power. Qutb Shai rulers, from Muhammed Quli to Abdul Hassan, performed Azadari, mourning for Imam Hussain, with a complete devotion during the month of Muharrum in the Ashur Khans, festival hall of Muharrum. Sultan Qutb Shai universalised the ceremony of Muharrum and opened the door of Ashur Khans for all the religious sects. (Naqavi, 1994, p.62) Persian architectural style could be seen in many constructions of Qutb Shai dynasty of Golconda such as Tombs of Seven Qutb Shai rulers, mosque and Ashur Khans. Abul Hassan (1672-1687), the last ruler of the Qutb Shai dynasty, not found as enthusiastic on Persian art and literature and he was concerned about the attack on Mughal Empire.

**Mughal Conquer of Golconda Dynasty**

Aurangzeb, Mughal ruler, conquered the Qutb Shai Sultanate and captured Hyderabad city in 1687. Since the new rulers of Deccan focused on the Mughal Court and its directions rather than Persia. Since the Persian migration into the Deccan region came to an end by the decline of Qutb Shai Sultanate. However, Persians who settled in North India continued migration into the Deccan region till the colonial administration. After the end of Mughal rule, Asaf Jahi, the Sunni believers, became the Sultan of Hyderabad. Its rulers like Mir Nizam Ali Khan II, Mir Mahboob Ali Khan, Asaf Jahi VI and Mir Osman Ali Khan were Sunni followers. However, they showed tolerance towards the Shia people and let them practice their faith. These rulers built new Ashur Khans halls for the Muharrum festival of Shia sect in Hyderabad city. Moreover, the Asaf Jahi rulers continued the Persian as a court language and common peoples also used Persian as a local language. Most of the Asaf Jahi dynasty’s constructions were the fusion of Mughal and Qutb Shaii architectures. The Mughal conquest and subsequent administrators of Deccan did not considerably concentrate on Persia. If the Qutb Shai dynasty were not demolished by Mughal Deccan region especially Hyderabad would have been the stronghold place of Shia sect after Iran.

**Conclusion**

The article analysed the political, religious and most importantly, the cultural contribution of Persia into the Deccan plateau of India. All the Deccan dynasties maintained considerable contact with the different Persian
dynasties. A huge Persian people migrated from Persia into the Deccan region among them included the ulemas, poets, writers, architects, artisans, builders, calligraphers and tradespeople and they had potential to deciding the political, economic, cultural and religious profiles of all Deccan Sultanates. The Persian art and architecture designs can be easily seen in the Sultanates constructions in Deccan region. Persians not only contributed abundantly to the art and architecture but also to the administration and military affairs. Habib Borjian, the secretary of Association for the Study of Persianate Societies (ASPS), said, at the 5th Biennial Convention held at Hyderabad in 2012.

“Hyderabad is the ideal venue to host the convention. The Indo-Persian art and architecture found in this city can be paralleled only by a few Persian cities. Hyderabad even surpassed Isfahan and became the centre of the confluence of cultures. The city also gave the world exhaustive dictionaries and thousands of manuscripts in the Persian language”(Times of India, 2012)

His words are enough to understand the relation between Persia and the Deccan Sultanates in the medieval time. At present, significant tangible and intangible Persian cultural influence can be seen across the Deccan region, especially in the city of Hyderabad. The Shia–Sunni coexistence could be seen on the outskirts of Hyderabad city. The Shia people celebrate religious festivals and commemorate their great leaders will march forward on the way to progress” (Report of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of India)

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2 The day of Ashura is marked by Muslims as a whole, but for Shia Muslims it is a major religious commemoration of the martyrdom of Hussein, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, at Karbala. http://www.shia.org