

Sultanate Literature (1200 AD—1526 AD)

■ **Persian Literature:** During the medieval period, Persian emerged as the official language, and its literature gained prominence. Initially, Persian literature flourished in Iran, with Mahmud Ghazni playing a crucial role in fostering a renaissance in Persian language literature. Notably, the renowned scholar Firdausi composed the Shahnama during this era.

Subsequently, the Turkish rulers in India adopted Persian as the official language. As scholars sought refuge from the Mongol invasion, they migrated to India and received patronage from central and provincial governments. Additionally, scholars from various regions of India also supported Persian language literature.

During this period, numerous texts were written in Persian, particularly historical works. Writing about the life of the Prophet and the Caliphs held religious significance in Islam. Furthermore, marking events related to the Sultan's life gained importance, leading to the composition of numerous historical books. In the court of Qutubuddin Aibak, Hasan Nizami wrote 'Taj-ul-Maasir,' which provides insights into the architecture of the Delhi Sultanate. Minhaj-us-Siraj's 'Tabaqat-i-Nasiri' and Barani's 'Tarikh-i-Firozshahi' continued this tradition. Afif further carried Barani legacy in his work as a sequel of 'Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi.' Yahiya-bin Ahmad Sirhindi's 'Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi' also contributed to this genre.

■ **Amir Khusro** - a prominent scholar of his time, composed significant literary texts in Persian that shed light on contemporary history. His works such as 'Qiran-us-Sadain,' 'Miftah-ul-Futuh,' and 'Khazain-ul-Futuh' played a crucial role in this regard. Moreover, Amir Khusro's contributions extended to the development of

the vernacular language. He is credited with the development of 'Hindawi,' based on Khari Boli, which further evolved into two styles. The style written in Devanagari script came to be known as 'Hindi,' while the style written in Persian script was called 'Urdu' (Rekhta). Therefore, Amir Khusro is also acknowledged as the father of Urdu.

■ Native Language

• **Sanskrit literature:** While certain Hindu dynasties experienced a decline during this period, Sanskrit literature continued to receive patronage from regional Hindu rulers who recognized its religious significance.

• **Hindi and Urdu:** Hindi language literature gained prominence during this era, largely due to the contributions of Bhakti saints. Rama Bhakti poets promoted the use of Awadhi language, while Krishna Bhakti poets emphasized the Braj language. Additionally, Kabirdas played a pivotal role in strengthening the Hindi language.

Urdu emerged from the interaction between Persian and Indian languages. It is believed to have originated in Sufi Khanqahs or military camps. Initially, this language spread towards the south and became known as Deccani.

■ Regional Language and Literature

During the early medieval period, regional languages began to flourish due to increasing local influence. Languages such as Punjabi, Bengali, Gujarati, Maithili, and Oriya underwent significant development during this time.

The development of Punjabi can be attributed to the speech of Guru Nanak and the contributions of other gurus who promoted its usage. Guru Arjun Dev compiled the Guru Granth Sahib in Punjabi, further establishing its significance. Similarly, the Gujarati language developed independently with notable contributions from Bhakti saint Narsi Mehta.

Maithili language literature saw significant growth under the influence of Vidyapati's contributions. Additionally, Bengali language developed independently, with influences from Maithili. The biography of Chaitanya, penned by the saint poet Vrindavandas, laid the foundation for the development of Bengali language literature.

During this period, Maratha literature also witnessed progress, with Marathi saints making noteworthy contributions. Saints like Namdev, Ekanath, and Tukaram played vital roles in the development of Marathi language literature.

Mughal Literature

The Mughal period was a remarkable era in terms of literary and artistic endeavors. The Mughals held influence over vast territories, enabling them to provide patronage to literature and art.

■ Factors Motivating Literary Activities

The Mughal rulers generously supported numerous scholars, ensuring a continuous presence of intellectual figures within the Mughal court from Babur to Aurangzeb's reigns. Even after the fragmentation of the Mughal Empire, rulers like Muhammad Shah continued to provide patronage to scholars. This resulted in the support and recognition of many esteemed scholars, such as Faizi Sirhindi and Abul Fazl during Akbar's reign. Likewise, notable scholars like Mutamid Khan, Khwaja Kamgar, Abdul Hamid Lahori, and Inayat Khan thrived under Shahjahan's patronage, while Mirza Muhammad Kazim, Ishwardas Nagar, Bhimsen Burhanpuri, and others received support during Aurangzeb's reign.

The Mughal rulers had a special interest in literary writing. For example, Babur himself wrote his autobiography, *Tuzuk-i-Baburi*, which was written in Turkish. Similarly, Jahangir authored a work named *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, which serves as his autobiography. Additionally, the Mughal rulers demonstrated a keen interest in

the composition of historical texts and maintained renowned historians within their courts.

For instance, Gulbadan Begum, the sister of Humayun, authored a work known as the *Humayun Nama*. Faizi Sirhindi and Abul Fazl both composed the *Akbarnama* in the court of Emperor Akbar. Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* is a part of the *Akbarnama*. On the other hand, Badauni, a staunch critic of Akbar, penned a work titled "*Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*," while Nizamuddin Ahmed wrote a book called *Tabaqat-I-Akbari*. During the reign of Jahangir, Mutamid Khan wrote the *Iqbalnama-i-Jahangiri*, and Khwaja Kamgar composed the *Maasir-i-Jahangiri*. Similarly, in the era of Shah Jahan, Abdul Hameed Lahori and Muhammad Warish wrote the *Padshahnama*, while Inayat Khan authored the *Shahjahannama*. Furthermore, during Aurangzeb's rule, although the writing of history was prohibited, limiting the activities of historical writing, Khafi Khan secretly penned a work called the *Muntakhab-ul-Lubab*. Mirza Muhammad Kazim also wrote the *Alamgirnama* during this period and presented it to Aurangzeb. The tradition of the Mughal rulers exemplified liberal rule, which fostered a composite culture. Consequently, alongside Persian literature, the Mughal court also patronized literature in various Indian languages. In Akbar's court, Mansingh and Birbal (Mahesh Das Thakur) made significant contributions to Hindi poetry writing. Similarly, Pandit Jagannath received patronage in the court of Shah Jahan.

During the later Mughal period, Urdu language literature received special treatment. Wali Deccani, a renowned Urdu scholar from the south, arrived at the Mughal court in the 18th century, leading to the establishment of Urdu literature alongside Persian. Poets such as Miratki Mir, Dard, and Sauda played a pivotal role in the development of Urdu literature.

Among the Mughal rulers, Akbar demonstrated a particular interest in translating

Indian texts into Persian. To facilitate this, a translation department was established, overseen by Faizi Sirhindi. As a result, major Indian texts such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Lilavati, Panchatantra, and others were translated into Persian.

During this period, the Bhakti movement received a significant impetus, leading to the continued encouragement of regional language literature beyond the Mughal court. Let's explore some examples:

1. Awadhi language: In Awadhi language the Ram devotee poets made notable contributions. Tulsidas, during the reign of Akbar, composed the renowned Ramcharitmanas.

2. Braj Bhasha: The Braj Bhasha witnessed the development of Krishna devotee poets. Surdas, during Akbar's rule, composed the Sur Sagar. Moreover, Vitthal Das composed the 84 talks of Vishnu during this period.

3. Punjabi language: saw special contributions from the Sikh Gurus, not only in religious literature but also in the creation of non-religious literature. For instance, the famous work Heer-Ranjha was written during this period.

4. Bangla language literature: scholars like Vrindavan Das, Krishnadas Kaviraj, and Lochandas played pivotal roles in its development.

5. Marathi language and literature: were enriched by the contributions of Eknath, Tukaram, and Ramdas Samarth, who was the guru of Shivaji. Ramdas composed Dasbodh, an important literary work.

Development of education system in medieval period

In the medieval period, educational activities were limited to the elite class, and the information we have about this era is predominantly found in elite languages.

During this time, the Indian subcontinent started to be influenced by Islamic culture from the 7th century onwards. The Quran, which served as the foundation of Islamic culture, contained important teachings and revelations from Allah as conveyed by Prophet Muhammad. The study of Hadith, which refers to the traditions of Prophet Muhammad, was also an integral part of the Islamic education system. This system of education garnered the attention of sincere scholars, and the use of paper played a crucial role in its development.

During the Mongol invasions of Central Asia and West Asia, many scholars migrated and took refuge in Delhi, which served as a prominent center of the Muslim world. These scholars from Central Asia and West Asia played a significant role in the dissemination of Islamic culture. Their presence in Delhi and other cities facilitated the establishment of maktabs and madrasas, which were educational institutions focused on Islamic teachings. For instance, a 14th-century scholar named Al-Umari mentioned that around 1,000 madrasas were established in Delhi.

In addition to the aforementioned aspects, Sufi Khanqahs also played a significant role in the advancement of education. Various Sufi saints, from Nizamuddin Auliya to Naseeruddin, made valuable contributions to education. Notably, both the state and private individuals allocated funds for educational development. Consequently, the progress of education relied heavily on the interest and support of the ruling class. However, whenever there was a change in the rulers at the higher level, scholars often faced challenges in obtaining patronage. At times, even issues of sectarian differences such as Shia-Sunni conflicts affected the state's protection and support towards scholars.

It is a common belief that in the medieval period, the state did not support education based on Sanskrit, but instead focused on Persian and Arabic education. However, this belief is not entirely true. Persian texts provide evidence that an education system centered around Sanskrit also flourished during this period, and Hindu scholars received encouragement as well. Banaras emerged as a significant educational hub during this time. The Brahmins, who were proficient in Hindu sciences, expanded their knowledge beyond Sanskrit and also delved into Arabic and Persian studies.

The advancement in bookbinding techniques using paper played a significant role in fostering the growth of education during the medieval period. This led to the establishment of large libraries that became centers of knowledge. The

Mughal rulers, along with some prominent nobles, also took initiatives to create important libraries. Among the Mughal rulers, Akbar made noteworthy contributions to the development of education by emphasizing secular education. Shah Jahan, too, established a college in Delhi. The Mughal court was home to many esteemed scholars, including Sheikh Abdullah Shirazi, Abul Fazal, renowned astronomer Sawai Jai Singh, and celebrated poet Mirza Ghalib.

However, during colonial rule, the indigenous education system faced a decline in state support. Only a fraction of the indigenous education system managed to thrive under the state's patronage, while significant emphasis was placed on promoting the English education system.

