

The Expansion and Status of Dari Persian Language in the Indian Subcontinent

*Seyed Jan Sate'e¹ - Gholam Reza Safdari²

1. Professor of Dari Persian Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Baghlan University, Afghanistan. (Corresponding author) Email: savedjansati@gmail.com
2. Pohanmal Dari Persian Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Baghlan University, Afghanistan.

Article Info (173-191)

ABSTRACT

Article type:
Research
Article

Article history:

Received:
۲۰۲۳/۱۱/۰۶

Accepted:
۲۰۲۴/۰۲/۲۲

Keywords:

Dari
Persian
Language
India
Spread
of Language
Lahore
Delhi
Bengal
Multan

The inception of the Dari Persian language into India dates back almost a thousand years ago during Sultan Mahmud's expedition to the Indian subcontinent. Since the Ghaznavids, who were of Turkic descent, spoke Persian, and their counterparts during the Ghurid period, the Tajiks, also spoke Persian, the Persian language paved its way into India and deeply penetrated its culture. It became the sole language of communication, understanding, education, and academia in India, and its poets, intellectuals, and statesmen wrote their works in the sweet Dari Persian language. This research, conducted using a descriptive-analytical method, seeks to elucidate the reasons for the expansion of the Dari Persian language in India. The findings suggest that after Mahmud Ghaznavi's arrival in India, this language found a special place in Indian literature, and this land became a major center for the dissemination of Dari Persian works. The study of Indian literature and philosophy captivated Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, who accompanied Sultan Mahmud to India, and he authored books such as "Ma'alim al-Hind" and "Kitab al-Qanun al-Tajrim." Sultan Mahmud made seventeen trips to India between 1014 and 1032 AD, and each time he was accompanied by numerous scholars, poets, and literati, such as Unsuri Balkhi and Farrokhi Sistani. As Sultan Mahmud had an affinity for the Dari Persian language, poets and literati of this language gathered at his court. From that time onwards, the Dari Persian language expanded in India, and literary and cultural centers were transferred from Khorasan to India. These centers played a significant role in disseminating Khorasani literature and culture, yielding valuable fruits. Lahore, Delhi, Bengal, Deccan, Multan, and Kashmir are among these centers.

Citation: Sate'e, Seyyed Jan; Safdari, Gholam Reza (2024). The Development and Status of the Persian-Dari Language in the Indian Subcontinent. *Modern Literary Studies*, 3(1) 173-191

Publisher: Association for the Promotion of Persian Language and Literature
© The Author (s).



DOI: [20.1001.1.28211413.1403.3.1.8.9](https://doi.org/10.28211413.1403.3.1.8.9)

Introduction

Dari Persian, a significant member of the Indo-Iranian and Indo-European language families, holds a profound historical legacy that extends far beyond its origins in the Khorasan region (modern-day Afghanistan and Iran). Over fifteen centuries of evolution, this language evolved into a sophisticated medium capable of articulating complex philosophical, literary, and administrative concepts. Consequently, it transcended its geographic origins to become the official and literary language of major empires in the East, particularly across the vast Indian subcontinent. This research explores the historical trajectory of Dari Persian in India, investigating the catalysts for its expansion, its role as a lingua franca of administration and education, and the intellectual centers that facilitated its deep cultural integration.

Method

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical methodology. By utilizing a library-based approach and drawing upon primary sources, historical records, and literary analyses, the researchers provide a comprehensive overview of the Persian language's status in India. The study systematically examines the timeline from the early Ghaznavid invasions (approx. 10th century) to the British colonial period, focusing on the specific contributions of monarchs, scholars, and poets who transformed the subcontinent into a repository of Khorasani culture and Persian intellectual output.

Results

The research highlights several key findings regarding the penetration and flourishing of Dari Persian in India:

١. **Ghaznavid Foundations:** The expansion began with the military campaigns of Sabuktigin and his son, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna. Their courts were centers of Persian literature, and their influx into India brought a wave of scholars and poets (e.g., Unsuri, Farrukhi Sistani) who established the foundations of Persian literary presence.
٢. **Centers of Literary Production:** The study identifies major urban centers—Lahore (often called “Little Ghazna”), Delhi, Bengal, the Deccan, Multan, and Kashmir—as critical hubs. These cities evolved into vibrant centers where Persian culture and language

were not only preserved but actively developed, bridging the gap between local Indian traditions and Persian intellectualism.

۳. **Intellectual and Administrative Dominance:** Beyond poetry, Persian became the indispensable language of administration, diplomacy, and higher education. It facilitated the synthesis of Indian and Persian thought, leading to the translation of major Sanskrit works (such as the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*) into Persian.
۴. **Lexicographical Milestones:** A significant portion of the results focuses on the robust tradition of Persian lexicography in India. The research notes that over 200 major dictionaries were compiled in the subcontinent, including foundational works like *Farhang-e Jahangiri*, *Burhan-e Qati*, and *Farhang-e Rashidi*. These works demonstrate the linguistic rigor and development of the language in the region.
۵. **Historical Shift:** The dominance of Persian as an official administrative language persisted for seven centuries, even serving as the medium of communication during the early stages of British colonial rule. The transition to English (formalized around 1836) and Urdu eventually marginalized Persian, though its structural and vocabulary influence remains embedded in South Asian languages and the history of the region.

Conclusion

The presence of Dari Persian in the Indian subcontinent represents one of the most successful cultural and linguistic transfers in history. For over 700 years, Persian served as the unifying intellectual medium of India, fostering a unique Indo-Persian culture. The legacy of this period is vast, consisting not only of literary masterpieces and administrative records but also a deep influence on the evolution of regional languages and lexicons. The study emphasizes that understanding the history and culture of the Indian subcontinent is incomplete without engagement with its extensive Persian-language archival and literary heritage. It concludes by urging contemporary scholars to continue the vital task of cataloging, translating, and researching these invaluable Indo-Persian manuscripts.