

# CONTRIBUTION OF KASHMIRI PANDITS TO PERSIAN LITERATURE

By: TASDIYA TU ZEHRA

(Research Scholar, Department of Persian, Maulana Azad National Urdu University,  
Srinagar).

RECOMMENDED BY: DR. JUNAID AHMED

**INTRODUCTION:** The contribution of Kashmiri Pandits to Persian literature is a remarkable chapter in the cultural and intellectual history of the Indian subcontinent. During the medieval and early modern periods, especially under the rule of the Mughals and Afghan dynasties, Persian was the court and literary language across much of North India, including Kashmir. Kashmiri Pandits, known for their scholarly inclinations and linguistic abilities, mastered Persian and produced a rich body of literary, historical, religious, and administrative works in the language. Their contributions include poetry, prose, translation, histories, and philosophical treatises, which play a crucial role in transmitting Indo Persian culture and thought. Esteemed figures such as Pandit Bhawani Das, Pandit Anand Ram Mushkils, and others left an indelible mark on Persian literature, showcasing the Syncretic intellectual tradition of Kashmir

**KEY WORDS:** Kashmiri Pandits, Persian literature in India, Indo-Persian tradition, Kashmir as “Little Iran”, Mughal and Afghan rule.

Kashmir is often referred to as “Little Iran” and boasts a rich tapestry of Persian influence that has profoundly shaped its cultural, literary, and religious landscape for centuries [1]. This deep connection traces back to the 14th century during the Sultanate period when Persian was established as the court and administrative language [2]. The introduction of Persian into Kashmir was significantly influenced by the arrival of Islamic missionaries, particularly the revered Sufi saint Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani, who arrived in Kashmir in the 14th century [3]. Accompanied by 700 disciples, Hamdani not only propagated Islam but also introduced Persian as a medium of instruction and communication, laying the foundation for Persian to permeate various aspects of Kashmiri society, including administration, education, and literature [3].

The contribution of Kashmiri Hindus, especially the Kashmiri Pandits, to the Persian language and literature is both significant and historically fascinating, particularly from the medieval period onward, when Persian became the court and literary language across much of North India, including Kashmir [4]. This article explores a range of contributors from the Kashmiri Pandit community and highlights their artistic contributions that enhanced Persian literature.

A recent example of this ongoing literary exchange is the Hindi poetry collection *Khoye Hue Prishth* by Dr. Satish Vimal, a renowned poet, critic, and broadcaster from Kashmir, which was translated into Persian under the title *Barg-haa-e-Gum-Shudeh* [5]. The translation was skillfully carried out by Dr. Mohammad Ibrahim Wani, a respected authority in Persian literature, and was launched in a distinguished ceremony at the Persian Cultural Centre within the Iranian Embassy in New Delhi [5].

Among the Kashmiri Pandits, Munshi Bhawanidas Kachru holds a distinguished place as one of the foremost Persian writers and poets [6]. His original and distinctive style in the *Bahri Taveel* form has earned him widespread recognition, particularly within the realm of international Persian literature. The term *Bahri Taveel* is derived from two Persian words: *Bahr*, meaning "verse," and

*Taveel*, meaning "long," referring to an expansive lyrical composition that can span thousands of verses [6].

چون موج، روانم به دریای عشق  
هر بیتم حدی نشت از راز عشق  
“*Like a wave, I wander in the sea of love,  
Each verse of mine whispers a secret from above.*”

Bhawanidas Kachru's mastery of this form has solidified his reputation as a literary innovator and contributed to the rich tapestry of Persian poetry [6]. Another notable contribution to Persian literature from the Kachru family comes from Dayaram Kachru (Khushdil), whose father, Birbal Kachru, was a distinguished civil servant and a writer in his own right. Birbal Kachru's *Majmu' al-Tawārikh* (Compendium of Chronicles), a monumental Persian historical work, stands as an invaluable contribution to historical literature [7]. The work is also renowned for its lavish illustrations, which enhance its literary and historical significance [7].

Another notable contribution came from Pandit Taba Ram Turki (1776–1847), known as Betab, a distinguished poet from Rainawari, Srinagar [8]. A prominent figure in literary circles of his time, Betab made significant contributions to Persian poetry, earning high esteem among poets and scholars across Central Asia [8]. One of the most memorable moments of Betab's poetic career occurred during a celebrated *mushaira*:

شکسته رنگی من با طیب در جنگ است  
علاج درد سرم حسن صندلی رنگ است

“*My shattered colors quarrel with the healer's hand,  
The cure for my aching head is beauty, sandalwood and grand.*”[8]

Betab responded:

سیاه بختم که از بخت خویش خرسندم  
که بخت منو زلف یار هم رنگ است

“*Though my fate is dark, I rejoice all the same,  
For my fortune and my lover's locks share the same name*”

This poetic duel became legendary in Kashmiri literary history. The brilliance of Betab's couplet earned him a reward of one hundred kharwars of paddy from Pandit Raja Kak Dhar, reflecting the cultural reverence for literary excellence [9].

Betab's poetry, often compared to the *Shahnama* of Firdausi, continues to be celebrated for its depth and grandeur [9]. In addition to his mastery of Persian, Betab was proficient in Arabic and was a contemporary of Mulla Mohammad Taufiq Kashmiri [10]. Betab frequently visited the court of Pandit Raja Kak Dhar, where literary exchange flourished. His *Diwan* was posthumously published in 1861, fourteen years after his passing [10].

Satram Baqaya, an 18th–19th century Kashmiri Pandit poet and scholar, also enriched Persian literature with works reflecting Kashmiri Shaivism and Persian mysticism [11]. His poetry reflects a synthesis of Persian forms with local spiritual traditions [11].

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Narayan Kaul Ajiz emerged as another important figure. His poetry collections—*Sangarmal*, *Kaleem-e-Ajiz*, *Nairang-e-Khayal*, and *Roodad-e-Kashmir*— are central to the study of Persian literature in Kashmir [12]. Ajiz, a historian and poet, was known for philosophical depth and lyrical beauty.

در آینه ی دل، نقش یار است پدید  
که بیعشق، جهان همچو خواب است و دید

***“In the mirror of the heart, the Beloved’s face appears,  
Without love, the world is but a fleeting dream of tears.”*** [12]

Allah Bakhsh Yusufi, a noted historian, authored *Mokhtasar-e-Tarikh-e-Kashmir* around 1710–1711, offering critical insights into Kashmir’s socio-political conditions [13]. His poetic work *Bagh-e-Suleiman* further exemplifies the integration of mystical philosophy into Persian narrative forms [13].

Pandit Shivji Dar authored *Tarikh-i-Kishtwar*, a Persian historical chronicle considered one of the oldest narratives about the Kishtwar region [14]. Persian was not only a literary medium but also an administrative language, and scholars like Shivji Dar were masters of it [14].

In the 17th century, Krishna Pandit, known by his pen name Bekhabar, contributed to the Sufi literary tradition with Persian poetry steeped in mysticism [15]. Through poets like Krishna Pandit, Betab, and Narayan Kaul Ajiz, Persian literary forms were harmoniously merged with Kashmir's indigenous traditions [15].

Figures like Chandar Bhan Brahman, a 17th-century Mughal court poet, further showcase the Pandit community’s reach in Persianate India [16]. His work *Chahar Chaman* blends autobiography, moral thought, and literary criticism while incorporating Sanskritic ideas into Persian prose and verse [16].

Diwan Kripa Ram (1838–1874), another prominent scholar, played a vital role in the 19th-century Kashmiri literary renaissance [17]. His works such as *Risalo* and *Kalam-e-Kriparam* are notable for their philosophical and mystical insight.

هر آنچه در دل است، نشان از او دارد  
جهان و جان، هر دو، زبان از او دارد

***“Whatever is in the heart bears His sign,  
Both world and soul speak only of the Divine.”*** [17]

These contributions illustrate the pivotal role of the Kashmiri Pandit community in preserving and enhancing Persian literary and intellectual traditions [18]. Their works serve as cultural bridges, weaving together spiritual, intellectual, and artistic expressions of South Asia and the Persianate world.

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