

Subject:- PERSIAN

B.A.(Hons) Part-III

Paper- VIII

History of Persian Literature

Topic- Samanid Period

Online Class Materials

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Samanid Period

سامانیان

The Samanid Period also known as the Samanian Empire, Samanid dynasty, Samanid Emirate, or simply Samanids was a Sunni Iranian empire from 819 to 999. The empire was centered in Khorasan and Transoxiana during its existence; at its greatest extent, the empire encompassed all of today's Afghanistan, large parts of Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and parts of Kazakhstan and Pakistan.

The Samanid state was founded by four brothers; Nuh, Ahmad, Yahya, and Ilyas—each of them ruled their own territory under Abbasid suzerainty. In 892, Ismail Samani (892–907) united the Samanid state under one ruler, thus effectively putting an end to the feudal system used by the Samanids. It was also under him that the Samanids became independent of Abbasid authority.

Though Persian poetry, which had adopted the Arabic system of prosody, had sporadically began to flourish with the rise of the Tahirids and the Samanids that it reached its considerable extent. Shibli Namani says that the former were mostly of Arab origin while the Samanids were purely Iranian. They played dynamic role in preserving and promoting their national literature by patronizing liberally the literary luminaries of the period. The Samanid kings like Nasr bin Ahamad, Mansoor Bin Nuh, Nuh Bin Mansoorr, and their ministers like Abul Fazl Balami and Abu Ali Balami were great patronage of Persian poets and scholars did noble service to the cause of Persian literature in Iran. During this period, the Iranian scholars wrote prose in Arabic and verse in both Arabic and Persian.

The Samanid Empire is part of the Iranian Intermezzo, which saw the creation of a Persianate culture and identity that brought Iranian speech and traditions into the fold of the Islamic world. This would later lead to the formation of the Turko-Persian culture.

The Samanids promoted the arts, giving rise to the advancement of science and literature, and thus attracted scholars such as Rudaki, Ferdowsi, and Avicenna. While under Samanid control, Bukhara was a rival to Baghdad in its glory. Scholars note that the Samanids revived Persian language and culture more than the Buyids and the Saffarids, while continuing to patronize Arabic for sciences as well as the religious studies. They considered themselves to be

descendants of the Sasanian Empire. In a famous edict, Samanid authorities declared that "here, in this region, the language is Persian, and the kings of this realm are Persian kings."

The most important contribution of the Sāmānid age to Islamic art is the pottery produced at Nīshāpūr and Samarkand. The Sāmānids developed a technique known as slip painting: mixing semi fluid clay (slip) with their colours to prevent the designs from running when fired with the thin fluid glazes used at that time. Bowls and simple plates were the most common forms made by Sāmānid potters. The potters employed stylized Sāsānian motifs such as horsemen, birds, lions, and bulls' heads, as well as Arabic calligraphic design. Polychrome pieces usually had a buff or red body with designs of several colours, bright yellows, greens, black, purples, and reds being the most common. Many pottery pieces were produced at Nīshāpūr, however, with only a single line on a white background. The art of bronze casting and other forms of metalwork also flourished at Nishāpūr throughout the Sāmānid period.

Abu Shakur Balkhi who lived in the earlier part of the Samanid is said to have been the first to compose Masnavi of which a great us was made in the later centuries for mystical verses. Fragments of his compositions showing refreshing and simple style are to be found in biographical works of the verse ascribed to him. Only 192 verse have remained of his whole output.

There is a Masnavi entitled "Afarin Nameh" composed in 994 A.D. that has been attributed to Abu Shakur Balkhi, but only few verse are extant.

Another well known poet of the period was Abul Moid Balkhi. He is one of those poets who were associated with the writings of the Shah Nama before Firdausi. He also versified the story of Yusuf and Zulekha in Persian before Firdausi.

With a few exceptions, the Persian poems of the early 9th century A.D. lack in literary merit in comparison with the poetry of the later ages. Their significance lies in their antiquity. The longest poem belonging to this period is the Danesh-Nama of a certain physician called Maysari. The best author of the late 9th century was Abul Hasan Shahid Balkhi, who is considered as a great poet and philosopher. He was a learned man and composed verses in all branches of poetry. He knew Arabic well, and one of his Arabic verses has been mentioned in the "Lubabul Albab". His poetic excellence has been recognised by the famous poets of the later period.