

## **The 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Century Turkmen Literature** **An Overview of Prominent Mathnawi Poets**

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Human civilization across the globe has been all along in its long drawn-out march characterized by diverse mystical, theological, ethical, socio-political and literary outlooks. Possibly the most attractive and arresting feature or phenomenon of human civilization has been diversity of cultural and literary traditions across the spectrum. The emergence and development of world languages and literatures is a process very similar to an evolutionary process and is true of Turkmen language as well. Reconstructing the history of the Turkmen literature is extremely difficult for, they did not possess their own educational or literary institutions that could ensure the preservice of their literary heritage but instead lived at various times under the political and linguistic influence of Khivans, Bukharans, and Persians, none of whom made significant efforts to preserve the works of Turkmen writers.

The family of the genetically-related Turkic languages is represented today by about 120 million speakers and 21 literary idioms. The first written evidence (8<sup>th</sup> century) belongs to a people which emerged in the 6<sup>th</sup> century under the name Turk, which due to certain historical circumstances, has become the name of the entire family. The hypothesis that these peoples and languages originate from areas close to Inner Asia is strongly supported by strong linguistic evidences.<sup>1</sup>

The diffusion of Turkic peoples, their expansions and internal movements, was a long-lasting and gradual process combining frequent confrontations with the settled civilizations. This process had profound consequences with respect to the formation of these languages. On the one hand,

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it led to the change (enlargement or diminution) of the linguistic territory while, on the other hand, it caused important population redistributions in certain areas. This process, manifested in varying extents, steadily influenced the evolution of individual idioms, their dialectical divisions and their contacts with other languages.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of Turkic written and literary languages is related to different geo-cultural areas and ages which, from the chronological perspective, clearly reflect a process of the historical diffusion of Turkic peoples from Inner Asia towards the West.

The emergence and development of Turkic literary languages was closely related to the religion accepted and professed by the given community. The historic and cultural background widely influenced the formation of language. The acceptance of a particular religion also led to the acceptance of loanwords, while offering new options for their writing systems.<sup>3</sup>

Contact of Turkic languages with other idioms is reflected in various evidences of linguistic interaction. The borrowings in their vocabulary clearly illustrate the extensive contact of Turkic peoples with other Eurasian civilizations and languages. At the same time, we find traces of Turkic loans in other Eurasian languages. The original word-stock of Turkic languages clearly displays influences from Paleoasiatic, Mongol, Uralic, Semitic and Dravidian languages. The diffusion of Turkic peoples in the south and west, and the creation of their successive literary languages through a process of cultural interaction, left their vocabularies exposed to foreign borrowings. The literary idioms of the east display clear Chinese, Iranian, Tokharian, Syriac, Sanskrit, Tibetan and later, Mongol influences, together with a constant alteration of their character and intensity, while as those of the west experienced Arabic and Persian influences.<sup>4</sup> Thus the Turkmen language continued to emerge as a dynamic and vibrant entity of that

vast linguistic family that lives with its speakers and writers in the region that possesses a rich linguistic heritage and incredible cultural legacy.

The literature of Turkmen language represents one of the high water marks of their cultural and civilizational history. The literary activities that point towards this progress were seen in towns, in the founding of remarkable schools, *maktabas* and *khankahas* across Central Asia; in the transference of the administrative machine from the hands of the old aristocratic families to those of a new middle class intelligentsia. The older forms of Turkmen poetry that had developed as a result of cultural assimilation in the Muslim era started receding with the passage of time and the genre developed in an entirely new direction and adopted a changed discourse which, though thematically Islamic, essentially represented Turkmen lore and local cultural ethos.

The literally legacy of Turkmen language is highly colourful and complex in nature. Their literature in general and the genre of *Mathnawi* and *Dastan* in particular embodies the essence of the Turkmen poetic discourse during the 17th and 18th centuries displaying its fullest range in the intimacy, intensity and precision. It represents many aspects of social change, behaviour patterns, hopes, repressed wishes, creative thoughts, unconscious yearnings and collective dreams. It analyses the social drama in the geographical frame and with reference to its beauty, diversity and complexity of interpretation, this literature has received the attention of various scholars of different fields of learning.<sup>5</sup>

This genre depicts many social institutions like family, women and brings out contrasts in their behaviour. It is full of the reflections about diverse social conflicts, cultural contradictions, economic compulsions as well as linguistic beauties. The poetry is especially rich in depicting emotions, dreams, miseries and a host of other issues of the social ethos.

The first texts which the Turkmen claim as part of their

tradition are written in Caghatay and date back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In 1464 Wafai (Wepai) from the Yomud tribe put his poems together in the book, *Rawnaq al-Islam*. Yet the literary tradition was not extensive and lacked continuity until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Most poets of that time had enjoyed a *madrassa* education (at Khiva and, more rarely, Bukhara), but they were also familiar with popular poetry, so that they were in command of both the 'arud and the syllabic verse and created poetry in both manners. Many used to recite their poems singing to the *dutar*. Their works were partly handed down orally and partly in manuscript form. Up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, bibliographical data for the authors can only be taken as approximate.

Caghatay poets living in Hirat Lutfi; Yusuf Amiri (first half of 15<sup>th</sup> century), known as the author of the *Mathnawi Dahnama* (1429-30), a *diwan*, and the *munazara Bang u caghir*; and Yaqini (first half 15<sup>th</sup> century), who wrote the *munazara ok yaynin munazarasi* pointed to new ways of poetic discourse. The mathnawi and panygeric ode reached its greatest heights in the works of Lutfi and Yaqini. Husayn Bayqara, ruler of Hirat, contributed to the flourishing of literature, and he even wrote a *diwan* himself under the *takhalus* Husayni. The author of *ghazals* and *qasidas*, Saqaqi (d. around 1449), lived in Samarqand, since he wrote a *qasida* for Amir Arslan Khwadja Tarkhan, military commander and governor of Ulugh Beg in Sawran. The latter had a great reputation as a friend of poetry. He had the *Atabat al-Haqa'iq* copied, writing some verses himself to complement it. Atai was also one of the Samarkand *ghazal* poets, though he came from Balkh and died in his hometown in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Timurid Sayyid Ahmad, author of the *Mathnawi Taashuq-Nama* (1435-6) lived as a governor in Khurasan. Khudjandi, who around 1400 wrote the *Mathnawi Latafat-Nama*, is likely to have written his works in Khwarazm. Another poet Gadai (1405-92) is considered one of the pioneering lyricists of Turkmen literature.<sup>6</sup> Yet another legendary figure of Turkmen literature was Sayyid Qasimi of

whom four *mathnawis* were found in the library of Rampur in the 1970s: *Madjma al-Akhbar* dedicated to Timur's grandson Abu Saeed, *Gulshan-i-Raz*, *Haqiqat Nama* and *Ilahi Nama*.<sup>7</sup>

Another Uzbek poet Hamidi or Durbek, the author of the *Mathnawi Yusuf u Zalikha*, composed in 1469-70. Hence in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Caghatay literature was not only flourishing in Herat and Samarqand, widely known as cultural centres of the Timurid era, but also in the southwest and in the northern regions of Central Asia. Well-known genres were *ghazal*, *qasida*, *rubai*, *tuyugh*, *muamma* and *mathnawi*, as well as *munazara*, the latter in verse or in prose interspersed with verses.<sup>8</sup>

Among the poets of the 16<sup>th</sup> century are the two founders of states, Babur and Shaybani Khan. Only one manuscript each exists of Shaybani Khan's *diwan*, *Bahr al-Huda* and of his *Risala*, whereas Babur's *ghazals*, *rubais* and *tuyughs* were widely spread, and his memoirs, *Wakai* (the *Baburnama*), were translated into Persian more than once, encouraged by his successors who were anxious to preserve them.<sup>9</sup>

To the same period belonged the Khan of Bukhara Ubayd Allah, whose pen-names were Ubaydi and Kul Ubaydi (d. 1539). The collection of his selected poems *Wafa kilsan* was published at Tashkent in 1994. Many of his poetic collections, which the Persian *tadhkira* author Hasan Nithari makes mention of, seem to be lost. Some *mathnawis* of the 16<sup>th</sup> century have enjoyed great popularity almost continuously, e.g. *Majlisi Kissa-yi Sayf al-Muluk*, the material of which was taken from the tales of *Thousand and One Nights (Alaf Laila)*. Since 1807 it has been printed several times in Kazan. Of the *mathnawis* by Padshah Khwaja (1480-1565) the father of Nithari, the *Maqsad al-awtar* has been published at Tashkent in 1982. He produced a prose work entitled *Gulzar*, following the example of Sadi's *Gulistan*. Another *Mathnawi Tahir- u Zuhra* by Sayyadi, in which the *Mathnawi* verses alternate with four-line strophes, was probably composed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup>

A quite different aim was followed by Sufi Allah (ca. 1616-ca 1706) from Yangi Kurghan, who intended to pass on the fundamental values of Islam by narrating vivid *Mathnawis* to the less educated people. Both his *Siraj al-ajizin* and his *Thabat al-Adjizin* were very popular. Also the works of Saykat from Hisar have been widely read since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Other prominent Turkmen *Mathnawis* include the *Mathnawi Amir-i-Akhtam*, the *Mathnawi Bahram-u Gulandam* (ed. Tashkent 1960), and *Wafat Nama-i Payghambar*, which is a translation of Husayn Waiz Kashifi's *Rawdat al-Shuhada* and which is often cited under the titles *Diwan-i-Saykali* or *Kitab-i-Saykali*. Khwaja Nazar from Osh, with the *takhallus* Huwayda, (d.1780-1) lived near Marghalan (Cimyan). The poems of his *diwan* and his *Mathnawi Rahat-i-Dil* (new ed. Tashkent 1994) also found him many readers. None of these religious poets sank into oblivion. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when poets like Mashrab, whose poems allowed a secular interpretation, was inaugurated into the official canon of Turkmen literature, the poetry of his contemporaries was also transmitted because their texts provided a reservoir of material for arranging funeral rites, which play a great role in Turkmen life.<sup>11</sup>

Another secular poet Turdi, lived until 1699 or 1700, at first near Bukhara, later in Khujand. In critical poems and in a syntax close to the language of the people, he expressed his disillusionment over all the struggles for the throne of Bukhara and the battles devastating the country among the Beks, in which he was involved himself.<sup>12</sup>

The critical line in poetry that began with Turdi was continued by the bilingual poets Makhmur (d. 1844), Gulkhani (b. 1770), Muqimi (1850-1903) and Dhawqi (1853-1921) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Khokanad Khanate showing its continuity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Makhmur wrote narrative poems in the *mukhammas* and *tarji-band* forms, often interspersed with dialogues and occasionally close to the language of the people. In these he gave satirical portraits of his contemporaries. He

liked alternating between Caghatay and Persian within one poem.

The didactic poems by Azadi, whose real name was Dawlat Muhammad (Devletmammet), were compiled in the volume *Waz-i-Azad* (ed. Ashkhabad 1962) and more recently, *Saylanan eserler*, (Ashkhabad 1982). His son Makhdumkuli, pseudonym Firaqi (Piragi, 1733-82), whom the Turkmen see as one of the founders of their literature, wrote eschatological and socio-critical poems as well as love poems. Makhdumkuli's disciple Sayyidi (Seydi 1775-1836) and his nephew Dhalili, followed the kind of poetry of their teacher. In 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries some of the singers of the epic poems (*dastan*), which until then were considered as anonymous, made themselves known as authors. The most famous among them are Abdullah Shahbende (1720-1800) who wrote the *dastan Shah Bahram* (ed. Ashkhabad 1940, 1948) and *Sayyaad wa Hamrah*; Qurban Ali Marufi (Magrupi 1735-95) wrote *Yusuf wa Ahmad* (ed. Ashkhabad 1943, 1995), *Sayf al-Muluk wa Madh al-Jamal* (ed. Ashkhabad 1943, 1979) and other epic poems. Another *dastan* writer Shayda (1730-1800) compiled *Gul u Sanawbar* (ed. 1943, 1978) while the famous Molla Nafas (Nepes 1810-62) wrote *Zuhra wa Tahir* (ed. Ashkhabad 1963). Strong satirical elements are contained in the poems of Mahmud Wali (1770-1840) popularly known as Kemine, who, in the course of time, became surrounded with anecdotes comparable to those about Khwaja Nasr al-Din. His style was followed by Kormolla (1872-1934) and Mollamurd (1879-1930).

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