



Cultural and linguistic links between Bharat and central Asia

Shahbaz Amil

Assistant Professor, Department of Language Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

Abstract

This paper highlighted the cultural and linguistic links between Bharat and Central Asian Countries since the ancient times. This is attested in Puranas and by also the fact that Taxila, the most advanced Centre of Higher Education and Learning, was situated at the Silk Route that connected India to the Central Asian countries. Because of this regular trade contact and that of Muslim Invasion of India, culture and languages of both regions got influenced mutually, which is a universal sociolinguistic reality. Many times, it happened that an element enters the domain of another language and comes back in the source language with minor modification, like the word for the gate in the Central Asian region is *darwaja* (that came from Persian *dar*) is also used in many of modern Indian languages, which has originated from Sanskrit *duar*. There are hundreds of terminologies used in Indian languages which are commonly used in most of modern Central Asian languages, likes of *payjama*, *rumal*, *shal*, *dushala*, *pulao*, *achar* etc. However, such influences are only at lexical level; there is zero influence on morphological and syntactic level. There are many words which have their equivalent in Sanskrit; they are now rarely used in modern Indian languages. Here I would like to acknowledge support of ICSSR for contribution of this article.

Keywords: Ancient links, silk route, linguistic link and common words of Indian and Central Asian Languages

Introduction

India, also referred to as Bharat, and Central Asia, which includes nations like Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, are areas rich in cultural legacy and history. Central Asia is a large region that is bounded to the west by the Caspian Sea, to the east by China, to the south by Afghanistan, and to the north by Russia. For many centuries, this area has been a crossroads for different civilizations, allowing people, ideas, and things to travel across continents. In contrast, Bharat is a subcontinent in South Asia that is bordered to the north by the Himalayas, to the south by the Indian Ocean, to the west by the Arabian Sea, and to the east by the Bay of Bengal. It has always been an important hub for trade, culture, and political power due to its advantageous position and varied terrain.

The historical ties between Bharat and Central Asia were shaped by a number of empires and dynasties. For example, Ashoka the Great Mauryan Emperor (c. 322–185 BCE) spread Buddhism throughout Central Asia, influencing the region's religious and cultural landscape for a long time. Parts of northern India and Central Asia were ruled by the Kushan Empire (c. 30–375 CE), particularly Kanishka the Great, encouraged cultural connections between Central Asia and Bharat and supported Buddhism. During this time, a remarkable example of the blending of Indian, Persian, and Greco-Roman artistic forms is the art of Gandhara. The ties between Bharat and Central Asia were further reinforced by the Aryan migration that occurred circa 1500 BCE. The language, culture, and social institutions of the Aryans, who are thought to have come from Central Asia, were brought to the Indian subcontinent during their migration. The early Vedic civilization in India was greatly influenced by this migration. Under Darius the Great leadership, the Achaemenid Empire expanded its sphere of influence into the northwest of the Indian subcontinent in the sixth century BCE, especially over what is now Pakistan. Increased economic and cultural exchanges

between Bharat and Central Asia were made possible by the Achaemenid Empire's growth. An important turning point in the relations between Bharat and Central Asia occurred with the construction of the Silk Road under the Han Dynasty in China (around the second century BCE). Through its passage through Central Asia and its connection to the Indian subcontinent, this extensive network of trade routes linked East and West. The Silk Road promoted the trade of concepts, technologies, and religious beliefs in addition to commodities like silk, precious stones, textiles, and spices. Indian faiths and philosophies spread throughout Central Asia, new cultural components were brought to the Indian subcontinent by Central Asian tribes like the Huns and later the Mongols. Another notable example is the Mughal Empire (1526–1857 CE), which was established by Babur, a Timur descendent from Central Asia. Indian customs were combined with Persian art, architecture, and administrative techniques by the Mughals to create a distinctive cultural environment. During this time, Central Asian and Indian influences led to the blossoming of literature, music, and the arts. While to fully appreciate the breadth and complexity of the cultural and linguistic links between Bharat and Central Asia, one must have a solid understanding of their historical and geographical backgrounds. Despite being very different from one another, these areas have a shared history of interaction that has shaped their current relationships and their individual histories. The historical dissemination of religions, ideologies, and knowledge has been greatly aided by the cultural and linguistic ties that bind Bharat and Central Asia. Bharat gave rise to Buddhism, which quickly expanded throughout Central Asia, transforming the region's spiritual and cultural landscape. This religious and cultural interchange is attested throughout Central Asia by the monasteries, stupas, and other Buddhist constructions. In a same vein, Hinduism and its related customs also made their way to Central Asia, where they added to a rich mosaic of common religious heritage. These interactions were facilitated by the Silk Road, which linked Bharat and

Central Asia. Scholars, priests, and traders were able to travel more easily and bring ideas and knowledge in addition to things. science, medicine, literature, and the arts all advanced as a result of this interchange that benefited both areas.

Significant reciprocal impacts have resulted in language between Bharat and Central Asia. Numerous languages in Central Asia bear the permanent influence of Sanskrit, the classical language of India. Since numerous Buddhist works were translated into Central Asian languages, the growth of Buddhism was crucial to this linguistic interchange. Buddhist monasteries and cultural hubs were founded in Central Asia as a result of missionaries and monks bringing the Buddhist teachings along the Silk Road. Among the most notable instances are the historic cities of Gandhara and Bactria, which developed into important hubs for Buddhist scholarship and art. The archaeological remnants of stupas, monasteries, and Buddhist artwork clearly demonstrate the impact of Indian Buddhism on Central Asia.

This promoted the dissemination of Buddhist teachings and aided in the creation of regional scripts and languages. The Indian subcontinent's languages were greatly impacted by Persian, which emerged as the common tongue of Central Asia, particularly during the Mughal era. Indian languages like Urdu, Hindi, and Punjabi were enhanced by Persian literature and language, resulting in a rich literary and cultural legacy that endures to this day.

The interactions between Bharat and Central Asia are the visit of intellectuals and Sufis from the region. Several well-known Indian literary masterpieces, such as *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesh*, made their way to Central Asia and profoundly influenced the poetry and writing of a number of authors. The inhabitants of India were familiar with the writings of the famous central Asian scientist Ibn Sina as well as works of Al Beruni, Rudki, and Navai. At the same time Indian scholars such as; Amir Khusrau, Zebun Nish and Mirza Abdul Qadir Bedil are very famous in Central Asian Countries. They were also aware of the works of Indian scholars such as Aryabhata, who wrote on mathematics and astronomy, and Charak and Sushrut. Al Beruni travelled to India, studied Sanskrit, penned *Tahqueeq-ul-Hind*, and provided encyclopaedic knowledge on the country. During Iltutmish, Badar Chachi, a scholar from Tashkent, travelled to India and provided a detailed account of the country. The renowned Indian poet, writer, historian, and linguist Amir Khusrau is also from Central Asia. *Tuzuk-e-Baburi*, written by Babur in Chaghatai Turkish, is a three-part work that discusses Hindustan in its third section. The Indian Persian poet Bedil Azimabadi, who was buried in Delhi after being born in Bihar, is well-known throughout Central Asia. In *Sanskriti ke Char Adhyay*, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar writes cogently about the social, cultural, and linguistic effects of Islam on the Indian subcontinent. Central Asia was visited by several Indian explorers, including M.N. Roy, Raja Mahendrapartap, and Rahul Sanskrityan (*Madhya Asia ka Itihas* in two Volumes), who wrote about the region's culture. Persian works that describe India and Central Asia include *Tarikh-e-Munaji -e-Bukhara*, *Tarikh-e-Rashidi*, and *Ain-e-Akbari* etc.

Bharat and Central Asia were able to interchange ideas and religious practices thanks to the Silk Road. One of the biggest effects was the introduction of Buddhism to Central Asia from India. Along the Silk Road, Buddhist monks

established monasteries and disseminated teachings. Ancient Buddhist sites in Central Asia, such as Bamiyan in Afghanistan, Mogao Caves in China, Khotan, Samarqand and Bactria clearly show the influence of Indian Buddhism. These locations functioned as hubs for learning and cross-cultural interaction in addition to being places of worship. Additionally, Indian epics, literature, and art work made their way through Central Asia via the Silk Road, impacting local civilizations.

The Silk Road promoted interactions that resulted in important language exchanges. Central Asian language development was impacted by Sanskrit, the classical language of India. Buddhist writings, which were first written in Pali and Sanskrit, were translated into Central Asian languages to aid in the dissemination of Buddhist ideas. Working together in monasteries, Indian and Central Asian scholars translated these books on a frequent basis. Originating in Kucha, Central Asia, the renowned Buddhist scholar Kumarajiva (344–413 CE) was instrumental in translating Buddhist writings from Sanskrit into Chinese, which helped disseminate Buddhist doctrine throughout Asia. In Central Asia, Buddhism was more widely practiced, although Hinduism also had an impact. Hindu philosophical concepts and practices were transmitted between Bharat and Central Asia as part of the cultural and religious contacts. Little Hindu communities were founded in Central Asian cities as a result of the religious practices and beliefs that Hindu travellers and merchants brought with them on the Silk Road.

On the other hand, Persian, which developed into the common tongue of Central Asia, had a profound influence on Indian languages, particularly in the Middle Ages when Persian served as the Mughal Empire's court tongue.

The profound relationships and reciprocal influences that have moulded the societies in both areas are reflected in these aspects of common culture. Spring arrives with Navruz, the Persian New Year, one of the most important common celebrations. Navruz is observed throughout Central Asia, and it has inspired comparable festivities in several areas of India, especially those with Persian and Central Asian cultural roots. Similar harvest festivities in Central Asia and India, such as Baisakhi, are agricultural festivals that signify common agricultural traditions. The harvest of the rabi crops and the Punjabi New Year are commemorated on Baisakhi, which is observed in the northern Indian state of Punjab. It includes group festivities that highlight the agrarian lifestyle and traditional dances like the Bhangra and Gidda.

The cultural exchange of food customs is another important facet of the contacts between Bharat and Central Asia. With its origins in Central Asia, the Mughal Empire left behind a rich gastronomic legacy that had a significant impact on Indian cuisine. Central Asian culinary traditions are the source of many modern Indian cuisine mainstays like *biryani*, *kebabs*, and *naan*. In a similar vein, Indian cooking methods and spices have impacted Central Asian food. The common culinary legacy is seen in the use of spices like cumin, coriander, and turmeric, as well as in the cooking techniques like grilling and baking in *tandoors*. The Indian meal pulao is a counterpart to the well-known Central Asian dish *plov (pilaf)*, illustrating the culinary interchange between these regions.

Central Asian religious and philosophical works were largely transmitted through Sanskrit, the ancient language of

Bharat. Sanskrit was a classical language that was used to write Buddhist and Hindu scriptures, including the Tripitika and Mahayana sutras, as well as epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata and Vedas. Sanskrit was learned and translated into regional languages in Central Asia, which helped Indian literary and philosophical traditions proliferate. Archaeological sites in Central Asia have been found to contain Sanskrit inscriptions, which provide witness to the presence of Indian intellectuals, traders, and monks who spread their religious and cultural traditions throughout the area.

Gandhara, a historical territory encompassing parts of modern-day Afghanistan and Pakistan, was home to the Gandhari language, a Prakrit language closely linked to Sanskrit. In the northwest of Bharat, the Kharosthi script—which was adapted from Aramaic scripts—was primarily used to write Gandhari and other Prakrit languages. The finding of Kharosthi inscriptions in locations such as Taxila (in modern-day Pakistan) and the Afghan borderlands underscores the historical cultural and linguistic interactions between these areas. Pali, an additional historic Indian language, functioned as the official language of Theravada Buddhism and facilitated the dissemination of Buddhist doctrine throughout Central Asia and other regions. The Buddhist canon known as the Tripitika, which was written in Pali, was translated into a number of Central Asian languages, such as Gandhari and Sogdian, which helped Buddhism travel along the Silk Road.

During the Middle Ages, Sogdian became a widely used language for trade and cross-cultural communication in Central Asia. Sogdian traders were instrumental in promoting trade between Bharat and the Mediterranean region, recording deals and corresponding over great distances with the use of their language and scripts. Aramaic script was modified to become Sogdian script, which was then used to write other Central Asian languages like Bactrian and Khotanese. Writing systems for the Prakrit languages and Sanskrit were written in Brahmi, one of the first known scripts in Bharat. The expansion of Brahmi script outside of Bharat made it easier for Indian cultural and religious concepts to reach Central Asia and other nearby areas. The writing system was further standardized and the development of scripts in Central Asia was inspired by the Gupta script, which was descended from Brahmi.

Due to these stronger ties, languages are inevitably influenced, and as a result, the languages of the two regions became so influenced that many words used on a daily basis now cannot be said to be native to either region. Regular and intimate interaction between two groups of individuals who have different languages, tastes, ethnicities, cultures, etc. is what leads to this phenomenon. The sibling language of Sanskrit, Persian, had a significant influence on the development of modern languages in the Central Asian regions, which derived from Turkish. Following the Arabic invasion of Persia, the Persian people fled eastward to India and northward to Turkistan, where their highly developed cultures greatly affected the inhabitants. Influence of Sanskrit on Persian, which in turn influenced Central Asian languages, which in turn influenced Modern Indian Languages throughout the medieval era, could be one of the causes. The languages of Central Asia and India have a significant influence on one another. Indian and Central Asian contact led to the creation and evolution of Urdu and Turkic lexemes in Hindi. Sanskrit has also had a significant

influence on Central Asian languages. Sanskrit was closely related to the Shaka and Slav languages spoken in Central Asia. Turkic languages have a very old relationship with Aryan languages.

When linguistic affinities between these two regions are concerned there have been various waves going through Persia, North-West India, China and Tibet. Persia (Iran) and Bharat have neighbours since ancient times and Sanskrit and Old Persian have been sister languages. When Islam entered Central Asia, it was Persian and not Arabian culture which dominated the central Asian culture largely. Another wave of contact between these two regions were through the famous Silk route, which was not only a trade route but also a route of cultural interaction. Indian traders had their colonies in Khotan, Bukhara, Fargana and Eastern Turkmenistan. Given below are shortlisted terminologies of different parts of speech.

Payjama, Rumal, Shaal, Doshalaa, Pulav, Achar, Bazuband, Zanzir, Paazeb, Huqqa, Chilam, Mashaal, Banduq, Takhta, Munaqa, Bedana, Anar, Khumani, Injir, Seb, Jalebi, Samsa Murabba, Gulab, Tashtari, Sisa, Dalaal, Vakil, Saraf, Chadar, Bimar, Tabiyet, Dawat, Aynak, Sanduq, Kursi, Lagham, Jin, Raqab, Parada, Dalan, Rasad, Karigar, Chehra, Mazdur, Siyahi, Siyah, Safeed, Qalam, Taza etc. These nominal and adjectival words are commonly used in major Modern Indian languages particularly of Indo-Aryan stocks. If these words are removed languages will lose their natural beauty.

Generally, nominal and adjectival words are easily borrowed when two cultural groups contact each other. This is not the case with Adverbials; they enter the target languages when there is a regular contact. This is not the case with European languages (Portuguese, English and French) influencing Indian languages. Followings are some adverbials which are commonly used in Modern Indo-Aryan languages: *Jald, Bilkul, Yani, Beshak, Albatta, Zarur, Hargiz, Qareeb, Vagherah, Fauran, Maslan, Takhminan, Shayed, Khair, Vaqayi, Razi, Laiyeq, Babat, Khatir, Vaste Taraf, Baad, Shiva, Shivay, Magar, Alavah, Lekin, Yaa, Bavajood, Basarte, Agar, Balki, Taaki, Goyaki.* Followings are Indian Words commonly used in Central Asian languages: *Tilak, Duar, Dewar, Kar, Kaal, Savgaat, Kim, Katti, Kara, Baba, Buvi, Vihar, Kanishk, Sak, Meru (Merv), Khadan, Khan, Tir Kaman, Sauda, Dhol, Nagara, Mohalla, Kucha, Shah, Darakht, Xola, Charkaha, Saudagar, Nahar, Asthan, Zardalu, Mehmon, Piyala, Bahor, Dehat, Tanbul, Pargana, Zila, Daru, Darban, Pairokar, Surag, Dava, Avara, Gavah, Rishvat, Ahata, Sarkar, Kagaz, Jurab, Degchi, Bavarchi, Tandur, Shorba, Tahri, Murraba, Kulcaha, Maida, Suji, Namak, Piyaz, Kaddu, Tarbuz, Allav, Samosa, Sabun.* These words are both Sanskrit origin as well as native Indian words.

Besides, all languages of the Indian Sub-continent, except Kashmiri and Khasi are syntactically use Subject-Object-Verb word order which is also there in all languages used in the Central Asian languages. Urdu, Dakhini and Gojari have developed as independent languages under the influence of Central Asian languages particularly after Mughal period.

Conclusion

Both Bharat and Central Asian languages diversity promoted multilingualism and cultural fusion. Religious tourists, merchants, and diplomats from both areas frequently interacted in many languages, using interpreters

and translators to get around language obstacles. The flow of ideas, information, and cultural practices that enhanced the civilizations of Bharat and Central Asia was facilitated by this linguistic mobility. These exchanges have had a lasting impact on both countries, from the advent of Buddhism and Hinduism that impacted spiritual landscapes to the ancient trading networks like the Silk Road that facilitated cultural exchange. These days, the breadth of history is reflected in the variety of cultural expressions, language borrowings, and common customs that highlight a profound interdependence. Cultural linkages between Bharat and Central Asia provide a basis for global cultural discussion, geopolitical diplomacy, and economic collaboration as they negotiate modern opportunities and challenges. Both regions embrace their common history narratives and work together to ensure that their lasting legacy of cultural synthesis and mutual enrichment thrives in the current global interconnectedness and mutual respect environment.

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