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Shā'ir aur Barsāt

Nazīr Aḥmad Dahqānī

Introduced & translated by

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Abstract. Dakhni Urdu is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in the Deccan region of India, especially in the states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala. This variety of Urdu, which developed in the Deccan from the 14th century, is the result of the language contact between Urdu and Dravidian languages spoken in South India. It flourished as a literary vehicle during the 14th and 15th century and, following the conquest of Deccan by Mughals in 1687, it saw a rapid decline that constrained it to the oral form. Nazīr Aḥmad Dahqānī (1908-1949) is one of the most prominent writers in modern Dakhni. Despite being considered the “father” of an entire generation of poets who wrote during the 20th century, his works have been highly neglected by scholars. The translation of the poem titled *Shā'ir aur barsāt* (“The poet and the rain”) offers a glimpse of Dahqānī’s style and themes.

Keywords. Deccan, Dakhni, Urdu poetry, Indian literature

The study of the Dakhni (Dakanī) language has garnered significant interest from scholars over time. Defined by linguists as one of the earliest instances of interaction between Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages in Asia (Pray 90; Harbir and Subbarao 18), it has also captured the attention of historians for its profound impact on the literary landscape of North India. Indeed, Bailey (14) and Sayed (7) have traced the origins of literary Urdu to the Deccan, arguing that until the mid-18th century, Urdu poetry and prose were largely confined to this region. Eaton further explored the religious contributions of Sufis in the Deccan, showcasing their role in promoting Dakhni and vernacular idioms in southern India. Despite its potential to uncover important questions, academic attention towards Dakhni language and literature has been notably lacking for years. However, recent studies

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indicate a promising resurgence of interest in the Deccan region as a rich field of research. This newfound focus holds the potential to shed light on a multitude of significant aspects, enriching our understanding of linguistic and cultural dynamics in the area.

The origins of the Dakhni language can be traced to the 14th century, after Muḥammad ibn Tughlaq (1290-1351) shifted the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad (present-day Aurangabad), in Maharashtra, in 1327. Following this decision, soldiers, government officials, businessmen, and Sufis migrated from Delhi to the Deccan, bringing with them their language, which entered in contact with local customs and practices. According to scholars, this event marked the birth of the Dakhni culture, understood as the intermingle of north and south Indian traditions and societies. During the 14th and 16th century, this language flourished as a literary medium, particularly within the courts of independent kingdoms governed by the Bahmanis, Ādil and Qutb Shāhī dynasties, situated in Bijapur and Golconda. In this period, Dakhni prospered as a literary vehicle together with Persian, which had the status of official language. However, with the arrival of the Mughals to the Deccan and Aurangzeb's conquest of Bijapur and Golconda in 1687, Persian ascended to prominence as the court language, relegating Dakhni primarily to spoken discourse. Historically, Walī Aurangābādī (1668-1707/8) and his pupil, Sirāj Aurangābādī (1714-1764), who moved from the Deccan to the North following Aurangzeb's conquest of the region, are considered the last exponents of the Dakhni literary tradition. According to Faruqi (131), Valī's style, which was deeply rooted in the Deccan, was influenced by the high Urdu or Persian-mixed *Rekhta* of Delhi, brought by immigrants who settled in Aurangabad after the city's foundation. As highlighted by Bailey (34), Valī is remembered for introducing Urdu poetry to Delhi poets, marking the beginning of Urdu literature in northern India, which earned him the title *Bābā e Rekhta* ("father of Urdu"). Although few works of Valī are written in Dakhni, following the adoption of Urdu as a literary language, Dakhni was largely abandoned in its written form. From this moment onwards, almost no literary works were produced in this language.

In contemporary times, this idiom persists as a spoken vernacular across the Deccan, encompassing present-day Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, segments of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka. However, the language varies considerably from one region to another. In his study of linguistic convergence between Dakhni and Telugu, Mustafa (186) identified three main varieties: Andhra Dakhni, Kannada Dakhni, and Tamil Dakhni. The Andhra variety is further subdivided into two dialects; the first is spoken in Rayalaseema, Andhra Pradesh, and imports features from Telugu, while the second dialect, spoken in Telangana, particularly in Hyderabad, more closely resembles to Standard Urdu. As linguists pointed out, Dakhni is the result of the linguistic contact between northern Urdu, from which it adopted the script and grammar, and south Indian languages, such as Marathi, Kannada,

and Telugu. While the convergence between Dakhni and other vernacular languages, especially Marathi and Kannada, remains largely unexplored, few studies have focused on the interaction of Dakhni with Telugu. Arora and Subbarao (28), who examined the syntax convergence between the two languages, observed that Dakhni underwent a process of “dativization”. This phenomenon resulted in the misuse of the genitive case, which is characteristic of both Hindi and Standard Urdu, and led to the adoption of dative constructions from Telugu. Another linguistic trait exemplifying such encounter can be found in reporting speech sentences, in which Dakhni follows the Telugu pattern (Pray 96). Despite the limited research on the subject, Marathi influence on Dakhni is evidenced through the incorporation of words and expressions, such as *nakko*, *hallū hallū*,² which are commonly used in the everyday speech of the Dakhni-speaking community.

Despite its origins, the language spoken today across the Deccan presents many differences from ‘historical Dakhni’, a rich and sophisticated idiom patronized at the time of the Deccan sultanates. However, a resurgence of Dakhni in its modern guise, bearing striking resemblance to standard Urdu, manifested in written form during the first half of the 20th century. Following Nazir Dahqani, who is the precursor of the renaissance of modern Dakhni, Sulimān Khatīb (1922-1968), Ghulām Sarvar Khān Dandā (1925-1962), ‘Ali Ṣāyeb Miyān (1920-1966), A’jāz Hasan Khaṭhā (1922-1993), and Ḥimāyatullah (1932-2017), were all contemporary poets who wrote in Dakhni. However, the death of Ḥimāyatullah in 2017, considered the last poet of this tradition, symbolically marked the denouement of Dakhni as literary language once again. Subsequent to his demise, there was very little, perhaps insignificant effort, to write in Dakhni.³

Nazir Ahmad (*takhallus*, Dahqani) was born in 1908 Jangaon village, situated in Nalgonda, within the contemporary boundaries of Telangana, South India. After receiving his primary education in Jangaon, he relocated to Hyderabad, where he assumed the role of a propaganda officer in the publishing department. In 1949, following the dissolution of the Hyderabad State, he migrated to Pakistan, eventually passing away in Lahore in 1984.

² *Nakko* derives from the Marathi term *nāko*, used as a particle of prohibition. In Dakhni, it appears in imperative sentences such as *nakko karo*, literally “don’t do it!”. *Hallū hallū*, which in Dakhni context is translated as “slowly slowly”, also originates from the Marathi term *halū*, meaning “lightly”, “softly”, “gently”, and “easily” used for speaking, walking, and moving.

³ This observation may not be true in the case of prose. Nazia Akhtar’s book, *Bibi’s Room: Hyderabad Women and Twentieth-Century Urdu Prose*, provides an analysis of the works of three female writers of Hyderabad, showing that there is considerable number of writings composed in Dakhni during the 20th century. However, as Akhtar observes, the main language is Standard Urdu. Dakhni elements are very few and do appear only in specific contexts and situations.

Unlike his contemporaries, Dahqani spent most of his life in villages of the Hyderabad State, thus, he conversed primarily in the pure dialect of Dakhni, which became the medium of his poetry. Dahqani extolls Dakhni as a delicate, rich, and easily comprehensible language, asserting its profound influence on his existence.

I don't write only poetry in *dehqani* language, my entire life is a *dehqani* production. My life experiences also provide wisdom to anyone, those who listen can think and maybe shed some tears. In *dehqani* language I saw much delicacy, richness with no difficulty, and I made it necessary for my own thoughts. As my special language plays with brevity, it can be easily understood by every reader. Some gentle ideas can be simply accommodated in this language without inviting a revolutionary period with any danger (Shakib 18).

His literary production was divided into three periods, which correspond to different phases of his life. The poetry of the early period deals with village life and its people. *Lambaran*, *Mauṭ kā gīt* and *Dahatan* were produced in this phase. The second period, during which he wrote *Roti zurat*, *Kab Tilak*, *Nakko* and *Ghap Cap*, reflects on urban life, addressing the issue of indifference and distress, and unnecessary traditionalism of society. Finally, the third phase, much influenced by his migration to Pakistan, is represented by poems such as *Allah Daulat Bahut De* and *Qaidā 'Azam*.

The dearth of research on Dahqani's life and works represent a significant gap that merits attention, especially in elucidating the evolution of Dakhni language during the early 20th century. In 1963, Dahqani's poetry, *Shā'ir aur barsāt* ("The Poet and the Rain"), was published in the University magazine on Urdu literature, which was curated by students of Osmania University in Hyderabad. The special number was dedicated to Dakhni literature and featured selected poems from prominent Dakhni writers, including Nazir Dahqani, Sulimān Khatīb, Ghulām Sarvar Khān Ḍandā, 'Ali Ṣāyeb Miyān, and A'jāz Hasan Khaṭhā. Mustafa Kemal, the current chef editor of the monthly magazine Shagūfa, and President of the Zinda Dylan-e-Hyderabad, was a student of Urdu literature at Osmania University and served as a member of the editorial committee for the University magazine. In December 2022, the Shagūfa issue dedicated to modern Dakhni literature showcased nearly the same poems as those presented in the Osmania students' magazine in the 60s, including *Shā'ir aur barsāt*.

Shā'ir aur barsāt, of which the date of composition may be difficult to retrace, emerges as an ode to the intrinsic essence of poetry and its profound resonance within the human experience. Within the lyrical narrative, the poet's existence unfolds amidst the backdrop of a rainy day, characterized by solitude and introspective contemplation. The poet lives alone in misery in a house with frugal furniture, with no water to drink or food to eat. The scene

is narrated through the lens of an observer, engaged in dialogue with the poet. According to the artist, the act of poetic creation is depicted as an organic and fluid process, akin to the rhythmic undulations of waves traversing the boundless expanse of the mind. In his view, writing flows effortlessly, involving its entire body. The poet contends that poetry serves the dual purpose of enlightening people's intellect and awakening to a deeper awareness of life and the world around them. He further compares the ideas expressed in poetry to flowers, which can be appreciated and embraced by all human beings. The realm of poetry itself is compared to an evergreen garden, whose flowers, bushes, and fruits need to be taking care of, nourished, and protected. Following the conversation, the poet falls asleep and his thoughts and images fade away into the night.

“The Poet and the Rain”

It was dark all around, silence spread everywhere
 Everyone was forced to hide at home
 Clouds were flying around with the wind on their heads;
 It was raining and one could not get out of here safely.
 Meanwhile, the bushes trembled and itched with fear,
 Sweat flowed, all the mountains stood in powerful glory
 All the fireflies floated on the water –
 The earth looked like the sky with stars twinkling in it
 The frightened drains were gurgling all around...
 Perhaps they were rushing to hide themselves in the lap of the river...
 I rushed into the poet's house with a blanket;
 Childlike, I sat in the corner watching the spectacle
 There was a bed of ropes in the corner
 And an old pillow of coarse cloth
 A thick log of wood burned under the tamarind tree
 The flame was small but the smoke rose high
 The rain clouds were rumbling outside
 The mosquitoes were singing all around me
 The quiet poet lay humming, who knows what!
 And the water was pouring – excitedly snapping its fingers
 He felt neither hungry nor thirsty
 His family had gone to sleep; he was the only one awake.
 At times he would sit up and at times, lie down and sleep

Sometimes he would move his lips and sometimes remain silent
 Sometimes he would secretly bite a pencil with his teeth
 Maybe, his blood rushed in excitement
 Thinking about something, he opened the book proudly,
 Then spoke to me in a gentle, yet majestic voice –
 “This writing in my books
 Is like an army sleeping in the jungles.
 Line after line each one occurs to the mind
 Then standing up, they are expressed through the pencil
 Different in appearance and in colors, they appear the same
 They seem to target the eyes and pierce the heart
 And also, the lonely eyes.
 Neither there is sound, nor blood when the gun fires
 But the sharp bullet boils the blood in his torso;
 If they want, they can turn the world to dust
 All this if the enemy wants, he can embrace a friend
 There are millions more lying in this kothi right now
 Many are awaiting the paper’s arrival
 Think of each dot⁴ as superior to a cannonball
 If you see it in winter, it is more than hail
 This ghazal is written in my books alone,
 These are the waves of the ocean that rise in the mind
 Ships tossed and tossed in the storm of the intellect
 So the waves can sing it from the seashore.
 They go around nurturing the plants of the community
 They make green the bushes that are about to dry up.
 Each word is an oyster, each dot is a pearl.
 The waking community wins, and he who sleeps, loses.
 There is a garden in it where all the people stroll
 Grass grows in it; flowers bloom in it –
 The bushes in this garden will not dry up till the Day of Judgment;
 They do not bend even by bending the branches
 These flowers are pleasing to all the wise
 These are the fruits that people eat with their eyes

⁴ Of the Urdu alphabet.

Every word is a flower, every dot, a bud
 The truth is that whoever wants can come and claim this flower board.”
 He put the book under his head and finally fell asleep.
 Now he was lost in the world of thought
 The sea, the river, the canals, all of them, were under his pillow –
 Under this very pillow all the soldiers stood one behind the other.
 He was the king of literature; he had covered himself from head to toe
 He had neither water to drink nor food to eat
 I accept that there were a lot of desires in his house
 But despite this, the world craved to see it
 When I opened my eyes suddenly, I felt quite shaken
 There was neither sea, nor army, nor house, and no poet...

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