

## Delhi: The cradle of Persian literati circle of Abdul Qadir Bedil

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**Abstract:** Delhi holds a significant place in the history of Persian language and literature in the Indian subcontinent. Throughout various sultanates and the Mughal Empire, Delhi served as a major center of political and cultural power. This led to extensive patronage of Persian language and literature by rulers and nobles. Courts in Delhi became hubs for Persian poets, scholars, and writers, fostering a rich literary environment. The "Sabk-e-Hindi" (Indian style) of Persian poetry, characterized by its ornate and complex style, flourished in the Delhi region itself. This style incorporated Indian themes and imagery, creating a distinct Indo-Persian literary tradition.

Abdul Qadir Bedil (1644-1720) was a notable Indo-Persian poet and Sufi mystic during the Mughal era. Later poets like Mirza Ghalib, Khwaja Rafi Sauda, and Khwaja Mir Dard were greatly affected by his intricate and metaphorical style 'Sabk-i-Hindi'. Bedil's literary relationships with the poets who either adopted or were inspired by his style and ideas are explored in this article.

**Keywords:** Persian Literati circle, Ghalib, Sauda, Mir Dard, Sabk-e-Hindi, Delhi, Khusraw

**Introduction:** Apart from being a power center, Delhi has been the birthplace for shedding light on the influence of Sufi philosophy and Persian poetry on the Indian subcontinent. Thus, it attracted a large number of intellectuals from Persia and Central Asia. These immigrants brought with them their knowledge, traditions, and literary skills, contributing to the growth of Persian literature in India. Figures like Amir Khusrau, a prolific poet and writer, exemplified this trend. He not only

mastered Persian but also blended it with local Indian elements, creating a unique Indo-Persian literary style.

Over time, Persian literature in Delhi evolved, incorporating local themes, imagery, and linguistic elements. This led to the development of a distinct Indo-Persian style, which was different from the classical Persian literature of Iran.

### **Circle of Persian Literati**

Mirza Abdul Qadir Bedil (1642-1720) is considered one of the most prominent figure of Sabk-e-Hindi. Bedil's influence extended beyond his own writing. He was a central figure in a circle of Persian literati in Delhi, which included poets, scholars, and patrons. This group played a significant role in shaping the cultural landscape of the Mughal court.

### **Some notable members of Bedil's circle include:**

**Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib** (1797-1869) A renowned Urdu and Persian poet who admired Bedil's work. Mirza Ghalib, the renowned Urdu and Persian poet of the 19th century, held a deep admiration for Abdul Qadir Bedil. Bedil's complex and metaphorical style 'Sabk-i Hindi', significantly influenced Ghalib's own poetic development.

Ghalib openly expressed his admiration for Bedil in his early Urdu verses, acknowledging Bedil's profound impact on his work. He even declared that writing Rekhta (Urdu poetry) in Bedil's style was an impossible feat. In this regard Ghalib says:

طرز بیدل میں ریختہ لکھنا  
اسد اللہ خان قیامت ہے<sup>۱</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ahsan-uz-Zafar p 47

Influence of Sabk-i-Hindi: Bedil's Sabk-i-Hindi style, characterized by its intricate metaphors and philosophical depth, resonated with Ghalib. Ghalib adopted and adapted this style in his own poetry, contributing to its complexity and richness. Ghalib further says:

جوش فریاد سے لوں گا دیت خواب اسد  
 شوخی نغمہ بیدل نے جگایا ہے مجھے  
 گر ملے حضرت بیدل کا خط لوح مزار  
 اسد آئینہ پرداز معانی مانگے<sup>۲</sup>

Both Bedil and Ghalib were deeply interested in Sufism and mystical philosophy. This shared spiritual perspective is reflected in their poetry, which often explores themes of love, existence, and the search for truth.

While Ghalib eventually distanced himself from some aspects of Indo-Persian poetic traditions, Bedil's influence remained evident in his work. Ghalib's poetry, like Bedil's, is known for its intellectual depth, intricate imagery, and profound exploration of human existence.

In essence, Bedil served as an important source of inspiration and guidance for the young Ghalib, shaping his poetic sensibilities and contributing to his unique style. Their connection highlights the enduring legacy of Bedil's poetry and its impact on later generations of poets in the Indian subcontinent.

**Sauda:** Mirza Muhammad Rafi Sauda (1713-1780) was a renowned Urdu poet, known for his satirical and humorous works, as well as his mastery of the ghazal. He was a key figure in the development of Urdu poetry in Delhi. He was heavily influenced by Bedil's style.

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2 ibid

While Sauda primarily wrote in Urdu and Bedil in Persian, they both lived and worked in Delhi during a period of significant cultural and literary activity.

Sauda's more accessible and satirical style contrasts with Bedil's intricate and philosophical poetry. Yet, both flourished in the same environment, reflecting the diversity of literary expression in that era.

Mirza Muhammad Rafi Sauda and Abdul Qadir Bedil were two prominent figures in the vibrant literary scene of 18th-century India, though they represent distinct styles and contributions to the development of poetry in the subcontinent.

**Khawaja Mir Dard:** (1721-1785) A Sufi mystic and poet who shared Bedil's interest in philosophical themes. Khwaja Mir Dard and Abdul Qadir Bedil were two prominent figures in the Delhi literary scene during the 18th century, though their approaches to poetry and Sufism differed significantly.

Khwaja Mir Dard was a renowned Urdu poet and a Sufi mystic of the Naqshbandi order. His poetry is characterized by its simplicity, emotional depth, and focus on mystical themes. Dard's ghazals often express the pain of separation from the divine and the yearning for union with the beloved. He emphasized introspection and the purification of the heart as the path to spiritual enlightenment.

Abdul Qadir Bedil (1644-1720), on the other hand, was a master of the Indo-Persian poetic style known as Sabk-i Hindi. His poetry is complex, metaphorical, and intellectually challenging. Bedil's works delve into intricate philosophical and metaphysical concepts, often employing elaborate imagery and wordplay. He explored themes of existence, the nature of reality, and the interconnectedness of all beings.

Differences and Interactions:

**Language:** Dard primarily wrote in Urdu, while Bedil's major works were in Persian. This reflects the different linguistic landscapes and literary traditions they were part of.

**Style:** Dard's poetry is known for its simplicity and directness, while Bedil's style is characterized by its complexity and intellectual depth.

**Sufi approach:** Both were Sufis, but their expressions of Sufism differed. Dard's poetry emphasizes emotional longing and the personal experience of divine love, while Bedil's works delve into more abstract philosophical concepts.

**Influence:** Bedil's influence on later poets like Ghalib was profound, while Dard's impact was more focused on the development of Urdu ghazal.

While they may have interacted within the literary circles of Delhi, their distinct styles and approaches suggest that their relationship was primarily one of contemporaries rather than close collaborators. Nevertheless, both Bedil and Dard contributed significantly to the rich cultural and intellectual heritage of 18th-century India.

This circle of literati contributed to the flourishing of Persian poetry in India during the 18th century. They also helped to preserve and promote Bedil's legacy after his death.

### **Legacy**

Bedil's work continues to be studied and appreciated today. His poetry is admired for its beauty, depth, and complexity. He is considered one of the most important figures in the history of Persian literature in India.

His tomb in Delhi is a popular destination for poets and scholars who pay tribute to his enduring influence.

### **Conclusion**

Abdul Qadir Bedil stands as a monumental figure in the history of Indo-Persian poetry. His unique style, Sabk-i-Hindi, with its intricate metaphors and profound philosophical depth, left an indelible mark on the literary landscape of the Mughal era and beyond.

This exploration of Bedil's life and works reveals not only his individual genius but also his significant role within a vibrant circle of Persian literati in Delhi. He was not an isolated figure but rather a key node in a network of poets, scholars, and patrons who contributed to the flourishing of Persian literature in the Indian subcontinent. His relationships with these individuals, whether through mentorship, collaboration, or intellectual exchange, enriched his own creative output and fostered a dynamic environment for literary innovation.

Bedil's legacy extends far beyond his own time. His influence can be seen in the works of later poets like Ghalib, and his poetry continues to be studied and appreciated for its artistic brilliance and spiritual insights. By examining Bedil and his circle, we gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and intellectual forces that shaped Persian literature in India, highlighting the enduring power of artistic expression and the importance of community in fostering creativity.

The Persian literary tradition nurtured in Delhi had a lasting impact on Indian culture. It influenced the development of Urdu, a new language that incorporated Persian vocabulary and poetic forms. Many important historical chronicles, Sufi texts, and works of poetry were produced in Persian in Delhi, leaving behind a rich literary heritage.

In conclusion, Delhi's role as a political, cultural, and intellectual center, combined with royal patronage and the influx of scholars, made it a fertile ground for the development of Persian literature in India. The city's contribution to this literary tradition is immense, and its legacy continues to inspire poets and writers today.

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