Chapter Four

The Rise of Persian Lexicography in India

Beginning with the thirteenth century and lasting up until the nineteenth, India was the major center for the development of Persian lexicography. The Persian language began to spread throughout India at the beginning of the eleventh century, from the time of the invasive raids into India by Maḥmūd of Gazna (r. 998-1030), who had created a vast empire encompassing Eastern Iran, the southern part of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and large areas of North-western India. Persian became in effect the official literary and administrative language of Muslim-ruled India. It began to assume the important role of an intermediary language for the polyglot peoples of the subcontinent, and to condition them to new cultural influences [see Borah 1934; Kapranov 1973: 8-13; 1977; Alam 2004].

Large-scale literary circles had sprung up and were flourishing at the courts of the rulers and of the local feudal lords. Here, celebrated writers such as Abu’l-Faraj Rūnī (d. between 1099 and 1115), Masʿud-i Saʿd-i Salmān (1046-1121), and Anūr Xusraw Dihlavī (1253-1325) created classics of Persian literature as described by numerous scholars [see, e.g., Aliev 1968; 1974; Marek 1968]. Classical poetry in New Persian was widely practised in India. All this stimulated the development of lexicography and the creation of Persian-language defining dictionaries. Three major periods may be distinguished in the history of Persian lexicography in India:

13th-15th centuries: First Persian farhangs in India compiled.
16th-17th centuries: Brisk competition in Persian lexicography.
18th-19th centuries: Establishment of a tradition.
The age when Persian lexicography flourished in India between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has been the subject of several studies [e.g., Kapranov 1969b, 1970, 1973, 1977; Naqa프 1962]. The least studied period remains that of its genesis during the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. The dearth of scholarship may be explained in part by the fact that extant dictionaries of that period, as a rule consisting of unique manuscripts, have been practically inaccessible to researchers. The scholarly literature gives scant information about them, some of these documents having been published only in recent decades. Other dictionaries compiled in India between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries were thought to have been lost, and unique manuscripts of them have been discovered quite recently.

The following documents of the initial period of Persian lexicography in India are available to us today (in chronological order):

1. *Farhang-i Qavvās* (late 13th–early 14th century)
2. *Dastūr al-afāżīl* (743/1342)
3. *Dānišnāma-yi Qadar Xān* (807/1405)
4. *Adāt al-fużālā* (822/1419)
5. *Farhang-i zařāngūyā va jahānpūyā* (before 837/1433-39)
6. *Bahār al-fużā’il* (837/1433-1434)
7. ‘*Ummān al-ma‘ānī* (859/1455)
9. *Šarafnāma-yi Munyarī* or *F. Ibrāhīmī* (878/1473-74)

Of the works enumerated, only three have been published: *Farhang-i Qavvās*, *Dastūr al-afāţīl*, and *Farhang-i zařāngūyā va jahānpūyā* (twice). A description of each of these follows.