
Development of Awadhi culture in Calcutta under Nawab Wajid Ali Shah(1856-87)

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Abstract: Wajid Ali shah was dethroned on the plea of misgovernance and was forced to leave his beloved place and people. Though he was reluctant, but he had no other option but to come to Calcutta and settle here. But once he settled in Calcutta in Matyaburj he did not remained confined to the life his Palace, rather he engaged himself in various cultural and artistic works. This article is aimed at bringing out the literary and cultural contribution of the 11th Nawab of Awadh. While in Calcutta in Matyaburj,he devoted his life to its people till his last breath on 1st September, 1887. The Nawab was a poetic genius himself and patronized many such personalities. His arrival marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Calcutta as a huge number of family migrated from lucknow and settled in Calcutta to live by the side of their beloved Nawab. The culture that he brought with him has been developing in the city of joy since the time of late king and the people are still getting benefits of his contribution.

Keywords: Nawab, Rahas, Awadh, Khansama, Mutah, Parikhana, Jogojashn, Masnavi, Mahroo

Nawab Wajid Ali Shah (r.1847-56) was the last Nawab of Awadh and one of the most controversial and debated personalities in Indian history was deposed by the Colonial Imperialist in India, ascended to the throne of Awadh at a very young age of twenty fours, is credited to have contributed much in the development of culture and literature of the period.

The last king of India was born to Nawab Amjad Ali Shah (1842-47 C.E) on 30th July 1822. He began his life as an ordinary prince who was given the usual training and initial education in Persian literature as well as horse riding and shooting. As a young prince and heir apparent he spent most of his time in learning music and writing verses. When he ascended the throne in 1847, he is said to have engaged himself in spending on music, dance, drama and other cultural activities.

First of all, he established his famous Parikhana (House of fairies) where hundreds of beautiful and talented girls were taught music and dance by expert teachers engaged by royal patron. These girls were known as Purees or fairies with fancy names such as Sultan Part Mahrukh Pari and so on. On each of his birthday, the nawab would dress up as a yogi with saffron robes,

ash of pearls smeared on his face and body, necklaces of pearls around his neck and a rosary in his hand and walk pompously into the court with two of his purees dressed up as Jogans. Gradually he made it into a spectacular fair or mela known as Jogia Jashan, in which all citizens of Lucknow dressed as jogis, irrespective of caste and creed could participate. It was this Jogia Jashan that took the curtain upon the Hindustan theatre'. Later on when his favorite venue, the Kaisarbagh Baradari was built, he began to stage his magnificent Rahas (persianised name for Rasleela), full of romantic poetry which were his own lyrical compositions under the pen name Akhtarpiya. Glamorous Kathak dances were also staged at this venue.' Wajid Ali Shah in his book entitled "Bard" mentions 36 types of Rahas all set in Kathak style (with colourful names like Mor Chatri, Ghunghat, Salami, Mor Pankhi and Mujra) and gives exhaustive

notes about the costumes, jewelers and stagecraft. Rahas prepared at a fabulous cost of several lakhs of rupees, became very popular and was performed at the Kaisarbagh Rahas Manzil which thus emerged as the 'first Hindustanis theatre'. Many have regarded Wajid Ali Shah as the first playwright of the Hindustanis theatre' because his Radha Kanhaiya Ka Kissa staged in the Rahas Manzil was the first play of this kind. It featured Radha Krishna, several Sakhis(Female friends) and a Vidhuska like character. Songs, dances, mime and drama were all delightfully presented in these Rahas performances.

He dramatized many other poems such as Darya-i-Taasshuq, Afsan-i-Isbag and Bahar-i-Ulfat. It was said that Amanat's hider Sabha was inspired by dance-dramas written, produced and staged by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah.

Kathak dance attained new heights of popularity and glory under Wajid Ali Shah's expert guidance and lavish patronage. Thakur Prasad was his Kathakguru, and the unforgettable

Kalka-Binda brothers performed in his court. With the grand pageantry of the Rahas, Jogia Jashan, dance, dramas and Kathak performances, Lucknow became the magnetic cultural centre where the most reputed musicians, dancers and instrumentalists of the time enjoyed his munificent patronage and hospitality.' There were 1700 men of literature and the same number of men of music, dance, drama and 500 physicians at the court of Wajid Ali Shah.

He composed the famous Bhairavi Thumri like " &and Mora Naihar Chchooto Jaay, chair kahar mil, mori doliya Uthayo, Mora Apna begana chchooto jay." It is well known fact that " Lucknow is the mother and Banaras the sweet heart of the "Thunui style". A large number of composers who thrived under the lavish patronage of the nawab rulers of Lucknow enriched this light classical form whose popularity was mounting day by day. Among these the name of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah stands out in golden letters. He was not only a munificent patron of music, dance, drama and poetry but himself a gifted composer, and a proficient kathak dancer.' He had received a vocal training under great ustads like Basit Khan, Pyar Khan and Jaffar Khan and Kathak training under Thakur Prasad and Bindadin Maharaj. He is said to have composed many new ragas and named them Jogi, Jithi, Shah Pasand etc.

Wajid Ali Shah had good interest in gardening and architecture. A garden was created and it was named as Huzur Bagh. Around it was a broad road which allowed three carriages to pass side by side. The banana trees were planted on both the sides of the road. There were two pretty canals on two sides of the garden, one called Chashm-i-Shirin and other Chasma-i-Faiz both studded with fountains with sprays of water falling into beautiful cascades. He also built three palaces during his prince hood: Shahanshah Manzil was the winter palace while Makan-i-Khas was for summers. The Falak Sair was, on the contrary used during the rainy season.He also started a new calendar Wajadi since 13th Zilkadah 1246 A.H. Wajidi, Muhammadi, Akhtari, Sikandari, Sulaimani Nabi, Imami Sanober, Maratib, Mansuri, Husaini, Asna Asri were the twelve months of his calendar year.

He used English way of parade like right wheel, left turn and about turn. He tried to develop his army on the pattern of the British. He maintained women regiments and trained them fully with military arts. They were such a sharp shooter that the British soldier did not dare to enter Sikander Bagh during the rebellion of 1857, when these women were alive. He wanted to give a new color to his culture by assimilating British culture in it but he found the difficulties as he did not know English language and also he could not establish cordial relation with the British. Wajid Ali Shah was a man of literature. He penned over 40 books on different themes. Now we have to discuss some of the important books which have been authored by Wajid Ali Shah in Urdu, Persian and Hindi languages.

Some literary works of Wajid Ali Shah:

Afsan-e Ishq (Urdu): It is Dastan-I Masnavi (fantasy) love story in the form of poetry. It comprised of almost three thousand eight hundred couplets. We find the description of a Hero, his birth, his education, brought up, adulthood and his infatuation and love for a beautiful girl. Then he struggles against devils to get his love. In his battle against devils, he was helped by the leader of the Pares (fairies). He succeeded to defeat devils and returned along with his bride. The presentation of this love story in the form of poetry is beautiful.

Dariyay-e Taasshuq (Urdu): It is Dastan-e Masnavi and has three thousand couplets. It is a love story. There was a king who did not have any heir. After prayer and devotion to God for a long period, a daughter was born to king. She was named as Ghazala. During her adulthood the princess Ghazala has fallen in love with Mahroo, one of the princes of Khatan Kingdom. On the other side Lalpari, one of the pari (fairy) also fallen in love to same Mahroo and took him in her custody. Mahroo love Ghazala but he was helpless. In the meantime Ghazala was engaged to another prince against her wish. A new development took place in which the leader of jinn carried away Ghazala from marriage ceremony and brought Mahroo and Ghazala together. When Lal Pari got the information that her prisoner has been released by the leader of jinn, she along with her army attacked them. In the fight between devils and jinn, the latter were successful. After her defeat in the war and love, Lal Pan decided to commit suicide but Ghazala sympathised with her and persuaded Mahroo to marry Lal Pan also. Thus Mahroo first got marry to Ghazala and then to Lal Par The parents of Mahroo and Ghazala became glad with this decision. In this love story, we find different aspect of the human feeling and expression e.g. envy, lust, love, jealousy, emotion etc.

Bahr-e Ulfat (Urdu): This book is Dastan-I Masnavi. It includes four thousand couplets. The book narrates a love story in which three women are in love to one prince. Then the struggle between devils (along with prince) and jadoogars (magicians) began and at the end devils won the battle and the prince succeeded to get his real love These above mentioned Dastan-I Masnavi are imaginary creative love stories of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah which show the different facets of the human feelings and their effect.

Ishq Nama (Persian): Ishq Nama is the autobiography of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. This is most famous and controversial book of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. It is the story of one's own suffering. The book begins with couplet which describes Usuf Alaihasalam and obsession of the Egyptian women with him. Wajid Ali Shah compared himself to Usuf (alaihasalam) and his love ladies were also mischief and bluff. It also mentions their mischief and lustful behavior with him (Usuf). Ishq Name shows infatuation, love and lust of Wajid Ali Shah to a number of women and their pomp and show. It considered of 132 stories which are full of romance.

Habat-e Haidari (Urdu): The book is related to Ma:habi Masnavi or Noha (dirges). It explains Islam from Prophet Mohammad to the Khilafat of Hazrat Ali and detailed accounts of different holy wars. This book includes three thousand couplets.

Saut-ul Mubarak (Persian): It gives detailed description about music e.g. the reality of Sur, its division, its different names, its effect, identification of stirs etc. Wajid Ali Shah has praised Tal and Lai to a great extent and has mentioned four types of saz (beats) e.g. tat batat, khan and sikhar. He has admired dance and named fourteen lovely songs e.g. parigeet, salamigeet, faryadgeet, anchalgeet, husngeet etc. We also find an account of twenty four Hekayat and Kamalat (feats) of musicians. It also deals about group dance which is called "Rahas Mubarak Sultani." The given numbers of Rahas (group dance) are thirty two. These are Rahas Salami, Rahas Ghunghat, Rahas Siddhi, Hath Jorki, Rahas Morpankhi, Rahas Mujra, Rahas Morchatri, Rahas Chumak, etc.

Jawab-e Bluebook: This book is related to the history of Awadh. It mentioned how Col. Sleeman and general Outram planned to tarnish the image of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. It also describes about the differences and dissension among Lord Dalhousie, general Outram and the members of the Board of Council. The evidences have been shown in this book to prove that the rule and regulation of Awadh were better while the East India Company had made their mind to annex it.' Wajid Ali Shah has also given some detailed accounts of various warfare, bloodshed, riots etc. which took place against East India Company.

There are some other prominent books of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah on different themes. Diwan-I Mubarak and Sukhan-I Ashraf are the collection of Ghazals. Nasha-I Akhtari is related to the adab of the court. Tarikh-I Mo=ahhib, Tarikh-I Mumtaz, Tarikh-I Ghazala, Tarikh-I Noor, Tarikh-I Bahar, Tarikh-I Firaque, Tarikh-I Jamshedi etc. Are collections of letters of Wajid Ali Shah? He wrote letters to his love ladies and received its Jawab (answers). Shivn-I Faiz, Kuliya-I Akhtari, Qamar-I Mazmun, Nazo (Hindi), Nazm-I Namwar, Imran, Dtilhan (Hindi), Bani, Mulk Akhtari are a collection of poetical works. Mulaz-ul Kalamat is collection of Naat, Taushia-I

Akhrat, Riyazul Uqba, Riyazul Quloob and Sibat ul Quloob are Mazhabi Marsia of Noha (dirges).

By going through various works and around one lakh couplets one can obviously perceive that he had great love and interest in the field of literature. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was a prolific writer. He adopted a simple language which easily conveyed meaning to all; it showed shrinking of Awadh, the local dialect. According to critics he was better of masnavis than of Ghazals. He wrote Masnavis, Ghazals, Noha, Salaam, Qasida, Qata, Rubai and Marsiya with equal ease and command. He also wrote Thumris which he himself set to music and which became very popular. It was the Wajid Ali Shah, who for the first time introduced Thumri to Kathak, where the dancer used to convey the meaning of poetry, through facial expressions and hand gestures. His two works Nazo and Dulhan are an excellent and rich collection of Thumris.

Wajid Ali Shah appreciated good literature and enjoyed the company of poets and writers with the fame of his patronage, writers and poets from all corners of India converged on his court. There were 1700 men of literature on his court. Notable among them were Barg 'Ahmad Mirza Sabir', Mufti Munshi, Amir Ahmad, Amir, Bahr, Sahar and Aseer etc. Mirza Rajab Ali Beg Saroor the author of Fasana-I Ajayab and Abdul Haleem Sharar, the author of the famous work Guzishta Lucknow also enjoyed the patronage of Wajid Ali Shah.

The famous poet Ghalib received the patronage of Wajid Ali Shah, who granted him a pension of Rupees five hundred per year in 1854. But he was unfortunate that he could only avail it for two years, as Awadh was annexed in 1856. He wanted to achieve a new height in the field of poetry, Ghazals, Masnavis, etc., But he was in shortage of time.

Although he had many qualities that make him a good administrator, he was generous, kind and compassionate towards his subjects, besides being one of the most magnanimous and passionate patrons of the fine Arts, the British agents and some of the treacherous elements in the court of Awadh indulged in debauchery and treachery and succeeded in banishing him from his beloved kingdom.

Other Contribution of Wajid Ali Shah: Apart from the above activities, he was also a great innovator in food. A sum of 12lacs that was being paid to him at that time used to be insufficient as he was a very hospitable man and had to feed a number of people daily, he had to look after a good number of his wife, both Mutah(Contact Marriage) and Regular and their families, the attendants and his Employees. Thus,

the scarcity of funds did not allow his 'Khansama', to prepare the food as per his previous liking. But Wajid Ali Shah was so fond of food and feeding people that his cook had to find another way to feed his people. Therefore, one day the 'Khansama' added Potato to Biryani instead of meat without his prior approval as freedom was given to them by the Nawab, and this was presented to the Nawab. The Nawab liked it so much that this became a regular affair in the kitchen since then. Thus Potato became an important part of Biryani in Calcutta. We do not find potato in Biryani in any other places outside the state of west Bengal because Wajid Ali Shah came to Bengal not elsewhere.

Wajid Ali Shah was a man of literature and language as mentioned above. The words like, shakkar, tashreef and others such modification in language took place in Matiaburj due to the presence of Wajid Ali Shah.

Another time pass of the Nawab was Kite flying which was never a part of culture of Calcutta before him. He brought this activity from Lucknow and popularized it in Calcutta. Kite flying competition began to take place here since then and still today thousands of people not only in Matiaburj but other parts like Khidderpore, Raja Bazar, Belgachia etc. are engaged themselves in this time pass. As a consequences, Kite making industry developed and a good number of family are engaged in this business and earning their livelihood since long time now.

On February 1856, Wajid Ali Shah was deposed by the British Resident and exiled in far off Matiaburj near Calcutta. Even when shocking ultimatum was given to him, Wajid Ali Shah appealed to his beloved subjects not to offer any resistance and to maintain peace. The touching description of the bewailing citizens of Lucknow has been recorded by Munshi Zahiruddin Bilgrami in Asrar- I Wajidi.

With all these qualities and skills mentioned above he came to Kolkata and began his own kingdom here, though not the kingdom to rule, rather a new kind of Kingdome, which was cultural and poetical one. It should be noted here that he was initially not ready to stay here and wanted to go back to his own place and live around his own people in Awadh. But once he realized that he would have to stay here, he established his own small Awadh in Matiaburj and engaged himself in cultural activities as in Awadh. Many people from Awadh began to follow him and came to Matiaburj and settled here, which made Matiaburj popular and populace. Matiaburj began to develop since then and the same same development is still evident.

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