Conclusion

The focal point of attention in this dissertation has been the impact of print culture on Persian language and literature. The discussion began with Persian book production in the 1780s (emergence of colonial rule in India) and came down to the 1880s (beginning of the end of the importance of Persian print in Indian public sphere). The main concern has been with issues relating to the importance of Persian in pre-colonial and colonial India till the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

In Chapter I we explored the British encounter with a language that was not a vernacular. It was characterized by colonial officials either as a ‘classical’ or a ‘foreign’ language in India. At the same time, despite debates on the relevance of a Persian language education, the British did not hesitate in using Persian-in-print as a means through which indigenous knowledge could be marshaled to create colonial knowledge of South Asia. Persian print was used in shaping ‘colonial knowledge’ which may be said to be derived to a considerable extent from indigenous knowledge.

In Chapter II, we linked Persian book production with written culture and educational policy and requirements of the colonial government vis a vis the Indian population. Missionary activities too played an important role in the consolidation of British colonial rule through the early printing activities of the East India Company printing. Further, as textbooks, they became cheaply available for the use of students in schools. As for the link between the activities of Christian missionaries in Bengal and print, we observed that there were two types of Biblical literature translated into Persian: one was the translation of the New Testament and the other was that of religious tracts with extracts from the Scripture. Missionaries were driven by the belief that after reading these texts—either in part or full—in their own languages, the non-Christians would be able to comprehend the truth of their religion. There was a strong connection between print and sovereignty, legitimacy, and effective functioning of a Company-state in Bengal. The argument is that early Company printing in India came with empire rather
than trade. This is in contrast to the case of Iran where in the absence of colonial empire print came with trade, and the first printing presses were imported from Russia in the 1820s.

We also attempted to show how the increasing use of print and the standardization of Persian script contributed to Orientalist knowledge of India by removing its monopoly from the hands of the munshis. When the script was not standardized, only specialists with long experience such as munshis could read the various forms. When one kind of Persian script was made the universal script, then anyone with the basic knowledge could read it, and reliance on the munshis was naturally reduced. Our findings corroborate the view of Miles Ogborn that printing was for the East India Company a 'political technology': the fact that a large portion of printed works were commissioned by official departments testifies to the Company's very efficient use of this technology for their own purposes.

Another important point that emerges from the study is that the coming of print had a huge impact on education by bringing it within the reach of all. When manuscripts were printed their audience increased. Thus, they gave great importance to clarity of the texts they published, and this contributed to the popularity of Persian print. As for circulation, we have seen that the usage of printed work was not confined to the place of its publication, as these works spread both inland and were also sent to Britain. All these examples indicate the trans-national circulation of Persian printed books. Books created what has been called their own 'geography of space'.

Persian Print culture began through administration, revenue, literature, vocabulary, etc. used as a means of informing and binding together local communities. In Chapter III, we considered the role of early Persian newspapers in consolidating the hold that language had on the literati. By noting the British preoccupation of Persian newspapers' content, we came to the conclusion that no matter what their cultural judgment was the British were compelled to track them as closely as possible as guides to prevailing public opinion. While these newspapers had the English-language press
largely as their model for form and content, they also drew partly upon the manuscript *akhbar* tradition. The story of transition has important implications for arguments about continuity and change. It is clear from our study of the British colonial attitude to these papers that the colonial government used Persian forms (such as *akhbarat*) during the early phases of their rule, but in the later phase they also did not hesitate from using legal means in order to suppress those Persian newspapers that they considered disloyal to the British state.

There were two important developments in the diffusion of print culture. One was the establishment of printing presses and the creation of regional centers of Persian print, and the other was the shift in patronage of Persian printed works from official-government sources to individuals. The role of the private lithographic press as an agent of expanding commercial publishing was important. So was the role of Persian print in a multilingual society, and discussed the patrons and the commercial viability of publishing Persian printed works as well as the fate of Persian in its rivalry with vernacular language printing. Our statistics for Persian printed books bear out the point that it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that the transition from Persian to Urdu books had led to quantitative reversal in the number of Persian and Urdu books produced in North India. Thus, the demand for Persian printed books continued long after Persian had been disassociated with employment opportunities with the colonial state.

Chapter IV looks at the specific relationship between print culture and the tradition of history writing. The argument of the chapter is that even though a major strand in the British explorations of the Indian past tended to glorify the ancient period at the expense of the medieval, Persian sources written in the medieval period were not devalued as historical sources, but in fact used heavily as materials and models for British histories of the medieval period. In other words, devaluation of the medieval past of India did not mean an automatic devaluation of the sources (Persian histories) using which that past was constructed.
Chapter V examined the Persian linguistic controversy around Persian purism in which print was involved in the production, distribution and encouragement of literary debate in public sphere. With the coming of print not only the oral literary traditions such as mushairas declined, but the very mode of communication among the literati changed. Print also magnified manifold the size and composition of authorship’s connection with the audience. In this way tagriz (a laudatory book review) page was provided in published books for critics to share and present the known idea in public sphere.

Chapter VI traced the shift towards the ‘Anglo-Vernacular’ educational policy of the British, which marginized Persian. The pressures of livelihood and identity were critical in the rise of vernacular languages (Urdu) at the expense of Persian. The employment factor came first, whereas the link between identity and language only became apparent later. Urdu could thus be used as a marker of religious identity, as well as a passport to secure employment. After the 1860s, Persian was still seen as part of Indian Muslim heritage, but not a language that could serve a multiplicity of needs, in the way that Urdu could. It is ironic that print, which was popularized by Christian missionaries, was also used as a means to protect Islam from the criticism of other religions. There was a large amount of work done of translating texts from the original Arabic and Persian to vernacular languages. The ulama—by translating key works of the Islamic tradition into Indian languages and by printing them on a large-scale—aimed to give Muslim society the strength to cope with the colonial rule.

As we have shown in this thesis, Indo-Persian literary culture did not die with the coming of print, but in fact used the new technology to enrich itself and widen its reach. Persian print culture was created by the reproduction of texts using new technologies, so they were able to play an important role in shaping colonial policy, as well as serving as a base for colonial knowledge of India. Persian culture had a clear identity in India till the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and it is the argument of this thesis that this culture was constructed through print. Persian printed book could be reproduced exactly and repeatedly, in any location, utilizing standardized tools and techniques thus eliminating
the corruptive elements inherent in manuscript creation. All this happened from the 1840s onwards, with the burgeoning of print technology (lithography) right across North India. Thus, the abolition of Persian as an official language did not signal the end of Persian culture in India.