CHAPTER IV

CORRUPTION OF ARABIC LANGUAGE

1. Influence of foreigners on Arabic language
2. Effect of fall of Baghdad on Arabic language
3. Loss of power by Arabs.
CORRUPTION OF ARABIC LANGUAGE

To assess the literary worth and value of the writings of Suyuti it is necessary to bear in mind the low depth of corruption to which the Arabic language had fallen. When we consider that he was living under non-Arab rulers who were mere rude soldiers with no interest in literature, we are forced to give greater credit to Suyuti. A short history of the corruption of Arabic language which I give below will be a great help to evaluate the language and style of our author.

During the pre-Islamic period and the early centuries the Arabs spoke their language with care-endings as we find in the Qur’an and the sayings of the Prophet and his companions. But when after they had settled down in the conquered countries, grammatical mistakes began to appear in the language of the Arabs themselves which naturally led sometimes to the incorrect understanding of the Qur’an. As I shall relate when speaking of grammatical errors of Suyūṭī, that this fact became an incentive for the codification of Arabic grammar. This corruption reached its zenith when the Arabs fell under the Turkish domination which endured for several centuries. Suyūṭī was born in Egypt when it was under the Turkish rule, but he writes correct Arabic with exception of a few mistakes which will be discussed in the proper place.

Under the Abbasid who claimed to represent the cause of Islam, not that of the Arabs who were shown no favour, non-Arab Muslims and particularly Persians who had risen to the Abbasid to the throne rushed in large numbers to Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid. These Persians were not only members of the upper classes but came from the lower cadres also, e.g. artisans, soldiers and men of other trades. The presence of these Persians in the Arab towns had naturally a very adverse effect on the Arabic language. Nearly a hundred years after the establishment of the Abbasid caliphate Mutassim, one of the Abbasid caliphs, fearing the domination of the Persians and their preponderance, followed the policy of importing Turkish race from the lands of Transoxiana or Tūrān. These Turkish race were originally employed as bodyguards of the caliphs and soldiers but in course of time, as their numbers grew, they became powerful so as to dominate the caliphs themselves. The emergence of these non-Arab elements in the Arab countries led to greater corruption and decay of the Arabic language. Despite all the efforts of the grammarians of Kufa and Basrah to stem the corruption of Arabic, the flood of decay went on unabated.

Influence of foreigners on Arabic language:

A most potent cause of the corruption of Arabic language was the mighty influx of foreign slaves, both male and female into the harem of caliphs and noblemen with the result that the vulgar and the corrupt Arabic which had become the common language of the daily life, drove out classical Arabic from the
field of life in cities and towns. An idea of the crave of possessing foreign slave-girls can be had by considering that only three of the thirty-seven caliphs of the house of Umayya were sons of Arab mothers, the rest being sons of slave-girls of different ethnic origins. Foreign slaves either captured in war or acquired by purchase were so numerous that they reached even the Arab deserts, and thus we see that the vulgar Arabic began to invade even the desert where Arabic had succeeded so far in preserving its origin purity.

Decay and corruption of the Arabic language under the Abbasids as a result of frequent contacts of Arabs with non-Arabs, their inter-marriages, the custom of keeping slave-girls as concubines who were all foreigners as according to an edict of Umar, the second caliph, Arabs could not be held in slavery, and since a Muslim man can marry legally only four wives but can have as many slave-girls or concubines as he chooses, there being no limit to their number. Hence, the number of foreign women in caliph's seraglio almost innumerable, as idea can be had of the number of the concubines, kept by caliphs from the life of Matwakil who had four thousand concubines

slave-girls meant for singing in the presence of caliphs were, indeed, fortunate to be given a thorough grounding in Arabic language, grammar, literature, even the recitation of the Qur'an and its interpretation, traditions and nothing to speak of music and the art of singing which was to be their main occupation.

The story of the slave girls of Fadl-b-Ashi in an instance in point. But the vast majority of slave-girls were meant for nuptial-beds. Children born to the caliph of such women who could not speak Arabic correctly or spoke broken Arabic after their own habits of pronunciation, spoke Arabic as they learnt it from their mothers with faulty pronunciation and grammar. Male slaves, too were all foreigners for the reason stated above.

Caliph's children were looked after by them from whom they learnt correct Arabic. Caliphs' example was followed not only by the upper classes, but the lower strata of Arab society, as there was no dearth of slave girls, as foreign women and girls were not only captured in campaigns against foreign countries but the Jews carried on a flourishing slave trade, although it was illegal according to the Muslim law, as a woman or man captured in war, could be enslaved but free men should not be sold or brought as slaves.

38. Vide Appendix -III.
40. Shibli Naimi : Al-Faraq, p.54.
However, the Muslim rulers allowed such trade to flourish for their own pleasure and to minister to their lust. These foreign slaves played havoc with the Arabic language and the most vigorous efforts of zealous grammarians and philologists, and even caliphs like Harun could not stem the tide of the vulgar Arabic which in no time swept away the classical or correct Arabic speech from the field of everyday life, confining now to a few members of the elite, even caliphs now began to speak vulgar Arabic.

1. An idea of Harun's zeal to preserve Arabic free from corruption to which it was subjected, we can form an idea from the advice which according to Al-Qalqashandi, the author of Sahih asha, used to give his sons, i.e. is no one of you are ashamed that his language should be like that of his slave and slave-girl (ألا يستحب أن يكون لسانه لسانه عبده أو أمه).

The eagerness of Harun is illustrated by his eagerness and keen desire to have his sons thoroughly grounded in Arabic language and literature, for which purposes he appointed the best scholars and grammarians of Arabic like Kisai and Yajiji as tutors of his sons Harun and Asim, and when their teachers themselves were proud and used to say to them, "The Umayyid caliphs used to send their sons to the desert to learn correct Arabic, but you are mere element and possess greater command of Arabic than they, without leaving your harem."

Palmier relates in his work on the life of Harun that the caliph, as was his wont, left one day his palace to see for himself the condition of his people. While passing by the river Tigris, on the bank of which Baghdad stands, he heard the homesmen singing songs which greatly appealed to the caliph, but their faulty language greatly irritated his ears. He, therefore, called Abu'l-Aswad Jiyah, one of his court poets and ordered him to pen some songs of their grammatical mistakes and faulty language and to rewrite them in the same time, and then recommended the musicians to sing those songs to him.

The corruption of the language that had now been prevailing the Arab society did not spare even the language of the traditions or to say it otherwise, the traditionists (or hadithim) the custodians of an important branch of religious knowledge, too, could not escape the corrupting influence of the foreign scene which had now been living side by side with the Arabic speaking communities for five or six centuries. It will be evident if we look into the language of the collection of the traditions by Bukhārī, the most sacred religious text, next to the Qurān among the Muslims of the Sunna sect, for it is claimed by them to be the most correct book next to the Qurān (recited by Muhammad ﷺ), it being lawful to take oath upon it. One is really amazed to come across mistakes of language or grammar in this book. The question is how to explain them and how these mistakes found their way into them particularly when one considers the claim that 30,000 men had directly studied that book under Bukhārī himself.

One or two explanations can possibly be given for this fact, either the Arabic language itself had been developing features which later on originated in spoken dialects that during the Middle Ages and particularly after the first four centuries of the Islamic era, the cultural life of the Muslims, naturally of the Arabs also had been dominated by the Persians. It is true that the Persians at one time of the literary history of the Arabs, when the Arabs themselves were masters of their language, in some cases, gave to the Arabic language and literature, great scholars whose command of the language was by
no means inferior to that of the Arabs themselves. But after Arabic had ceased to be a living language, even among the upper classes of the Arab society, the Arabs as well as the Persians naturally were affected by it. It is, therefore, nothing strange that the narrators (ناشأ) who had been non-Arabs naturally first thought and spoke in their own languages and then translated their thoughts into Arabic. This fact had been recognised by the Arab philologist at a very early date as we find it discussed particularly with the reference to pronunciation in Al-Bayan waltakīn by al-Jahis.

This tradition has been narrated by Bukhari a number of times, sometimes with the correct use of the verb which should be singular, and sometimes with the plural verb which is wrong according to Arabic grammar. It is really surprising that no grammarian has to say anything on such apparently incorrect expressions. No attempt to explain such expressions according to the usage of the people of Yaman, according to which the verb preceding a plural subject can be plural. Example mostly quoted by grammarians is

There is no justification of dropping the noun as it does not stand as direct adjunct (مضاف) to Sahih.

Here the singular verb yadha is in accordance with the usage of the dialect of Carthage which shows that there is some confusion in the narration of traditions in the past of ancestors who were either non-Arabs or even if Arabs, lived at a time when Arabic was no longer a living language.

64. Ibid. vol. 3, pp. 293-4.
65. Ibid. vol. 4, pp. 207-42.
The Egyptian edition gives both 'dawmah' and 'fathah' on the 'qāf' of the verb 'asūra, while the Indian edition by Maulavi 'Abd Ur-rahman Hyderahed gives only 'dawmah' on 'asūra, although 'asūra should have fathah as jawabul-ain to 'iwmī.

Traditions have been accepted as a reliable source of the study of the Arabic language, but on a critical examination it is found that the language of the traditions is not free from flaw. In this connection a quotation from Sahib al-Ashfahāni a modern scholar of grammar will not be beside the point.

47. Sahih al-Bukhari, vol. 1, Beba Fadli sahatil-ain, p. 70, Jāri.
In the above tradition we first find the expression 'masquthah' in the sense of fallen i.e. lying.'Masquthah' is apparently or to say better obviously is the past participle from the intransitive infinitive 'swat' meaning to fall. Now it is a rule in Arabic that unlike Aryan languages the past participle is not formed from intransitive infinitives, e.g. we must say 'tahil' i.e. the present or the active participle from 'rahlah' or 'rahil which is intransitive and not 'mantul' as we say departed in English. 'Rafah in Persian and 'gaya ham' in Hindi or Urdu, which are all Aryan languages. Therefore, the use of the past participle 'masquthah' is by no means justifiable here. We see in the above tradition barely after one and a half line that the narrator uses the correct expression 'masquthah' in place of masquthah. This fact clearly indicates that the narrator either was himself a non-Arab, say a Persian who followed the modes of expressions of his own language first, but corrected himself after a line or so. The use of the past and present participle at the same time may be construed that the narrator was confused and had no clear idea of the correct Arabic expression. That every person naturally follows the modes of expressions of his mother-tongue or his original habits of pronunciation when speaking a foreign language, was noticed and recognised at a much earlier period by Arab grammarians and philologists. 49 This fact has given birth to silly tales which, however, no reliable authority relates about.

1. It is related that Sibwain, who was a Persian and the most learned grammarian of the age, went to a certain Arab tribe posing himself as an Arab and desired to marry a woman of that tribe. His desire was fulfilled and he was duly married to an Arab woman of the tribe: but when they went to bed, Sibwain asked his wife to put out the lamp saying «wažānaq raj», which is exactly a literal translation of the Persian expression «chiragh ra bānay», i.e., kill the lamp. Hearing this, the woman raised a hue and cry throughout the mosque of the tribe eyes up and exclaimed into the ears of the populace, the woman said: "This man is an 'ajamî' and has insulted us by murdering us." So, then, took them the whole story hearing which the whole tribe was instantly angry and punished him by burning the words "wažānaq raj", i.e., the use of Parsi in his form, and then drove him away. Sibwain always kept his speech covered with his veil so as not to let the word, "wažānaq raj", be seen by the people. But on one occasion, while Sibwain was making ablutions preparatory to prayer, one of his students who stood there and could not go beyond of Sibwain's oaths, to avoid him away, noticed the word, "wažānaq raj", and called his master but his master was not to be pleased. Sibwain had to relate the story. The important student corrected his master not to make such words and then going immediately beat upon some fire and a piece of iron which he heated and mixed the letters "wa" before the word, "wažānaq", into "wažānaq" meaning the pride of Persia.

Such tales may be without any historical foundation but simply illustrate the principle enunciated by Sibwain that everyone speaking a foreign language follows his modes of expression and the habits of pronunciation of his original language.
In the above traditions and the one quoted above i.e. "Kattā yarfa ilajā muraqqa," we notice that the verb although preceding the subject which is plural, is also plural i.e. in accordance with the number of the subject, while the rule as is known to every student of Arabic grammar that the verb must be singular even if the subject is plural when it follows the verb. We see that the verbs in the tradition quoted above are plural agreeing with the subject as is the rule in non-Arabic languages like Persian, Hindi, Urdu etc. It will not be, therefore, unreasonable to conclude that the narrator was a non-Arab, may be a Persian or an Indian, in whose language the verb even if it precedes the plural subject, as if the narrator thought in his own language "our hādir latī thin mūmin murrā samān krā" or "we all amazed see pro-semin becamera" and then literally translated his thought into Arabic.

Another point which requires an explanation is that 'al-magā and 'al-ma'mināt' as they stand in the text of the tradition, form

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51. Ibid, vol. 3, Bahā verseil-Sajr, p. 82. Published Dehliendent.
a possessive compound (marakab-a-idaa), although if we say, 'nunin suruten' and 'nunun-s-munin', the compound is an adjetival one which requires in this case that as a noun qualified is rational and refers to human beings, the adjective and the noun must agree in number and gender. But perhaps the narrator being either a non-Arab or even an Arab was ill-grounded in Arabic grammar, he could have certainly said and correctly 'risal-s-mansin' meaning women or wives of the faithful or in Hindi, Urdu, Persian etc., 'namine Ki bibiyan or martan', 'nunun-s-mansin etc. etc.

As for the words of the tradition cited above, 'hetta yarsan illayya urafusun', point out forcefully in this case, too, that the narrator was again a non-Arab or an Arab having only a poor knowledge of the rules of Arabic grammar. The narrator, here too, as is obvious, thought first in his own mother-tongue and then translated into Arabic, as if the narrator thought in his language, "yehun takhli pashchishai tumhare mansind se mafi tak tumhari bat ho", or in Persian, ta he rasamand bane mansind se mafi tak tumhari bat ho". "moina-ke-aham".

**Effect of fall of Baghdad on Arabic Language**:

With the fall of Baghdad and destruction of the Abbasid caliphate all the vestiges of Arab leadership in culture whichever had managed to survive received a death blow. Arabic was replaced by Tartar, Persian or Turkish as official languages of the Muslim world. Arabic now being confined to a few Arab countries where it became utterly corrupt.
Arabic remained a corrupt language and went on being more corrupt as there was hardly any court or government which could be said to patronise it as the Umayyids, the Abbasids or the Fatimids had done. It will not be beside the point to mention here the keen interest taken by the Fatimids, notwithstanding their alleged Persian or Jewish origin, in the preservation and keeping it pure after the manner of the Arabe. With this object in view they appointed Ibn Bahshash, a noted grammarian of the time to examine the language of all official correspondence carried on by the secretaries of the royal court and issued by it. No letter would be issued unless it had received the approval of the Bahshash as regards the correctness of its language and the purity of its style.

To be brief, from 1250 A.D. roughly speaking till the accession of Muhammad Ali the Great in 1805, when he introduced the printing press into Egypt, the people had no access to books with rare exceptions, which led to more and more corruption of the language and the style. As related above, almost the greater part of the Arab world of the former Arab dominion was now under the rule of the Persians and the Turks whose languages now replaced Arabic as the official language.

1. Iraq, a very important and extensive part of the Arab world, was after the fall of Baghdad in 1258 under the Turks or the Mongols, these under the Turks of the Aqquyunlu and Cassapanca tribes and then by the Ottoman Turks, between whom and the Persians took place a long and drearless struggle for the possession of Iraq, as the Persians considered that country a holy land for themselves, owing to the cities of Karbala, Naja' Hanijaya being situated on the soil of Iraq. The Persians could.....
captured it under Safavid dynasty from the Turks and ruled it for a long time. As the majority of the Arabs of Iraq is the follower of the same sect of Islam, i.e., Shii as the Persians, the two peoples went on very well and a very large number of Persians settled down in Iraq due to the second character in their eyes. Once when the Census of Baghdad was conducted by the British Government, when it held mandate for Iraq, the Persian population of the city, the population of which was estimated at something like two and a half lacs, was found to be sixty thousand. It will be no less interesting to mention that during the Sharifian regime according to the author of the book Nakhah-e Mihanemal, when a census of Mecca was taken, its population was found to be one lac fifty thousand of which 25,000 only were Arabs, while the rest belonged to different non-Arab racial stocks - the Indians, the Indonesians, the Afghans, the Turks etc. etc. The author is an ardent nationalist who complains that it was the foreigners under whose protection these non-Arabs settled down in Mecca exploited them and replaced them to their own advantage.52

To return to Iraq the Persians' influence was so terrible or tremendous that in Hajaj e.g. it would not be possible for a foreigner to decide whether he stood on Iranian soil or of that of Iraq. Persians were to be seen everywhere, there was no other means of communication but Persian language. Persians opened here their religious schools in which learned men from Iran lectured on Shii theology, law and other subjects. To the detriment of Arabic, Persian was the medium of instruction, as despite their ability to read and write Arabic, the learned men could not speak Arabic fluently, and even if they spoke it, they did so with a non-Arab pronunciation which does not distinguish between ha and ha, aia and hama, sia and the etc as we find in India. With the result that Arab students who came to attend their lectures learnt Persian and were more efficient in it than in Arabic. It is needless to say that these factors only led to further corruption and degeneration of Arabic and even the Arabs who came in contact of them, began to speak Arabic with Persian pronunciation. The same is true of Hijaz where religious schools e.g. Madrasa Suleyiah in Mecca, and others are run by Indian learned men.

Arab historians relate that by the half of the fourth century A.H., the classical Arabic had disappeared even from the desert. Classical Arabic now became the exclusive property of the educated classes in towns and cities. Although it was no longer the language of daily life, it continued to be the language of not only religion but also of science and literature and even of music. Although the upper classes, too, did not speak Arabic as mother-tongue, it, however, continued to be the language of culture, and slave-girls meant or intended to be singing women, were given a thorough and decent education including Arabic grammar, literature, history etc. This state of affairs continued as long as at least the Abbasid caliphate lasted. Arabic continued also to be the state language of not only in Arab countries, but also in non-Arab countries as the language of diplomacy throughout the Muslim world. Although out of the 37 caliphs of the Abbasid house who ascended the pontifical throne, only three had Arab women for their mothers while the rest were all sons of foreign slave-girls. But since the religion of the state was Islam and official language of the caliphate was Arabic, the Abbasid caliphs were referred to by foreigners, as Arabs.\(^1\) Consequently the Arabic language to...
apparently suffer any loss of prestige and influence.

Grammatical mistakes now found their way not only into the speech of the common folk, but also into the writings and the speech of the learned and the upper class. A study of the work "Durratul ghawwas fi ahadil Khawass" by Hariri, shows how the language had been corrupted among the upper classes as a result of their contact with foreign elements in the Muslim population or to be more exact in the Arab community. Hariri, for instance, enumerates hundred ninety two mistakes which were rampant in the speech of the upper class which explains the name of his work. Some of these mistakes have persisted even down to our own time and have been committed by Sujutí also and speak of them when discussing his language and style.

Here arises a pertinent question that the order of verbs in the above traditions is according to the rule of Arabic sentence and is quite correct. Why then this particular mistake?, while the verb is plural. A plausible explanation is that the languages of the non-Arab Muslims were strongly influenced by the Arab modes of expression and the learned men among the Muslims, either when translating from Arabic into their languages followed the order of words as in Arabic sentence. This is clearly brought out by the Urdu translations of Shah

Abdalqadir and Shah Raffudin. Anyone can see that for himself. The Urdu translators took their cue from their Persian predecessors, as any Persian translation of the Qur'an or any other religious text will show. The habit of following the Arabic construction of a sentence struck root and was sometimes followed even in secular writings. It is the reason why Prof. Browne declared the writings of such Persian writers as of no literary value. As to have said above that the Persians and the non-Arabs dominated the cultural life of the Muslims not only in their own country but also in Arab lands.

Loss of Power by Arabs:

It has been repeatedly stated above that with the establishment of the Abbassid dynasty on the pontifical thrones which her risen to power with the help of the Persians, the Arabs were first deprived by the new state of political power and authority, they being replaced by Persians as the latter were enthusiastic supporters of the Abbassids who stood for the ideals of Islam, i.e. equality and brotherhood of all the believers. On the other hand, the Arabs were the supporters of the Umayyad dynasty which believed not only in the superiority of the Arab race but in the right of the Arabs to rule the conquered nations which were far more civilized and cultured than themselves. The Umayyids embraced Islam.

only towards the end of the life of the Prophet when he conquered Mecca or in other words they embraced Islam when they saw no option or way to escape but to embrace Islam. They were as a matter of fact the upholders of the ancient or the pre-Islamic ideals. Their roughshod treatment of the non-Arabs, although the latter had embraced Islam gave rise to great resentment among the conquered people and particularly among the Persians who were a proud race, and in spite of their conversion to Islam still loathed their defeat by the Arabs when they considered a despicable people with no culture and civilization. The Persians took advantage of the rivalry between the Hashimides from whom came the Prophet himself and the cousin and son-in-law, Ali and the Umayyids who were the rivals of the Hashimides. After the civil war among the Muslims which began towards the end of the reign of the third caliph, Uthman and ended with the assassination of Ali, Hasanah Abi Sufyan, his bitterest rival became the indisputed ruler of the Muslim world. But the Abbasids, the descendants of Abbas, the Prophet's uncle never yielded, nor recognized the claims of the Umayyids to rule the Muslims. They, therefore, carried a propaganda among the Persians that as Hashimides and kinsmen of the Prophet, it was only they who should rule the Muslim people. As the Persians had always been under hereditary rulers for over a millennium, they could not understand how Abu Bakr or Umar succeeded the Prophet after his death because he was not only a founder of a religion, but also that of a powerful state, and why not his daughter and son-in-law who were in their eyes the most
natural heirs of the Prophet. Hence their natural inclination was towards Shias. They sided, therefore, with the Abbasids and in return of their services they not only received high posts and also dominated the whole state but also became the leaders of the Muslims in the fields of religion and literature also. Even a cursory glance at the history of Muslim civilisation will show that all the traditionists (ahadithia), scholars, historians were all Persians, with the exception of Imam Ahmed b. Hanbal, all the leading traditionists like Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Abu Da'ud were Persians.

As long as Arabic was a living language, no house ceased to the Arab culture and its medium of expression Arabic language, but the decay of Arabic due to the contact of the Arabs with foreigners and their domination of the cultural life of the Muslims and the Arab peoples, began to tell adversely, at least as regards the Arabic language. After the rise of the Abbasids, the Arabs not only lost their political power but also ceased to act as leaders of Arab culture. Deprived of their former position as leaders in politics and culture, the Arabs gradually sank into their old ignorance going back to their desert age ceasing to be an active force in Arab or Muslim life. Thus the whole field of life whether political or cultural was left to the non-Arabs who undoubtedly now produced great scholars and writers, though they now took to write in their own language. The Arabs
also now began to concede the superiority of the non-Arabs. Ibn Khaldun, the great Arab historian says, "Most of the men of learning in Islam are non-Arabs. (Hamin al-alam fi' Islam aktharun mu'ajam)."