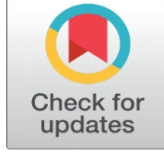
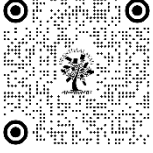


TRANSLATION OF SANSKRIT TEXTS INTO PERSIAN DURING AKBAR EMPEROR

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ABSTRACT

Akbar was the third emperor of the Mughal Empire. He was a patron of art and culture, fond of Indian literature, and created a library of over 24,000 volumes written in Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Kashmiri, etc. Akbar wanted to establish a strong kingdom in India, and his desire to rule effectively compelled him to encourage the indigenous language, Sanskrit. He commanded his courtiers to translate Sanskrit works into Persian, including the Atharva Veda, the Upanishads, the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata, the Bhagavad Gītā, and other Purānas. Initially, Akbar's Persian scholars translated the Sanskrit epic Mahābhārata into Persian. The famous Persian scholar Abul-Fazl refined the raw translation into poetic verses. Akbar's Rāmāyana is a prose translation of all seven books of Vālmīki's Sanskrit Rāmāyana into Persian. This demonstrates the significant literary fusion of Sanskrit and Persian languages during Akbar's reign.

Keywords: Akbar, Abul-Fazl, Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Bhagavad Gītā.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Mughal Empire was one of the largest centralized states in pre-modern world history, lasting from 1526 to 1858. The dynasty was established by capable Muslim rulers from present-day Uzbekistan. Under Mughal rule, India was unified under a single powerful leader. During this period, art and architecture flourished, leading to the construction of many beautiful monuments.

One of the greatest Mughal emperors to have ruled India was Akbar. He was the third emperor of the Mughal Empire and was popularly known as Akbar the Great due to his ability to rule efficiently and skilfully. Mughal India developed a strong and stable economy, leading to commercial expansion and greater patronage of culture. Akbar had an extensive library with a vast collection of books and scriptures. His courtiers read books aloud to him, and he possessed knowledge equivalent to that of the most learned scholars of his time. He was also an admirer of fine arts and consistently encouraged poetry, music, and dance in his court. Additionally, Akbar was an architecturally inclined ruler who constructed numerous palaces and monuments, including the Red Fort and Fatehpur Sikri in Agra.

Akbar was tolerant of all religions and did not differentiate between Hindus and non-Hindus. Disillusioned with orthodox Islam and perhaps hoping to foster religious unity within his empire, Akbar promulgated Din-i-Ilahi, a syncretic creed

derived from Islam, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity. Many of his courtiers adopted Din-i-Ilahi as their religion, as they believed Akbar to be a prophet.

The most common subject of contemporary prose writing was history. As Mughal supremacy in India became well established under Akbar, he began commissioning chroniclers to write official annals of the dynasty's rule. The most important official history is the Akbar-nama, written by Abul-Fazl, the emperor's confidant and minister. This voluminous and monumental work is complemented by his Ain-i-Akbari, an encyclopaedic directory of the administration of the era.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to examine the translation of Sanskrit texts into Persian during the reign of Emperor Akbar and to assess its impact on cultural exchange, literary traditions, and intellectual development in Mughal India. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Analyze the historical and socio-political context that led to the translation of Sanskrit texts into Persian.
2. Identify key Sanskrit works translated during Akbar's reign and the scholars involved in these efforts.
3. Evaluate Akbar's role in promoting translations and the extent of royal patronage.
4. Investigate the literary and linguistic adaptations made in Persian translations of Sanskrit texts.
5. Assess the broader implications of these translations on Indian literature, philosophy, and cultural integration.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a historical-analytical approach, combining qualitative research methods to analyze primary and secondary sources. The methodology includes:

Literature Review – A thorough examination of historical texts, manuscripts, and secondary literature related to the Mughal court, Persian translations, and Sanskrit literary traditions.

Primary Sources – Analysis of Persian translations of Sanskrit texts, including the Razmnāmah (Mahābhārata), Rāmāyana, and Bhagavad Gītā, as well as historical accounts such as the Akbar-nāma and Ain-i-Akbari.

Secondary Sources – Scholarly works, journal articles, and books discussing Indo-Persian literary exchanges, Akbar's policies, and the impact of translation on cultural unity.

Comparative Analysis – A study of linguistic and philosophical differences between Sanskrit originals and their Persian translations to understand how ideas were adapted or modified.

Interpretive Approach – Analyzing the role of translation in fostering religious and cultural dialogue within the Mughal empire, as well as its influence on later literary and philosophical developments.

By integrating historical research with textual analysis, this study seeks to highlight the significance of Sanskrit-to-Persian translations as a major intellectual and cultural endeavour of the Mughal era.

4. TRANSLATION OF SANSKRIT TEXTS INTO PERSIAN

The literature of a country serves as a mirror reflecting the social, political, philosophical, and cultural aspects of its time. During the Turkish rule in India, trade relations promoted the exchange of linguistic knowledge, allowing the dissemination of ideas through language. Language is a fundamental medium of human expression. Sanskrit, the oldest language of India, persisted in various forms during the Mughal period. Meanwhile, Arabic and Persian became the primary languages of expression for Muslims in medieval India. As a result, scholars translated many Sanskrit texts into Persian, the predominant language of the Mughal era.

During Akbar's reign, two major Hindu epics, the Rāmāyaṇa (Ramayana) and the Mahābhārata (Mahabharata), were translated from Sanskrit into Persian. In addition to these, several other Sanskrit texts, including the Atharva Veda,

Upaniṣads (Upanishads), Bhagavad Gītā (Bhagavad Gita), Purāṇas (Puranas), Līlāvātī (Lilavati), and Rājataranginī (Rajatarangini), were also rendered into Persian.

One of the notable Persian scholars of the Mughal period, Abul-Fazl, a distinguished prose writer, revised Anwār-i-Suhaylī (Anwar-i-Suhaili) at the behest of Emperor Akbar and produced Iyār-i-Dānish (Iyar-i-Danish). In his writings, he recalls Akbar instructing him to rewrite Anwār-i-Suhaylī in a simpler style, removing rare Arabic expressions and complex metaphors to make it more accessible. However, Sir Denison Ross noted that Iyār-i-Dānish never gained the same popularity as Anwār-i-Suhaylī¹.

The vast number of translations and versions of this book in various languages has been documented by scholars. It has been translated into Pahlavi, Syriac, Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, Latin, Spanish, Tibetan, Greek, English, Russian, French, Italian, Slavonic, Turkish, Caravani, Dutch, Danish, Czech, Icelandic, Yiddish, Swedish, Polish, Hungarian, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Mongolian, Urdu (Hindustani), Dakhani, Afghani, Prakrit, Pashto, Japanese, and many other languages. Despite this extensive documentation, a highly valuable Persian translation has remained largely unknown.

Among the significant Persian translations of Sanskrit texts, the Atharva Veda, one of the four sacred Hindu scriptures, was translated into Persian by Haji Ibrahim Sirhindi. Kalhaṇa's historical work, Rājataranginī (Rajatarangini), was translated by Maulana Shah Mohammad Shahabadi, an effort initially commissioned by Kashmiri Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin. The famous Sanskrit folktales of the Pañcatantra (Panchatantra) were rendered into Persian by Mulla Hussain Waiz under the title Kalīlawā Dimna (Kaleelawa Dimna). Emperor Akbar continued this tradition, and his successor, Dara Shikoh, further advanced it by translating fifty Upaniṣads (Upanishads) into Persian, naming the work Sirr-i-Akbar (The Greatest Secret).

The Rāmāyaṇa (Ramayana) and Mahābhārata (Mahabharata) stand as India's most revered epic poems. Emperor Akbar commissioned their Persian translations. Abul Fazl, in the introduction to Razmnāmah (The Book of Wars), described the Persian version of the Mahābhārata (Mahabharata). Mulla Abdur Qadir Badayuni, who translated the Rāmāyaṇa (Ramayana), wrote:

"The Emperor commanded me to translate the Rāmāyaṇa (Ramayana), which is a superior composition to the Mahābhārata (Mahabharata)... In the year 997 (Hijri), I completed the translation, which had taken me four years. At the end, I wrote the couplet:

We have written the story—who will bring it to the Emperor?

We have burned our soul—who will bring it to the Emperor?"

It was much admired..... He commanded me to write a preface to it..... but since it was no such great recovery from my former falling out of favour..... I dissimulated.²"

Despite facing political challenges at court, Badayuni's work was well received. Razmnāmah was a foundational component of the political ideology of Akbar's court, where by the Mughals developed a new type of Indo-Persian imperial aesthetic. Akbar's Rāmāyaṇa, completed in 1584, is a product of several layers of translation. Brahmins at the court first translated the verses from Sanskrit into Awadhi. Court translators then interpreted the various scenes. The original translation of Akbar's Rāmāyaṇa is lost, but pages from subsequent editions are available in private collections. Later, during Jahangir's reign, Sheikh Saadullah created a poetic Persian translation of the Rāmāyaṇa (Ramayana), titled Rama Wo Seeta (Rāma wo Sītā).

The Bhagavad Gītā (Bhagavad Gita), often considered a summary of the Mahābhārata (Mahabharata), was translated into Persian by scholars Abul Faizi and Allama Abul Fazl. However, they viewed its philosophy as secondary to the grand narrative of the Mahābhārata (Mahabharata), which they perceived as a tale of adventure and warfare—hence the Persian title "The Book of Wars".

Among scientific texts, Līlāvātī (Lilavati), the renowned Sanskrit treatise on arithmetic by Bhāskarācārya (Bhaskaracharya), was translated into Persian in 1587 at Akbar's command by Abul Faizi.

¹ Encyclopedia Iranica, Vol. 3, Fase - 4

² Essays on Indo-Persian ... p.234.

A newly discovered Persian translation of the Pañcatantra (Panchatantra), undertaken by Mustafa Khaliqdad Abbasi at Emperor Akbar's request, has been found in the National Museum, New Delhi. Unfortunately, the manuscript is incomplete, with several missing folios. In his preface, Abbasi describes how Akbar instructed him to translate the Sanskrit original. He notes that earlier Persian versions—such as those by Burzoe in Pahlavi, Ibn al-Muqaffa' in Arabic, Rudaki, Nasrullah bin Mohammad, Hussain Waiz Kashifi, and Abul Fazl—were not approved by the Emperor due to their deviations from the original, variations in content, and excessive use of Arabic phrases. Abbasi's Persian Pañcākhyāna (Panchakhyana) appears to be a first draft, intended for Akbar's review and possible revision.

Philologist Franklin Edgerton has classified the original Pañcatantra (Panchatantra) (which he terms Ur-Pañcatantra) into four branches. One of these, the northwestern version, served as the source for Gunadhya's Br̥hat-Kathā (Brihat-Katha), Somadeva's Kathāsaritsāgara (Kathasaritsagara), and Kṣemendra's Br̥hat-Kathā-Mañjarī (Brihat-Katha-Manjari). Another, Ur-Tantrākhyānika (Ur-Tantrakhyanika), led to the Kashmiri Tantrākhyāyika (Tantrakhayika) and Pañcākhyānika (Panchakhyanika) of Purnabhadra. The third branch gave rise to three later versions—the southern Pañcatantra (Panchatantra), the Nepalese recension, and Narayana's Hitopadeśa (Hitopadesha, The Book of Counsel). The fourth branch was translated into Pahlavi and became the foundation for subsequent versions in Old Syriac, Arabic, and other languages.

If Abbasi's Persian translation was based on a Jaina recension of the Pañcatantra (Panchatantra), its date can be estimated. Jaina scholars such as Hiravijaya Suri, Vijayasena Suri, and Bhanuchandra Upadhyaya were invited to Akbar's court in 1582 AD, indicating that the Persian translation likely emerged around that time.

5. CONCLUSION

The translation of Sanskrit texts into Persian during Emperor Akbar's reign represents a significant intellectual and cultural endeavour that bridged the linguistic and philosophical traditions of India. Akbar's commitment to knowledge and cultural synthesis led to the systematic translation of foundational Sanskrit works, including the Mahābhārata, Rāmāyaṇa, Bhagavad Gītā, and various Upaniṣads, into Persian. These efforts were not merely linguistic exercises but served as a means of fostering religious dialogue, promoting intellectual exchanges, and strengthening cultural integration within the diverse Mughal empire.

The translations undertaken during Akbar's time, with the involvement of scholars like Abul Fazl, Badauni, and Abul Faizi, played a crucial role in shaping Indo-Persian literary traditions. The adaptation of Sanskrit texts into Persian helped introduce Indian philosophical, ethical, and historical thought to a broader audience, influencing the literary and administrative policies of the Mughal court. Moreover, these translations laid the groundwork for future scholarship, including Dara Shikoh's Persian translation of the Upaniṣads, which later influenced European Indology.

By making Sanskrit knowledge accessible to Persian-speaking elites, Akbar's translation movement contributed to the preservation and reinterpretation of Indian heritage. It also demonstrated the Mughal Empire's pluralistic ethos, where diverse traditions coexisted and enriched one another. This period stands as a testament to the power of translation as a tool for cultural diplomacy, intellectual growth, and the transmission of knowledge across linguistic and religious boundaries.

Thus, Akbar's initiative not only fostered Indo-Persian literary fusion but also reinforced India's syncretic traditions, leaving a lasting impact on the historical and philosophical discourse of the subcontinent.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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