



**Original Article**

# Persian as the Foundational Language of Indian Science, Philosophy and Arts

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## Abstract

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Persian, as a language of knowledge, culture, and aesthetics, occupied a central role in India for nearly six centuries. Between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries, Persian was not only the administrative medium of empires but also the intellectual channel through which science, philosophy, and art flourished. This paper explores how Persian functioned as a bridge between Sanskritic and Islamic traditions, while simultaneously shaping uniquely Indo-Persian cultural forms. By examining Persian translations of scientific texts, philosophical works such as Dara Shukoh's *Majma' al-Bahrain*, and poetic contributions by Amir Khushrau, Faizi, and Bedil, the paper highlights Persian's foundational status. Quotations from Persian texts illustrate how knowledge was expressed, debated, and transformed. Comparative analysis with Sanskrit, Arabic, and English demonstrates Persian's integrative role. The study concludes that Persian was not a borrowed court language but the intellectual bloodstream of India, transmitting ideas across cultures and centuries.

**Keywords-**Persian language; India; Indo-Persian science; Sufism; Philosophy; Mughal arts; Translation movement; Knowledge transmission; Comparative linguistics

## Introduction:

Language is not only a vehicle of communication but also a medium through which knowledge is structured, preserved, and transmitted. In India, Persian emerged as a foundational intellectual language from the thirteenth century, mediating between Sanskritic wisdom, Arabic scholarship, and vernacular creativity. Its role was not limited to courts and administration; it permeated science, philosophy, historiography, poetry, and the visual arts.

The Delhi Sultanate institutionalized Persian as the language of governance, but it was under the Mughals that Persian became truly embedded in the cultural fabric of India. Abul Fazl, the chief ideologue of Akbar's court, described Persian as a refined medium capable of uniting diverse intellectual traditions:

"زبان فارسی به گونه‌ای است که هم لطافت دارد و هم توانایی در بیان معانی دقیق."

(*A'īn-i Akbarī*, vol. 1, p. 17)

"The Persian tongue is such that it possesses both delicacy and the capacity to express subtle meanings."

This recognition of Persian's expressive richness explains why it became the chosen medium of scientific translation, philosophical synthesis, and artistic creativity. Persian and the Sciences in India

Persian texts became essential for transmitting scientific knowledge across India. Medical, astronomical, and mathematical works originally composed in Sanskrit were translated into Persian, thereby widening their accessibility.

## Medicine:

Muhammad Mumin's *Tuhfat al-Mu'min* (Gift of the Believers, 17th c.) is a comprehensive Persian medical encyclopedia compiled in India. It synthesizes Unani, Ayurvedic, and local remedies. In the introduction, Mumin praises the Indian medical tradition:

"طب هند به سبب دقیق و تجربه، برترین پایه را در میان علوم دارویی دارد."

(*Tuhfat al-Mu'min*, p. 5)

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*"The medicine of India, due to its precision and experience, holds the highest rank among pharmaceutical sciences."*

This reflects how Persian became a platform to valorize indigenous sciences while integrating them into Islamic medical discourse.

*"فرام آید که مطابق با افلاک این سرزمین باشد."*

(*Zīj-i Muḥammad Shāhī*, p. 112)

*"We drew upon both Indian and Islamic calendars to compile tables suited to the skies of this land."*

This cross-pollination of traditions was only possible because Persian operated as the scholarly lingua franca.

Persian, Philosophy, and Intellectual Exchange:

*"حکمت هندیان و تصوف مسلمانان هر دو به یک دریا می‌ریزند."*

(*Majma' al-Baḥrāyīn*, p. 21)

*"The wisdom of the Hindus and the Sufism of the Muslims both flow into the same ocean."*

(*Sīrr-i Akbar*, p. 67)

*"Brahman is the reality that permeates all things."*

By rendering Sanskrit metaphysics in Persian, Dara created a shared intellectual platform.

*"به هر قطره اگر نگر کنی عالمی است / به هر قطره اگر نگر کنی عالمی است."*

(Bedil, *Kulliyāt*, vol. 2, p. 318)

*"If you look into each particle, it is Brahman; if you gaze into each drop, it is a universe."*

Such verses reveal Persian's capacity to express hybrid philosophical insights.

*"من ترک هندم، هم هندیام و هم فارسی."*

(Khusrau, *Kulliyāt*, p. 44)

*"I am the Indian Turk, both Hindi and Persian am I."*

This self-identification shows how Persian anchored composite cultural identities.

*"بدون علم و حکمت، سلطنت پایدار نمی‌ماند."*

(*Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*, p. 89)

*"Without knowledge and wisdom, sovereignty cannot endure."*

Thus, history in Persian was simultaneously political philosophy. In art, Persian aesthetics infused Mughal

*"یا ایتها النفس المطمئنة ارجعی إلى ربک یا ایتها النفس المطمئنة ارجعی إلى ربک."*

(*Qur'an 89:27, Persian calligraphic rendering*)

*"O tranquil soul, return to your Lord."*

The medium of expression persian calligraphic style was integral to the architectural message.

## Comparative Analysis

- Sanskrit: Rich in sciences and philosophy but socially restricted; Persian democratized access.
- Arabic: Central to theology and law, yet Persian reached wider audiences in India.
- English: Introduced during colonial rule but disrupted centuries of Indo-Persian synthesis.

Persian thus emerges as the most integrative and foundational intellectual language in India's medieval and early modern history.

## Conclusion:

Persian in India was not simply the language of rulers; it was the medium through which sciences were transmitted, philosophies reconciled, and arts redefined. By quoting from

## Astronomy:

The *Zīj-i Muḥammad Shāhī* (1730s), commissioned by Emperor Muhammad Shah, exemplifies Indo-Persian astronomy. It merged Sanskrit astronomical calculations with Islamic *zīj* traditions. One passage states

*"از تقویم هندی و اسلامی هر دو بهره گرفتیم تا جداولی فرآم آید که مطابق با افلاک این سرزمین باشد."*

Philosophy in Persian texts illustrates intellectual dialogues between Hindu and Islamic traditions.

## Dara Shukoh's Syncretism:

Dara Shukoh (1615–1659), the Mughal prince, sought to reconcile Sufi metaphysics with Hindu Vedanta. In *Majma' al-Baḥrāyīn* (The Mingling of Two Oceans), he declared:

*"حکمت هندیان و تصوف مسلمانان هر دو به یک دریا می‌ریزند."*

His Persian translation of the Upanishads, *Sīrr-i Akbar* (The Great Secret), introduced Brahmanical concepts into the Persian-Islamic philosophical world. One verse reads:

*"بر هن حقيقة است که در همه چیز جاری است."*

## Sufi Metaphysics:

Persian Sufi texts also shaped Indian thought. The poetry of Bedil (1642–1720) embodies a blend of Islamic mysticism and Indian metaphysics:

*"به هر ذره اگر نظر کنی بر همنی است / به هر ذره اگر نظر کنی بر همنی است."*

## Persian and the Arts in India Literature:

Persian poetry flourished in India, shaping both Indo-Persian and Urdu traditions. Amir Khusrau, the iconic Indo-Persian poet, described his bilingual creativity:

*"من ترک هندم، هم هندیام و هم فارسی."*

## Historiography:

Persian was also the language of history. Ziauddin Barani, in his *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi* (14th c.), wrote:

*"بدون علم و حکمت، سلطنت پایدار نمی‌ماند."*

painting and architecture. The inscriptions on the Taj Mahal exemplify the fusion of Persian calligraphy with Indian monumentality. For example, on the main gateway is inscribed:

*"یا ایتها النفس المطمئنة ارجعی إلى ربک یا ایتها النفس المطمئنة ارجعی إلى ربک."*

(*Qur'an 89:27, Persian calligraphic rendering*)

*"O tranquil soul, return to your Lord."*

Persian texts—from *Tuhfat al-Mu'min* to Dara Shukoh's *Majma' al-Baḥrāyīn* and Bedil's poetry we see how deeply embedded Persian was in India's intellectual bloodstream. Its decline in the nineteenth century marked the rupture of a centuries-long dialogue between cultures. To understand Indian science, philosophy, and art in their full richness, we must recognize Persian as a foundational language

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#### Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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