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# SANSKRIT MANUALS FOR LEARNING PERSIAN

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## I

The interaction between the Islamic and Sanskritic traditions of learning involved translation of a number of representative works from Sanskrit into Arabic/Persian and vice versa from the eighth century onwards. While we know the names of several works thus translated or adapted, not much is known about the methodology of translation, nor how Muslims had learnt Sanskrit or Hindus and Jainas had learnt Arabic or Persian.

An exploration of the unpublished Sanskrit manuscript collections shows that there existed a class of works whose aim was to teach Persian through the medium of Sanskrit, the most notable being Bihari Krsna Dasa's *Parasika-Prakasa* which was dedicated to Akbar. No doubt, Akbar's attempts at cultural synthesis, coupled with Todar Mal's introduction of Persian as the bureaucratic language, gave an impetus to the compilation of such hand-books, but these began to be composed much earlier.

There are about fifteen such manuals written during the four hundred years between A.D. 1364 and 1764. They contain mostly

bilingual vocabularies in verse, in the style of traditional Sanskrit lexica, though one or two provide grammatical rules as well. Some manuals give vocabularies related to specific areas of learning only. Thus, for example, Vedangaraya's *Samskrita - Parasika - Padaprakasa*, composed in the reign of Shah Jahan, aims to teach Islamic calendar and technical terms related to Islamic astronomy and astrology.

In the context of my study of exchanges between Hindu and Islamic scientific traditions, especially in the field of astronomy and mathematics, I have been investigating the mechanics of this exchange which include such manuals for learning Persian. In this paper, I propose to make a bibliographical survey of this new genre of writing but I shall not attempt at any analysis of the texts from the lexical and grammatical viewpoints.

## II

1. The earliest work we know of this nature was the *Yavananamamala*, literally a "Garland of Muslim words", composed in 1364 by Vidyanilaya who appears to be a Jaina. Three manuscripts are said to be available of this text in some private Jaina manuscript collections in and around Baroda. Beyond this we do not know anything more about this book. But it is quite probable that this work may have been composed at the court of Firuz Shah Tughluq who sponsored translations from Sanskrit to Persian and also vice versa.

It is well known that Firuz Shah Tughluq collected some 1300 Sanskrit texts from the *Jvalamukhi* temple during his campaigns in the Himalayan foothills and got some of these translated into Persian, notably the *Brhatsamhita* of Varahamihira.

At least two Jaina monks, Mahendra Suri and his pupil Malayendu Suri were at the court of Firuz. These two must have helped in the translation of the Sanskrit texts. They were also responsible for the reverse transmission of knowledge, viz. from the Persian into Sanskrit. In 1370 Mahendra Suri wrote the first ever manual in Sanskrit on the astrolabe. Within the same decade, his pupil Malayendu Suri wrote a commentary on this work. Mahendra Suri was greatly impressed by the multiple functions of the astrolabe and called it *Yantraraja*, "the king of astronomical instruments." His book, also called *Yantraraja*, was extremely popular among the Jainas and Hindus just as the Persian manual on the astrolabe, the *Bist Bab* by Nasir al-Din Tusi, was popular among the Muslims.

It is probable that Vidyanilaya belonged to the circle of Jainas around Mahendra Suri and composed his Persian-Sanskrit lexicon to facilitate the learning of Persian by the Sanskritists.

2. But the intellectual exchanges between the two groups were taking place not only at Delhi, but in Gujarat as well. In fact, Gujarat had a long history of maritime relations with the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula. Large colonies of Arab navigators and maritime traders lived on the west coast even before the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. In Gujarat was produced in the year 1365 another work called *Parasi-Namamala*, that is, a "Garland of Persian words". This work was composed by Minister Salaksa at the request of King Haribhrama of *Ilavarana* (modern Idar). The author justifies his composition of this lexicon of foreign terms by saying that proficiency in several languages leads to high honour at royal courts. As an example, he cites the case of Varahamihira, who popularised Greek astronomy and astrology through his works.

Salaksa had a son called Mahipa, who shared his father's interest in lexicography and composed a Sanskrit lexicon which is known under the name of *Mahipakosa*.

3. The next work in the series is called *Parasika-Bhasanusasana*, which can be translated as "Instruction in the Persian language," or "Introduction to the Persian language". It was composed by one Vikramasimha who was also known as Virasimha. He was also a Jaina, belonging to the Pragvata clan. We learn that Vikramasimha's father was Madanapala Thakkura, that his grandfather was Jajaga and that his guru was called Ananda Suri. Unfortunately none of these persons can be identified in relation to a definite chronology. However, it is said that the book was composed some time before 1544. The book was printed in Lahore in 1940, but I could not locate a copy in India so far.

All the three texts that I have mentioned up till now have been composed by Jainas. This is not surprising. I have argued in my *Thakkura Pheru's Rayanaparikkha: A Medieval Prakrit Text on Gemmology* (Aligarh 1984) that in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, the banking and minting operations in the Gujarat-Rajasthan-Delhi region were controlled by the Jainas. Therefore the early Sultans of Delhi sought the cooperation of these Jainas for their minting and banking operations. In fact, up to the time of Allauddin Khalji, the Sultans issued their coins in the existing designs with legends in Sanskrit and Devanagari script. Owing to these commercial and monetary reasons, the Jainas had better relations at the Delhi court. They also played the role of mediators in the exchange of ideas between the Islamic and Sanskritic traditions of learning.

For example, the Jaina bankar Thakkura Pheru was not only the

essay master at the court of Allauddin Khalji and his successors, he also transmitted a number of ideas from Islamic sources in several of his writings in Prakrit. Thus, in his work on gemmology, he discusses gems imported from Persia and their prices; in his work on assaying, he talks of the Persian technique of purifying gold; in his work on mathematics, he teaches how to convert dates from the Hijri era to the Vikrama era and the other way round, and so on. We have already seen how the Jaina monk Mahendra Suri popularized the science of the astrolabe through his Sanskrit manual.

4. Under the Mughals and especially from Akbar onwards, the interaction between the two cultural groups became more pronounced. That Akbar established a Maktabkhana or the bureau of translation is too well known a fact to need reiteration here. Equally well known are the names of the various Sanskrit texts that were rendered into Persian at this Maktabkhana. In the reverse direction, only one text appears to have been translated from the Persian to Sanskrit at Akbar's court, viz. the astronomical tables of Ulugh Beg. Abul Fazl and Fatullah Shirazi, it was said, explained the meaning of the original text, while Kishan Joshi, Gangadhar and Mahesh Mahanand wrote it down in Sanskrit. From this and other accounts of the translation work carried out at Akbar's court, it appears that there were not many persons who were masters of both languages, namely Persian and Sanskrit. Consequently the translations were done by a team consisting of some who knew Persian only and some others who mastered just the Sanskrit.

One of the rare persons who learnt both the tongues was Bihari Krsna Dasa Misra, who was a Sakadvipiya brahmin and sun worshipper. Therefore he had a great affinity towards Akbar who too observed sunworship. At Akbar's instance, he composed the *Parasika-Prakasa*,

literally, "The Light of the Persian language," and dedicated it to the monarch. At the beginning of this work, he says that he did not study Persian systematically but just picked it up by mere listening. In spite of this disclaimer, he hopes that his work will serve as a boat to those who wish to cross the ocean of Persian literature. This work was published from Berlin in 1887 by the famous Indologist Aibrecht Weber. Again in this century the Sanskrit University at Varanasi brought it out in 1965 under the editorship of a remarkable scholar called Bibhutibhusan Bhattacharya, who knew both Sanskrit and Persian well.

5. Akbar's son and successor Jahangir encouraged an Assamese scholar named Karnapura to write another manual to learn Persian. Accordingly Karnapura composed a new book but with the old title *Parasika-Prakasa*. This was apparently popular in Nepal and, on the basis of a manuscript from Nepal, it was published from Kashi in 1952. This edition is difficult to locate. Luckily Bibhutibhusan Bhattacharya cites many passages from this in his edition of Bihari Krsna Dasa's work.

6. Jahangir's successor Shah Jahan ordered yet another Sanskrit manual to learn Persian. But this one is of a different kind; so was also its author. I have shown in my "Astronomical instruments in Mughal Miniatures" (*Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*, Vol. 16-17, Hamburg 1992) that Akbar instituted the custom of appointing Hindus as royal astrologers with the title Jotik Roy and that this custom was continued by his successors. I have also shown that one Nilakantha from Benaras, who was the author of a very popular Sanskrit work dealing with Islamic astrology entitled *Tajikanilakanthi*, was the Jotik Roy at Akbar's court. Jahangir had two royal astrologers: Kesava and Paramananda.

Likewise, one Srimalajit was Shah Jahan's royal astrologer. But this one was given the title Vedangaraya, which means the same as Jotik Roy, but sounds much more impressive. This Vedangaraya also composed a Sanskrit manual to learn Persian under the title *Sanskrita-Parasika-Padaprakasa*. But as I said, this manual is somewhat different from the predecessors. It teaches vocabulary related to Islamic astronomy and astrology. It also teaches how to convert dates in Hijri era into dates of Saka era and vice versa.

7. Obviously this vocabulary of astronomical and astrological terms was quite popular. So much so, within sixteen years of its composition, i.e. in 1659, a shorter paraphrase was prepared by Vrajabhusana under the title *Parasi-Vinoda*, i.e. "Persian Delight."

8. Some time before 1649 a Jaina writer composed a work entitled *Toruski-Namamala* or *Yavana-Namamala*. Unfortunately the first folio is missing in the only extant manuscript of this work, which is now at the L.D. Institute of Indology of Ahmadabad. Consequently we do not know the name of the author. The colophon at the end of the work merely states that the author was a Jaina and the son of Minister Soma. The manuscript was copied in 1649.

9. Again some time around 1676 Shivaji ordered the compilation of the *Raja-Vyavahara-Kosa* by Raghunatha Pandita. This work contains administrative terminology in Persian together with Sanskrit equivalents. It was published from Poona in 1880.

10. A similar work dealing with Persian vocabulary related to administration and royal correspondence was compiled at the instance of Sawai Madhava Singh about the year 1764 by Dalapatiraya under the

title *Yavanaparipatyānukrama* or *Patraprasasti*. The last chapter called *Rajānitinirupānasataka* contains a bilingual vocabulary.

11. Sawai Madho Singh also caused, about the year 1764, the composition of a Persian dictionary with meanings, this time not in Sanskrit, but in the vernacular under the title : *Parasi-Prakasa-Kosa Bhasa*, by Hiralala Kayastha. A unique manuscript of this work is now in the Khas Mohur Collection of the Maharaja Sawai Mansingh II Museum and Library at the City Palace of Jaipur.

12 & 13. The same collection at Jaipur contains two other works of this nature but of uncertain date. These are *Parasi-Prakasa-Kosa* by Divakara, s.o. Siva, and *Parasi-Namamala* by Vikramasimha Mahanta.

14 & 15. Finally, there are two anonymous and undated manuals at the L.D. Institute of Indology of Ahmadabad, which I saw in xerocopies. These two texts are named *Pharasi-Kosa*, and *Pharasi-Dhatu-Rupavali*.

These then are the fifteen texts composed during the four centuries between 1364 and 1764, which aim to teach Persian language to those who know Sanskrit. Vedangaraya aims still higher and says :

*samskrtoktividi parasijnata  
parasividi ca samskrtajnata /  
tadvayavidi ca tadvayajnata  
jayate 'tra tad adhiyatam idam //*

He who knows Sanskrit will acquire the knowledge of Persian.

He who knows Persian will likewise get the knowledge of Sanskrit.

He who knows neither will learn both the tongues.  
May you, therefore, study this book thoroughly.

### III

Now I may make a few remarks about the nature of these compositions. All these works invariably attempt to teach Persian in the same manner as Sanskrit was taught. Traditionally a Sanskrit pupil is first made to memorize a lexicon and at the same time the paradigms of declension and conjugation. The lexicon which the pupils learnt by heart was the *Namalinganusasana* composed by Amarasimha in the fifth or sixth century. Since it was composed by Amarasimha, it is known more popularly as the *Amarakosa*, i.e. "Amara's Lexicon." It is a synonymic dictionary, where the words are arranged subjectwise in three sections. The first section deals with words related to the heaven, the sky, its quarters, time, and so on. The second section contains words connected with the earth, towns, mountains, animals, humans, castes, professions etc. The third section has adjectives, homonyms, indeclinables and the like. This lexicon as well as the other similar lexica in Sanskrit are all composed in verse form.

Now the Persian-Sanskrit vocabularies also have adopted the same pattern. They are all composed in verse form and the vocabulary is arranged quite often in the same successive groups as in the *Amarakosa*. Generally a Persian word is followed by the Sanskrit equivalent, but for the sake of the verse metre, the reverse pattern is also employed. Again for maintaining the length of the verse foot as required by the metre, some filling words are employed. Likewise for metrical reasons, the Persian words which generally end in consonants are treated like

Sanskrit substantives of *a*-stem. Thus Bihari Krsna Dasa begins his vocabulary, which he wrote at the order of Akbar, in the following manner :

*srisurya ukta aphtabo 'lamanuro 'pi kathyate /  
nairyara ajamas capi tavako bhuvanesu ca //*

"The divine sun is called *afstab* and also *alam nur*, and again *nayyir azam*; *tabaq* [signifies] the worlds." Another example :

*ajnane syan nadani danayi tadviparyaye /  
rupe syat suratah sabdesv avajah parikirñtatah //*

"For ignorance let [the word] be *nadani*; *danayi* in the contrary [sense]; for shape let [the word] be *surat*; for sounds *avajah* is said to be [the equivalent].

Or this is how Vedangaraya teaches the names of the Islamic lunar months :

*muharam sapharas canyo ravil avalas tathakhirah /  
jamadil avvalas tadvaj jamadil akhirah smrtah //  
rajaba-savana-ramajanah savvalo jilakadi ca /  
jilahijja ime masah ksapesodayatah sada //*

"Muharram, Safar, Rabi-ul-awwal, likewise Rabi-ul-akhir, Jamad-ul-awwal, similarly Jamd-ul-akhir; Rajab, Shaban, Ramajan, Shawal, Zilkanda and Zilhijja. These [lunar] months [commence] always from the rise of the moon."

Besides vocabulary, some texts attempt to teach the grammar of

Persian as well. I have said that the first grammar lessons a pupil gets in Sanskrit are the tables of declensions and conjugations. The same pattern is also followed in teaching Persian. The *Parasi-Dhatu-Rupavali*, literally "The Row of Verbal Formations in Persian," contains "The Tables of Persian Conjugation." It begins with the conjugation of the root *sud* in the present tense, with Sanskrit equivalents, which runs as follows :

<i>mi</i>	<i>savad</i>	<i>bhavati</i>	
<i>mi</i>	<i>savand</i>	<i>bhavanti</i>	<i>prathamapurusah</i> (III Person)
<i>mi</i>	<i>savi</i>	<i>bhavasi</i>	
<i>mi</i>	<i>saved</i>	<i>bhavatha</i>	<i>madhyamapurusah</i> (II Person)
<i>mi</i>	<i>savam</i>	<i>bhavami</i>	
<i>mi</i>	<i>savem</i>	<i>bhavamah</i>	<i>uttamapurusah</i> (I Person)

Jahangir's protege Karnapura devotes nearly half of his work to grammar which, like the lexical part, was composed in verse. Akbar's courtier Bihari Krsna Dasa also devotes half of his work to grammar which he composed in the traditional sutra style. It will be too tedious to explain his methodology here. Suffice it to say that by adopting the pattern of a highly complex Sanskrit grammar, he appears to make Persian more difficult than it is. However, Krsna Dasa often takes pains to explain the difference between the two languages.

But the main failing of these works in general is the inability to reproduce the phonetic values of the Persian consonants, for some of which there are no exact Sanskrit equivalents. Some scholars devised special symbols to represent the Persian *khe* and *fe* but these have been rarely used. But I suppose the persons who learnt Persian through these manuals had ample occasion to hear Persian spoken on the street



and thus could acquire reasonably correct pronuciation.

Finally, from the modern point of view, a language text book should contain, if not sentence structures, at least some sentences to practice and memorize. I conclude with two Persian sentences and their Sanskrit translation as provided by Bihari Krsna Dasa. These are examples respectively for the nominative and accusative cases :

*Hajrat Sahe Akbar der be manad.*

= *Sri-Akabarasahas ciram jivatu.*

( May Akbar Shah live long ).

*Alampanah Hajrat Aphtabra mibinad.*

= *Jagadekasaranyah srisuryam pasyati.*

( The Sole Refuge of the World looks at the Sun )