

Translation of Sanskrit Books into Persian during Mughal Period

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Abstract

Mughal dynasty was founded in India by Zahir-ud-Din Mohammad Babar in 1526 A.D. which came to an end in 1857 A.D. with the dethronement and imprisonment of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor of India. Mughal Period in India is remembered as golden age for the development of Persian language and literature. This is because, Mughal emperors took several measures to expand and enrich Persian language and literature. One aspect of enrichment of Persian language was translation of renowned Sanskrit books into Persian. However, so far, no systematic effort has been made to write a research paper on the topic. Hence, in this article an effort is being made to see that during Mughal period how many Sanskrit books were virtually translated into Persian and who were the scholars involved in the translation work.

Key Words; Book, India, Mughal, Translation, Sanskrit

Introduction

Mughal dynasty (1526-1857A.D.) was founded in Indian 1526 A.D. by Zahir-ud-Din Mohammad Babar (1483-1530A.D.) (1). He was a learned man and being recognized as an author of Tuzake Babari or Waqeyate Babari or Babar Nama as the book is generally known which he wrote in Turkish language. He was also a poet and wrote both in Turkish and Persian languages. He is also remembered as inventor of Khate Babari a style of calligraphy. He patronized learned men and therefore his court was full of poets and scholars of different disciplines. Due to his sudden death he could rule over India for a very short period. His sons Humayun, Kamran, Askariand Hindal all were men of letters. However, like Babar, Humayun (1530-1556) also did not get much time to devote towards literary activities and therefore, no mention of

translation of Sanskrit books is found during the rule of Babar and Humayun.

Translation of Sanskrit Books

A minute study of the literary history of Mughal period and Akbar Nama, Aine Akbari of Abul Fazl and Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh of Mulla Abdul Qadir Badauni suggests that among Mughal rulers of India Akbar (1556-1605) was the first emperor who took keen interest in Sanskrit literature and took efforts for translation of Sanskrit books into Persian. Sayed Abdullah is of the opinion that Akbar was attracted towards old Sanskrit books due to simplicity of its style of writing and clarity of thoughts.(2)Almost all contemporary historians of Akbar's court and later history of Persian language and literature of Mughal period speak about active participation of Akbar in literary activities though he was not much literate.(3) The above histories also reveal that books on

different topics were read out before Akbar and he took keen interest in listening them. The opinion of S. Abdullah seems very near to the truth because most of the books which were read out before Akbar lacked simplicity and clarity of thought due to ornate and complex style of writing and even contemporary writing lacked simplicity. Therefore, in the given background simplicity and clarity of thought of Sanskrit books might have been one reason which inspired Akbar to get important Sanskrit books translated into Persian.

Whatever, may be the reason the fact is that Akbar is the first Mughal emperor who ordered to translate Sanskrit books into Persian. For this purpose he selected top most Persian scholars of his court and assigned books to be translated by them. Shamsul Ulama Dr. J.J. Modi in his article 'King Akbar and Persian Translation of Sanskrit Books' is of the view that scholars of Sanskrit language and literature were also invited to assist each group of translators and their main task in this project was to read out Sanskrit text and explain its meaning and elaborate certain terminologies used therein.(4)

Dr. J.J. Modi has also given a list of Sanskrit books with the name of its translator in his referred article. According to him Sanskrit books namely Kishan Joshi, Gangadhar and Mahesh Mahanand was translated by Abul Fazl, Mahabharata by Naqib Khan and four others, Ramayana by Naqib Khan, Badauni and Shaikh Sultan of Thanesar, Atharban (Atharva Veda), by Haji Ibrahim of Sarhind, Lilavati by Abul Faizi, Harebans (Harivamsa) by Maulana Sheri, Qissehishq-i-Nal va Daman (Nala-

Damyanti) by Abul Faizi, Singhasan Battisi by Badauni and Jog Basishta by Abul Faizi. (5)

Sayed Sabahuddin Abd-ur-Rahman has also given a list of Sanskrit books which were translated into Persian during the reign of Akbar. In the above list a Sanskrit book Tajik Nilkanthi Satik authored by Acharya Nilkanth Virchitais also included. This is an authentic book on astrology and it was translated by Mukammil Khan Gujarati. (6) Another book which has got a mention in the list of S. S. Abd-ur-Rahman is Kalila wa Damna authored by Bedba, a Sanskrit scholar. In fact, Kalila wa Damna was so important that for the first time it was translated into Persian in the Samani period (261-389A.H.) but that translation has disappeared.(7) Rudaki, (d.329) a well-known poet of Samani period also converted the story of Kalila wa Damna in Persian verse but at present only some portion of verse is available.(8) During the reign of Bahram Shah Ghaznavi (512-547A.H.) it was once again translated by Abulmaali Nasrullah son of Abdul Hamid.(9) Thereafter, this book was again translated into Persian in the reign of Abul Ghazi Sultan Husain who ruled over Herat for forty long years by Mulla Husain Waiz Kashefi and it was named "Anware Sohaili".(10) This book of Kashefi was quite famous during the time of Akbar however, Akbar did not like its style of writing because it was ornate and complex and therefore he ordered Abul Fazl to translate Kalila wa Damna into simple Persian which can be easily understood. Thus, the task of translation of Kalila wa Damna was completed by Abul Fazl in the year 1587A.D. and it was named Ayare Danish (11). Another Sanskrit book which is included in the list of Abd-ur- Rahman

is Rajatarangini of Kalhana. During the visit of Kashmir when Akbar came to know about this book he desired that this book should be translated into Persian and assigned the translation of this book to Maulana Shah Mohammad Shahabadi. Obeying the order of the king Shahabadi started the work however, when the translation was completed and presented to Akbar he did not like the translation because it lacked simplicity and therefore again assigned this work to Mulla Abdul Qadir Badauni who translated it into simple Persian. (12)

A critical analysis of the list of Sanskrit books presented by both Shams-ul-Ulama Dr. J.J. Modi in his article referred to above and by S.S. Abd-ur- Rahman in his book Bazme Taimuria and its comparison with the list of Abul Fazl given in Aain 35 of Aaine Akbari proves that the list of books given by Shams-ul-Ulama Dr. J.J. Modi does not tally with the list of Abul Fazl. Whereas, the list of translated books given by S.S. Abd-ur-Rahman is correct. (13) Dr. J.J. Modi in his referred article has mentioned that the Sanskrit books namely Kishan Joshi, Gangadhar and Mahesh Mahanand were translated by Abul Fazl. But, according to Abul Fazl, Kishan Jogi, Gangadhar and Mahanand were Sanskrit scholars who, with the help of Abul Fazl, translated Zeech-e-Mirzaee, a Persian book into Sanskrit. (14) According to Dr. J.J. Modi translation of Jog Basisht was done by Abul Faizi but this book has also got no mention in Aine Akbari in the list of translated Sanskrit books. At the same time few Sanskrit books like Tajik, Kalila wa Damna and Rajtarangini which were translated into Persian and being included in the list of Abul Fazl do not find any mention in the list of Dr. J. J. Modi.

This may not be out of context to mention here that in Persian language and literature the Sanskrit book Jog Basisht is quite popular. This book is Persian translation of Yoga Vasistha and the credit of its translation is given to Prince Dara Shikoh (1615-1659), the elder son and heir apparent of Shahe Jahan, the Mughal emperor (1627-1658). However, the fact is that the translation of referred book, for the first time, was done in 1597-98 A.D. by Nizam Panipati (15) by the order of Prince Nuruddin Mohammad Sultan Salim son and heir apparent of emperor Akbar who, in 1605A.D. ascended to the throne and adopted the title of Jahangir and ruled over India till 1627 A.D. The author of this article has seen the referred translation and found mentioned in the foreword of the book where in translator reveals that he did the translation of the book by the order of Nuruddin Mohammad Sultan Salim and in the translation took help from Pathan Misr Jajipuri and Jagannath Misr Banarasi.(16) From the foreword of the editors of the referred book it appears that after Nizam Panipati this book was again translated into Persian but the translation of Dara Shikoh is quite famous.

The work of translation of Sanskrit books which commenced during the reign of Akbar was carried forward and it is therefore that references of translation of few important Sanskrit books are found during the reign of Shah-e-Jahan as well. During this period we find Dara Shikoh taking keen interest in Sanskrit literature and philosophy. He is credited for translating Upanishad, to which he finished in 1657A.D. (1067A.H.) with the help of Sanskrit scholars of Varanasi and it was named Sirre Akbar. (17) Another book which, is said, was translated by Dara

Shikoh is Bhagvat Geeta. However, narrations of S.S. Abd-ur-Rahman about translation of Bhagvat Geeta suggests that one manuscript of Bhagvat Geeta kept in British Museum is said to be translated by Abul Fazl and this is said on the basis of one line written in the beginning of manuscript which says that this book is the work of Abul Fazl. On the other hand another copy of the same manuscript kept in India Office Library is attributed to Dara Shikoh whereas one Bhagvat Geeta was published from Lahore which has been claimed is the translation of Faizi. In the light of above facts it seems that Bhagvat Geeta was translated by Abul Fazl, Faizi and Dara Shikoh. But S.S. Abd-ur-Rahman is of the view that he did not find any list suggesting that Bhagvat Geeta was translated into verse by Faizi. If we approach the original source that is Aine Akbari of Abul Fazl and Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh of Abdul Qadir Badauni we find that Abul Fazl does not say anything about the translation of Bhagvat Geeta but on the other hand Badauni has given a full detail regarding translation of Mahabharata which contain Geeta. According to Badauni while the translation of Mahabharata was going on emperor Akbar realized that the translation work was very slow and therefore he deputed Faizi and instructed him to translate two chapters of the Mahabharata in both prose and verse and which he did. Similarly Badauni says that when translation of Mahabharata was completed Abul Fazl wrote foreword of Mahabharata in two parts (Bazme Taimuria, vol.1, p.105). Hence, on the basis of information provided by Badauni it is quite possible that Faizi would have translated Bhagvat Geeta in verse and one part of foreword of Mahabharata written

by Abul Fazl would have been translation of Bhagvat Geeta and probably this is the reason that manuscript of Bhagvat Geeta kept in British Museum contains the name of its author as Abul Fazl. (18). An important book which was translated by the order of Dara Shikoh is Jog Basisht (Yoga Vasistha). The translation of this book was done in the year 1656A.D. (1066A.H.) (19)

During the reign of Aurangzeb (1658-1707) and onwards i.e. till Bahadur Shah Zafar(1837-1857A.D.the last Mughal emperor the author of this article did not find any mention in the history of Persian language and literature about any Sanskrit book which would have been translated into Persian. Whereas the mention of books being written on Indian astrology, music and stories of Baitalpachisi, Singhasan Battisi, Kamrup and Sasi Panwan were transferred from Sanskrit to Persian is found during the period of Aurangzeb. (20)

A comprehensive study of Persian translation of Sanskrit books done during the reign of Akbar suggests that this was a huge task and a number of Persian and Sanskrit scholars were involved in the translation work. The translation was not restricted to Sanskrit only. Important books from other languages were also translated into Persian and vice versa. Therefore, emperor Akbar had established a separate department for copying books and translation which was named Department of Naql-o-Tarjuma. This department has got a mention in Ain 35 of Aine Akbari of Abul Fazl, p.192. From Aine Akbari it is also inferred that all translation works were done under the

supervision of this department and Akbar himself used to take review of the work.

Conclusion

To conclude it may not be wrong to say that Mughal emperor Jalaluddin Mohammad Akbar took keen interest in the translation of Sanskrit books. He appointed best available scholars of his court to translate Sanskrit books into Persian. To assist Persian scholars Sanskrit scholars were also appointed. Apart from Akbar Prince Nuruddin Salim and Prince Dara Shikoh also contributed in the translation of Sanskrit books. Thus, renowned Sanskrit books like Singhasan Battisi (1574) by Badauni, Attharva Veda

(1575) by Badauni, Faizi, Haji Ibrahim Sarhindi and Shaikh Bahawan, Mahabharata (990 A.H.) by Naqib Khan, Baduani, Faizi, Sultan Haji Thanesari and foreword by Abul Fazl, Ramayana, (1584) by Badauni, Liliavati (1586) by Abul Fazal, Kalilawa Damna (1587) by Abul Fazl, Rajatarangini (1589) by Maulana Mohammad Shahabuddin, Badauni. Tajik by Mukammil Khan Gujrati, Harbans by Maulana Sheri, Nal Daman (1594) by Faizi, Jog Basisth (1597-98) by Nizam Panipati, Upanishad, Bhagvat Geeta, and Jog Basisth by Dara Shikoh were translated from Sanskrit into Persian during the Mughal Period.

End Notes:

1. Williams L.F.R, Zahiruddin Mohammad Babar, Ur. tr. by Dr. Rafat Bilgrami, (New Delhi-1989), PP.40 and 223
2. Sayed Abdullah, Adabiyate Farsi Mein Hinduwon ka Hissa, Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu, (New Delhi-1992) PP.52
3. S.S. Abd-ur-Rahman, Bazme Taimuria, Vol. 1,(Azamgarh-2011) PP. 102
4. Sham-ul- Ulama Dr. J.J. Modi, King Akbar and the Persian Translation of Sanskrit Books, (Poona-1925), PP. 1-25
5. Ibid, PP. 9
6. S. S. Abd-ur-Rahman, op. cit. PP.111
7. Dr. Razazada Shafaq, Tarikh-e-Adabiyate Iran, Ur.tr. by Sayed Mubarizuddin Rafat (Delhi-2005), PP.309
8. Ibid, PP. 61-67
9. Ibid, PP. 309
10. Ibid, PP. 326-327&446
11. S.S. Abd-ur-Rahman, op.cit. PP.108-109
12. Ibid, PP. 109
13. Allama Abul Fazl, Aaine Akbari, Vol.1, part-1, Ur.tr. by Maulavi Mohammad Fida Ali Sahab (Hyderabad-1938) PP.191-192
14. Ibid.
15. Jog Basisth, Per. tr. by Nizam Panipati, ed. by S.M.R. Jalali Naini and N.S. Shukla, (1360 Shamsi) PP.4-5
16. Ibid, PP. 19-21
17. S.S. Abd-ur-Rahman, Vol.111, op.cit, PP.184-187
18. Ibid, PP. 187-189

19. Ibid, PP. 189-191

20. Ibid, PP. 83

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2. Maulavi Mehdi Husain Naseri, Sanadide Ajam, (Allahabad)