



## COLONIAL TRANSLATIONS AND REORIENTATION OF PERSIAN HISTORICAL TEXTS FROM 1773 TO 1793 A.D

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### **Abstract:**

*Translation of Indian literary works, written in indigenous languages, into the language of the colonizers was one of the most crucial and highly supported mechanisms throughout the whole process of western colonialism and imperialism. Among all, the translations and transformation of Indian historical texts was most pivotal and significant. After being translated into English Parisian histories became more accessible and useful for the English administration in India. These works contain the records of empires and rulers who ruled over this vast and diverse land of the Indian subcontinent. The information of statecraft, polity, diplomacy, economy, society, and religions, recorded in these histories were highly pivotal and critical for the new British regime in India. The present study has three main objectives; first, to discuss the importance of translation in general, second, to know the process and mechanism which supported this whole journey of retouch and reorientation from 1773 to 1793 AD., and third, to highlight the works which were transformed from Persian to English.*

**Keywords:** *Translations; Persian Historical texts; Orientalism; Colonialism; Reorientation*



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### **INTRODUCTION:**

The word translation is a combination of two Latin words, “trans” and “latum”, together meaning "a carrying across" or "a bringing across". Oxford University defines translation as “*The process of translating words or text from one language into another*”. In other words, we can say that “it is a process of moving texts encoded in one culture and language and transferring it to another language and cultural”. Different cultures and communities get connected and interacted with each other with the help of translation. According to J.C Catford, translation is a “the replacement of textual material in one language (source language) by equivalent textual material in another language (Target Language)”.<sup>i</sup> Edward Said describes the process of translation and states “the first time a human experience is recorded and then given a theoretical formulation, its force comes from being directly connected to and organically provoked by real historical circumstances. Later versions of the theory cannot replicate its original power; because the situation has quieted down and changed, the theory is degraded and subdued...”<sup>iii</sup>

The process of Translation is as old as human civilization itself. India is a multi-lingual country of various regional languages. But throughout the entire history of India, there was a language that had its dominance over the rest of the languages. Like Prakrit and Sanskrit in ancient times and Persian in the medieval period. Under the Mughal empire, Persian had an important place as a courtly language and the language of



scholarship. Various scholars and translators were linked to The Mughal courts. An autobiography of Babur (Baburnama) written in the Turkish language, was translated into Persian by Bahram Khan, a minister of Empire Humayun. But it was under Akbar's rule that we saw the translations of some of the most important works, like *Mahabharata* of ancient times, written in Sanskrit into Persian. Dara Shikoh, the great-grandson of Akbar, translated the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad-Gita* into Persian. From late-eighteenth-century British efforts to obtain information about the Indian people largely came from the translation. It became a part of the colonial discourse of Orientalism which had great influence over the servants of East India company.

According to Ranajit Guha, "some of the very first and most important works on Indian history written from a British standpoint belong to the period of the thirty years of colonial era, between the grant of Diwani (1765) and Permanent Settlement (1793)". These works, in his opinion, "ranged widely over time from antiquity to the most recent past; others were content to take a relatively foreshortened view of the past going back no further than the thirteenth century".<sup>iii</sup> The East India Company in Bengal showed a great interest in gathering information about the past kingdoms. This urgency often found expression in exasperation and frustration with their Indian 'informants' who they believed, were withholding critically important information from them. Ranajit Guha characterizes this as a form of resistance to British rule.<sup>iv</sup>

#### THE CHIEF PURPOSE OF TRANSLATION:

Indian text translated into European languages was prepared for a western audience to let them know about Indian Orientalist images. Colonial translations generally depend on the notion of Western philosophical reality, representation, and knowledge. In the opinion of Tejaswini Niranjana, "Translation functions as a transparent presentation of something that already exists, although the original is brought into being through translation".<sup>v</sup> Thus, to perpetuate the colonial domination, translation was deployed in different kinds of discourses, such as philosophy, historiography, education, missionary-writing, travel-writing, etc. The translation of useful Persian historical sources into English was one another most dominated colonial project in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>vi</sup> Translation of Persian historical works into English was the creation of Indian colonial bureaucracy. And it became another mode of representation of India's past and a characteristic of European imperialism. Tejaswini Niranjana has suggested that "the practice of translation shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relationships of power that operate under colonialism".<sup>vii</sup> According to her, "translation was positioned in different kinds of discourses like philosophy, historiography, and education to renew and enhance colonial domination in India".<sup>viii</sup> She has also stated that through translation, the colonized were represented in such a manner that highly justified the colonial domination. She states that "translation 'fixes' colonized cultures, and makes them unchanging".<sup>ix</sup> Translation enabled the servants of the company to analyse the historical texts of past reigns and decoded them for administrative and governing purposes.<sup>x</sup>

The translations of the Persian historical texts include perceptive, astute forewords, appendices, and commentaries by the colonizers indicate that almost all these works of this era "were designed to construct, propagate and perpetuate hegemonic ethnographic agenda of the promotion of the superiority of their race".



Edward Said rightly observes in his well-known book *Orientalism*, “The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture; and Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies, and colonial styles”.<sup>xi</sup> The primary aim of these translations was to provide necessary cultural information to colonial officers to understand, manage and to rule over colonized. Mahasweta Sengupta in her essay “Translation as Manipulation” recognizes this potential: While choosing texts for rewriting, the dominant power appropriates only those texts that conform to the pre-existing discursive parameters of its linguistic networks. These texts are then rewritten largely according to a certain pattern that denudes them of their complexity and variety; they are presented as specimens of a culture that is simple, natural, and in the case of India otherworldly or spiritual as well. Bassnett and Trivedi also indicate a similar notion about the motif of colonial translations, “colonialism and translation went hand in hand”.<sup>xii</sup>

In the colonial and postcolonial eras, translation played a noteworthy role in understanding, analyzing, and examining the socio-political aspect of Indigenous literature. The translation of Indian kinds of literature into the English language was a major transformation. It provided a “wider space for sharing the Indian literature with readers, unknown to Indian languages,” as it is a well-known fact that translation removes the barriers and brings people closer. In the opinion of noted social theorist Gauri Viswanathan, “the colonizing enterprise and translation served to feed particular representations of the British to their colonial subjects in India to establish the image of the benevolent and just British ruler governing the Indian people”.<sup>xiii</sup> British were generally trying to engulf every aspect of Indian society under colonialism including intellectual, spiritual, along with economic control. It is the opinion of Michael Dodson that “translation made available legal cultural information for the administration and rule of the non-west”. He believes that, “translation was a strategic means for representing ‘otherness’ to primarily domestic British reading audiences”.<sup>xiv</sup>

The most important part of these translations is the prefaces of books translated from Persian to English. Which usually contain the aims with which they were published in addition to the information about the translator, place of publication, etc. The preface, therefore, is a useful piece of information for studying the objective and strategy of translation as well as their implications for colonial rule and the print culture. Here we will examine some of these translations and their prefaces to interrogate the text as well as, the, motive of the translators. It must be noted that most of these translated works were regional histories or biographies of regional rulers.

### **The Channels of Translation and Translators:**

The establishment of the printing press at Goa by the Portuguese in 1556. A.D enabled the spread of Christian texts, which were translated into the Tamil language. This boosted the spread of Christianity first on the western coast of India and then these religious teaching gradually made inroads in the rest of India.<sup>xv</sup> In the 17th century, the impacts of the printing press got visible in various ways. The missionaries spoke fluently in indigenous languages and intermingled with the natives. They started constructing vocabularies,



grammar, concessionaries, and prayers in indigenous languages.<sup>xvi</sup> While at the same time even the richest province like Bengal did not have access to printing presses due to lack of education and they failed to realize the potential benefit of printing on their language and literature.<sup>xvii</sup> Following its victory in 1757 in the Battle of Plassey, The East India Company consolidated British power in the province of Bengal and, by 1762, had satisfactorily taken over governance of the province. British had learned various lessons from the previous rulers by analysing the historical narratives of the Indian past. They realized that to ensure the legitimacy and the longevity of the British rule and commercial effectiveness they would require more than just blood and iron, and had to take on a policy of intellectual colonialism. And this policy would play an important role to keep a fine balance between exploitation and promotion of the Indian languages and culture.

The increasing concern of the English East India company about the language and the literature of the Indians developed Calcutta as a centre of British intellectual activity under the successive Governors of Company from Warren Hastings to Dalhousie. The real beginning of the translation of the indigenous text into English appeared in the late-eighteenth under Warren Hasting (1723-1818). He wanted to reconcile British rule with Indian institutions. This meant a further investigation into the manners and the customs of the country, and more studies of the pre-existing literature and the laws of the Indian subcontinent. Hastings stressed the pragmatic value of Oriental studies, regarding inheritance, marriage, caste, and other religious usage and institutions, the laws of the Quran concerning Muslims, and those of the Shashtra concerning the Hindus. Hastings acted on the principle of understanding people through their language, literature, customs, poetry, and mythology.<sup>xviii</sup> The first Muslim educational institute established in India by the British government was Calcutta Madrasah. It became the pioneer institute in the history of Muslim education in India since the beginning of British rule. It was founded on the request of the Muslim elite of Calcutta in 1780 by Warren Hasting at Calcutta. The main objective of its foundation was to promote the study of Arabic and Persian languages and Muslim laws. As a result, a Muslim gentry class could emerge to serve in the British administration in India.

#### **William Jones And Asiatic Society of Bengal:**

Sir William Jones was born in London on September 28, 1746, was an Orientalist linguist and translator. He came to India in September 1783, in 1784 he founded the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal and became its first president. Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal became such a successful project of early colonial rule in India that it inspired the founding of many similar societies in Europe during the nineteenth century. The Society was established “to develop an Oriental humanism in its work that would correspond to the neo-classical European humanism, though enlarged into universalism”.<sup>xix</sup> The main aim of the society was to chalk out a plan for the growth of oriental knowledge and to create a pro-English class for the better administration of East India Company in India. For this purpose, “Weekly evening meetings were held in the grand jury room for the perusal and discussion of papers on the history, antiquities, arts, science, and literature of Asia, and a selection of these papers was from time to time published as the Asiatic Researches”. These meetings were afterward held monthly, and then once every three months.<sup>xx</sup>



The scientific studies of William Jones in India are historically important. His English translations and interpretations of Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit literature helped to expand the frontiers of European knowledge. He was very fond of Oriental literature and languages. According to him “Persian language is ancient, rich, melodious, and elegant”.<sup>xxi</sup> At the same time, he criticized Englishmen for not having the study of Persian literature from an “appreciative” point of view. His main contribution to the Persian language is his work on Persian grammar, later known as, *A Grammar of Persian language*. In 1767 he began to collect rules for Persian grammar through his use of the translation made of the Persian dictionary *Farhang-i jahāngīrī* by Munshī I’tiṣām al-Dīn. It is said that he wanted to give it to his friend who was planning to come to India.<sup>xxii</sup> But due to lack of encouragement and cooperation, it took a much longer period to be completed for publication in 1771. In 1783 an index was added by W. A. J. Richardson in its third edition. Jones gave a scholarly treatment and showed an attitude of good scholar throughout the main text of the Persian Grammar. He dealt with the alphabet of thirty-two characters and their pronunciation. He identified consonants and vowels and their use, and explain all the advanced rules of Persian grammar in his most important well-articulated work. Jones also gives a chronological description of Persian poets, including Firdausi and his epic poem on Persian history, Abul Ola, Falaki and Khayam, Anwari, Sadi and his *Bed of Roses*, Hafiz, and Jami. In his Preface to the Grammar, Jones stresses the need for East India Company officials to learn the languages of Asia. Speaking of the increasing interest in Persian (used as the court language in India at the time), he puts it down to the frustration of the British administrations at receiving letters they could not read: “... it was found highly dangerous”, says Jones “to employ the natives as interpreters, upon whose fidelity they could not depend”.<sup>xxiii</sup>

William Jones translated the history of Nadir Shah from Persian into French in 1768-69, at the request of King Christian VI. The original history was written by Mirza Mahdi in the 1760s. Jones divides history into two parts and Six books. The translated work contains the whole story of Nadir Shah's life and politics from his birth to death, including his coronation and expeditions. Apart from the translation of original Persian historical narratives, Jones added two essays from his sides in this book, the first, an essay on Asiatic geography, in which he describes the empires of Persia, India, and Turkey, and the kingdoms of Tartary, and in the second essay, he discusses Persian history, the three ruling families and the Mohammedan dynasties. According to Jones, he had to face a lot of challenges and difficulties as an English scholar who translate Persian history into French, such as the length of the history, the dullness of the subject, and difficulty of the source, while translation this Persian history. Some of the most distinguished French critics applaud this translation for its correctness and grammatically pure form. And also praise for his creative craftsmanship as a translator.<sup>xxiv</sup>

According to Tejaswini Niranjana, “the three most significant nodes of William Jones work are, (I)the need for translation by the European since the natives are unreliable interpreters of their laws and culture, (II)the desire to be a law-giver, to give the Indians their laws, (III)the desire to purify Indian culture and speak on its behalf.” The interconnections between these obsessions are extremely complicated. They can be seen,



however, as feeding into a larger discourse of Improvement and Education that interpolates the colonial subject.

### **Francis Gladwin and his Translations.**

Francis Gladwin (1744/5–1812) was also an orientalist and a prolific translator of the Persian language. He first served the British East India Company in Bengal as an Army man, and later he became one of the founding members of the Bengal Asiatic Society in 1784. He had a remarkable linguistic ability and carried out his scholarly works and translations under the patronage of the first Governor-General of Bengal, Warren Hastings. His scholarship and devotion to oriental literature led him to appoint one of the three professors of Persian Language at Fort William College in Calcutta in 1800.

***Ain-i-Akbari*:** In 1773, Gladwin translated *Ain-i-Akbari*, the most noted History of Akbar's period, and he dedicated it to Warren Hasting. Its printed edition was issued in London in 1800. In his translation, Gladwin has given the greater part of the First Book, more than one-half of the Second and Third Books, and about one-fourth of the Fourth Book. Gladwin in his Translator's preface mentions the difficulties he faced while translating this Persian history. He says that unlike the first volume and the first part of the second volume, which is written in modern language, the second part of the second volume and throughout the whole of the third volume the author tries to adopt the style of earlier Persian authors. The later style is not only harsh and unpleasing to the audiences but incomprehensible to the readers.<sup>xxv</sup>

Gladwin says that he had to deal with an author who uncommonly adopted a style that was almost absolute two centuries ago. But he confidently says, "I will try best of my abilities, to make author speak in such a manner, as I conceive, he would have done, he wrote in English".<sup>xxvi</sup> In his opinion his translation was merely for English readers, so he tried to avoid the mode in which the earlier European translators and authors have written "oriental names". And tried to spell these words in such a manner that an English man can pronounce them as they are pronounced in Hindustan. He remarked that the letter "a" should always be pronounced broadly such as in the word, *Hall*, *Pall*, etc. And other vowels and diphthongs need no illustration.

According to, Heinrich Blochmann, one of the main translators of *Ain-i-Akbari* (tr.1873), "although in modern times inaccuracies have been discovered in the portions translated by him, chiefly due, no doubt, to the fact that he translated from MSS; in every way a difficult undertaking—his translation has always occupied a deservedly high place, and it may confidently be asserted that no similar work has for the last seventy years been so extensively quoted as his".<sup>xxvii</sup>

***The History of Hindustan During the reign of Jahangir, Shahjahan, and Aurangzeb, (1788)*:** It is a partial translation and partly reinvention based on earlier Persian historical works. The candor and indulgence which he had experienced after the successful translation and the publication of the *Ayeen Akbery*, in India as well as in Europe, motivated and inspired him to let the English reader know that what changes took place in the constitution of Hindustan, during the succeeding reigns of Jehangir, Shahjahan, and Aurungzeb.<sup>xxviii</sup> Gladwin remarked in the preface that he collected all the source materials for this work from authentic Persian manuscripts. Even, during twenty -three years of his residence in India, he had to



purchase an ample collection of this work at very high expenses. According to K. V. Rangaswami Aiyangar, the editor of the first part of this work, “He wrote out the bulk, if not the whole, of this work, to judge from the reference to the later parts of it in the preface to the first volume of the large history, which alone was published”.<sup>xxix</sup> However, unlike his previous work, *Ayeen Akbery*, Gladwin, unfortunately, failed to sustain the patronage of Warren Hastings as later was replaced by new governor-general Lord Cornwallis. And this shift became the main cause of the failure of Gladwin to complete the projected History of Akbar's successors.

To make his work more authentic and faithful for the English readers and the satisfaction of the orientalist, Gladwin gives the original Persian edits, laws, and regulations, particularly important, along with the English translation, in an appendix at the end of each reign.<sup>xxx</sup>

“Those of Jehangir and Shahjahan afford only a few instances of innovation or reform, but the reign of Aurungzeb furnishes many important documents; as, under the Government of that monarch, the constitution of Hindustan was publicly declared (what was before only implied) to be founded on the strictest principles of Mohammedanism; and in these edicts the landed property and other rights of the subject are clearly stated; many points relative to the prerogative of the crown are accurately defined, and the officers of Government folly instructed in the nature and extent of their respective duties”.

Aiyangar believes that “the merit of Gladwin's History consists in his careful study of virtually all the sources available to the student of the history of the reign of Jahangir”. Though annalistic in form and written in an unornate and pedestrian style, the History is redeemed from dullness by the good sense and critical acumen of the author.<sup>xxxi</sup>

*Tarikh-i-Bangalah* is an important and contemporary Persian source of Nawabs of Bengal up to Alivardi Khan. Authored by Salim Ullah Munshi, it also draws light on important historical events that took place in Bengal in the sixty years before the east India company's rise to power.<sup>xxxii</sup> The book was devoted to Henry Vansittart, Governor of Bengal from 1760 to 1764. *Tarikh-i-Bangalah* was translated into English by Francis Gladwin under the title, *A Narrative of the Transactions in Bengal during the Soobahbaries of Azaam Us Shan, Jaffer Khan, Shuja Khan, Sarfaraz Khan, and Alyviridy Khan*, in 1788. In the dedication of translation Gladwin mention that “The author, whose name is unknown, appears, in general, to be well acquainted with his subject, and conveys much curious information, on the state of the government, and of the revenues, of Bengal, during a very interesting period of Asiatic History; but, at the same time, I have found it necessary to abridge some of his tedious details of immaterial events, to render the translation acceptable to an English reader”.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

**JONATHAN SCOTT:** Another servant of the East India Company, Captain Jonathan Scott (1754-1829) who also functioned as a private personal translator to Warren Hastings, translated a Persian source into English, under the title, *The Memoirs of Eradut Khan*, who he described as a “nobleman of Hindostan” was published in London in 1786. A.D. This translation was again dedicated to Warren Hastings. The memoir



contains “interesting anecdotes about Aurangzeb and his successors Shah Alam and Jahandar Shah, in which one could find the causes of the very precipitate decline of the Mogul Empire in India”.<sup>xxxiv</sup> As Eradat Khan remarked in his preface;

“During the short period of my age, which has this day arrived at the sixty-fourth year, and the 1126A.H (1715A.D), of the holy Hijhera, such wonders of the time, such astonishing marks of the power of the creator of the night and day in the vicissitudes of worldly affairs, the destruction of empires, the deaths of many princes, the ruin of ancient houses and Nobel families, the fall of the worthy men, and the rise of the unworthy, have been beheld by me, as have not been mentioned by history to have occurred, in a such number of succession, in a thousand years”.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Jonathan remarked in his translator preface that being a servant of East India Company in India, he got the full opportunity to study the languages and history of the country. He translated the memoir from original Persian writings of Eradat Khan. He gave it the title, *The Memoirs of Eradat Khan*, and remarked that the original Persian source from which he translated, was authentic and undisputed genuine.

“As, on account of my office, and being engaged in these transactions, I have obtained a perfect knowledge of the sources of most events, and what, to other, even information of must be difficult, was planned and executed in my fight; and I was a sharer, as well as a spectator of all the dangers and troubles, I have therefore recorded them.”<sup>xxxvi</sup>

The simplicity and flow in writings which is the strong proof of the veracity of the writer made it much easier for the translator to translate it into simple English language. The translator has done magnificent work, he not only translates it word to word but also provides important notes for the interpretations and the explanation of difficult unknown terms and used in the original Persian source.

**BURISH CRISP:** Another work entitled *British India Analyzed: The Provincial and Revenue Establishments of Tippu Sultan and Mahomedan and British Conquerors of Hindustan* was printed in London in 1793 in three parts. Its one part was published in Calcutta in 1792, was entitled *The Mysorean Revenue Regulations*, and translated by Burish Crisp (1762-1811).<sup>xxxvii</sup> In the preface of the book, it was stated that the Parisian copy of the regulations, from which this translation has been made, bears the original seal impressions of Tippu Sultan. The Persian source was in the possession of Colonel John Murray who acquired it during the Coimbatore campaign, and it was the “most accurate delineation of the modern Mahomedan government that has appeared”. The translator shared the difficulties he faced while translating this into English. he stated, “it was very unfortunate, that after a long search I have not been able to find a single person in Calcutta who could translate for him the Malabar dialects or explained provincial terms”.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Thus, he had to explain the terms from the context of the text. This episode indicates the dependence of British translators on native informants for information about terms and how work suffered due in case of unavailability of native informants, etc. Translated historical texts became more accessible to the servants of the company. Once a single copy manuscript could be transformed, after





translation, into printed English texts and that could be circulated much more rapidly and widely with ease, throughout the country.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The decline of the Mughal empire and the rise of the British East India Company in the 18<sup>th</sup> century wrapped up the dominance of the Persian language with itself. This new British dominance added the English language to the list of pre-existed multi-lingual list of Indian languages. With the passage of time and the rise of the British empire in India English saw rapid growth and replaced Persian as an official language in India. Since, English has become the most vital means of communication in all political, business, and educational affairs. Even today, in our daily life, English plays a role of a bridge, connects and conveys the ideas and thoughts of the people by translating different mother-tongue and regional languages, and brings all the information on a single platform for easy access. Translations of Indo-Persian historical texts gained a particular meaning and importance under British colonialism during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Translation became the chief agent of the colonial administration which played a crucial role in the commercial interests of the East India Company. Translation not only displayed the pre-existing portrayal of the affairs of the colony but sometimes it also represents the same picture in new and different ways. In most of the cases, the translation of Persian sources was done also to learn about the different useful aspects of Indian society. The study of ethnic groups and cultural awareness of India was one of the most important among others. The history of one part of India was seen to be a useful and important source of learning and information about the rest of the country.

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